

Submission Number: NND.001.01164

Submission Of: Michael Roze

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise?

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? Bulga Plateau RFS

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

Support from our local community. They had equipped over a dozen utes or trailers with water tanks, fire pumps and hoses, 2-way radios, and overhead sprinklers (a Black Swan brigade). These were invaluable in keeping watch and controlling small outbreaks where the local RFS were overstretched. However, the authorities have great difficulty in relating to these informal community efforts, whereas the contribution ought to be welcomed and integrated into the effort.

The Elands Village established a community support hub at the old Elands sawmill . They served well over 1000 meals to fire fighters, provided shower and toilet facilities and a viable communication network/system when Telstra communication failed.

The Bulga Plateau RFS, with very few active members, was able to provide almost 24 hour support during the month long fire crisis.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

Communications catastrophically failed. Friday November 8, 5.30 pm power failed. 11.30 telephone failed. The Elands community was without power and communication for a week until a generator was provided to power the local exchange. refuelling had to be carried out unofficially by local community members. This is unacceptable in a time of crisis. Informed decisions could not be made.

Accurate RFS communication from the regional incident controller was patchy. The brigade was sent on goose chasers when there were more immediate needs.

The Fires Near Me app was inaccurate to the point of being dangerous. Many times it didn't even display active fires.

The catastrophic fire which destroyed Bobin (our neighbouring village) and attacked the Bulga Plateau originated from a source which had been burning for a month. It had not been given a state priority and had not been adequately dealt with.

A neighbouring RFS brigade , Mt George, had a roll over in their truck and occupants were seriously injured. Roll over protection must be incorporated into all RFS vehicles.

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

Access and instruction should be provided to a local responsible authority, possibly the RFS, to install and fuel a portable generator at phone towers and exchanged in order to keep communication channels open.

RFS trucks be fitted with digital communication technology including screen display, and vehicle locations be mapped in real time.

Every RFS truck must have a hand-held digital mapping device that has up to date mapping of the actual firefront.

RFS members on the foreground should be provided with modern digital hand held radios that log messages, display caller ID and log the position of the calling device.

Roll over protection must be built into all RFS vehicles.

The Fires Near ME app must be replaced by a system in which the data is drawn directly and automatically from the incident management GIS, to show actual fire fronts, hotspots and other relevant hazards such as blocked roads.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

The Bulga Plateau fire burned most intensely in eucalyptus regeneration. Many patches of rainforest understory did not burn and rainforest remnants significantly slowed the fire and in many places stopped it. Drought, exasperated through climate change was the significant contributor the the devastating nature of the fire. Logging has been proved to be a significant contributor to forest flammability. Logging both dries out the forest by removing the canopy and introducing more sunlight. It leaves massive piles of debris on the floor and leads to rapid growth of eucalyptus and weeds which suck up further moisture. Ending of logging on public lands, especially near at risk communities, should be considered.

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