



## Your details

Ms

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**Title**

**First name**

Sue

**Last name**

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

Emergency services personnel

**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

**Your position in the organisation (if applicable)**

Brigade Secretary RFS

**Consent to make submission public**

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

Our experience as a Rural Fire Brigade was a lack of communication at our Station We were part of the Hillville fire, it started in our area and our station was the water point with up to eight tankers lined up at a time for water. Communications within the station were almost impossible, our mobiles would sometimes ring, sometimes go to messages or we would have to run outside the shed to answer the call. Our community was relying on us giving them updates on Facebook and to do this we had to sit outside and find a place where connection was available.

Even tankers were asking us how to find the Groupie or where the fire front was? A few trucks arrived and had no radio to

access Firecom. Our trucks and crews operated 24hour shifts for weeks and communication was essential to organise. My suggestion is that the NSW Government or RFS should provide reliable internet connection to all fire sheds. So many local brigades had no phone coverage let alone internet. On requesting information as to whether our District is to receive internet support following the fires, I was told that they had no plans and no funds to provide this for our 90 odd local Brigades. Internet and phone coverage is an essential safety issue. If the service cannot be provided free, at least the NSW Govt or RFS should negotiate a bulk deal for Brigades to be able to connect for a reasonable price. Particularly with all training and meetings being done digitally now (and more and more resources only available on line) it is wrong that members do not get this support. I have to bring all digital computers/laptops/GPS etc home to update as it can not be done at our station. The members of the RFS have put their lives on the line to try to prevent loss of life, houses, properties and livestock. They deserve the best communications available. This may not be a problem in cities and towns, but it certainly is in our rural areas. Ask the brigades from MidCoast how they found communications and you will be told it was dangerously inadequate. Our main way of getting information was to listen to Broadcastify (an app) on our phones to find out where everything was happening and relay that to those who needed to know, including crews from FNRNSW who came to our station for welfare and directions, private contractors trying to get water out, locals contacting us to see if events had to be cancelled. One such event was one that our Brigade always helped out with, a weekend camp for up to 100 disabled children and families run by Manning River Lions Club. We were asked to make a decision on whether to cancel it. We could not get any connection to Firecom and so as a Brigade made the call to cancel and stop people who would be at risk coming into the area. As it turned out, the site was evacuated but all the tents etc were damaged and only the residence was able to be saved. We all did what we could to protect our community but there were times that members had to go to the fire front in their private vehicle (safely with trained community engagement staff) just to be able to let people know if they were in danger. Not everyone got the mobile phone warnings and people stopped believing what was on Fires Near Me as it was not able to be updated quickly enough. At one stage our Fire Station was threatened and we had to set up hoses to protect it in case trucks could not get back to defend it. There will be many lessons to be learned from these fires and one of the big ones is communication at a local brigade and community level. We cannot provide help to residents if we do not have the communications to do so.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

### 1.1 Causes and contributing factors

Lack of communications and support to obtain equipment. All radios, GRNs, PMRs have to be purchased by Brigades to RFS standards. Fundraising has to happen for the equipment to be supplied.

### 1.2 Preparation and planning

No plan for District to help with Brigade communications. It is even difficult to find out where to procure this equipment. We have been told to apply for grants if we want anything. We have

been waiting to purchase a new GRN at about \$4000 and cannot do so as RFS has not decided on what system to use.

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### 1.3 Response to bushfires

These were horrific fires that went on for months. Our Brigades sent members all over the state to help out before and after our local fires. When crews came back to the station on the first night, they said they had never seen anything like it and that the Hillville fire would not stop until it got to the ocean and they were right. These firefighters put their lives on the line everytime they go out in the trucks, give them the proper support. These are volunteers who don't have to do this, so the Government and the RFS needs to ensure support gets to the Brigade level.

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### 1.4 Any other matters

I am so proud of the volunteers, and the locals who defended their properties with well set up water carts. These locals were referred to as vigilantes by a local Council official, but that is untrue. We would have lost so many more properties if these people hadn't been prepared, and stayed with RFS support to mop up after the fire front went through.

Our property was saved by our Brigades who defended our house in horrific conditions. The house across the road was completely saved. My partner (a Brigade Senior Deputy) stayed on after the firetrucks had to leave and used a pump and the water from our pool to put out the fires that keep on coming. This was a night long vigil and luckily he was here when a burning tree fell onto the roof and through the house windows. Had he not been here it would be gone. In the following days when we were back out fighting other fires, our locals and relatives patrolled our properties and put out many a fire that would have resulted in more loss.

## Supporting documents or images

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### Attach files

-  Driveway.jpg

