



Your details

Ms

Title

First name

Suzanne

Last name

Dickson

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

I am a 70 year old single woman. I live on a 5 acre plot near the small community of Quaama in the Bega valley, NSW. On the evening December 30th I prepared myself to evacuate however I became so focused on putting my fire plan into action that I forgot to leave!

For months prior I had been preparing my property and myself. I had over hanging branches removed, I had filled all my water tanks, I had tested every hose and hose fitting and pump, I had rehearsed filling the gutters and I knew how long it would take and I had fire proof mesh fitted to all my windows. I had removed all rubbish away from the house and verandahs and I had even climbed under my buildings dragging out all leaves and kikuyu grass. So when the fires came I felt that I was ready, I had a plan and I knew what to do.

From about 8pm I had ABC radio SouthEast as my constant

companion so I knew where the fires were (and there was more than one) I stayed up all night methodically putting my plan into action. About 4am when I was completely surrounded by fires I drove to my local RFS shed about 1 km away. By this stage everything was alight, the roadside was burning, 20 foot flames leapt from tree to tree, the concrete bridge was alight and fire bombs were landing on the village of Quaama. I stayed in the fire shed with about 40 other people while the fire passed over us.

My home and sheds survived with minor damage but my land was devastated and my alpacas died.

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

Logging and the debris left behind after the valuable timber has been removed is a fire hazard.

In my area local indigenous groups have been given "responsibility" for national parks ie Biamanga however their opinions are not valued and their voices are not heard. Their knowledge and wisdom must be considered as a valuable resource alongside science and other local knowledge. Mass hazard reduction without consideration of the land, its vegetation and geology is a waste of time and further adds to the risk.

1.2 Preparation and planning

Our local RFS brigades did their best to warn their communities to be prepared for the summer bush fire season however many people did not heed the warning. They failed to prepare their homes adequately nor did they prepare themselves physically, mentally or emotionally. They felt that they were safe because they lived in a village (Quaama) or town (Cobargo). Also many people expected the RFS to protect them and their property so they took no responsibility for their own safety. Many people did not follow the RFS app 'Fires near Me' and expressed surprise when the fires were lapping at their door steps. They were waiting for a knock on the door or the cavalry to arrive. Communities, especially small communities have to be encouraged to be more self reliant, more independent and better prepared. I suggest that every member of small, rural communities be given fire fighting training. Everybody, and I mean everybody, young and old, male and female should know where the fire hydrants are located in their village, how to access and use them and how to read a fire. We should have regular training all through the winter months so we are ALL responsible for our safety instead of relying on a hand full of volunteers using inadequate, aging equipment.

1.3 Response to bushfires

In my village of Quaama, 14 homes out of 38 plus the church, were destroyed and many more were damaged. Our RFS team is very small and many are in an older demographic however they made a valliant effort to protect us using old equipment, well worn uniforms and very little water. As a community, not just the RFS volunteers we have to be better prepared, better trained and our RFS has to be better resourced. Individually we must take greater responsibility as a community for our safety.

1.4 Any other matters

ABC radio SouthEast saved my life. Please, please encourage the Federal government to increase its funding. The Quaama telephone exchange was severely damaged by the fires and many towers were also damaged. There was no communication.

My only reliable source of information came from ABC radio!
People in rural Australia rely heavily on the ABC.

Supporting documents or images
