

The Busbys Flat Bushfire Begins October 4, 2019

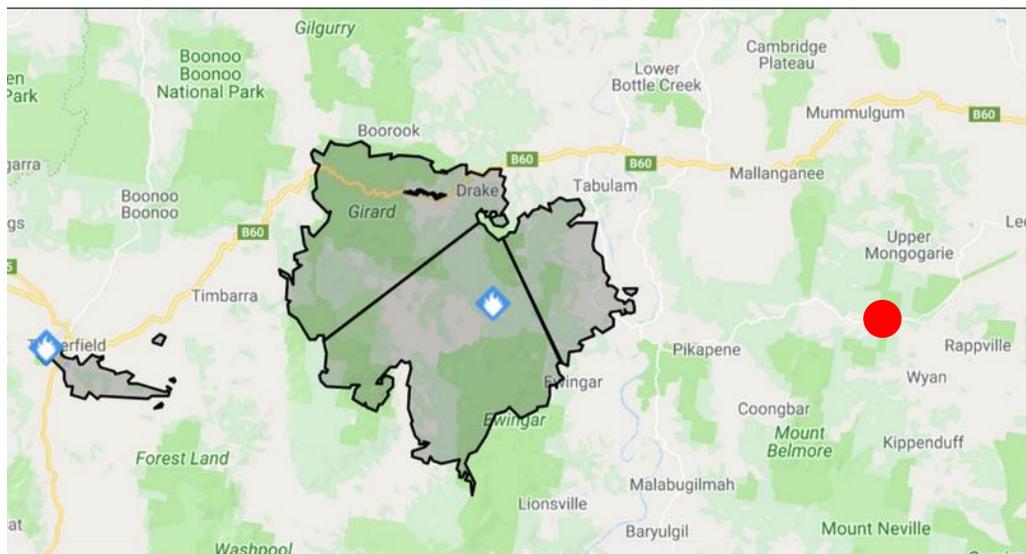
(30km East of the Long Gully bushfire)

Denis O'Bryan
Red Eagle Bushfire Protection Services
20 November 2019

Introduction

The aim of this study is to document the spread of this fire by making use of publicly available data from the fire agency, other government agencies and the media. The primary purpose is to seek to understand why it grew so large and to explore the respective role of weather, bushfire behaviour and fire agency policies in that growth, specifically, to identify policies and procedures that encouraged or prevented its growth. The secondary purpose is to record the impact it has on people and their property in the pathway of a running bushfire in severe weather, to contemplate their rights to remedy for unwanted life or property loss and to collect evidence to support the case for neighbourhood self-defence as a complementary bushfire prevention policy.

This bushfire begins on Friday October 4th on the Busbys Flat Road (red dot) while the Drake / Long Gully bushfire, some 30 km to the west, is still being blacked out to control lines.



Source RFS

Its size at first attack is not known, but not relevant in this study. Over the next few days, the firefighters burn it out to the surrounding tracks, growing it to over 600ha. It escapes control on Monday 7th at the south eastern tip, the day before a severe weather day is forecast.

The original bushfire could have been ignited by a ne'er-do-well or by lightning. Authorities deem the cause suspicious. Just after this fire destroyed houses in Rappville, the suspicion of a deliberate ignition was raised publicly by the RFS. A month later, RFS investigators and police believe the ignition was deliberate. <https://www.miragenews.com/busbys-flat-bushfire->

[being-treated-as-suspicious-northern-nsw/](#). In terms of liability, the cause of the original bushfire is irrelevant for remedy of damage in this case because the fire escaped after active intervention by fire authorities, and shifts duty of care to their hands.

The site of the bushfire origin is approx 150m elevation. The nearest weather stations are at Casino at 37m elevation about 30 km to the NE and the Tabulam Post Office, 25 km away to the NW on the Clarence River valley at 130m elevation. Casino and Lismore have the full suite of records long term rainfall, daily max / min temperature data, daily evaporation data and 9am and 3pm readings weather readings. Tabulam Post Office has long term rainfall records. Based on proximity and landform, the Casino weather is of most relevance to this fire ground.

Source data for this study uses updates from the Northern Star's rolling coverage (<https://www.northernstar.com.au/news> = *NS UPDATE*) as the framework and supplements it with other media coverage and Rural Fire Service (RFS) Tweets, and Bureau of Meteorology records. Sourced quotes are in blue. Author narrative in black. Author highlights in red.

Note: Sometimes FRS tweets are delayed or their date stamp does not match media reports. In these cases, we can reconstruct the fire's development to match primary local sources, ie, media reports.

Chronology by the day

Friday 4 October

Weather from 4th to 7th

All mornings are cool with high humidity and light winds. The 3pm weather between 4 and 7 October indicates the potential mid-afternoon fire behaviour. The common afternoon air flow is from east to west, which would push a fire towards the west. October 4 is very warm dry air with moderate wind from the NE. October 5 is cool moist air with moderate wind from ESE. The 6th is warmer with light winds from the north. The 7th is very hot dry air with light winds from the ENE.

Casino, New South Wales October 2019 Daily Weather Observations

Date	Day	Temps		Rain	Evap	Sun	Max wind gust			9 am			3 pm						
		Min °C	Max °C				Dir	Spd km/h	Time local	Temp °C	RH %	Cld g th	Dir	Spd km/h	MSLP hPa	Temp °C	RH %	Cld g th	Dir
1	Tu	14.6	23.3	0			ESE	50	12:01	19.7	62	SSE	11	1029.7	20.6	50	SSE	19	1028.0
2	We	9.5	25.9	0			ESE	39	15:36	19.4	52	ENE	7	1030.9	24.6	34	ESE	24	1025.8
3	Th	6.3	29.2	0			E	35	15:29	21.4	47	NW	11	1026.7	28.3	24	ESE	20	1024.7
4	Fr	6.6	32.3	0			E	35	16:23	22.5	47	NNW	7	1023.3	30.8	20	NE	19	1017.1
5	Sa	13.5	27.3	0			E	63	13:34	23.8	53	SSE	19	1021.5	21.8	59	ESE	22	1020.2
6	Su	11.8	30.2	0			E	37	16:24	19.4	64	WNW	6	1021.9	29.0	32	N	9	1015.0
7	Mo	10.6	39.2	0			N	41	21:25	20.9	69	NE	4	1014.4	36.1	23	ENE	15	1008.3

Fire and Events

Fire Origin

Fire agency crews “have been battling a bushfire on **Busbys Flat Road, Busbys Flat since Friday 4 October 2019**” *Mirage News* <https://www.miragenews.com/busbys-flat-bushfire-being-treated-as-suspicious-northern-nsw/>

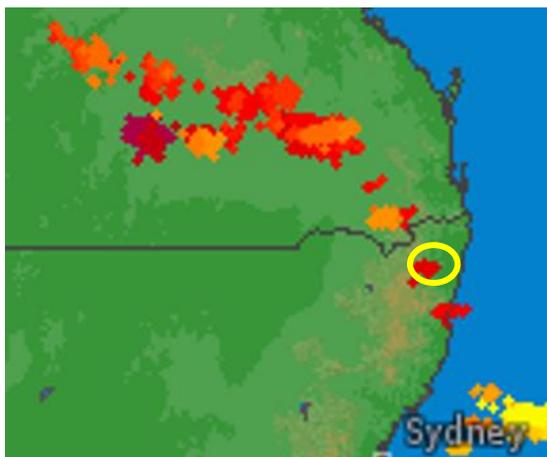


Source RFS

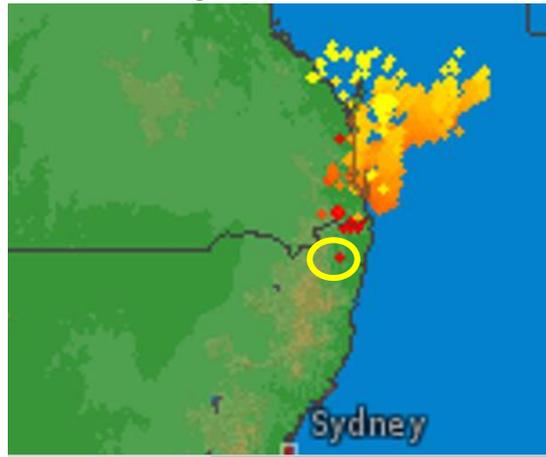
Cause

If the red symbol is an accurate version of the origin, the fire was ignited near a road, which supports the case for an illegal ignition. However, the possibility of lightning cannot be ruled out because there were two lightning storms in this area on 26 and 30 September, and nearby during 1 and 3 October. In drought conditions like here, a lightning ignition can smoulder unnoticed for several days.

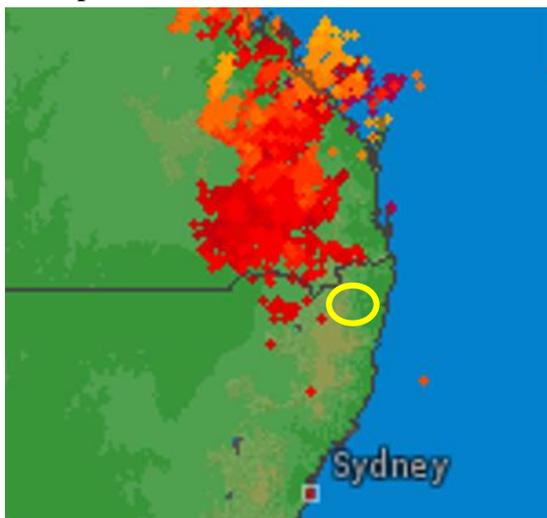
The following Charts are 24 hour totals of indicative lightning activity from <https://www.lightningmaps.org>, whose disclaimer highlights its non-accuracy by stating “We are **not** liable for the completeness, timeliness, quality and accuracy of the information on our website”. Nevertheless, the disclaimer implies that if lightning was in this area, their coverage could have missed some strike areas. Yellow circle is fire ground.



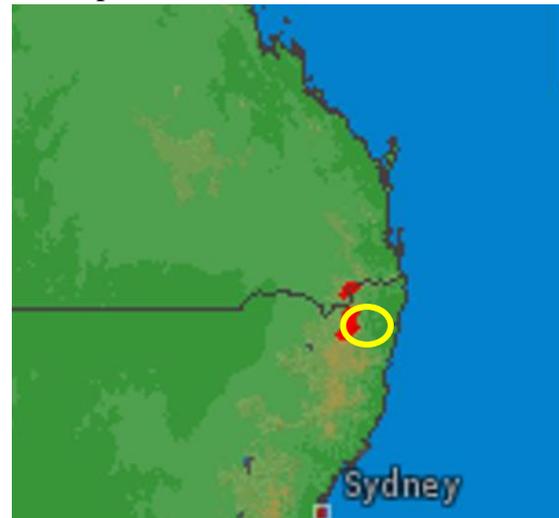
26 September 2019



30 September 2019



1 October 2019



3 October 2019

Monday 7 October

Weather

Today's afternoon weather at Casino and Lismore has an easterly / 23% RH air flow. Applethorpe has a westerly dry (10%) air flow.

It is probable that Applethorpe's air flow reached the fire ground because the spot fire is east of the containment line in IMAGE 1. The likely time of this event is 2pm in the afternoon. Whatever the correct time, the weather at the fire area has a westerly air flow.

Fire and Events

RFS Tweet – Busby Flat classified as “ADVICE” status

Busby Flat Rd Fire: A fire burning approx 15km west of Rappville broke containment late yesterday & is burning within the Mt Belmore State Forest. Today the fire is likely to burn under strong westerly winds towards the Old Tenterfield Rd in the Wyan, Wineshanty area. #NSWRFS



This ADVICE is date-stamped at 2.40pm on 7 Oct, but the text, suggests it is re-tweeted on 8 Oct.

The attached image is designated as IMAGE 1.

IMAGE 1 shows the first breach of their containment lines.

RFS supply IMAGE 1 to the media.

It clearly shows (1) the freshly ignited and active edges along tracks in yellow, (2) the multiple faded yellow hot spots in the recently burnt out area within the red line, and (3) the fresh bright yellow of the escaping fire tongue from the southern edge, complete with new spot fire.

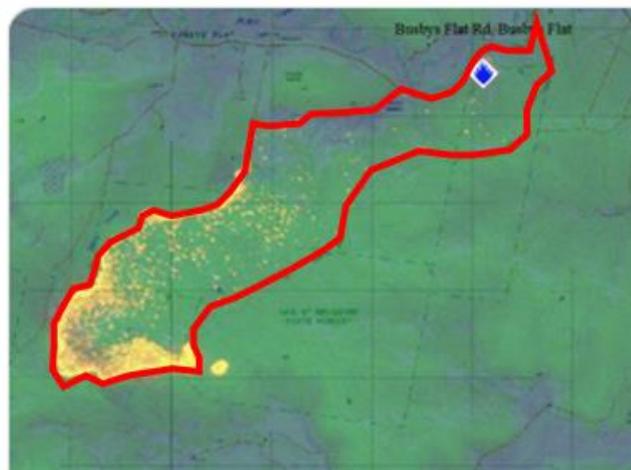
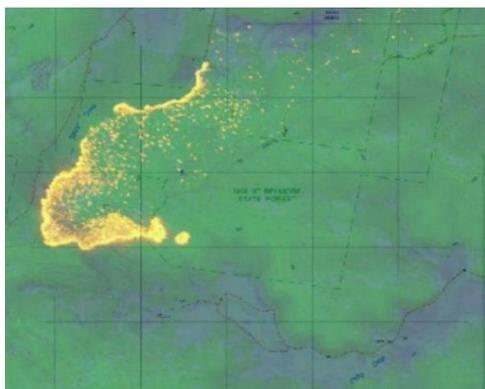
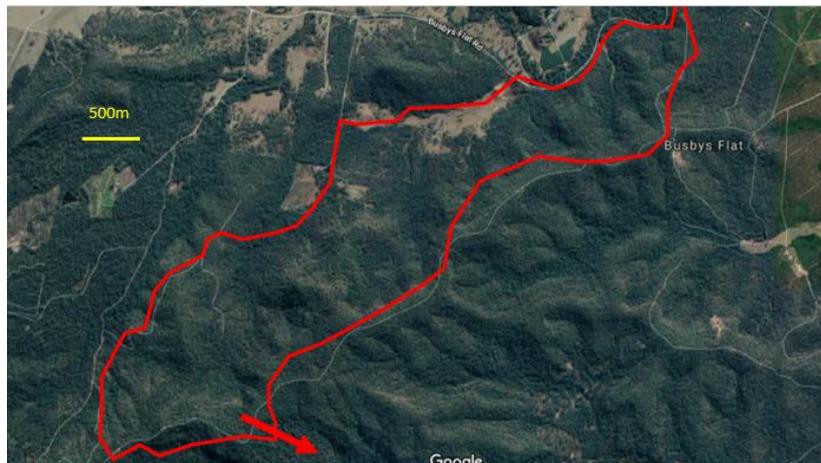


IMAGE 1 The burn out area is defined better by the red outline.

Deductions about IMAGE 1: The mass of faded hot spots suggests the firefighters completed the ignition of the entire red area since the 4th, and most has burnt out. We can deduce they have run a burn-out line along the northern and western tracks to secure the edge and let it run back into the burnt area. They continue the burn-out line to meet the ridge track along the SE edge as late as today (Monday the 7th). Somehow, this spot fire escapes to the east, perhaps helped by W winds.

Why 600ha? We can question why the fire fighters grew the fire to 600ha over three or four days. The area is in drought. The weather since the 4th has been essentially mild with a general easterly air flow, excellent for a burn out. But a burn out in the dry season requires heavy and continuous resourcing of the containment lines. This is OK for forestry workers who are paid to care for the whole forest estate, but is too much to expect from part-time volunteers. A best practice forest suppression response would have kept the fire small on the 4th. Why let it grow to 600 ha when a cheaper and far less time-consuming alternative exists?

IMAGE 1 is now plotted onto an aerial photo to show scaling and the lay of the land.



The red outline comfortably fits the ridge track in the south and the track system along the northern edge. The red arrow shows the first breakaway point on the southern ridge under pressure from a strengthening NW wind.

Comment about bushfire suppression requirements The dimensions of the red outline are approx 6 x 1km, approx 600ha, a total perimeter of at least 14 km. The length of very active edge is 4km. The edge most likely to breach is the 1km southern edge.

To prevent escape of a freshly lit edge in severe weather like tomorrow's forecast requires well planned and adequate skilled resources located on site and determined to stop escaping spot fires in adjacent unburnt forest.

The entire live edge should be blacked-out overnight as a determined effort. If it is, to stop tomorrow's inevitable escape of downwind spot fires requires at least two helitankers and an infrared spotter chopper to continuously patrol the southern boundary and downwind forest and adequate specialist dry firefighters to contain and blackout the spot fires on site. All should be on site early tomorrow morning and all fully briefed with coordinated response strategies.

If they are not provided, spot fires like that on IMAGE 1 will escape. A response of four trucks for 1km is adequate for patrolling a blacked-out area but inadequate to quieten flames

on a fresh vigorous edge in today's weather and inadequate to stop downwind spot fire spread beyond hose reach.

We can deduce from tomorrow's commentary that this level of suppression effort is not provided. The fire agency knows the forecast and knows that a fire escape will run to the east on a wide front through the forest and beyond into farm land. It can hit this fire hard tonight to hold it at 600ha, or it can let Nature have its way in the forest and they will catch it when it emerges into farmland. This strategy allows the fire to enter farmland against the wishes of the land owner, and to prevent damage to pasture and fences and stock would require a substantial and well-coordinated army of firefighters that the government will have to pay for. The prospect of litigation for damages also emerges. Why do it, when a cheaper alternative exists?

Tuesday 8 October

Weather

Today is a declared Total Fire Ban day, meaning very hot, very dry air and very windy. The day starts at Casino's with 9am weather of 28C and 43% RH with light (11kph) NW wind. Lismore also has a light northerly air flow in the mid 20C's with high humidity.

The high humidity air in the Richmond River valley is akin to an inversion with upper level hot dry air flowing above it. Upper level air flow is represented by Applethorpe's 9am air mass at 29C and 13% RH, with light NNW winds (9kph). This dry air mass is blown from inland. For example, Charleville's 3pm air mass since the 4th has been 10% RH and temperature mostly above mid 30C. Even after the wind change on the 8th, its RH remains around 10% for most of October.

At 10am the hotter air begins to mix down and by 11.30am, air flow on the ground in the valley is very hot in mid 30C's and strong (30+kph) from the NW. When this air flow hits the fire ground, it will suddenly invigorate the flames. When? The fireground is 100m higher elevation than the valley, suggesting the strong wind hits earlier than 10am. When we see the mid-morning map of the fire area (below), we can deduce a NW air flow has been pushing the two escaped tongues for several hours before mid-morning, perhaps drier than Casino's 43% and stronger than 11kph.

Deduced wind directions on fireground today:

From 12am to 9 / 10am	12 / 1pm	- Light wind from NW
From 9 / 10am to 12 / 1pm		- strong wind from NW
From 12 / 1pm to approx 6pm		- strong wind from W
From 6 - 6.30pm	into tomorrow	- Strong wind from S

Compare this with Lismore's weather pattern for today:

Before 10am – balmy, calm, high humidity.

From 10 – 11am until 3.30pm, the wind blows very hot (35C+) very dry air (10% RH) from NW to W at 30 to 40 kph.

At 3.30pm it blows this hot dry air just as strongly from the West until 7pm. From 7pm, a cool moist air mass blows from the south, well into tomorrow.

Casino's 3pm air flow today is 39C and 9% with strong (33kph) WNW wind.

Fire and Events

10:59am RFS raise concern level Watch & Act - Busbys Flat Rd, Busbys Flat
A bush fire is burning in the Busbys Flat Rd, Busbys Flat. The fire has burned more than 611 hectares and is out of control.

Current Situation: The fire is burning in the Mount Belmore State Forest and is moving in a south easterly direction towards Old Tenterfield Rd.

<http://www.ewn.com.au/alerts/nsw-bushfire-watch-act-busbys-436487.weather>

Late-morning NS UPDATE

Briefing 1 Rural Fire Service Far North Coast Superintendent David Cooke said "this morning we got the call to provide assistance to a bushfire at Busby's Flat which has already burned 611ha of bush. "We had a strike team of four fire trucks with crews from the Northern Rivers and Far North Coast and were on their way within an hour."

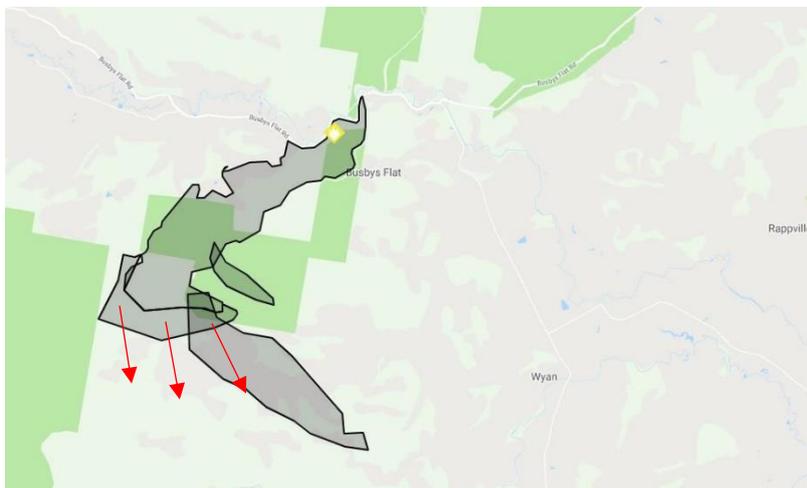
Supt Cook said the incident which is on the RFS Fires Near Me website was called in by a couple of people who reported smoke. "It was called into us at 9.48am today that there was smoke in the vicinity," he said. "It is being investigated."

Supt. Cook reminded everyone that it is a Total Fire Ban

Comment: If the only resources on the fire this morning are the four trucks that will arrive late morning, the fire edge is sadly under-resourced and this explains why the fire escapes.

Briefing 2 Original story: NSW RURAL Fire Service have upgraded the Busby's Flat Rd Fire to Watch & Act.

RFS Superintendent Michael Brett said the fire is burning out of control and firefighters are now in property-protection mode



A bushfire at Busbys Flat has broken containment lines and is now at a Watch & Act advice level. NSW RFS

"We have 4m plus flames as the fire has taken a significant run this morning in a south-easterly direction along Old Tenterfield Rd," he said.

"Currently we are moving resources into the area which are being supported by two fixed wing aircraft and a water-bucket helicopter."

Supt Brett said the fire is very difficult to fight as it is roaring through rough and rugged terrain. "It's burning in country we can't access easily," he said.

Advice: Residents in the area of Old Tenterfield Rd near Wyan, Wineshanty and Kippenduff should monitor the situation and follow their bush fire survival plan.

Comment The RFS release of this fire map at this time means the fire has escaped control of suppression resources and is now under the full control of the strengthening winds. The map shows the entire SW semicircle (2km long – red arrows on map)) has crossed the containment line. In addition, a 4 – 5km long tongue extends from near where the spot fire began on IMAGE 1. This outcome shows that suppression had no influence on containing the firefighter's containment lines. Fire fighters who build containment lines that extend the fire area are duty bound to retain control of them. Not to do so indicates lack of skills or resources or commitment on the fire line, for which command level is accountable.

11.30am, NS UPDATE: A BUSHFIRE burning at Busbys Flat Rd has been upgraded to an emergency warning. The RFS has advised there has been an increase in fire activity and, under strong westerly winds, the fire is moving in an easterly direction towards Old Tenterfield Rd.



A bushfire at Busbys Flat has been upgraded to emergency warning level.

12.03pm, NS UPDATE: AMAZING aerial footage shows the spread of the fire burning at Busbys Flat. The Rural Fire Service posted the footage, saying firefighters are working to slow the spread of the fire burning in the vicinity of Seery Rd and Phillip Swamp Rd in the Mount Belmore State Forest. Ground crews are supported by aircraft to protect isolated and rural homes in the area.

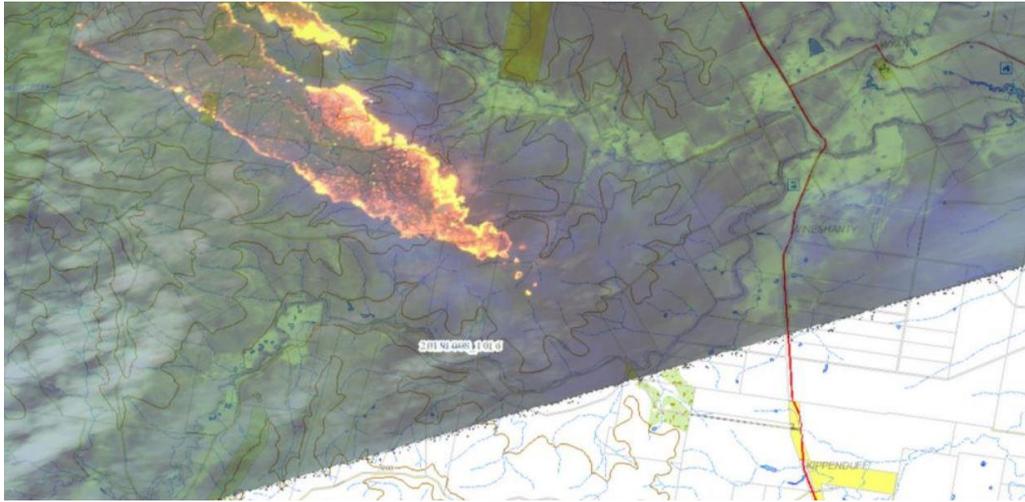


IMAGE 2 An aerial image showing the Busbys Flat Rd bushfire.

Comment The 4+km long tongue is channelling through forest and pine plantations along a gully parallel to the NW wind. IMAGE 2 shows spot fires being thrown up to 500m ahead. After IMAGE 2 was taken, the fire made no further progress towards the SE. This may have been due to change of wind direction to a Westerly, or the fire may have run into a recently fuel reduced area. The aerial photo below shows many areas of scorched forest, eg, evidence of a previous fire. However, until this can be verified, this study will assume that the Westerly wind hit the fireground soon after, eg, between 12 and 1pm.

12.20pm NS UPDATE: TWO 737s are on their way from Coffs Harbour to help firefighting crews as the Busbys Flat Fire is expected to impact on properties along Old Tenterfield Rd by 1pm today. RFS Superintendent Michael Brett said the fire was gaining traction and they have called in for reinforcements.

"The fire has doubled in size over the past few hours to 1150ha," he said. "The RFS has put out an Emergency Warning for all residents on Old Tenterfield Rd, as we expect the fire to impact within an hour."

"The RFS has put out an Emergency Warning for all residents on Old Tenterfield Rd, as we expect the fire to impact within an hour."

Mr Brett said residents in the area of Old Tenterfield Rd near Wyan and Wineshanty it is now too late to leave.

He advised them to take shelter when the fire arrives and protect yourself from the heat of the fire.

"We are aiming to keep the fire to the western side of Old Tenterfield Rd," he said.

"As this fire is continuing to ramp up, we will soon have six aircraft at the fire including two Large Air Tankers which are on route to lay some lines of fire retardant to give us a buffer between the properties."

1.30pm, NS UPDATE: THE fire at Busbys Flat has now crossed Old Tenterfield Road, moving in an easterly direction towards Old Wyan Road.

2.20pm, NS UPDATE: FIRE continues to burn in an easterly direction in the vicinity of Wineshanty towards Myrtle Creek and Rappville. Residents in Myrtle Creek and Rappville should seek shelter as the fire approaches and continue to monitor for embers and spot fires ahead of the main fire.

2.46pm, NS UPDATE: SUMMERLAND Way near Rappville is being impacted by smoke and motorists are advised to exercise caution.

3.23pm, NS UPDATE: SUMMERLAND Way near Rappville has been closed due to the bushfire burning nearby.

4.20pm, NS UPDATE: THE fire is burning in the area of Rappville, Wyan, The Island, Myrtle Creek, Wineshanty, and Mount Belmore State Forest. The fire is moving quickly in an easterly direction and has crossed the Summerland Way.



The Busbys Flat Rd fire is approaching Rappville. NSW RFS

Comment: The inset clearly shows two separate fire fronts running in tandem along separate pathways. The leading one has low flames, suggesting it is in grassland. The rear one has taller flames, suggesting it is in forest.

4.45pm, NS UPDATE: FIREFIGHTERS are at the Rappville school, where a number of residents are sheltering from the approaching bushfire. The Rural Fire Service says roads may be cut off and unsafe to use. "The fire's spreading quickly between Summerland Way and Bungawalbin," the NSW RFS

Comment There is one fire front approaching Rappville at the same time as another fire front is 6+ km further south west. Separate fire fronts are attacking the Tarmac sawmill and the neighbour's property. Thus, there are several fire fronts running to the west independently, but in tandem.

5.30pm, NS UPDATE: A NUMBER of homes and buildings have been destroyed by a bushfire in the Rappville area.

5.44pm, NS UPDATE: AT LEAST eight homes have been lost in the village of Rappville, with the fire heading east towards Myrtle Creek and Main Camp. RFS Superintendent Michael Brett said many people living near Rappville had self-evacuated to Rappville School which was being protected by resources from the RFS, including a strike force team, Fire & Rescue NSW and State Forestry. He said eight houses, the hall and other buildings in the village had been lost to fire.

Supt Brett said the fire was ongoing and they were not yet aware of the full extent of the fire damage outside of Rappville.

He said strong wind, downed powerlines and trees made it too dangerous to get more resources into the area.

He said the fire had now moved past Rappville and had already reached Elliotts Rd. He said the fire was heading east towards Myrtle Creek and Main Camp and urged anyone who did not need to be there, to evacuate if it was safe to do so.

Summary of fire chronology:



White circle = Rappville township, Red / white circle = sawmill,
Fire behaviour symbols: Blue line = fire edge Oct 7 (= IMAGE 1), green line = fire edge 11.30am on 8 Oct (= IMAGE 2) Oct 8, yellow line = fire edge at approx 6pm Oct 8 (= IMAGE 3 below).
Green arrow = indicative pathway of separate tandem fire fronts. Time stamps = fire front site
Time tags are based on times reported in media.

Comment Time tags are based on times reported in media. There is probably a delay between actual time and reporting time, but without more evidence, we will have to use their times.

The references pinpoint the fire front arrival at Rappville around 5pm, but spotting into the town properties may have occurred earlier. Based on town layout, the fire front ran through the paddocks and western woodland as a continuous flame wave, but stopped on the outskirts of the town and threw embers into the town from the woodland area. The flame wave continued around the town and resumed in the eastern paddocks. IMAGE 3 below captures its location 5 km east of the town. We can estimate the average windspeed at 30 kph, and estimate fire speed through the paddocks at 5 kph or so.

6.42pm NS UPDATE: CURRENT fire situation:

Rappville

The fire is moving quickly in an easterly direction and has crossed the Summerland Way. There are reports of a number of homes or buildings being destroyed by the fire in the Rappville area.

7.41pm Channel 9 Long Gully bushfire broke containment line at Ewingbar and crossed the Clarence River at approx **3pm**.

8.49pm NS UPDATE: THE below photo shows how close the Long Gully Road fire and Busbys Flat Road fires are burning to each other.

The below photo shows how close the Long Gully Road fire & Busbys Flat Road fires are burning to each other. A number of spot fires are starting ahead of the Long Gully fire, south of the Busbys Flat Road fire. #nswrfs



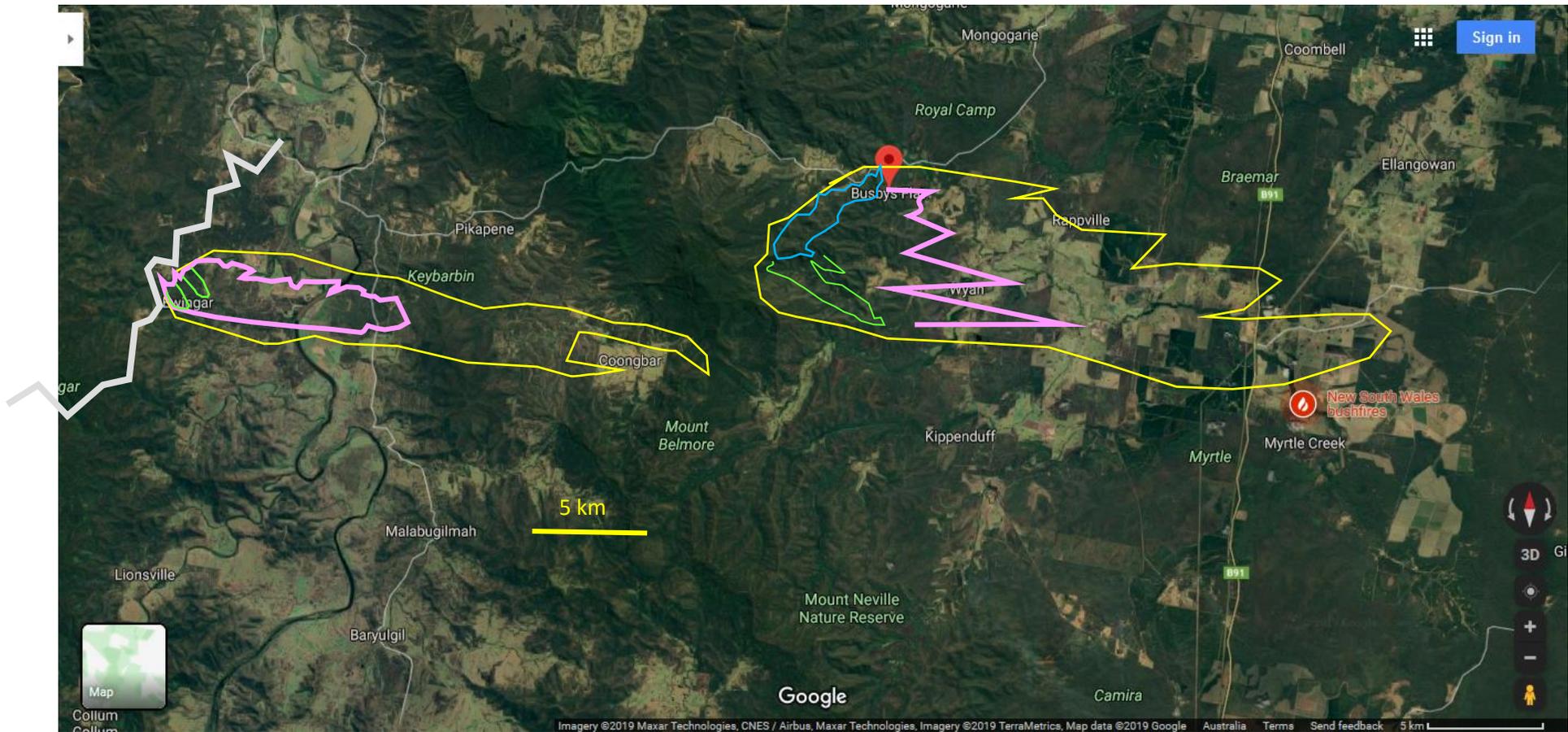
IMAGE 3, Source RFS

Comment IMAGE 3 show the freshest flame is on the north side of the outline. This means the wind is changing from the Westerly to a Southerly.

Based on time for the fire front to travel past Rappville, estimated time of IMAGE 3 is 6 – 6.30 pm.

[Check: If fire front hit Rappville at around 5pm and it took an hour or so to travel another 5km. Possible that W winds were moderating by then]

IMAGE 3 is now transposed onto an aerial photo to show estimated co-location and spread pattern of the Ewingar escape from the Long Gully fire and the Busbys Flat fire.



Blue = 7pm on Oct 7, Green = 11.30am on Oct 8, Pink = 3pm on Oct 8, Yellow = 6pm on Oct 8
Grey = approx containment line of Long Gully fire

9.24pm NS UPDATE: A FIRE has significantly impacted the townships of Rappville, Busby Creek, Coombell and Myrtle Creek, near Casino today.

9.27pm NS UPDATE: A MAN has been injured trying to protect his property from fire at Busbys Flat.

The Westpac Life Saver Rescue Helicopter responded at 5.35pm this evening with the Helicopter Critical Care Medical Team to a reported 62-year-old male who suffered superficial burns to one arm and both legs trying to protect his property from fire at Busbys Flat near Casino.

The patient and property were very isolated and the helicopter was able to land nearby.

10.03pm NS UPDATE: AN EMERGENCY warning remains in place for the Busbys Flat Rd, Busbys Flat.

The bush fire is burning at Busbys Flat, Wyan, Myrtle Creek and Rappville and has burned more than 13200 hectares and is out of control.

Current Situation

A wind change has moved across the fire ground. The fire is now moving quickly in a northly direction towards Coombell, Ellangowan, . It has also crossed the Summerland Way and is currently impacting Duke Road and Neileys Lagoon Road, West Bungawalbin.

This fire is dangerous and has continued spreading quickly.

There are reports of a number of homes or buildings being destroyed by the fire in the Rappville area.

After 10pm RFS Tweet feed and accompanying feedback (Note Tweet date incorrectly states Oct 7)

This exchange happened after 10pm. The Tweet time compares with Carol's private Tweet, which also dates it Oct 7.

The point of this inclusion is that that the RFS message was relevant 5 hours before, when the fire front wave went through Rappville, yet the RFS person replied as if it was happening at 10pm. A person's life was involved. If the time of the exchange is really 10pm, the RFS response may have been inappropriate.

10:07 PM - 7 Oct 2019 RFS Tweet

EMERGENCY WARNING: Busbys Flat Rd (Richmond Valley LGA). Dangerous fire in Wyan, The Island, Rappville and Myrtle Creek areas. Fire is spreading quickly. If you are in the path of this fire, you are at risk. Seek shelter if the fire impacts. #nswrfs #nswfires #alert

New conversation

Carol Duncan

Verified account @carolduncan

Oct 7

Replying to @NSWRFS

Recommendation on best place to shelter in Rappville? School would be good but isn't open.

1 reply 0 retweets 3 likes

NSW RFS

Verified account @NSWRFS

Oct 7

Firefighters are at Rappville School. A number of residents are sheltering at the school. Roads may be cut off and unsafe to use.

1 reply 1 retweet 6 likes

New conversation

Carol Duncan

Verified account @carolduncan

Oct 7

Thank you.

1 reply 0 retweets 2 likes

💧 Joan Evatt

@Boeufblogginon

Oct 7

Gawd woman. Stay safe.

1 reply 0 retweets 2 likes

Carol Duncan

Verified account @carolduncan

Oct 7

I'm safe, but my Dad is 83, unwell, hiding in his shed (opposite the school) - distressed. I can't contact him. :(

2 replies 2 retweets 4 likes

💧 Joan Evatt

@Boeufblogginon

Oct 7

If there are RFS people opposite in a safe zone, can they not just go and get him? Jesus, you must be worried sick. Hope all will be OK.

2 replies 0 retweets 2 likes

Carol Duncan

Verified account @carolduncan

Oct 7

They're checking on him. I'm so grateful.

1 reply 0 retweets 3 likes

💧 Sandra

@abissicus

Oct 8

That is so scary for him Carol...hope he's safe now. 😊

1 reply 0 retweets 3 likes

Carol Duncan

Verified account @carolduncan

Oct 8

He is incoherent with grief and shock. I'm so scared for him.

2 replies 0 retweets 2 likes

💧 Sandra

@abissicus

Oct 8

It's so hard being away from him at this time...my ❤️ goes out to you both.

10:39 PM - 7 Oct 2019 RFS Tweet

Busbys Flat Rd (Richmond Valley LGA). The fire's spreading quickly between Summerland Way and Bungawalbin.

Rappville just after ember attack

Courtesy ABC on line



yellow arrow panorama



red arrow panorama



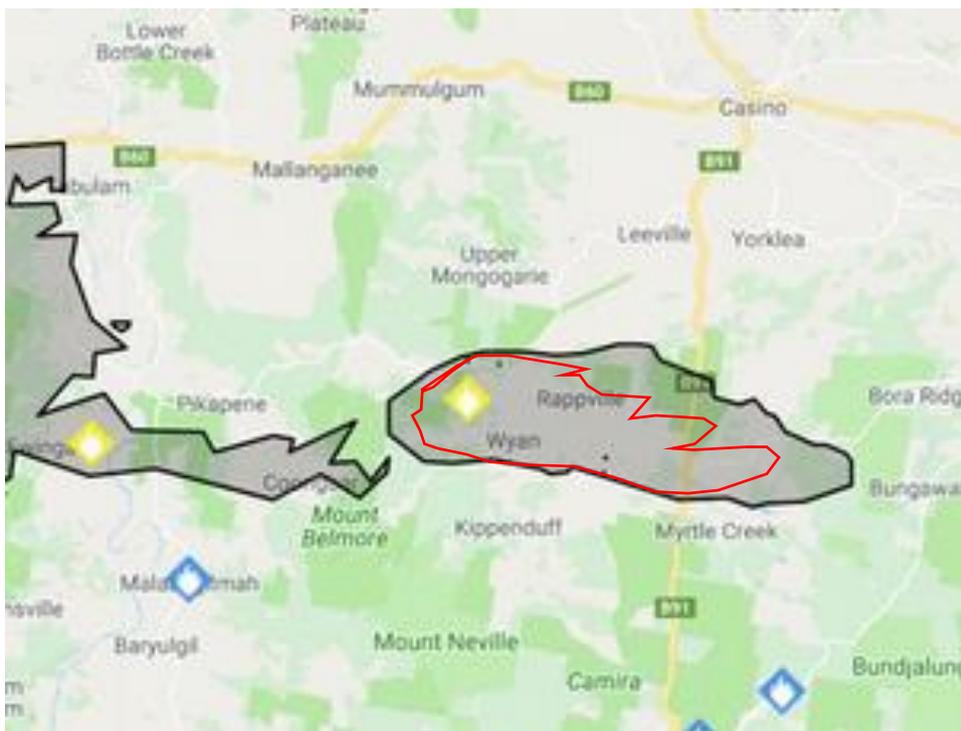
Observations Stationary flames only, no running flame in bare paddocks or on wide roads, wide zero-flame expanses, one house burns, another does not. Safe. A bit of smoke. Fire fighter watches as house burns. This house fire started with a flame the size of a match that was not extinguished when small.

Wednesday October 9

Fire and Events

Daily Telegraph <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news>
POLICE are hunting for the person who may have deliberately lit the inferno that has destroyed 30 homes

The Busbys Flat Rd fire in Busbys Flat, Richmond Valley & Long Gully Rd fire in Drake, Tenterfield have merged. This fire area spans a width of 64km. These remain at Watch & Act. Continue to monitor & know what you'll do if the fire threatens. #nswrfs #nswfires



Red outline is location of fire perimeter at 6pm on Tues 8th at the time of S wind change

The RFS confirmed that up to 30 homes were lost in Rappville as 80km/h easterly winds, daytime temperatures of up to 40C and low humidity stoked the previously contained Busbys Flat fire.

Witnesses say smoke from the fires turned the sky pitch black by 3pm on Tuesday, as emergency services warned residents to take shelter as it was “too late to leave.” The strong winds caused havoc for firefighters by blowing embers and creating spot fires that threatened properties before the main firefront even arrived.

ABC on line

Fifteen homes have been destroyed or damaged in the Rappville area, according to the Rural Fire Service (RFS).

Richmond Valley Mayor Robert Mustow said the community was facing "challenging times". "The community hall is gone. The hotel was saved, they tell me it was caught on fire a couple of times but it was extinguished," he said.

"For the farmers, if they have stock left, there's going to be no feed.

"20,000 hectares — that's a lot of grazing land lost.

"The timber side of things, a lot of that will never come back."

ABC on line

"The community hall is gone. The hotel was saved, they tell me it was caught on fire a couple of times but it was extinguished," he said.

As the fire approached, many residents who had left it too late to leave took shelter at Rappville Primary School.

Principal Kathleen Collis said about 50 residents, including some livestock, used the building.

"We had goats who took up residence in the boy's toilets, we had dogs in our staff room, I think there were sheep as well," she said.

One resident, who wished only to be known as Tanya, said she and her partner were holed up at the school until midnight, as RFS volunteers worked hard to keep the fire at bay.

"Everyone had fire extinguishers and were putting out all the spot fires," she said.

"The fires were doing the major fire hazards and ... I was on the phone to Mum and I was saying 'This house is gone, that house is gone, another block has gone'."

The school's oval continues to smoulder, showing just how close the fire came.

<p><i>Interpretation:</i> Spot fire attack so small enough for people put them out in safety, Rapid spot fire ignition means highly flammable fuel lying around, Oval smouldering = spot fire ignitions after random ember dumping, People able to shelter, eg, in school, in buildings The firefighters focus on “major hazards”</p>
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Inverell Times

The neighbouring Busbys Flat fire - which has since joined up with the Drake blaze - only started on Friday evening and police believe it was deliberately lit.

Eight homes were destroyed in the Drake inferno on Tuesday. At least 21 homes were lost in the Busbys Flat fire with half thought to be in the tiny hamlet of Rappville.

In total across the region, 72 outbuildings were destroyed, according to the Rural Fire Service's most recent count. Some 23 were damaged.

Two community facilities were razed - including the Rappville Town Hall, according to locals - and seven were damaged.

Thursday 11 October

Fire and Events

2pm NS UPDATE: A TOTAL of 45 homes have now been confirmed destroyed following the bush fires in northern NSW this week.

NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) Building Impact Assessment teams are continuing their assessment of impacted properties.

Crews have now surveyed more than 550 buildings and confirmed the following losses:

- 45 homes destroyed, 11 damaged, 166 in the direct area of the fire saved
- 5 facilities including a hall destroyed, 9 damaged, 18 saved
- 87 outbuildings destroyed, 32 damaged, 191 saved

"BIA teams are continuing their assessments, and these numbers will change as more remote areas are inspected," the RFS said.

"Of the homes destroyed, 37 were impacted by the Busbys Flat Road fire.

"Eight properties were destroyed by the Long Gully Road fire this week, in addition to 24 which were destroyed last month.

"Across the bush fire season to date, a total of 89 homes have been destroyed in NSW."

2.44pm NS UPDATE: CASINO Detectives are asking for anyone who had property damaged or destroyed in this week's bushfires to attend their local police station.

They would like you to fill out a damaged property questionnaire, to help them assess the damage and collate evidence.

Sydney Morning Herald <https://www.smh.com.au>

The "large" bushfire around Busbys Flat Rd in Richmond Valley has so far burned 40,800 hectares between Busbys Flat and Bungawalbin, and remains out of control.

"Firefighters and aircraft have slowed the spread of the fire, and are being assisted by milder conditions," the RFS said about midday.

Saturday 11 – Fri 18 October RAIN

Fire and Events

RFS Tweet



Recorded Rainfall

Date	Applethorpe	Tabulam	Casino
October 11	3mm		
October 12	22.8mm	20mm	10mm
October 13	3.8mm		1.6mm
October 15	4.6mm		
October 17			13mm
October 18	5.4mm		

Saturday 12 October

Fire and Events

ABC on line *Impact of fires*

The Tarmac Group is promising to rebuild the multi-million-dollar sawmill, which employs more than 150 people.

Richmond Valley Mayor Robert Mustow estimates the impact of the fires on the local economy could run "into the tens of millions of dollars".

"It's not only the mill, it's the livestock industry, farming, cropping — it's devastating," he said.

Hundreds of livestock are believed to have been killed, with many needing to be euthanised. Robert Smith says his neighbour, who owns 200 acres next to the sawmill, lost \$20,000 worth of cows.

The fire came frighteningly close to Mr Smith's property, which was protected by fire trucks until 4:00am on Wednesday.

"We've got a heap of pine trees around the place and if the wind had changed — which it was doing yesterday, it kept swirling ... from nearly every direction — it could have been a different story," he said.

ABC on line

Before the fire hit, Mr Robertson ducked into his Nandabah Street property to collect some nighties and hospital paperwork for his partner.

The fire front arrived "like a tornado" from the west, giving him no time to save anything else inside.

Mr Robertson said the fire was so fast and the wind so strong that "you just couldn't defend against it".

"The place next door started going first and the fires couldn't stop it and that was it — it just spread from there into my place," he said.

Interpretation Sudden gust / strong wind blast laden with embers

The speed of ignition suggests a lot of fine flammable fuel on / under house next door

Two doors down, the Rappville pub was copping a beating as embers started to burn the top of the timber building, but firefighters managed to save the pub with several waterbombing runs.

Interpretation Peppered by embers / dousing them with water is effective

The Tarmac timber mill, 16 kilometres west in Wyan, wasn't so lucky.
The last of its employees left an hour before the fire arrived.
The building is now twisted metal, woodchips still smoulder out the back, while other piles of milled timber remain unscathed.

Interpretation Embers are too small to ignite solid timber, but they ignite flammable fuels inside sheds.

No self-defenders on site ?? Where are the fireies? This is a big local employer. They were next door. There are not enough firefighters to go around.

Wednesday 16 October

Fire and Events

Canberra times

Firefighters have confirmed 64 homes were razed in bushfires that swept through northern NSW last week, with more than 150 outbuildings also destroyed.

The Busbys Flat and Drake fires are still burning and are currently at advice level, one week after blazes swept through the area south of Casino.

The NSW Rural Fire Service on Wednesday said it had completed most inspections of fire-affected areas and confirmed 64 homes were lost.

The RFS said 44 homes were destroyed by the Busbys Flat blaze and 19 in the Drake fire, which claimed the lives of Bob Lindsay, 77, and his wife Gwen Hyde, 68.

Another home was lost at the Purgatory Creek fire at Jackadgery, west of Grafton.

In addition, 153 outbuildings and seven other facilities were destroyed.

RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons said there had been more than 5000 bush and grass fires across NSW this season, with a million hectares of land burnt out.

A total fire ban has been declared for the NSW far north coast, north coast, Greater Hunter, New England, Northern Slopes and north western regions on Thursday due to forecast hot and windy conditions.

The RFS has advised residents that actively defended and well-prepared homes can provide safety during a fire.

Wednesday 23 October Under Control

The Busbys Flat Rd Fire started on Friday 4 Oct. and burnt more than 50,700 ha of bush and farm land. After weeks of exhausting work by hundreds of firefighters and community members, the fire was declared under control this morning. [#nswrfs](#) [@frnsw](#) [@OEHmedia](#) [@VisitNSWForests](#)

source RFS

Wednesday 6 November

Gladstone Observer A CORONIAL inquest will be held to investigate the bushfire which devastated the tiny village of *Rappville*

Conclusion

If a public poll had been taken the night of the 4th October on this question - **Do we keep the fire at 10 ha or do we burn it out to the tracks?** What would be the response?

If a public poll had been taken the night before the 8th October on this question - **Do we keep the fire at 600 ha or do we let it run and catch it in the paddocks?** What would be the response?

The point is this. It does not matter what the people with destroyed property think about bushfire suppression strategies. The outcome is what matters. This outcome is disastrous because it is avoidable. The initial fire should have been kept small on the 4th. But it was not. The escaped spot fire should have been stopped before the 8th. But it was not. The 6 km eastern boundary of the burn-out fire also escaped. They should have prevented that as well. They should have thought of these things before they lit up the 600ha. But they evidently did not.

If local people knew how vulnerable they were to the outcome of failed suppression strategies, and if each property and settlement were prepared at base level 101 for a severe bushfire attack and occupants prepared for active self-defence, the danger flames would be kept well away, the people would safely extinguish the small spot fires, the fire attack wave would come and go like a hail storm and their assets would survive and they would resume their interrupted activities soon after. The outcome would be independent of suppression strategies. But it was not.

This does not happen here because there is no catalyst to make it happen. The fire agencies have their policies and procedures but they do not include organising the local properties for self-defence. They do however include disaster-response policies like trust us and obey our instructions if a fire occurs. Their instructions are typically evacuation related, a strategy that can exacerbate house loss rate. At the same time, fire agencies are aware their capability to protect houses in unprepared surroundings under severe bushfire attack is more a hope than a reality. Meanwhile, individual property owners are not encouraged by any authority to consider self-defence as an option. The missing catalyst is a government level goal of zero house loss in severe bushfire attack. Indeed, a towards zero goal would be useful. That would re-focus the fire agency policies and procedures and encourage property owner focus on preparedness and self-reliance.

Meanwhile, back to the disaster. People don't usually sue fire agencies, so they will probably cop it sweet. Fire fighters were putting themselves on the front line to do what they could. Insurers will pay out the least they can get away with. Some people are uninsured. Houses and sheds will be rebuilt by local tradies. Some people will have mental trauma for years.

If people know the fire agencies play these games of chance and know the fire agencies physically cannot protect most properties in the runaway fire's pathway, would they self-protect?

In this level of severe bushfire attack, the fire agency is virtually helpless, despite a massive force of 74,000 volunteers and massive budget. The latest published house loss rate for this RFS policy model this fire season around 20%. It is much lower than the house loss rate under the then CFA policy model in the Black Saturday fires of Victoria in 2009 (average 39%, range by fire 14 – 60%, but individual towns were higher, eg, Marysville 90%).

Would the sawmill have better self-protected?

Would the town of Rappville have prepared itself better against the running flame and ember attack?

In the first hundred years of Victoria's history, there was no fire agency. **In those days, rural people let fires run in the surrounding bush for weeks and months because there was no law or mechanism to extinguish them.** Communities and properties prepared to self-protect each year for when severe weather invigorated these fires into infernos and pushed one their way. They watched the smoke. They had no forecasts, no fire brigades, no fire maps, no phones. They sent a messenger on a fast horse off to the next town – “there's one comin' your way”. They teamed up and fought together.

The choice today for the citizen is this - rely on the fire agencies policies in NSW and you have a 20% chance of house loss, or complement it with self-protection and aim for a zero chance of house loss.

POSTSCRIPT

What is the Busbys Flat fire ??

Google includes the Ewingar escape with the Busbys Flat fire, despite the Ewingar escape running into Busbys (see below).

The Long Gully fire is missing from the Google map. We have included it as the dotted blue line below. The Ewingar tongue (blue arrow) escaped from the Long Gully fire on 8 October and ran into the Busbys Flat fire as shown.

No, it's not out yet??

The map below shows that both the Ewingar escape and the Busbys Flat perimeters have grown considerably since the rains of mid-October, including a thousand extra ha between 13th and 19th of November (see red circle).

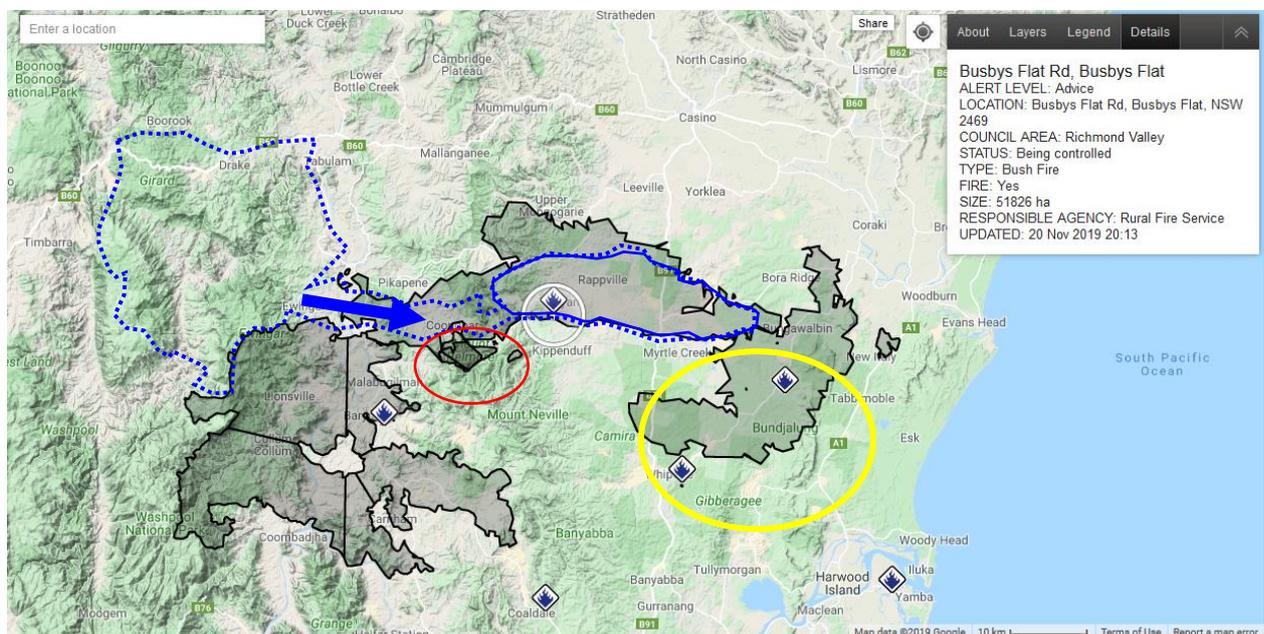
Did the Busbys Flat fire cause the 50,000 ha Little Italy fire to its east. Its yellow area grew substantially in the last few days.

RFS seems to tolerate uncontrolled perimeters in forest areas but at the same time warns the public to enact their plans when each severe weather day is forecast.

Their policy of letting fires burn the forests into the summer months till the rains come is risking property loss. [Is this done with or without approval of forest managers?]

- If the rains come before the next severe weather day, risk is forgiven.
- Every day the rains are delayed, the drier the drought, the worse the outcome when each next severe weather day comes.

This seems an unacceptably high-risk strategy for unprepared rural houses because the fire agencies well know their capacity to protect assets and suppress severe weather bushfires is very limited. But if forewarned about their strategy, rural properties can prepare themselves for self-defence and defeat the bushfire threat.



Blue line is Busby fire perimeter on October 9. Blue dotted line is Long Gully fire on 9 October

Fire information[Fires Near Me](#)**Major Fire Updates**[Hazard Reductions](#)[Fire Danger Ratings and
Total Fire Bans](#)[Bush Fire Danger Period and
Fire Permits](#)[Prevent bush fire arson](#)[Report a cigarette butt
tossler](#)[Emergency information](#)[Home](#) [Fire information](#) [Major Fire Updates](#) [Major Fire Update Details](#)**Major Fire Updates****Advice - Busbys Flat Road, Busbys Flat (Richmond Valley LGA) 2019-11-19
07:53**

Posted: 2019-11-19 07:53

A bush fire is burning in the Mount Belmore State Forest in and around the Busbys Flat, area. The fire is currently more than 51,820 hectares in size and is being controlled.

Current Situation

- › The fire is burning in the Mt Belmore State Forest, Carwong State Forest and Braemar State Forest area.
- › There was an increase of fire activity on the southern edge of the fire on Sunday afternoon in the Wyan Creek, Seery Road area.
- › These conditions have now eased.
- › The fire continues north of the Bulls Nest.

Advice

- › Those in the area of **Wyan Creek and Bulls Nest** near Seery Road, monitor conditions. Take advice from firefighters in the area.
- › Check and follow your Bush Fire Survival Plan. If you do not have a plan, decide what you will do if the situation changes. Leaving early is your safest option.

If you are threatened by fire

- › Do not be in the path of the fire.
- › Protect yourself from the heat of the fire. Wear protective clothing and footwear. Cover all exposed skin.
- › If the fire impacts, seek shelter in a solid structure to protect yourself from the heat of the fire.