

**Submission
No 32**

INQUIRY INTO WAMBELONG FIRE

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During the past five years prior to the Wambelong fire it became obvious to me from my observations that the National Parks and Wildlife Service had not much respect for the land and the services they were paid to provide and protect.

Creeks bulged with piles of dead trees from floods. Paths, long overdue to be fixed, were not fixed. Non-Native weeds were allowed to flourish in full view. An out-dated pit toilet with no paper, no seat and no roof stood open for public use. These all burnt in the fire.

During the total fire ban beginning on January 7th and the subsequent statewide National Park closure for NSW, there were no obvious or distinct signs to alert passing traffic to the warnings. When the National Parks and Wildlife Service were made aware of this, a laminated piece of A4 was a feeble attempt. This was on Friday 11th January 2013.

Post Wambelong fire I have observed no better. Attempts to cover signs in black plastic, closed signs with the cover fallen off when the park is now open.

Directly after the Wambelong fire, the National Parks and Wildlife Service closed the entire park for the obvious reasons of assessing risk and damage. Shale had become so hot it now shatters, making large rocks dangerous. Parts of the large National Park have access from the tourist drives. These remained open the entire time, and still are, without indication if it is National Park or not.

Our local area has many records of fires in the past. Some closely following a similar track to the Wambelong fire. The weather conditions we experienced in January 2013 have been experienced before. Devastation like the Wambelong fire has never been recorded before.

During the extreme dry heat of December 2012 and into January 2013, and during the statewide National Park closure, the fire rating never reached Catastrophic. This suggests that the weather conditions still had favour towards containment if a fire were to ignite.

I believe that in addition to not reacting in a more prompt and concerned manner to use every available form of extinguishing the fire on first ignition, that the lighting of a second fire and allowing them to join created such heat and speed it hindered the ability for firefighters to act.

I believe that we, as residents could have received a warning such as a watch and act, hours earlier and that the fire would have been slower and smaller. Giving us and the firefighters a better chance of saving more property, more homes, more livestock and much less loss.

Our home, 20km from the initial fire, evaporated.

It was not embers. A fire ball blew in and kept going. It did not blow back once. Two houses, outsheds, the kids cubby. We were in the open with nothing but dirt surrounding us. Everything evaporated.

Between my partner, my mother, our three children and myself we lost three houses, all the sheds, generations of belongings.

If I believed that the National Parks and Wildlife Service had committed themselves to doing everything it possibly could to avoid the original fire from getting bigger, I would be able to accept what has happened. A matter of trust and disappointment that has long lasting effects. This is not to mention the 12 months that a description does no justice to the experience we have been through.

Thank you for your time.