



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: Renaee Churches

Email: 

Gender: Female

Age: 45-54

Privacy preference: I would like the Inspector-General to make my submission publicly available

My personal story of the fires:

I was not personally affected by the bushfires in that I was lucky not to lose property, livelihood or loved ones. However the bushfires of 2019 and 2020 affected me deeply and caused me great personal pain, anxiety, grief and utter despair.

Never have I felt more worried about the future of life on earth than being trapped in a big city, choking on thick smoke each day, and knowing that the country side all around us was burning.

The powerlessness and frustration that arose in seeing that our national leaders were not taking the crisis seriously and that our own PM chose to go on holidays to another country just as the crisis was unfolding, was unfathomable and made me realise on a deep level, that he did not care for the beauty and importance of the natural world all around us, of animals, forests, insects, fungi, of living and breathing eco systems that sustain us every day. That the government do not comprehend this truth, and the indifference of the government in taking decision action was plain to see.

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:

Added to this immediate pain of the situation was the knowledge that the whole tragedy could have been avoided if the threat of climate change was taken seriously by governments and corresponding policy actions were put in place.

It has been proven over and over again that the biggest single cause of climate change is pollution from burning fossil fuels, so to reduce the risk of future catastrophic fires all new fossil fuel developments (including coal, oil and gas) must be stopped and existing fossil fuel facilities phased out over the next two decades.

While that is an obvious public policy approach that should be put in place, there also needs to be a deeper and more profound respect and appreciation for the the biodiversity and the 'magic' that the forests contain and how integral they are to our continued well being as a species.

This can be addressed at all levels of education, with 'nature appreciation' studies, green time and immersion in the natural world, being an integral part of our cultural socialisation process reflected in our education from the youngest to highest levels.

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":

In future bushfire seasons, islands of unburnt vegetation within burnt areas **must be protected** from burning out by fire crews, whenever possible. The burning of these natural refuge areas increases the ecological impact of the fires and blunts the recovery of plants and wildlife in general, when we loose the threatened species in these remaining biodiverse rich pockets.

'Salvage logging', which is going on in Victoria, builds upon the impacts of the fires, disrupting the forests from recovering in a natural way.

Please do not let salvage logging continue by forest industry.

Please stop ALL logging of natives forests.

Instead, focus on biodiversity recovery work (fund people to help regenerate the land), which can help these local towns with their economy where they have been given the double whammy blow of bushfire devastation followed by Covid-19. Don't just had out cash money to the people who don't really need it and whose circumstances have not changed (my parents and in-laws got cash payments as retirees and there has been zero change in their personal circumstances), but give this money to employment programs that are skilled in bush regeneration and get local people who have lost their livelihoods, involved in bringing the bush around them back to life, and help them gain their sense of self reliance and agency once again.

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:

With regard to managing the forests on going, given that the landscape has been so profoundly altered and damaged by years and years of bushfires and logging, priority must be given to preserving the oldest trees and pockets of existing old growth trees, as these areas are the most resistant to burning, compared with younger post fire growth, which is highly flammable.

The less old growth forests we have, the more at risk the landscape is of burning once again.

At the moment in Victoria the government, specifically the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, are conducting 'planned burns' that are not effective. These types of broad-scale planned burning reduce wildlife and spaces for wildlife to take refuge like tree hollows and hollows in logs.

Those best qualified to manage sustainable and sensitive management of forests going forward are our first nations people whose cultural burning practices are able to protect the forest from the most severe burning.

Government should provide ongoing support to the expansion of existing and new Aboriginal groups specialising in a range of fire management activities, planning, preparation, response and recovery activities, on Country.

I would like to make the following recommendations:

In summary, my most important recommendation is to please **listen to the experts** and respond to the bushfire and climate crisis with the same degree of fervour and decisiveness that the Covid19 crisis has elicited from state and federal governments.

It has been proven that an extraordinary amount of swift action, policy and legislation can be passed when everyone is in agreement and the seriousness of the threat is seen.

What will it take for our governments to also realise the seriousness of the threat of climate change and habitat destruction in our country and in the world?

Yours sincerely,

Renaee Churches

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