



Title	Mrs
First name	Theresa
Last name	Matthews

I am making this submission as	Resident
Submission type	Personal

Organisation making the submission (if applicable)

Your position in the organisation (if applicable)

Consent to make submission public	Public
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Your story

I had been watching this fire since it began in November. I had been mapping and writing down wind directions for a week prior to the fire arriving here at Bimbimbie. I was disappointed in the size of the fire break created behind Mogo which started at Batemans Bay. I was disappointed that the council left it so long before making this feeble attempt at stopping the fire. I knew once the fire got to Runnyford Road that Mogo and Bimbimbie would stand a 99% chance with a westerly wind of arriving to our homes and businesses. I was extremely disappointed with the community meetings held in Batemans Bay. At no time did they mention Mogo or Bimbimbie. I had found that the Ulladulla community meeting was the only meeting held where a member of the public had asked about Mogo and was told that YES the fire would probably reach us. I have a business in Mogo and after realising that the fire would probably impact stepped up my graphing and monitoring of what the fire was doing. On the week prior to the fire I began speaking to business owners who lived

on the Main Street of Mogo. I advised them that I believed the fire would arrive and that my elderly neighbours Mary [REDACTED] and Leah should be evacuated from the village as the fire began its track near Nelligen. The fires near me app was useless! I gathered my own information not from the council, not from a community meeting in our areas of Mogo or Bimbimbie but from listening to the fire fighters on the scanners. I listened for almost a month and as the fire began to come our way I listened continuously. My concern was that no one had been alerted in Mogo or Bimbimbie that the fire impact was imminent. I know from the discussions that I had with many people of Mogo that they thought Mogo would be safe as it is a tourist village on the NSW south coast. The day prior to the fire I opened my business The Mogo Lolly Shop and spoke to every tourist that arrived at my counter and told them all to go home before the fire arrived. I told them that I believed the fire would impact us over the next 48 hours and that there would not be enough fire fighters here to keep them safe. I advised them to know where evacuation areas were. Most told me that their accomodation has said nothing to them and that they were happy to stay. At 2.30pm on the 30th December 2019 I watched as debris fell from the sky getting heavier. I left my store and came home to Bimbimbie to finalise things here at home and had been told that they had started door knocking Bimbimbie residents advising them that they should be prepared to evacuate. No one came to my home or that of our neighbours! I called the Batemans Bay Police Station on the eve of the fire at 8pm and asked them whether we were supposed to be evacuated. They advised me that they did not know the answer and that I would need to speak to one of the fire stations. Their recommendation due to our location of Bimbimbie was to speak to Moruya RFS. I called them also and was advised that we would be safe to stay at home if we felt comfortable and that door knocking would continue at 7am in the morning. They did advise though that they believed we should be ready to leave by 8am. It is only due to my own graphing of wind speed, temperature and the fires whereabouts that I realised we were going to get hit here. I spoke with my neighbour again as I had been with her from 3pm cutting and clearing a break behind her home for 4 hours that should have been taken care of for years by forest control. I know that Belinda [REDACTED] my neighbour had been making these phone calls consistently to have this done and they had never shown up to do it. Working together we cleared what we could hoping that it might provide her with a buffer. We spoke many times that night and I had gone to bed at 1.30am setting my alarm for 4am not feeling secure that the information presented on the phone would be correct. When I awoke I walked out onto my deck and could see the fire coming from behind us. I called my neighbour and made them get up to finish preparing. I took a photo of the fire behind my house and sent it to her so that she could see what we could see from our house which is set up higher. I woke my husband and my daughter and 5 year old grand child. I called my friend in James Street at Mogo at 5am to alert her also to what I was seeing and she advised that they had not been evacuated and that Mogo would be safe. At 6am my husband took our camper trailer to my business at Mogo as we had packed it just in case our home was lost. My husband argued with me just prior to leaving to place the trailer behind my store as I believed it would not be safe there and he was listening to the advice of our friends. While he was gone I got a message on my mobile for everyone to evacuate Mogo and I tried to call my husband to tell him to turn around. His mobile was ringing on our kitchen bench, he had left it behind. I called my friends in Mogo again and told them to get out! To head for Tomakin. I called my neighbour and told her I had gotten a text to alert fire was going to impact Mogo and that I believed we would be next and that I would be leaving for safety and that I wanted her and her partner to leave as well. She refused to leave. I had wanted to drive to Mogo to get my husband but my

daughter was screaming at me that I couldn't leave her and my grandchild. As this was happening my husband returned and another text followed advising it was too late to evacuate Mogo now. When he arrived the wind was hot and gusting towards us and the temperature in his car read that it was already over 30 degrees and it was only 6.30am. Just before 7am we had left for the safety of Moruya. Our house is 7 metres off the ground on a hill and when we purchased it 3 years earlier we had cleared what the RFS has advised us that we could. We had wanted to clear more but were told that it was not necessary. Once we arrived at the Moruya Showground we realised that there was no fire trucks or people who would protect us there. There was large animals and a lot of straw everywhere. People began panicking as there was reports that the fire was now behind the showground near pioneer avenue. I didn't believe we were safe so I had earlier in the week looked for a place of last resort and found that the airport was noted. Believing that with all of the water bombing planes being stationed from there I packed us up and relocated us to a building at the airport. My neighbour called me crying and not knowing where to go. She said they were losing the fight at her house and that my house was on fire and that of our neighbours. I told her to come to us at the airport. We could see how massive the fire front was that was coming towards Broulee. I called another friend whose husband is disabled and screamed to her that she needed to get out of her place fast! My neighbour was concerned as we had no idea where fire hoses were at the building and so we made the decision to relocate to Moruya Park. Once we arrived my friend called me whose husband works at the RFS Moruya and told us we would not be safe to stay there at the park. I told her there was over a thousand people there. She advised that no one would be coming and that we needed to go back to the showground. We had heard on the scanner that the fire was impacting Batemans Bay so I called my youngest daughter and her partner and advised them to leave their flat near Bunnings. I called my employee who lives in the same complex and told her to get to an evacuation centre as well. My daughter called me back later and advised that they could not see and that there was fire everywhere and that she was returning to her flat. I begged her not to do this but she advised that there was no fire near her flat and that she believed she would be safer there. Later in the afternoon we were advised that the police were letting people through at the road block on the Princes Highway to go home. I believed that if they were letting residents through that it must have been safe for us to return to our home. My husband and family were in one vehicle and me and our pets were in another. We became separated on the exit out of Moruya. I was about 10-15 cars behind them. My husband had gotten through so I had waited for my turn and drove towards our home. As I headed home I saw our Ute coming towards me flashing the lights. I pulled over and found that it was only my daughter and grandchild. My daughter was screaming that she was going for help that everything was in fire and that my husband had jumped out of the vehicle to try and put the fires out. I told her to go back to Moruya and tell the police officer to try and get us some help and to stop letting people through. For 4 hours my husband and I fought with buckets from our last remaining water tank to save our home and my daughters tiny home. We had no power our pumps were lost so we had no choice but to fight with buckets to get out what we could. Just in 7pm we left our home to head back to the safety of Moruya as there were too many trees behind our house on fire that we believed would fall and possibly land on our home. We had called a motel at the airport earlier in the day and had secured a room for all 4 of us to seek shelter for the night so we went back to Moruya and grabbed our daughter and grandchild and drove away from the hundreds of displaced people to the safety of the motel. There we met a 104 year old lady staying with us who had lost her home at Rosedale. What

followed was 8 days of chaos. My husband the store manager for Batemans Bay [REDACTED] has had to leave us to make his way to his store to see what needed to be done there to get it ready for the public. On his first day he had arrived alone and with a flashlight he had begun removing product from the shelves of the fridges. His staff had seen his car there and a crew of 10 arrived at his back door including my youngest daughter to strip the store and await a generator to arrive once the roads were again open. While my husband dealt with his store I had come back to our home alone repeatedly to douse fire that had restarted around our house. Leaving my daughter and grandchild at the motel at the airport. When we got word that a second high fire day was looming I arranged for the 104 year old lady to be removed from the airport and taken to shelter at Moruya. My daughter and grand daughter would not leave me. I found floatation devices should my daughter and grandchild have to go into the water and I set about blocking drains in the street with tyres and tarps so that if necessary I could flood the road in front of us with water to act as a buffer from the fire. The owner of the motel worried about his private home at Tuross just left us. He returned repeatedly with trailer loads of his home contents and delivered them inside his plane hanger which is where he had made us tie up our dogs to a tractor for 7 days. We were on our own with the caretaker. My husband and I plus the caretaker set about deciding a plan to keep us as safe as possible. But on the night before the second fire was going to arrive the owner had booked in a family with a severely disabled son. The father clad in thongs and a pair of shorts and a tank top was met by me with aggression as I had overheard him trying to change our fire plan. I told him only idiots show up to fight a fire in what he was dressed in and that he needed to get kitted up in something to protect himself from the heat and the fire. I advised him that his other adult children needed to stay in the rooms at the front of the motel and that once the fire began coming towards us that he needed to make sure that they remained inside and that my belief was should they allow fire or embers inside the building that we would lose the last place we had left to sleep. His children were disrespectful of the danger that was coming towards us so I was forced to lock them out of the room where my daughter and grandchild and our dogs had been placed for their protection also. I argued with this man to get his kids to stay inside with his disabled son and to stop going in and out of the building. It has been a nightmare of all proportion that we have endured.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors	I believe that the breaker placed behind Mogo was not deep enough to protect the area from fire impact. I believe that the logging that occurred out towards Runnyford Road and around Mogo was mismanaged and that the fuel loads that were left on the ground were a contributing factor to the heat of the fire front. I believe that a town meeting for our area should've been done in the week before the fire arrived.
1.2 Preparation and planning	The preparation was poor in the lead up. The council was encouraging more visitors to the area on Canberra television and the council did not communicate to the wider community via radio to leave the area the day before.
1.3 Response to bushfires	The response was poor by the council. They were in no way prepared for the thousands of displaced people who became stuck here due to highway closures. The council did not have a management plan of how they would deal with such a large scale evacuation.
1.4 Any other matters	As property owners living near the forest we should've been allowed to increase our property protection zones. The forestry should've maintained the forest around us with annual clearing

and back burning. Emergency evacuation points should be sign posted in every village along the coast and at those evacuation points there should be water for human protection. When large fire fronts are encroaching a tourism area at holiday times radio broadcasts should be frequent alerting the tourist to the imminent danger they could face by remaining in the areas. Hotels and motels should be contacted by the council with updates of the severity of the conditions preceding such an event so that notices can be placed in these venues for tourist warning.

Upload files
