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<b>Title</b>	Mr
<b>First name</b>	Vaughan
<b>Last name</b>	Hirschausen

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<b>I am making this submission as</b>	Resident
<b>Submission type</b>	Organisation

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<b>Organisation making the submission (if applicable)</b>	
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<b>Your position in the organisation (if applicable)</b>	
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<b>Consent to make submission public</b>	Public
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<b>Your story</b>	<p>G'day</p> <p>I think the story starts around the 24th of December 2019 when we received an automated telephone message saying we were in imminent danger from a bushfire or at least ember attack. The fire in question at this time was the fire around Batemans Bay which I believe was called the Currowan fire. Batemans Bay is approx. 100 kilometres from Bewong and at this time (if I have the timing right) the fire was still approx. 100 kilometres to the south. In reality we were not in imminent danger.</p> <p>Unfortunately this message was also received by other residents of Bewong and within a day we saw the gossip machine crank up and a number of people evacuate. (Bewong consists of about 25 houses some of which are treated as holiday type accommodation so about half were occupied and of these 50% left.)</p> <p>In the time between this initial alert and the eventual fires at</p>
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Bewong I noted that a fire had started at Tiangara Falls which is approx. 20 kilometres due west of Bewong.

My alert levels were now raised and while I had been monitoring what was happening using the RFS web site I knew that the danger levels were now much higher than before.

For us the real issue was on New Years eve when in fact fire did come to Bewong.

Again some people left but if I recall correctly this time there were no phone messages because I think both mobile and landline phones were out. People made the rash decision to go when the fire was already happening.

My plan was to always stay and fight any fires that might impact my house. While my property is surrounded by large trees I believed that my wife and I would be able to manage the situation and had therefore decided to defend my property.

I had some 50000 litres of water available along with a household type petrol fire pump plus hoses to reach all areas of the property and the house.

I had ensured the house valleys and gutters were clean and cleaned away all loose leaves and flammable material in the week prior to Christmas.

Leading up to the fire at Bewong I would suggest that the RFS website called Fires Near Me provided no real assistance to help me assess when I might come under threat. The web site while it probably accurately tracks the fire, in my opinion it really tracks where the fire has been and not where it is. As a person who is willing to stay and defend not just my property but those of neighbours I need to have the latest info on where the fire is.

(Note:-This is a key comment as I believe this web site needs to be modified so that the actual fire locations are clearly shown along with directions that it is travelling)

On News years eve I had been ill in the morning and decided to rest. I arose at around 1230 and my wife advised that the info from the 2ST web sites was advising that we were likely to come under ember attack at any time. We went outside and my wife noted live embers falling at which time we went in and dressed ready to fight a fire. By the time I got back outside the forest some 100 metres across the road from our house was roaring.

We spent the next 6 hours ensuring no burning embers affected our property as well as assisting my 79 year old neighbour whose property backed onto a forest within the Bewong river retreat which was also fully alight.

The RFS (a single truck) came when the fire opposite me started, observed the situation and then left. Maybe the police and RFS observation vehicles drove down the street during the time the few residents left were ensuring their properties didn't burn down. I was too busy to notice.

Whole scenario repeated itself a few days later.

My comments \ thoughts are this:-

1:- The emergency computer generated phone calls can be counter productive especially when in fact the danger is not imminent as human nature dictates people will react in a way that eventually amounts to panic.

2:-The message that everybody should leave in my opinion is not the best action. In situations as occurred this year where fires were burning across a 1000 kilometre front the then RFS resources are stretched beyond any reasonable limit, abled bodied people willing to help should not be forced to leave. In my opinion this message needs to be reviewed. Yes I understand we have probably gone from no messages to leave, to everybody goes and leave it to the trained RFS people. (This year given the scale of the fires I would suggest resources were so thin on the ground that they could see the people who were protecting their properties had the situation under control and were thankful for the efforts these people put in) I think the answer lies somewhere in between. Trust me if a small number of people at Bewong had not been willing to protect their properties and in cases those of their neighbours this story may have been quite different.

3:- A suggestion I could make is that the RFS visit small communities like Bewong and seek assistance from the locals. Provide some training. Now instead of half the people leaving only a quarter would. At Bewong the houses on the river could be protected by a few fire pumps drawing water directly from the river. Maybe people could be encouraged to purchase a pump. The standard comment to this suggestion will be well join the RFS. Bad answer.

4:- Having the media coverage that you get nowadays is in my opinion counter productive. They don't really add value just more drama. Yes they keep you informed, but when you are actually involved the tools that are supposed to assist (that the media coverage refers you constantly to) are in fact less than helpful. I reiterate being able to view a web site that has a map of where the fire has burned is useless when the fire appears at your doorstep. Having emergency phone calls when the fire is some 100 kilometres away is also useless

Do we really need to see the media network presenters in their brand new protective clothing giving us the news from a recently burnt out village. This doesn't add value just makes the news media people feel good.

5:-I have watched a number of programs that have raised the issue of inquiries and subsequent recommendations which have largely been allowed to fall by the wayside. Now a substantial track of bushland and forest along with the wild animals that lived there, as well as the human lives and properties have been lost because those charged with implementing these recommendations chose to ignore them. Shame on governments of all persuasions for not listening. Will it be different this time. Time will tell.

Regards  
Vaughan

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**1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

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**1.2 Preparation and planning**

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**1.3 Response to bushfires**

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**1.4 Any other matters**

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**Upload files**

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