

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Eurobodalla Shire Council

Response to the Notice and Summons to Give Information

(NTG-HB2-263)

4 May2020

Executive Summary

This submission of information is made in response to the Notice and Summons to Give Information to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements number NTG-HB2-263.

The following information is in addition to the submission made on 27 March 2020 to the Royal Commission via the web-portal with the identification number NND.001.00133 (including 3 attachments) and our response to the Notice and Summons to Give Information dated 29 April 2020 number NTG-HB1-06.

As agreed, the responses herein cross references Council's previous submissions and where necessary, adds further information to assist the considerations of the Royal Commission.

The information provided is done so in good faith in pursuit of improved solutions to assist and protect our community during natural disasters.

Council thanks the multi-agencies teams in the Incident Management Team and Emergency Operations Centre, the many volunteers, Agency and Council personnel and local contractors on the frontline, the Australian Defence Force, media and our community for the role they played in aiding our community during the devastating 2019-20 bushfire season.

Council also recognises the extraordinary support provided throughout and since the bushfires by our local State member the Hon. Andrew Constance MP. We also thank Fiona Phillips MP for her support as our local Federal Member for Gilmore.

1. *Describe what steps the Eurobodalla Shire Council took to prepare for the 2019-20 bushfire season.*

This question has been responded to in the information provided by Council's submission dated 29 April 2020. In particular, please reference the responses to Questions 1 & 2.

- 2. Describe the Emergency Response Plans or management frameworks currently in place that inform the Eurobodalla Shire Council's response to natural disasters. Detail the current status of the Emergency Response Plans or management frameworks and when they are expected to be reviewed and whether they were implemented in the 2019-2020 bushfire season.**

This question has been responded to in the information provided by Council's submission dated 29 April 2020. In particular, please reference the responses to Questions 1 & 2.

3. Describe the level of engagement (i.e. frequency and nature of interactions and information sharing) by the State of New South Wales Government with the Eurobodalla Shire Council and other local authorities regarding natural disaster preparedness, response and recovery.

This question has been responded to in the information provided by Council's submission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020. In particular, please reference the responses to Questions 1 & 2 of the latter.

This engagement is achieved through the emergency management processes established under the SERM Act 1989 and Rural Fires Act 1997. The overall level of information sharing during preparedness and response is excellent as is the approach to collaboration.

During the response phase, there are some limitations in getting the information, to then be able to share due to the constraints of the unfolding disaster. For instance, getting an aerial line scan to locate the position of the fire during cloudy and/or windy days. Further advances in technology to overcome these challenges and make the information more readily available should continue to be pursued.

Having strong local decision making delegation in place with people with the right skill set and experience improves the timeliness of information sharing.

The most significant gap in information exists in the telecommunication space. The Australian and NSW Government should fund far simpler maps (layers for geographic information systems) which provides the location of the critical infrastructure, the impact of loss of service (eg area, number of people impacted) and the contact details for direct liaison from the local Emergency Operations Centre to the responsible Telco. This information should be prepared with preparations, response and recovery from natural disasters in mind. There is currently no telecommunication representative on Local Emergency Management Committees.

There were also some challenges during the recovery phase and these have been addressed in earlier submissions (eg see the response to Question 8 in our response on 29 April 2020).

4. Describe the areas (if any) where the Eurobodalla Shire Council has responsibility and accountability to act in preparing for a bushfire but is unable to do so because another entity/agency holds the authority.

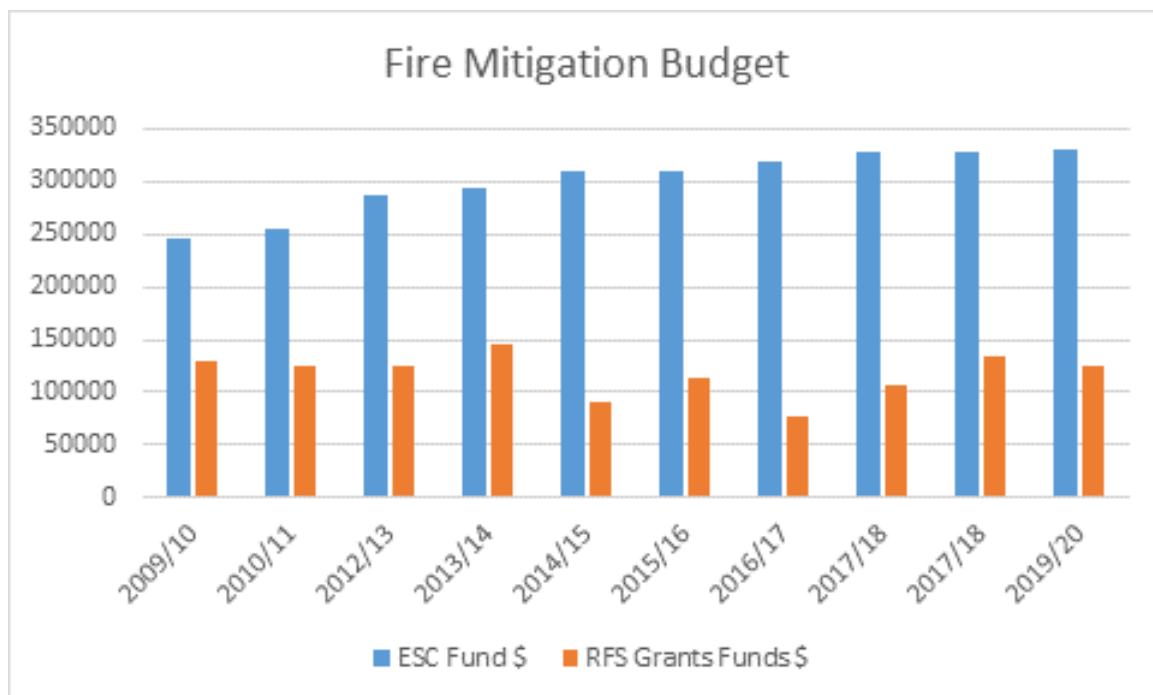
Council undertakes preparations for bushfire as a land manager for land owned and/or under our care and control.

The processes for this work are outlined in the information provided by Council's submission dated 29 April 2020. In particular, please reference the responses to Questions 1.

Council's mitigation work on its own land is also limited by available funds as already outlined. Each year Council pursues additional grant funding to achieve the outcomes needed.

Any change to standards of work would require identification of a new funding source. For instance, if the asset protection zones under the guidelines were to be expanded, then there would need to be additional funding to change the environment from bushland to a more maintained state, and then on-going funding to maintain that outcome.

The following funding graph has been prepared to demonstrate the value of RFS grants to our fire mitigation program.



Council's 2019-20 fire mitigation program for lands under our control is on track for delivery by 30 June 2020. The length of interface with the type of work undertaken is shown below.

| Eurobodalla Shire Council | Interface Length (km) | Houses Directly Adjoining |
|---------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------------|
| Hand clearing | 21.2 | 906 |

| | | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|
| Slashing | 34.6 | 1372 |
| Grooming (form of slashing) | 3.2 | 145 |
| Hazard reduction burns (Council land) | 23.3 | 1216 |
| Fire management trails | 35 | 0 |
| Total | 117.3 | 3639 |

These figures exclude area mown routinely as part of Council's reserve mowing program (such as high use sporting reserves).

Our land monitor indicates there are 19,665 dwellings in the urban and village areas of Eurobodalla (excluding rural small holdings and rural).

Forestry NSW, National Parks and Wildlife, and Crown Lands, are all responsible for the fire mitigation works on lands under their control (refer previous submissions regarding the bushfire risk plan).

5. Does the Eurobodalla Shire Council consider that there is a need for, or value in developing, national standards for disaster preparation, response and recovery? In your response, describe any opportunities which the Eurobodalla Shire Council can identify for the Commonwealth to provide additional support to improve standardisation across State and Territory and local government.

This has been covered in part by Council's submission dated 29 April 2020. In particular, please reference the responses to Question 5, 6, 8 and 9.

The following comments do not detract in any way from the outstanding individual and combined efforts of the Incident Management Team, Emergency Operations Centre personnel and frontline fire fighting volunteers and personnel. We will be forever grateful for the amazing collaboration and work they undertook to protect our community.

Emergency management is a now specialist field. Our view is prime responsibility should rest with an appropriate State Government emergency services agency, and the role of Local Government changed as outlined in our previous submission.

The challenge of delivering consistent standards through over more than five hundred Local Government bodies far outweighs the challenge of delivering those same standards across the six States and Territories. Financially these services should be a State Government responsibility.

This fundamental change would aid in the delivery of nationally consistent standards, including such matters as standardised levels of alert across all forms of natural disasters in all jurisdictions.

Any change of this nature would require restructuring emergency management within State jurisdictions, appropriate changes to legislation and appropriate financial resourcing.

Very importantly, in any proposed change, the value of retaining local emergency services personnel, and acting first locally, is critical to the success of any response. We would oppose moves that regionalise emergency management and/or remove decision making from local personnel closest to the frontline.

We accept that there would need to be an escalation processes (as there is now), and a decision making processes where limited resources exist across Australia (eg such as aircraft). Appropriately this allows response resources to be prioritised to the areas of highest need.

We also recognise, encourage and support the wonderful work of our volunteers. Our local and visiting volunteers must be fully supported and resourced to continue the great work they do. They should be allowed to volunteer in a range of roles within structured arrangements best suited to their preferences, skill sets and physical and mental capability. This may include a preference for being a response resource for specific natural disasters and/or tasks. There is a wide range of scope to allow this to occur and further discussions with the RFS and SES would give greater insight.

In NSW, this may best be achieved by:

- restructuring Emergency Management in NSW including modifying the LEOCON and LEMO roles to provide a NSW Government funded Local Emergency Management Coordinator for LGAs such as Eurobodalla, as part of and reporting to the appropriate NSW Government agency
- Council to relinquish the role of Local Emergency Management Officer and move to a role similar to Essential Energy and Transport for NSW as a functional area support
- other aligned reforms to the number and form of combat agencies to bring about strategic efficiency and effectiveness gains
- shifting the role of Local Recovery to be led by the NSW Government through Resilience NSW rather than Local Government (as most agencies within the recovery process are NSW Government agencies)
- moving all emergency services infrastructure for the NSW RFS, SES and EOCs to NSW Government ownership, rather than part in Local Government ownership
- moving the funding of State Government emergency response agencies to the full responsibility of the NSW Government.

In all phases of emergency management, Local Government should play a key role aligned to their key primary functions (eg local roads, provision of water and sewer, making available existing resources to assist in response such as facilities to be used evacuation centres, providing local knowledge of community characteristics, etc). That is, in our Local Government service role.

Regardless of the emergency management structures in place, a regional integrated emergency services precinct should be constructed in Moruya jointly funded by the NSW and Australian Governments. This should be a NSW Government owned facility and be appropriately resourced, inclusive of a purpose built Emergency Operations Centre. The other local emergency services property (ie NSW Ambulance and NSW Fire and Rescue sites) should then be sold to contribute to the net costs of the NSW Government share.

Coordination of response

- 6. In the context of the 2019-2020 bushfire season, describe the Eurobodalla Shire Council's experiences relating to the coordination of response and recovery (and the division of responsibility), including when natural disasters occur at or around State and Territory borders. Describe whether there are any opportunities for improvement.***

This has been appropriately covered in our original submission of 27 March and 29 April 2020.

The overall cooperation across LGAs was excellent.

The attitude and commitment of those involved in the response was outstanding.

The Commission may wish to liaise with those agencies more directly involved with cross border matters such as transport (Transport for NSW) and fire fighting (RFS).

Council has already made recommendations on moving responsibility for some functions, including leading recovery, to the State Government.

7. Does the Eurobodalla Shire Council consider that there would be benefit in additional Commonwealth involvement in facilitating a coordinated response between Commonwealth, State and Territory and local governments and authorities in relation to preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters?

This has been appropriately covered in our original submission of 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 and elsewhere in this response.

The prime responsibility for emergency management in New South Wales should rest with the NSW Government, rather than Local Government or the Commonwealth Government. The basis of the multi-agency approach including various functional support areas, works well and allows strong coordination of activities.

The principle of responding locally first should be maintained whilst ever this is within the capacity of responsible agencies and communities to do so.

Having agreed arrangements between the Australian Government and State Governments that inform decision making as to when the Commonwealth would be involved is appropriate. Sharing this agreement widely through to Local Emergency Management Committees is key. Building an appropriate escalation mechanism could then be incorporated into local EMPLANS through requests through to regional/State emergency management coordinators to enable activation of Commonwealth resources.

The community would expect that information is being appropriately shared between State and Commonwealth Government now. The power of Local Government is controlled by Acts of State Parliament and Local Government would therefore direct information we hold via the State Government channels. Where appropriate, this sharing back to Local Government should be reciprocated.

The Commonwealth would also need to be prepared to share information relating to the capacity, capability and availability of any resources made available. Any resources made available to the States should be integrated into the overall emergency preparedness, response and recovery teams.

Where involved, the Commonwealth should also have people on the ground who have greater delegation to make decisions to act, rather than make recommendations back to a State level.

The Commonwealth also needs to have pre-agreed strategies and resources already determined for when large scale impacts on communities occur (eg ability to fund or assist the State with an immediate temporary housing solution). This should include appropriate mechanisms to overcome any perceived or real impediments to planning approvals for temporary solutions.

8. *How was local knowledge used and integrated during firefighting operations and responses in the 2019-2020 bushfire season? How can the utilisation of local knowledge during natural disasters be improved?*

Local knowledge (and skill) was critical throughout the fire fighting response across many areas of the operation, both in the Incident Management Team and the Emergency Operations Centre.

Council's original submission of the 27 March 2020 outlined aspects of the response. Many of these involved the detailed local knowledge of key agencies.

For instance, Forestry NSW and National Parks personnel brought considerable local knowledge to the planning of the fire fighting response across the lands under their control to the Incident Management Team. The RFS would be able to comment more specifically in this respect.

In the functional areas, having local people on the ground who knew the local and State road network, water and sewer network and electricity network was invaluable throughout the response and clean-up. Having representation of local people together within the Emergency Operations Centre, made coordination and sharing of information so much easier, and worked well.

Similarly, local SES and NSW Police were more easily able to adapt to known locations to assist with door knocking and information provision into rural areas. Local Land Services personnel were often familiar with farms where they had to attend to supply emergency fodder or deal with injured stock.

Local Health Liaison Officers already had relationships with key aged care facilities and were therefore able to liaise efficiently with them. Council organised in excess of 200 welfare checks on vulnerable community members.

There was also established local working relationships through the Local Emergency Management Committees which flowed directly into the Emergency Operations Centre teams and through the Eurobodalla Bushfire Risk Management Committee that flowed directly into the Incident Management Teams. The LEMC and EBFRMC also have common members. This made operations more collaborative and seamless during the response.

That said, visiting resources also contributed positively and significantly. This appeared to work best when there was a local presence to support their expertise.

If changes are made in the future to emergency management arrangements, then the principle of utilising local people and acting locally first should be retained.

Our view is there should be a dedicated emergency services resource for the Eurobodalla LGA rather than shared arrangements across LGAs given the obvious risk and geographic scale of the Eurobodalla. The RFS used to have one Fire Control Officer for Eurobodalla and Bega each which worked better. This should be re-instated. This should be fully funded by the NSW Government and incorporated into the appropriate State agency.

Resources

9. In the context of bushfire behaviour which was observed during the 2019-20 bushfire season, describe the extent to which the Eurobodalla Shire Council had adequate access to resources including:

- a. fuel**
- b. water**
- c. electricity**
- d. telecommunications**
- e. fire fighting personnel**

in order to respond to that bushfire behaviour.

The fire fighting efforts in NSW are led by the NSW Rural Fire Services and NSW Government through the Incident Management Team.

This question is therefore best directed to the NSW RFS.

The challenges relating to fuel supply/access, water supply, electricity and telecommunications (and food supply through major retailers) have already been addressed in our submissions of 27 March and 29 April 2020.

Council played a significant support role in the response and this has been outlined in our previous submissions.

Council has a limited supply of graders, backhoes and loaders for this type of work and willingly assists where requested to assist with preparation of containment lines and/or preparing and/or re-opening roads. Ensuring the Government has a fairer payment arrangement in place where Council is fully funded when it contributes resources to the response should be an outcome of this review.

10. From the perspective of the Eurobodalla Shire Council, and given budget constraints, describe the priorities for improving access to Resources.

This has been addressed in Council's

- submission of 29 April 2020 under 6(b)
- in our previous submissions in relation to provision of a State owned and operated integrated emergency services precinct in Moruya
- and in both regarding mobilisation of the Australian Defence Force.

In relation to direct fire fighting resources, that question is best addressed to the NSW RFS who have greater expertise in relation to the positive impact of different resources.

11. Describe any opportunities that the Eurobodalla Shire Council can identify, including in response to the 2019-2020 bushfire season, to improve resource sharing between the relevant Commonwealth, State and Territory agencies and local authorities.

This has been addressed throughout the previous submissions to the Royal Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

Access to Roads

12. In the context of the 2019-20 bushfire season, describe the extent by which Eurobodalla Shire Council had adequate access to roads (including key access roads and evacuation routes).

This has been addressed in the previous submissions to the Royal Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

All major highways and many fire affected local Council roads were significantly impacted and closed during/after the fires. This included impacts due to the burning fire itself (direct fire, smoke or threat of fire impact), thousands of fallen and/or fire affected hazardous trees and the loss of key infrastructure such as timber bridges.

Similar impacts were felt on rural non-Council access roads to properties through State Forests and National Parks.

The re-opening of local Council roads was prioritised to re-connect the largest number of people, to provide an alternate route to the Princes Highway and/or to provide access for emergency supplies (eg water, fodder, animal welfare). The location of residents in very remote locations required extensive resources to re-open access for small numbers of people.

Some rural property owners assisted themselves by cutting an access road through the burnt and fallen timber back to town in the days after the fire impacted, demonstrating the greater resilience and independence of rural people. The public roads were then cleaned up by Council, Forestry NSW or others.

The collaboration and work undertaken by Council, Transport for NSW, Forestry NSW and contractors to re-open roads was remarkable in its scale and effort. This work was assisted by the Australian Defence Force in some instances.

Eurobodalla's access roads were again impacted by the flood occurring on 10 February 2020, destroying bridge by-pass side tracks.

13. Identify any issues encountered during the 2019-2020 bushfire season regarding road access hindering the evacuation of individuals from fire-affected areas in the State of New South Wales.

This has been addressed in the previous submissions to the Royal Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

The greatest impacts in evacuation of individuals from fire affected areas was in the more remote areas (see Q12 above). This loss of access also impacted the ability of the NSW Police recovery of deceased persons.

The provision of timely information on closure of key access routes worked well with regular liaison with Transport for NSW Liaison Officers, the Emergency Operations Centre and the Incident Management Team.

The reclosure of the Princes Highway north of Ulladulla on 3 January 2020 due to essential back burning operations did result in the need to hold some people in Ulladulla overnight during the major evacuation of the south coast to the north.

However, the effectiveness of this mass evacuation from Eurobodalla LGA on 2 & 3 January 2020 should be considered a remarkable piece of collaboration, skill and commitment by everyone involved. This resulted in tens of thousands of people being moved to safety and fuel resupply to both Eurobodalla and Bega LGAs. The challenges overcome included:

- the extensive fire still in the landscape over a wide area of the region
- the predicted extreme weather and fire behaviour just a few days ahead
- the devastation that had already occurred on New Years Eve
- fire impacted and closed highways and local roads
- no mains power
- no access to fuel
- limited telecommunications

14. Describe how the Eurobodalla Shire Council communicated and coordinated with State fire authorities to support evacuations during the 2019-2020 bushfire season and identify any challenges experienced and any areas for improvement.

This has been addressed in the submissions of 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

The unpredictable nature of the bush fire was the greatest challenge. This is perhaps more complex in coastal areas such as Eurobodalla where the constant battle between the hot dry western airstream and wind, competes against the typical coastal easterly influence. Minor variations in weather patterns and the confluence of the westerly and easterly influences, result in major variations in bush fire behaviour due to the wide variation in humidity and temperature.

Therefore it is always a balancing act for the RFS combat agency in being too conservative in fire predictions (to the point where the community becomes complacent) and keeping the community on sufficient alert to be able to enact their bushfire survival plans early.

The IMT team communicated directly with the EOC in respect to any assistance required to support evacuations. RFS fire prediction mapping assisted in making decisions in this respect.

Ultimately the community itself must take responsibility for preparing their own properties to be more resilient to natural disasters, remain alert and enact their bushfire survival plans early. This is particularly so when the fire is in the landscape for a long period such as in this campaign fire.

The Commonwealth may wish to investigate the need to provide additional weather stations in coastal areas such as Eurobodalla to enable more accurate real time weather information to be fed back to the Incident Management Team and Emergency Operations Centre.

Eurobodalla has a high dependency on the visitor economy. Decisions to ask visitors not to come to the Eurobodalla at the peak summer period, cannot be taken lightly, given the massive economic impact that ensues during the summer holiday period. These decisions were therefore undertaken through discussions between the IMT Incident Controller, EOC LEOCON/LEMO, local Member for Bega Andrew Constance MP and Mayor Liz Innes.

The following RFS media release was issued on 30 December 2019.

'Leave Eurobodalla now if leaving

NSW Rural Fire Service warn there is significant potential for fires on the far south coast to impact people's travel plans tomorrow and over coming days.

Visitors who choose to remain may not be able to leave until any fire-impacted areas can be made safe. If you need to leave, leaving now is the safest option.

Please check Live Traffic and Fires Near Me prior to departure, and regularly during your journey. Drive with your car headlights on at all times so you can be seen, and please travel with extra food and water.

People planning to visit the south coast of New South Wales are asked to delay their plans until the current fire activity has passed. This includes Eurobodalla's popular tourist towns of South Durras, Batemans Bay, Broulee, Moruya, Tuross Head, Narooma and Tilba.

If you intend to stay on the south coast, please have a bushfire survival plan ready to activate. Do not enter bushland areas.

Stay up to date with the latest RFS information via Fires Near Me, call 1800 679 737 or listen to ABC Southeast radio or 2EC/PowerFM.'

These messages were strengthened further immediately following the New Years Eve fires with major evacuations from Eurobodalla occurring in the days following New Years Eve, particularly 2 & 3 January 2020.

The day of 23 January 2020 was predicted to have modest fire behaviour. A significant drop in humidity mid-morning caused significantly increased fire activity, directly impacting Moruya township and industrial area. Access along the Princes Highway was also compromised north and south of Narooma preventing access of evacuees to the pre-arranged facility at Moruya showground.

Welfare agency teams were unable to access Narooma due to the highway closures. A number of residents evacuating to Narooma were temporarily allowed access into the Leisure Centre before being accommodated overnight within Club Narooma by agreement with the club. This demonstrated the spirit of cooperation through the event and the adapted solution worked well. We have previously recognised the wonderful support offered by Club Narooma (and other clubs).

Having a greater number of local welfare support personnel may have assisted on this day, however suitable alternate short term accommodation measures were implemented and were adequate.

15. Identify any issues encountered (if any) during the 2019-20 bushfire season regarding the reopening of roads, including to provide access to property owners.

The challenges of fire affected roads have been covered in our submissions of 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020, and above.

The most significant challenges were due to:

- fire still in the landscape
- the intensity and scale of the bushfires
- the sheer number of fallen and/or fire affected hazardous trees
- the very steep side hill terrain in some areas
- the long lengths of access roads into remote areas
- the need for highly skilled specialist tree fallers to deal with many of fire affected trees in a safe manner
- the loss of timber bridges in the fire and then loss of side tracks in the fire ending flood

In some instances, the limitations on access into fire affected villages such as Nerrigundah, aided in restricting people accessing these areas. 'Residents only' access had been restored, and residents were concerned with looting of their fire impacted houses. Anxiety and trauma levels within the community were understandably high given their life threatening experience in the bushfire. Council therefore supported these residents by providing appropriate signage advising access was for residents only. This action also assisted to reduce the overall risk to the community until the fire affected hazardous trees were fallen and cleaned-up.

16. There was no question 16.

17. Describe with reference to specifications, the emergency warning systems and the communication systems (including radio and paging) utilised by the Eurobodalla Shire Council during the 2019-2020 bushfire season and describe how effective those systems were and any material weaknesses in those systems.

Emergency warning systems and media communication is the responsibility of the NSW Rural Fire Service and therefore this question is best directed to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Any consideration of warning systems should be considered in the context of other key messaging and community education programs undertaken by the RFS. In particular, the bushfire preparedness and on-going messaging for the community decisions to leave early messaging.

Council did make comment on public warnings, including use of the Fires Near Me App, and communications in our submission of 27 March 2020 under section 3.

The Live Traffic App was also a key reference tool during the event. We understand that Transport for NSW did experience some challenges and are addressing these as part of their after event actions. Overall, this tool provided useful information to the community on closures of major transport routes. T4NSW included Araluen Road closure on the App site at Council's request due to the interconnecting nature of this local road to supplement the signage and physical road closures in place on the ground. The Live Traffic App does need to include information across State & Territory borders and we understand T4NSW are already investigating this with their interstate colleagues.

Comments were also provided in our previous submissions on the additional role Council played in communication to the public through the Emergency Operations Centre.

For its own operations, Council used fixed and mobile phones, and internal email systems. Council also used its own radio system for operational teams, which remained useful throughout this bushfire event. This was particularly important when the telecommunications networks were adversely impacted by the fire to allow Council to continue to communicate with our own operational teams who were in the field looking after local roads and essential infrastructure.

A brief overview of Council's radio system is provided below:

- 70MHz VHF voice radios in Operations vehicles and several hand-held.
- Base station/tower at Boundary Mountain, approximately 38km WNW of Batemans Bay. Solar power supply.
- Base station/tower at Gollarribee Mountain, approximately 11km NW of Moruya. Small Solar power supply with generator backup (this site is also a base for water and sewer telemetry).
- Base station/tower at Peak Alone (Mount Wandella), approximately 13km NW of Cobargo. Mains power (currently temporary Solar power supply).
- Repeater at Montague Island. Solar powered.

- All stations are linked by 400Mhz link radios.
- Mains power was lost to Peak Alone and communication on Council's radio system was poor for a day or so in the Narooma Area. NOTE: Additional backup batteries have already been purchased and will be installed shortly to further improve the future resilience of Council's radio system on this tower.
- The limited sunlight at the peak of the fires, impacted solar battery levels yet these sites continued to operate satisfactorily.

18. Describe any opportunities which the Eurobodalla Shire Council can identify, including in response to the 2019-20 bushfire season, to revise, update or enhance emergency warning systems and communication systems and procedures within the local area.

Emergency warning systems and media communication is the responsibility of the NSW Rural Fire Service and therefore this question is best directed to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

The resilience of telecommunications and power supply to telecommunications should be improved and recommendations are included in this respect in previous submissions. Comment is also made under the response to Q3 above.

Dissemination of information to emergency services

19. In the context for the 2019-2020 bushfire season, did the Eurobodalla Shire Council have access to timely and effective situational awareness information? Describe any weaknesses or limitations with the information and any challenges encountered by Eurobodalla Shire Council in relation to the dissemination of information, including in relation to access to telecommunication systems.

This has been addressed in the previous submissions to the Royal Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

At times there were challenges for the RFS in obtaining information relation to the position of the fire front as a result of cloud and/or windy conditions preventing accurate line scans and/or the fast moving nature of the fire (particularly on New Years Eve).

The challenges in the provision of information to the Emergency Operations Centre have already been covered in our previous submissions and recommendation made for improvement (eg on telecommunications).

The community's unrealistic expectations in terms of map updating and over-reliance on the Fires Near Me App to obtain the precise position of the fire front has already been covered in previous submissions.

20. Describe any opportunities for improvement which the Eurobodalla Shire Council can identify including in response to the 2019-2020 bushfire season, in relation to dissemination of information to Emergency Services during a natural disaster (including the Commonwealth's role in dissemination of information).

This has been addressed in the previous submissions to the Royal Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

The comments made therein in regard to the resilience of telecommunications and assistance from the Australian Defence Force are particularly relevant to the Commonwealth.

Dissemination of information to the community

21. Describe the emergency warning procedures and systems (if any) presently in place in the State of New South Wales and utilised by the Eurobodalla Shire Council.

Emergency warning procedures and systems and media communication is the responsibility of the NSW Rural Fire Service and therefore this question is best directed to the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Refer our response to Q17 above and our previous submissions dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

22. Identify the plans, programs, initiatives and arrangements developed by Local Governments to prepare communities for, and communicate with them during, and following natural disasters in the State of New South Wales. Describe how these were plans implemented in the 2019-2020 bushfire season.

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

In NSW, the relevant combat agency for natural disasters has the role of preparing and educating the community. This is as it should be.

In the case of bushfires, this is the role of the NSW Rural Fire Service. This includes responsibility for communicating with the community during the event as the prime source of truth on matters in relation to fires.

Council did assist with communications by providing a communications resource to the Emergency Operations Centre and the Local Emergency Management Officer to support RFS communications. This was undertaken as part of and for the Emergency Operations Centre. This was implemented to cover related matters such as impacts on local roads, water, electricity and the like, drawing on the expertise and knowledge available in the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC). Information on the activities in this respect are contained within our previous submissions. Council has received positive feedback about our role in keeping the community informed in relation to these matters, particularly in relation to the EOC updates.

Council does have a role in communicating with the community following the natural disaster during recovery. This commenced on 17 January with regular recovery updates sent to local media, posted to Council's Facebook page, and hosted on Council's dedicated recovery webpage at www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery. More than 80 recovery-specific media items have been distributed, including media releases and updates on this page <https://www.esc.nsw.gov.au/living-in/about/emergency-information/eurobodalla-community-recovery/bushfire-recovery-community-updates>. In conjunction with the OEM, Council managed the establishment of a Recovery Centre at Batemans Bay and an outreach facility at Narooma. Over 6,000 households registered and were provided assistance. 12 x outreach meetings were held with communities impacted by bushfire before COVID-19 restrictions halted them. Council immediately commenced a recovery helpdesk to provide support and information to residents whose properties had been impacted. Eurobodalla Mayor Liz Innes wrote to those 700+ fire-impacted residents to reconnect, reassure support will continue, advise of the new helpdesk service. A recovery newsletter aimed at those rebuilding commenced in early May. Council's draft Delivery Program and Operational Plan 2020-21 directly addresses recovery actions in a summary on p24 and notated throughout the annual action plan.

23. Describe the technologies, applications and/or communication systems utilised in the local community by the Eurobodalla Shire Council to disseminate information to and within communities and describe how effective they were and what worked well and any opportunities for improvement?

This responsibilities for communications in bushfires is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

The primary responsibility for communications relating to the bushfire rests with the NSW Rural Fire Service.

Council assisted the EOC with supplementary communications by providing our Communications Manager to assist using Council's communications platforms and media relationships.

Communications consisted of twice-daily written EOC updates provided to an email broadcast list of media, community associations, evacuation centres (example attached). The same updates were posted on Council's website and [Facebook page](#), often reaching more than 30,000 people and widely shared by local noticeboard and community pages.

EOC updates consisted of official advice from the Rural Fire Service about fire activity and weather predictions, and practical localised advice for residents about power supply, road closures, police warnings, evacuation centres, returning home, animal welfare and more. These updates were praised by media for their media-friendliness (for instance, new information was notated accordingly) and by residents for their practicality.

EOC updates were supplemented by video messages by a variety of emergency personnel and the Mayor, shared on Council's Facebook page. Media were encouraged to share these on their own platforms. Community meetings instigated by the RFS were successfully livestreamed using [Facebook Live](#).

Power, internet and television outages meant many residents were isolated from information. Attempts were made by the EOC to overcome this by providing twice daily briefings at each evacuation centre, and Council staff delivered hard copies of the updates to communities when access was safe. Significant feedback was received that people outside the shire were using our Facebook posts to phone updates through to relatives and friends without internet access, who were then able to share important information in their neighbourhoods.

A factsheet to help the community better prepare for what RFS call a campaign fire – fires that extend over a long period - was created and distributed on behalf of the Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre by Council. It was widely used by local media and neighbouring councils to provide information and strategies to the community in the lead up to recent bad fire days (attached).

In summary, a mix of traditional and social media was successfully used to communicate important, trusted information to the Eurobodalla community.

24. Describe whether there is a need for standardisation of information disseminated to communities and whether there is any necessity for additional Commonwealth assistance and/or intervention e.g. in setting national standards regarding emergency communication and information.

There is an opportunity to make alert levels consistent across different natural disasters and in all jurisdictions.

The highest priority for the Commonwealth should however be focussed on assisting to fund the improved the resilience of the electricity and telecommunications network to allow dissemination of information during natural disasters.

The Commonwealth should also invest in:

- Research and new technologies that aid the Incident Management Team in tracking the active fire front
- Improved weather forecasting (see earlier recommendations about extra weather stations in coastal areas)

All of these measures will better assist informing the community about actions to be taken in natural disasters.

Also, it is essential that information going to the public be tailored specific to the local context and the natural disaster unfolding. Our recommendation is greater delegation be given to the local RFS Incident Controller to approve media produced by the IMT media team for release.

Where necessary, as it was in the 2019-20 bushfires, the Emergency Operations Centre also needs to have the ability to prepare and distribute localised information. Eurobodalla EOC received significant positive feedback from residents that the practical, local information - fire predictions, power supply, water supply, road closures, evacuation centres, animal welfare, etc - supplied twice daily was essential. "It answered all our questions" was a common response. A suggested template supplied to EOCs could be useful. The Eurobodalla EOC examples are attached to this response.

It is critical the local IMT/EOC teams has authority to make decisions about what to tell the community and when, using very specific localised information that provides reassurance where possible ('stay in place, you'll be ok today, but stay alert') or localising warnings to relocate early or prepare to defend.

One of the successes of the EOC communications, was to specifically lower anxiety levels within the community, in areas where the intense crown fire had already passed through. In a campaign fire such as this one, where the fire risk continues to spread to new areas of the Shire, those already impacted by the intense fire were traumatised and extremely anxious. Concern over the fire happening again in already intensely burnt areas was allayed in messaging, encouraging residents to stay home and manage any potential for residual embers on poor days, as the risk of further intense bushfire activity was low.

Those who were yet to be impacted were also extremely anxious. Key RFS messaging about preparing to leave early unless residents were well prepared and physically and mentally capable of defending their property in a bushfire was repeated in EOC releases. Where very poor weather conditions and rapid fire spread were predicted, this RFS messaging was escalated to direct people to main town centres (Batemans Bay, Moruya, Tuross Head and Narooma). Support services were staged in these four main town areas (eg Ambulance or St Johns Ambulance, Police, Council response teams).

Providing this advice is of course a balance that must take account of the potential fire behaviour and risk as assessed by the RFS, IMT/EOC.

Evacuation Centres

25. With regard to the 2019-20 bushfire season, describe any opportunities which Eurobodalla Shire Council can identify to improve readiness and availability of evacuation centres for natural disasters and where there is any additional support for practical assistance (if any) that the Commonwealth can provide.

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 (Q9 addressed the potential involvement of the ADF) with recommendations for improving the resilience of Council facilities made therein.

Evacuation centres are run by the NSW Department of Community and Justice.

If the Commonwealth is to be involved, then it must have the ability to integrate into the Emergency Operations Centre team at a local level, and to predict needs and be able to respond to changes to those needs rapidly. The unpredictable and devastating nature of bushfire was demonstrated on New Years Eve 2019 when the fire behaviour far exceeded the RFS fire mapping predictions.

The alternative is to deploy Commonwealth resources in advance on a precautionary basis. In some cases, this may lead to criticism for the use to Commonwealth resources unnecessarily.

Underpinning all of this of course, is the higher priority to continue to build greater resilience and self-reliance within local communities, and to reduce the vulnerability of infrastructure and property to natural disasters.

Council has already used lessons learnt from this bush fire event and applied for funding to upgrade evacuation centres under the NSW Government's ClubGrants Category 3 Fund under the Disaster Readiness & Community Infrastructure component. If successful, these funds will be used to improve the resilience of existing public buildings during power outages and upgrade supporting facilities. Council proposes to match this funding using part of the \$1.4m provided by the Australian Government for bushfire recovery.

In this bushfire event, formal evacuation centres were established at various times at:

| Evacuation Centre | Short term Capacity | Long Term Capacity |
|--|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Hanging Rock Function Centre, Batemans Bay | 125 | 70 |
| Batemans Bay Basketball Stadium (co-located with Hanging Rock) | 300 | 175 |
| Mackay Park Function Centre, Batemans Bay | 105 | 60 |
| Moruya Showground Basketball Stadium | 350 | 200 |
| Narooma Leisure Centre | 300 | 170 |

These facilities all have the advantage of having immediately adjoining open reserves to bolster evacuation capacity. At the peak of the evacuations to main town, reserves, streets and golf clubs were also used to temporarily hold people in cars, car/caravans combinations in the largest evacuations.

The following information on was recorded by the Welfare Agency to the EOC on peak days.

| Date | Evacuation Centre | Numbers |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 31 January 2019* | Narooma | 1,200 (1,000 at centre) |
| | Moruya | 800 (600 at centre) |
| | Batemans Bay (Hanging Rock) | 2,500 (800 at centre) |
| 4 January 2020 | Narooma | 4,434 |
| | Moruya | 1,593 (232 in building) |
| | Batemans Bay (Hanging Rock) | 2,736 |
| 10 January, 2020 | Narooma | 4,421 (17 at centre) |
| | Moruya | 2,488 (59 at centre, most camping) |
| | Batemans Bay (Hanging Rock) | 3,837 (3 on-site) |

*Estimated figures by WELFAC on 31 January 2019 at centres denoted. WELFAC identified potential demand for temporary accommodation as 2800, 500 & 1500 respectively at each of the three centres at 1500hours on this day.

Council has already recognised the important role that various clubs played in assisting during the evacuations. See previous submissions.

Displaced animals were temporarily housed at various locations including:

- Moruya showground
- Moruya high school
- Moruya showground
- Batemans Bay high school

It is important to note that evacuation centres also act as triage point to move evacuees into temporary accommodations, first by directing people to family or friends, and/or into temporary accommodation (such as motels, caravan parks and the like).

The evacuation of tens of thousands of people freed up accommodation within main towns to allow more people to be placed in temporary accommodation.

Clean-up

26. Describe any challenges encountered by the Eurobodalla Shire Council in relation to the clean-up of communities

This is addressed in part through our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020.

The emergency preparedness and response arrangements have built up local collaborative arrangements over a long period of time. This creates an environment that leads to strong teamwork, rapid decision making and action. Initial recovery and clean-up occur quickly whilst still working within this framework.

The NSW Government has a State recovery plan attached here.

<https://www.emergency.nsw.gov.au/Pages/publications/plans/supporting-plans/recovery-plan.aspx>

The development of regional recovery plans and local recovery plans is more dependent on the consequence of the event. Historically natural disasters in Eurobodalla have been able to be managed effectively through the restoration of infrastructure across NSW Government and Local Government infrastructure independently under the natural disaster funding arrangements.

The scale of this event identified that more detailed planning is required at both a regional and local level. The NSW Government moved quickly to instigate recovery by appointing a regional recovery coordinator, Mr Dick Adams, as did Council at the local level. Mr Adams has been of great assistance in supporting local government and in raising issues at the State Committees.

However, despite the NSW Recovery Plan, Government agencies involved in recovery are structured to work within the constraints of 'business as usual' frameworks under the constraints of the legislation of the day. In recovery from natural disasters, much faster decision making is required.

Legislative and structural frameworks should be designed to facilitate rapid recovery actions, rather than hold progress to 'business as usual' legislative and structural regimes. More nimble arrangements should be available to restore community safety and security and begin recovery as soon as practical. Appropriate mechanisms should be in place to fast track or by-pass 'business as usual' mechanisms and/or turn-off legislative constraints under emergency powers to enable faster delivery of outcomes.

Council applauds the decision of the NSW Government to appoint Deputy Premier John Barilaro MP as Minister for Recovery and Shane Fitzsimmons as the head of a new agency Resilience NSW to improve recovery arrangements in NSW. How the work of Resilience NSW will dovetail in the Commonwealth arrangements is a matter for the NSW Government, however there is a clear need to ensure these arrangements are integrated and any Commonwealth legislation is in tune with that of the States.

Infrastructure Clean-up and Recovery

This has been covered in our responses dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 including commentary on improving the financial arrangements for natural disasters.

Greater certainty is required on the financial arrangements relating to clean-up and recovery to enable Local Government to act with confidence.

The 21 day time period for clean-up after a natural disaster of this scale is simply unrealistic and should be moved to a 90 day minimum, with the ability to readily gain approval for an extension commensurate with the scale of the natural disaster event. Decisions relating to extensions of time should be appropriately delegated within Resilience NSW so such requests can be turned around in less than 48 hours.

Recovery including Clean-up

The scale of the clean-up of private properties in Eurobodalla is a huge task. Building impact assessments (RFS BIA Update 21 February 2020) identified the following impact from the fire.

| Location | Destroyed | | | Damaged | | |
|--------------------|-----------|-----|------|---------|-----|------|
| | HS | FC | OB | HS | FC | OB |
| Eurobodalla | 501 | 80 | 859 | 274 | 36 | 297 |
| NSW | 2448 | 284 | 5469 | 1013 | 194 | 2042 |

HS – dwelling or building considered to be one's home

FC – overarching term for buildings not a house or an outbuilding. Includes commercial, industrial, school, hotel, health.

OB – a separate building not connected to the primary residence (eg shed, garage, barn, cabana, pool house)

We thank the teams that undertook the initial post-fire building impact assessment. The cross-organisational team from the NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW Fire and Rescue, Public Works Advisory, NSW Police Rescue, ADF and Council had the difficult job of visiting sites across Eurobodalla to record the devastation caused by this fire. This work was led by the NSW RFS and completed in a timely and efficient manner to inform the first impact assessment reports and identify those people most affected by the bush fires. The information was shared across agencies.

We also thank the NSW Police teams who were called upon to undertake assessments of properties and building where potential victims were thought to have been caught in the fire. Sadly, three people lost their lives in the 2019-20 bush fire in Eurobodalla.

A subsequent second round of building assessments was conducted by PWA, EPA and Council to better identify properties with any asbestos waste. Appropriate testing of sites was arranged to confirm or exclude asbestos and to place a temporary holding material over

the asbestos to mitigate the risk to the community. Subsequent air testing by did not reveal airborne risk to the community.

This assessment process appeared to work well in very difficult circumstances.

We also congratulate and thank the NSW and Australian governments for funding the clean-up of private properties in NSW impacted by the bushfires. This will provide a much more consistent and faster clean-up across Eurobodalla (and NSW), as well as reducing the cost to individuals, providing greater opportunity to re-invest this saving into building in greater resilience to bushfire in their new dwellings.

Council also advocated strongly to the NSW Government to develop easier approval pathways to permit the clean-up of properties without development consent. We are pleased the NSW Government responded so quickly [by amending a State Environment Planning Policy](#) to facilitate improved outcomes. This change can serve as an effective model to assist clean-up for future natural disasters.

The experience in Eurobodalla however demonstrates that more pre-planning is required to be able to accommodate a more rapid response to clean-up from natural disasters and consideration of suitable alternatives to the use of existing Council landfills for disposal. The volumes of waste generated by such events can be huge compared to annual waste disposal from a regional community such as Eurobodalla, as shown by the figures below.

In any normal year Council receives approximately 30,000 tonnes of waste per annum.

In response to the fires it has been estimated by the NSW Government Public Works Advisory that approximately 69,000m³ of non-asbestos waste and 37,000m³ of asbestos contaminated waste has been generated within the Eurobodalla. Ultimately volumes will not be known until the clean-up has been concluded.

Ultimately Council has negotiated a satisfactory disposal option for bushfire waste which includes:

- A variation to the landfill plan for Surf Beach Waste Management Facility providing an additional 3m of elevation over cell 1, creating approximately 100,000m³ of space to receive bushfire waste
- Based on capacity at respective sites and volumes of waste non-asbestos waste is being received at Surf Beach and Asbestos contaminated waste received at Brou. This provided operational efficiencies at the sites for the management of asbestos waste.
- Additional resources (plant and staff) contracted to assist council staff in the management of the waste volumes being received at each of the sites.
- Payment of a commercial gate fee by the NSW Government for the disposal of the waste, based upon agreed volumes and timeframes within which the waste will be received.
- Council potentially receiving waste from adjoining LGAs. (Council has assisted by receiving waste from both Shoalhaven and Bega LGAs)

- Any waste in excess of the capacity of our facilities would be transported to larger regional facilities such as Woodlawn.

Whilst the solution will not adversely impact Council's operations at Surf Beach as we are using air space that was not proposed to be utilised prior to the Bushfires, it does limit Council's options for increasing the capacity in the future. In regard to the use of Brou, receiving bushfire waste will reduce the life of the existing cell significantly leaving approximately 3 years of capacity. As a result Council will need to commence the detailed design and approval process for the next cell in order to ensure ongoing capacity.

Although there are opportunities for resource recovery as part of the clean-up in order to minimise the utilisation of landfill space, such practices have not always been practical or cost efficient given the mix of waste, its location, volumes and time frame for the clean-up.

The waste solution so far adopted hasn't developed solutions for the management of green waste nor rural fencing materials damaged and destroyed during the fire.

27. Describe any opportunities for more efficient clean-up of public and private properties, including whether there is a role the Commonwealth for providing or facilitating clean-up assistance.

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 (Q9 addressed the potential involvement of the ADF).

Natural disasters occur and when they do, they generally produce significant amounts of waste. It is projected that natural disasters are likely to increase in frequency and severity as a result of changes to our climate. Whilst with good planning, design and construction we can minimise the impact of natural disasters, it is inevitable that they will occur in the future and will create future waste management issues.

The clean-up after these events would be more timely and efficient if we assessed the likely events in each region, the potential waste volumes and types generated from different types and scales of natural disasters and put in place plans for the clean-up, management and disposal of waste under each scenario. Plans should involve all 3 levels of government and address as a minimum:

- Regional capacity for waste disposal
- Clean-up process and responsibility
- Reuse and recycling opportunities and targets
- Waste management technologies and options
- Identification of emergency disposal sites, with approvals in place to enable sites to be activated at short notice
- Funding arrangements and responsibilities
- Management structure and responsibility
- Monitoring, reporting and review process.

The Commonwealth should play an active role in the planning process and in the funding of planning, implementation and management of the finished plans in partnership with the relevant State or Territory Government.

Defence and Australian Defence Force Assistance

28. During the 2019-20 bushfire season what requests were made to Defence and/or the ADF for assistance?

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 (Q9 addressed the potential involvement of the ADF).

ADF assistance included:

- provision of emergency supplies to remote areas for people and stock
- provision of a logistic centre for donated goods at MacKay Park Batemans Bay
- clean-up of roadways and opening accesses into private properties (within the skillset limitations noting falling fire affected trees is a specialist area)
- provision of additional medical and evacuation support at Hanging Rock (ultimately not utilised)
- provision of medical presence in Narooma Library mid-January to support Narooma community and evacuation centre
- assessment of sea rescue options for coastal areas, provision of Navy ships offshore to enact this option (ultimately not utilised for evacuation in Eurobodalla)
- assistance with building an animal welfare shelter at Mogo Zoo
- assistance with accommodating visiting RFS teams in Narooma (ultimately taken over by an RFS base camp)
- assistance with clean-up of the Eurobodalla Regional Botanic Gardens
- assistance with fencing off hazards building sites in Mogo
- clean-up of some rural fence-lines fronting public roadways

Additional requests for assistance were made for the following and rejected:

- accommodate and feed contingent HVP and maintaining public order at Moruya, Ulladulla and Bega (ADF reference JTF077 – 8 January 2020)
- establish a regional waste facility capable of handling fire affected materials including asbestos (ADF reference JTF084 - 8 January 2020)
- establish and coordinate removal and disposal of building waste from fire affected sites in a timely manner to allow residents to rebuild (JTF044 - 17 January 2020)
- provide a minimum of 700 camp beds as well as the assessment of catering adequacy for the evacuation centres in Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma with particular attention on refrigeration requirements and the sourcing of such equipment (DR0105 - 17 January 2020)
- establish and coordinate the removal and reconstruction of rural fencing from fire affected sites in a timely manner to allow rural producers to rebuild (DR0106 - 17 January 2020)

29. If applicable, please provide a summary of the assistance Defence and/or the ADF has provided, or is providing, as part of the recovery efforts in connection with the 2019-20 bushfire season. To the extent possible, please provide a response that details the types of activation in which Defence and/or the ADF has been involved and how effective that assistance has been in the recovery process?

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 (Q9 addressed the involvement of the ADF). See also the response to Question 28 above.

Financial assistance

30. Describe the Eurobodalla Shire Council's experiences in seeking to obtain State and Territory and Commonwealth financial assistance, including any challenges or obstacle.

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 (Q1 & Q8 addresses this issue).

During response phases, our approach was to do what was needed to help save our community and other agencies in a time of crisis. For instance, when asked to assist the RFS and Forestry NSW prepare contain lines west of Batemans Bay in the State Forest, we diverted staff called back from leave and tasked them to assist without hesitation.

Since those extraordinary efforts, we have had to expend significant resourcing advocating to Government for positive changes in terms of funding arrangements for responding, undertaking clean-up and rebuilding infrastructure, so our community will not be significantly disadvantaged as a consequence of the natural disaster. We understand the NSW Government will consider our request for financial assistance.

Local Government collects less than 3% of all tax across Australia. As a sector, Local Government does not have the financial capacity to fund emergency preparedness, response and recovery, especially in regional Australia.

The cost of emergency services levies is also not equitable across Local Government when compared to the available rates. This means diverting significant and very limited financial resources away from the core functions of Council (refer particularly page 5 & 6 of Council's response 29 April 2020). These funds would be better served assisting Councils improve the resilience of community infrastructure to natural disasters.

Council has just received our notice of Council contribution assessment from the NSW Government for 2020-21. The amounts specified have increased dramatically (far in excess of the rate pegging amount in NSW 2020/2021 - 2.6%) as follows:

| State Combat Agency | 2019-20 Contribution by Council | 2020-21 Contribution by Council |
|------------------------------|--|--|
| NSW Rural Fire Service | \$741,780 | \$1,058,902 |
| NSW State Emergency Services | \$59,245 | \$74,022 |
| NSW Fire & Rescue | \$166,072 | \$185,442 |
| Total Contribution | \$967,121 | \$1,318,366 |

The NSW Government has announced that it will provide a mechanism to refund Councils the increase in contribution in 2020-21 for one year. However, it is plain to see that the current financial model is unsustainable from a Local Government perspective.

On a positive note, the recent changes in funding arrangements between the Commonwealth and State Governments to enable replacement of like for like with a more

resilient option is a major step forward. This will see a number of destroyed timber bridges in Eurobodalla replaced with concrete bridges under the current funding arrangements, providing a far more resilient option for the future. This positive change would have been unable to be achieved by Council except as a result of this funding arrangement.

The Australian Government could consider modifications to the Australian Land Transport Program to provide an additional funding program to replace low resilience structures such as timber bridges, with more resilient options. In the case of bridges, this would also assist with improving the national productivity by removing load capacity impediments to high mass vehicles.

Fundamentally we recommend the following changes in terms of the financial and structural arrangements for Local Government for emergency preparedness, response and recovery:

- the cost of NSW Government emergency services agencies should be moved to wholly to the NSW Government (Q1 response 29 April 2020). The Commonwealth should consider its own level of responsibility in this regard. For instance, the Commonwealth could fund the component currently funded by Local Government.
- the ownership and cost of emergency services infrastructure should be wholly the responsibility of the State Governments, including for the NSW Rural Fire Service and the NSW State Emergency Service.
- the Commonwealth should contribute financially to facilities particularly to the Integrated Emergency Services Precinct in Moruya.
- the role of Local Emergency Management Officer should be moved out of Local Government to the NSW Government emergency services agencies and integrated into emergency services frameworks and be fully funded by the State Government.
- the role and cost of educating and preparing the community for natural disasters should remain with the response NSW Government emergency services combat agencies.
- the Commonwealth should co-fund the development of improved public education campaigns delivering consistent messaging across all States, delivered by the relevant State Government agency
- the Commonwealth should review the funding arrangements with the States and remove financial barriers to the use of Council resources in responding to natural disasters, clean-up and rebuilding of public infrastructure by agreeing it will fund the cost of day labour resources
- the 21 day limit on clean-up should be moved to a 90 day minimum with flexibility to extend in large scale natural disasters using a simple and collaborative approvals process
- the Commonwealth should enhance funding programs to improve the resilience of public infrastructure including roads and bridges, water and sewer, electricity supply and telecommunications

- the Commonwealth should invest in new technologies to drive innovation and availability of information to assist in response to natural disasters (eg improved real time data on fire movement)
- the Commonwealth should work with the States to review legislative arrangements that provide additional emergency management powers to override legislative impediments to rapid response and recovery
- the role of Local Government in emergency services should revert to that of service provider (similar to the role of Essential Energy and telecommunications providers).

31. Describe any opportunities that the Eurobodalla Shire Council can identify for improving efficiencies to existing financial assistance arrangements.

This is addressed in our previous submissions to the Commission dated 27 March 2020 and 29 April 2020 (Q1 & Q8 addresses this issue), and the response to Q30 above.

Council is using available in-field technology already to capture damage and record outcomes for the purposes of making claims.

The cooperation from Transport for NSW in working with us to assess damage, shared contract resources, develop solutions and prepare claims has been excellent.

Other relevant matters

32. Describe (in summary terms) any other matters which the Eurobodalla Shire Council considers relevant to its response to this Notice, or the Commissioners' inquiries regarding preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters within Australia, in response to the Terms of Reference.

Please refer to Council's initial submission to the Royal Commission via the web-portal with the identification number NND.001.00133 (including 3 attachments) dated 27 March 2020 and Council's response dated 29 April 2020.

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre

Bushfire update - Thursday 9 January, 10am

Fires

NSW Rural Fire service will provide updated fire predictions for Friday and Saturday and instructions for the Eurobodalla community around lunchtime today.

Eurobodalla residents living outside the main town centres of Narooma, Moruya, Tuross and Batemans Bay are asked to standby for today's update, and be ready to relocate if asked. This includes residents living near bush on the outer fringes of main towns. Residents living in the main towns can stay in place. When RFS says main towns, they mean the town centres of Batemans Bay, Narooma and Moruya, not outlying villages.

The first and best option is to stay with friends or family in a main town. Otherwise, be ready to attend your nearest evacuation centre in Narooma, Moruya or Batemans Bay.

Unless you are physically and mentally prepared to defend your property – and NSW RFS Incident Controller Angus Barnes says if you need to ask yourself the question you aren't prepared – then you should be ready to move towards a main town.

Batemans Bay evacuation centre Hanging Rock Function Centre, Hanging Rock Place

Moruya evacuation centre Moruya Basketball stadium, in the showgrounds, Albert Street

Narooma evacuation centre Leisure Centre, Bluewater Drive

Tuross Head residents who live away from bush are advised to stay in place. Tuross Head Country Club will again be open for residents who would like to take refuge.

People with medical conditions

People with medical conditions should be on standby to move to an official evacuation centre (Batemans Bay, Moruya, Narooma) depending on today's RFS advice. Please take your required medication and copies of prescriptions. Do not present to the hospital unless you require immediate medical attention. The evacuation centres offer food, water, safety, company and St John's Ambulance personnel.

What to take to the evacuation centre

If asked to move, please take a bag with medications, prescriptions, important documents, precious items, wallet, phone and charger, clothing for all seasons and toiletries for a few days. If you can, bring your own bedding and towels, and your own food if possible.

People with babies and young children, please bring nappies, formula, baby food, toys and activities.

Small pets are welcome. Please bring pet food and bowls. Large animals can be accommodated under owner-care at Moruya Showground. Local Land Services reps are onsite to assist with animal welfare.

People with camping equipment may camp on the grounds of each evacuation centre. Pack up tents and store them in cars before the firefront arrives - embers will burn tents and make it unsafe for others.

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre

Bushfire update - Thursday 9 January, 10am

Returning to Moruya west

Residents of Deua, Pollwombra and Larry's Mountain Road areas west of Moruya may not return home for now while NSW RFS continues to monitor fire activity in that area.

NSW Police

NSW Police has deployed additional personnel to Eurobodalla to assist in the emergency response. Fire impacted areas or areas that have evacuated are patrolled regularly to protect property.

Travel

For travel within Eurobodalla:

-) Broulee Road and Araluen Road remain closed
-) Avoid travelling west of the Princes Highway into areas of burnt ground or approaching fires, including areas such as Nerrigundah and Belowra.

The Princes Highway is open north and south. Continue to monitor Live Traffic. Drive cautiously, do not cross road blocks and obey traffic control.

Water

NEW The boil water notice for residents in Moruya and south to Tilba has been lifted. Sampling has confirmed the drinking water supply was not compromised and it is no longer necessary to boil drinking water.

All Eurobodalla residents should be conservative with water use until further notice to ensure we have enough water for drinking and firefighting. All reservoirs are now filled. Do not wet down buildings or grounds or leave sprinklers and hoses running. This is only useful when properties are under threat of fire or ember attack. An ember is a hot glowing coal – cold and blackened leaves are not embers.

If you are staying to defend your property according to your bushfire survival plan, filling your bins with water can be helpful for firefighting. Please empty them after and resume their normal use.

If you notice neighbours misusing water, you might feel comfortable having a chat to explain why it's important to conserve our water for firefighting and community use, or you can call 1800 755 760 to report.

Rubbish collection

Eurobodalla's kerbside collection is now on track and up to date. Please continue your good bin habits – red for waste, yellow for recycling, green for green waste.

If filling bins with water to assist firefighting efforts, please don't leave those filled bins on the kerb now that kerbside collection has recommenced.

Surf Beach tip is closed due to fire impacts. Moruya Transfer Station will now open seven days per week until Surf Beach re-opens, and Brou tip is open seven days per week.

Residents whose bins have been destroyed by fire, please contact Council's waste services on 4474 1024 to organise delivery of replacements.

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre

Bushfire update - Thursday 9 January, 10am

NEW Power

Essential Energy reports that 3,245 customers remain without power in Eurobodalla. The Surf Beach and Sunshine Bay electricity network, near Batemans Bay, has suffered extensive damage. Once crews are able to safely access firegrounds, estimated times to restore the damage and return power to customers will be provided.

A small number of customers who had power restored are unfortunately experiencing an additional unplanned outage as a result of further bushfire damage.

With the prediction of worsening fires on Friday and Saturday, Essential Energy reminds the community that for safety reasons the electricity network may need to be switched off, or it may be damaged, and this means that power will not be available for pumps and that customers should have an alternative plan for water if it is required.

NEW Donations

Eurobodalla has been overwhelmed by the generosity and kindness of people from around Australia donating items for our fire affected residents. NSW Disaster Welfare Recovery is now asking everyone to reconsider how they can best support those impacted. Money is the best way to help people buy the things they really need, empower them to make decisions about their future and support their local businesses by spending locally. Consider donations to Salvation Army 2019 November Bushfire Appeal, Red Cross Relief and Recovery, St Vincent de Paul Society Bushfire Appeal, Wildlife Rescue.

Fire affected land managers – stock and infrastructure assistance

Fire affected land managers can report stock losses and infrastructure damage, request animal assessment, or request emergency fodder or water for stock, by calling the Agricultural and Animal Services Hotline on 1800 814 647. Fodder distribution points are now open across the South East. We ask that you call the hotline to register and only present to a fodder distribution point when advised to.

Food and fuel

Food and fuel trucks are coming into Eurobodalla.

Asbestos awareness

Do not sift through fire-damaged material until it has been inspected and verified to be asbestos-free. Licensed contractors from NSW Public Works Authority are progressively working through fire-affected areas, and started yesterday Monday 6 January.

NEW Swimming

Smoke, ash, debris, potential runoff from burnt areas and sewer surcharges may have impacted Eurobodalla's waterways. As a precaution residents are advised to avoid swimming in waterways and beaches for now.

The good news is Eurobodalla's three swimming centres in Batemans Bay, Moruya and Narooma will re-open from 1pm today, Thursday 9 January, much sooner than anticipated. Council's website has opening hours and check with the pools for resumption of regular programming. Fire ash continues

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre

Bushfire update - Thursday 9 January, 10am

to be blown into Moruya and Batemans Bay centres and although this ash may be unsightly, the water remains suitable for swimming.

NEW Visitors

Eurobodalla's Emergency Operations Centre reminds visitors to delay their travel plans to Eurobodalla for now. Local tourism businesses are urged to adhere to this advice. There is still active fire in most of Eurobodalla and south to the Victorian border. At this time it is in the best interests of visitors and our community to delay travel plans to Eurobodalla. Many local residents have lost their homes or can't return to them and these people require accommodation, resources and support. Until this Friday's high fire danger has passed and NSW RFS reassess the forecast, visitors should stay away from the Eurobodalla.

Evacuation centres

To those at evacuation centres, we thank you for your patience and goodwill in trying circumstances. The centres will remain open and providing support for as long as required. Please talk to centre staff about disaster welfare assistance. We understand online access to information about support services is limited, and printed information is now available at the centres.

Community updates

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre will continue to provide 10am and 6pm updates for the community. These are distributed to local media, community associations, evacuation centres, posted on Eurobodalla Council's Facebook page and website, as well as printed and pinned to community noticeboards. Other announcements are made as required via local media and social media. Eurobodalla Council prepares and distributes the official communications as part of the multi-agency emergency response.

Communications can be difficult when power is out. Have a battery-powered radio on hand for company and information when this happens. Our local radio stations ABC Southeast and 2EC/PowerFM are providing continuous coverage and broadcasting the official community updates.

Warren Sharpe, OAM

Eurobodalla Local Emergency Management Officer

Where to find emergency info

The Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre distributes daily bushfire emergency updates for the community when fires are threatening.

They include Rural Fire Service updates about the fires, as well as information about evacuation centres, road closures, power outages, and other practical information for residents.

The updates are distributed to local media, community associations, emergency services representatives and Disaster Welfare staff at evacuation centres.

Find emergency and recovery info online

NSW Rural Fire Service

www.rfs.nsw.gov.au or Fires Near Me app

Road closures

www.livetraffic.com or Live Traffic app

Eurobodalla Emergency Operations Centre community updates

www.esc.nsw.gov.au/emergency

Eurobodalla bushfire recovery information

www.esc.nsw.gov.au/recovery

Facebook:

@Eurobodalla Council

@Far South Coast RFS

Community information for bushfires: getting and staying prepared

Fires

Eurobodalla has been hard hit by bushfire. Extreme conditions on Tuesday 31 December and Saturday 4 January saw heavy fire impact on several towns and villages, as well as rural areas. The threat continues and the community should take steps now to prepare for further fire impact.

The clear priority of NSW RFS is always the protection of life and property, in that order. Firefighting resources are deployed strategically to provide optimal coverage. Please always follow the advice of emergency services to ensure the safety of yourself and others. Be prepared to enact your bushfire survival plan. During fire impacts, only call Triple Zero (000) if you are in a life threatening situation.

Water

Conserve water where possible. Eurobodalla already had water restrictions in place. Bushfires have put more pressure on our water resources.

Demand exceeded supply on our last bad fire day, Saturday 4 January. Reservoirs needed to be filled quickly for firefighting and community use and the only way for this to happen is to skip the treatment process. That is why we required a boil water notice for Moruya to Tilba. As of Monday 6 January, the shire's water storage facility at Deep Creek Dam was at 54 percent capacity.

Please help conserve water for essential drinking water and firefighting. Do not wet down buildings or grounds or leave sprinklers and hoses running. This is only useful when properties are under threat of fire or ember attack. An ember is a hot glowing coal – cold and blackened leaves are not embers.

If you are staying to defend your property according to your bushfire survival plan, filling your bins with water can be helpful for firefighting. Please empty them after and resume their normal use.

Roads

When fires threaten, only drive when essential or to move into town for safety. Put your headlights on. Otherwise stay off the roads. Smoke and roaming animals are a threat to your safety, and our RFS and emergency services crews need unimpeded road access to do their job. Expect the highway and local roads to close during fire impacts. When a road is blocked or closed, obey the traffic control - it's for your own safety.

Food/Fuel

Food and fuel supplies from Sydney and Melbourne are being escorted through highway roadblocks when possible. Until then, a full range of supplies may not always be available. We are working with supermarkets to help them better prepare.

Power/Electricity

Conserve electricity where possible until the fires have passed and full capacity is restored. This helps ensure everyone maintains access to vital services.

Generators are in position at critical locations, including water and sewer facilities, hospitals, fuel stations, aged-care facilities and supermarkets.

The electricity network has been extensively damaged in numerous locations with safe access due to active fires and hazard trees delaying Essential Energy's assessment and the commencement of repairs. It is expected that parts of electricity network will need to be completely rebuilt with at least 500 power poles requiring replacement.

More than 320 Essential Energy personnel throughout NSW have been deployed to assist local crews with repairs. Due to the extensive damage and hazard trees, restoration will be a slow process. Please remain 8 metres away from any damaged electrical infrastructure.

Estimated restoration times will be available on Essential Energy's website and Facebook page once clearer details are to hand.

Rubbish and bins

After fire impacts, kerbside collections services will resume as soon as roads are open and it is safe for trucks. Keep all three bins – yellow, red and green lids – on the kerb and they will be collected as quickly as possible and potentially not according to the usual schedule. Unless otherwise advised, bins should continue to be used as usual for waste (red), recycling (yellow) and green waste (green).

The Surf Beach Waste Management Facility is currently closed due to fire. Moruya tip is now open Monday-Friday. Brou tip is open seven days.

Some residents have left yellow bins on the kerb to signal to firefighters they are staying to defend their property. RFS advise this has worked in some areas, although can create confusion. A sign saying you stayed and the number of residents inside is helpful.

NSW Police

NSW Police have deployed dozens of extra personnel to Eurobodalla to assist in the emergency response. A key role will be patrolling fire-impacted areas.

Visitors

Emergency services are telling visitors to stay away from the South Coast regions while fire remains active in the area. The focus must be on protecting and supporting our own community. Emergency services will advise when visitors can be invited back to the area.



Evacuation centre information

Evacuation centres are a lifeboat, not a cruise ship.

Prepare a bag of clothing, medication and toiletries ahead of time, and be sure important documents (birth certificate, passport) are located and stored in a place safe from fire.

Evacuation centres are located at:

- Hanging Rock Function Centre, Hanging Rock Place, Batemans Bay
- Moruya Showground, Albert Street, Moruya
- Narooma Leisure Centre, Bluewater Drive, Narooma

If you can, bring your own bedding and towels, and your own food if possible.

People with babies and young children, please bring nappies, formula, baby food, toys and activities.

Small pets are welcome. Please bring pet food and bowls. Large animals can be accommodated under owner-care at Moruya Showground. Local Land Services reps are onsite at the showground to assist with animal welfare.

People with camping equipment may camp on the grounds of each evacuation centre. Pack up tents first thing this morning and store them in cars before the fire front arrives. Embers will burn tents and make it unsafe for others.

On arrival, be sure to register with the evacuation centre, and online at [Register.Find.Reunite](#). Registering online so family and friends can find you without contacting response teams allows them focus on those most in need.



People with medical conditions

When fires threaten, people with medical conditions should move to an official evacuation centre immediately. Please take your required medication and copies of prescriptions. Do not present to the hospital unless you require immediate medical attention. The evacuation centres offer food, water, safety, company and St John's Ambulance personnel.



Fire affected land managers – stock and infrastructure assistance

Fire affected land managers can report stock losses and infrastructure damage, or request animal assessment, or emergency fodder or water for stock, by calling the Agricultural and Animal Services Hotline on 1800 814 647.

Fodder distribution points are now open across the South East. We ask that you please call 1800 814 647 to register and only present to a fodder distribution point when advised to.

Mental health services

Confidential services are available 24/7, and include:

- NSW Mental Health Line – 1800 011 511
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Beyond Blue – 1300 224 636

If you or someone else is in immediate danger, call Triple Zero (000) or go to your nearest hospital emergency department.

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Key contacts

Disaster Welfare Assistance: 1800 018 444 or www.emergency.nsw.gov.au

- immediate needs for water, food or shelter
- information about disaster relief grants and assistance

NSW DPI Agriculture and Animal Services: 1800 814 647