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My husband and I are both in our mid 70s and live in Bright, this is the 4th major fire we have had in the region since living here.

Submission and needs to be addressed.

Little or no coverage for mobile phones. A tower needs to be built on Tower Hill to give coverage to west side of Bright and Porepunkah.

We stayed at the house as living on a large block and beside a golf course, both well maintained, our only danger was from the north or west and no fires were there.

Many people claimed the \$560 to evacuate and then returned home, this needs addressing.

When back burning is done in the forests the growth returns even thicker. Allow people to forests to pick up dead trees for home burning. More clearing of road sides and help with the elderly to clear gardens. No more back burns in its current way.

There are areas in Bright that never should have passed council planning to build a house on.

Please acknowledge that you have received this submission.

[REDACTED]

Community preparation

I live adjacent to State Forest in Mallacoota, and part of my access runs through a small portion of this forest. I lost my home in the recent bushfire. I had been very concerned for many summers by the lack of fuel reduction for the last 15 years in this area and in all areas of State forest and National Parks surrounding Mallacoota. There had been a planned burn in the bush adjacent to my property for the last three years which never eventuated One year it was stopped due to concern re smoke affecting a nearby fruit bat colony! Last winter, this area was mulched as an alternative to burning.

However, there were three large windrows of timber refuse left on the ground. During the bushfire, the two of these heaps closest to my home burnt which would have added to the ember attack on my home. So I now have no home and do not believe this was an effective alternative method ESPECIALLY considering three large piles of large timber was left in the forest. This should have been burnt before the summer season and could easily have been done with the support of cfa being on standby to assist in containing the burning of these windrows.

I did everything I could to keep the area around my home clear of debris/ cleaned, watered and stopped up gutters/ and roof/ Yard and verandahs/left sprinklers on front and back of house/ wet towels at all windows and doors/ water containers everywhere. I also had a full water tank w CFA fitting close to the house. I decided not to stay and defend as I was on my own and frightened that if a tree went over my driveway, I may not be able to escape. Also my roof was extremely steep and pretty inaccessible.

Victorian Government and emergency services preparation

I don't believe the Vic Govt has protected us well enough at all. They should have mandated fuel reduction burns as it was widely known that the bush was extremely dense and drier than ever due to drought conditions. I feel our local CFA kept the community well informed of what to expect if our town was threatened by bushfire and we were all encouraged to formulate a fire plan.

However, I believe that the local East Gippsland Shire should have emptied the foreshore camp park of tourists as soon as the fire at Wangan began. A lot of emergency services were deployed to protect the lives of these tourists. And they did a fantastic job in no loss of life. However, with many CFA personnel being used to protect tourists, less resources were available to protect homes. I have to wonder, if the tourists had not been in town, might I still have my home of 28 years.

Community response

I believe that the tourists in town should have self evacuated or been forced to evacuated at the first warning of imminent fire approach. Many of them seemed to treat it as a big adventure/ adding to the interest of their holiday. It became clearly evident once the fire front hit town and the following smoke filled weeks that it was not an adventure, but a disastrous situation.

Many locals self-evacuated in the days before the fire front hit, and many more afterwards. The defence forces did an exemplary job of banding together to evacuate tourists and locals. I evacuated after the event to be reunited with my family who had come home for the holiday and self evacuated before the firestorm hit. Many other locals did the same.

Victorian Government and emergency services response

I can only relate to what happened in Mallacoota, I cannot comment re other communities. During and after the fire, the State and Federal Govt worked together in rare unity to ensure the safety of people in our community which is to be applauded. I feel the efforts of all agencies worked well in ensuring public safety and well being after the event. However, in the lead up to the fire event, I feel Vic Emergency were remiss in advising people to remain

in Mallacoota so far ahead of the actual firestorm. Many people could have evacuated into NSW safely during the lead up to the fire. I felt this was mis information by Vic Emergency. Also, our local radio station had been designated the emergency broadcaster for our area.

This station is manned by volunteers only, and of course, during the fire, many were unavailable as they had either evacuated or were busy defending their own homes. It became an onerous task for only a few of these volunteers to remain on the air as long as they could. My partner was one of these volunteers, consequently, he was unable to give me the assistance I needed to prepare/defend my home. If the local radio station is to remain the emergency broadcaster, it should not be left to volunteers to man it 24/7, and there needs to be direct contact w CFA rather than only Vic Emergency, as was the case

CFA volunteers and paid, ADF and overseas strike teams were an absolute asset during the fire fighting effort. Without them there would surely have been more damage and possibly loss of life. They are to be commended.

Relief activities

I feel the support re dived after the event was outstanding, and continues to be. The one thing that our town does not have for future emergency events is a “SAFE EVACUATION CENTRE”. This needs to be addressed given that we are surrounded by National Park. This safe place should be fitted with air scrubbers, and relevant safety equipment Having people sitting out in the open near the waters edge is not acceptable management of such a disaster.

Our existing community hall may be able to be brought up to an acceptable standard, but if not, the a purpose built facility needs to be constructed. Donations and financial support for our town has been overwhelming. Sadly, there are many in our community who have not been directly impacted by this fire, taking advantage of this generosity. I feel this needs to be better managed in future emergency events.

The Case Management support through Lakes Complete Care is a wonderful initiative, but assistance from case managers has been delayed. I understand that it was a logistical nightmare to put in place, but that assistance was really required immediately following the fire by those directly impacted. It has been overwhelming and extremely stressful having to deal w insurance companies/ relief agencies/ applying for grants etc etc.

Recovery activities

So many agencies, banks, charities, govt agencies have responded promptly to provide immediate relief and that has truly been appreciated. I think the creation of Bushfire recovery Agencies is a necessity as bushfire is going to be a given part of our summers henceforth with the climate changing as it is.

Bro on seems to be slow in the clean up process, which is providing more stress to those whose homes were lost, but I'm extremely grateful to the government for providing this support. It allows us to free up more insurance dollars into rebuilding. I am pleased to see our community rallying together and forming our own recovery committee.

Would you like your submission to be made publicly available?	
Would you like your name (or your business or organisation's name) published with your submission?	
During the 2019-20 fire season, were you in an area where fires occurred?	Yes
Where were you impacted by fires?	Yes. I lost my home.
How would you describe your connection to the area?	Resident
Were you involved in responding to the fires in that area?	Yes
How would you best describe your involvement in responding to the fires?	Volunteer role outside of the emergency services
Were you (or do you continue to be) involved in supporting individuals or communities affected by the fires?	No
How would you best describe your involvement following the fires?	
What is the main reason for your submission?	
What is your Local Government Area (council)?	East Gippsland
What is your postcode or town?	3892
What age group are you in?	
What gender do you identify as?	
Other ways to be involved in the Inquiry	Yes
Full name Phone number Email	
What types of activities would you be interested in hearing about?	Community meetings, Online or telephone surveys, Follow-up submissions, Inquiry progress updates (please note that updates will be provided by e-mail)
Preferred method of contact	Email