

**Submission  
No 112**

**INQUIRY INTO INTEGRITY, EFFICACY AND VALUE FOR  
MONEY OF NSW GOVERNMENT GRANT PROGRAMS**

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# INQUIRY INTO THE BUSHFIRE AND ECONOMIC RELIEF FUND

Office of Greens MP David Shoebridge

## Submission To The Inquiry Into The Bushfire And Economic Relief Fund

Dear David Shoebridge.

Thank you for this opportunity to place a submission to the inquiry into the Bushfire and Economic Relief Fund.

I would like to address this issue in relation to moneys allocated to the Snowy Valley Council (SVC). Although I currently resident in South Australia, I was born, went to school in Wagga Wagga, and have spent a lot of my life in and around the Tumut, Talbingo areas and the Kosciuszko National Park.

Over the summer of 2019/2021, I watched with grave concern the destruction of important forest and ecological habitats in the SVC area, Kosciuszko National Park, and many other areas in NSW, as here in South Australia, sections of the Adelaide Hills also burned. At the time I wondered how both communities and environments would recover and what efforts society would make to bring about workable change.

- How much money and who got it?

I have noted that the NSW Bushfire Local Economic Relief Fund handed out \$177m with roughly \$45 million of that money going to the Snowy Valleys region. That is about a third! Why so much when vast swathes of NSW were affected?

According to the Tumut and Adelong Times, Feb 4, 2021, the breakdown consisted of:

Forestry Industry:

\$15.5 million to AKD in Tumut,  
\$13,103,177 to Visy Pulp and Paper,  
\$6,497,996 for the Hyne Mill in Tumbarumba,  
\$275,000 to Snowy Mountains Forests Australia Trust  
**Total: About \$25 Million.**

Orchard Industry:

\$3,509,000 to the Apple Thief,  
\$2,283,050 to Seven Springs Orchard, Batlow,  
\$991,000 to Ardrossan Nurseries,  
**Total: About \$6.5 Million**

Wine Industry:

\$418,000 for Mount Tumbarumba Vineyard,  
\$337,500 for Courabyra Wines,  
\$240,000 to Tumbarumba Vignerons Association,  
\$43,500 to Tumbarumba Wines Escape,

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**Total: \$823,000.**

Snowy Valley Council

\$12.5 million to Tumut Airport,

\$3,952,571 to Snowy Valleys Council for the Batlow Caravan Park

\$480,000 to Snowy Valleys Council to repair the Wondalga Road

Finally, the Tumbarumba Hall got a share of \$3.M to rebuild the Hall

Since then, the SVC has applied for funding, \$8m, to run a Mountain Biking Track through the Kosciuszko National Park from the Yarrangobilly Thermal Pool, down Talbingo Hill into the township itself.

I have to question the allocation of the \$45 million bushfire recovery money, in that close to half, (\$25,370,173.00) of it has been allocated to ‘helping’ industries that continue to cut down our forests and build monocultures.

- Monoculture Forests vs Diverse Local Forest Habitat

These activities have long been a major source of employment to the SVC and I can understand why so much has been allocated to these industries. However, it needs to be asked how does this help forests and their diverse habitats recover? Where is the investment for this recovery? For example, how much of this *public money* is going to be allocated for the training up of ecologists or put into increasing the staffing levels for rangers for the Kosciuszko national park? A Park which is meant to be the jewel in the crown of NSW, if not Australian National parks. Not a cent has been allocated to this park’s recovery from this fund. Yet the fire impacts within it have been horrendous.

It seems to me that the local Mountain Bike Group at Talbingo which proposes to build a Mountain bike track through some of the most remote and burnt sections of the Kosciuszko National Park, namely Yarrangobilly Caves, down Talbingo Hill into the township itself takes the view that this fire destruction is of no consequence.

Not only does this proposal take the track close to caves that are the habitat of the endangered *Miniopterus orianae oceanensis*, Eastern Bent-wing bat, but its impact on the downhill slopes of Mt Talbingo will be considerable. Their idea is to create in the end 55 EFT jobs, whilst ignoring the fact that there already exists an array of mountain biking opportunities in the SVC area.

It seems that the appeal of the Talbingo to Yarrangobilly MBT is the proposed 1000m decent, thus attracting a clientele that is not only riding for the thrill, but is highly skilled. Further, this clientele is predominately male, aged 30-40yrs with high disposable incomes, (Master Plan of the MBT Section 4.6). The question must be asked why to build yet another trail that meets the need of such a narrow, predominately male clientele, when there are tracks that already meet the needs of this enthusiast group at Thredbo and Tumbarumba at 1700m and 800m elevation respectively?

- Who gets the jobs?

This begs another issue concerning the allocation of bushfire recovery money. The aim it seems is to create jobs. But what kind of jobs are they? For whom are they? What is the gender break down of these jobs, what is the age group that will receive the jobs? Where are the career options within these jobs?

The SVC wants to increase the tourism potential of the area, but if COVID has taught us anything, tourism is a fickle industry, with constantly changing demands and experiences.

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Importantly, tourism creates employment that is seasonal, itinerant, and this is mostly paid at the lower end of the scale. It creates employment that relies on bedmakers and baristas or for blokes that have things to build things with, like buildings, walking tracks, roads. Is this the future of employment for our school leavers, or twenty somethings? Where are the professional employment opportunities for a 35-year-old woman, for example? Are they really to be found within Visy or Hume forests at the moment? Are the women in the SCV area going to own the large equipment used in these industries if they are never given the income creating jobs that will allow this to happen even if they were employed in these areas

Where is the bushfire recovery money for the hospitals, doctors, specialists or the teachers and thinkers that regional areas so desperately need?

The current allocation of the bushfire recovery money is not acceptable. It does not build inclusive and resilient communities nor provide sustainable employment opportunities. It is not providing for the recovery of our natural environments. Rather it provides the political elite with the opportunity to build up its voting patronage for the next election.

Sincerely

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