

Your details

Title

Mrs

First name

Trish

Last name

Keeley

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 resided in Long Beach NSW 2536 from end of November 2019-April 2020 with my husband and 9yo son. We were affected by the North Black Range and Currowan/Clyde Mountain fire from November-January. My parents 10km from Braidwood were affected by the North Black Range fire and impacted by the Currowan Fire.

We had moved into a rental property in Long Beach which was not bush fire ready or safe to shelter in, we relocated based on RFS advice (community meetings and Fires Near Me app) on 3 occasions, first on 4 December to Dalmeny campground, on New Year's Eve and 3 January to Batemans Bay evacuation Centre at Hanging Rock Catalina slept/sheltered in our car.

We were affected by bushfire smoke, anxiety, power and telecommunications outages, grocery shortages, and road closures which impacted ability to work and see/assist family for that period. My son's school was also impacted by fire.

I would like to make submission as I believe there were some things which made positive difference, and other things which if had of been done in preparation could have helped at the extremes and in recovery.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.2 Preparation and planning

The Evacuation Centre and local council were grossly underprepared, and this contributed to situation of humanitarian crisis...which could have been worse.

There should have been sufficient food and water, power generators, and telecommunications facilities in place at the Evacuation Centres. Toilets were in darkness with no soap to wash hands, donations were out of bounds yet people couldn't get food or water in extreme heat with no alternative open in town...the only food options available for my hungry child on two occasions were chilli sausages and dry flat bread if he couldn't eat curry. He was grateful be permitted a milk with Milo for breakfast on 4 January, I was grateful they had been able to rig up a light for shower, provide a couple of cakes of soap in the toilets and clean toilets on daily basis.

I would have thought registration though Red Cross at evacuation center could have been used as starting point for distribution of donated funds.

Community information and evacuation points should be given greater consideration and more adequate resourcing in advance in future.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The Fires Near Me app and local Facebook groups kept us out of harm's way, and I am incredibly grateful for that information lifeline when power and telecommunications were operational. We were educated immensely on bushfire preparedness and weather during this period.

The lag was a concern.

We spent a couple of evenings on the mobile phone to mum relaying information when their power and satellite internet went out during spotfire and arial firefight activity in close proximity.

During power outages I had to sit with car running in driveway to charge phone enough to make call, the car battery and phone went flat at evacuation center on 4 January so wasn't able to be in touch with mum when Currowan Fire impact their property. We had expected, based on prediction map, their property wouldnt be in direct threat that evening - had it not of been for brake light in car preventing the 8hr trip (usually 45mins when Kings Hwy open) we would have been there.

Thankfully their local RFS attended to assist - my parents who had always planned to stay and defend realised how far out of their capabilities they were on their own and recognise now they would not have succeeded if the fire had of threatened their house.

Our RFS capability should now be expanded to include skilling the community and annual preparedness consultation prior to bushfire season.

Rental properties in bushfire threat areas should be required to be of standard suitable to shelter in, preparedness of property for bush fire an item to be checked on routine inspections/entry condition reports by agent.

Residential developments in bushfire areas must have more than one access road so as residents not trapped in or having to evacuate towards danger to get out.

1.4 Any other matters

Medical facilities were insufficient.

Aged care facilities and their fire plans were inadequate for residents throughout extreme events.

Rubbish tip facilities have been cause for concern in Eurobodalla since fires - they need to be open and functioning so as residents and property owners can ensure bushfire preparedness. The council has done an excellent job in maintaining curbside collection, but those facilities are inadequate beyond week to week living to ensure yards and gutters and clutter cleared when additional waste removal options unavailable inaccessible or extremely expensive.

Housing affordability deserves a mention, as does economic impact. These issues are currently being overshadowed by COVID19, as are the mental health issues. Cost of rent, due to demand, has increased approximately \$100/wk, this seems in line with \$100,000 increase in cost to buy. The initial response to fires and humanitarian crisis was outpouring and compassion - this was quickly overtaken by greed and preference to cash in on opportunity created

by misfortunate circumstances people in fire ravaged areas now find selves in. The extent of economic impact in coastal towns from the 2019-2020 fires (particularly as now also being impacted by COVID restrictions...for which we are thankful right now because we are acutely well aware of how vulnerable and isolated and under resourced we are) is yet to be realised.

Supporting documents or images
