

To The Inspector General for Emergency Management

**Submission to the Independent Enquiry into the 2019-2010
Victorian Fire Season.**

**The following is my submission addressing 2 terms of
reference.**

- **Effectiveness of emergency command and control and
Victoria's operational response.**

COMMUNICATIONS- TELSTRA

On the 30th Dec I received a msg from my brother at South Buchan that the Buchan area was under severe threat of wild fire attack with fire storms coming from all directions. Having farmed in Buchan since 1974, and our family knowing the area so well, I understood from my brother's voice that the situation was indeed dire and all my family and neighbours were in grave danger. He was calling on his mobile from a location about 5 km from his farm where he was able to get intermittent reception. He asked me to get a msg to Telstra that the Buchan area had lost all phone communications.

I was in Melbourne for the New Year. I tried to call my neighbours on the farm to the East of my property, but the land line and mobile reception were both out. I tried to call my sister and brother inlaw on their farm to the South of mine, their land line and mobile were also out. Not being able to contact anyone of my neighbours I feared for the worst. Something drastic was wrong.

When I rang Bairnsdale council to see what was wrong with communications with Buchan I was told to ring my phone retailer.

I then rang Telstra to try and find out what was going on. After one hour of phone calls to the faults number and talking with 4 different people, I kept getting asked to give the name and number of the person I was trying to contact. I told them all of Buchan, about 200

people were out of communication and did Telstra know what was the problem. They said that to escalate my report I would need to give the name and no of the person I was trying to contact. I was getting extremely frustrated by this time and asked for the manager. I asked him who I was talking to and where was located. He said he was Telstra manager, later on he said he was also NBN Manager and was in the Phillipines and I must give him the name and number of the person I was trying to contact in Buchan. I then gave him my sisters name and number. He then asked for her birth date. By this time I was furious. I asked if I could speak with someone in Australia who was handling crisis situations as it was a matter of life and death with what was going on at Buchan. I got nowhere as it appears that Telstra have no one that handles such situations and if there is, I was not directed to them. I told them they were the most useless organisation I had ever dealt with. I asked for them to report back to me with details of what was going on with communications at Buchan and hung up in disgust.

I had a msg from my brother later that night that my home, shed and fencing had been destroyed by the fires.

On 10th February, I was advised by the Buchan Recovery team that Telstra were coming to Buchan to help fire victims with communication issues and would be in Buchan on Thursday 13th February. I made an appointment to see them at 11 am.

After they listened to my issues with having very poor wireless and internet connectivity at my farm, they 'graciously' offered to assist me if I was to pay them \$1,000 for a booster setup. Oh yes and I could have the benefit of paying it off on a monthly package.

I then told them what had happened to me when tried to find out why all of Buchan lost communications with the outside world on the night of the fires. Having lost most of my life's work at Buchan, I

became so upset with the attitude of the Telstra people at the appointment that I broke down and stormed out of the meeting.

To date I have received no contact from Telstra and no report on what happened during the fires in Buchan. What reasons were there for all of Buchan to be without phone communications for at least 3 days.

Furthermore, that Telstra has taken more than 6 weeks to come to Buchan to discuss issues with the local people about their phone and communication problems, indicates to me their absolutely dismal failure as a communication organisation. As far as I'm concerned their visit to Buchan was nothing more than a sales trip.

- [Preparedness ahead of the 2019-2020 fire season.](#)

FOREST FUEL LOADS AND REDUCTION BURNING.

I have been farming at my property [REDACTED] BUCHAN since 1974. My property is bounded on the North by 2.8 km of State Forest.

Since 1974 there has been no reduction burning in that area of the state forest. During the 1970's and 80's reduction burning of bush and tussocky areas on our properties was a common practise by local farmers however after this time the government did not allow us to do any burning as it was considered too high a risk for escaping into the State Forest.

In 2003 I entered into a Management agreement with the Dept of Sustainability and Environment, Bush Tender Trial, to forego grazing on 274 ha of bush for a period of 16 years with the aim of increasing bio diversity of the bush.

A clause in the agreement stated:

Fire prevention

The landholder will take all reasonable steps to prevent fire on the land, provided these steps are not inconsistent with the Landholder's commitments.

As the management plan proceeded I became increasingly concerned about the build-up of fuel loads in my bush and the lack of reduction burning in the adjacent forest to the North. This issue I brought to the attention of the DSE in my request for it to be discussed at a Bush Tender field day in December 2011, however to my dismay, fire protection and control burning was not addressed.

The fuel load accumulation over at least 40 years was a time bomb.

The lack of any reduction burning in the State Forest immediately to the North of my property and the resistance by the authorities to reduction burning within private lands including my Bush management site caused intense heat and resultant fire storms that destroyed my home, fencing and all bush and wildlife in the area.

The recent press release by the FFM Vic of the 5th March 2020 includes the comment

"We know the proven benefits of clearing fuel loads under controlled conditions, with previous planned burn sites slowing fire spread at a number of locations in East Gippsland this summer.

The planned burn program is undertaken across public and private land with FFMVic working in partnership with CFA, local government and landholders, as well as the Bureau of Meteorology to assess weather conditions such as humidity, temperature and wind speed.

The comments are in stark contrast to what I was told by DELWP. If the FFM had carried out properly planned burn programs in the forests to the North of my property as well as my private land the devastation on 30th of December may never have occurred.

Yours Sincerely,

