

## If not now, when?

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How can we get action on climate change when the Premier of NSW and other political leaders refuse to talk about it?

I'm a member of the Wyaliba community that was recently impacted by catastrophic bushfires. These were horrific fires: unprecedented and devastating.

The fires moved quickly, fuelled by 80km/h winds into land that hasn't seen much rain for two years. Within an hour of seeing this mushroom cloud, the embers were raining on the community 10km in front of the fire. This land had been burned not six weeks before.

This wasn't an ordinary fire and students, the young students from the school described it as like a fire monster coming down the hill. Luckily when it burnt the school it was after 3 o'clock.

The fire consumed everything in its path: the landscape, animals, homes and tragically we lost two of our community members that could not escape. Others were badly burnt trying to save them and many lost everything they own walking through flames to get out.

Half of the students lost their homes, others fought through the night with their families in the firestorm.

It's now a scene of the apocalypse: charred trees, twisted metal, dust, smoke and the smell of death. And the worst thing is that there is no water in the river, so like many communities, all of the people out west, we have no water.

Yet our political leaders on the day after said that this wasn't the time to talk about climate change. My community is the survivor of a climate catastrophe. If now's not the time, when?

The disaster has brought out the best and worst in people. Thank you to everyone who has donated; and the school is getting a lot of support, thankfully, from the Department. We have promises of being rebuilt in 2020 with two new classrooms. But the question is, which community will next be struck by such disasters, when politicians refuse to even talk about climate change?

**Abigail Sparks** is a Councillor for Glen Innes Teachers Association. This is an edited version of her address to November Council

