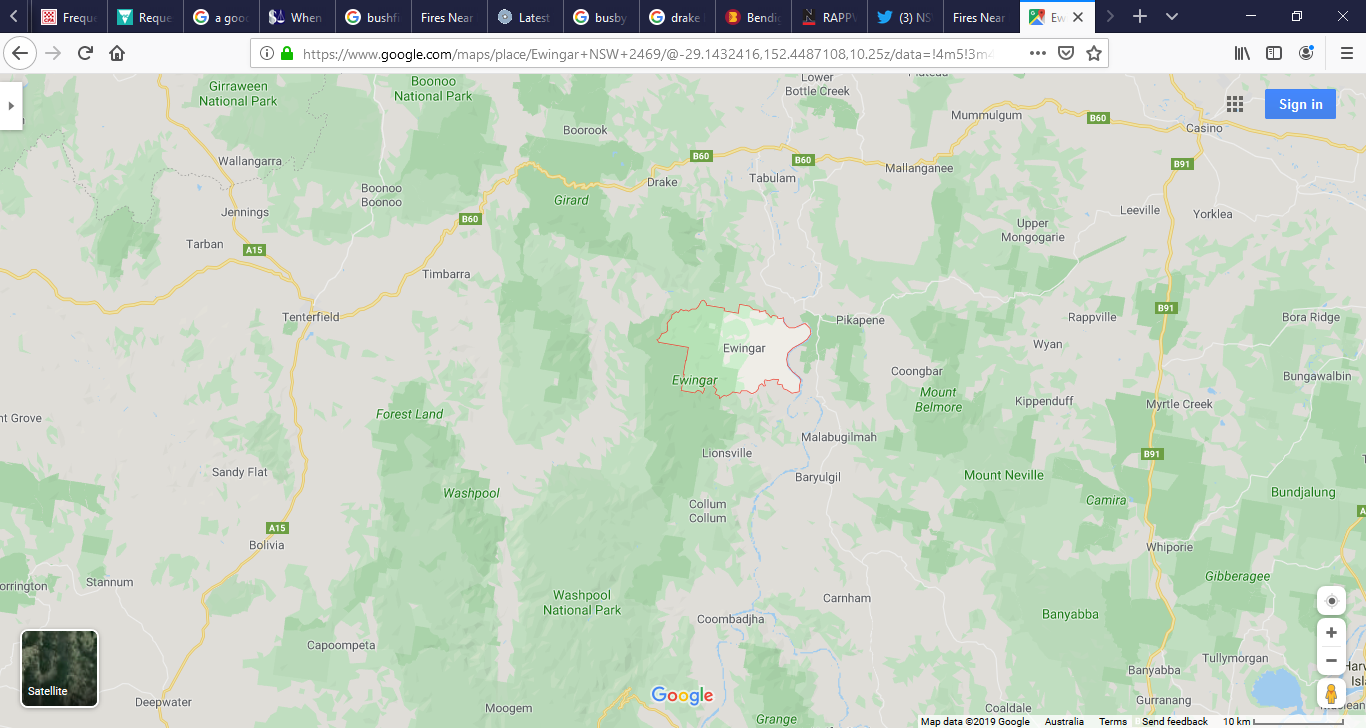
**Long Gully Bushfire 2019 / 2020 Fire Season**

**Initial fire area - 5 September = 19 ha**

Here is where the fire started. Red dot.



19 ha is approx 600m x 300m. Fire perimeter = 2 km. Theoretically, a skilled overnight crew of 25 could comfortably contain and mop up this fire before the winds spring up.

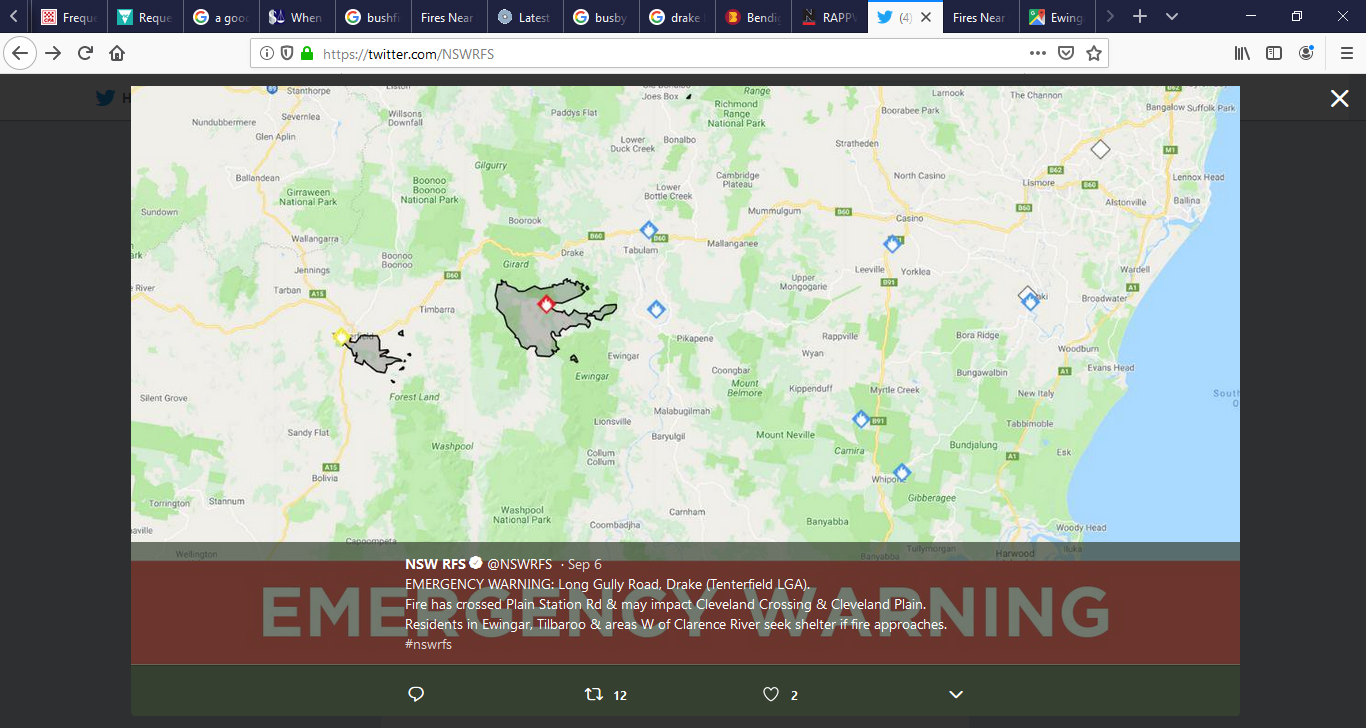
Tomorrow is a Total Fire Ban day, but the firefighters decide to monitor this fire.

**Blow up day 6 September**

The fire today is exposed to moderately strong winds all day, which change direction three times as the cold front from the deep south moves through the fire area.

* Between 10pm of 5/9 and 4am of 6/9, light wind in the fire area becomes a strong NW wind.
* In early afternoon, the strong NW swings Westerly ahead of the cold front
* In late afternoon, the Westerly swings to a South Westerly.

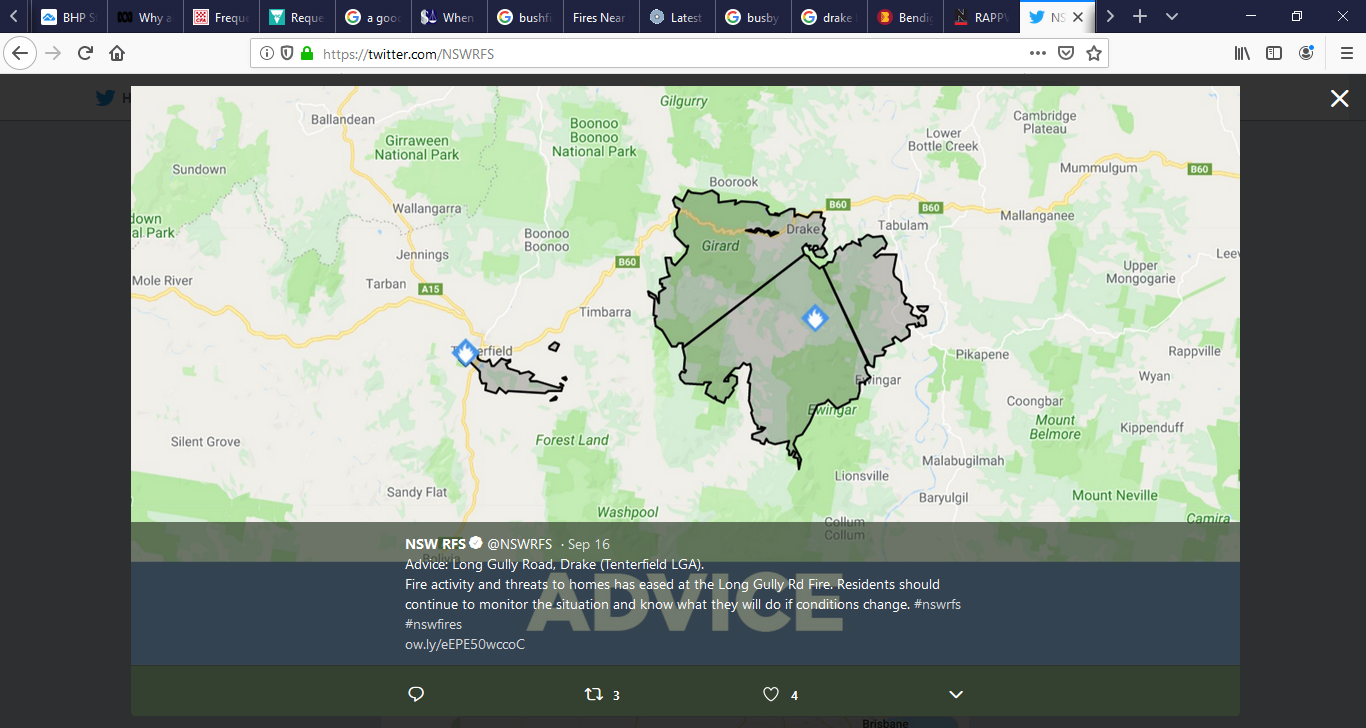
Fire area at end of day 15,000ha approx



**Fire size at 16 September 60,000ha**

Fire’s growth is caused by wind on uncontained sections, by escapes from containment lines and by burn-outs to containment lines.

***RFS Tweet confirms the known house toll to date in this bushfire is 16 houses***



**Blow up day October 8 *Escape from containment line at Ewingar***

Deduced wind directions on fireground today:

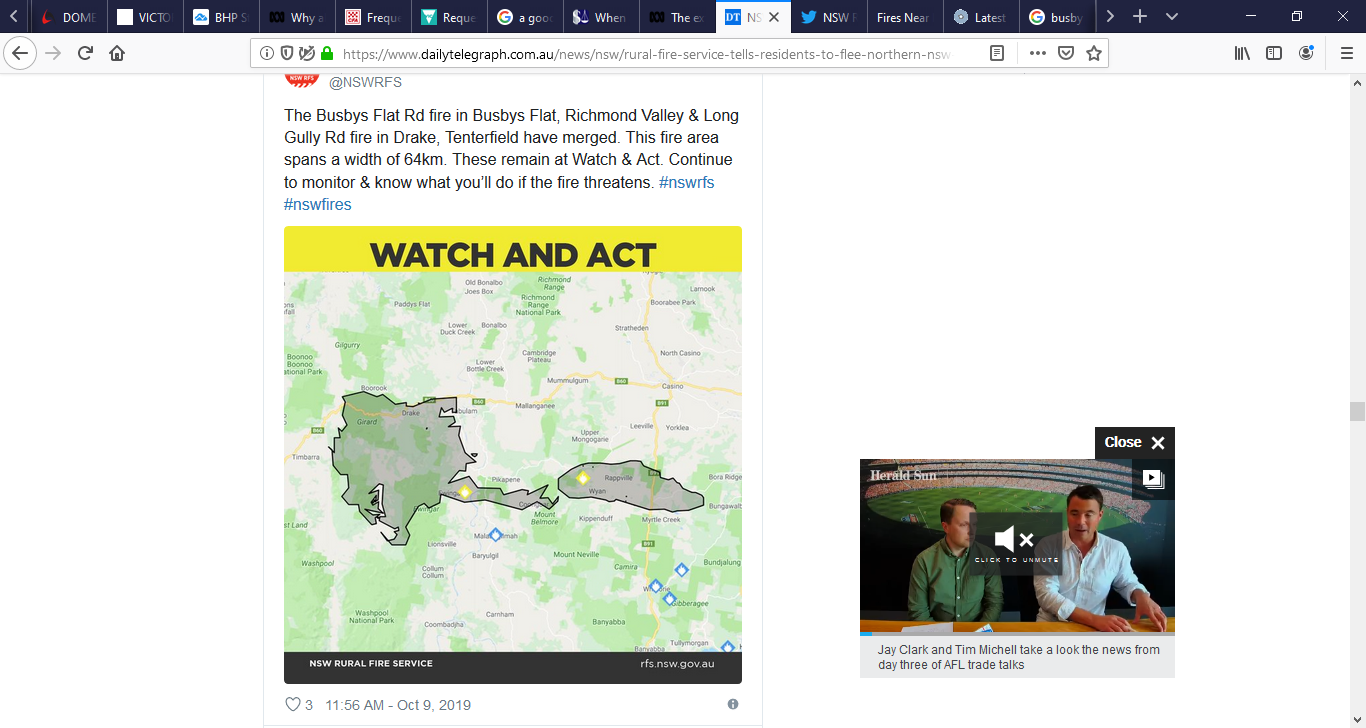
From 12am to 9 / 10am 12 / 1pm - Light wind from NW

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

Change of wind direction is due to passage of cold front from deep south across fire ground.



Ewingar escape runs into Busbys Flat fire

***The RFS said 19 homes were destroyed by Drake fire, which also claimed the lives of Bob Lindsay, 77, and his wife Gwen Hyde, 68.***

***Final area 74,000 ha***

**Conclusion**

This fire was avoidable. If only the fire agency had stopped it dead at 19ha on the 5th September. But, it did not, and no doubt had its reasons. Let’s hope they were good reasons because the consequence was that it grew to an unstoppable fiery perimeter of 70km by the evening of the 6th in a dry forest interspersed with farming properties and settlements, that were now endangered through a government decision that was no fault of their own. They let it grow and indeed encouraged it to grow to a perimeter of 100km, and it was not stopped until the rains of mid-October.

But it surprisingly escaped at Ewingar Creek on the 8th October and caused two deaths and even more property loss. The RFS had created a huge perimeter and created a liability for it to patrol till all of it was safe. Was the RFS patrolling this part of the perimeter then? Did they know about its condition on or before that day? I their answers to either or both questions are NO, their liability may descend into negligence.

The point is this. It does not matter what bushfire suppression strategies are employed. The outcome is what matters. This outcome is disastrous because it was avoidable.

It was avoidable if the fire was stopped according to best practice forest bushfire principles on the 4th September. It was avoidable if the Ewingar Creek was being patrolled on the 8th November. It was avoidable if the local residents were all properly prepared to self-defend against a severe bushfire attack.

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 apparent policy of letting fires burn the forests into the summer months 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 a 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.

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 the current RFS policy model this fire season is 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%).

This leads into my theory that self-defence can complement suppression and save houses.

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 they would resume their interrupted activities.

This did 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.