

Impact of Climate Risk on Insurance Premiums and Availability enquiry

Public submission from:

Ben Buggy

I'm sitting in my home and writing this submission to the enquiry, from the Bega Valley of NSW. Looking out over the greens of the grass, trees and mountain through the window beside me. But even with the four wet seasons and verdant growth, the signs of the bushfire remain. There's a 'forest' of shiny grey limbs of the eucalypts that didn't regenerate. There's the massed fluffy green of the young wattle forests that were germinated by the heat. It was the Badger's Forest fire, which burned through the valley, and devastated the towns of Cobargo and Quaama on NYE 2019/2020.

This home would not be here either, but I stayed home that night and protected my home with my life. My mum, , also stayed home that night and fought the fire, along with my partner.

But our efforts to save our home from fire didn't start that night - it started many years earlier, when I visited Kinglake during my permaculture studies. I heard from people that had stayed and defended their home during the Black Saturday of 2009. From that time, I had become aware of the danger of fire, its likelihood, and I'd be given the tools to prepare for it.

When we moved to the Bega Valley in 2014, and started to make plans for our house and garden, fire was always on our minds. We invited the local fire captain to come by and give us advice. We engaged a consultant to help us plan. We had a sprinkler system designed and installed. We built a water tank dedicated to fire defence.

And inside, we had a bag of PPE - gloves, masks and eyewear. The battery radio and spare batteries. The head torches. And we had our designated place of last resort.

So when the red glow on the horizon kept getting brighter that night, we were outside and watching it. The sprinklers were going, and we waited for the blaze to get closer. It wasn't easy to stand our ground at that moment - we were terrified. But I'm still so glad that we did.

So how does the insurance company view my actions? Do they pat me on the back and applaud my behaviour? We were defending our home, but also defending them from exposure. Do our premiums go up, just the same?

We have spent \$50K in preparing our home to survive bushfire, and we've expanded on that system since then, to create more hosepoints, and sprinklers further out from the building.

We are putting our money, our effort and experience into protecting our home into an unknowable future.

We are not operating in a world of actuarial calculations and meteorological mapping. We are living in a world of relationship - with our home, our property and community - and making decisions that can support life into the long term.

I challenge the insurance industry to do the same. To understand their role in supporting the lives of their customers, and our community across the country. In my mind, if you reap profits during the good times, it is your role to support people through the hard times.

And maybe there is something to be learned from our experience here.

Sincerely,

Ben Buggy,