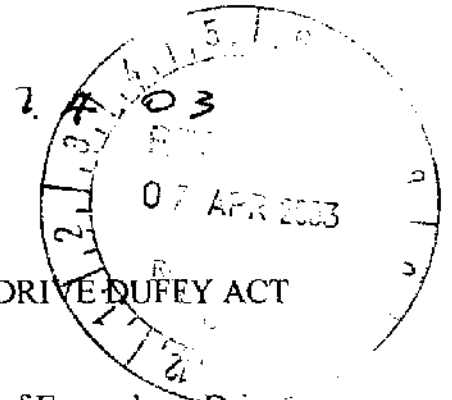




The Secretary  
Select Committee on the recent Australian Bushfires  
The Department of the House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600  
Fax: 62774424



**SUBMISSION BY SOME RESIDENTS OF EUCUMBENE DRIVE DUFFY ACT WHO STAYED TO SAVE HOUSES**

Attached is a submission to your inquiry from some residents of Eucumbene Drive and Somerset Street Duffy who were there throughout the fires on 18 January 2003.

The Submission is in the form of series of questions that the Inquiry should look at in coming to its conclusions. The questions are based on issues raised by our experiences and those of neighbours who also stayed through the fires. The questions are designed to help plan to ensure that such an event does not occur in the future, rather than to attribute blame.

One issue that has not been obviously highlighted so far in public discussion is the fact that many houses could have been saved by the occupants had they been there. It was very noticeable that many of the houses in our vicinity caught alight due to spot fires and were lost well after the fire front had passed. Many spot fires were small and were easily put out in their early stages by a bucket of water and others could have been put out easily by a tender or hydrant had they been available.

By way of background, we have attached statements from us and Simon Douglas which give short details of our experiences during the fire.


We would be happy to give further details in person to your inquiry if needed.



Mark Douglas



Paul Garrett



Phil Tuckerman

**SUBMISSION  
BY  
SOME RESIDENTS OF DUFFY  
WHO STAYED TO SAVE HOUSES**

**QUESTIONS FOR THE INQUIRY**

- 1 What contingency plans and strategies were in place to cope with fires of similar ferocity to those that hit Canberra from the north west in 1952?
- 2 What action was taken to implement those plans and strategies to ensure that future fires from a similar direction and of similar ferocity did not occur in the ACT?
- 3 After the fires in December 2001 from the same direction was any action taken to ensure that future fires from a similar direction and of similar ferocity did not occur in the ACT?
- 4 Were additional precautions put in place due to the drought in the ACT?
- 5 To what extent was there coordination and cooperation with the New South Wales authorities to prevent and control the fires that were potentially threatening Canberra on 15,16 and 17 January 2003?
- 6 What action was taken to respond to the weather warnings issued 2-3 days before the fire of strong to gale force north west winds blowing on 18 January?
- 7 What communications did the fire controllers have with the weather bureau in the hours leading up to the fires in Canberra regarding wind strength and direction?
- 8 Were communication plans in place to warn residents of the risk of fire?
- 9 What warning was given to ACT residents of the potential danger of the fires?
- 10 How was any warning communicated?
- 11 Did AGILITY have notice that there could be fires, including house fires, in Duffy on 18 January 2003?
- 12 When was AGILITY warned and by whom?
- 13 Did AGILITY have staff on the ground near Duffy at about 11.00 am or any time on 18 January turn off gas connections?
- 14 When were residents and others in the Cotter area warned to evacuate?

- 15 What precautions did ACT Forests take to protect their headquarters on the Cotter Road from the fires?
- 16 Did the mature pine trees surrounding the headquarters include an underlayer of blackberry and other scrub, particularly on both sides of Eucumbene Drive at the Cotter road end and down Warragamba Avenue?
- 17 Were any assessments made of the fire risks in vulnerable areas of the ACT?
- 18 If an assessment was made, what was done to publish the results?
- 19 Were Eucumbene Drive and Warragamba Avenue Duffy ever identified as the ACT Streets most at risk of fire?
- 20 Were the residents of Duffy warned of this risk?
- 21 What was done to train residents in Duffy in fire prevention and fighting?
- 22 When were the fire hydrants on Eucumbene Drive last identified and checked and by whom?
- 23 Were fire officers instructed to show residents how to use the hydrants?
- 24 How many fire tenders were on Eucumbene Drive at the time the fire hit Eucumbene Drive?
- 25 Were any reserve tenders near by?
- 26 When and by whom was Eucumbene Drive given up as a lost cause?
- 27 Is this the reason that no fire tenders attended the street until about 4 hours after the fire front passed?
- 28 What are the criteria for the declaration of a State of Emergency in the ACT?
- 29 When was the State of Emergency declared in the ACT on 18 January?
- 30 Why were the Commonwealth fire fighting resources (particularly Defence) not asked for assistance?
- 31 What emergency power supply did the Emergency Services Headquarters have when the power failed?
- 32 How did the Emergency Services communicate with other services involved after the power failure?
- 33 Why did the Emergency Services not gather a similar force of tenders and take protective measures to protect Weston Creek as it did for Belconnen in the days after the fire?

## STATEMENT BY MARK DOUGLAS ABOUT THE FIRES ON 18 JANUARY

My name is Mark Douglas and I live at 90 Eucumbene Drive, Duffy. The fires trapped me and my son and we saved the house. The events of the day are detailed below. The timings are approximate, particularly during and immediately after the firestorm, however, they give a framework to the events.

The lack of warning is certain. We were told at about 2.40 pm that we would have plenty of warning to evacuate by the police and that the fire was about 7 to 10 k and 1 to 1.5 hours away. It was on us 20 minutes later. My recollection of this timing is certain as I thought that, given the strength of the wind, the timing estimate was optimistic and checked my watch when told and when we saw the fire coming.

- 1.15 pm      Radio reports of '*serious deterioration*' in bush fire situation-son arrives to help having heard report
- Prepare house-stockpile water - evacuate some valuables and sick wife to Lyons
- 2.20 pm      Return with son to Eucumbene Drive – 2 fire units at Hindmarsh drive end – advised by them that there was about 1.5 to 2 hours before arrival of fire – continue to prepare house and water stockpile
- 2.40 pm      Small Fire unit on Eucumbene Drive near No 86 – officers advise fire 7 to 10 k and about 1 to 1.5 hrs away and that we would be warned by police if and when we should evacuate – hear increasingly loud roar from the North West
- 2.55 pm      Fire front visible and roar approaching rapidly from north and north west and heading along Eucumbene Drive – visibility equal to very late evening – trapped and safer to stay so return cars to garages under house-I stay at the front and son goes upstairs and covers the interior and back
- 3 00 pm      Fire front hits - wall of flame 30m high topping mature pines approaches front of house-no action possible when fire front passing-lose power and immediately garage doors fly up-I pull these closed several times and hose out burning embers inside-2metre high wall of burning embers including pieces of wood running along Eucumbene Drive and coming down drive
- After main fire front passed - winds still very high - 2m high stream of large cinders still being blown against the house – front garden lost-some unexplained water hits roof possible air drop of water helps front-immediately leave garage and start putting out many and continuing spot fires including side fence – son putting out spots in the back-back fence disappeared and most of garden -

water pressure minimal-put out 5 house threatening fires which would have destroyed it otherwise

- 3.15 pm No 94 Eucumbene catches alight at south end - slow but dangerous burn - neighbours with our help defend No 92 for about 45 minutes - this helps save Nos 90, 88 and 86 - water pressure less - hydrant outside No 86 running at full bore into gutter with hose but no nozzle - water some use for bucketing out of gutter - hydrant outside No 92 not connected
- 4.00 pm House to rear south No 47 Somerset Street catches alight from gas leak - put out by Fire unit on Somerset Street
- 4.20 pm No 47 Somerset Street realight and burns - Numbers 45, and 43 follow - explosions being heard from all over Weston Creek
- Somerset Street houses well alight - houses continue to catch and burn- continue to extinguish spot fires- last mobile phone contact possible - Son returns to Lyons because of fire threat there from 2 directions, NW and S
- 6.00 pm Wind dropping, smoke clearing - still putting out spot fires - houses still catching and burning - explosions still being heard
- 8.30 pm Wind change to South East - relights houses to the South East (Somerset Street)- embers start fresh spot fires - explosions still heard
- First fire tender seen on Eucumbene Drive after fire storm - a lost NSW Fire Crew
- 9.00 pm House fires on Somerset Street still active so am still spotting
- 10.00 pm Still putting out spot fires - police and some tenders on Somerset and Eucumbene Drive putting out some fires - people prowling around on Somerset who disappear when challenged in torch beam - explosions still being heard
- 10.30 pm Seek leave Duffy but stay when told would not be allowed to return - still chance of spot fires or looting fires so stay
- 12.00 pm Continue to check house and grounds for fires - police and fire tenders continue intermittent appearances - continue regular checks- leave 7.00am on 19 January



Mark Douglas

4 April 2003

## STATEMENT BY PAUL GARRETT,

My apologies for not annotating accurate times to this statement. The first time I looked at my watch after the onset of the fires was at approximately 2200.

On the morning of 18 January 2003, my wife and I walked down the forest track to the west of the intersection of Eucumbene Drive and Warragamba Avenue for a morning walk and to observe the proximity of the smoke from the fires to the west of Canberra. The forest behind Eucumbene Drive had been felled a year previously but the detritus from that operation had not been cleared and the grass was at least a metre high and extremely dry. We noted that a fire would quickly race through this area because of the quantity of dry material lying around.

At approximately 1400 on the afternoon of 18 January, my wife, daughter and I walked to the corner of Eucumbene Drive and Warragamba Avenue, DUFFY. The smoke from the fires to the north west was plainly visible and there was a group of people standing around talking to firemen and police near a recently erected roadblock. We spoke to the firemen who were there and we were told that the fires, the smoke from which was now clearly visible beyond Mt Stromlo, was an hour to an hour and a half away and that we would get plenty of warning if we had to evacuate. After about 10 minutes we decided to return home and make preparations to evacuate, if necessary, in case the fire reached us.

Within half an hour of that decision the three of us were fighting the enveloping firestorm with two garden hoses and buckets – fortunately we had filled every available container with water and had placed them at the front and side of the house. We had no warning to evacuate, there were no fire appliances, firemen or police visible in our part of the street and, it seems to us, we were apparently left to fend for ourselves. I positioned myself, with a garden hose, on the north west corner of the roof (facing the prevailing wind direction). My daughter, also with a garden hose, was on the front patio (facing north) and my wife was on the ground trying to co-ordinate our efforts and using buckets fed from the two filled garbage/recycling bins to put out spot fires not visible to my daughter or myself.

Given the time taken for the fire to reach us I believe that we would have had no chance to evacuate. Our car was in the garage (with the door closed and locked) which faced north, was at the end of a long driveway, the direction from which the fire was burning. With no power available the door was locked down and to open it would have taken time and then allowed the fire to get into the garage and then under the house.

We stayed in our positions for about three hours when we then concentrated on trying to douse fires in the next house (No 94). When I came down from the roof I turned our gas supply off. I could only just reach the side of the house next door because the garden hose was not long enough. As far as I could see, the house caught alight on both the south west and south east corners, the former assisted by burning gas from around the meter. Soon after this I moved my daughter's car (which was parked at the bottom of our drive and as it had been b de) half way up the driveway as I feared it would be totally destroyed from ouse next door. After some time,

trying to save this house was seen as a lost cause as the roof was by then well alight. I then moved the car further up the drive as it was still too close to the burning house. Coping with this occupied us for some time as we were still concerned that the fire in this house, with the prevailing wind, may cross over to our house. When No 94 collapsed in on itself, we thought the immediate danger had passed. However, amongst the burning debris, burning gas from the fractured gas pipes was still noticeable.

Our priority was then the fires still burning around the house, the fences, gardens, trees, wooden garden edging and in the pine bark liberally spread outside on the nature strips. We managed a small respite until a house behind us in Somerset Street (which had previously been on fire and which was supposedly put out by firemen) reignited and with the wind change from the south east again placed us in the path of a fire. I fought this second front from the south east corner of the roof. This time, I was assisted by my son (also on the roof) who had managed to get to our house by walking up from Holder.

Our first sighting of fire appliances in our street was not until about 1900 although there were fire appliances in Somerset Street earlier and we had heard aircraft overhead in that area. We finally left our house about 2300 as we were having difficulty breathing and with our vision. With no power and with the house full of smoke, ash and soot we could no longer stay inside.

There are stories circulating that our end of Eucumbene Drive was given up as a lost cause and that is why there was no line of defence in our street. However, we have heard that residents further along Eucumbene Drive (towards Hindmarsh Drive) and in Somerset Street were advised to evacuate by police. The veracity of these reports will hopefully be proven in the inquiry to follow. We (and our neighbours, who also stayed and fought) would like to know if we were abandoned and, if so, the reasons why.

  
(Paul Garrett)  
03 April 2003

## BUSHFIRE CANBERRA 18 JANUARY 003 – OUR EXPERIENCE THE TUCKERMAN'S BURNT OFFERINGS

It was a normal Saturday afternoon although I was a bit late going to the TAB at Cooleman Court getting there about 2.00pm. I had heard the news that the fire had jumped the Murrumbidgee River but was not overly concerned as there was a fair way to go before it reached the Stromlo pine forest which had always been my concern after the fire at Christmas 2001.

Tom Stoya, a neighbour from up the road, and I had a chat and watched a couple of races until his wife, Maureen, came in at 2.30. After a few words she went to put her groceries in their the car but came running back in to say there was a fire alert and people should return to their homes in Duffy, Rivett and Holder. Tom and I had a small laugh and said "they always over exaggerate these things. Don't worry Maureen!"

Tom left and I then went outside. Usually I go shopping and then Janet, my wife, had wanted me to get some petrol. I looked at the black smoke cloud to the northwest and decided I should go straight home.

Our house had the worst possible features to protect in a fire. We had a wood heap at the front, a large wattle tree overhanging the house on the NW corner, and trees close to the other corners of the house. Also we had little piles of wood (kindling) drying at "strategic" locations round the house.

I arrived home at 2.50 and set the hose on the wood heap at the front of the house. I went inside and told Janet and my son Geoffrey that a fire was coming and to prepare. They were unaware of the situation at that stage. Janet closed all the windows and curtains and filled the bath with water. Geoffrey decided to ride his bike to the corner of Eucumbene Drive and Warragamba St to see the fire at Stromlo. I went out the back and started watering the roof and the corners of the house (in my shorts, nylon shirt and bare-feet). I told Janet not to worry as we were a long way from the forest!!

I watched the smoke cloud get bigger and bigger. In the centre you could begin to see it was furnace red. The helicopters (I don't know how many) sounded like one of the Vietnam War scenes (then they were all gone – obviously they could see what was coming). Geoff arrived home saying there were fire-balls jumping down the Stromlo pine forest and he thought a couple of houses along Eucumbene Drive were on fire. I told him to water the front especially the wood heap and the trees at the corner of the house.

The cloud was getting closer and it was becoming very dark. I looked due north towards Warragamba St and saw the firewall. It was, I guess, about 80-100 meters high and I thought "bloody hell we're going to die". It was about 3.10.

There wasn't much time to think as at that moment the wind struck and I had to get inside. As far as you could see all the back fences, gardens, trees etc erupted (there was no rolling fire – it was just like an explosion). Janet yelled out that the front was on fire



and I went running to the front thinking it was the house, only to see the front garden on fire and the neighbours' gardens also burning fiercely.

There were many spot fires – in the wood heap, along the side fences, in the eaves and other places. We put them out and then we put them out again and again.

The wind came back not as fierce as the first blast but brought burning cinders. It was time to get shoes on!! Janet provided wet towels which we draped over our heads – in about 10 minutes they were dry.

Our daughter Catherine arrived home about 3.40. She had come against the traffic and ignored police advice about coming home. She assisted in throwing buckets of water and helping Geoff, Janet and me in fighting the fire in the back yard.

The house diagonally behind caught on fire and Janet shouted out that the houses across the street were on fire. I told John Chapman, next door neighbour, not to worry about his backyard, as I would cover it. He said the house next door to him and the house over the road were on fire but if there had been somebody there or he had a better hose he might have been able to stop the fires.

My other neighbours left after the first wind strike (an elderly couple but he had been on the roof filling the gutters etc). He was nearly blown off the roof when the first wind blast came through.

The house at the back burnt down fairly quickly. The heat was intense and the way the metal barbeque stand melted worried me as I thought his gas bottle might explode – the hissing flame that shot into the air indicated a safety escape valve – thank heavens.

Janet said the people over the road had left. They could not move their cars and had lost everything. They were able to borrow John Chapman's other car - he was leaving with his wife also but their house was still standing and really in good shape.

Things started to settle down. The fence fires were just about out and the gardens reduced to blackened smouldering piles around burnt stumps. To the NW and South you could see the glow of houses still burning. The house behind and to its left had survived and either side of us also were still standing and looked under control.

We were pretty exhausted at this stage. I don't know what time it was but guess about 5pm when the soot came down. It had been dark before but the soot made it "inky" it was as if you could swim through it. Visibility went to about 3 or 4 metres. It was then that I thought the house next door had caught on fire. At the same time Janet called out that the firemen had told us to get out of there. Time to go.

Janet and the kids said stay. I said no - I had seen the house burn down behind and knew if the house next door was on fire we could not stop our house from going. We had to go our safety was on the line at this stage – the house could go.

We grabbed what we could in the dark. Car keys, mobile phone, wallet and a pair of trousers; Janet got her purse; the kids nothing. Out to the front, and of course we couldn't open the garage door- goodbye to our car as well as the house. Into Catherine's car and we followed Geoff.

We had no idea of the extent of the fire at that stage. We turned into Moogerah St noting that the four houses opposite were either fully burnt partially burnt or just starting to burn – some of these people from those houses we had known for 30 years – it was very sad. In Moogerah St on both sides of the road houses had been lost and we then turned into Somerset St again and saw that more houses had been lost down towards the school.

We could hardly see. Geoff had his hazard lights on and that was about all you could see of his car about 5 metres ahead of us. We turned into Burrinjuck St and saw that the BP garage had burnt down. How far had the fire travelled into the suburb we thought?

We drove into Hindmarsh Drive and joined a thinning stream of other cars leaving Weston Creek and headed for Woden and then on to Palmerston to our daughter's place.

We heard the 6pm news on the car radio. They said up to 40 homes had been destroyed in Duffy. We had passed more than that on our drive out!! They were also saying to residents to return to their homes even though the police had closed the roads (this was a minor aspect but the TV news and others continued to say this up to about 9pm).

We made a few phone calls talked a bit, walked a bit, and tried to get some sleep. In some ways the kids appeared more upset or cranky than Janet or I – perhaps we were too exhausted or resigned to the loss of everything.

The next morning we were told that residents were able to return to their houses. We went as fast as we could. About 8.30 we had just driven into Weston Creek and Geoff got a phone call from a mate to say that our house had still been standing at about 7.30 – he had walked up from his parent's house, had seen our wood heap still smouldering and burning away and put it out with the front hose. What a champion.

We drove into Somerset St and went up the hill. Lots of houses had been burnt. At the top of the hill we veered right and there was our house with the neighbours houses either side still standing. Jubilation and then sadness for our friends and neighbours. Six houses on the top of Somerset St were left standing – eleven were destroyed.

Tom and Maureen Stoya lost their home. As we looked at the still smouldering remains, Maureen said "they weren't exaggerating after all were they Phil??"

**Simon Douglas**

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22/01/2003 13:05

To: newseditor@your.abc.net.au  
cc:  
bcc:

Subject: Eucumbene Drive Duffy during the Firestorm

My parents, thankfully, still live on Eucumbene Drive - about half way between Renmark Street and Waragamba Avenue - in Duffy, the worst affected suburb. I live in Lyons with my family, central in Canberra and, so we once thought, fairly safe.

The fires burning in Namadgi National Park for the previous few weeks had been in the backs of our minds but, as ever, one took comfort from the idea that the bushfire services will be able to successfully manage them, without giving the matter too much thought.

Saturday began as Saturdays do, until late in the morning, when local ABC radio reported a 'serious deterioration' in the bushfire situation. I drove to Duffy to help my parents (my mother had eye surgery the day before) pack their most valuable possessions. Having take one load to my house in Lyons (Woden Valley) my father and I returned to their house to finish packing their two cars and prepare their house (flooding gutters etc) before making a decision on whether to remain or not.

By that stage, a number of local bushfire trucks had positioned themselves along Eucumbene Drive (by about 1pm perhaps... I didn't keep track of time) and word came through that the firefighters advised the fire was about one and a half hours away.

Sitting on the roof flooding the gutters (they held much more water than I had expected) a distant roar could be clearly heard. It was a sound I hadn't heard before, and was definitely not the sound of wind in trees.

About 20 minutes later, the decision about whether to stay or go was made for us.

Having done as much as we could to prepare the house, stockpile water and wet the grounds, the firefront began to appear from the north, heading along Eucumbene Drive. We kept watering for as long as we could before the flames arrived, at which point we dived in to the garage (under the house) and my father stayed there whilst I stayed in the main part of the house upstairs.

The poor firefighters couldn't really do anything, the scale of the blaze was just overwhelming.

By this stage, the sky had darkened.. like late evening... and there were fierce, hot winds from the north, north west. With dark around us, the only source of light was the flames themselves.

As the fire front went through the strip of pine trees across the road, the view from the house was of nothing but flames. This was accompanied a loud roar and strong winds. It was at this point, when there was nothing we could do but watch, that the first thoughts about the predicament we had found ourselves ... in a firestorm, really sank in. We just had to force these thoughts out of our minds while waiting for the firefront to pass - this was a very long minute.

When the fire front had passed we raced outside, grabbed the hoses again and began to douse spot fires around the house... my father at the front, myself at the back.

The winds were still strong, blowing embers through the air... the wind currents were often

clearly visible as streams of sparks. As more spot fires were breaking out in the back yard than I could manage, the focus was on dousing only those directly threatening the house. Water pressure is not strong on Eucumbene Drive at the best of times... and so there is a limit to what can be achieved with a domestic hose. By running backwards and forwards on the first floor deck (not wooden, and with a steel frame pergola with laserlite covering, thankfully) which runs the length of the eastern side (ie back) of the house, I was able to douse fires up against the house. The eaves of the house are so far from the ground and there were no plants up against the house that could take fire directly up to them... I'm sure that this was a major factor in the house not being destroyed.

All of the plants away from the house I let go up, not trying to douse them, as there was no point in wasting time and energy in trying to save them when they were not an immediate threat to the house. The various trees and shrubs in the back yard went up with a "whoosh", one after another, but in a random order. Some flared and disappeared quickly, others burnt more slowly. The old wooden fence between my parents and their back neighbour simply disappeared. The colourbond fence on the leeward (southern) side survived in tact, and I'm sure the fact that it was not wood had a large part in saving our and their house.

Once there was nothing much left to burn in the back I went to the front to help my father and see how he had fared. We then worked around the house for the next several hours - it seemed like no time - dousing embers. The neighbours on the northern side had stayed and were working to save (successfully) their house. Their neighbours were not there and so we helped them to protect their house as their neighbour's house began to burn. We all did what we could to protect their house, watching their neighbour's house burn. It burned slowly but remorselessly, gradually collapsing as the structural elements gave way until the brickwork was left standing, surrounding mounds of burning embers... a family's entire possessions being destroyed. This was just so tragic, and repeated again and again in Duffy.

One thing that really stood out was the calm of the people that stayed. We all remained calm and focussed on doing what needed to be done. No angry words or panic... amazing.

Winds rose and fell throughout the afternoon, which kept sparks flying and us dousing, and redousing smouldering embers in (what was left of) the garden - mulch in garden beds smoulders VERY efficiently. At some point we moved the cars out of the garage and parked them over on the other side of the road, away from anything that could burn.

Behind the house, the property diagonally to the left (south) and the following four houses all caught alight at different stages in the afternoon, and burned to the ground over a fairly long period of time. Again, the physical evidence of families lives being burned slowly and remorselessly.

Throughout, I had kept regular contact with my own home via mobile phone. The communications began to break down with the mobile networks being (presumably) overloaded and fixed telephone lines down. The crunch came for me at about 4:30pm when the phone line was dead at my own home in Lyons. I took one car and drive from Duffy to Lyons. This was a most horrifying and surreal journey.

It was only at this stage that I came to realise the true scale of the destruction. Travelling north along Eucumbene Drive there were a few houses alight between my parents and the top of Waragamba Avenue. I drove slowly, with the emergency warning lights on. Turning right from Eucumbene Drive, with sparks still flying around the car, I noticed that the first two houses were OK, but then, a seemingly endless line of burning houses came into view. This was just horrifying/awe inspiring/tragic/frightening.

Half way down Waragamba Ave, the burnt out remains of a fire truck sat in the centre of the road...

At the bottom of Waragamba Avenue and left onto Dixon Drive houses, seemingly everywhere, were on fire. It was not until I reached Streeton Drive that I came across other traffic - all of

which was driving slowly, as it was still as dark as late evening with smoke.

Reaching my own home, my wife, kids, mother, mother-in-law and brother had gathered there. I was blackened, but uninjured, but had had an easier time than they, in the sense that I was on the scene and could do something. The trauma experienced by my family who could do nothing but sit and wait, without knowing, was something they'll never forget - and hopefully never experience again.

With fires threatening Lyons from two directions by this stage - north west and south, I had to turn around and go through the fire preparation process again, and psychologically lift myself for the possibility of defending my own home. My wife took my mother and our kids to the Phillip evacuation centre and returned to help me get ready. Some old friends of mine came over from Nth Canberra to help - much appreciated - but by about 7pm it was clear that the emergency had passed. The easterly wind change blew the closest of the fires back onto itself and some interstate fire fighters had reached the hill and doused it.

Later on the evening my wife retrieved my mother and kids from Narrabundah College Evacuation Centre where they'd been transferred. The kids were great and were asleep in the car when they got home. We put them and my mother to bed and by about 11pm we could relax... well as much as possible in the circumstances.

The house on Eucumbene Drive was saved - we were unbelievably lucky. My father stayed until about 6 the next morning and was probably one of the last to leave that section of the street.

Simon