



Upper Murray Inc.  
C/O 33 Hanson St  
Corryong VIC 3707  
[www.uppermurray.com.au](http://www.uppermurray.com.au)

21 April 2020

NSW Bushfire Enquiry

To Whom it May Concern

Upper Murray Incorporated (UMI) is a not for profit organisation governed by a Community Board established to encourage Economic Development including Agriculture, Tourism and Business and to implement the Upper Murray 2030 Vision Plan.

We as a Board have been working with the Towong Shire and Snowy Valleys Council on the Bushfire Recovery for the Upper Murray.

The effectiveness of the Emergency response to the devastating fires was complicated by several issues notwithstanding several decisions that were made based on the last Royal Commission.

What happened in the Black Saturday Fires as devastating as they were, will not necessarily happen in all rural areas. All factors need to be considered when the emergency warnings are issued.

We believe that rural landowners (farmers) should be supported in their decision to protect their asset and in fact the damage the fire caused, could have been mitigated, by greater support of these landowners, on the ground by the RFS and CFA.

The following is an outline of the concerns we have after the recent fires in the Upper Murray which straddles both sides of the Murray River.

#### **The NSW and Victorian Border**

The CFA and RFS radios were unable to communicate to each other and in fact on occasions with their own members

Mt Elliot Tower not only services Corryong and Surrounds but also a great swathe of Southern NSW so when this tower was down due to no power both NSW and Victorian Communities were endangered



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The different mapping and warning structures used by each state meant that Communication stopped at the Border. We need to implement best practice right across Australia  
ABC regional Radio needs to service both sides of the River during emergency response not just one or the other

### Communication in General

Emergency services needs to be defined as critical and therefore have all the back-up power and other necessary resources to function in an emergency  
If satellite phones are to be the back-up, they need to work  
Power will always be lost, and communication relies on power  
UHF radios are an under resourced communication tool

### Warning Systems

This was based on the Royal Commission into the Black Saturday Fires  
We understand that preservation of life is the priority however the blanket evacuation orders were unnecessary, and, in some instances, they endangered rather than protected as there was a sense of panic  
The standing down of all emergency services on Friday 3<sup>rd</sup> January left the Upper Murray vulnerable  
There seemed to be no common sense in the evacuation approach

### Resources and Asset Protection

#### **The Upper Murray was completely under resourced**

Not enough CFA Tankers (several of them are so big they cannot access certain areas)  
Not enough Quick fill water sites

Asset protection needs a more common-sense definition  
Grass is an asset to Farmers  
Grass fires are overall more controllable and had they been Cudgewa may have had a different outcome  
There was also overall a lack of air support especially in the initial stages of the fire in NSW (Talmalmo)



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### **Solutions**

Ensure there is adequate back up power to protect the emergency services and communication between NSW and Victoria (Generators, battery etc)

Re introduce the Farmer based Slip on Fire Units to the CFA and RFS

Every farming property should be provided with at least one Slip-on Unit (depending on size of property) and UHF Radios to communicate if they do not have one (this could come out of the RFS funding for equipment and training)

Each Community to have Training and equipment checks annually

Those Communities who do not have a Tanker to be provided with one (Communities should not have to fundraise to be protected)

Ensure that ALL radio stations have the latest emergency information to broadcast as the ABC cannot be relied on unless power is guaranteed and ensure the information does not stop at the border

Ensure that evacuation orders are appropriate for the district not just a blanket warning.

Evaluate the effectiveness of staying and defending properties that were defendable, rather than blanket evacuation orders, which may have caused more damage rather than less

Evaluate the worst-case scenarios and make sure that the Emergency Response for these situations is adequate

Increase fuel reduction and investigate cool burn methods

Liaise with National and State Park Departments to develop adequate fire breaks to protect private property. Work with LLS and other stakeholders to ensure the road sides are grazed.

Thank you for your time and interest. We hope that the information provided in this submission may ensure that our community is better protected and supported in the future.

Kind Regards

Jo Mackinnon, Ian Cesa, Ed Barry, Sarah Whately, Jeff Sheather and Kay Whitehead.  
Board Upper Murray Incorporated