

## **Interview for the Bushfire Inquiry - Adrian Nation – 5 November 2020**

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Just hitting record now. Adrian, I've just got some questions at the start to go over which are like demographic-type information for the inquiry. Is that okay to go over a few quick questions?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, go for it.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** So firstly would you like your submission to be published? You don't have to and it wouldn't be 'til next year.

**ADRIAN:** I'm okay with it, yes.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** That's a yes?

**ADRIAN:** Yes.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Would you like to have your name on your submission or you can remain anonymous?

**ADRIAN:** Yes, that's okay.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Your name?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah. If I'm going to say it I might as well own it.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** I think I know the answer, were you in the area where the fires occurred?

**ADRIAN:** Yes.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Were you involved in responding to the fires?

**ADRIAN:** Yes.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Do you continue to still be involved in supporting communities or individuals after the fires?

**ADRIAN:** Yes.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Local government area is East Gippsland Shire Council. Your postcode?

**ADRIAN:** 3890.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** What town is that then?

**ADRIAN:** Cann River.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** You don't have to answer this question if you don't want to but age group in decades?

**ADRIAN:** Fifty.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Adrian, would you like to receive updates about the inquiry going forward? We're providing them via email.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, I don't mind. Yes, thank you.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Just lastly obviously sharing your story and your experiences may bring up a range of emotions for you. If at any stage you want to stop or pause the recording I can do that and I can also provide information about support services if you or anybody else needs them. Otherwise all I need to say is that you're welcome to talk to me about any aspects of the relief and recovery but also the response to the fires. Where possible if you can provide examples that's the best way for us to view the information and to analyse it but I'll just basically be listening and I may ask you some clarifying questions depending on what you talk about.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, no worries.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Over to you.

**ADRIAN:** Oh okay so basically when did it start? On the Monday, I think -

**ANNE-LOUISE:** That like New Year's Eve, was that right?

**ADRIAN:** I can't remember if it was the night before New Year's Eve -

**ANNE-LOUISE:** The 30<sup>th</sup>.

**ADRIAN:** - for us. 30<sup>th</sup>. I'm pretty sure. Look, to be quite honest dates haven't got etched in my mind. Yeah so I'm pretty sure it started on the Monday night. Smoke rolled in and we started putting a plan into place. Basically it was a sleepless night. I got up somewhere between 1 and 2 and could see fire to the west of Cann River. I said to my wife [REDACTED] "I'm going over to the other side of the river to check on people that we know over there, see they're alright", got over there and couldn't actually see the glow anymore so I continued up a road called Combienbar Trail and got as far as top of what they call The Switchbacks and I could see right and left of the areas and right, you could see back towards Mallacoota and the fire going off down that way and looking left you could see the fire - I'm guessing at that time that it was at the stage of impacting Club Terrace which is to the west of Cann River so it was around that time.

Time I got back out of up there it had got close to the road that I was on and the time I got down to private property and told people, woke people up it was not far away. Then basically left them, went around back around to my place and continued on talking to people and just getting prepared and watching and listening and did that for the next month or more.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Yeah, you guys had to deal with it for a long time, didn't you?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, it wasn't just one event. Because we ended up being surrounded on all sides of it, it depended on the wind which was pretty lucky with but it was just continually just niggling at all the edges, waiting for it to come down to the private property, coming down to there and the agencies dealing with that bit and with the lack of agencies, lack of people, fire-

fighters and etc in the Valley where a lot of private property owners engaged in protecting places when the agencies were busy doing what they needed to do in other places. Like myself and my son, we were patrolling the next door neighbour's place over the road and there was occasions there where we were putting spot fires out in the paddocks and that sort of stuff and so on and so on.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** What type of equipment did you have, Adrian?

**ADRIAN:** Basically it was just a ute with one of those 1,000L pods on the back and a pump and a hose.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** So quite a few private property owners were defending their own homes and other properties?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, I'd say there's probably a good half a dozen or more, yeah and people that were staying at home and doing their own thing and that sort of stuff so it was very much a collective effort in the Valley, it wasn't just all one agency approach, it was a whole thing. I think that's what saved us, is that people were working as one because we were all in the same boat and lack of resources, etc, there was no standing back and letting say for instance the CFA coming in with strike teams and etc and taking over. There was none of that, that wasn't happening so it was all in. I think that the day that it demonstrated for me was north of my place there's a box forest reserve, East Gippsland Gray Box Forest Reserve and the fire was coming out of that. I'm pretty confident that everything in the Valley that was able to fire fight was there.

When it came out of it, if we didn't stop it in the grass there it was going to take pretty much everything north of us and the whole of the Valley. So there was graders, bulldozers, skidders, I don't know how many CFA tankers, I think there was two or three of them. The DELWP people, private people. It got to the point in the paddocks I was concerned – I was just driving and looking for work to put out and I was just concentrating on not hitting someone and that gradually got less and less because the fire got bigger and bigger but that was pretty full-on that day.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** The role of local knowledge so you guys obviously knowing the area really well, how do you think that played out in that fire?

**ADRIAN:** I think it was pretty immense. Just like go back, after the event, two or three days later we got a strike team of CFA in from [unclear], New South Wales. They were up towards Bendoc and they come down the Monaro Highway and like my son and myself, we'd been in the paddocks, neighbours' paddocks and putting out spot fires and then DELWP came along and said "we're getting a strike team, they're actually on their way down the Valley" and I said "oh look, things are pretty good here, if you're happy I'll go down and bring them in, direct them in and show them where to go and that sort of stuff". So rather than just leaving and they can fend for themselves it's always nicer if somebody can actually direct you and tell you about things and whereabouts crossings are and all those sort of things, it's much easier.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Was that appreciated and respected?

**ADRIAN:** Oh yes. Can't thank them enough.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** That's good to hear because we had a few occasions where the local knowledge wasn't as well valued and respected so I was just interested to hear how it was in Cann River.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, no, the strike team, they came in, it was what I would now after what I've learnt, was of the old CFA. It was more country, just wanted to do the job so it wasn't union-orientated or "we're the bigger mass so we're going to take over". So that was good. They were really nice to deal with.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** After the fires in that time like during and after was there anything to do with road closures, food drops, that kind of stuff, people able to access information or anything in that regards?

**ADRIAN:** The road closures, the road blocks and etc, locally it wasn't a big issue until we had out of town police turn up and started manning road blocks and public order, I think they were order, public order people. I just don't think that they respected the – I understand they have a role to play but where the road closures and etc was doesn't necessarily mean the town stops there. For instance I did stuff for East Gippsland Water and East Gippsland Water's water supply plan and pump station is outside of Cann River. They were able to get a big generator in and they were able to pump water up to the dam and continue making water but I needed to bring the generator into town to pump the sewer pits down otherwise things would be a bit disastrous.

They just didn't appreciate that – it was on the Saturday that it was all meant to get worse and they said if we get directed you won't be going back. I said "look, mate, the generator is there to pump water up to make water or it can pump water up to the plant to provide water for the town". No, didn't matter, they started telling me the laws and all that sort of stuff and why they were there and all that sort of stuff and look, I appreciated all that and all that sort of stuff but I think I had a lot more knowledge and a lot more appreciation of what was going on than what they did and yeah, I just couldn't see the rationale behind it-type – look I do and I don't, I just think that it was very heavy-handed for the situation when they were leaving.

They telling us one thing and then doing another thing because they ended all up leaving, all the police and – what do you call? People that wanted to go – this is evacuees as the evacuation's happened and all that sort of stuff and the police and that left for that day. So people that decided to stay stayed and defend their properties and etc and protect the town. To be told you will not be doing this and then being told "oh we're leaving". "Well why didn't you just tell me when you were leaving and then we could have not had the discussion and I could have brought it down after you left?".

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Did it sort itself out in the end? You were able to get through?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah. Well I didn't end up doing it while they were there anyway. It was just easier.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Look, I've heard a few stories about yes, police from Melbourne and particularly around the road closure area up in the northeast as well, very similar story to what you're saying.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, I think it needs to be planned a little bit more and the people that – well they might need pepper spray but it was very intimidating but that's what their job is but to have firearms and all that sort of stuff, don't know. I just thought that it was a bit over the top for the situation. But that's me but I'm not dealing with the cranky people. But I just think there's a little bit more thought to it. Whether that be in where they set it up which I think was appropriate where they set it up but okay then from that they need to probably be more mindful of that there are other vehicles, DELWP vehicles, the CFA vehicles where there needs to be some sort of sticker or coloured stickers or something or other for landowners beyond that point so that they are able to travel back and forth without having to be pulled over every time or so on and so on.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Are you a contractor for East Gippsland Water or something like that?

**ADRIAN:** I am, yeah, I do. Basically I do their maintenance and mowing and etc, the water storage here in Cann.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Because I would have thought that under that essential services that you would be able to get through as you said with the generator and so forth.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah. I'm a contractor to them but I'm still just a bloke in a white ute, I don't have a contractor sticker or anything like that for East Gippsland Water.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Have you had any conversations since with them like East Gippsland Water about that in the future, what would make it easy or better?

**ADRIAN:** No, I haven't, no. I've kept my emergency management sticker from DELWP on the back window so I'll just put it to the front when I need to.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Good idea.

**ADRIAN:** I appreciate that it's a difficult one but I think it could be a bit more organised because I think it's probably one of the first times it's been enacted since 2009 that the state emergency-type stuff and road closures and etc and "you're not going back" and all that sort of stuff. But I think the organisations need to appreciate that sometimes these things have got to go on, that some people do need to go past. So whether the incident management people need to find out, drill down and get to their contractors and have that East Gippsland Shire or East Gippsland Water or DELWP know that these people are the contractors and etc, every two years they catch up with them and they give them a sticker or something like that to identify them as "are you still required to do this stuff?", "yes", da, da, da. It's not just fire-fighters, it could be nurses, all sorts of reasons, I guess.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Yes, stock transporters, that's what we heard up in the northeast where stock transporters weren't able to get through for ages or there was lots of toing and froing and in the interim stock are suffering, being burnt.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah and that does bother me because from growing up I just remember that the fire goes through and the next thing is the stock thing so whether they're bringing in feed, managing the stock and that was always the second thing. I just remember that as being a kid and so on and talking to other people. I was talking to one transport owner that's no longer in business but he said he used to transport stockfeed in '83 and he was driving through Cockatoo in '83 and they still hadn't shifted the bodies in the streets and he was driving through delivering stock feeds. It's a critical thing because it's required. Somewhere along the line it changed.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Any other experiences of the relief or the recovery after the fires that you wanted to share?

**ADRIAN:** Look, I think all in all everything worked as best it could like Cann River, Club Terrace, Combienbar, Buldah and all those sort of places, because of the fire we didn't have immediate access and all that sort of stuff and because of the highway being dangerous in all directions, that sort of stuff, I think it worked out alright. I don't think that probably the highways needed to be closed because all that work should have happened prior to it all happening but that's a different story altogether.

I was not disappointed but because of the tourism-type issue at Mallacoota and that sort of stuff I think it took away from other areas in attention from media and etc because there was a lot of other people hurting from this. Whether it be farmers and their stock or no, they wouldn't have wanted it publicised and all that sort of stuff but the resident that because of the fire died in Genoa. That's a significant thing for a small town for that to happen. I think that people of Genoa, they did it very hard.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Do you think that that's had an impact on people's recovery or do you think it's caused a bit of angst that potentially might see that somewhere like Mallacoota had so much of a focus compared to some of the other smaller areas?

**ADRIAN:** I'm sure it probably has. May not be spoken about or anything like that but I'm sure others probably think similar because of the tourism-type issue. If it was just a local community being – same thing happening there probably wouldn't have been such media hype. It's a difficult one, I just found it a bit – I don't know what the word would be but just found it a little bit – not uneasy but bit frustrating. But again it did focus media coverage on East Gippsland and that we weren't in a good situation.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Definitely. During the fire itself, Adrian, and afterwards, how were you accessing information? Were there community meetings in the town? I understand the comms were down, is that right or not too bad?

**ADRIAN:** I think the phones were working. Basically in the mornings I'd go up to the DELWP office and just stand at the back of the morning briefing and listen to

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Were you doing that as a resident or were you doing that in your employee or contractor kind of role?

**ADRIAN:** I was probably doing it as a bit of a nosey resident and doing it as a contractor kind of thing because I knew I was going to get the right information. I used to work with DELWP for 20 years, I know [REDACTED] and all that sort of stuff so probably I was a bit more at ease going up there than other people and listening. Basically we were all in it together so couple of mornings running he thanked me for helping, taking time and thanking other residents and myself about what we did on days and helping put out fires and saving houses and etc which was pretty good of him, I thought.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Were there public community meetings?

**ADRIAN:** There was down at the school which was the relief centre. I'm assuming that it was run by the CFA and that might have come from the incident management team from Orbost and I just found them to be not helpful.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Why was that?

**ADRIAN:** Because people wanted to know when the road was going to be open and all that sort of stuff and they just didn't have the answers. I can sympathise with them because it's crystal ball-gazing when the highway was going to be open, things have got to be put in place, things that's got to happen, the time that it's got to happen, all those sort of things. There's a lot of time and effort goes into a lot of that stuff and once it's up and going it's going and it'll get done quickly but again it's that momentum, the build-up to it and then do it and build down from it so it all just takes time.

But getting back to the briefings I went to one where we were being told if we stayed for the Saturday – I can't remember the date, it would have probably been the 4<sup>th</sup> or the 3<sup>rd</sup> or something like that, the bad day that we were told, we were being told if we stayed we were going to die. I was just bit gobsmacked with that, I thought that was really poor management, telling people that if they stayed they were going to die. I could understand from a point of view trying to get people to leave that you might tell them that sort of stuff but that was in bad taste. I think there was other ways and means of delivering it and look, personally if I thought that was going to be the case I would have left, I just couldn't see the case when we'd been burnt around from Tuesday to then all the way around the valley fringe so to speak and couldn't come in as a fire front, only from down the bottom.

I really struggled with that so I stopped going to them. Likewise I stopped using the app because the app didn't give you up-to-date information or correct information because go back a step but the Monday night – pretty sure it's Monday night – when they was going with the night – the fire came to Cann River and the fire went into Mallacoota. My mother lives in Mallacoota and my brother was able to be there to help her. I made the decision to go to Mallacoota because the app was telling me the fire was still over the other side of Bonang Highway in the Snowy National Park. That was wrong from what I've been told and later worked out, is that it was east of Bonang and in the Errinundra National Park and it was still not telling us the right things. So getting told that the road into Mallacoota was closed probably saved me being there and cut off from my family and making it worse for us. I stopped using the app because it wasn't -

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Yeah, we heard quite a lot of that in the phase 1 part about information not being up-to-date.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, I found that government wants us to rely on these things but okay then give us the most up-to-date information or predicted information, call it predicted information or something or other. It's got to be up to the minute-type thing because people are making life decisions about this sort of stuff. So for me on that night I was outside watching the smoke come over, rang my wife, I said "look, you're going to have to go get your mum and the pets etc, bring her up here and she was busy at work and she didn't even notice" so she – oh, she did that and we went through it all and it's not the first time we've had to do that but I think it just demonstrates that some people – well I know she does – puts faith in some of those things more than what I do. I prefer to be outside watching and looking because clearly that night when the fire was rolling into Cann River DELWP didn't know. The incident control management team did not know that it was coming into Cann River. I know that because I told them that the fire was coming into Cann River because I rang them and told them that the fire was coming into Cann River. Basically I was getting told "sorry, we don't have any resources to send you, we'll start putting out the right alerts".

The frustrating part about it all I find is that I could see all this coming from September, October, everything was getting worse and we're getting closer to summer and from Queensland all the way down. It wasn't the only fire that was happening, all fires that started turned into basically large fires and uncontrollable fires and I'm sorry but the Victorian Government was just sitting on their hands. I'm a bit bitter about it because that fire started on the Saturday and my understanding is it was reported to the incident management team in Orbost. Nothing happened. Sunday it started and I know DELWP had two bulldozers here in Cann River and there was probably three or four bulldozers here in Cann River, one on a float and two DELWP ones on the ground next door to the float and none of them moved until the fire was in Cann River.

I was working with them in '02 and '03 and we had every available machine if not more going around every track – not that it was going to do much this time 'round but you would like to think that we would have been putting in mineral earth breaks in private property or on the grass interface, start doing things, preparing. I just found that a little bit distasteful.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** I can understand that and some of the others have talked about that as well, for sure.

**ADRIAN:** I do blame the incident management team and I blame the incident management in Melbourne as well. There's a big building down there that holds the whole state in their palm and if they don't see that some of the actions and etc aren't correct they need to be saying so and they need to be actioning different actions. Hindsight's a beautiful thing and I really don't like the idea of blaming individuals or the people in the ICCs because they're doing a really hard job and I know a lot of them. We've got to come up with a way of allowing decisions to be made and followed through without risk being put on them because we had a good opportunity to burn off the stony peak fire break at Mallacoota which was blowing towards the fire. They could have done that for 12 hours or more and I'm not saying

that there wouldn't have been fire into Mallacoota from that but that would have been far less impact than the fire front that came through Mallacoota.

It still wouldn't have maybe stopped spotting and etc but that impact on Mallacoota and Genoa and all those sort of things would have been far less. It may not have ever got to New South Wales and into New South Wales. So I think if things aren't happening on a local scale then the state needs to start questioning what are we doing? How are we doing it? That's something that I know I'll never find out about and etc because that's how they're necessarily going to put all that out.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** No, you've raised similar points to other people, particularly about some of that authorising environment of local decisions as well, enabling those things to happen when the locals think this is really important, could really work, we know the area, that type of thing and then it not going ahead because the decision's been made further up the chain for a different reason.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah and whether it be risk-averse. Everything we do is risk and I just think that if you or I made the decision to do something, yeah, okay, we do that but we know that there might be implications to that but what are the other implications? I think at those times those people need to - better word - be protected if something goes wrong. If somebody loses a house that's a decision that you and I have made and it's gone sideways and that's going to live with us for the rest of our life. We can't just plug it into a computer and get it to tell us and then say we blame the computer. We need to be making the decisions and the people that make the decisions need to be defended.

Look, I've got a friend in Mallacoota that lost a house. She's quite bitter and I've had a couple of conversations with her about the stuff and she blames the CFA. She could see the CFA station and CFA trucks but nobody saved her house. So it's really hard, you don't know the background to decisions being made, all that sort of stuff so I think it's really hard mentally for people to understand and to work out the process when the background information's not there.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** How do you think generally people have been going with their recovery? How's it been for yourself and for others? Are there things that you've seen that you've thought that's working really well or things that you think could be done differently?

**ADRIAN:** I think Cann River itself –I had some people talk to me and I was actually a bit surprised with their emotion to it. It did affect them and I really didn't think that it had affected them and it did affect them and so on. Just coming out in general conversation and etc, talking to one bloke and he was saying he's still – I don't know if you'd call it flashbacks but definitely he was thinking about it because I was saying to him “oh look, I'm getting up at 1 or 2:00 in the morning and still going outside and having a look around, just being situationally aware.

So there's all those sort of things. I think Cann River itself, it's probably moved on quicker than most places because we didn't lose houses and etc, we didn't lose anybody. Club Terrace, Combienbar, Chandlers Creek, Genoa, Mallacoota, they lost assets, they lost people, they were much more heavily impacted. Looking at those and talking to people from Club

Terrace and Mallacoota and Genoa and etc you can tell that it has scarred them. Hopefully it's a once in a lifetime thing but still.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Are you aware of whether people are accessing the services that are available, whether that be counselling or financial support, the case support program, any of those types of things, business support?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, I don't get into other people's businesses, drill down that hard. If they're happy to talk to me I'll talk to them but I'm not asking those sort of questions of them etc. I know some people that have lost assets and etc, they've got into the system and people are helping them out and etc with finance and that sort of stuff.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** That's good.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah. While I remember it I think like after the event and with the fire clean-up and etc, it seems to be one of the things the government's going to do is provide cleaning up. I think state government and local government need to come up with a plan of where they're going to send the stuff. Needs to be a whole of government approach because for East Gippsland the contract was awarded to Grocon which is fair enough but then where's it all go? No-one knew, it all had to be worked out and then you've got WorkSafe saying one thing, EPA saying one, the shire saying one thing and then you got all the people that have been affected at the bottom of the food chain. They're the ones that are wanting to move on, they're wanting the clean-up and for a few weeks afterwards they're wanting to be cleaned up and they're being told no because we can't accept the stuff at the landfills, "it's all still being worked out, sorry but" - that's not what they wanted to hear and I think that the whole of government approach to this sort of thing needs to be worked out.

So if it does happen the concrete pad wherever the site is, is already in so the mobile weighbridge can come in and then weigh it and the huts can come in, all the infrastructure's there and it just gets connected up, power, water, whatever and we're talking within weeks and we should have a contract awarded to whoever's going to do the clean-up. Say that's a contract for two years and then it's redone but we need to know where that stuff's going, all the contaminated stuff, all that sort of stuff.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Like preplanning of it?

**ADRIAN:** Yeah. I think that's something that's new, it's not something that we've had to deal with very often and hopefully we don't but that's something that we've got to deal with a bit quicker and it will make the people's lives after the events a bit easier.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** That's a really good insight because obviously clean-up is one of the areas that we're interested in having a bit of look at to see how it's worked, how it's performed, what people thought, were there delays or anything like that, how effective it's been.

**ADRIAN:** If you live in East Gippsland you do many jobs but I also work for the Shire and I work at the Cann River Landfill and I work with the people in the waste management in the Shire and I think they did a wonderful job and hats off to them because they were put under the pump straight away. Let alone just having the fire and having power turned off, all those

sort of things and people with fridges, all that sort of stuff, all that waste but their waste facilities were burned. They had to get all that stuff working again so then let alone organise the clean-up and then so on because I guess everything else has to move on as well. Everything else keeps working and so on.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Yeah, normal day-to-day business of waste removal.

**ADRIAN:** It still happens, it still had to happen in Orbost, everywhere else. I think they did a terrific job but having that pre-planned and a whole of government approach so saying “yes, this is what we’re going to do, this is where we’re going to do it” and having tenders let and being organised will take the pressure off the individuals after the event immensely let alone it be at local government level or the householder that’s lost their house or house and contents and etc.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** It’s a very good point.

**ADRIAN:** Maybe a bit more awareness. Like I say it’s new. It’s all happened before but we’ve got new rules and regulations these days so it’s something that’s got to be thought about. One thing I’d like to see out of all this because to have the clean-up done, not looking at the destruction is strangely – it seems to be much better. Just driving in to Mallacoota to see my mother and to work over there and etc, just not to see those people’s homes the way they were, it’s much easier to see a clear block.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** And the mental impacts that that has for people when they’re passing by.

**ADRIAN:** Mentally for whatever reason.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Is there anything else you wanted to talk to me about?

**ADRIAN:** Just from the preparedness point of view I got to say I’m a bit bitter about it because I could see things could be done much better. I think where a whole of government thing, we need to stop managing forests to a budget and manage the forest for the forest. When I say whole of government that’s DELWP, Parks Victoria, local government and all that. I think Cann River district basically is nearly 400,000ha, X amount is national park and that’s divided up. There’s some rangers in Mallacoota which is four or five or something like that and Cann River has one part-time ranger. I just don’t see how they can manage anything with that amount of people. They need resources and support to manage the park. It’s just turned into a people management thing. They’re not managing it and I’m not trying to belittle them or say that they’re doing the wrong thing.

They’re doing the right thing by the management plans and etc what managers are put in place to do, I just don’t think – they couldn’t tell us what was lost on the coast or how things are coming back and etc. We heard about the koalas and the bristlebird and all that sort of stuff, what about everything else? The skinks, the snakes and all that sort of stuff. There was a big impact out there but no-one can tell you what had gone on. It’s like DELWP, they’re transitioning from forestry into forest management now. They need more people. It comes back to more people, more resources to manage it, if we leave it to self-manage this is what’s going to happen again. So whether we as a state put the money into managing after the

disaster I think it needs to be looked at whether we start managing it before the disaster because I could see it coming and I'm no expert, you could see it coming rolling down the coast. We were going into summer and it was just happening and happening.

I put sprinklers on my roof, I have things on the back of my ute and all that sort of stuff and DELWP had their bulldozers in the yard. I was going to the furthest point that I was happy with to fight the fire and I was happy to fight the fire as a fight and retreat if it had to be but I was going to it. I've forgotten why we don't go to fires anymore, we always let the fires come to us. I understand about OH and S and all that sort of stuff but if we can't put people into safe situations then there needs to be other avenues for managers to be able to manage those areas, whether they put fire breaks around a national park or whatever just so they can burn off on a given day, I don't know. But it's got to come back to more people.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** That was a pretty strong theme from community in phase 1 and also from people I've spoken with in this part as well so definitely the resourcing and that issue around forest and fire management and actually managing the forest.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah and look, the flow-on effect from that is there's more people in town, the economics of town is better, the communities, schools, all those sort of things down to hardware store, the nursery and all that sort of stuff, everything is beneficial from it. I do get a little bit frustrated with it.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** I can understand that, for sure.

**ADRIAN:** Because I can see a way out of it but unfortunately government doesn't want to see the same what we see. The elected officials see it as a monetary thing, not as an ecological thing and I think that's got to change, it's got to be turned into an ecological thing and that's what it's going to take. In money, that's what it takes. We spend all our time building bridges in the bush to get to places but what's the point if we're not going to manage the tracks and get to places and etc to get there?

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Anything else?

**ADRIAN:** Oh I think we covered it all.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Thank you, you've provided a lot of really valuable information, particularly the examples have been great so thanks very much, Adrian, and certainly if you're talking with anybody else in your community or any of the other communities you're getting around to see at the moment, visiting – you seem to have got connections in lots of different places – if you think that they might be interested in sharing their story please pass on my phone number or my email address, ask them to make contact. Hearing from community's really important as part of the inquiry and it does make a difference so the more people we hear from with different experiences in different places just means that it's a much more holistic sort of review of the process. So if you get that opportunity please pass it on.

**ADRIAN:** Yeah, will do. Oh just one thing if I may, I just want to talk about the CFA side of things. I was really disappointed and it feels like Country Fire Authority, the country's been taken out of it, it's just the Fire Authority now. Like I was getting told stories that we had fire

rescue people here but they weren't allowed on the fire trucks because they had volunteers on them. Now that just seems a bit bizarre to me and I don't know if it's right or wrong and then I was getting told that they wouldn't get on the trucks because there was MFB fire-fighters on there that were volunteering but they were union-orientated so they didn't want to get in trouble. So if we've got to that point that people aren't allowed on trucks to hold hoses or give their knowledge about how to do things efficiently and correctly and save time and money what's the point of it? All the training and etc that we can't do those sort of things. I was just gobsmacked when I was getting told that, it was really quite disappointing. It's really changed to me as an organisation.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** I can't verify any of that information but I do know that other community members talked about just different agencies and working together, not working together, that type of thing. So it's something that we did hear about but I don't know whether it's true or not.

**ADRIAN:** No look, I don't know if it's true or not but like I say it's a sad point if we've got to that with all the training and education and etc, those guys. They're paid professionals and they can't do what they're being paid for. Mind boggles.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Yeah. Alright well listen, if there's nothing further thank you very much. As I said the interview's been recorded so the transcript will be back probably early next week and then I'll check that and I'll send it through to you for a copy. If there's any queries just let me know and we'll record one as a submission into the inquiry.

**ADRIAN:** No worries, thank you very much.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Thanks again, I really appreciate your time.

**ADRIAN:** No worries, Anne-Louise.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Alright.

**ADRIAN:** Talk to you again.

**ANNE-LOUISE:** Thanks Adrian, okay, bye-bye.

**ADRIAN:** Take care, bye.

Would you like your submission to be made publicly available?	Yes
Would you like your name (or your business or organisation's name) published with your submission?	Yes
During the 2019-20 fire season, were you in an area where fires occurred?	Yes
Where were you impacted by fires?	Yes
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?	
Were you (or do you continue to be) involved in supporting individuals or communities affected by the fires?	Yes
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 Shire Council
What is your postcode or town?	3890, Cann River
What age group are you in?	50s
What gender do you identify as?	Male
Other ways to be involved in the Inquiry	Yes
Full name	
Phone number	
Email	<a href="#">0</a>
What types of activities would you be interested in hearing about?	
Preferred method of contact	