



Your details

Mr

Title

First name

Peter

Last name

Redman

Submission details

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

Your story

I have owned a 15 hectare "Bush block" at [REDACTED], Bell, NSW 2786 since 2002 and been a member and active fire fighter of Bell RFS since 2003. I am currently the President of Bell RFS. I had lived on my block for a few years from 2002 to 2004 before moving into Katoomba. The block is native bush, surrounded by crown land with National Park on the other side of Darling Causeway. There was a couple of simple cabins and sheds on the property with some water tanks and a caravan. I had used my bush block as a weekender ever since 2004 and had planned to build a house/shed on the property in late 2020 or 2021. There is an active DA on the property for a dwelling/shed.

We are used to fires, having had major fires in 2007 and 2013, both times my infrastructure on my property was saved by back burning from around a perimeter fire trail that I have and maintain

on my property and surrounding crown land. Because of the frequency of the recent fires and other fires pre 2002, fuel loads were not excessive.

On the 21st of December, I lost all my infrastructure except 1 concrete water tank in a horrendous fire attack. I was not at my property when the fire impacted my property, as I was on a RFS truck trying to save properties in the village of Bell. While working to save properties in Bell, our truck was hit by the fire storm and myself and my crew leader survived, because of quick action by the crew leader to get myself and him to shelter in the truck and turn the truck protection sprinklers on. Being inside our fire tanker surrounded by fire all around/above was quite a traumatic experience which did not impact on me till days later. Once the firefront passed, and we were able to get out of truck, we picked the rest of our crew up who were sheltering inside Bell RFS shed, and went about trying to save as many properties as possible. We did extremely well at saving as many properties in Bell as possible. During that time I was told that my place had been totally destroyed, which I took about 2 minutes to think on, then went back on a hose putting out fires impacting on properties. The Fire season 2019/2020 was unprecedented.

The impact of the drought was one of the major contributing factors, with creeks in the Bell area that rarely ever stop flowing, having stopped over a year ago. One of those creeks, Kangaroo Corner Creek, on Crown land just off my place, had been dry for the last year, and was severely impacted by the fires. This creek in the area just off my place is a narrow cannon with some small pockets of temperate rain Forrest, not used to fires at all. After the fires I dropped into the cannon and found dead Lyre Birds in one of the small water holes where they had tried to survive the fires, this was a very sad sight.

The other major contributing factor in the fires was the unprecedented record high temperatures combined with incredible low humidity levels. The top temperature in the Bell area prior to this fire season was 37.4 degrees, which was only reached a few years ago. This summer had 40 degrees reach a few times, including on the 21st of December. The drought and high temperatures/low humidity, can only be explained by CLIMATE CHANGE.

I spent 14 days straight on the fire ground, up until the 22nd of December, preparing for the impact of the Gaspers Mountain Fire in the Clarence, Bell, Mount Wilson, Mount Tomah and Bilpin areas. We had also been deployed prior to this on the Ruined Castle Fire in Katoomba area.

We thought we were well prepared in the Bell area, but not for what hit us.

In my opinion, we were let down by governments state and federal, in not doing no where enough in trying to mitigate climate change. Also they/us needed to be better prepared for this fire season. To not bring in ADF personal in to assist till 2020, was another major stuff up, as they should have been deployed in late October at the latest.

The last point I would make in regards to the impact of the fires in the Bell area was bad "Divisional Comand" radio communications. On the 21st of December, there were 3 "Div Coms" controlling fire resources in the Bell area. Lithgow controlled Bell to Lithgow on Chifley Road, Blue Mountains controlled Bell to Mount Victoria along Darling Causeway, and Hawkesbury controlled Bell towards Mount Tomah along Bells Line of Road. This was crazy and in my opinion caused property loss, but luckily no lives. As a long term RFS volunteer and member of Bell Brigade, we had incorporated issues with Divisional Comand before because we are located on the boundary of Lithgow and Blue Mountains Council areas, but

throwing Hawkesbury into the mix, because “the Gospers Mountain Fire” was under there Comand was ridiculous.

Terms of Reference (optional)

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

1.1 Causes and contributing factors

In my opinion, we were let down by governments state and federal, in not doing no where enough in trying to mitigate climate change. We all have been warned by the scientific community for many years about the impact of climate change and the possibility of un precedented bush fires. Well it has happened as predicted, and I would hope that governments will now make major policy changes to help to reduce climate change as well as it's impacts. Funding of National parks needs to be greatly increased as they are the manager of vast tracks of native bush.

1.2 Preparation and planning

To not bring in ADF personal in to assist till 2020, was another major stuff up, as they should have been deployed in late October at the latest. Governments had been warned of a dangerous fire season this season because of the drought and the high temperatures forecasted, and should have had at the ready as many resources as possible, which includes the ADF. Another point, is the already clear “back burn” line north of Clarence, Bell, Mount Wilson, Mount Irvine, Beraming, Bilpin and Mountain Lagoon would have had the potential to save numerous properties/environment from the Gosper Mountains Fire. There were significant gaps in the defence line north of these villages, that took up allot of resources to try to address as the fire approached. In the end we did not have time to have a safe and controlable back burn line north of these villages in places, and this caused major impacts and property losses.

1.3 Response to bushfires

The last point I would make in regards to the impact of the fires in the Bell area was bad “Divisional Comand” radio communications. On the 21st of December, there were 3 “Div Coms” controlling fire resources in the Bell area. Lithgow controlled Bell to Lithgow on Chifley Road, Blue Mountains controlled Bell to Mount Victoria along Darling Causeway, and Hawkesbury controlled Bell towards Mount Tomah along Bells Line of Road. This was crazy and in my opinion caused property loss, but luckily no lives. As a long term RFS volunteer and member of Bell Brigade, we had incorporated issues with Divisional Comand before because we are located on the boundary of Lithgow and Blue Mountains Council areas, but throwing Hawkesbury into the mix, because “the Gospers Mountain Fire” was under there Comand was ridiculous. Fires HAVE NO BOUNDARIES, and so the over all control of fires need to change and should not be controlled by districts where the fire starts or by state in which fires start. This has to be addressed.

Also local knowledge/brigade captains opinions need to be heard and acted on in regards one important tool in fighting these fires, which is Back Burning. The decision to do the back burning from Bells Line of Road towards Mount Wilson off Mount Wilson Road should have been significantly more resouced, with Aerial bombing protection used to stop any spot fires. This back burn was lost and the fire spotted over Mount Wilson road and hit Mount Wilson, Mount Tomah and crossed Bells Kine of Road and into the Gross Valley. Local knowledge and Hmong of this back burn should have been taken into account.

Supporting documents or images

Attach files

- F2E59354-8C63-4762-B2E0-9D04FCFF0B44.jpeg
 - 5BD68EBD-A40F-4A83-B3AF-C71416501919.jpeg
 - E183043F-4097-4E32-9A73-50A72D79E198.jpeg
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