

## Your details

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**Title**

Mr

**First name**

Keith

**Last name**

Brister

## Submission details

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**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

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**Your story**

Please see document attached

## Terms of Reference (optional)

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

## Supporting documents or images

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### Attach files

- Bushfire Inquiry Submission.rtf

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10<sup>th</sup> April 2020

### **Submission to the NSW Independent Inquiry into the 2019-20 Bushfire Season**

We have been residents of Blackheath in the Blue Mountains for 35 years, on a bush block adjoining the National Park. In that time our block has been burnt twice – first in 2006 during back burn operations and in the recent fires. We were home in 2006 but not in the recent fires and have relied on accounts from neighbours.

We are members of the Blue Mountains Conservation Society and supporters of the Nature Conservation Council and fully support their submissions so will not repeat them here. Instead we want to provide several comments on our experiences.

#### **Information**

Information on fire activity has improved greatly in recent years with the Fires Near You app. However this proved inadequate in the recent fires due to the huge size of some fires and the inability to pinpoint fire activity in areas of interest. The arcgis hot spot mapping was far more useful and we relied on this. The RFS app needs upgrading to provide live and focused information.

#### **Mopping Up**

We were surprised in the 2006 fire by the time spent by crews on our property mopping up after the fire, ensuring the edges of the fire were out and burning trees extinguished.

The recent fires illustrate the importance of this as we understand there were several serious flare-ups in our street, one which burnt the upper part of Connaught Swamp and another came right up to the back of our house and was fortunately spotted and fought by a passing postman. We assume it was also a flare-up which destroyed Jemby Rinjah Lodge at Evans Lookout on New Years Eve, 8 days after the main fire – the only loss of property in Blackheath.

We can understand that mopping up was not possible after the main fire as crews had to follow the fire, but we understand that there were several crews patrolling the area for days after the main fire and they could have been usefully employed checking all the fire boundaries near settled areas. There needs to be more attention to this particularly if property owners have evacuated or are otherwise absent.

#### **Grass vs Bush Fires**

We have noted that many damaging fires are in grassland with scattered trees rather than densely forested areas, for example in Victoria, the Eyre Peninsula and in Southern NSW recently. However most media reports describe them all as bushfires leading to a common perception that the problem is

forests and chopping down trees is an answer to bushfire threat. In fact removing trees and replacing them with grassland may well lead to more dangerous fires in some conditions. We have however never seen any analysis of this difference and why grassland fires can be so dangerous – perhaps because they can move so fast.

We would like to be sure that the Inquiry carefully considers the relation between landscape and fire intensity and if any conclusions can be made incorporates these in their recommendations.

### **Climate Change**

We think it is imperative that the Inquiry recognises and documents the contribution which climate change has made to the severity of these fires and the implications of this for the future. This includes:

- The exceptional weather conditions leading up to and during the fires – drought, heat and wind.
- The huge cost of the fires, including deaths, damage to peoples health across eastern NSW, damage to buildings and other infrastructure, damage to the environment including a huge toll on native fauna, effects on peoples wellbeing both through loss of property, loss of income and health impacts, etc
- The recognition that whatever actions we take to reduce hazards, improve building standards and improve fire-fighting capabilities that there will always be a point where the fire is too severe to stop. Climate scientists tell us this is more likely in the future.

We must take this event as a warning – that climate action must be taken now to minimise such events in the future and whatever the cost of this action it is justified by the huge and unpredictable future costs of doing nothing.

Keith & Lorraine Brister