

Your details

Title

Mr

First name

Stewart

Last name

Needham

Submission details

I am making this submission as

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

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

Bush fires were burning in our area for several weeks and we were put on 'high alert' on 3 separate days. On NYE a fire entered the village of Broulee and reached within 150m of our house, with loud roaring, radiant heat and red embers falling in our yard. Luckily the wind suddenly dropped, but that day was very traumatic and the whole period of the fires in the region was debilitating and exhausting. Some friends were totally burned out or suffered significant damage to property. The community was badly let down through failures in the planning regime, communication systems collapse with no information available at critical times, and long-term power outages. The local community and economy will take years to recover after 'the Summer from Hell'.

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

I suspect little if anything can be done directly to mitigate the increase in fire danger levels from extended drought, or increasing temperatures, soil/vegetation/forest litter drying, and weather energies related to climate change. However, it is clear that the main underlying driver of increasing fire risk is climate change and for this to be tackled to decrease fire risk in the future, a long term program of policies designed to address climate change must be developed and implemented. First and foremost, greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced heavily. Climate change and bush fire risk should be first order considerations in development proposals. Economic interests and proposals should only be supported when independent experts agree that they do not exacerbate carbon emissions and do not increase the level of bush fire risk.

1.2 Preparation and planning

The effectiveness of the RFS was diminished to a degree by poor access into some areas of national parks to access fires or to establish back burning operations. Resourcing to NPWS should be increased to enable clearing and extension of fire breaks and fire trails, and to undertake other fire risk mitigation.

The impacts of logging operations should be studied to determine to what degree forestry in native forests might exacerbate fire risk, and whether certain models of logging, handling of trash, and assistance to reestablish ground cover and understorey may assist in reducing fire risk or shortening periods during which logged areas are at elevated risk of fire owing to e.g. trash piles, depressed soil moisture levels.

The Eurobodalla Shire Council has allowed large areas of 'small acreage' development, e.g. between Batemans Bay and Rosedale. Many of these developments take the form of cul-de-sacs with houses dotted amongst mature native forest in steeply dissected country. Several small coastal villages also have only one way in and out, with houses on small blocks amongst tall native forest. Some of these areas were devastated in the bush fires, such as North and South Rosedale, Dunns Creek Road and Ridge Road. This is clearly a very bad development model. Yet the Council has recently modified its LEP to make it easier to subdivide in bush fire prone areas - against the advice of the RFS, Department of Environment, and some other State Government departments/agencies, and concerted protests from community groups (who were barred from expressing their views at Council meetings). Clearly there needs to be oversight by State Government to ensure that Local Government planning and decision-making is in accord with the need reduce bush fire risk, and to protect infrastructure, communities and the environment from any future devastating events like the one we has just endured. The days of councils taking actions to benefit themselves, their families or associated businesses should surely be over by now!

Communication channels are critical - when we most needed it, we had no radio, TV, internet, mobile phone or landline services. ABC Radio and the 'Fires Near Me' app were godsend - but were not available when we were in most danger. It took weeks for all these services to come back on line, and repairs were still being carried out on the radio transmitter in the 2nd half of April (Mount Wandera). Clearly a more resilient and fire-proof technology is needed; it didn't just affect home-owners like us, but limited communication options for emergency services. People in remoter parts, such as farmers etc would have been particularly affected and must have felt abandoned.

Power outages were extensive and long-lasting, and made the impacts and traumas of the fire days long-lasting for many; hundreds of timber power poles were burned through and lines brought down, yet they have been replaced by exactly the same infrastructure! Most of the poles burned through within 1 metre of the ground (see attached photos taken along Dunns Creek Road near Tomakin). There are simple alternatives to reduce the likelihood of a timber pole burning through, such as the NUKOTE or FIREGUARD proprietary treatments, or a metal or concrete collar infilled with earth. All of these can be applied after the new pole is erected, and would substantially reduce the risk of so many poles burning through in the future, hence increasing the resilience of the power supply system substantially. (I have no pecuniary or other interests in the systems I have named).

Some newer areas of Broulee etc have underground electrical power, but this made them no more resilient than areas serviced by the old timber poles - in fact they were more vulnerable because the ground-level plastic conduit running into the base of the 'pad transformers' melted and (presumably) shorted out the wiring. Again, there would be a simple engineered solution to prevent this from reoccurring. In summary, a technical eye should be run over existing electrical and communications infrastructure looking for solutions which could substantially improve the

resilience of services in the event of another bush fire.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The difficult terrain through which these fires approached the towns and villages of Eurobodalla made it almost impossible for RFS units to get in to fight the fires or to back-burn. When the fires were near us, the pitiful scale of the helicopter water bombers was all too evident - they might help save an individual house, but they are useless in tackling a fire front. The success of regular water bombing of the Orroral Bush Fire south of Canberra by a large DC10 aircraft was impressive, and contained the spread to the west of the Monaro Highway. In my view serious consideration should be given to establish a squadron of 10 - 20 of these aircraft for rapid deployment, which would provide a much more effective method of concerted, large-scale bombing to 'nip bush fires in the bud' irrespective of the terrain type.

RFS, NPWS and urban fire brigades would then focus on property protection on farms and in built-up areas.

1.4 Any other matters

Our unique flora and fauna distinguish Australia as special to Australians and many foreigners, and clearly influence the tourism and travel sectors which are major inputs to our GDP. The huge number of native fauna killed during the fires is most distressing and should be seen as a massive indictment on Australia's past policies and attitudes towards what is special about this country. Government should develop and fund a big recovery effort to build up fauna and flora and where appropriate fund reintroduction programs.

Ongoing pressures on native flora and fauna will be even more impactful now that they are so vulnerable; programs should be developed quickly to target feral pests and weeds to improve the chances of recovery to our native species. In particular, these should target feral cats, pigs, foxes and horses (i.e. brumbies).

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- powerpole1.JPG
- powerpole2.JPG



