

**Submission Number: NND.001.01199**

**Submission Of: Seán Burke**

**Your Details**

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my personal situation

What was your personal situation in relation to the 2019-20 Bushfires?

Where do you live? Eurobodalla (A) - Wallaga Lake (L)

**Your Submission**

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

Very little.

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

Having been evacuated from my home at Wallaga Lake 5 times, I also have concerns about how the disaster was managed down here but I hope other people who went through these experiences will provide their information to you.

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

I write this submission to ask that the Aboriginal traditional cultural burning practices be funded and brought into wide practice throughout Australia following the disastrous recent bushfires.

Over 100,000 years, Aboriginal people have developed a system of land management that drastically reduced the occurrence of catastrophic bushfires and we need to learn from this ancient learning. It will no doubt take many, many years to get our bush to the point where it returns to the level of fire retardant capability that was evident before European interference in their cultural practices, but it's my opinion that we need to get started as soon as possible to reintroduce these practices to avoid similar disasters in the long run.

Aboriginal cultural burning is done on a mosaic basis across small ecosystems in a way that the fire is so cool that the soil underneath retains its moisture and the regrowth following the fire is more fire retardant. The effects of our management of forest landscapes since colonisation has been that these forests have become far more fire prone. This has come about by logging opening up the canopy to allow more drying of the forest floor and hazard reduction burning that has been too hot resulting in further drying of the soils and the promotion of more fire prone species.

We are incredibly lucky that some of the ancient knowledge has survived and it would be negligent of us to allow this ancient learning to die when it has the potential to ensure our survival on this continent. Can I ask that you seek the information available through the NSW Firesticks Alliance program regarding the use of cultural burning. Their website is <https://www.firesticks.org.au/>.

The best proponent of cultural burning practices I've spoken with is Vic Steffensen who is working with the NSW Firesticks Alliance and I ask that you contact him to provide further information about the history of the practice and the ongoing efforts to spread the practice throughout this country. Vic has provided a lot of information in the recent ABC program "Fighting Fire With Fire" on Australian Story. Please take the time to view this program here: <https://iview.abc.net.au/show/australian-story/series/2020/video/NC2002Q009S00>. Vic has also published a book "Fire Country – how Indigenous fire management could help save Australia" and I urge you to read it and seriously consider his valuable knowledge in your recommendations.

Vic has undertaken some cultural burning down here training Bega Local Aboriginal Land Council members and the effectiveness of the practice was demonstrated with a burn behind Tathra a couple years back. When the Disastrous Tathra fire came through from the west, it slowed and stopped when it met the area that was the subject of the burn.

Another great advantage of promoting and funding the expansion of the cultural burning program would be the employment of many Aboriginal people, particularly young people. The rewards of having Aboriginal people working on Country have been demonstrated so often so using this opportunity, especially as part of the CORVID-19 recovery, would reap lots of benefits for both our environment and our Aboriginal community.

Thank you,  
Seán Burke.

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

No.

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name