



Dear Inspector-General of Emergency Management Tony Pearce,

I would like to make a submission to the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season. My personal details are below:

Name: Lorraine Bull

Email: 

Gender: female

Age: 65-74

Privacy preference: public

My personal story of the fires:

On New Years Eve, 31 Dec 2019, I was transfixed to the ABC, unable to comprehend the devastation unfolding in my part of the country. Thousands of people seeking refuge from an inferno on the beaches of Mallacoota, beaches on which I had enjoyed relaxing walks and peace of mind. Gippslanders are all connected in various ways and although Latrobe Valley had not been burnt this year, it still felt close to home. How did they cope with embers reining down on their families, darkened skies at midday and fires engulfing foreshore vegetation? I cant help wondering how do you prepare for this, in a small isolated bush town with many thousands of visitors?

A debt is forever owed to the firefighters who paid particular attention to protecting Mallacoota. They demonstrated that preparedness is essential. Each town could develop fire plans and practice ahead of summer. Safer places, as recommended by the Black Saturday Bushfire Royal Commission, should be clearly advertised. There is a need to address climate change due to its effects making the bushfire season longer and more severe.

My response to term of reference: Consider all challenges and implications for bushfire preparedness arising from increasingly longer and more severe bushfire seasons as a result of climate change:

Increased more intense bushfires are among the effects of climate change which have been predicted by credible scientific bodies including CSIRO and BOM. Drought, increased temperatures and low humidity lead to increased fuel levels. Bushfires are most likely to occur on hot windy days when grasses and forest litter are tinder dry. This has been recognised for many decades, but what is new is the length and intensity of heatwaves, as the earth's average temperature has risen at least one degree Celsius. So many firefighters were appalled at the ferocity of this year's fires, saying that it was like nothing that they had ever witnessed in their long careers.

Therefore it is necessary to understand the causes of climate change and what can be done to eliminate the causes and reverse the effects of the present. Burning of fossil fuels is recognised as the major cause of increased greenhouse gases particularly carbon dioxide emissions. The Paris Agreement aims to hold temperature rise to 1.5 degrees C through reduction of GHG emissions. The most obvious tactic is to reduce use of fossil fuels (electricity production, transport fuels, heating, use of petrochemicals for plastics etc) but reduction should also happen in agriculture, forestry and industry.

My response to term of reference: In considering effectiveness of Victoria's operational response to the 2019-20 fire season, IGEM should particularly consider, "planning and response mechanisms to protect biodiversity threatened by bushfire":

Australia has a very poor record for conservation, and has amongst the highest threatened species in the world. This is partly due to the large number of unique animals and plants which have developed here in response to the harsh Australian climate. Wildlife has been hunted since settlement, habitats destroyed and much native vegetation has been cleared. In addition, many pest species have been introduced which destroy the landscape and hunt native animals.

Bushfires have wrought further destruction over many seasons. The 2019-20 fires burnt over 1 million hectares in Victoria, mostly in eastern areas, with huge impact on native animals and plants. The ancient Kuark rainforest was normally resistant to fire but following several years of drought, it was sufficiently dry enough to burn with loss of a magnificent ecosystem. Such areas should be left to regenerate naturally, preserving any unburnt islands to provide a seed bank. Logging will destroy regeneration of trees and food supply, and disturb the forest floor where newly fire-stimulated seeds may be germinating. Efforts may be better directed to rehabilitating the forests rather than salvage logging for short term gain.

My response to term of reference: Review of all opportunities and approaches to bushfire preparedness, including different methods of fuel and land management (for example

'cool burning', mechanical slashing, integrated forest management, traditional fire approaches) to protect life and property as well as ecological and cultural values:

Fuel management is a most difficult problem. My mother grew up at Mt Dandenong and taught me the Importance of a cleared area around the house. The same can apply to a township but in a conflagration there is no guarantee of safety. Planned burns will reduce fuel but this has been shown to be of limited value in severe fires as the fire spreads through tree tops, and embers igniting kilometers ahead of the main fire. Planned burns impact on ecosystems and affect the lifecycles of plants, animals, birds and insects. It is not uncommon to have large areas of countryside affected by smoke from planned burns causing discomfort to many people. Cultural cool burning is spoken of as an alternative, and is worth investigating, provided that aboriginal people still retain adequate knowledge and the extended fire season permits an appropriate time.

I would like to add the following:

The bushfires have had a severe impact this summer, and are but one effect of climate change. The most pressing need is for swift action on reduction of emissions in the hope of limiting all effects of climate change. This will take a coordinated effort from government and business if the human race is to have a chance of survival. At one degree temperature rise, we are seeing more extreme weather, sea level rise, coral bleaching, extended heat waves, polar ice melts, water shortages as well as extreme bushfires. What more does it take until the population will work together to solve this common crisis? COVID-19 has shown that we can work together to solve a common problem.

I would like to make the following recommendations:

Every town and household is involved in developing and practising fire plans
Encourage climate change action at every level possible
Put resources into rehabilitation of forests. They are the lungs of the earth.

Yours sincerely,

Lorraine Bull

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