

COUNCILLOR PETER MARSHALL
QUEANBEYAN-PALERANG REGIONAL COUNCIL

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Mailing Address:

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16 April 2020

Dear Sir/Madam

I am a councillor on Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council (QPRC).

I have been an active volunteer firefighter in the NSW Rural Fire Service since 2003, and hold the qualifications of Advanced Firefighter and Village Firefighter. I am a former Deputy Captain of the Captains Flat Rural Fire Brigade, and former Training Officer for the brigade (as well as former Treasurer). I am the only QPRC councillor who is a volunteer firefighter.

I wrote to you in a submission dated 16th April. Now that you have extended the deadline for submissions, I am making another, addressing a different issue.

I am not sure under which of the terms of reference this would fit, but I think it needs to be said very firmly that media and political reporting, echoed on social media by (apparent) members of the public, was extremely harmful to Australian society during and after these fires.

In October 2019 the Deputy premier, John Barilaro, presented me with a (unwanted) medal for 15 years of service in the NSW Rural Fire Service. He knows me. He knows I am a member of The Greens NSW. A few weeks later he was denigrating people who were talking about anthropogenic climate change as the bushfires ramped up. He denigrated me, a 16-year volunteer firefighter, for his own ideological political advantage. His colleagues in the National Party and Liberal Party, in NSW and federally, said similar despicable and untrue things. The right-wing media, in particular News Corp and shock-jocks on radio and television, wrote and said similar things.

Politicians and media told outright lies about “greenies” preventing hazard reduction burns. They should be held accountable for those lies. They have never presented a mechanism for how “greenies” could have done so. Rather, hazard reduction activities have been impeded by NSW LNP Government cuts to the National Parks and Wildlife Service, cuts at a time when climate change means they need *more* resources to conduct fire prevention and mitigation activities. The NSW LNP Government had been in power for over eight years, but desperately tried to blame anyone but themselves.

As the fires developed, these voices quietened, as their position of climate change denial became untenable. No apologies were issued to people like me. No retractions were issued. They pretended it hadn't happened.

Later, politicians told outright lies about the fires being the result of arson. Not one major bushfire this season was started by arson. They were all started by lightning. The politicians and media deliberately spreading this fake news need to be held accountable. Your inquiry is one way to do so. Call them out. Name them. Shame them.

Thank you.

Peter Marshall (unsigned as submitted electronically)