

Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

By LIVE (Locals Into Victoria's Environment)



In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

Thank you for the opportunity to submit our concerns and views about what is happening to our wonderful country, Australia. In fact, we are not alone and many other countries are facing the same challenges as we venture into an uncertain future.

Our group is made up of professionals from all walks of life. We are dedicated students of the Society and the impacts on the Environment. We are not experts in Emergency Response and as such we can only provide our opinion based on what is reported to us.

The emergency responders (men and women) showed great skills, courage and gave everything; putting their lives on the line to save other peoples' lives and property – they are our heroes. Resources were requested from interstate and from our overseas allies and it was received. Federal support and resources could have come faster, but it eventually arrived.

The task was huge, fighting fires with such ferocity and on many fronts. It was inevitable that much vegetation and animals were lost. However, good communication and evacuation procedures prevented a potentially greater loss of life. Some people chose to stay behind to fight the fire and protect their property – that is understandable, but some lost their lives in the process. It is a miracle that more lives were not lost.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

Can we better prepared? The answer is always "yes" because there are always lessons that can be learned from every disaster. But let's not forget that the conditions that faced us during this period are unprecedented – record drought and record temperatures (yes, 2019 was a new record for Australia) – we need to understand what is happening to better prepare ourselves into the future.

With reference to the website of the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, the historical temperature graph shows how Australia's annual mean temperature has increase 1.5 oC above the values in the early 1900s while the world's average is around 1.0 oC. The last 4 decades shows a temperature trend that is not just increasing, but accelerating.

It seems logical that, if we are faced with a growing problem, then we need to increase the resources (firefighting equipment and well-trained personnel). It seemed that we were deficient in this area and it needs to be improved. But we need to keep on increasing these resources every year and ahead of time because the temperatures are increasing rapidly every year and the south east part of Australia is getting drier.

The IPCC AR5 Summary Report (2014) for Australia (page 3) reinforced what was already predicted in 2007 and that is: "There are significant future risks of increased loss of life, damage to property, and economic loss due to bushfires in southern Australia".

At no time in the geological history of the world have the temperatures changed so quickly and it is going to be difficult and expensive to be prepared for what is to come. This process of increasing temperatures and reduced rainfall will lead to a gradual desertification. We will gradually lose our forest, wildlife, ability to farm and thus destroying the livelihood of Australian families and whole communities.

How can you properly prepare for such a catastrophic scenario?

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

The first thing that needs to change is our political resolve to act on what the scientists have been telling us for decades. Instead, our politicians, who are in the pockets of the fossil fuel lobby, are working tirelessly to prolong the life of a dying industry. It is absurd that an industry that has been around for hundreds of years still get \$29 billion per annum in subsidies. Subsidies should be given to new industries that show merit of a prosperous future such as renewable electricity generation (e.g. wind and solar) and battery storage – not the damaging and dying fossil fuel industry.

Climate change is real and the latest IPCC AR5 report (2014) made it clear that the burning of **FOSSIL FUELS** is the prime driver and also **DEFORESTATION**. It is obvious that to prevent the worst effects of climate change we have to stop burning fossil fuels and switch to renewable energies and electricity to drive our economy. Renewable energies such as wind and solar are already cheaper than gas and coal. Battery technology is coming down in cost and very soon we will see that electric cars will be cheaper than the fossil fuel equivalent.

At the same time, we need to stop deforestation (stop the logging of native forests) and reforest marginal agricultural land as a way of sequestering carbon. Ross Garnaut has published on many occasions (including his latest book *Superpower*) the tremendous potential that Australia has for sequestering carbon by growing forests (storing of carbon in trees and the soil) and the implementation of international carbon trading systems. This is true and necessary; however, this is costly and a very slow process. It takes decades to grow trees to maturity. All this work of reforesting fades into insignificance if at the same time we allow logging of native forests to continue. **Easy to destroy but difficult to build.**

Australia is a big destroyer of native forests and this is a reason for national shame. We are in the same league as the poor developing nations of South America and Central Africa. We know how poor Haiti is in comparison to its neighbour the Dominican Republic. They share the same island, yet Haiti has destroyed its forest while the Dominican Republic is a lush tropical paradise bustling with eco-tourism.

The Australian logging industry is on the brink of financial collapse – barely surviving even after a long history of generous public subsidies. The time has come to transition this industry as quickly as possible. The environmental and economic damage it is creating is greater than the benefits it claims. The damage caused by the recent fires, prolonged drought and floods are a testament to this fact.

No doubt we can improve our preparedness for responding to these emergencies (resources, personnel, better communication, training, remuneration, land management, back burning, etc.). But, let's not forget to focus on the predominant driver of this disaster with much worse to come. It is called Climate Change.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

Dear members of this Royal Commission, you have a very important task and you need to produce a well-balanced report to our leaders.

It is supremely important that the issue of Climate Change is given the correct balance. Our leaders and the public needs to hear from you the absolute truth about the cause of this national disaster. Some of our leaders may not like it, but the truth needs to be told and the nation needs to move quickly on a path of repairing centuries of damage. That is, that we need to phase out quickly our dependence on fossil fuel (within 10 years) and stop logging our native forests (within 2 years). I am sure the fossil fuel and logging industry will have their version of the truth – your task is to choose wisely.

You are wielding a powerful axe – you have the power to decide whether we continue on the path of destruction OR embark on a path to repair to a clean world powered by renewable energy and full of wonderful native forests and the unique biodiversity that they harbour. Australia needs to lead by example and be a beacon to the rest of the world.

Please be on the correct side of history - we hope that you act for justice.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission. Below are my details if you wish to contact me.

Yours truly.

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NOTE:

The submission allowed 50,000 characters for each of the 4 section = 200,000 characters

This submission was only 7,587 characters

It used less that 4% of the allocated characters

Thank you for your submission to the Royal Commission. Your reference number is NND.001.00934.