

Interview with Susanna Bady for the Bushfire Inquiry – 13 November 2020

Anne-Louise Lindner: I've just got some questions at the beginning, which are more demographic type information for the inquiry from a submission point of view, if that's okay?

Susanna Bady: Yep.

Anne-Louise Lindner: I think I mentioned that I'll provide you with a copy of the transcript, and with your permission we'll have a copy as a submission into the inquiry. Would you like the submission to be published? It doesn't matter whether you do or you don't.

Susanna Bady: Sure.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah? Would you like your name to be on the submission or anonymous?

Susanna Bady: You can put my name on it.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yep. I ask this question but I think I know the answer. Were you in an area where the fires occurred?

Susanna Bady: Yes.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Were you involved in responding to the fires in any sort of emergency services capacity?

Susanna Bady: No.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Do you continue or are you still involved in supporting communities or individuals after the fires?

Susanna Bady: Formally or informally?

Anne-Louise Lindner: Either.

Susanna Bady: Yes.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yes. Perfect. Local government area is East Gippsland. Your postcode?

Susanna Bady: 3889.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And that town is then – is that Cabbage Tree Creek?

Susanna Bady: Yes.

Anne-Louise Lindner: You don't have to answer this question if you don't want to. Age group in decades?

Susanna Bady: I'm ■.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And would you like to receive updates about the inquiry going forward? The community updates we've been sending out to people via email?

Susanna Bady: Yes.

Anne-Louise Lindner: I will also, as I said, send this transcript via email if that's okay?

Susanna Bady: Sure.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And lastly, just before we get started, I just like to remind people that sharing your story and experiences might bring up a range of emotions for you. If at any point you want to stop, just let me know. We can pause the recording. I can provide some advice about support services that are available, but I just like to put it out there to people to be mindful about these things. Otherwise, pretty much it's over to you. So as I said on the phone, interested to understand about your experiences of during and after the fires, the emergency relief and recovery. I'll just basically be listening and will ask you more specific questions depending on the topics that you talk about, based on the information that we've already received and the areas of interest that we've got and the team are working on. They've given me a whole bunch of questions to tease out with people if it comes up. So I'll leave it up to you. Over to you.

Susanna Bady: Okay. So I have a couple of different identities in the relief and recovery space. So I live in Cabbage Tree Creek, and I'm a mum, and I've got a hobby farm here, and I evacuated four times with my kids. So I have experiences. But I also was, for four years, up until July of this year, the coordinator of the Neighbourhood House in Cann River. So I had a number of roles in that sense; in my professional role and to do with relief and recovery with what was going on in Cann River, which is 70kms down the road from Cabbage Tree Creek. So they're two different communities, two different sets of experiences, and my personal experiences and my professional experiences. So I'm just flagging that at the start.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Perfect. And if you're happy to share about both, that would be really good. I notice it's a little bit fuzzy, so I don't know if it's worth us turning the video off. I can hear a little bit of it not coming through quite well in the – just -

Susanna Bady: I'll try.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, so I think let's just try that.

Susanna Bady: I think that's better.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. And we'll go from there. But as I said, if you're happy to talk about both personal and professional, that would be terrific.

Susanna Bady: Yeah. My professional experiences in Cann River were quite complex. And there were a lot of different things going on. As you may or may not know Cann River very know, it's a community of about 300 people. It's fairly remote. The Neighbourhood House there, it's known as the Cann River Community Centre, and it's the Neighbourhood House,

and the Shire Outreach Office, and the Centrelink office, and the food bank, and the library, and – so it was a complicated set of roles that I was performing in Cann River. And that overlapped a lot with a lot of different relief and recovery aspects in that community. And then there's my experiences as a resident down the road at Cabbage Tree Creek, which is [inaudible]

So I don't know where to begin! So in the immediate relief and recovery phase, so there were quite a few weeks where I was unable – the Cann River Community Centre was shut for quite a few weeks. It was closed during the emergency period. We reopened as soon as the highway reopened, which was about three weeks after the major fire events for Cann River. And then, in the immediate period of relief, the main thing that we were doing at the Community Centre, that I was doing and that I would like to give some feedback about, was immediate financial assistance to our community. So we are the Centrelink office there, and I was acting as the Centrelink agent.

And our experience was both state and federal financial relief programs, so obviously there was Centrelink, there was a number of DHHS as well as DHS relief programs being run for people in Cann River. Those staff were coming into Cann River. They were using the Bush Nursing Centre rather than the Community Centre, where the Centrelink agency was. And there was no liaising and communicating about coordinating relief services for our community, which was frustrating for us. Because we were paid to be a staff Centrelink outreach office for our agency, for six hours a week. The demand was huge. And Centrelink did recognise that and increased our agency hours to 30 hours a week. But I had no staff. My only Centrelink agent, her house had burnt down.

Trying to staff the agency, provide the support the community was expecting. And then a bus would turn up, driven by the army, with a couple of DHHS workers in it, providing the same services at the Bush Nursing Centre, when I couldn't staff the service I was supposed to be providing for Centrelink down the road. It was not very well coordinated. And that was frustrating for me in trying to make sure that that service was going to continue to be available. At one point I had to just pick myself up and go down to where the army bus was and say, "Can you at least leave me some pamphlets? Because when you guys go home, this town is going to be asking me what money they can get. So can you leave me a pamphlet about what you're offering?"

Anne-Louise Lindner: And did the community find it confusing as well?

Susanna Bady: Oh God, yes. Just distinguishing between DHHS and DHS by itself was hard enough for everybody. Never mind who could get money for what. "Oh but my house didn't burn down. Oh, but I got smoke in the curtains," sort of stuff. And the – there was a lot of issues for us with the state border. So Cann River is the last town on the highway before you cross the state border, going into New South Wales. So during the evacuation period a lot of our community ended up in New South Wales and in the ACT. Some of the people who were evacuated and ended up in New South Wales, and were having a very difficult time coming home because of road closures couldn't access emergency relief money to pay for their evacuation housing, because they were across the border in New South Wales.

So that – the coordination cross-border was really difficult. And the road closures of course made it very difficult for everybody to get home for quite a long time. There were family separations, mothers separated from their teenage sons, that sort of stuff, that on a community level we were doing our best to respond to, but without coordination from the agencies that were providing that direct relief. It made it really difficult for us to be the on-the-ground response on that level. Does that make sense?

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, no, definitely. Definitely. And if it was to happen again, Susie, what would you say would be the key things they should do differently?

Susanna Bady: In that particular category? Well -

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, with regards to that coordination -

Susanna Bady: The cross-border stuff was just nuts. So even in the immediate emergency phase, in the response phase, there was a period of time when I was evacuated with a carful of children, where I was using four different apps to try and navigate across the border, because there were – the vic emergency, and the Fires near me and the Vic roads closures, and the New South Wales roads closures, and I was trying to drive with a carful of children, and flipping between four apps to decide which exit to take, which was – I really think that could have been better coordinated.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. We heard a lot about that in phase one, and I think there are some recommendations in that report that talk about that. Definitely.

Susanna Bady: But certainly, that continued on into that immediate relief phase, particularly for our residents on the border towns. There were a lot of people in New South Wales, there a lot of people in ACT trying to get home, who were stuck, with no immediate relief. And when you would ring up the 1800 number of whatever it was, on the Vic emergency line, they'd say, "Oh, just call into the relief centre in Morwell." You know?

Anne-Louise Lindner: That's a little way away!

Susanna Bady: Hilarious! And now would be – so that state border was tricky for us, for a long time. But also the coordination with the local Centrelink agency and the buses that were coming up to – and I appreciate that they were coming, and that was – and they were very much needed. But with the difficulty we were having staffing our local agency, a little bit of coordination would have gone a long way. And in terms of understanding where – and I think this is still an issue with our recovery stuff, understanding where providing extra services, if you don't coordinate, can undermine the existing services and leave the community ultimately weakened instead of strengthened. Does that make sense?

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, no, definitely. And I've heard this raised by somebody else in Cann River, and also down in Mallacoota are the same. So the fact that you've got already established services there, and then bringing different services. And at the end of the day, your community service is the one that's remaining. So -

Susanna Bady: Well, or not, actually. So the Neighbourhood House that I was working for is barely still standing now. And it looks like the BRV Hub is just replacing it. But when they leave in two years there will be nothing. So there's slim margins, in terms of human resources, in terms of the financial resources the community gets, in terms of the people you get to work and volunteer, in terms of the participation from small communities, there's not room for competing services. And if a new service comes in, it either is going to fail, or it's going to undermine the existing service in order to provide.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Did you have much communication with the – whether it be council, BRV agencies, about this recovery phase and the role of the Neighbourhood House, the Community Centre?

Susanna Bady: I really, really tried. I said a lot of things to both council and BRV. I can't tell you how much of that got heard. I really, really tried. I've had this very conversation I can't count how many times this year, and I didn't get anywhere with it.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Right. That's very interesting. Yeah. Very, very interesting. Because -

Susanna Bady: So I've had exactly this conversation with BRV when they were setting up their hub. When they first came into town and were setting up the hub I said, "Look, we've been working with the council two years on a strategic plan for our community, and we are 75% of the way towards having a community facilities review to decide which community facility needs investing in. Can you maybe hold off putting up your hub until we've had our review and we can have the investment all go towards what we all need?" And they said, "No, we haven't got time for that. We're going in that empty shop right across the road."

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. Right. Very interesting.

Susanna Bady: And a similar conversation about staffing when BRV was recruiting, when Shire Council was recruiting, when Gippy Lakes was recruiting caseworkers. And I rang them and I said, "Look, I've lost 75% of my staff since the emergency, and I'm [inaudible] service. You guys are all competing with recruiting for the same skill sets, with better pay and conditions." And predictably they got the staff and I didn't.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, which makes it really difficult in those smaller communities, you know? Yeah, when you're competing against each other.

Susanna Bady: There's not a lot of qualified people around. There's just not enough of us to go around.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. So obviously despite that fact that the Community Centre had been involved – and I am very aware of the community plan that was developed as well. That obviously wasn't considered in what BRV's position was about how it was going to deliver its recovery services.

Susanna Bady: Not At all.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. Okay. And do you think – what do you think the outcome of that has been for the community?

Susanna Bady: It's been an absolute disaster. So this year – so again, I need to say that I no longer work there. I had to resign in July, and I don't know if you've heard the whole sorry story, but that Community Centre had been a thriving local organisation with very high volunteering rates, and statistics of about a third to a half of the town calling in at some point most weeks. And it has lost 90% of its paid staff, 60% of its volunteers and is barely standing today, as a result of the year beginning with the bush fires. COVID hasn't helped. And BRV and the Shire Council haven't helped either. But that combination of factors has pretty much done for that organisation.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Right. That's not good for your – for that community at all.

Susanna Bady: Absolutely not. Absolutely not.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And is that – do you – I can understand those things, they're all different impacts and stuff. But is there something that's changed with regards to the community's use or desire to be involved with the Community Centre, is it because of those other thing that that's dropped off? Or is it because of the competing services?

Susanna Bady: It's a whole combination of stuff. But it has also been a very toxic year in the local politic, and I think that has been exacerbated by both Shire Council and BRV's actions this year. They have exacerbated the community splitting. That was a predictable, psychological consequence of the trauma we'd all been through. But the way that external government agencies have acted have absolutely made that worse rather than better this year.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, right. Because I got a sense that because of the good work that had been done around that development of the community plan, that the community itself was quite good at coming together in the initial part, during and immediately after the fires?

Susanna Bady: So it depends, I guess, on who's telling the story, of course, as it always would. My perspective is the development of that plan is not an easy or necessarily enjoyable process for a lot of people. It was a difficult process for a lot of people. And from my perspective, what happened immediately post the fire was the Shire Council were determined to use the representative group that they were referring to for that plan, which had been a difficult thing to get established and was not particularly successful before the fires. They were having three, maybe four people come to their meetings, and they weren't particularly well engaged. And immediately after the fire the Shire Council decided that that was their group to represent our community.

And that led, for me personally, to some conflict with the Shire Council officers, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]. And from the time of the fire until I resigned from my job in July, there was not a single meeting in Cann River that Shire Council came to, in which the whole community was invited.

They tightly controlled the invitation list to every single meeting, and when I challenged them on that they said, “Community meetings in this town have been too difficult.” Essentially they blamed the community for having a diversity of views and not necessarily agreeing with what’s said in meetings, and refused to have broader engagement and to have a participatory process of choosing our representation. And Shire insisted on working only with the people they wanted to work with.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And is that how it finished? In that – because I’m aware there is a Cann Valley CRC.

Susanna Bady: There is. Look, there wasn’t – I can’t speak really for what happened since July, but up until July there had not been a single open meeting or request to the general community to participate in selecting their representation. And the Shire was insisting on using the representative group from the planning process, which was a very separate thing to – and had nothing to do with bush fire recovery. And there was two or three or four people engaged with that who had their own motivations for being engaged with that. And that’s fine. But it was not a recovery committee, and the Shire insisted that it was.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Right, okay.

Susanna Bady: Does that make sense?

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, yeah. Because I’m familiar, just from having read some information and being told by others that there was initially – and I was looking at BRV information in the early days, and they were talking about the reference group potentially being the CRC.

Susanna Bady: You see, everybody was pushing that. Everybody was – the BRV and the Shire and all the external agencies were pushing that that’s what had to be. And I took a bit of a stand along the lines of, “Well, actually you need to ask the community who they want to represent them. You can’t assume that the three people who were coming to your meetings last year are who this whole community wants to represent them.” There is some serious divisions in that community. There is a large, low literacy population. There’s some serious socioeconomic disadvantage. And the people who were attending those meetings were engaged business owners, the people who would go to a meeting. Which is legitimate, I don’t have any qualms with that. But it just happened to that class of Cann River, and the rest of Cann River was not invited to participate in the recovery.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Did you participate in any of the debriefs that have occurred there about the fires? Was that in your time?

Susanna Bady: We were lectured by – there was one meeting with [REDACTED], which was called a debrief, which was a lecture. And when it was opened to questions the only questions asked were by a Shire Council representative. And that’s the only one that I was invited to.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, okay. Because I think, from what I – well, I think, from I understand, that they had done some debriefs potentially with the agencies, CFA, DELWP and so forth, about the fires?

Susanna Bady: Not that I'm aware of. I don't know.

Anne-Louise Lindner: I don't know when that's occurred, so it could well have been after you finished. Yeah, not 100% sure. Okay.

Susanna Bady: But look, it was – and I don't want to stake too much on my personal stand in that process, but what I had been insisting on, since – from the minute I got back into town and until the minute I resigned, was a transparent process that included the whole community in selecting representation. And that never happened. And without that, I don't think it's legitimate to say that you're doing community-led recovery.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yep. And obviously you're familiar with some of the other processes that some of the other towns have gone through.

Susanna Bady: And this is where, similarly, as a resident of Cabbage Tree Creek, and that hasn't changed, I have not been invited to participate in the recovery process at all. So there was – we don't get a recovery – my husband has been trying to get us as recovery – anyway, we're in the Orbost district.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Orbost one. Okay.

Susanna Bady: There was a meeting, by the way BRV draws the map, we fall to the Orbost side. We're halfway between Orbost and Cann River, where I live. But on the BRV map we fall to the Orbost side. And there was one meeting in Orbost in January or something, or I guess it was February, about a community recovery committee, which – I think it was decided to do it by expressions of interest. And then I think last month we got letterboxed an application for an expression of interest to participate in the Orbost community recovery, which was a long – it was eight pages, and you had to five little essays about who you are and why you should be on the recovery – which, to me, is an insult to a low literacy community.

To me, that letterbox drop was, “We actually don't want to hear from you guys.” As a way to invite people to participate, when you know that so few of the people in our district can read or write, in my opinion, to participate by writing five essays is an insult.

Anne-Louise Lindner: I did actually see that expression of interest.

Susanna Bady: And it's disgusting. I mean, it makes sense if you were in a university-educated suburb. It does not apply to our district. And from what I understand, and what everybody I have spoken to assumes, and the scuttlebutt around town, and I can't swear to it, is that it's [REDACTED]. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] And nobody wants a bar of it, because of that. And our little community, which had a very different fire to Orbost and a very different fire to Cann River, has nothing. My partner did a lot of work trying – pulling BRV out here for a meeting to talk about whether we could have a separate community recovery committee for Cabbage Tree Creek, or Cabbage Tree Creek and Bemm River and [inaudible], our little corridor between Orbost and Cann River, of smaller communities.

It was during COVID, so there was a maximum ten people to attend the meeting. There were three government people there, so there were only seven people from the communities allowed to come. And it's pushing shit up a hill and we still don't have a recovery committee, nor any way to participate in one. It feels to me, [REDACTED]

Anne-Louise Lindner: You all right? You all right?

Susanna Bady: It feels to me as though we are being asked not to participate and not to lead. And the rhetoric around community-led recovery is absolute nonsense, from my perspective. Between my experiences in Cann River and my experiences in Cabbage Tree Creek, I feel as though someone has pointed a finger at me and said, "Community-led, but not you, get back in your box and shut up." That's how it feels.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And Susie, if it was to be different, what would be those enablers? What would you want to see done differently to ensure that your community of Cabbage Tree Creek was able to lead its own recovery?

Susanna Bady: Well, we ask, "Can we go on a recovery committee separate to Orbost?" And they said, "Oh well, you'll have to jump through this hoop and do that," and my partner has been, as a volunteer, ringing around everybody who lives in Cabbage Tree, Marlo Plains and Bemm River to see what they think about it. Is that not the job of some six-figure salary at BRV? I don't understand why the resources aren't being used on community engagement. There's no engagement in our community. I know COVID's a challenging thing, but there are ways to do it, and it doesn't seem as though they've even tried. There's been no attempt to survey the community. There's been no attempt to engage people on the basis of their demographics.

There's been no attempt to say, "Hey you parents," or, "Hey you seniors," or – nothing to identify communities of interest. Nothing – it feels as though they just actually don't want to hear from us. And if you ask – and my partner is educated and experienced enough to have asked articulately and forcefully for our own community recovery committee. And what he has gotten in return is a whole bunch of volunteer tasks for him to do for them to prove that we need it, which to me is – we're the affected people here.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah.

Susanna Bady: It seems to me there's a lot of state government money getting paid to people who should be able to do these jobs.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And we've heard a bit of that. And I think it's about, as you said, the theory or the rhetoric, and what's actually happening, practically, on the ground.

Susanna Bady: And I think also, it's not – our community is not – doesn't speak the same language as the educated professionals who have the jobs of engaging us. This is – and that's something I came up against a lot as a community development professional in Cann River for four years. And it's something you need to acknowledge and be proactive about addressing, instead of waiting for the community to act like something that you recognise. I

think the professionals need to take the onus on themselves to do the work, and understand how the community works, and talk to them in language they recognise.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. And I do remember talking to [REDACTED] in the early days, potentially about the inquiry, and he talked a lot about that, and about understanding where the community was at, and coming out to the community and meeting the community in their place, in their space.

Susanna Bady: Well, yeah, the whole district operates on a face-to-face, informal, personal relationship, friendship and kinship network level. It doesn't operate on a fill-in-an-eight-page-form-and-post-it-back level. It's not how things get done around here. And I understand how frustrating it can be to be told, "We don't do things that way around here," and that's not what I'm trying to say. What I'm trying to say is if you actually wanted to engage the community, you have to try and understand what the existing systems are, and what the language people are discussing this stuff with is, and adapt your messaging to the local conditions, rather than wait for the locals to fit the box you've already made for them.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. And taking your example before of the Council wanting to use the reference group for Cann River as that CRC, I'm pretty sure when I spoke with [REDACTED] that he talked about your hall committee at Cabbage Tree Creek. You could -

Susanna Bady: But that's a very different thing. Because – and I think there's reasons why – the hall committee is, in a similar way, it is the people who would turn up to a meeting, and who can be bothered with meetings, from Cabbage Tree Creek. And on a certain level that's fair enough. But the reference group in Cann River was about economic development. And so it was a particular subset of interested people. It wasn't about – they weren't talking to the bulldozer drivers, and they also weren't talking to the mothers of five kids at all. There were whole sections of the demographic in Cann River who were not involved in that planning process. Whereas our hall committee, there's only 40 of us here in town. It's not a big town. And our hall committee is the only people who can be bothered going to meetings at all. You know what I mean?

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah. But I imagine, as the hall committee, you organise – whether it be events, functions, whatever, where your community is able to come together, in that informal way, share information, gain connection and so forth?

Susanna Bady: Absolutely. And if we need to have a Christmas party, or if somebody is bereaved and needs a casserole, that's who's going to do it. That's what the hall committee is for.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And you had a – as I said, I'm still just – I've got to hear back from Tony about the places that he wants to get back out to and visit. But Cabbage Tree Creek is on the list for either us as the inquiry team coming and doing an informal something with whoever wants to have a chat with us, or Tony coming and doing a similar thing at some point, just to get people's experiences, which obviously sounds quite challenging.

Susanna Bady: Look, I really feel – and given that I've been working in the community development space, I have a particular perspective on it. But it's been an enormous year for

us, and as an individual and a resident, I feel as though I have had zero recovery services. And I see all the money and I see all the jobs, and I see nothing happening for me or my family, or my community.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And would you be expected to access that through Orbost or through Cann River?

Susanna Bady: I would assume they would be expecting me to access it through Orbost. So in fact I ended up getting a psychologist from the Mallacoota Medical Clinic because – well, okay, this is another reasonable story about recovery resourcing. So I'll tell it as an anecdote. So not long after we got back from my first and longest evacuation, which was ten days, my son happened to step on a rusty nail. So I had to take him into the hospital in Orbost for a tetanus shot. And while we were there, and as we were all exhausted, I said to the doctor, I said, "Look, the Vic Emergency app says there's all these more psychological services on offer, and my kids and I have just had a hell of a time. Can I have some please?"

And he said, "Erm," and didn't know what to do with me, and forwarded me to [inaudible] who also didn't know what to do with me, and forwarded me to the Director of Community Services, at the hospital, who I used to work for. So I knew her personally. But in the end my son, my ten-year-old son and I were at the hospital for I think it was close to two and a half hours before they said, "Oh, well, why don't you just call in and see the counsellor who exists down at Browning Street some time?" And that was the extent of the extra psychological services that the emergency app told me I could access. That was it for my family. That was it.

Two and a half hours of people not knowing who to refer me to, and I ended up with the counsellor [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. It was completely no good. I ended up going through the Mallacoota Medical Service, who got me a decent psychologist in the end. But with my ten-year-old son asking for help after that bush fire, that was the response I got.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And did that then take some time before you actually got through to the service from Mallacoota?

Susanna Bady: Yeah, it was two months later that I saw a psychologist. And my kids never did. I think the school got one in.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Do they – where do they go to school?

Susanna Bady: In Orbost.

Anne-Louise Lindner: In Orbost. Okay. Yep. And so since then, basically you just haven't accessed any of the other possible services that might be available?

Susanna Bady: Yeah, that was a pretty off-putting experience in terms of accessing services.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Very interesting. Thank you. Is there anything else about your journey, professionally or personally, in that relief and recovery space that you wanted to tell me about?

Susanna Bady: That's the main points that I felt I needed to cover, I think. I think the long-term planning, in terms of resourcing existing local services, rather than undermining them with competing services, both in terms of resources and in terms of community participation, but also in terms of staff is the important one. And coordination. And the process – the transparency and the inclusivity of the process, in terms of representation, is the main point I really wanted to emphasise. I really feel it's been done very, very badly. And without doing that properly, the further recovery process, whatever comes out of it, whatever those recovery services decide to do, if that process of representation hasn't been done well, we'll have no credibility in the community at all.

[REDACTED]

Anne-Louise Lindner: But it's also -

Susanna Bady: I was surprised my neighbour here in Cabbage Creek, [REDACTED] – and her politics are very different to mine, and she's my friend and my neighbour, said, "Oh, well, we know who's going to be running it," he said, "And he's the reason Orbost is 20 years behind and going backwards, so what would be the point in participating?" And that's the general feeling.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, and it obviously doesn't represent the community, if the diversity is not there within that group, representative group.

Susanna Bady: We're very, very diverse communities. Very diverse. And I think – the other thing I was saying in an earlier meeting today, that I think has been missed in the process as it's been set up, is we're not only geographic communities in East Gippsland. Because we're a small population spread over a large geography, yes, there are some things that happen based on where you live, and a bush fire is often one of those. However, the impacts of that bush fire, and the way that you're going to recover from that bush fire, are also based on communities of interest, professional communities, and other things that extend past geography. And there are a lot of ways in which myself, as a community development and social services professional with relief and recovery experience, than, say, my next door neighbour who's a dairy farmer.

Now, while we had a geographically similar bush fire, our recovery has been really different, because we're in different communities of interest across the district. And I think that's been missed. I think doing everything geographically – certainly doing it township based has missed those of us who are out of town. Cabbage Tree Creek isn't in Cann River or in Orbost. But also, not acknowledging the communities of interest in terms of industry and profession, but also in terms of interest and in terms of outlook. I have friends dispersed in different small communities across East Gippsland, to whom I feel much more strongly connected about some things than I would my next door neighbour. Does that make sense?

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, no, it's a very good point. Yes. Very good point. Okay. Sorry, I'm not sure whether or not – are you still there?

Susanna Bady: Yeah, I'm still here.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Oh, that's all right. I wasn't sure if I was losing you or not. But no, look, I really appreciate that. And you've also reinforced some of the messages particularly about the local services bit, which we have been hearing. So it's good to – well, no, it's not good at all. But you have reinforced the same message that we have heard, which is I think a concern, which we need to seriously have a think about how that looks for the future, in future events. Because ultimately, as you described, either your community is going to – they're the ones who will be left, and holding that service. Or in the example of Cann River, potentially that community's organisation has gone, because of the complication of the services. So I think it's a really, really important point. So thank you very much.

Susanna Bady: And I think in terms of recognising when you're starting – when you want community participation in a service, I know how challenging it can be to get communities participating in the service. Recognising that it's ultimately about delivering the service that people need, in an ongoing way, and that participation and volunteerism is what keeps these community organisations afloat. So you can't just have a competing morning tea and just think, "Oh well, more morning teas is good for everybody." Because that's what's keeping the littler places even working at all, if you know what I mean.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yes, I do.

Susanna Bady: Because a lot of it is based on that volunteerism, and without it things just won't work.

Anne-Louise Lindner: And that's how those communities are sustained, so – yeah. Very good. Thank you very much. And Susie, did – if I make contact with [REDACTED] in regards to organising something for Cabbage Tree Creek, that's the best way to go?

Susanna Bady: Yeah. He's been pushing it. And again, as I'm sure I already said, but I'll say it again, I really find it overwhelmingly disappointing that the work of putting together something for our local community has been dumped on a volunteer, affected person, when there's so much resourcing going into these – a brand new state government agency, but nobody can do a ring-a-round to try and get meetings organised. That's – it doesn't make sense.

Anne-Louise Lindner: I completely agree with you. Because certainly just listening to some of the people who are volunteering on these community recovery committees, it's like a full-time job. And yeah, they're volunteering, and they're struggling to get assistance with the administration part of it. So I think, again, something needs to change in that area as well.

Susanna Bady: Yeah. And I think it is – I understand why you need your local informants and your local contacts to facilitate that sort of community engagement stuff. But I think there's a fine line between using that resource and dumping all the work on them.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Yeah, I agree totally. Yeah, definitely. Definitely. Well, listen, thanks so much. I really appreciate your time. I hope you don't have to do any more Zoom meetings today.

Susanna Bady: No, that's the last one.

Anne-Louise Lindner: That's good. And yeah, look, the transcript, I'll probably have it back by maybe Monday or Tuesday next week. So I'll check that over, and then I'll send you that as a copy in email. If there's any issues, just let me know. Sometimes when the audio goes a bit funny you can't quite work out the words. So there may be a little bit of that. But generally speaking it comes out pretty well. So yeah, thanks again for your time this afternoon. I really appreciate it. And also, until we can get up to Cabbage Tree Creek, if there was anybody else who you think would benefit from having a one-on-one chat like this, even if it's just using their phone as opposed to the computer, I can still do that with the Zoom platform anyway. Yeah, please feel free to pass on my email address or my telephone number.

Susanna Bady: Sure. No worries.

Anne-Louise Lindner: All right. Take care. And hopefully I'll catch up with you another time.

Susanna Bady: Okay. Thanks.

Anne-Louise Lindner: Thanks Susie. Okay. See you. Bye.

Susanna Bady: Bye.

Details for recording are:

Submission to be published - yes

Submission to be named - yes, Susanna Bady

Were you in an area where the fires occurred - yes

Were you involved in responding to the fires -no

Do you continue to be involved in supporting individuals or community members -
yes

LGA - EGSC

Postcode/Town - 3889 Cabbage Treek Creek

Age group - ■

Gender - woman

Keep up to date with the inquiry - yes - ■