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## Your details

Mrs

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**Title**

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**First name**

Yvonne

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**Last name**

Matthews

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## Submission details

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**I am making this submission as**

A resident in a bushfire-affected area

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**Submission type**

I am making a personal submission

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**Your position in the organisation (if applicable)**

Coordinator Fire Recovery - run by the local Presbyterian Churches, Moruya, Narooma and Tuross

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**Consent to make submission public**

I give my consent for this submission to be made public

## Share your experience or tell your story

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**Your story**

The Bush Fires of the summer of 2019-20 were a harrowing experience for all of us, who live on and love the South Coast of NSW. Although emotionally and physically exhausting for us, because of being on high alert, and in a state of hyper-vigilance for a month, nonetheless our property survived unscathed. Sadly, others were not so fortunate, many of our friends lost everything, save their lives.

Living on 100 acres of mainly pastured un-timbered land gave us a massive advantage. From our veranda we were able to watch the progress, direction and ferocity of the fires which raged through the Duea Valley, north and south of it.

Whilst this was a very stressful time, something we've never experienced before, nor wish to again, we've learned some

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valuable lessons.

Nonetheless we were very well prepared, with fire fighting pumps, dams close by. We spent weeks removing mulch from around the gardens and did all the other check list things to make our property as safe as possible.

On the fateful day, new year's eve, our children who were visiting, managed to leave and head back towards their own homes, one in Canberra and the other making their way to Sussex Inlet. The latter family, endured more stress as they had to constantly move about to stay out of the reach of the fire. For us, on that fateful day, if the wind hadn't changed from the south at 11.30 am when it did, we would've been directly in the path of the fire. We were spared but sadly, while it was good news for us, our neighbours to the north and north west, ravaged in its wake, Bimbimbie, Mogo, Malua Bay, Catalina etc. If the back burning was not done along the highway near Percy Davis Drive, we feel we would have been under threat.

What we have learned

1. To be prepared, generators, water pumps, plans in place, correct clothing etc
2. Be diligent, check the weather forecast, watch and be ready to act.
3. Have your phone charged at all times. Listen to the updates.
4. Strategic backburning needs to be allowed, the Greens have had far too much control – it was the combination of the extreme drought conditions and the amount of undergrowth that fuelled this monster.
5. Whilst going through the nightmare, it was disturbing to hear of people (other than the government bodies), starting fires.

Follow Up

For the last 3 months I have been helping with the Fire Recovery Group in our local church, Presbyterian. We've been given a large sum of money, from the Sydney churches which is to be used solely for the bushfire victims. We have made contact with families in the community, offering assistance, primarily what they needed where they were at, in that moment. Some needed a water tank to get back to their blocks, others chainsaw, farm equipment, food, fuel and Bunnings vouchers. Now we are finding folks need heaters and warm clothing. The important role for us is that these folks need to be followed up which we try to do with food boxes etc.

The people who don't have any insurance are finding things much harder.

The elderly needed extra help. They seemed to step back, and let the help reach others, thinking that their losses were not as bad as others.

The clearing of the land was a major problem for some, they've been waiting for months and months. The government kindly offered funding for this but in my opinion, a priority list should have been made. Folks, in their seventies are living in caravans, with winter approaching they will be very cold.

Also, I came across a man who was partially blind, trying to cope on his own whilst members of his family worked away.

I can happily say that finally there is some action for these poor folks who seem to go from one emotional low to the next.

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

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**1.1 Causes and contributing factors**

What can be improved.  
1. Mt Wandera Tower. Needs to be better and active fire management. Perhaps build a concrete wall around the outside and have Bushfire Brigades look after it.  
Fire took out the phone tower and TV transmission, cutting the south coast from the world.  
We did have a radio in the end. We made sure that we had a battery- operated one.  
Also contacting government bodies was a nightmare for some, being shoved from one department to another.  
I even found folks, that had lost everything had not heard of Minderoo and the generous work they do.

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**1.2 Preparation and planning**

What is needed in my opinion, is one person (Similar to the Commissioner of emergency management), to oversee all the operations, the giving out of grants, food vouchers etc)  
Perhaps giving a person a case number and asking volunteers or government agencies to follow up. This is not hard with all the means available to us, such as messenger, phones, emails etc.  
I helped a lady reconnect to Facebook so that she could receive feedback via messenger.  
In all our dealings with distraught people we need to show kindness and genuine concern for their needs.  
"Treating others as we would like to be treated."

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**1.4 Any other matters**

Thank you for the opportunity to express our opinions and concerns.  
If we can learn from what was done well and what could be done better then  
we have contributed to the betterment of our community.

**Supporting documents or images**

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