



## Your details

Mr

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**Title**

**First name**

Philip

**Last name**

Novak

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## 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**

I am making this statement as a bushfire affected resident and as emergency service respondent.

On the 4th January 2020 the Fires hit hard the little locality of Kiah, that has been my home more than 30 years. It was a tempest of previously unimaginable magnitude. After futile attempts to construct containment lines along the State Border, our small poorly equipt local brigades withdrew to our homes and waited. Most of the localities were spared, but Upper Kiah, where I lived, took a direct hit. Most of the infrastructure and homes are gone. Even more tragic is the loss of enchanted forests and wild creatures. Some few remain, pushed to the edge, others are likely extinct.

I have over 28 years firefighting experience. My rural property was prepared for Bushfire; inc. a small fire truck and refuge to escape fire overrun. My beloved horses were corralled by the

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river under willow trees as it was not possible, (by then) to evacuate them. The dog secured in the refuge.

However, after many hours of defending the fire threat, a fierce wind blew down from Mt Imlay. Fire erupted from the sky above and engulfed everything. I escaped to the refuge however the horses broke out of the corral and perished in the flames. The house, possessions and most of the equipment destroyed.

Being inside an explosion of elemental force has altered my vision. In all ways I see differently. Burns to hands and face, one eye swollen and stumbling out along the river at dawn.

Being inside the fire was not traumatic, more like revelations of peaceful expansion. The life after was a sudden disturbing shock. With this altered vision of how we are, more truly as we are, including myself, is a difficult acceptance.

## 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

Extreme dry, high fuel load. Two mega fires combining from across the State Border. Fire weather, (pyro-cumulus). The close proximity to Balawan, Mt Imlay, (mountain effect). Human inactivity to; 1/ Properly prepare 2/Engage the ADF to assist our efforts to create a control line along the State Border. (note; the Army were very helpful after the fire)

The climate has changed.

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### 1.2 Preparation and planning

For more than 10 years fuel loads have increased due to prohibition to burn-off due to excessive red tape. The RFS administration has had an attitude of avoiding Hazard Reduction Burning. Also there exists in the RFS a culture of intimidation that reduces the effectiveness of some Fire Brigades.

Hazard Reduction would not have stopped these fire, but would have reduced their impact.

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### 1.3 Response to bushfires

With what we have in the Fire agencies, the best effort was given.

The equipment is substandard; 1/ Fire trucks need to be purpose built, we have been asking for extra cabin protection and have been ignored. 2/ The fire screens need to be on the outside: The current system obscures vision of crew and the driver cant see up hills when descending. 3/The digital Comms don't work as well, in smoke, as the previous analog system.

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### 1.4 Any other matters

A Federal system is needed in these extreme disasters. The ADF should have been deployed sooner.

A return to more hazard reduction. The so called, "indigenous practices" were in partial use, until about 15 years ago. We called it "mosaic burning". However, more awareness of indigenous ways and a re-connection with the land and spirit would be a great benefit for us all.

To adapt to the bushfire risk, a new, 21st century method. Perhaps nanotechnology.

Emergency response in more populated (and popular areas) was

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excellent. However, South of Eden, we feel like we were left for dead. Actually we sacrificed our own homes to help save the Town of Eden, (and possibly Merimbula Airport). It was a difficult decision but the right one. We could of backburned around our area but that would have put the fire ahead of itself. It was like being asked to leave our nearest and dearest to die. But we did it.

The safety of first respondents has been greatly improved during my time with the RFS.

## Supporting documents or images

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### Attach files

- I.D. wHosp. admin..jpg
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**HOSPITAL COPY**

