



Your details

Ms

Title

First name

Susie

Last name

Headerder

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

Whilst my property was not affected by fires there were fires in my region and I was keeping a close watch as I have logging operations on both sides of me and was very concerned with all the logging waste that was in piles on the ground, and in such dry and volatile conditions that these could combust. I was particularly concerned about sparks as one logging operator was still actively using logging machinery on the days of intense heat when there were catastrophic fires elsewhere and this was in koala habitat. Being a Bush Regenerator and an advocate for our koalas and other wildlife and for our forests in this region which is a biodiversity hotspot I was extremely concerned for all the wildlife being killed and suffering in these fires and the loss to our natural ecosystems and heritage. It is staggeringly sad to know that more than a billion animals were killed in NSW during this bushfire season, with up to 10,000 koalas killed in NSW alone. being an estimated third of the total koala population in NSW. and 30% of their habitat destroyed. But here in northern NSW it

is estimated that 80% of the koala population was killed, and a hundred other species are edging closer to extinction. I offered to go and help rescue koalas and was shocked that even highly experienced wildlife carers were not allowed in to the forests to rescue animals after the fires had gone through or to put out water as any surviving animals had no moisture at all. This was devastating to the many concerned environmentalists and wildlife carers in this region especially to be left imagining the horrors that the survivors were still being subjected to. And even more devastating to see at the same time that loggers were allowed into these same firegrounds and were leaving these same forests with salvage logs. We saw time and time again that property and belongings of humans were given priority and the lives of our incredibly unique and special wildlife were barely given a thought. It wasn't until nearly a month had passed from the fires that a very select few were allowed in to look for injured wildlife, but by that time it was too late. It wasn't until the fires in the Port Macquarie Region months later, that affected koala habitat that there was even a mention of koalas being affected by these fires. Yet the Long Gully and Drake Fires in the north of the state killed thousands of koalas, and the fire at Mt Nardi burnt rainforest which had never burnt before including Gondwana era species such as the Nightcap Oak which it is estimated one third of their population was lost. The Mt Nardi fire ended up burning 3/4 of the World Heritage listed Nightcap National Park as the fire was not initially stopped and wasn't deemed a high priority. This tragic loss of our wildlife and environmental heritage has caused much grief and stress in our community and must be addressed in the future.

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

There can be no doubt that Climate Change is a contributing factor to the fires and to the drought that preceded them. We must not only address emissions from the energy sector but also from the animal agriculture sector. Methane emissions from the animal agriculture sector are immense and the main driver of deforestation on the east coast of Australia is clearing for animal agriculture. Logging is also contributing to the intensity of fires, by drying out our forests and taking all the larger trees leaving a fire prone stick forest behind. Plantation forestry acts in the same way with a monoculture of similar size trees which burn so quickly that fires are only intensified.

Water security is another issue which must be addressed and environmental flows must be left to sustain our rivers and watercourses. Again animal agriculture uses a lot of water and growing crops is much more water efficient.

We must also respect and take advice from indigenous elders in regard to firestick burning and managing our natural landscape.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Dangerous fires and other extreme weather events due to Climate Change has been predicted for years yet our state and Federal Governments have done absolutely nothing but fuel these fires by continuing to prop up unsustainable industries like fossil fuels, animal agriculture and logging.

It is evident from the fires in this region in the north of the state that there was not enough aerial fire-fighting equipment and this needs to be massively expanded to be able to be at multiple places at one time and to fight fires when they start and before they get out of control. Just countering in loss of human life and property no longer stands. You must start giving equal

consideration to the loss of wildlife and biodiversity and to our remaining natural treasures which help to sustain all life. From news reports there was obviously not enough Personal Protection Equipment for the volunteer firefighters, or enough fire-fighting equipment to deal with so many fires at the one time. With Climate Change this could be the new normal so must now be accommodated for.

1.3 Response to bushfires

Fires must be extinguished if possible when they start. The Mt Nardi Fire was left to burn till it threatened the Mt Nardi Communication Towers when an aerial bomber with retardant was used, but once they were safe the aerial support left and the fire continued to rage and then the fire went around the towers and became an immediate threat to properties. Had the fire been put out initially which the local fire brigade believes was possible a lot of effort, resources, damage and wildlife could have been saved. 3/4 of the World Heritage Listed Nightcap National Park burnt and with the right resources this could have been avoided. The value of native forests with all their biodiversity and wildlife cannot be underestimated and must be given equal consideration as to that of human infrastructure. It is essential that we protect them for their biodiversity, to reduce species extinction and for their role in being part of the climate change solution, and if kept in their natural state their resilience to fires.

In this region only 1% of the big scrub is left and only remnants of our rainforests and old-growth forests remain. We have koalas on a very rapid path to extinction with losing approximately a third of the koala population in these fires in NSW. We must develop an emergency response plan for our wildlife, to save as many as we can. It was criminal to just leave our wildlife to burn and even after the fires for the poor injured souls that survived they were still left to die of their wounds, starvation and dehydration without any assistance or aid given. Whilst at the same time the logging industry was given permission to go in to the fire-grounds to log. This is soul-destroying to wildlife carers and also creates mental health issues.

There must be suitably trained personnel either in the RFS or Wildlife Carers who are allowed to enter the fireground as soon as possible to assist and rescue wildlife.

Whilst the Fires Near Me App was a good initiative, it was not updated enough to be of use if a fire was very close as you could not tell where the real danger zone was and with the smoke it was hard to tell exactly where the firefront was.

1.4 Any other matters

I would like to congratulate the Fire Commissioner Shane Fitzgibbons for doing an excellent job of leading the Rural Fire Service and communicating to the very concerned public.

Land-use planning must be addressed, we must leave our native forests intact with their native groundcovers, grasses and shrubs in place where they retain the moisture and have more resilience to fires. The more they are logged the more they dry out and the more weeds invade and it is this modified bush with extensive weeds such as lantana that only add fuel to fires. We must stop using our forests as resources and save, protect and regenerate our forests to act as a defense against climate change, to save our wildlife from extinction and in turn they will be more resistant to fires.

Barbed wire fences criss-cross our state everywhere again due to animal agriculture. They are a dangerous impediment to animals escaping fires and also to firefighters accessing firegrounds. Farmed animals must be able to have a means to escape the fire, at least be given a chance. Again it is distressing to think of how many animals both native and farmed that unnecessarily suffered in these fires. I think particularly of the many animals confined in factory farm sheds. Dogs and puppies in puppy factories and animals either tied up or couped in cages. We must have empathy for other beings and stop using them and

considering their protection and planning for them in emergency situations.

With all the evacuation centres it is imperative that provision be made for pets and also larger farm animals. If they can't be accommodated in the one place then there must be separate areas designated for them. You cannot add extra stress to people escaping fires by not accommodating their whole family including pets and any farm animals that they may be able to save.

We must protect and stop our koalas from going extinct. If we have another similar fire season we must pull out all stops to protect and save their forest homes as well as ours. And we must protect World Heritage Listed areas like the Nightcap National Park with its rare endemic species and our rainforest areas that do not regenerate after fires.

Supporting documents or images
