

Your details

Title

Mr

First name

Phillip

Last name

Ward

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A member of the general public

Submission type

I am making a personal submission

Consent to make submission public

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

Share your experience or tell your story

Your story

I am a semi-retired teacher who has been active for over sixty years in promoting the preservation of natural values and health of the Australian environment. I graduated from Macquarie University with a degree in environmental science in 1974 and am still involved in environmental education of students and the wider community at Ryde East Public School. Also I am active in bushcare in the City of Ryde, and belong to several scientific and environmental organisations.

Terms of Reference (optional)

The Inquiry welcomes submissions that address the particular matters identified in its [Terms of Reference](#).

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

We have experienced devastating bushfires exacerbated by a changing climate and lack of action.

In 2008, a report by Professor Ross Garnaut was commissioned; it predicted that Australia's bushfire seasons would gradually lengthen and become more intense, with observable impacts by 2020. Sadly, these predictions were devastatingly accurate.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Future planning for bushfire risk management in NSW must recognise that climate change is now a major driver of increased bushfire danger and further increases in global temperature are likely to increase the length and severity of fire season, restrict the window of opportunity for safe and effective hazard reduction burning and increase the costs and the risk to the community from bushfire events across NSW.

Government should recognise the body of scientific evidence that strongly specifies only very recently burned areas may reduce fire severity under extreme and catastrophic fire weather conditions. Under these conditions areas hazard reduced, particularly those treated over more than one year previously, are unlikely to provide substantial fire suppression benefits.

Hazard reduction burning should be undertaken strategically, with clear objectives for burns that show measurable benefits in reducing risk to identified assets. Hazard reduction burning programs aimed at meeting area treated based targets are of little benefit. It would be beneficial to consider scientific evidence, and the slow burn techniques as used in the past by Aboriginal peoples.

There needs to be a comprehensive inventory of environmental assets, including the locations of threatened species and endangered ecological communities which are then included as environmental assets in Bush Fire Risk Management Plans. Treatments to reduce the risk to these assets must be identified where possible. The Plans must incorporate post fire restoration and rehabilitation guidelines, especially for threatened species, communities and refuge areas.

1.3 Response to bushfires

There are many strategies available and each needs to be assessed to determine effectiveness and detrimental outcomes for the natural environment. In particular, there is little benefit and indeed it may be counter-productive, to clear land containing fire retardant and fire resistant vegetation.

The Government must develop a State Fire Management Strategy in consultation with stakeholder groups including the Nature Conservation Council (NCC) that addresses fire response and recovery. The Government needs to commit to funding for these strategies which is not aligned to specific grant programs and has funding certainty. Following control burning operations and major bushfire events, post-fire environmental recovery actions are needed including targeted recovery for threatened species and communities which are listed as vulnerable, endangered or critically endangered. Recovery actions must consider pest species, weeds, minimising erosion and sedimentation and maintaining water quality.

1.4 Any other matters

While industry is largely supported in its activities by legislation apparently inadequate to minimise damage and with lack of monitoring, accountability and compliance, we see environmental agencies including the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) having ever-decreasing authority and share of state budget funds. This has inevitably led to our natural areas being less well managed, ultimately endangering our natural assets and all the native species they support, as well as making negative impacts more likely on communities and infrastructure.

Supporting documents or images
