

Our Ref: S008-T00025

22 June 2020

The Hon. Dr Annabelle Bennett AC SC  
Commissioner of the Royal Commission  
National Natural Disaster Arrangements  
[RCNDA.Notices@royalcommission.gov.au](mailto:RCNDA.Notices@royalcommission.gov.au)

Dear Commissioner,

**Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disasters – Local Government and natural disasters**

Thank you for the extension of time to 10am 22 June 2020 to make a further submission to the issues paper on the role of Local Government and natural disasters.

This submission should be read with reference to our previous submissions of 27 March, 29 April, 4 May and 19 June 2020.

Please find attached Council's bushfire presentation to the NSW Local Roads Conference 2020 prepared by our Director Infrastructure Services, Warren Sharpe OAM with some additional explanatory notes to replace the verbal presentation.

This presentation gave the opportunity to recognise the extraordinary efforts of everyone involved in defending and caring for our community to a NSW wide audience (including Local Government, Government agencies and Members of Parliament). This presentation provides a high level summary of our community's lived experience during the 2019-20 bushfires. The recommendations are referenced in our previous submissions with some additional detail provided on slides 21 and 22.

This presentation provides an alternate view to that expressed by some who look at the emergency management space from the perspective of the existing structures. What we advocate for, is a new paradigm altogether.

Slides 21 and 22 outline recommendations about a suggested new way forward; one where emergency management is treated as the profession that is needed to service our communities going forward, and where the key roles sit within an appropriate NSW Government agency, supported by other professionals in that space.

These recommendations include:

- Decentralisation of emergency management roles to regional NSW. This will also provide increased employment in the regions, stronger local knowledge and professional emergency management capability.
- Improved capacity for resilience and recovery planning with that resource capable to transition directly into leading recovery (instead of Local Government).
- Significant efficiency gains in the emergency management space with a greater capacity for more on-the-ground professional emergency management personnel in each Local Government Area.
- More consistent emergency management outcomes regardless of the size or capacity of the Council (which is of itself highly variable).
- Improved strategy and delivery of emergency services infrastructure in a fully integrated way. Our experience in trying to bring different agencies to the table to achieve the Eurobodalla regional integrated emergency management precinct in Moruya evidences the current structural challenges to achieving the outcomes needed.
- Improved structural alignment by allowing Local Government and NSW Police to focus on their core service roles.
- A significant boost to the financial sustainability of all Councils in NSW by moving the cost of emergency services to higher levels of Government.
- A greater capacity within Local Government to develop and implement permanent resilience improvements (eg on critical infrastructure) using the transfer of emergency management costs to higher levels of Government.
- Local Government still having a critical role to play in emergency management planning, preparation, response and recovery phases as a Local Government service provider.

Council's view is that any proposal to simply insert a paid Local Emergency Management Officer into Local Government is a short term and fragile mechanism that will not serve our communities nor Government well into the future, either in the response or recovery phases of natural disasters. To train, have back-up and proper career pathing in the emergency management space requires a robust emergency management organisation with appropriate depth and breadth of expertise and experience.

We ask that the Australian Government work with the NSW Government to develop emergency management structures and guidance that will provide a professional local emergency management capability regardless of the size and scale of Councils across Australia. These structures must fully respect, value, support and enhance the capability, skill and commitment of our wonderful volunteers engaged across the emergency management and rescue frontline.

Should you or your office require further information please contact my office on 44741308 or Council's Director Infrastructure Services Mr Warren Sharpe OAM on 0409398358.

Yours sincerely

*Catherine Dale*

Dr Catherine Dale  
**General Manager**

# Eurobodalla 2019-20 bushfire response

## Lessons for a more resilient future

Warren Sharpe OAM  
Director Infrastructure Services  
Local Emergency Management Officer



# Eurobodalla 2019-20 bushfires 30 December 2019

Currawan fire started north of Nelligen on 26 November 2019

Already heavy impact in Shoalhaven & part of Eurobodalla

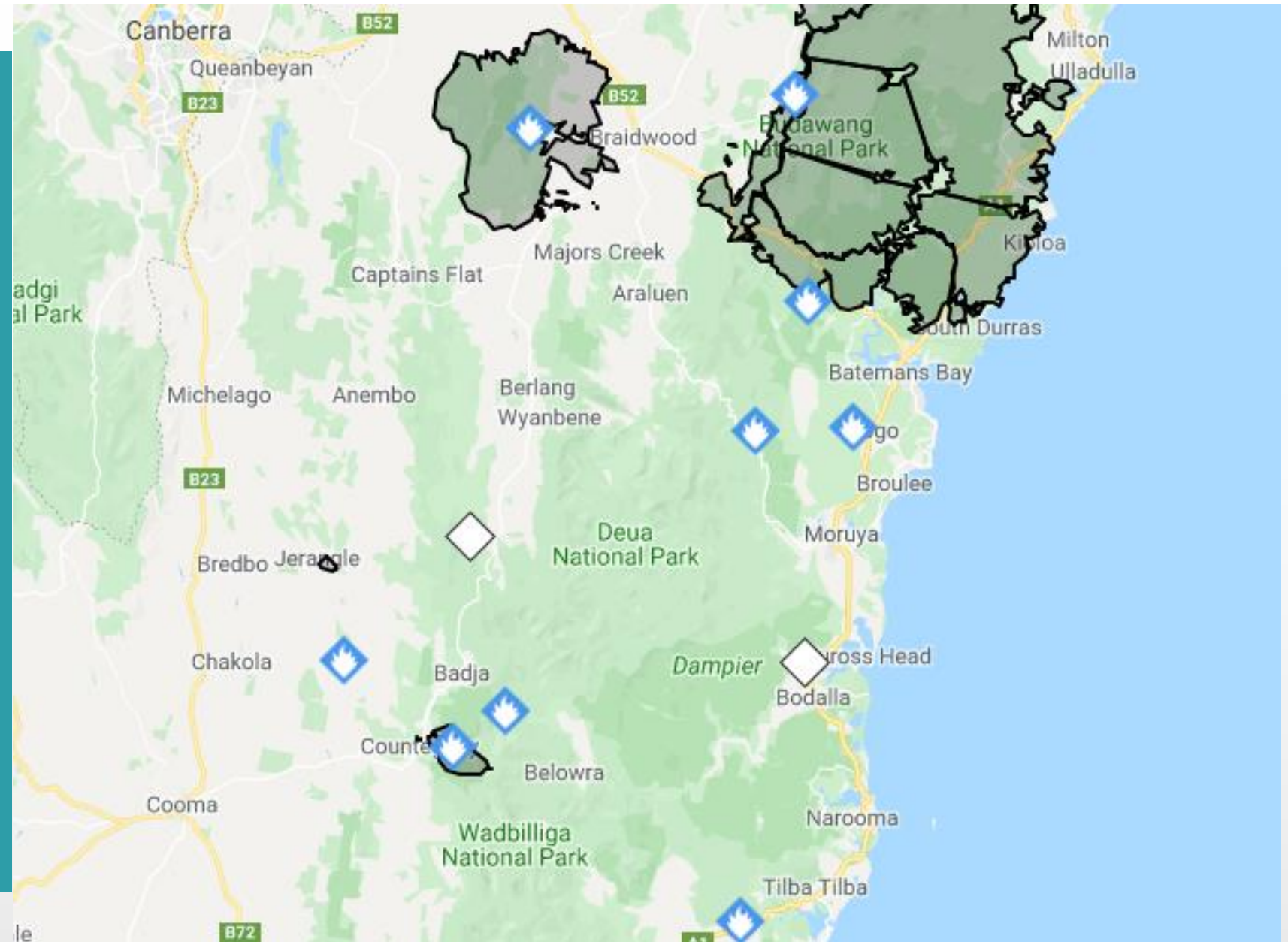
Immediate high threats to villages of South Durras, Nelligen, Long Beach averted

Fire jumped the Kings Highway at Government bend on 17 December 2019

Renamed Clyde Mountain fire – 29 December 2019

Araluen fire – 26 December 2019

Badja fire – 27 December 2019





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Typical line scan of the Currawan fire 27 December 2019 - Kings Highway



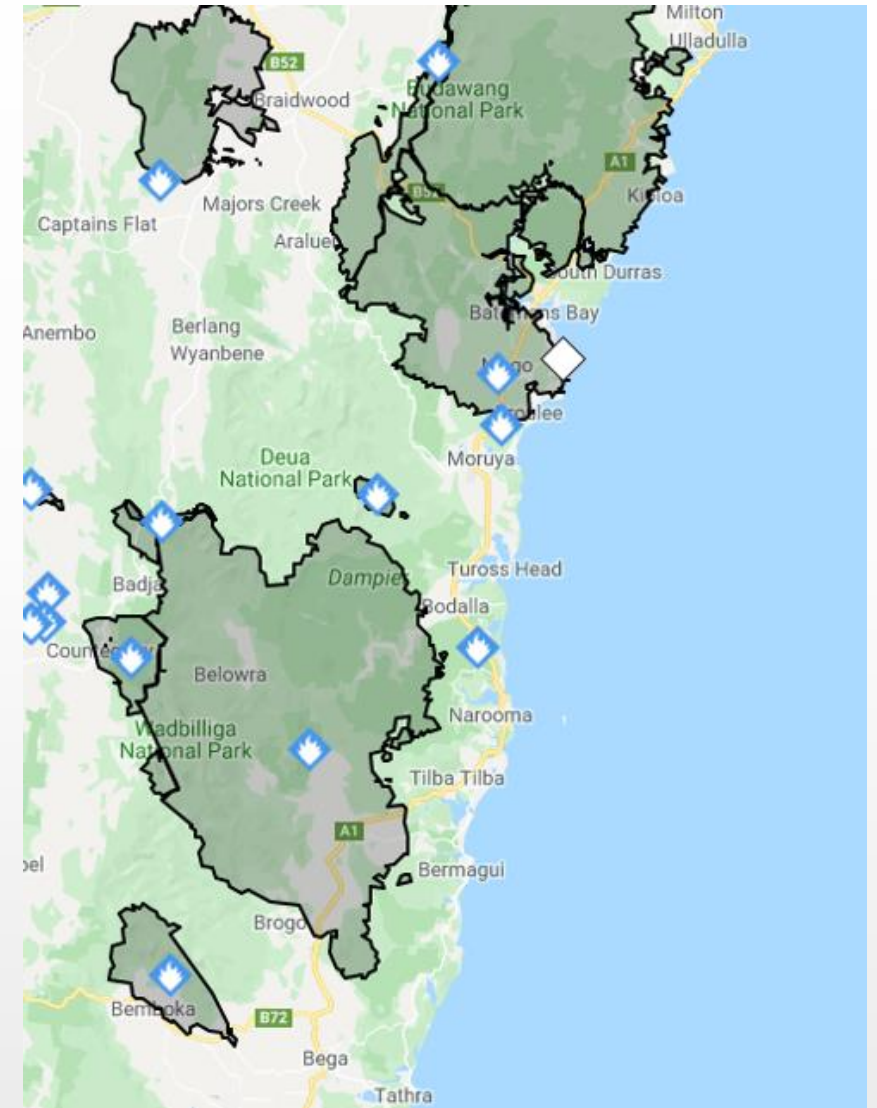
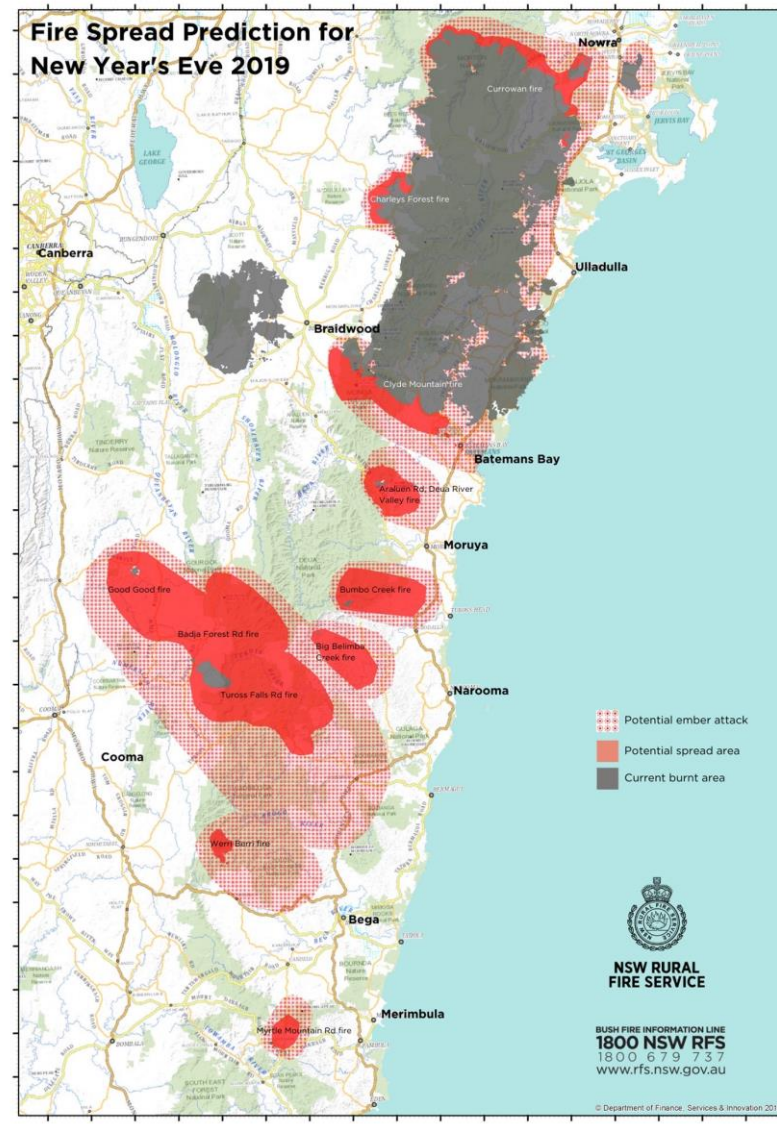
# Eurobodalla 2019-20 bushfires 31 December 2019

RFS Fire Prediction Map issued on the night of 30 December 2019

Badja firestorm raced over 50km overnight and devastating Belowra, Nerrigundah, Quaama and Cobargo

Clyde Mountain and Araluen fires joined together and raced 40km to the coast, devastating rural and the most populated areas of Batemans Bay-Rosedale and Mogo

Section 44 fire disaster declaration in place since Currawan fire extended



Predicted fire spread in solid red, potential for embers red hatched vs actual Fires Near Me plot after

31 December 2019 – Moruya looking north





## 31 December 2019 looking to Batemans Bay & at Rosedale Beach



# Eurobodalla 31 December 2019

Line scan taken 9.55am

The firestorm races to the coast between Batemans Bay and Broulee destroying homes, businesses, agricultural lands and the environment

Thousands huddle on the beaches at Malua Bay, Batehaven and at Hanging Rock Batemans Bay

Majority of South Rosedale and Guerilla Bay are saved by a timely southerly wind change

Mogo Zoo survives





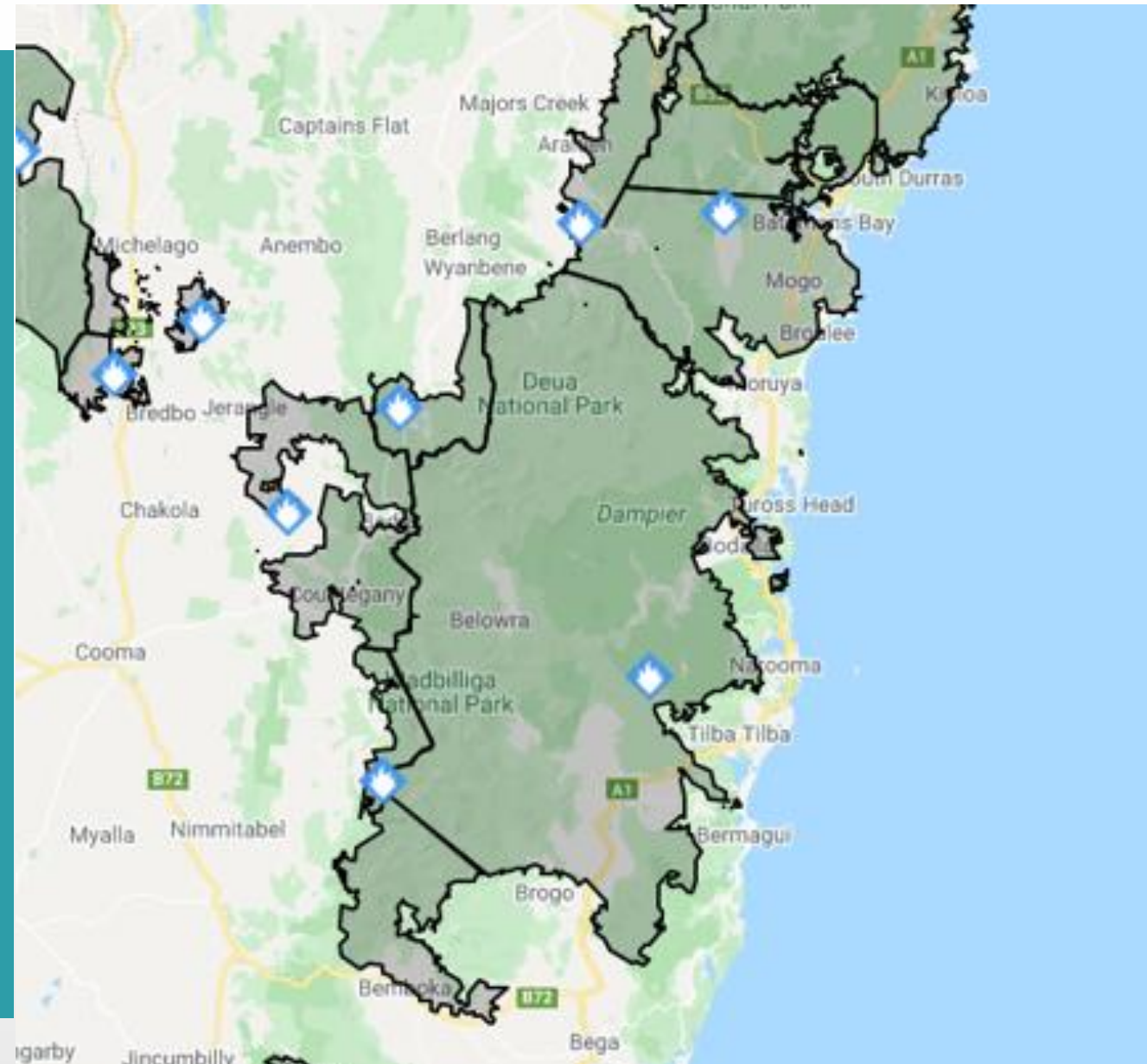
# Eurobodalla 2019-20 bushfires 7 February 2020

The hinterland fires have joined following a positive fire day 1 February 2020 sealing off the 'funnel' behind Moruya

The fires have extended beyond our LGA boundaries to the north, west and south for the full length of the Shire

Only the coastal villages of South Durras, Long Beach, Maloneys Beach and Moruya Heads to Central Tilba/Akolele are spared

80% of the Eurobodalla LGA is burnt





Impact of 2019-20  
Eurobodalla  
bushfires looking  
south west from  
Batemans Bay



# Eurobodalla fires 2019-20

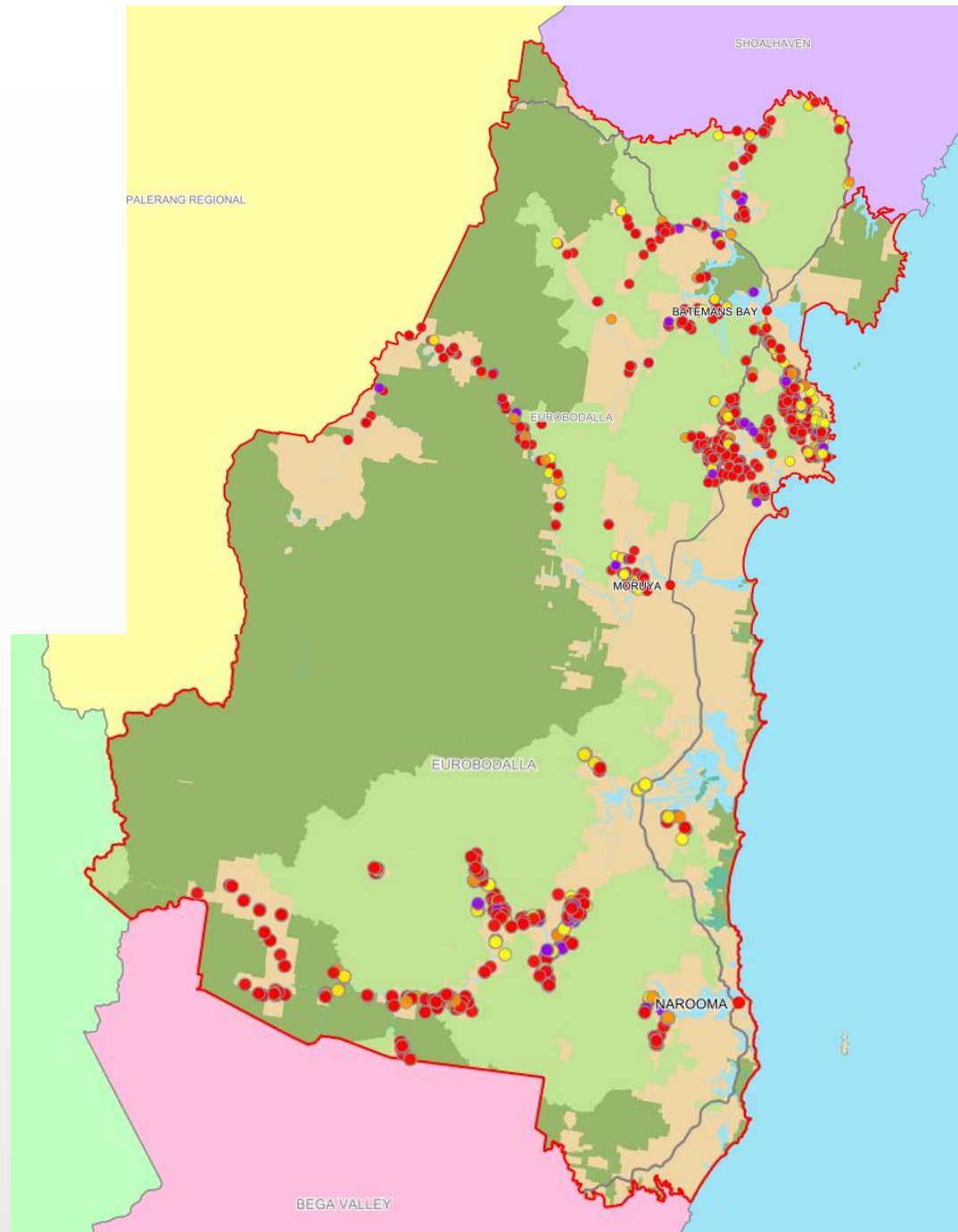
Eurobodalla fires 26 November 2019 to 4  
March 2020 – 100 days

3 people killed	501
homes destroyed, 274 damaged	80
commercial/other destroyed, 36 damaged	
859 outbuildings destroyed, 297 damaged	

Red dots indicate destroyed building (often as  
a cluster at this scale)

80% of Eurobodalla LGA burnt  
>20% of home losses in NSW

NSW  
2,475 homes destroyed, 1034 damaged  
284 commercial destroyed, 196 damaged  
5,556 outbuildings destroyed, 2105 damaged





Impact of 2019-20  
Eurobodalla  
bushfires  
looking north along  
the Princes  
Highway Mogo  
CBD (March 2020)





Impact of  
2019-20  
Eurobodalla  
bushfires  
looking back to  
North Rosedale  
village (March  
2020)





# Eurobodalla fires 2019-20

3 rural landowners killed

Homes, sheds and equipment lost

Thousands of livestock destroyed

Pastures burnt to bare dirt

Over 3,400km of fences impacted

Massive impact on fauna and flora

Massive community trauma

Photos shed lifted out of the ground by the wind in front of the fire in the Eurobodalla Valley (top left and right) and the devastated Nerrigundah village (bottom left)





# Eurobodalla fires 2019-20

490km of fire impacted Council roads

18 Council bridges destroyed or damaged

Princes Highway and Kings Highways closed for extended periods

10's of thousands of trees removed to make roads and reserves safe

Botanic gardens, SES and RFS buildings destroyed/damaged

Water, sewer and waste infrastructure damaged

Approximately \$15m in response, clean-up and infrastructure rebuilding

Photos Nerrigundah Mountain Road large trees blown over like twigs (top left) and Belimbla Creek (bottom left) and Reedy Creek (right)





# Eurobodalla fires 2019-20

Major interruptions and damage to  
telecommunication and power  
supply

Photo – Mt Wandera main  
telecommunications tower May  
2020

\$100Ms economic impact, then a  
flood, now COVID-19



# Eurobodalla fires 2019-20 response

Highway traffic management and tree work

Evacuating 10,000s of people within 48 hours with no highways, no power, no fuel

Wiring three service stations to provide fuel for evacuation and fire fighting

Restoring alternate highway access George Bass Drive

Restoring local road access – thousands of trees & debris removed & bridge side tracks built and temporary bridge repairs

Securing/delivering 120,000L of diesel for fire fighting, hospitals, telecommunications, water, sewer, EOC, Ccl office, evacuation centres

Getting drinking water and food to isolated people

Operating an entire water supply and sewage system without power & succeeding

EOC communications and public face of Council

Manned IMT, EOC, evacuation centres and provided the Council interface

## Adapt



## Invent



## Overcome





# Australia – the land of drought, fire and flood, and now COVID-19

10 February 2020 flood Nerrigundah & Belowra

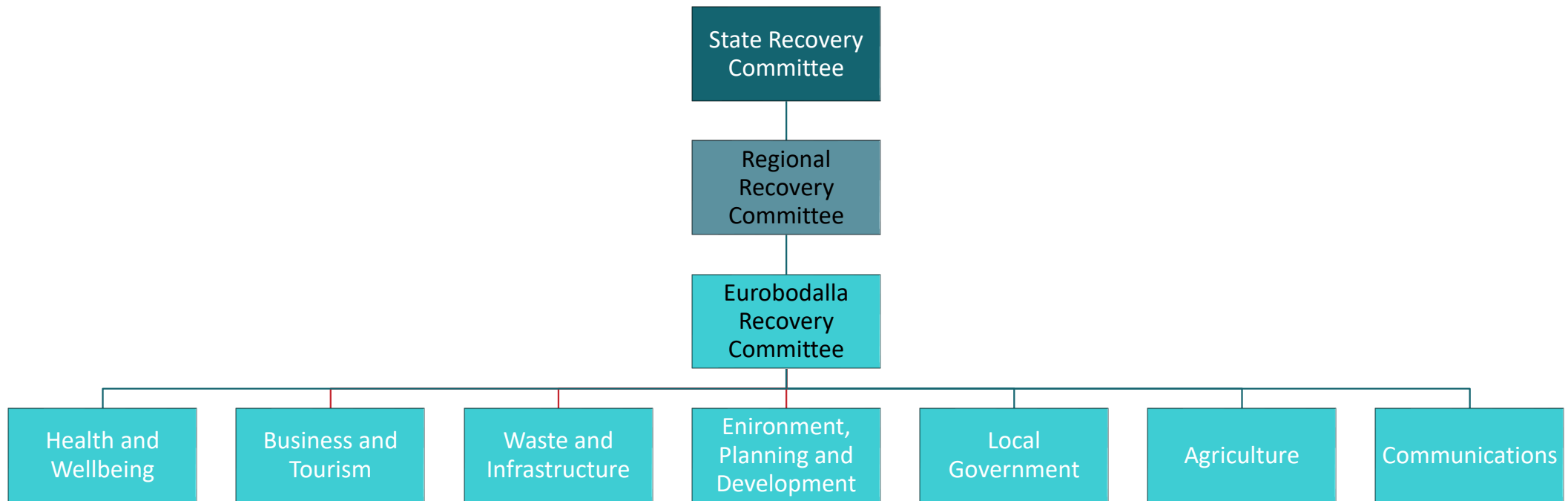




## Response -> Recovery



# Eurobodalla Recovery



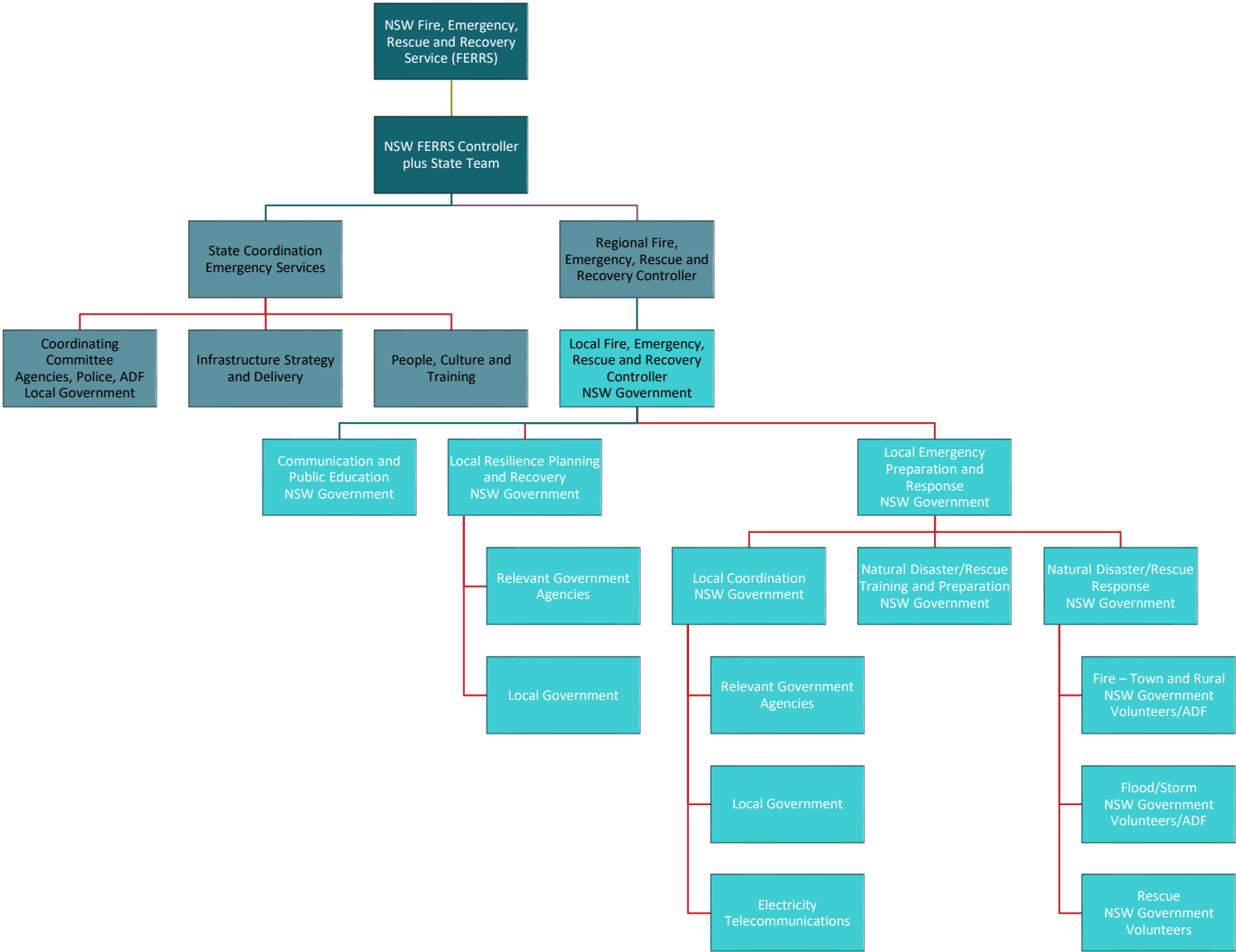
# Future Recommended Changes to Emergency Management & Resilience

- Reform Emergency Management in NSW creating a **single emergency service organisation with a local presence across NSW** to plan, prepare, respond and lead recovery – re-write the SERM Act 1989
- **Move all Emergency Services personnel and infrastructure to the NSW Government ownership**, fully funded by the NSW & Australian Governments
- Provide a **full-time professional Local Emergency Controller in each LGA imbedded in a new NSW Government emergency services agency** (not Local Government)
- Preparation, education and provision of information to remain the responsibility of the emergency services combat agency
- Improved infrastructure, training and support for our amazing Emergency Service volunteers including building the Eurobodalla Regional Integrated Emergency Services Precinct
- Local Government to remain a key player as a service provider (similar to Transport for NSW, Essential Energy), and with an active seat at the table for planning, preparation, response and recovery for Natural Disasters & Emergencies (as a member rather than the chair or lead)
- **Refine the Natural Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements** to lower the upfront costs to regional Councils to opt-in to the day labour, and provide for improved resilience and betterment
- Australian Government to fully fund a major upgrades to telecommunications resilience
- Australian and NSW Government fully fund a major upgrades to electricity supply and highway/major transport route resilience
- Existing Australian and NSW Government transport (and other) grant programs to include weighting for improved resilience to Natural Disasters
- Resilience NSW to develop more robust regional and local recovery plans that put our community first, with a focus on short term (safety, food/water, shelter, livestock and animal welfare), medium and long term objectives
- NSW Government accelerate roll-out of the Fixing Local Roads and Fixing Local Bridges programs
- **Local Government/Water Utilities develop infrastructure resilience plans** for roads, water and sewer infrastructure & utilise savings from moving emergency services infrastructure to the NSW Government to build infrastructure resilience



# Possible New NSW Fire, Emergency, Rescue and Recovery Service (FERRS)

Combined Decentralised Model with Strengthened Local Presence





# Thank you

Rural Fire Service, Eurobodalla Shire Council,  
Forestry NSW, T4NSW

FSC Incident Management Team,

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre  
Team

Bega, Snowy Monaro, QPRC Shoalhaven EOCs

REOC, SEOC, ADF, OEM

Our amazing volunteers, their supporting families

Our amazing community

Andrew Constance MP & Shannon Whitford

Mayor Liz Innes, Councillors, Exec & Staff

Angus Barnes RFS IC, Greg Flood  
LEOCON, Rob Burke LEMO, Kellee Pisanos EOC  
Communications

Our IPWEA NSW family

<https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/living-in/about/emergency-information/eurobodalla-community-recovery/bushfire-inquiries>

Painting by Richard Sealy RFS Volunteer  
Nerrigundah/Belowra

