



Title	MRS
First name	MELISSA
Last name	FREEBODY

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	<p>It seems so long ago that the Currowan Fire started and was threatening homes on the South Coast. Because I live on Old Bolaro Road, Nelligen I started preparing in case this fire crossed the Kings Highway. I was glued to the RFS website 'Fires near me' and any reports about the fire like so many others in town for weeks and weeks. It took the closure of the Kings Highway and Forestry with RFS tankers moving up and down our road before I started getting concerned but still I thought we would be fine as they seemed to be working attempting to bring this fire under control. There were many days I had to leave work early due to the fire nearing the highway or alerts about the distance from my farm. My husband works away all week so I had my father staying with me every night due to the threat. Weekends my husband would return and we would be preparing as much as we could, but we were in drought which meant our creek was dry, our tanks were nearly empty and our ground was brown and dry. We ordered</p>
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10000 litres of water to fill one of our tanks and hoped it would be enough.

Neighbors started putting out signs of their intention to stay on their properties and fight the fire. We all could see and smell the smoke but it was North of us and a backburn was put in on the Kings Highway adjacent to Old Bolaro Road and along the Kings Highway to prevent this fire from crossing the road.

Nearing Xmas my husband and I were visited by SES who were gathering information on who was staying and who was leaving and the number of animals we had. We advised we were staying and I will never forget the fellow saying 'Dont worry you wont be out here fighting the fire by yourselves'. How wrong they were. Received news after Xmas the Currowan fire had jumped the Clyde Mountain and they had renamed it but it was still the same fire. Once we heard this news we drove up Old Bolaro Rd to try and pin point the fires location as we werent getting any news on how far away it was from our property. Daily we would starting our pump and started putting buckets of water around our house, making sure we were ready.

We had our son and grandsons (6yrs and 1yr old) visiting for the festive season and moved them into town to ensure they would be safe.

I cant remember why we knew the fire was closing in on us on 30th Dec but our son came out to stay with us to give us a hand if we needed it. We went for a drive up our road and found fire just on the boundary of Monga State Forest and Monga National Park burning everywhere but no one patrolling it. The winds were in our favour and my husband who had worked on the Forestry for 30 years kept saying that no one was manning this fire and it had the potential to go anywhere with these winds even the coast. That night we were woken by the winds at around 2am. When I got service on my phone I'd had a missed call from my neighbour. We could now hear the roar of the fire out the back of Nelligen run and the glow could be seen.

My son and I drove across to my neighbours John and Lydias place to see if we could view the location of it better as John lives on the high side of us. As the hot northerly wind howled we saw the fire burning all around our side of Bolaro Mountain. And again we waited, sitting out in the front yard watching and preparing. John phoned again to say it was getting closer and he and another neighbour had called triple 000 so the authorities had knowledge of the location of the fire, this was around 3.30am. Around 4.00am we saw a RFS brigade come from up Bolaro Rd and head down Paradise Rd then retrun back up Bolaro Rd. Neighbours started driving around the roads with IBC on utes and trailers. It hit the paddock at our other neighbours place down Paradise Rd, and started spot fires around the area. As our back boundary is shared with Aboriginal Council lands which hasnt been burn for years, we said we would have to be around the house as everything will burn if it gets in there.

With next doors paddocks alight, I watched from the front yard two RFS tankers come to it with lights flashing. I remember thinking 'thank goodness they are around to help us' but after a few minutes they turned around and took the road out to the highway without even turning a pump on.

By this time the wind had changed and was coming from the South and the fire had started coming up the dry creek bed towards us and spreading rapidly into the Aboriginal block. Another local from down Paradise Rd came over and told us they had saved the house the RFS had abandoned but now his place was being threatend but if we needed help call him.

I drove the ute with my son Hayden on the hose and my husband David on the rake. We went through that first 1000 litres so quickly and had to go back and back the trailer in to fill up. I was on auto pilot backing the trailer those first couple of times. The cows with calves and our horse Henry were all hanging around the house and I reckon they knew what was going on. The fire was roaring up the creek and across the front paddock

before we knew it. Even with no grass it was like petrol had been spilt and it just flew across the dirt.

Before we knew it, it was everywhere. We were surrounded, I watched the old caravan go up and looked at the road and it was all alight and then I knew even if we wanted too we couldnt get out. Everything was burning and we had retreated to the house yard.

When refilling our 1000 litre pod and my husband with the house hose protecting the side of the house which was being threatened I looked down and saw the whole front yard was on fire, I yelled to David to get around the front. The flames had made it to under the house before he managed to extinguish it. Smoke was everywhere, the heat from the fire was terrible and we were surrounded, it was at this time I called triple 000. The first operator asked if our lives were in danger and I remember telling him we had fire all around us and I thought we were going to die, he patched me through to RFS where I told him our predicament and he said he would try and get crews to us. I was screaming that all of Old Bolaro Road was on fire but no one came and even after it all no one came for a welfare check or anything. We had no one come out to check on us and we are only 16kms from Batemans Bay but feel a lot further and very alone.

While hosing the house and getting an advantage on the fire we heard our neighbour John and Lydias place explode and we prayed they were ok. Once things were under control my husband David and son Hayden drove over to our neighbours and didnt know what they would find. What they did find was our neighbours standing on their driveway with their dog in arms in shock with nothing left. House and cars all gone and all John could say was where was the RFS. Both spent a couple of days in hospital before travelling to stay with family.

This fire didnt only affect us but my other son in Newcastle and mother and siblings in Griffith phoned after seeing the fire on the news and was a nervous wreck not knowing if we were alive or not. My sons partner staying with his children in Batemans Bay listening to the radio reports. There was a lot of people affected and little did we know this fire did burn to the coast taking out houses in many areas.

The residents on Old Bolaro Rd lost two homes and many sheds and machinery and it is amazing that no one lost their lives as we all stayed to protect our homes.

Ten days after the fire our local council came out with a tree services company, we had mended our fences to keep stock in our paddocks but they fell trees over fences and smashed our cattle yard with a tree that had been standing for many years. No one has been back to clean any of this up so if you drive up the road to this day you will still see all these trees laying where they were felled.

We also have never been contacted due to our triple zero call or even a welfare check.

I am a 51yr old mother who fought this fire with no experience and only guidance from my husband and the help from our son. This has affected me immensely as I am angry and disappointed that we were left with no information, no assistance and abandoned.

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

1.2 Preparation and planning

1.3 Response to bushfires

1.4 Any other matters

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