

**SUBMISSION
TO THE ROYAL
COMMISSION INTO
NATIONAL
NATURAL
DISASTER
ARRANGEMENTS**



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GLOSSARY

AFAC – The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council

CPSU – Community and Public Sector Union

CSIRO – Commonwealth Science and Industrial Research Organisation

DPIE – Department of Planning, Industry and Environment

FCNSW – Forestry Corporation of NSW

FMO – Fire Management Officer

FOGO – Field Officer General Operations

NAFC – The National Aerial Firefighting Centre

NPWS – National Parks and Wildlife Service

PSA – Public Service Association of NSW

RFS – Rural Fire Service

SES – State Emergency Service

SMS – State Mitigation Service

SOC – State Owned Corporation

VKG – NSW Police Line (VKG)

DEFINITIONS

'The Association'

For clarification, the Public Service Association of NSW (PSA) is a state-registered employee organisation. The Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU) is its federally-registered counterpart. All members of the former are also members of the latter, although not vice-versa. Where industrial rights and representation are pursued in the NSW industrial relations system it is the PSA who is the relevant organisation, but where this is done in the national system under the Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth), such as the state-owned corporation, Forestry Corporation of NSW, the CPSU is the appropriate body. For the purposes of this submission the terms are interchangeable and will both be referred to as 'the Association.'

'Black Summer'

On 13 February 2020 ABC's Four Corners released a bushfire special program titled, 'Black Summer'. The Prime Minister adopted this term upon announcement of a royal commission into the fires on 20 February 2020, with the media release entitled, 'National Royal Commission into Black Summer bushfires established.' This submission will adopt this term to refer to the 2019-20 Australian bushfire season, however it should be noted that the actual fire season lasted far longer than the official three months of summer (December-February). Erratic fires were reported in QLD as early as June 2019, while in NSW fires started in July 2019, after which there was a 240 day run of active bush and/or grass fires across the State, finally coming to an end in March 2020.

INTRODUCTION

The 2019-20 'Black Summer' fires that engulfed the southeast of Australia for many months were of catastrophic proportions. They were twenty-five times the size of the deadly 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria.¹ They burnt an area the size of South Korea,² triple the area destroyed by the 2018 fires in California and six times the size of the 2019 fires in the Amazon.³ More than 20 per cent of Australia's total bushland burned⁴ – in NSW, that figure was closer to 40 per cent.⁵ At least 80% of the Blue Mountains world heritage area and more than 50% of the Gondwana world heritage rainforests were burnt.⁶ Thousands of homes were lost and entire towns decimated. An estimated one billion animals were killed; some species possibly made extinct. Thirty-three people lost their lives⁷ in the fires, while smoke pollution has been found to have been responsible for up to 417 deaths.⁸

The state of NSW bore a large brunt of these catastrophic fires, with Emergency Services Minister David Elliott declaring it "the worst natural disaster the State has ever seen".⁹ Over the course of the fire season, that spanned more than six months, approximately 10,000 people were deployed in response to the natural disaster.¹⁰ Many of these people were members of the Association.

Our members work in the agencies that were front and centre during the Black Summer bushfire crisis. These agencies include three out of the four direct fire combat agencies of NSW: the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS), the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS) and Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW), with the fourth being Fire and Rescue NSW, with firefighters covered by the Fire Brigade Employees Union (support staff are covered by the Association), as well as the State Emergency Service (SES), NSW Police Radio (VKG), and the Office of Emergency Management (OEM). Other public agencies that the Association covers that were impacted by the crisis, or were part of the response team, include Corrective Services NSW, Housing NSW and Community Services NSW as well as the Department of Planning, Industry and the Environment (DPIE).

First and foremost, the Association wishes to acknowledge the tremendous and extraordinary efforts of all our members who worked on the 2019-20 bushfire season. Our members, both on the fire front and behind the scenes, worked tirelessly, in some cases continuously for over 6 months to keep the people of NSW safe. We all owe them a debt of gratitude. They are the overwhelming proof of why a community is only as strong as the value it places in its public services. We could not be more proud of them.

In order to compile this submission, the Association surveyed our membership and talked extensively to our delegates about their experiences during and leading up to the Black Summer bushfires. The Association will use the following submission to address the matters relevant to our members. Every case put forward in this submission has been informed by them.

The following submission will put forward the position that the primary role of the Commonwealth is to ensure that state and territory agencies are strategically and financially equipped to deliver firefighting activities.

The principal recommendation of this submission is that the Commonwealth should establish a Central Coordinating Authority to set national standards for training, equipment, interagency communications and preparedness, set key performance indicators and provide additional, targeted funding to states and territories.

The Association will use the state of NSW as a demonstrative case study as to why an oversight national body is needed. NSW was significantly unprepared for the Black Summer bushfires, particularly in terms of being understaffed, undertrained and lacking in resources. These staffing levels and resourcing issues were completely within the NSW's Government's control.

The Association welcomes the critical examination of these serious issues by the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements. These issues are of great public importance. The Association also requests examination of decisions where critical errors were made in some instances with devastating and fatal results.

The Association looks forward to providing any other assistance that may be required.

Yours sincerely,



Stewart Little
General Secretary

- 1 Read, P. and Denniss, R. (2020). 'With costs approaching \$100 billion, the fires are Australia's costliest natural disaster.' The Conversation, 17 January, <https://theconversation.com/with-costs-approaching-100-billion-the-fires-are-australias-costliest-natural-disaster-129433>
- 2 Read, P. and Denniss, R. (2020). 'With costs approaching \$100 billion, the fires are Australia's costliest natural disaster.' The Conversation, 17 January, <https://theconversation.com/with-costs-approaching-100-billion-the-fires-are-australias-costliest-natural-disaster-129433>
- 3 Flanagan, R. (2020). 'Australia is committing climate suicide', The New York Times, 3 January, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/01/03/opinion/australia-fires-climate-change.html>
- 4 Cox, L. (2020). 'Unprecedented globally: more than 20% of Australia's forests burnt in bushfires', The Guardian Australia, 24 February, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/25/unprecedented-globally-more-than-20-of-australias-forests-burnt-in-bushfires>
- 5 NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 7 - Planning and Environment: Energy and Environment' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 6 March
- 6 Cox, L. and Evershed, N. (2020). 'It's heart-wrenching: 80% of Blue Mountains and 50% of Gondwana rainforests burn in bushfires', The Guardian Australia, 17 January, <https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2020/jan/17/its-heart-wrenching-80-of-blue-mountains-and-50-of-gondwana-rainforests-burn-in-bushfires>
- 7 Richards, L., Brew, N., and Smith, L. (2020). '2019-20 Australian bushfires - frequently asked questions: a quick guide', Parliament of Australia Parliamentary Library, 12 March, https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1920/Quick_Guides/AustralianBushfires
- 8 Borchers Arriagada, N., Palmer, A.J., Boman, D.M.J., Morgan, G.G., Jalaludin, B.B., and Johnston, F.H. (2020). 'Unprecedented smoke-related health burden associated with the 2019-20 bushfires in eastern Australia', in The Medical Journal of Australia, 12 March doi:10.5694/mja2.50545
- 9 NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Legal Affairs: Police and Emergency Services' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 10 March
- 10 NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Legal Affairs: Police and Emergency Services' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 10 March

CHAPTER ONE

Response to

(a) the responsibilities of, and coordination between, the Commonwealth and State, Territory and local Governments relating to preparedness for, response to, resilience to, and recovery from, natural disasters, and what should be done to improve these arrangements, including with respect to resource sharing;

The catastrophic fires that stretched across state borders all down the southeast of Australia in 2019-20 and the warnings that there will be more to come in future years are a clear indication that bushfire prevention, management and emergency response need to be a national priority. State governments and their agencies should no longer be expected to carry the full strategic and financial burden for fire preparedness.¹¹

The extent of the Black Summer bushfires highlighted the need for state, territory, local and Commonwealth governments to work together and share resources. The size and spread of the fires made it an all hands on deck operation and cooperation and coordination across borders and levels of government was essential. Bushfire seasons are expected to continue becoming longer and more intense – the extraordinary conditions experienced during Victoria's Black Saturday fires in February 2009 later prompted the creation of a new "catastrophic" fire rating, represented by a McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index of 100 or greater.¹² These drastic shift have led as the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) describes, to a "steady evolution from local specialist responses towards a more coordinated 'all-agency, all-hazards, all the time' approach."¹³

Emergency management is a state/territory responsibility across Australia and it is the position of the Association that this should continue to be the case. Historically, if and when the Commonwealth has intervened or assisted a state or territory in a natural disaster, it has been during the recovery phase. This is what the Association suggests needs to change: the Commonwealth must begin to play a strategic and financial role in every step of the way from preparedness all the way through to recovery and resilience.

Whilst maintaining the responsibilities of the states for the management of natural disasters the Association suggests a national coordination role for the Commonwealth analogous to the broad responsibility of the Commonwealth in relation to Health as well as providing additional funding to state/territory agencies through COAG (Council of Australian Government).

11 Keenan, R. (2020), 'There's only one way to make bushfires less powerful: take out the stuff that burns', The Conversation, 6 January, <https://theconversation.com/theres-only-one-way-to-make-bushfires-less-powerful-take-out-the-stuff-that-burns-129323>

12 The extent of the Black Summer bushfires highlighted the need for state, territory, local and Commonwealth governments to work together and share resources. The size and spread of the fires made it an all hands on deck operation and cooperation and coordination across borders and levels of government was essential. Bushfire seasons are expected to continue becoming longer and more intense – the extraordinary conditions experienced during Victoria's Black Saturday fires in February 2009 later prompted the creation of a new "catastrophic" fire rating, represented by a McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index of 100 or greater. These drastic shift have led as the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) describes, to a "steady evolution from local specialist responses towards a more coordinated 'all-agency, all-hazards, all the time' approach."

13 Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (2014). Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disaster-funding/submissions/submissions-test/submission-counter/sub047-disaster-funding.pdf>

The following chapter will put forward the case that the Commonwealth has an important role to play in preparedness for, response to, resilience to, and recovery from natural disasters. This chapter will outline the existing supports provided by the Commonwealth and other peak bodies, in terms of funding (from a NSW perspective), accountability, resourcing and research and strategy.

This chapter will highlight the strengths but, more importantly, the inadequacies of the existing Commonwealth support, and will put forward the Association's recommendation that a Central Coordination Authority should be established to provide an overarching base of financial and strategic support to each Australian state and territory and a set of national standards for all firefighting agencies.

Funding Responsibility for NSW Bushfires

The following section describes briefly the current funding arrangements in place for NSW. The Commonwealth currently provides little by way of funding in terms of preparedness for, response to, resilience to, and recovery from, natural disasters. The Association believes that Commonwealth funding needs to increase, particularly in terms of preparedness and resilience, including for hazard reduction and the upgrade and expansion of the aerial fleet

There are different arrangements for funding firefighting across Australia. There are three main aspects of bush firefighting funding in NSW with two supported by functional aspects of the service.

Except for Section 44 *Rural Fires Act 1997 (NSW)* declarations (listed below) the funding for National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Corporation of NSW hazard reduction and mitigation efforts is derived primarily out of their own budget.

There are planned aspects of maintaining paid personnel for undertaking planned hazard reduction and preparedness which comes in the annual state budget for the Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW. This is paid for mostly through the Emergency Services Levy under the *Emergency Services Levy Act 2007 (NSW)*, which was formerly the Fire Service Levy under previous legislation. The Emergency Service Levy is collected through Revenue NSW and distributed to Fire and Rescue NSW, Rural Fire Service NSW, and State Emergency Service.

The Emergency Services Levy is levied on Local Governments, Insurance Companies (insured property owners) based on a weighted percentage of premiums for different types of policies. The balance of funding for these agencies is contributed by the State of NSW.

The second main aspect of funding bushfires aspect is the Section 44 declarations which is paid for via the provisions of the NSW Government, Treasury Managed Fund (the NSW Government Self Insurance Agency). This is supported through the Commonwealth Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements¹⁴, which includes counter disaster operations in what operates in what has been described as a form of reinsurance.

Section 44 *Rural Fires Act 1997 (NSW)* has both pre-emptive and remedial aspects in allowing the Commissioner to take control of bushfires in scenarios that include:

14 Website, Department of Home Affairs, <https://www.disasterassist.gov.au/Pages/related-links/Natural-Disaster-Relief-and-Recovery-Arrangements.aspx>

- a) a bush fire has assumed or is likely to assume such proportions as to be incapable of control or suppression by the firefighting authority or authorities in whose area or locality it is burning, or
- b) the prevailing conditions are conducive to the outbreak of a bush fire likely to assume such proportions, or
- c) a bush fire is not being effectively controlled or suppressed by the firefighting authority or authorities in whose area or locality it is burning, or
- d) a bush fire is burning in a place that is not the responsibility of any firefighting authority.

This declaration triggers funding for the Rural Fire Service and also other land management agencies (FCNSW and NPWS) through the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy No.1 /2007.¹⁵ This document allows fire-fighting agencies to reclaim expenses for bushfires that are not under control. The document is clear that it does not cover for expenses that a fire fighting agency had deployed prior to the declaration of the Section 44 fire.

Every person benefits when our emergency services work well no matter in which state we live. A major disaster can mean total devastation to a local community. However, a major disaster in one state will have the effect of increasing pressures on federal budgets and affect insurance premiums nationwide. This is squarely an economic efficiency lever of the federal government that does matter to all Australians and requires greater contributions from the federal government.

Understanding the funding arrangements makes it clear that the Commonwealth Government currently plays a minimal role in funding for natural disasters. The Commonwealth does not provide any funding to states for hazard reduction. The Association recommends that the Commonwealth should provide funding to ensure states have adequate resources to undertake effective hazard reduction. This is a cost effective mechanism to minimise the extent of damage caused by future bushfires, and therefore the spending costs for both states and the commonwealth in terms of recovery.

¹⁵ Bush Fire Coordinating committee, Policy No.1 //2007, Section 44 Payment and Reimbursement Criteria and Procedures

Existing Accountability Framework

The Productivity Commission releases an annual report on Performance Report of Government Services¹⁶ comparing fire services in all the jurisdictions.

This report has indicators including:

- Response times (to structural fires)
- Fire fighter workforce by age group, and workforce attrition
- Efficiency noted as expenditure per person, with a description that describes this as not necessarily being an efficiency at all
- Fire death rate (structure and landscape fires)
- Fire injury Rate
- Value of assets losses

In reviewing these categories, the Productivity Commission currently lacks key indicators that are required to account for bushfires (natural disaster) risk management, preparedness, resilience and recovery. The most recent report – published in 2020 – does not even take the Black Summer bushfire season into account.

As will be proposed in this submission, the Association strongly recommends that the Productivity Commission begins including bushfire indicators in all future annual reports on Performance Report of Government Services.

Resources: The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC)

The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) was formed by the Australian states and territories in July 2003 to provide a cooperative national arrangement for combating bushfires. It achieves this by facilitating the coordination and procurement of a fleet of highly specialised firefighting aircraft that are readily available for use by state and territory emergency service and land management agencies across Australia.

This national aircraft fleet complements aerial firefighting resources that are arranged directly by the States and Territories. The National Fleet receives funding support from the Australian Government as well as State and Territory Governments.

NAFC also plays a key role in ensuring the sharing of aerial firefighting resources between emergency service and land management agencies throughout Australia, and in the development of national protocols and systems for aerial firefighting.¹⁷

There are inadequacies with NAFC, including the size and variety of aircraft within the fleet. These issues are directly tied to funding, and the buck passing that takes place between the Commonwealth and state governments.

¹⁶ Productivity Commission, Report on Government Services 2020, PART D, SECTION 9: RELEASED ON 29 JANUARY 2020, 9 Emergency services for fire and other events <https://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/report-on-government-services/2020/emergency-management/emergency-services>

¹⁷ Website, National Aerial Firefighting Centre, <http://nafc.org.au/>

The NAFC is jointly funded by the Australian, state and territory governments, while the Commonwealth provides an annual contribution of \$14.8 million.¹⁸

In 2016 a proposal was put to COAG regarding the Commonwealth acquiring a fleet of fixed wing large air tankers (LAT). This was ultimately rejected as bush firefighting was deemed a matter for the states. The current joint funding for NAFC remains inadequate to purchase these LAT aircraft. Reliance on a fleet of contracted LAT aircraft is not a viable option, as Australia and other foreign countries look to expect longer and more expanded fire seasons in future, the availability of contracted or loaned aircraft cannot be guaranteed.

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Members of the Association have made calls for a national fleet:

"Most [aircraft] need to be upgraded to meet current standards. A central pool (possibly national) would be helpful".

- Member, RFS

"More of all as a shared national resource [aircraft]".

- Member, RFS

The severity of the Black Summer highlighted the need for all State and Territory governments to significantly increase their spending on bushfire preparedness, resilience, and recovery. It is the position of the Association that, given this need as well as the fact that the Black Summer bushfires spread far and wide across borders, that the Commonwealth should assume a larger if not primary role in funding the NAFC.

¹⁸ Australian Senate Report, Australian Government to Report from Inquiry Responses to, and lessons learnt from, the January and February 2016 bushfires in remote Tasmanian wilderness, 8 December 2016, https://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Environment_and_Communications/TasmanianBushfires45/Government_Response

¹⁹ Sydney Morning Herald, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/government-rejected-major-air-tanker-expansion-20200103-p53onl.html>

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)

Established in 1993, the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) is the peak body for Australasian fire, land management and emergency, bringing relevant stake holders together to collaborate on matters of international, national and regional importance.

The NSW emergency service and fire combat agencies covered by the Association (NSW Rural Fire Service, NSW State Emergency Service, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service and Forestry Corporation of NSW) are all members of AFAC.²⁰

AFAC has stated that as joint members of this peak body, agencies can share each other's "extensive capabilities, experience, knowledge and learnings" and that communities therefore benefit "from the economies of scale, reduction in the duplication of effort and the strengthening of industry capability."²¹

Key functions of AFAC include:

- Collaborating and sharing knowledge;
- Development of national standards;
- Facilitates resources sharing of firefighters, specialists and aircraft (through the NAFC); and
- Custodian of the Australasian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS).²²

AFAC describes its role as:

"AFAC supports member agencies by helping fire and emergency services to share, collaborate and innovate and create greater synergy across the industry. AFAC does this by providing forums and mechanisms for members to work together in a structured way. Communities across Australasia benefit from the resultant sharing of ideas and lessons, economies of scale, reduction in the duplication of effort and the strengthening of the emergency management capability. This is also reflected through increased sharing of resources and inter-state deployments supporting one another."²³

Many previous Royal Commissions and inquiries into bushfire disasters have recommended more effort is pursued in the area of research into bushfire behaviour and climate change.

AFAC works collaboratively with its partner agencies to coordinate research in this area. These other organisations include:

Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre

The Commonwealth spent 47 million matched by state agencies into research into natural hazards including bushfires. This organisation commissions research as well as maintains a database of research and inquiries as a knowledge hub on disaster research. They list

²⁰<https://www.afac.com.au/teams/network>

²¹ Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (2014). Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disaster-funding/submissions/submissions-test/submission-counter/sub047-disaster-funding.pdf>

²² AFAC Website, About, <https://www.afac.com.au/auxiliary/about>

²³ Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (2014). Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disaster-funding/submissions/submissions-test/submission-counter/sub047-disaster-funding.pdf>

all bushfire inquiries (parliamentary, coronial, special commissions of inquiries and royal commissions) and their recommendations.

The Australian Institute of for Disaster Resilience

The institute works closely with AFAC, Department of Home Affairs and Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre and develops, maintains and shares knowledge and learning to support a disaster resilient Australia by building on extensive knowledge and experience in Australia and internationally.

Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)

The CSIRO also works with fire agencies to develop bushfire related research.

CSIRO is involved in a range of bushfire-related research, including:

- understanding and predicting bushfire behaviour
- developing prediction and fire data analysis tools
- impact of bushfires on infrastructure
- disaster management
- ecological responses to fire
- Indigenous fire knowledge and practice
- pollutants and greenhouse gases as a result of bushfires
- smoke forecasting for bushfires and prescribed burns
- building community resilience and risk management
- reducing impacts in the face of disasters
- preparing for climate change and extreme events
- investigating and reconstructing major wildfire events to aid learning and model development.

This has occurred since the 1940s and CSIRO has been critically involved in a range of activities from developing the Forest Fire Danger Index to the first Agency to internationally link an increase in bushfire weather severity to climate change in 1988. The CSIRO has been subject to significant budget cuts over recent years²⁴ as well as being stunted by ongoing Commonwealth public service staffing freezes.²⁵

Overall, AFAC is viewed as a very influential organisation by members of the Association. Our members have reported that they generally had a significant amount of respect for

²⁴ Turney, C. (2016). 'CSIRO cuts as redundancies are announced the real cost is revealed', The Conversation, 26 May, <https://theconversation.com/csiro-cuts-as-redundancies-are-announced-the-real-cost-is-revealed-59895>

²⁵ Jackson, S. (2019). 'Australia risks brain drain as CSIRO flounders', The Sydney Morning Herald, 18 September, <https://www.smh.com.au/national/australia-risks-brain-drain-as-csiro-flounders-20190918-p52sl7.html>

the organisation, with many members contributing to the work of AFAC committees (policy and technical). A number of good outcomes arise from the Council including the recommendations of improvement of standards, systems, and techniques as well as the broader information and research facilitated through AFAC.

Where the effectiveness falls over, however, is in AFAC's lack of power to enforce its recommendations. AFAC essentially serves an advisory role. AFAC advises state and territory governments on sound emergency management policy, however it is then up to those governments to implement the recommendations. This can therefore prove ineffective as state governments - such as NSW (as Chapter Two of this submission will detail) - make decisions based on a variety of competing factors, not least of which are cost and budget restrictions.

Overall, AFAC's inadequacy lays in its lack of authoritative power: while it plays an important role in *influencing*²⁶ national standards, it does not have the power to set them.

As AFAC has described, the organisation "provides linkages to the Federal Government, other industries, the tertiary sector, research partners and other key stakeholders in emergency management."²⁷ The Association believes AFAC should continue to provide this linkage.

If a Commonwealth Central Coordinating Authority was to be established, as this submission recommends, AFAC could be key stakeholder and continue to use its resources to influence and inform government policy on emergency management.

26 Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (2014). Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disaster-funding/submissions/submissions-test/submission-counter/sub047-disaster-funding.pdf>

27 Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (2014). Submission to the Productivity Commission Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/disaster-funding/submissions/submissions-test/submission-counter/sub047-disaster-funding.pdf>

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Association presents the following recommendations to the Royal Commission.

The Recommendations are broken up into three sections.

The first is the overarching recommendation of the submission, which details our proposal that the Commonwealth establish a Central Coordinating Authority for Natural Disasters. Note that the Association does not take a position on the specific form the body should assume (e.g. authority, government department, agency) but simply that some form of oversight body should be established (taking into account our recommendations below).

The second section lists our recommendations for ways the Commonwealth can provide targeted funding support to the States and Territories for each stage of a disaster, from preparedness to recovery. The third is any other related recommendation as per the information provided in this submission in relation to the individual terms of reference.

Central Coordinating Authority for Natural Disasters

1. That the Commonwealth establish a Central Coordinating Authority for Natural Disasters

The Central Coordinating Authority should act as a strategic and accountability oversight body for natural disasters as well as the coordinator of a needs-based pool of Commonwealth funding for States and Territories.

The Authority should be formed with expert representation, worker representation, Commonwealth representation, as well as State and Territory representation.

The Central Coordinating Authority should be charged with setting national standards for bushfire and other natural disaster preparedness, resilience, response and recovery including:

- a) Number of paid firefighters (bushfire) required per hectare of at risk bushland
- b) Equipment including vehicles, aircraft and communications
- c) Training in both firefighting and fire management
- d) Safety standards

The Central Coordination Authority should develop Key Performance Indicators for inclusion in the Productivity Commission Annual Report on Government Services including:

- e) Number of paid firefighters (bushfire) per hectare of at risk bushland
- f) Target and actual hazard reduction conducted in at risk bushland
- g) Number of appliances and equipment that meet the national standards
- h) Amount and type of training conducted each year that meets a minimum standard for both firefighting and fire management
- i) Recovery indicators including:

- Services available at evacuation centres
- Length of time for insurance companies to commence honouring claims
- Length of time for residents to be placed in housing (non-insurance)
- Length of time for residents to be supported through income support
- Percentage of residents who experienced secondary illnesses after the fires

Commonwealth Funding for National Natural Disasters

2. That the Commonwealth, via the Central Coordinating Authority provide funding to certain areas of natural disaster preparedness, resilience, response and recovery including:

- a) Commonwealth funding for planned hazard reduction efforts, including payment for staffing and equipment purchase.
- b) Increased Commonwealth funding to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre to ensure that a suitably sized fleet of required firefighting aircraft and pilots to be made available between the states and territories for use in bushfires.
- c) Continued Commonwealth funding for the Bush Fire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre.
- d) Ongoing and substantial Commonwealth funding for CSIRO research into fuel load, weather patterns, targeted hazard reduction, fire patterns and other matters related to bush firefighting

Other Recommendations

3. The Commonwealth must take a stronger and more decisive leave in terms of climate change policy. This includes setting ambitious national targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and establishing up a national accountability framework to ensure that all States and Territories are doing their part.
4. That the Commonwealth consider reinstating a Department of Climate Change.
5. The Commonwealth should assist by continuing to deploy 24 hour embedded Bureau of Meteorology coordinators in State Controls in fire seasons.
6. That the Commonwealth continue to assist in natural disaster response and recovery efforts by deploying Defence forces as required. However, members of the defence force are not firefighters and are not trained and do not have the local knowledge of members of state agencies.
7. The Association also calls on the Commonwealth and State of NSW to:
 - a) nominate and list under Section 178 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) the species of flora and fauna that have become

vulnerable after the bushfires

b) to provide a significant increase in funding to

I) the CSIRO Threatened Endangered and Protected Species Unit and

II) the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW) to fund the adequate recovery plans and teams for the recovery of these species threatened with extinction after the bushfires.

CHAPTER TWO

Response to

(b) Australia's arrangements for improving resilience and adapting to changing climatic conditions, what actions should be taken to mitigate the impacts of natural disasters, and whether accountability for natural disaster risk management, preparedness, resilience and recovery should be enhanced, including through a nationally consistent accountability and reporting framework and national standards;

CHAPTER TWO - PART ONE

THE PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE OF NSW - STAFFING

"While I was inspired by how well our staff coped and rose to the challenges during the season but there were not nearly enough NPWS staff and RFS volunteers to cope. The fires kept spreading because of a lack of people on the ground."

- Member, NPWS

In the years just prior to the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfire season, NSW was enduring one of the worst and most prolonged droughts in the State's history. Weather was drastically limiting the ability to clear fuel loads in national parks and on private property, and hazard reduction targets were consistently not being met. Climate scientists had been warning of worsening fire conditions and therefore fire seasons for decades.

The warning signs were clearly there but were ignored by the NSW Government. The NSW Government failed to adequately plan or prepare for the 2019/2020 fire season. Instead the focus of NSW Government was cutting budgets and saving money which had devastating results. This is clear from the testimony and information provided by our members within this submission.

As a result of years of significant restructures and redundancies in key positions in all agencies there were simply not enough fully trained and experienced firefighting and incident staff on the ground. The ones that were left were expected to do too much with too few resources in very challenging circumstances and suffered fatigue and exhaustion. They often suffered loss or damage to their own homes whilst fighting fires.

There was also over reliance on volunteers and casuals or lower paid staff without adequate training, expertise, equipment or experience.

To avoid the mistakes and devastating impact of the 2019/2020 fire season major and

fundamental change is required within RFS, NPWS, Forestry Corporation and other combat fire agencies. Complacency should be over.

The focus should be on ensuring state agencies are fully funded, properly equipped and have specialist trained and professional staff to deliver firefighting and fire management all year around, not just in peak season.

In the months/years leading up to the Black Summer bushfires, NSW emergency service and fire combat agencies including RFS, NPWS and the Forestry Corporation (FCNSW) had undergone or were undergoing major restructures that had significantly reduced firefighting and preparedness capacity.

This was compounded by the fact that combat agencies were being subject to additional cuts via the NSW government's annual efficiency dividend and a number of agencies, including the RFS, were enduring chronic job vacancy issues. In this submission we recommend that prior to any restructure occurring there should be mandatory consideration by the agency of the impact of a restructure or a reduction in staff on the agencies fire management or firefighting capabilities and that combat agencies are exempted from state efficiency dividends.

The most egregious fact about these cuts and vacancies were that they involved roles that were absolutely critical in preparing and responding to the Black Summer crisis. So critical, in fact, that in NPWS and RFS many of those staff who were made redundant were then asked to come back as volunteers, often placed in leadership roles. NPWS had at least 20 per cent less fire fighters going into this fire season than it did in 2011. In RFS at the start of the fire season 19 per cent of positions in the structure were vacant.

The figures are stark and irrefutable. The semantics and political scoring that we witnessed in the media from the NSW Government about the reductions in staff and resources must stop. The focus of all of us should be on fixing the problem.

In the following section, the Association will outline these cuts and restructures in detail agency by agency and the impact on the reduced capabilities and preparedness.

There is a need for the Commonwealth to establish and fully resource a central coordinating authority that has oversight over the states and sets national standards of training, equipment, preparedness that apply to each jurisdiction.

NSW NATIONAL PARKS AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

"NPWS were under prepared and under resourced for this fire season."

- Member, NPWS

In 2017, the then Office of the Environment and Heritage restructured the National Parks

and Wildlife Service (NPWS) from 37 areas across the State to 8 branches. In doing so, they removed \$121 million from the NPWS budget and deleted, altered or relocated more than 778 positions. The restructure was prolonged and brutal, it took over two years and severely reduced NPWS 's firefighting capabilities reducing the number of positions and shedding experienced and long term staff.

When accused of "cutting" via this restructure, the NSW Government attempted to argue that rather than cutting national parks, they actually increased staffing numbers. What they meant by this was that while they removed many ranger and senior ranger positions, they increased the number of the lowest classification of field officers (Field Officer General Operations "FOGO"), paid just \$40,293 in 2017). Through this restructure, FOGO roles increased from just 3 FTE to 79 FTE. Overall Field Officer Roles increased, however many positions were still vacant during the bush fire season.

Ranger numbers, meanwhile, have decreased from 261²⁸ in 2011 to 193 in 2018 just prior to the fire season, around 201 in 2019.²⁹ What is worse, is that the senior ranger position was abolished in the restructure. This meant that NPWS lost up to 28 of the people with the most experience, breadth of knowledge, and greatest skills and expertise in strategic planning for hazard reduction and pest management.³⁰ The senior ranger position had greater strategic responsibility for hazard reduction and pest management plans. As one ranger put it to The Australian, the people lost were those who know their patch and care about it.³¹ As one NPWS member told the Association:

"In my Area we have seen over 250 years of experience 'lost' in the last two years."

Whilst the Association is extremely critical of the decisions of government but is in no way minimizing the work of field officers within NPWS – field officers are just as dedicated as rangers and their work is vital. We also know that field officers were on the frontline during this fire season, working tirelessly to protect NSW national parks and communities. However, an increase in more field officer roles is no substitution for less ranger roles, which are higher-skilled, specialist trained fire fighters and perform more complex work. Although there is no definitive timeframe for someone to become a proficient fire fighter it would usually take about 5 years for someone to obtain a range of experiences that would make them reasonably proficient. Last bush fire season there were many young, inexperienced fire fighters across the state. It has been reported that there were field officers who underwent training in Blackheath in November last year, did the basic fire modules in 3 days and returned to KNP to fight the horrific Dunns Road fire which absolutely decimated a large proportion of KNP. Another example is in Oberon in January 2020 during the bush fires there were two young FO's

28 Clennell, A. (2019). 'Libs challenged on ranger cuts', The Australian, 14 November.

29 Morton, A. (2019). 'Factcheck: how park ranger numbers stack up amid debate over bushfire readiness', The Guardian Australia, 15 November, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/16/factcheck-how-park-ranger-numbers-stack-up-amid-debate-over-bushfire-readiness>, accessed 16 March 2020.

30 Morton, A. (2019). 'Factcheck: how park ranger numbers stack up amid debate over bushfire readiness', The Guardian Australia, 15 November, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/nov/16/factcheck-how-park-ranger-numbers-stack-up-amid-debate-over-bushfire-readiness>, accessed 16 March 2020.

31 Simalis, L. (2020). 'The impossible choice: How cost-cutting failed bush fireys', The Sunday Telegraph, 19 January.

who not trained fire fighters were. They were being used as 'gophers' running out supplies to the fire ground as they could not fight fires.

As has been made abundantly clear, NPWS has lost a significant amount of expertise across the board. When it comes to firefighting capabilities and what state the NPWS was in ahead of the Black Summer bushfires, the numbers are particularly troubling. Overall, the number of trained and accredited firefighters within NPWS has fallen at least 20 per cent since the current NSW Government came to power in 2011. In 2011, there were 1,349 trained and accredited firefighters within the agency.³² Currently, the government claims that there are 1,067 fire fighters,³³ however, the Association understands that the figure is likely even less. In July 2019 Minister Kean conceded there were 1044 trained firefighters in NSW parliament in response to a question by Kate Washington. Whatever the exact number is it is clear that the fighting force in National parks was reduced and less highly qualified than it was a few years ago.

In the 2015 report "*Living with Fire in NSW National parks a strategy for Managing Bushfires for National Parks and Reserves 2012-2021*" identified the need to recruit firefighters to increase the number to 1350. However due to restructures and job cuts the numbers actually decreased so for example there were less trained fire fighters in 2019/20 than there were in 2017.

The bitter irony was that those trained firefighters who were senior rangers and area managers before they lost their jobs in the 2017 restructure ended up being asked to volunteer during this summer's fires to cover the critical shortage of trained and qualified fire fighters. One such former ranger was Kim de Govrik with four decades of experience in fire management, who is now an official with the Association. Mr De Govrik said rangers were being asked to do more with fewer resources and take on more responsibility in unprecedented conditions. Mr De Govrik commented that this last fire season was the first of its kind in its intensity; danger and length in my whole career spanning 40 fire seasons.

As the Association's General Secretary Stewart Little reflected on *ABC Radio*:

*"I think you have a great deal of irony there, isn't it, that people made redundant are now basically being asked to come back and work."*³⁴

In cutting the numbers of rangers and senior rangers and to some extent replacing them with field officers, NPWS also replaced senior firefighters with very inexperienced ones without adequate training. Further during the fire season NPWS had to fill critical shortages with temporary and contract labour field officers. These temporary officers were not trained or experienced. A large majority have not received the higher levels of firefighting training and, frankly, they are not paid enough to be expected to have senior firefighting skills. This fact makes the 20 per cent reduction in NPWS firefighters even more alarming – while the overall numbers were down by 20 per cent, the percentage of staff with the highest levels of firefighting training removed is much greater.

32 Hannam, P. (2019). 'Government accused of hiding cuts in firefighters', The Sydney Morning Herald, 15 November.

33 NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 7 – Planning and Environment: Energy and Environment' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 6 March

34 Roe, I. (2019). 'Laid off fire management staff offer to work without pay', radio broadcast, ABC AM, 13 December.

"The restructure had a negative impact by losing a lot of skilled employees and this was evident with the lack of crew leaders and divisional commanders. Often we had many crew members and struggled to have the appropriate number of experienced supervisors for mostly all these new staff members - this was definitely an OH&S issue."

- Member, NPWS

"Staff being placed in roles that they were not trained - I.e. Divisional Commanders / Operations / D/IC. The result lost backburns, lost property, over runs of crews."

- Member, NPWS

NPWS suffered a significant reduction in specialised firefighting skills as a result of the 2017 restructure, including those involved in Remote Area Firefighting Teams (RAFT). This has led to a decline in strategic planning, or the use of methods such as "partial containment where raft teams were tasked to contain fires at key locations to put out a fire front".³⁵

87 per cent of NPWS members surveyed told the Association that the restructure had a negative impact on the ability of the NPWS to respond to this bushfire season, with 50 per cent saying it had a very negative impact.

The Association held a rally in Bega on 24 November 2017 to air concern that the 2017 restructure would make national parks unmanageable. Our calls to reverse the cuts were ignored by the local member Andrew Constance MP and the then responsible minister, Gabrielle Upton MP.

There are currently 100 vacant positions in the NPWS. These positions are front line firefighting roles primarily Rangers and Field Officers. Additional funding should go to the urgent filling of these vacant positions. Additional funding should go to the establishment of additional RAFT crews with helicopters.

Cuts to fire management and science

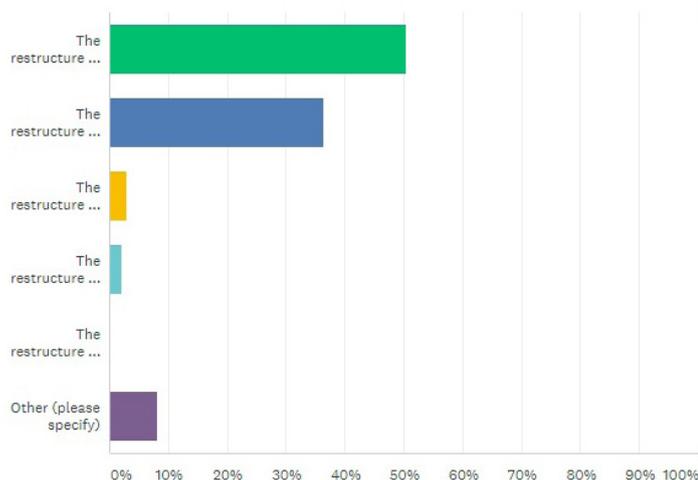
75 per cent of hazard reduction burning (HR) in NSW is conducted by NPWS.³⁶ Fire Management Officers (FMOs) – the very staff responsible for both hazard reduction and fire management and fighting in national parks were also cut in the 2017 restructure.

Prior to this restructure, every single region had a fire management officer – that person's job was to coordinate HR, organize it, be aware of it and have knowledge of the topography, the weather and the fire behavior in that region. In reducing the number of regions from 38 to a mere 8 branches, the NSW Government consequently reduced those fire management officers down to 10. As the Association's Assistant General Secretary Troy Wright told *Paul Murray Live on Sky News* on 14 November 2019:

³⁵ Simalis, L. (2020). 'The impossible choice: How cost-cutting failed bush fireys', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 19 January.

³⁶ RMIT ABC Fact Check, (2020). 'Has NSW seen more than twice the amount of prescribed burning in national parks this decade compared with the last?' ABC News, 5 February, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-22/prescribed-burning-nsw-backburning-hazard-reduction/11878316?fbclid=IwAR1fcJP1kFXHlt5GX0uNGVuyL7VIWfaFINF3OPI75V06bc4vObgRztOq3s>

To what extent do you think the 2017/18 NPWS restructure impacted the ability of the NPWS to respond to this bushfire season?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ The restructure had a very negative impact	50.51%
▼ The restructure had somewhat of a negative impact	36.36%
▼ The restructure had no impact	3.03%
▼ The restructure had somewhat of a positive impact	2.02%
▼ The restructure had a very positive impact	0.00%
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 8.08%
TOTAL	

Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – Rural Fire Service

“There are ten people responsible in the entire state of NSW for fire management programs in national parks. There is one member that we have in our union that has the size of Tasmania to coordinate. It’s ridiculous”.

NPWS has also been enduring an erosion of scientific expertise, which has been a common occurrence across land management agencies nationally. Firstly, specialisation has been replaced with generalisation, with the tertiary education requirement for land managers, including rangers, regularly being reduced to the level of generic ‘environmental science.’³⁷

In NSW, the NPWS has done this, and then taken it even further, by removing many of the scientists from the agency all together, and instead dispersing them into various sections of the broader government department. Shifting scientific expertise out of the NPWS and dispersing experts across the public service has produced a “siloing” problem, meaning that important information and data is not being shared with people who need it, moving scientists out of NPWS, effectively siloed them from the NPWS staff who undertake work to protect and manage flora and fauna, biodiversity and ecosystems both on and off park.

³⁷ Tolhurst, K. (2020). ‘We have already had countless bushfire inquiries. What good will it do to have another?’ The Conversation, 16 January, <https://theconversation.com/we-have-already-had-countless-bushfire-inquiries-what-good-will-it-do-to-have-another-129896>

Overall NPWS is currently lacking in highly skilled, specialised, and expert staff. This lacking has been a result of government cuts and restructures. These staff are critical in the both preparing for and responding to major bushfire events. They must be reinstated.

Efficiency Dividend - NPWS

One of the greatest resourcing challenges for NPWS is the fact that it is not a stand-alone agency. Not only does this make performing statutory responsibilities (particularly in relation to fire management) more difficult for NPWS than other fire combat agencies, it also means that NPWS is not exempt from the government's annual efficiency dividend. This means that its staff remain under constant threat of potential job cuts or downgrading of classifications.

By being embedded within the Department of Planning, Industry and Environment (DPIE) (previously the Office of Environment and Heritage), NPWS is subject to the cuts that each government department is required to make each year in order to find savings. In 2019-20, DPIE has been required to find \$81.4 million in savings (**ATTACHMENT A**).

THE NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE

"We were stretched right throughout the season, which is why we ended up going very early to activate our interstate and overseas arrangements to provide relief and to provide additional numbers. Off the top of my head, we ended up utilising somewhere around 6,000 or 7,000 interstate and overseas personnel to support the firefighting effort....Absolutely all fire services and emergency services were stretched this season".³⁸

- RFS Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons

"Staffing levels are at an all-time low".

- Member, RFS

As the Black Summer catastrophic fire season hit, the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) was in the middle of a restructure. The agency has failed to explain why it embarked upon a restructure, given that the drought was priming the state for an intense bushfire season.

"The RFS's decision to implement a restructure so close to a fire season, was a major strategic failure of management".

- Member, RFS

"As a result of [the RFS] planning to restructure, positions were held open. 174 vacant positions severely hampered the RFS's ability to fill vacant IMT positions".

- Member, RFS

38 NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Legal Affairs: Police and Emergency Services' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 10 March

In August 2019, the RFS made the decision to implement the wide-ranging Area Management Model restructure, just before the commencement of the worst fire season in living memory. This decision was a strategic failure which undermined the operational capacity and capabilities of the RFS.

RFS introduced the Area Management Model, which changed the organisational structure from four regions to seven areas and reduced the numbers of experienced staff in key strategic positions. As a result, the RFS declared all Regional Manager positions excess, and the Regional Managers had to reapply for a position as an Area Commander.

The Association's members in the RFS undertake critical and often complex managerial, operational and administrative roles all year around and support a volunteer force of fire fighters.

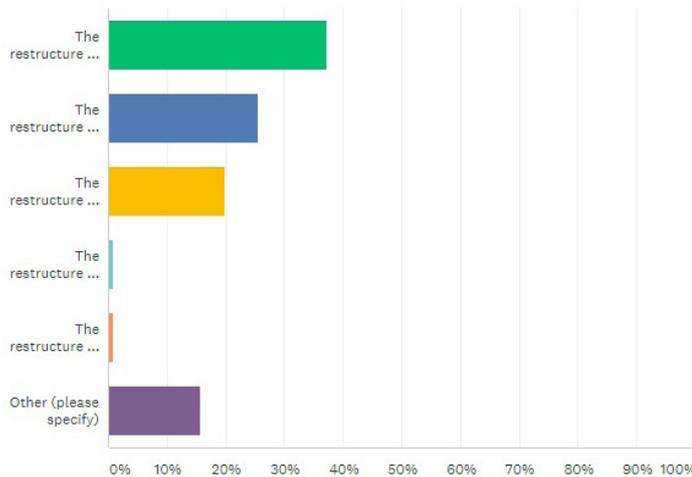
Further, in addition to the ordinary duties of RFS employees, the majority of RFS employees, particularly those undertaking operational duties, will be trained and qualified to be deployed into an Incident Management Team (IMT).

An IMT may be established in respect to any incident. The purpose of an IMT is to establish a managerial structure to support and assist RFS volunteers and members of other combat agencies in responding to a particular incident. IMT positions encompass a wide breadth of duties which extend from logistical support, to communications, to heavy plant and aircraft coordination. Some IMT positions are agency specific and can only be filled by the RFS, while the majority of positions can be filled by any emergency service agency with suitably qualified staff including NPWS.

The senior IMT position is that of the Incident Controller (IC), or in their absence, a Deputy Incident Controller (Deputy IC). The IC is responsible for the general management of the IMT, its coordination, as well as the coordination of the volunteers in responding to the incident.

63 per cent of the Association's members told us that the restructure had a negative impact on the ability of the RFS to respond to this bushfire season. The full impact of the restructure will be felt in the future. One exacerbated member said it was just another "band-aid" solution to a broader resourcing problem. The Association consistently raised issues with the restructure, including issues with high numbers of vacancies, the lack of cascading command with the proposed restructure and the lack of clarity with using the environment function across multiple streams **(ATTACHMENTS F - H)**.

To what extent do you think the above restructure impacted the ability of the NSW RFS to respond to this bushfire season?



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
▼ The restructure had a very negative impact	37.19%
▼ The restructure had somewhat of a negative impact	25.62%
▼ The restructure had no impact	19.83%
▼ The restructure had somewhat of a positive impact	0.83%
▼ The restructure had a very positive impact	0.83%
▼ Other (please specify)	Responses 15.70%
TOTAL	

Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – Rural Fire Service

Vacancies

“Delay in filling positions may have impacted on statewide resourcing particularly IMT personnel”.

- Member, RFS

“The Expectation that staff would stay on and work with no certainty of employment, some even having received end dates but still asked to work, had a massive impact on the morale of the agency”.

- Member, RFS

“The [Area Management Model] restructure fractured the family orientated nature of the RFS”.

- Member, RFS

On 22 July 2019, just prior to the restructure, the RFS had 174 vacancies from 911 effective full-time equivalent staff. That is 19.09 per cent of its workforce.³⁹ The Association was aware of these vacancies and urged the RFS to fill them promptly and transparently. These 174 vacancies includes positions held vacant within the agency, as well as newly created positions within the new structure. The newly created positions did not mitigate the positions that had been deleted and experienced staff being made redundant. The RFS was operating at the commencement of fire season at a reduced capacity in terms of staffing.

These vacancies could have been filled by staff trained and qualified to undertake the IMT positions which the RFS so desperately attempted to fill. The Association notes that as of 19 November 2019, the RFS reported 153 vacant IMT positions across NSW (**ATTACHMENT I**). Critical positions which extended from logistical support, to heavy plant operations, to aircraft coordination. The ability of the RFS to fill these positions was impeded by the number of vacancies within the agency.

The difficulties faced by the RFS in filling these IMT vacancies led the RFS to request that staff, without IMT training or qualifications, undertake IMT positions (**ATTACHMENT J**). This raises significant concerns about the quality of service which was provided by the RFS to communities threatened by the Black Summer bushfires.

Due to the RFS's chronic manpower shortage, there were multiple instances of Association members, who were declared redundant during the restructure, being either temporarily retained or reengaged in a volunteer capacity, to assist the RFS. These RFS staff members were undertaking duties in critical roles, with no assurances of employment, resulting in a dearth of staff morale and staff productivity.

There are a number of examples reported to the Association by members, of many long term and very experienced staff who were not successful in obtaining a new position but returned to RFS as volunteers to help fight fires due to the absence of available staff or volunteers to fill vacant IMT positions.

In one example a long-term employee of the RFS, employed as a Regional Manager in the South of NSW, was made redundant in 2019, returned to the RFS at the start of the Black Summer bushfires as a volunteer to undertake IMT duties as a Deputy Incident Controller at the *Currowan* Fire and undertook multiple shifts as an Incident Controller in charge of the IMT and volunteer brigades responding to the fire.

There are other examples of senior managers who were advised they would be made redundant upon the implementation of the Area Management Model but due to a critical shortage of experienced IMT staff, they were assigned to an IMT position during the Black Summer bushfires. They were then made redundant in the midst of the bush fire season, or just after they had undertaken IMT roles. Further details of this lack of preparedness can be provided to the Royal Commission at a later time.

Preparedness of Mitigation crews

The RFS State Mitigation Service (SMS), which is a key element of the RFS response to natural

³⁹ NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 5 - Legal Affairs: Police and Emergency Services' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 10 March

disasters is, members say, "chronically undermanned". SMS crews provide NSW communities with an invaluable service via the performance of their various roles, which include: hazard reduction operations, participating in the Assist Infirm, Disabled and Elderly Residents (AIDER) programme, in addition to undertaking firefighting duties in the absence of local brigades.

The RFS has had a massive back catalogue of vacancies in SMS, including in RFS districts directly hit by the Black Summer bushfires. There are also retention issues, given that these staff are almost all employed on temporary contracts. In fact, the SMS is composed almost entirely of temporary employees. Given the danger of future fire seasons, this must be rectified. No public employee performing hazard reduction work should be on a temporary contract.

The Association was inundated with RFS members raising this as an issue:

"Mitigation units are understaffed, poorly resourced and under used".

- Member, RFS

"Need more mitigation not more fire trucks".

- Member, RFS

"Not enough staff to support volunteers, or day to day processes relating to hazard mitigation".

- Member, RFS

"In state mitigation we have a massive dropout rate due to the lack of full-time employment and qualifications".

- Member, RFS

"Mitigation and community engagement are treated as after thoughts by senior management... Mitigation staff are still temporary employees with poor or non-existent career prospects".

- Member, RFS

"Based off my experience this season... I can say with absolute certainty we were, and still are, grossly understaffed and under-resourced. In an Area of Operation requiring at minimum, 21 SMS Crew members and 7 crew leaders. We were instead operating with a total of 7 individuals. Three CLs and Four Crew. This is due to the complete inability of the RFS to retain SMS staff owing to employing them on short-term contracts. (Four years maximum). This leads to difficulties retaining staff who do not feel secure in their work".

- Member, RFS

As will be discussed, RFS is also currently deficient in District staff numbers. For the purposes of mitigation, this means there is a lack of trained and experienced staff who are able to assess, plan and supervise hazard reduction works.

"District staff numbers have not changed since the implementation of the Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code, even though individual roles have expanded greatly since that time".

- Member, RFS

"The number of staff that can assess and approve hazard reduction certificates has not increased, training in this area has not increased. In the early 2000's the RFS recruited a few hundred fire mitigation officers for the specific purpose of dealing with Bush Fire Hazard Complaints and approving Hazard Reduction Certificates (the streamlined environmental approval required for carrying out the works), these positions no longer exist and the work has been bundled with other tasks into new roles".

- Member, RFS

A significant issue for the RFS is the agency's reliance on volunteers to conduct hazard reduction. Relying on volunteers has meant that hazard reduction can only be done on the weekend because volunteers are typically unavailable during the week. This further narrows the already narrowing window of opportunity to conduct hazard burns: if, for example the weather conditions only align for a two-week period over a twelve-month period, limiting hazard reduction burning to only weekends would mean that only four out of a possible fourteen days were utilised.

"Allow the State mitigation crews be more like a fire fighting force".

- Member, RFS

"Reinstate State Mitigation Services as a one stop hazard reduction service that do nothing other than plan, prepare and conduct HR burns all year round".

- Member, RFS

"If the state was serious then this would be a paid workforce, creating jobs in regional areas ensuring that the work happens".

- Member, RFS

Association members in the RFS (as well as members in NPWS and FCNSW) have overwhelmingly told the Association that the over reliance on volunteers is one of the greatest barriers to the RFS reaching its hazard reduction targets. If the RFS instead relied solely on its paid workforce to conduct hazard reduction burns, these could be done whenever the window of opportunity presented itself – during the week, over the weekend and overnight. The work would be guaranteed to get done, and it would be performed by skilled professionals.

District staffing levels

While the long term vacancies were across various areas of the RFS, the impact was certainly felt in the district offices, which have been chronically understaffed for years.

One message that the Association has heard loud and clear from our members is that district offices remain understaffed. This is in spite of the fact that Commissioner Fitzsimmons has said that the 2019 Area Management Model restructure was designed with better supporting district offices in mind.⁴⁰

“There are not enough staff in district offices”.

- Member, RFS

“Need for more staff at District level to be able to assist the community with decision making, mitigation, etc. and training of volunteers”.

- Member, RFS

“We desperately need more staff at the district level to meet our agency responsibilities”.

- Member, RFS

“More staff are needed in district officers to help manage the day to day operations and to be able to man the office during peak fire periods”.

- Member, RFS

In particular, the RFS needs to acknowledge that not only do any district office vacancies need to be filled but that there needs to be an increase in overall staffing numbers in anticipation of the growing length and severity of fire seasons.

“Staff numbers are...inadequate to manage fires in most fire seasons, let alone the type

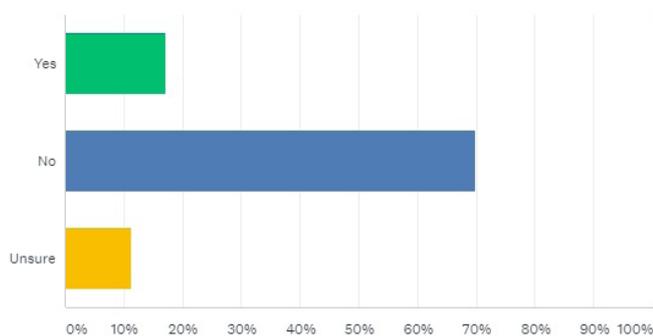
40NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 5 – Legal Affairs: Police and Emergency Services' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 10 March

of season we have just experienced. The number of people required to manage a fire and complete all the expected functions, especially reporting, has grown exponentially over recent years while staff numbers in district offices have changed very little and in many cases, not at all”.

- Member, RFS

The Association has urged the NSW Government to heed the calls for more resources from our RFS membership seriously. When the Association asked if our members believed that the RFS was well equipped to deal with future fire seasons, 70 per cent said no.

In your opinion, does NSW RFS currently have the necessary level of resources to protect and assist in moving forward into future events of this and lesser magnitudes and to continue to provide the necessary support to the Community of NSW, the NSW RFS Volunteers, NSW RFS Staff and a significant number of stakeholders.?



Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – Rural Fire Service

Efficiency Dividend – RFS

As a stand-alone agency, and an emergency service agency, the RFS should officially be eligible for exemption from the NSW Government’s annual efficiency dividend. Other ‘frontline’ agencies are eligible for exception, such as nurses and the police.

However, these exemptions are not automatic – they have to be applied for each year. Given the layers of bureaucracy involved in this process, the RFS has not been exempt from the efficiency dividend for a number of years, meaning that it has been vulnerable to cuts, the same as any public agency.

Given the recent bushfires, and the well-documented changing climate, it is the position of the Association that all emergency service and firefighting agencies should be subject to a review each year in order to determine how they can be *strengthened*. They should, under no circumstances, be subject to further cuts and should be automatically exempt.

FORESTRY CORPORATION OF NSW

As a state-owned corporation (SOC), Forestry Corporation of NSW (FCNSW) is expected to fund the majority of its routine fire management activities out of its own revenue. Over the past decade, FCNSW Management have cut firefighter numbers and budgets to improve the 'bottom line' of the business. FCNSW has also had significant cuts made to overall staffing levels over the past decade, with the last major restructure occurring in 2014. This has essentially decimated FCNSW's firefighting capabilities and led to significant reductions in firefighting personnel including:

- A reduction in total full-time equivalent positions of almost 50 per cent from 1,045 in June 2007 to 539 in June 2017.
- An increased proportion of casual and temporary staff, especially in fieldworkers who are at the front line of firefighting operations. These staff are not always available when required and suffer from higher turnover than permanent staff, with the subsequent loss of experience and knowledge.⁴¹

FCNSW has also had recent issues with ongoing vacancies, with one member writing:

"...we have had a number of experienced field staff retire in recent years and they have not been replaced. As such, our permanent field staff workforce is half of what it was 3 years ago, and this had a big impact on our ability to fight local fires. This staff attrition needs to be reversed".

Members have indicated a need for more specialised firefighters in their staff, such as RAFT crews:

"A resource I think FCNSW needs - and doesn't have - is RAFT (Remote Area) crews. At present we rely on NPWS or RFS or interstate crews to conduct these works... We need our own capacity in this space".

There is a concern that there are not enough firefighters within FCNSW with accredited IMT training. While the number of IMT-accredited officers looks okay on paper, many of these staff also have specialisations in other areas such as being tanker operators or heavy plant operators. These roles are in short supply, meaning those with the skills are often called away, then consequently leaving firefighting crews without IMT personnel.

FCNSW members have told the Association that there is a lack of resources applied to hazard reduction burning and that there is an overreliance on volunteers to conduct these burns. Many members have stressed that FCNSW needs to make hazard reduction an organisational priority.

Overall, while FCNSW has a strong team of capable firefighters, there is simply not enough of them. As indicated above, FCNSW has endured massive cuts under this NSW Government, and is only half as strong as it used to be in terms of boots on the ground. The NSW Government must ensure that FCNSW has enough professional firefighters ahead of future catastrophic fire seasons, and provide additional funding to the SOC if required.

⁴¹ Public Service Association of NSW (2018). 'Submission to the Keelty Inquiry into the Bega Valley Fire'.

"Bottom line is we need more staff. Staff who are trained and competent firefighters whether that is field or office-based firefighting. Critically, we need local firefighting staff who know the roads and trails, waterpoints and neighbours. We need them to be able to be a fire fighter, lead a crew, operate a tanker, supervise heavy plant and preferably - fall dangerous trees. We need this suite of skills in permanent local staff - so that these skills can be maintained along with the local knowledge".

- Member, FCNSW

The scale of the damage to FCNSW lucrative soft wood stock was so severe that the NSW Government was forced to shelve planned privatisation of the SOC. In fact, around half of the state's softwood timber stock was burnt in the bush fire season. The reduction in firefighting staff improves the financial position of FCNSW for potential sale. FCNSW is vitally important and supports directly and indirectly many thousands of regional jobs and large parts of NSW's natural ecosystems. The Association steadfastly opposes privatisation at any time in the future. The NSW Government's priority should be restoring the decimated forest industry.

NSW POLICE RADIO (VKG)

While this submission deals largely with the direct combat agencies, it is important to acknowledge the public agencies who work both behind the scenes and in the recovery response to the Black Summer bushfires.

The Association has been advised by our members in NSW Police Radio (VKG) that the NSW Police Force failed to properly prepare them for the Black Summer bushfire crisis. Not only did this cause great strain and distress to the staff in these centres, it also endangered the communities who were relying on their essential service.

"[There was] understaffing during [the] bushfire period - I consider this a massive safety risk not only to the public/NSW Police Officers but also VKG Radio Operators".

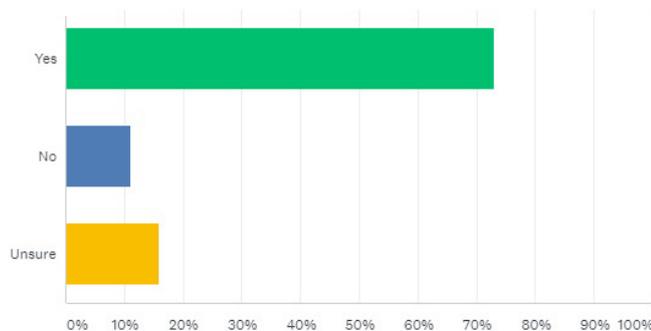
- Member, VKG

The vast majority of police dispatch in NSW is performed by civilian operators, who coordinate the logistics of police resources including car crews from local commands, Police Airwing, Police Rescue, and the Dog Unit, as well as liaise with the other emergency services agencies in NSW.

Like the combat agencies, the greatest failure of NSW Police, in terms of VKG during the fires, was a lack of staffing, although for VKG this was more a rostering issue than an overall resourcing issue.

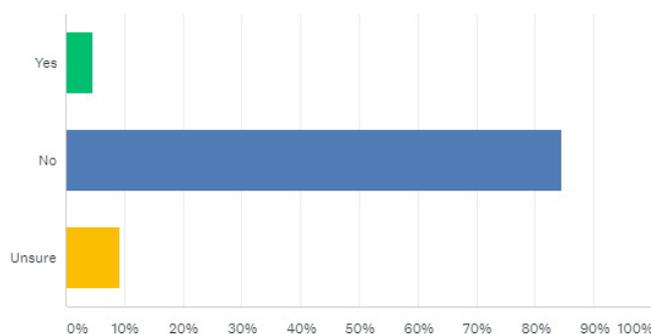
According to our members, in general, NSW Police base their staffing numbers on the minimum requirements, and are reluctant to listen to emergency warnings that predict an increase in required numbers of police and therefore an increase in required number of civilian staff, including within VKG.

Overall, do you think inadequate staffing levels impacted operational policing during this summer's bushfire crisis?



Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – NSW Police Radio (VKG)

In your opinion, was proper planning conducted at your centre (including ensuring adequate staffing levels) ahead of forecast major weather events and fire conditions this season?



Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – NSW Police Radio (VKG)

"[In response to complaining to management re: staffing levels] Got gas-lighted. Was told it wasn't as bad as we were imagining".

- Member, VKG

"We started that shift short staffed, everyone knew it was going to be a catastrophic day".

- Member, VKG

In the past, each police radio coverage area of NSW was coordinated by two radio operators – the main dispatcher, and a communications officer ("Despatch Assist") to assist them. In the last ten years, police radio channels have been "merged" regularly, to cut down on staffing

costs. This has resulted in radio operators being in charge of coordinating larger areas, meaning that they are also responsible for assisting more police officers. This set up completely falls apart in a large emergency situation, as was the case during the Black Summer bushfires. For example, during the 2019-20 Taree and Cessnock fires, the radio areas were merged into one, causing mayhem with police officers attempting to call for urgent assistance in the field, with not enough radio operators to take their calls. Even as the recent crisis unfolded, NSW Police in some situations refused to listen to staff alerts of the issue:

"I am aware concerns were passed from team leader to centre coordinator and commander with no result. Commander couldn't even bring his face into the studio to see what was happening".

- Member, VKG

The Association has consistently raised this with NSW Police, to no avail and ran an unsuccessful dispute in 2014 to attempt to mitigate the merging.

It should be noted that during the Black Summer bushfires, the centres most badly affected by work overload and lack of staffing were eventually provided with additional resources. However, not before the damage, particularly to the staff themselves, had been done. Numerous radio operators are now claiming workers' compensation for stress or PTSD due to their experiences working during the bushfire crisis. A majority of these claims are directly linked to the staffing issues within VKG centres.

NSW Police must address the rostering issue within VKG. As this submission has consistently stated, the changing climate will continue to bring extreme weather conditions – both for bushfires and other natural disasters – and all public services involved in emergency services need to be properly resourced at all times in preparation. As a member has said:

"The mentality of 'you can't roster for a plane crash' needs to change. The bushfires, their paths, the weather, all were known and protracted - there was no excuse not to have adequate staffing while this crisis was occurring".

- Member, VKG

More professional firefighters needed state and nation-wide

This submission clearly lays out the fact that NSW was not as prepared as it could or should have been for the Black Summer bushfires. A large part of this unpreparedness was due to staffing shortages in emergency service and combat agencies, both via vacancies and job cuts but also due to cuts to critical roles in the area of fire management and response. The Association believes that given that these fires were widely predicted, the NSW Government was knowingly negligent in not only failing to properly prepare its agencies for a bad fire season, but actively eroding that preparedness. If the Commonwealth was to have an oversight body in place with national standards for preparedness, including a detailed list of minimum staffing numbers (per role type), this could help ensure that the NSW public workforce was properly resourced for future fire seasons.

The Association would also like to commend the courageous efforts of the thousands of volunteers who put their lives on the line this summer to fight the catastrophic bushfires. Staff and members of the Association were among those volunteers on the frontline and we are incredibly proud of and grateful to them.

The Association does not take a position on whether volunteers should be utilised by emergency service agencies to fight bushfires, but we do wish to acknowledge the shortfalls of relying on them.

The first problem with relying on volunteers is that you cannot guarantee their availability. The RFS claims to have more than 70,000 volunteers, but less than 20,000 are ever recorded active in a given year.⁴² The Association understands that even during the Black Summer bushfire season, the RFS never had more than about 3,500 boots on the ground at one time.⁴³

Furthermore, volunteers have other commitments, and their own work/life balance to manage. They are also an aging group, with many needing to retire and there is a lack of new blood to take their places.⁴⁴

Another problem with relying on volunteers is their geographic spread. The Black Summer bushfire season clearly demonstrated that regional Australia is the most vulnerable part of NSW in terms of bushfires, and it is also the area of NSW most reliant on volunteers, rather than paid firefighters. Approximately 1 per cent of Australia's population are registered volunteer firefighters, however, the proportion of Australia's rural population volunteering with a bushfire service is closer to 4.5 per cent.⁴⁵

Regional towns are already under so much strain with the drought. Jobs have been leaving the regions, which means so too have potential volunteers. Changing methods of land management and agriculture mean there are fewer workers on farms and in the towns that support rural communities,⁴⁶ not to mention the fact that many regional NSW communities have been hard-hit by the downsizing of the public sector workforce over recent years.⁴⁷

Given the catastrophic fire season that NSW and the nation as a whole has just experienced, and the fact that we know that more seasons like this are expected in future, there are also ethical and economic arguments to consider: to what extent it is right to rely on the unpaid labour of volunteers for an issue of such national importance?

Volunteers need to work to pay their bills and feed their families. As the fire seasons grow longer, it may not be economically viable for them to continue volunteering. Cull (2020) has made an educated guess that volunteers currently contribute more than \$1billion to the Australian economy:

"The amount and quality of volunteer work is, of course, variable. But let's assume each volunteer gives 150 hours of their time a year. This is likely conservative, given estimates

42 Smith, A., Barlass, T., Hannam, P. and Snow, D. (2019). 'Farmers take fire fight to home turf', The Sydney Morning Herald 16-17 November.

43 Lewis, R. and Brown, G. (2020). 'Bushfire emergency: No longer safe to leave NSW fire zones, Premier Gladys Berejiklian says', The Australian, 5 Jan.

44 Snow, D., Cormack, L. and Gladstone, N. (2019). 'Safety in numbers' The Sydney Morning Herald, 16-17 November.

45 Cull, M. (2020). 'Value beyond money: Australia's special dependence on volunteer firefighters', The Conversation, 23 January, <https://theconversation.com/value-beyond-money-australias-special-dependence-on-volunteer-firefighters-129881>

46 Snow, D., Cormack, L. and Gladstone, N. (2019). 'Safety in numbers' The Sydney Morning Herald, 16-17 November.

47 Henderson, T. (2018). 'The Economic Importance of Public Services in Regional Communities in NSW', The Centre for Future Work at the Australia Institute, Canberra.

of the time volunteers have given up this season. At the average weekly Australian wage (including superannuation guarantee), the volunteers contribute about A\$1.3 billion to the community".⁴⁸

Prime Minister Morrison was asked about this issue over the summer to which he replied, "the volunteer effort is a big part of our natural disaster response and it is a big part of how Australia has always dealt with these issues".⁴⁹ The Association argues that the drastic changes in the length and severity of bushfire seasons mean that the age old adage 'it is as we have always done' is simply not good enough. Yes, volunteers have historically been a big part of our firefighting efforts, and every Australian is grateful to them for that. But the question now is, when we are facing future catastrophic fire seasons like – if not worse – the season we have just endured in 2019-20, is it right and appropriate to expect volunteers to be responsible for the fate of the nation?

Professor of Hazards and Disaster Risk Sciences at the University of Sydney Dale Dominey-Howes, has called for a "larger, paid, trained, professional emergency management workforce".⁵⁰ He has rejected that such a workforce would ever lay idle during the year, given that the fire season is getting longer and that the increased workforce could also be utilised for prevention work, including hazard reduction.

NSW needs to equip its emergency service agencies with more firefighters. The foundations are already there – for example, 70 per cent of the Association's surveyed members in the RFS are also RFS volunteers, and 56 per cent of them volunteered this summer. Also, as has already been addressed, many former firefighting staff who lost their jobs in restructures were called on to assist during the 2019-20 season. This clearly demonstrates that NSW can and should have more paid firefighters on the books.

The Black Summer bushfire crisis clearly exhibited that catastrophic fire conditions are too expansive and too dangerous for communities and governments to rely on volunteers. It is an unsafe and unfair burden to place on the shoulders of everyday Australians. All state and territory governments, including NSW, need to ensure that their emergency service agencies are equipped to their full strength and that their paid, professional workforce are the ones to lead Australians through any future catastrophic fire seasons and the Commonwealth Government should play an oversight role in ensuring and enforcing this.

48 Cull, M. (2020). 'Value beyond money: Australia's special dependence on volunteer firefighters', The Conversation, 23 January, <https://theconversation.com/value-beyond-money-australias-special-dependence-on-volunteer-firefighters-129881>

49 Davidson, H. (2019). 'Scott Morrison rejects calls for more bushfire help, saying bushfire volunteers 'want to be there'', The Guardian Australia, 10 December, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2019/dec/10/scott-morrison-rejects-calls-for-more-help-saying-volunteer-firefighters-want-to-be-there>, accessed 16 March 2020.

50 Dominey-Howes, D. (2020), 'Australia can expect far more fire catastrophes. A proper disaster plan is worth paying for', The Conversation, <https://theconversation.com/australia-can-expect-far-more-fire-catastrophes-a-proper-disaster-plan-is-worth-paying-for-129326>

CHAPTER TWO - PART TWO

THE PREPAREDNESS AND RESILIENCE OF NSW - OTHER

In addition to the staffing issues referred to in great detail above, the following section provides a brief overview of how well prepared the State of NSW was in terms of other important areas of fire management and response including training, equipment and communications.

Please note that these areas are detailed in much greater length in the Association's submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry.

Overall, the greatest issue for all of these areas is consistency. Each state agency has its own standards and requirements for training, equipment and communications. Having different standards creates gaps, inequalities and inconsistencies. Every firefighter should be equipped with the best available resources, no matter which agency they work (or volunteer) for, or in which state. Not only do the standards vary across agencies, but there are also compatibility issues, such as across different communication devices.

As the Association has put forward in this submission, the increasing size, severity and longevity of fire seasons means that strong and effective collaboration and coordination both across levels of government and across agencies within each state and territory is absolutely essential.

In our submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry, the Association makes recommendations to the NSW Government of how best to streamline the standards and collaboration between their emergency service and fire combat agencies.

As outlined in our Recommendations, the Association suggests that the Commonwealth can help ensure streamlining by setting national standards for training, equipment and communications, and enforcing these via accountability measures with the Productivity Commission.

Preparedness Training

"there were certainly skill gaps in our volunteer leadership at times" [in reference to placement of firefighters at fire grounds and burn overs experienced].

- Member, RFS

There are currently different training streams and procedures depending on the agency you work for and what state you work in. This makes fire seasons such as the one just experienced, more difficult and hazardous for our combined NSW and interstate (and international) firefighting crews.

The national performance reporting as recommended by this submission should include

numbers of each of the levels of training competency per unit of targeted bushland.

AFAC states that there should be harmonised standards and custodian of the AIIMS 2017 Incident Management System. The Association's consultation with members reported a number of untrained volunteers and new staff being placed in senior incident roles leading to significant safety breaches due to the lack of knowledge of the incident management system. We say that this management system was poorly applied.

We have discussed the inadequacies of training above. In the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry 2019-2020 we have addressed these in more detail.

Our survey resulted in the following types of responses in relation to safety incidents because of the lack of training and inadequate supervision:

RFS members' responses

- Insufficiently trained personnel deployed into fire affected areas without adequate support,
- Appointment of [untrained RFS] members to positions,
- Failure to comply with service standards,
- Untrained personnel were sent into active fire grounds to undertake assessments of property when it was unsafe to do so,
- Lack of supervision on the fire ground resulting in crews being where they should not,
- With regard to fire over runs, there were definitely skill gaps in our volunteer leadership at times, placing crew in dangerous situations.
- Inadequate safety decisions made by leaders

NPWS members' responses

- Visitor Experience Branch members being deployed into IMT roles who have no experience or training in this area, whilst others with experience and training not assigned to IMT,
- Many breaches of SOPS [standard operation procedures],
- Non-current/trained staff/people performing fireground/fighting duties,
- People doing roles not trained in (numerous responses),
- Inadequate general safety decisions made by leaders,
- Staff being placed in roles that they were not trained (senior roles)- i.e. Divisional Commanders/Operations/IC. The result was lost backburns, lost property, over runs of crews,
- Inexperienced staff rostered to fight fires,

- Untrained staff doing work beyond their capabilities,
- Staff performing fire ground roles for which they haven't undertaken the appropriate training.

We have made a recommendation in relation to the Central Coordinating Authority unifying and creating minimum standards for fire-fighting training.

Preparedness Equipment

"The RFS need a far better standard of fleet. Our fleet is well outdated and needs an urgent upgrade. We don't need more trucks, just better younger quality fleet".

- Member, RFS

"Most need to be upgraded to meet current standards. A central pool (possibly national) would be helpful".

- Member, RFS

"All vehicles in the fleet need to be provided with all safety upgrades. E.g. curtains, halos".

- Member, RFS

"Cat 9's are dated and not enough allocated. I went 8 weeks without one".

- Member, NPWS

"The type of vehicle depends on the terrain. The trucks I drove were old, one had to 'double shuffle' to change gear on steep terrain, and the air conditioner was not working so we drove with the windows down to stay cooler and hence got covered in dust".

- Member, NPWS

"NIL fire pants/jackets/boots, and to access stores was an 8 week wait for ordering fire uniforms, is unacceptable".

- Member, NPWS

The Association's submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry details a number of significant serious safety incidents whereby our firefighters were put at risk of serious injury or death due the lack of adequate equipment and communications equipment. This submission can be provided to the Royal Commission in the future.

Combat agencies were under-resourced in terms of staffing, and they were also under-resourced in terms of equipment and communication systems. This was in part due to the expansive spread of the fires – there were so many burning at any one time that there were simply not enough aircraft and vehicles to attend to all of them, nor staff to deploy to them.

Despite the good work done by AFAC and other international agencies in developing best practice equipment standards for bush firefighting, there were many different standards of equipment on the firegrounds with some equipment being many decades past best performance or not available in suitable quantities. The intensity and number of the fires combined with the work in different areas caused significant concern regarding the adequacy of vehicles for flashover scenarios as well as roll-over protection. The critical items of equipment which were not adequate include, but are not limited to:

1. Personal Protective Equipment

There was either not enough personal protective equipment, or it was not of a suitable standard.

2. Personal Protective Clothing:

There was either not enough personal protective clothing, or it was not of a suitable standard.

3. Vehicles and Appliances:

There were not enough vehicles of right type for the fire-ground. There were old vehicles, with some over 30 years old which were still being used. There were instances of the wrong type of fire suppressant being used. There was an absence of life saving protective equipment in the vehicles, including heat (flashover/burnover) protection, Roll Over Protection Systems and Falling Object Protection Systems. Unprotected hire vehicles were also being used at firegrounds. Additionally, there was a significant lack of first aid and defibrillators.

4. Preparedness Communications and Tracking Equipment:

"Crews working outside two-way radio and mobile phone coverage in dangerous fire conditions. The mobile appliance (fire truck) could not be heard from, managed or advised from the Fire Control Centre. Effectively a loose unit in a remote, high risk bush fire ground. Happened repeatedly, on numerous fires, often for extended periods of time. Where is the Government Radio Network they promised us so many years ago? This huge safety issue also means we cannot talk direct to other fire units from different agencies (e.g. Fire and Rescue, Forests Corp, RFS) because there is not one unified radio network. We do not know what

the next fire truck up the line, in the smoke is doing or intends to do. Very dangerous in any bushfire”.

- Member, NWPS

Communications devices were simply non compatible between and within firefighting agencies, and there was varied use of tracking devices and tablet technology.

Communications have been an ongoing issue of contention for the firefighting agencies over the last fire season and for many years before this one. Despite commitments to implement AVL systems, tracking systems, and ensuring that there is radio compatibility through the Government Radio Network GRN, this has not occurred for the RFS and NPWS to date, with little compatibility with the communications for FRNSW. However, the RFS maintains control of what is at best a piece meal communications system over the fire season.

Our submission to the Keelty Bega Valley Fires Independent Review detail a number of the problems with the RFS despatch communications.

Apart from communications on the fireground between and within agencies due to a lack of a unified radio network, there were also several survey responses that referred to miscommunication with the state control centre and local incident management.

Establishing and implementing mandatory best practice standards for communications and tracking equipment (including consistency, implementation) should be one of tasks of the Central Coordinating Authority, which is especially necessary in an environment where the intensity of fires is likely to require interstate deployments as a more regular proposal.

Resilience

The resilience of our firefighters and communities was tested this fire season with many working from June 2019 to March 2020 on firefighting. This is not sustainable with a number already notifying of workplace Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder type workers compensation claims.

Part of the issue was that there were not enough firefighters to do the work, no relief for the firefighters substantive work, the unavailability of volunteers for the length of and number of deployments, and the reduced skill base of the firefighters undertaking the work with many being made redundant due to workplace restructures targeted to meet budget cuts under the mandated efficiency dividends.

We propose a performance indicator that includes a requirement to have adequate staffing to fight fires in a season that lasts as long as this one did with the magnitude of fires that were experienced.

The Association and our federal counterpart union the Community and Public Sector Union has received a number of inquiries from members seeking assistance for workers' compensation for stress and trauma related mental health disorders since they have returned from firefighting

and from people assisting with the catastrophic fire days.

The longevity, intensity and scope of the fire season saw enormous stresses put on firefighting workers. The fatigue from hours worked, posting away from family and communities, the number of serious critical incidents and ongoing news or experiences of injury and death, all had an accumulated effect on firefighting workers and workers supporting first responders.

Over 50% of FCNSW workers who responded stated that that they were deployed for more than 8 weeks over the fire season. When they answered, *“was your family/personal life impacted by your deployment?”* 85% answered in the affirmative.

The Association asked members to respond to the question, *“Have you made contact with any of the following services due to the recent fire season? Tick all that apply”*.

The following is the response applied for the different agencies:

Recovery

The Office of Emergency Management with support from Family Communities and Justice Disaster Welfare workers and local government led the local recovery efforts with additional support from Service NSW. The Federal Government entered the recovery efforts more significantly in January with Defence and social security. However, there were still many concerns when in March this year the Association met with members in the NSW South Coast area and were told that the funds still had not been released to people who qualified.

There are a number of performance indicators that could be used in national performance reporting for recovery including:

- Services available at evacuation centres;
- Length of time for insurance companies to commence honouring claims;
- Length of time for residents to be placed in housing (non-insurance);
- Length of time for residents to be supported through income support; and
- Percentage of residents who experienced secondary illnesses after fires.

CHAPTER TWO - PART THREE

NATIONAL LEADERSHIP ON CLIMATE CHANGE

The Commonwealth must take a stronger and more decisive leadership in terms of climate change policy. This includes setting ambitious national targets for reducing greenhouse gas emissions, and establishing a national accountability framework to ensure that all states and territories are doing their part. This action should be considered part of the necessary mitigation work required to reduce the impact and severity of natural disasters.

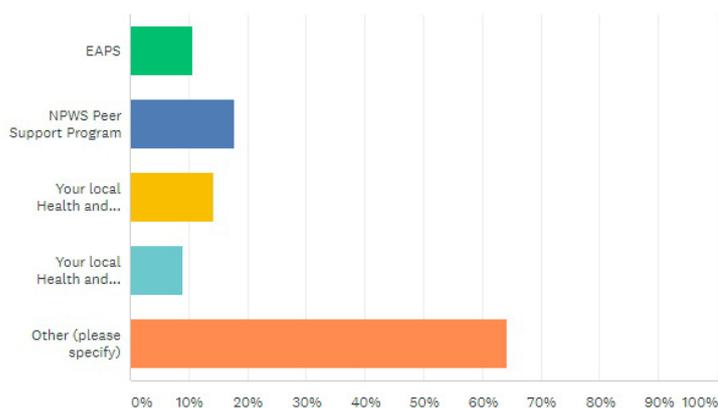
Robert Glasser (2019) the former Head of the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction has called for a National Strategy for Climate Change and Disaster Resilience:

Reduction has called for a National Strategy for Climate Change and Disaster Resilience:

"It should bring together a substantially reworked National Strategy for Disaster Resilience with Australia's National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy. It makes no sense to treat climate change adaptation and disaster risk reduction separately when 90% of major disasters are from hydrometeorological hazards (storms, droughts, floods and so on)—precisely the hazards that are increasing as a result of climate change".⁵¹

Have you made contact with any of the following services during the current fire season? Tick all that apply.

Answered:

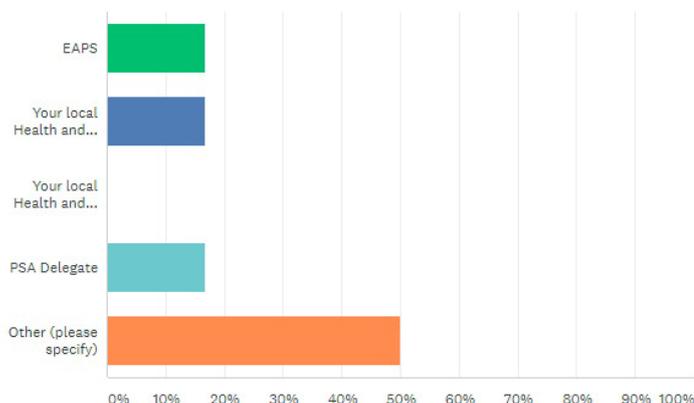


Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – National Parks and Wildlife Service

⁵¹ Glasser, R. (2019). 'Preparing for the Era of Disasters', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Barton, p13

Have you made contact with any of the following services due to the recent fire season? Tick all that apply.

An



Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – Forestry Corporation of NSW

Many experts commented that the unprecedented nature of the 2019/20 bushfires were a clear demonstration of the effects of human-induced climate change. As James Collett of RMIT University stated “Australia is now a striking example that is driving international climate change discourse”.⁵² Gergis and Cary (2020) stressed that, “unless there are global reductions in greenhouse gas emissions, temperatures will continue to rise, increasing the risk that catastrophic bushfire conditions become Australia’s ‘new normal’”.⁵³ A member of the Association from the National Parks and Wildlife Service reflected, “this season was like none I have ever seen. The volatility of the fire behaviour is a true indication of climate change in action”.

There is mounting evidence that the size and number of fires are increasing at an alarming rate.⁵⁴ The deadliest bushfire seasons in the past 200 years took place in 1851, then 1939, then 1983, 2009, now 2019-20.⁵⁵ This clearly demonstrates that the years between extreme bushfire seasons are shrinking rapidly.

In his 2019 report for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Glasser wrote that Australia is on the precipice of entering an “Era of Disasters”, with climate change – not terrorism, the rise of China or even cybersecurity – as the biggest threat to our national security.⁵⁶ Glasser warned that this emerging Era of Disasters will, “increasingly stretch emergency services, undermine community resilience and escalate economic costs and losses of life”.⁵⁷

52 Cox, L. (2020). ‘Unprecedented globally: more than 20% of Australia’s forests burnt in bushfires’, The Guardian Australia, 25 February, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/feb/25/unprecedented-globally-more-than-20-of-australias-forests-burnt-in-bushfires>

53 Gergis, J. and Cary, G. (2020), ‘Some say we’ve seen bushfires worse than this before. But they’re ignoring a few key facts’, The Conversation, 14 January, <https://theconversation.com/some-say-weve-seen-bushfires-worse-than-this-before-but-theyre-ignoring-a-few-key-facts-129391>

54 Bradstock, R. and Nolan, R.H. (2019), ‘Drought and climate change were the kindling, and now the east coast is ablaze’, The Conversation, 11 November, <https://theconversation.com/drought-and-climate-change-were-the-kindling-and-now-the-east-coast-is-ablaze-126750>

55 Read, P. and Denniss, R. (2020). ‘With costs approaching \$100 billion, the fires are Australia’s costliest natural disaster.’ The Conversation, 17 January, <https://theconversation.com/with-costs-approaching-100-billion-the-fires-are-australias-costliest-natural-disaster-129433>

56 Glasser, R. (2019). ‘Preparing for the Era of Disasters’, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Barton, p4

57 Glasser, R. (2019). ‘Preparing for the Era of Disasters’, Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Barton, p4

Both the Federal and NSW State Governments have previously given climate its own government department, with the federal Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency⁵⁸ which existed between 2007 and 2010 and the NSW Department of Climate Change and Water, which was superseded by the Office of Environment and Heritage in 2011.⁵⁹

Given that climate change is considered to be one of Australia's greatest national security threats,⁶⁰ it needs to be front and centre of policy debate and decision-making. Giving the issue its own department in both levels of government would be of great assistance in ensuring that proper action is taken to reduce its impact on Australia, as well as the world more broadly.

Howes et al (2013) have labelled climate change a "wicked" policy problem as it is difficult to solve and requires "a whole-of-government response".⁶¹ On occasion, solutions for or action on a wicked problem can be helped along by a crisis which opens a window of opportunity for radical policy change. Examples of this include the Port Arthur Massacre in 1996 which led to a complete overhaul of Australian gun laws, and the 1941 attack on Pearl Harbour which catapulted the previously reluctant United States into World War II.⁶² It is too soon to determine whether Australia's 2019-20 'Black Summer' bushfires will be the turning point in Australian state and federal action on climate change. This Royal Commission has an important role to play in making that determination.

58 <https://trove.nla.gov.au/people/1472988?c=people>

59 <https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/whoweare/20090802aboutdeccw.htm>

60 Glasser, R. (2019). 'Preparing for the Era of Disasters', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Barton, p4

61 Howes, M., Grant-Smith, D., Reis, K., Bosomworth, K., Tangney, P., Heazle, M., McEvoy, D. & Burton, P. (2013), Rethinking disaster risk management and climate change adaptation, National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility, Gold Coast, p43

62 Daley, J. and Milane, E. (2020). 'Might the bushfire crisis be the turning point on climate politics Australia needs?', The Conversation, 16 January, <https://theconversation.com/might-the-bushfire-crisis-be-the-turning-point-on-climate-politics-australian-needs-129442>

CHAPTER THREE

Response to

- (c) whether changes are needed to Australia's legal framework for the involvement of the Commonwealth in responding to national emergencies, including in relation to the following:**
 - (i) thresholds for, and any obstacle to, State or Territory requests for Commonwealth assistance;**
 - (ii) whether the Commonwealth Government should have the power to declare a state of national emergency;**
 - (iii) how any such national declaration would interact with State and Territory emergency frameworks;**
 - (iv) whether, in the circumstances of such a national declaration, the Commonwealth Government should have clearer authority to take action (including, but without limitation, through the deployment of the Australian Defence Force) in the national interest;**

We refer to our submissions and recommendations in relation to other related Terms of Reference. At this time, the Association does not wish to make specific recommendations in relation to this Term of Reference. However, we reserve our position to provide recommendations or comment on the submissions of other parties. Further, we make the following observations and comments:

The Commonwealth Government does not currently have national emergency management legislation nor does it have the specific power to declare a national State of Emergency. The Commonwealth Government does not currently have a clear legal authority that outlines its responsibilities for co-ordinating the disaster management efforts of the states. The current role of the Commonwealth is unclear and ad hoc. There is no definition of what constitutes a national emergency agreed to by the states and territories.

The Commonwealth Government has no legal authority over the states in relation to disaster management matters. The Commonwealth created Emergency Management Australia (EMA) which is a division of the Department of Home Affairs that oversees federal emergency management and coordination. However, currently the role EMA is uncertain and without legislative authority.

In a report on *National disaster resilience for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute 2008* the position of the EMA was summarised as: "*The EMA has no mandate, legislation or cabinet endorsement with which to take command. The delivery of EMA functions for the most part is the result of goodwill on behalf of other agencies. This is clearly not a satisfactory situation.*"

Any consideration of whether the Commonwealth Government should have the power to

declare a state of national emergency or introduce federal legislation would need to include a detailed and careful consideration of the legal and political implications, the interaction between state legislation and a detailed examination of the legal framework by relevant stakeholders including constitutional experts and COAG.

In 2009, the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd facilitated financial assistance to victims of the Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria and victims of major flooding throughout north Queensland. Further, in December 2009 the COAG agreement to settle a National Disaster Resilience Statement was issued which outlined the authority and current arrangements to invoke the involvement of the Commonwealth “in the event of a disaster or emergency within Australia or its offshore territories’ and that can include ‘the provision of Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) category one, which is activated for a set period of time under local arrangements” [1.4.5].

In 2017, the Commonwealth released the ‘Australian Government Disaster Response Plan – (COMDISPLAN 2017)’ – the plan for the provision of Australian Government non-financial assistance to Australian states and territories in an emergency or disaster. Under the COMDISPLAN, the Minister with responsibility for emergency management must authorise approval for the provision of Australian Government non-financial assistance. In NSW, the State Emergency Operations Controller has the authority to request non-financial assistance from the Commonwealth Government.

In relation to the deployment of the Australian Defence Force in the national interest, it is acknowledged that the Australian Defence Force can provide valuable assistance with specific tasks such as recovery, clean up and emergency evacuation. However, the Defence Force are not trained firefighters and do not have specialist firefighting training or knowledge, or expertise using firefighting/rescue equipment. Any assistance by the Australian Defence Force should be as part of a cooperative and coordinated effort. There should be clear lines of communication with the various state agencies and any assistance provided under the overall management and authority of the relevant state combat agency.

CHAPTER FOUR

Response to

(d) relevant matter reasonably incidental to a matter referred to in paragraphs (a) to (c).

In addition to this submission, the Association will also be making a submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry which is also relating to the 2019-20 bushfire season. Our submission to the state inquiry goes into much greater detail about the experiences of our members during the Black Summer bushfires, as well as the ongoing industrial issues impacting not only our members, but the preparedness of NSW for fire seasons and other natural disasters. The Association urges the Royal Commission to review the submissions made to this inquiry, including the one put forward by the Association.

As stated above, the Association urges the Commissions to review our submission made to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry for other relevant matters. However, there is one matter we wish to raise. Further to our submissions in chapter two regarding the issues in relation to communications and training, members have highlighted concerns around the fatal air crash incident that occurred on 23 January 2020 in the Cooma Area that resulted in the death of three US contractors. The Association reserves its position to make further submissions and provide further evidence at a later time subject to appropriate confidentiality arrangements. In the Association's view this incident further examination to avoid similar issues in the future.

In summary, it is clear that there are gaps in commander/controller training covering the use of aircraft on the fire ground. This fire season, there was also a lack of communication between the State Operations Centre (SOC) of the RFS based in Sydney when allocating Large Air tankers (LAT) to local Incident Management Teams (IMT).

The SOC of the RFS is responsible for coordinating bush firefighting and related activities across the state for the RFS, including the allocation of LATs. The State Air Desk is located in the RFS Headquarters at Homebush. Its function is to coordinate and allocate aviation resources for firefighting based on requests from Incident Management Teams. The Major Incident Controllers are in Homebush and coordinate with the Incident Controllers in the field. Air Attack Supervisor (AAS) are on the ground locally operating within local IMTs and tasking aircraft on the fireground based on the needs at any one time. The AAS could be from any of the combat agencies involved in the operation. There is normally a roster of RFS and NPWS AAS. The Air Operation Manger (AOM) runs the local aviation unit and requests aviation resources from the RFS State Air Desk.

The usual sequence of events is that an IMT incident controller (in the field) submits a request for a LAT to SOC and a State Operations Controller usually approves or rejects the allocation of the LAT. Standard Operating Procedure specifies that a lead plane (Bird Dog) flies ahead of the LAT who drops water or suppressant (gel or retardant).

On the day of the Bomber 134 crash, the established process of tasking aircraft was circumvented. The aircraft that flew that day were tasked by the State Air Desk (4 aircraft were tasked). There was no request for those aircraft from the Aviation Unit within the local IMT. The tasking was not an effective or considered use of these resources and the tasking was in breach of the Standard of Operating Procedure.

One critical issues raised by our members is that the RFS State Operations Controllers do not have aviation specific training. Aviation specific training would include training on the capabilities of LAT aircraft and on the effect of weather systems and smoke on LAT aircraft.

Training

In recent years, fire training has been shortened due to budgetary constraints and money saving measures. There are other concerns that should be addressed such as that in the RFS many of the AAS are volunteers which can raise a number of issues.

In NPWS, for example, original Crew Leader training was reduced from two weeks to one week and does not know include the structural firefighting component. NPWS crews did more structural fire work this season than any other. As a result of the reduction of training, there is less opportunity to cover subjects such as effective use of and communication with aircraft.

In NPWS, many of the fire training packages are 20 years old and in desperate need of review and updating. It is 20 years since the tragic Kurin-Gai incident where four NPWS firefighters died. Unfortunately, the changes and improvements in fire training that occurred after this have not been continued. NPWS rely on trainers from the ranks that have increased workloads and supervisors reluctant to release them to conduct training.

Many NPWS trainers undertake preparation for training and marking in their own time. This is not a professional approach to fire training.

There is a need for a national training centre, to have minimum standard followed across agencies and for each agency to have dedicated trainers and to break down the "silo" situation that can exist between combat agencies. It is essential that more training priority is placed on communication and cooperation between SOC's and local crews and AAS on the ground.

CHAPTER FIVE

Response to

(e) The finding and recommendations (including any assessment of the adequacy and extent of their implementation) of other reports and inquiries that you consider relevant, including any available State or Territory inquiries relating to the 2019-20 bushfire season, to avoid duplication wherever possible;

In addition to this submission, the Association will also be making a submission to the NSW Independent Bushfire Inquiry which is also relating to the 2019-20 bushfire season. Our submission to the state inquiry goes into much greater detail about the experiences of our members during the Black Summer bushfires, as well as the ongoing industrial relations issues impacting not only our members, but the preparedness of NSW for fire seasons and other natural disasters. The Association urges the Royal Commission to review the submissions made to this Inquiry, including the one put forward by the Association.

Since 1927, there have been over 106 Royal Commissions, Independent/Agency Inquiries, Coronial Inquests and Parliamentary Inquiries into Australian Bushfires, with 80 of these inquiries occurring within the last 20 years alone.

Of the 56 inquiries occurring since 2008, over 1080 recommendations have been made collectively.

These 1080 recommendations can be grouped together into broad themes of:

1. Responsibilities;
2. Preparedness;
3. Response;
4. Recovery;
5. Agency Organisation; and
6. Research and Technology.

Recommendations from previous inquiries reveal a need for standardisation and upgrades in technology and training, the importance of planned and effective hazard reduction burning and the need for adequate funding to support this all.

Further, in evidence to the 2010 *Inquiry into Bushfires in Australia* by the Australian Senate Committee, COAG inquiry panellist Professor Peter Kanowski highlighted common themes that had emerged from previous inquiries into Australian bushfires including:

- i. the importance of prevention and mitigation activities before fires occur, improving community education and awareness, and improving track access for fire fighters;
- ii. the need for adequate resources including resources for fire agencies and land management agencies, using local knowledge more effectively, and recognising the value of volunteers; and

- iii. other issues relating to communications infrastructure, local government responsibilities and the role of the insurance industry.⁶³

We provide a further break down of relevant previous recommendations from bushfire inquiries below.

The 2010 *Inquiry* stated that the consistency and uniformity of previous recommended action over a number of years indicates that governments and regulators have not risen to the challenge of adequately addressing well known and documented deficiencies in bushfire management.⁶⁴

Professor Kanowski described to the Inquiry a sense of recommendation fatigue or the bushfire 'cycle of response' that needs to be broken to improve the way Australia manages bushfires:

"The COAG Inquiry ... found a repeated cycle of response by governments and the community to major fire events: first, suppression and recovery processes are always accompanied by assertions, accusations and allocations of blame, even while the fires are still burning; second, inquiries are established and report; third, recommendations are acted upon, to varying degrees; fourth, the passage of time sees growing complacency and reduced levels of preparedness... and the cycle begins again with the next major bushfire event.

The COAG Inquiry concluded that breaking of this cycle, collectively and individually, was perhaps the greatest challenge we face in learning from the impacts of each bushfire on life and property, and applying our learning in time for the next bushfire event".⁶⁵

Victorian Association of Forest Industries (VAFI) lamented the frequent bushfire inquiries followed by inaction:

"It is quite unfortunate, from my brief experience with this industry, that we continue to have inquiry after inquiry and we continue to have the same recommendations made time and time again. The reason that that occurs is because it is common sense. The recommendations cannot change. However, the attitudes do not change either—that is, the implementation of those recommendations, unfortunately, fails to see the light of day in respect of many of them".⁶⁶

⁶³ Professor Peter Kanowski, Committee Hansard, Canberra, 12 March 2010, p. 31.

⁶⁴ *Inquiry into Bushfires in Australia*, Australian Senate, August 2010, p. 39.

⁶⁵ Professor Peter Kanowski, Committee Hansard, Canberra, 12 March 2010, p. 31.

⁶⁶ VAFI, Committee Hansard, Melbourne, 25 March 2010, p. 51.

The Institute of Foresters of Australia also expressed their frustration:

"The Institute of Foresters of Australia has previously contributed to a wide range of Federal and State Parliamentary Inquiries including the 2004 COAG Inquiry and the current Victorian Royal Commission into Bushfires.

Institute members are concerned with the lack of implementation of recommendations arising out of the various Inquiries/Commissions and the Institute wishes to register its strong opinion that any further inquiries into Australian bushfire management are futile until recommended actions arising out of previous inquiries are resolved".⁶⁷

Recommendations from Previous Inquiries Wambelong Fire Inquiry Evidence, NSW Legislative Council, October 2016

1. That the NSW Rural Fire Service:
 - a) streamline the regulatory system for hazard reduction burns, including the permit system, in order to identify and remove any unnecessary impediments to timely, planned hazard reduction burning
 - b) improve accountability in relation to the implementation of bush fire risk management plans as a means of delivering more hazard reduction.
2. The NSW Rural Fire Service, in collaboration with the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, review and improve the system of bush fire management zones to ensure that greater priority is given to hazard reduction on land classified within land management zones.
3. The NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service establish a regime of frequent mosaic burning within the Warrumbungle National Park, where conditions permit, to be monitored and evaluated via a formal fully funded research program. This program should then inform the Service's approach to the wider national park estate.
4. The NSW Government commit to and fund a long term program of prescribed burning based on the recommendation of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission of an annual rolling target of a minimum of five per cent of public land per year, and that the NSW Government commit to extending the funding for the National Parks and Wildlife Service five year hazard reduction program past 2016.

Responses to, and lessons learnt from, the January and February 2016 Bushfires in Remote Tasmanian Wilderness, Commonwealth Senate Committee, December 2016

5. The committee recommends that the Australian Government recognise that climate change has increased fire conditions in south-eastern Australia.
6. The committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to long-term funding for the the National Aerial Firefighting Centre of an amount that is at least equal to government's current contribution, rising in line with the Consumer Price Index

⁶⁷ Institute of Foresters of Australia, *Submission 6*, p. 1.

7. The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with state and territory governments, investigate a national remote area firefighting capability, to support Australian fire agencies.

Coronial Inquiry into the Warrumbungle Bushfire, NSW Coroner, 2014

8. That the National Park and Wildlife Service review its fire weather training regime and consider adopting or adapting the fire weather training courses introduced in Victoria following the 2009 bushfire disaster.
9. That the National Parks and Wildlife Service consider reviewing its guidelines and protocols in respect of hazard reduction planning and burning-off operations in the light of the evidence from expert witnesses in these proceedings that the incidence of, and intensity of, major fires is increasing and in the light of expert evidence given in these proceedings concerning the dangers of vorticity-driven lateral spread.
10. The NPWS to consider developing a land management policy that requires hazard reduction around identified assets within the Park and the clearing of fire trails within the Park before the bush fire season commences. Consideration should also be given to developing additional fire trails in the Park, bearing in mind the lack of available fire trails to the south of the John Renshaw Parkway in the park.
11. That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service introduce training, exercises or information packages, or other suitable forms of professional development, for operational fire fighters and analysts concerning the potential effects of atmospheric instability and vorticity-driven lateral spread on fire behaviours in severe-catastrophic fire danger conditions.
12. That the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service introduce training, exercises or information packages, or other suitable forms of professional development, for operational fire fighters and analysts concerning the potential effects of atmospheric instability and vorticity-driven lateral spread on fire behaviours in severe-catastrophic fire danger conditions.

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Victorian Royal Commission, July 2010

13. The State establish mechanisms for helping municipal councils to undertake local planning that tailors bushfire safety options to the needs of individual communities. In doing this planning, councils should:
 - a) urgently develop for communities at risk of bushfire local plans that contain contingency options such as evacuation and shelter
 - b) document in municipal emergency management plans and other relevant plans facilities where vulnerable people are likely to be situated—for example, aged care facilities, hospitals, schools and child care centres
 - c) compile and maintain a list of vulnerable residents who need tailored advice of a recommendation to evacuate and provide this list to local police and anyone else with pre-

arranged responsibility for helping vulnerable residents evacuate.

14. The Country Fire Authority and the Department of Sustainability and Environment prescribe and audit the minimum number and nature of level 3 joint training exercises in which incident management team staff (including volunteers) are required to participate.
15. Ensure that an individual with local knowledge is incorporated in an incident management team.
16. Provide regular training to IMT staff, highlighting the importance of information and reinforcing the support available from specialists within the State Control Centre.
17. The Country Fire Authority and the Department of Sustainability and Environment establish before the 2010–11 fire season:
 - a) a uniform, objective and transparent process based on the current DSE approach for the accreditation of level 3 Incident Controllers
 - b) a performance review system for level 3 Incident Controllers
 - c) a traineeship program for progression from level 2 to level 3 incident management team positions.
18. The Country Fire Authority and the Department of Sustainability and Environment amend their procedures to require that a suitably experienced, qualified and competent person be appointed as Incident Controller, regardless of the control agency for the fire
19. The State (through Energy Safe Victoria) require distribution businesses to review and modify their current practices, standards and procedures for the training and auditing of asset inspectors to ensure that registered training organisations provide adequate theoretical and practical training for asset inspectors.
20. The State, in conjunction with Emergency Management Australia and the Department of Defence, develop an agreement that allows Commonwealth aerial resources that are suitable for firefighting and support activities to be incorporated in preparedness plans and used on days of high fire risk
21. The Country Fire Authority and the Department of Sustainability and Environment standardise their operating systems and information and communications technologies with the aim of achieving greater efficiency and interoperability between agencies.
22. The Commonwealth establish a national centre for bushfire research in collaboration with other Australian jurisdictions to support pure, applied and long-term research in the physical, biological and social sciences relevant to bushfires and to promote continuing research and scholarship in related disciplines.
23. The State fund and commit to implementing a long-term program of prescribed burning based on an annual rolling target of 5 per cent minimum of public land.
24. The Department of Sustainability and Environment report annually on prescribed burning outcomes in a manner that meets public accountability objectives, including

publishing details of targets, area burnt, funds expended on the program, and impacts on biodiversity.

25. The Department of Sustainability and Environment report annually on prescribed burning outcomes in a manner that meets public accountability objectives, including publishing details of targets, area burnt, funds expended on the program, and impacts on biodiversity.

Reframing Rural Fire Management: Report of the Special Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire, Independent Waroona Fire Special Inquiry, Western Australia, June 2016

26. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services, utilising the Office of Bushfire Risk Management, to develop a simplified and fast track hazard reduction burn (and other fuel mitigation techniques) planning and approval process to ensure the timely conduct of township and asset protection burns by Bush Fire Brigades and individual property owners. The process is to be agile and adaptable for the range of stakeholders which may participate in low risk, small scale, low complexity burn planning and approvals.

Bushfire Preparedness, ACT Auditor-General Performance Audit Report, Australian Capital Territory, July 2013

27. The Committee finds that on the evidence presented, that the Fuel Reduction Burn Program should be maintained and have its budget directly funded to ensure that the program continues and does not hinder other services or programs.
28. The Committee finds that on the evidence presented, that the Government should undertake a review of how firefighting equipment and gear in Tasmania can be better standardised with interstate equipment and gear to improve cross-jurisdiction resource utilisation.
29. A Review into the Management of the Tasmanian Fire of January 2016, Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council Independent Operational Review, April 2016
30. All Tasmanian fire agency staff who are assigned to aviation-related roles be required to complete the formal nationally recognised training appropriate to that role. Tasmanian fire agencies arrange secondments to larger states for staff who are going to undertake aviation-related roles, to give them practical experience of the role in advance of any major incidents.
31. Further conversations take place between TFS and SES to identify what skills and capabilities may be transferable between the agencies, not just in the event of a future fire, but in case of future hazards for which SES is the primary response agency, including food, earthquake and tsunami.
32. Further conversations take place between TFS and SES to identify what skills and capabilities may be transferable between the agencies, not just in the event of a future fire, but in case of future hazards for which SES is the primary response agency, including food, earthquake and tsunami.

33. That a full review be undertaken of the benefits and costs of training a cadre of Tasmanian volunteer firefighters in remote area firefighting, with reference to the experience of jurisdictions interstate that already do so.
34. That sufficient Tasmanian firefighters are trained in winch operations to sustain a 'first strike' capability until they can be reinforced (if necessary) by interstate capability; and that consideration be given to how winch-capable aircraft can be sourced to support this activity at fire incidents.

Bega Valley Fires Independent Review, NSW Office of Emergency Management, June 2018

35. As a matter of priority, commence the roll out of AVL capability for the RFS fleet, completed as much work as possible before the 2018/19 bushfire season, capitalising where necessary on current and future work undertaken with the NSW Government Radio Network to ensure both officer safety and situational awareness.
36. Acknowledgement that, by definition, any volunteer organisation may not have the same response time to an event than full time equivalents and even some retained employees.

CHAPTER SIX

Response to

(f) Ways in which Australia could achieve greater national coordination and accountability – through common national standards, rule-making, reporting and data-sharing – with respect to key preparedness and resilience responsibilities, including for the following:

CHAPTER SIX – PART ONE

(i) land management, including hazard reduction measures;

“The game is changing and we need to keep up”.

- Member, NPWS.

“We need to get smarter”.

- Member, RFS.

Hazard reduction burning has been the subject of much discussion and controversy for many years. Increasing hazard reduction burns will not save Australia from another catastrophic bushfire season. It is not the silver bullet; it is not the panacea.

As a National Parks and Wildlife Service ranger told *The Weekend Australian Magazine*:

“There was nothing normal about these fires. Nothing was safe. The fires were destroying forests that had been cleared of ground fuel in controlled burns two years before.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Bearup, G. (2020). ‘The Last Stand’, *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 15-16 February.

The Association is of the position that hazard reduction targets do not need to be increased but rather, we need to get smarter and more strategic, in reaching the existing targets and the best way to do this is with a professional, paid workforce. If the existing targets are to be reached each year, then this needs to be met with an increased specialised workforce and resources to deliver increases in hazard reduction.

Weather is one of the greatest barrier to performing hazard reduction and, as our climate changes, this is causing the window of opportunity to shrink even smaller. Furthermore, as NSW RFS Commissioner Fitzsimmons has said, the Black Summer fire season were so severe that hazard reduction burns did little to alleviate the spread of the catastrophic fires: "hazard reduction burns that are only two years old, we're seeing these fires on these bad days just skip straight through it".⁶⁹ And as a spokesperson for NSW Emergency Services Minister Elliott has agreed, "the ability of the NSW RFS and partner agencies to complete hazard reduction burning is highly dependent on the weather, and the windows of opportunity available are limited".⁷⁰

Furthermore, hazard reduction must cease being considered the silver bullet solution to preventing the spread of bushfires. There is no single initiative that will solve this problem. Price (2013) warned that "planned burning has little effect under catastrophic weather, so it is an uncertain form of protection."⁷¹ Penman et al (2019) noted that, "reduced fuel loads do little for bushfire mitigation under extreme fire weather and in times of drought".⁷²

"The weather patterns and soil dryness were so extreme, I saw fire travel through bare paddocks where the only thing that burnt was dirt and kangaroo dung".

- Member, NPWS

"[We need] to not look at hazard reduction as a single solution - needs to be considered as part of a larger picture - one of a number of measures to achieve resilience".

- Member, RFS

It is understandable why hazard reduction is so often turned to for criticism and critique after bad fire seasons: aside from big picture climate policy changes, it is often seen as the only tangible solution that people can do something about.⁷³ While the people of NSW watched the Black Summer bushfires burn out of control, it is natural that many turned to something that they assume is within human control.

Unfortunately, there has also been a significant amount of political debate and lot of finger pointing around hazard reduction and its role in bushfire control and prevention. Some that do not fully appreciate the complexities of fire management seek to proportion the blame on

69 Hayman, R. (2020). 'RFS Commissioner says hazard reduction burns made his organisation 'public enemy number one', *ABC News*, 8 January

70 Smith, A., Barlass, T., Hannam, P. and Snow, D. (2019). 'Farmers take fire fight to home turf', *The Sydney Morning Herald* 16-17 November.

71 Price, O. (2013). 'Reducing bushfire risk: don't forget the science', *The Conversation*, 11 October, <https://theconversation.com/reducing-bushfire-risk-dont-forget-the-science-19065>

72 Penman, T., Parkins, K. and McColl-Gausden, S. (2019), 'A surprising answer to a hot question: controlled burns often fail to slow a bushfire', *The Conversation*, 15 November, <https://theconversation.com/a-surprising-answer-to-a-hot-question-controlled-burns-often-fail-to-slow-a-bushfire-127022>

73 ELCA's full list of recommendations for the Federal Government. Excerpt from letter sent by Greg Mullins to David Littleproud, 29 November 2019, <https://www.climatecouncil.org.au/full-list-of-fire-and-emergency-chiefs-recommendations-to-federal-government/>

'green tape' and environmental groups allegedly seeking to ban hazard reduction burns. NSW Deputy Premier John Barilaro has accused national park rangers of deliberately avoiding hazard reduction because they are "ideologically opposed" to it, while Agriculture Minister Adam Marshall has called for an increase in hazard reduction burns claiming that farmers are "fed up" with environmentalists trying to "lock up national parks to keep 'pristine' forest".⁷⁴ The truth of the matter is that in the past decade, park managers have never been under such intense pressure to maintain hazard reduction burning to attain their "hectare KPIs" to meet targets set by the NPWS and Bushfire Management (See Dr Philip Zylstra and Dr Amy Griffin's graph further below).

It is true that apart from the 2018-19 financial year, the NPWS has not met its annual hazard reduction target of 135,000ha, since 2016.⁷⁵ In 2012-13, the NPWS was involved in 208,000ha of hazard reduction burning; in 2016-17 that was just 88,136ha, and just 95,589ha in 2017-18.⁷⁶ However, as the above graphs demonstrate, NPWS exceeded both its hazard reduction area target and property protection target in 2018-19. Furthermore, according to RMIT ABC Fact Check, NSW has performed twice the amount of hazard reduction burning in national parks in this decade than in the decade prior.⁷⁷ As can be seen in the below graph, two separate analyses of the NPWS burning data have been conducted and while the figures were slightly different, the trend was the same: burning has increased significantly this decade.

It should also be pointed out that the argument to increase hazard reduction burns ignores the evidence across the board that says that the window of opportunity for hazard reduction burning is decreasing, and that this is already one of the primary reasons why less hazard reduction is being achieved.

There are two reasons why hazard reduction targets are not always being met are the conditions in the field, where faced with warmer and drier weather as part of an ongoing drought, hazard reduction is not always possible.

"The weather and climate have in our area been the biggest hurdle to undertaking burning with the limited windows of opportunities".

- Member, RFS

"Suitable "window" of burning conditions have been very narrow reducing opportunities to implement burns. ie. weather conditions have limited burning".

- Member, FCNSW

The second reason hazard reduction may have not have been carried out is one entirely within the NSW Government's control – resourcing. This issue has been thoroughly addressed in

74 Le Messurier, D. and Gellie, C. (2019). 'We should have done more', *The Daily Telegraph*, 12 November.

75 Office of Environment and Heritage Annual Reports, various

76 Clennell, A. and Ritchie E. (2019). 'Danger of cutbacks to rangers burns MP', *The Australian*, 13 November.

77 RMIT ABC Fact Check, (2020). 'Has NSW seen more than twice the amount of prescribed burning in national parks this decade compared with the last?' ABC News, 5 February, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-22/prescribed-burning-nsw-backburning-hazard-reduction/11878316?fbclid=IwAR1fcJPplkFXHlt5GX0uNGVuyL7VIWfaFINF3OPI75V06bc4vObgRztOq3s>

Chapter 2. The key argument in terms of resourcing is that it is no longer feasible to rely on volunteers to conduct hazard reduction burning. Given the narrowing window of opportunity and the need to be more strategic, hazard reduction burning should be the sole responsibility of paid professionals within the NSW Government.

“HR needs to be finessed to ensure it protects/enhances plant and animal habitats while still saving valuable assets. This is more likely to happen if the practitioners are experienced and professional, and guided by sound science and policy.”

- Member, FCNSW

HAZARD REDUCTION AREAS COMPLETED BY LAND TENURES VERSUS TARGET

Land tenure	Target (ha)	Completed HR Area (ha) by method				Completed vs target(%)
		Burning	Mechanical	Other	Total	
Australian Rail Track Corporation	292.2	93.35	62.21	0.00	155.56	53.2%
Catchment Authority	434.8	949.33	0.00	0.00	949.33	218.3%
Commonwealth	136.3	89.39	2.40	0.00	91.79	67.3%
Department of Primary Industries (Crown Lands)	2,783.5	1,404.33	2,378.32	11.19	3,793.84	136.3%
Local Government Authority	12,498.6	438.92	7,212.45	1,492.81	9,144.18	73.2%
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	135,000.0	136,157.37	1,588.59	17.55	137,763.51	102.0%
Other state Government land	2,733.8	6,856.25	44.29	0.00	6,900.54	252.4%
Private	11,145.4	4,469.75	1,716.77	0.00	6,186.52	55.5%
RailCorp	242.1	5.41	0.02	0.00	5.43	2.2%
Roads and Maritime Services	631.8	43.74	134.88	0.00	178.62	28.3%
Forestry Corporation of NSW	21,142.6	33,786.98	265.06	26.95	34,078.99	161.2%

Source: Rural Fire Service Annual Report 2018-19

Not reaching these targets are not to blame for the severity of the Black Summer bushfires.

PROPERTIES PROTECTED BY AGENCY

	Target	Number of properties protected	Completed vs target (%)
Department of Primary Industries (Crown Lands)	18,854	21,146	112.2%
Local Government Authority	57,737	37,461	64.9%
NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service	16,852	22,282	132.2%
Other	1,384	854	61.7%
Forestry Corporation of NSW	1,297	1,476	113.8%
Fire and Rescue NSW	4,219	2,426	57.5%
NSW Rural Fire Service	48,450	27,485	56.7%

Source: Rural Fire Service Annual Report 2018-19

Hazard reduction is an effective tool in combatting regular bushfire seasons, but this summer was a clear demonstration that hazard reduction is not the single answer. True community preparedness is a shared responsibility between government and the community.

NSW currently pays for hazard reduction out of the centralised budget, and therefore has an incentive to operate these operations with lesser short term costs, such as through the use of volunteers. As discussed in Chapter 2, the reliance on volunteers (whose availability is limited) is becoming increasingly problematic as the changing climate and weather patterns increasingly reduces the window of opportunity to conduct hazard reduction burns.

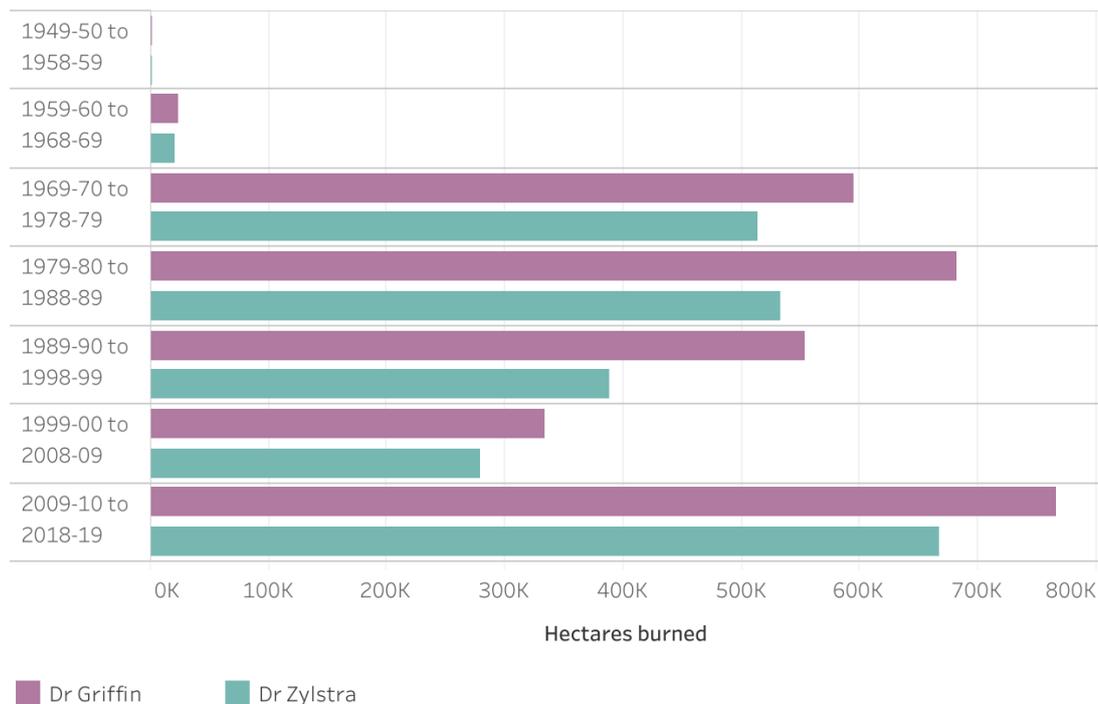
As this submission's recommendations state, one of the key roles of the Central Coordinating Authority should be to ensure that all states and territories are resourcing and running effective mitigation programs, including meeting hazard reduction targets and employing professional, skilled staff to perform such work.⁷⁸ As recommended, this could be done via the Productivity Commission's Annual Report on Government Services.

According to the Productivity Commission, funding for 'mitigating disaster risk' currently equates to only about 3% of what the Australian Government spends on post-disaster responses.⁷⁹ The Association also recommends that the Commonwealth provide further funding for hazard reduction work, including providing additional funding for staffing and equipment purchase.

⁷⁸ Glasser, R. (2019). 'Preparing for the Era of Disasters', Australian Strategic Policy Institute, Barton, p13

⁷⁹ Productivity Commission, (2014). Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, Inquiry Report no. 74, Canberra, p9

Calculations of total area subjected to prescribed burning in NSW national parks by 10-year period



Sources: Dr Philip Zylstra and Dr Amy Griffin using NSW Department of Planning, Industry and Environment data..

CHAPTER SIX - PART TWO

Response to

(ii) wildlife management and species conservation, including biodiversity, habitat protection and restoration;

Australia has one of the most ecologically diverse environments on the planet.⁸⁰ For example, 87 per cent of our mammals are found nowhere else in the world.⁸¹ Regrettably, the extraordinary nature of Australia’s biodiversity has not been a key consideration in Australian policy-making. This is evidenced by the International Union for Conservation of Nature’s (IUCN) finding that Australia has the highest rate of mammal extinction in the world.⁸²

Many critics believe that Australia is not doing enough to protect its biodiversity. In a study published by the Nature Journal which examined the conservation status of species in 109 countries and compared that to conservation funding, Australia ranked as second-worst, with

⁸⁰The Department of Environment (2016), *Report on the Review of the first five years of Australia’s Biodiversity Conservation Strategy 2010 – 2030*, <http://www.environment.gov.au/system/files/resources/fee27a4f-8a96-430d-ad18-9ee8569c8047/files/bio-cons-strategy-review-report.pdf>

⁸¹International Union for Conservation of Nature 2018, *WSPA Oceania*, <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/where-we-work/wcpa-oceania>

⁸²International Union for Conservation of Nature 2018, *WSPA Oceania*, <https://www.iucn.org/theme/protected-areas/wcpa/where-we-work/wcpa-oceania>.

a biodiversity loss of 5-10 per cent.⁸³ Australia was one of the top seven countries worldwide responsible for 60 per cent of the world's biodiversity loss between 1996 and 2008.⁸⁴

The estimated one billion deaths during the bushfires and as many as 700 species that could become extinct⁸⁵ has accelerated the problem. The need to protect our native flora and fauna has never been more urgent.

The changing climate is having a severe impact on our biodiversity, threatened species and broader ecosystems. The diminishing window to undertake hazard reduction burns is reducing the ability to protect native flora and fauna from extreme bushfire events, which puts them in even greater danger in the event of a protracted and catastrophic fire season, as was experienced during the Black Summer fires. Our biodiversity is at high risk of significantly reduced species diversity.

In this most recent fire season even sub-tropical rainforests on the far north coast were decimated by fire for the first time, and the sole known natural location of the Cretaceous period Wollemi pine required a Herculean effort to save the pine in its natural canyon floor habitat.⁸⁶ In the past, moist rainforest gullies acted as fire advantages to protect the spread of fire across the landscape. These ecosystems (along with many others) were almost completely destroyed by the vast spread of bushfires across the landscape of the far north coast and northern tablelands during this past fire season.

A staggering 2.7 million hectares, or 37 per cent, of NSW National Park was burnt during the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires.⁸⁷ The fires hit the habitat of 84 of the State's most vulnerable animals, while 46 threatened plant species had more than 90 per cent of their recorded range affected by fires in fire zones.⁸⁸ The wildlife losses that resulted from these fires are devastating. If the State government does not act now, many species will never recover and will certainly be ill-equipped to survive any future catastrophic fire seasons.

The managers of Australia's national parks are facing the challenge of working with less money, less staff and less park maintenance.⁸⁹ Don Driscoll of the ANU Fenner School of Environment and Society has said that national parks are so underfunded that it is no wonder they cannot keep on top of pest animals and weed problems.⁹⁰

Australia's existing national parks and reserve systems are not adequately resourced to protect Australia's biodiversity,⁹¹ with extinctions increasing while funding is decreasing.⁹² Campbell

83 Preece, N.D. (2017), 'Australia among the world's worst on biodiversity conservation', *The Conversation*, 2 November, <https://theconversation.com/australia-among-the-worlds-worst-on-biodiversity-conservation-86685>

84 Preece, N.D. (2017), 'Australia among the world's worst on biodiversity conservation', *The Conversation*, 2 November, <https://theconversation.com/australia-among-the-worlds-worst-on-biodiversity-conservation-86685>

85 Mike Lee, Australia's bushfires could drive more than 700 animal species to extinction. Check the numbers for yourself, *The Conversation*, 14 January 2020, <https://theconversation.com/australias-bushfires-could-drive-more-than-700-animal-species-to-extinction-check-the-numbers-for-yourself-129773>

86 The Guardian, Prehistoric Wollemi Pines saved by Firefighters, <https://www.theguardian.com/global/video/2020/jan/16/prehistoric-wollemi-pines-saved-by-firefighters-from-australias-bushfires-video>

87 NSW Parliament, (2020). 'Portfolio Committee No. 7 - Planning and Environment: Energy and Environment' Estimates Hearing uncorrected transcript, 6 March

88 Hannam, P. (2020). 'Grub and guns to save species on edge of extinction', *The Sun-Herald*, 2 February

89 Campbell, A. (2012), 'Thinking corporately: getting national parks on national balance sheets', 13 July, <https://theconversation.com/thinking-corporately-getting-national-parks-on-national-balance-sheets-8152>

90 Story Carter, J. (2014), 'Farmer says urban public are misguided about the reality of national parks', *Radio National*, 11 November, <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/bushtelegraph/national-parks-and-the-farming-reality/5882432>

91 Lunney, D. (2017), 'A history of a contested ideal: national parks for fauna conservation', *Australian Zoologist*, vol. 39, No. 2, p386

92 Eagles, P.F.J. (2008), 'Governance models for parks, recreation, and tourism', in K.S. Hanna, D.A. Clark, & D.S. Slocombe (ed.), *Transforming Parks and Protected Areas: Policy and Governance in a Changing World*, Routledge, New York, p43

(2012) has stated that Australia's parks are in "survival mode."⁹³ Nowhere is this more evident than in the state of NSW.

It is the position of the Association that the NSW Government is not currently equipped to deal with the wildlife crisis. This is also the overwhelming position of our members in the NSW NPWS: we asked them whether they believed that the agency had the necessary level of resources to protect and assist in the recovery of NSW wildlife and the regeneration of their habitat. **90 per cent said no.** Only 2 per cent said yes.

⁹³ Campbell, A. (2012), 'Thinking corporately: getting national parks on national balance sheets', 13 July, <https://theconversation.com/thinking-corporately-getting-national-parks-on-national-balance-sheets-8152>.

NPWS Members added to their answers to this question, which included comments such as:

"Grossly inadequate".

"Nowhere near enough resources".

"NPWS is a dismal failure to actively assist with immediate wildlife rescue and or recovery".

"Not anywhere near adequately prepared or resourced to undertake the recovery work required as resources and knowledge have been progressively stripped away".

As this submission continues to put forward, in spite of predictive modelling that forecast such an extremely harsh fire season for 2019/20 the NSW Government rather than 'gearing up' the combat agencies for the significant threat this posed, saw fit to continue to cut land management and combat agency resources (firefighting planning, risk management and firefighting staff).

As discussed in Chapter Two, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service has had scientific expertise, including ecologists, removed from its staff. The Association understands that it also has a poorly resourced threatened species unit that relies heavily on rangers from elsewhere in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (without backfill) in order to staff the unit.

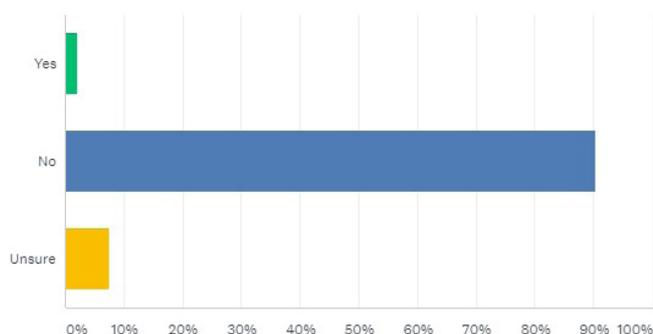
Research funding

Lunney (2017) has said that research is immensely valuable in the battle to protect Australia's

b In your opinion, does NPWS currently have the necessary level of resources
p to protect and assist in the recovery of our wildlife and the regeneration of
1 their habitat?

Australia's national
Service from
e conservation are
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conservation agency

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nt Protection and
ies:

Public Service Association (2020) Membership Survey – National Parks and Wildlife Service • endangered

- vulnerable
- conservation dependent

This enables Commonwealth involvement and funding for Recovery plans and Recovery teams. As the Association put forward in our list of recommendations for this submission:

94 Lunney, D. (2017), 'A history of a contested ideal: national parks for fauna conservation', Australian Zoologist, vol. 39, No. 2, p385

The Association also calls on the Commonwealth and State of NSW to:

- a) nominate and list under Section 178 of the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999* (EPBC Act) the species of flora and fauna that have become vulnerable after the bushfires
- b) to provide a significant increase in funding to
 - I) the CSIRO Threatened Endangered and Protected Species Unit and
 - II) the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NSW) to fund the adequate recovery plans and teams for the recovery of these species threatened with extinction after the bushfires.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Response to

(g) any ways in which the traditional land and fire management practices of Indigenous Australians could improve Australia's resilience to natural disasters.

The following section was written in collaboration with an Aboriginal member of the Association.

Fire is a key component to maintain a healthy landscape to enhance native vegetation and biodiversity through cultural fire application. The key is to be able to read country, country tells the story for when it is ready for fire and when it is not. Traditional knowledge talks about how a healthy country equals healthy people and the country can only be healthy if it is managed with the right fire.

Within traditional knowledge it is against traditional lore for fire to be in the canopy, if it's up there it's too hot, "cool fire is the good fire". The other aspect of cool fire is to ensure Aboriginal history and cultural values are protected from the threat of wildfire. These sites are significant evidence of Aboriginal occupation in what is now a highly modified agricultural landscape. These teachings are essential for young Aboriginal people to continue with their cultural burning practices.

There are employment and training opportunities that empower Aboriginal people to care for their country like their Elders have done for millennia. Aboriginal people are connected to their country and have a strong desire to care for it. The opportunity to officially recognise cultural burning practices will increase the amount of young Aboriginal people being back on country, leading to an increase of healthy country and healthy people.

Fire is culturally significant to Traditional Custodians. Where Traditional Owners have not been able to continue these practices the depth of spiritual and cultural knowledge and connection to country is only maintained through stories and memories. Integration of this knowledge into current agency practices should be actively promoted and supported.

Where knowledge gaps exist, agencies should work with Traditional Owners to build that knowledge and where appropriate, revive cultural fire practices.

Land managers and fire agencies alike have recognized the use of cultural burning for 'ecological burns' and the protection of both built and natural assets. One reason why cultural burning has not been widely adopted for hazard reduction purposes is that the traditional knowledge is not widely recognised or understood by fire agencies.

Adopting the principles of Aboriginal cultural burning is an important potential strategy to improve fire management and biodiversity outcomes across Australia. It will increase Aboriginal participation in broader land management, restoring key traditional values such as increasing the health of country and people. The Association encourages the Commonwealth to talk further with the relevant stakeholders in this field.

ATTACHMENTS

ATTACHMENT A

From:	Jim Betts	Version:	FINAL
To (BCC):	All staff DPIE	Drafted by:	James Still
Date:	TBC	Reviewed by:	James Abbott
Subject:	Budget savings update	Approved by:	Jim Betts
Mailbox:	Secretary's Mailbox	For distribution on:	20 February 2020



Good morning,

Today, I can share with you how we will meet the budget savings target set by the NSW Treasury for this financial year.

I apologise it has taken some time to reach this point. I also acknowledge that some of you have shared your concerns with me – by email, in person or at the town hall meetings late last year – about the time taken to get us here.

The reason it has taken longer than anticipated to get back to you was due to my commitment to investigate every possible opportunity to avoid a reduction in our staff numbers. We also had to recently adjust our calculations to reflect additional funding the Government is giving us to cope with the drought and bushfires.

A recap on our initial budget savings steps

Last November I updated you on some of the initial budget steps we'd taken to meet the \$81.4 million savings target, which included saving:

- \$22 million by cutting back on consultants
- \$10 million by reducing the amount of senior executives
- \$10 million in travel, advertising and legal expenses
- \$3 million by consolidating office space in the Sydney CBD

This message shares how we'll find the remainder of our savings target this financial year, which is approximately \$36.4 million. To put that in context, our Department-wide budget is close to \$6.5 billion.

ATTACHMENT A

As I have said before, our guiding principle has been to reduce our non-staff operating costs (including travel, office rent, advertising and the use of consultants) wherever practicable.

Our final savings plan

Your divisional or group leader will be sending you a message today about the specific savings found within your division, but on a Department-wide level we have found the remaining savings required of us through:

- **Re-evaluation of projects** – we have re-evaluated our current and planned projects and decided to postpone or cancel those which are less strategic or urgent
- **Less backfilling** – when a staff member leaves their position, we will only recruit to replace them when there is a critical need to do so. If a position is not backfilled, you will not be required to take on additional work beyond the scope of your existing duties. Managers have also been advised that team members are not expected to pick up any overflow work. If you have any concerns, please speak to your manager in the first instance to develop a solution. You can also talk to your Director or [People Partner](#).
- **Cutting back further on consultants and contractors** – beyond the cutbacks we've already made on our use of contractors and consultants (by bringing roles in-house and using our existing people wherever possible), many more contractors have recently not had their contracts extended.

In some parts of the Department, we will be making a small amount of highly targeted reductions in staff numbers. These will be based on changes in our strategic needs or due to the deferral or cancellation of a project. Teams that are affected and their union representatives will be consulted, and we will discuss the options available to them.

Future budget savings

NSW Treasury have also informed us that additional savings will be required of us over the next two financial years, but the scale of these reductions has yet to be finalised.

We have started to take an initial look at how this might impact next year's budget and we will keep you regularly updated as this work progresses.

Questions

If you have any questions or concerns, you can [drop me a line](#) or chat with your manager, Director or [People Partner](#).

We have also prepared a list of frequently asked questions on the [intranet](#).

Lastly, I would like to thank you for your patience and understanding as we have gone through this process. I know it hasn't been easy. I hope this announcement gives you greater clarity on our overall budget position.

Take care,

ATTACHMENT B



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: AP:jm

27 September 2017

General Manager
Clarence Valley Council
Locked Bag 23
GRAFTON NSW 2460

By email: council@clarence.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Impacts of proposed restructure of National Parks and Wildlife Service on the Clarence Valley

The Public Service Association (PSA) represents workers in the Public Sector across NSW, including those who work in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

NPWS are currently proposing a restructuring of the agency across NSW to amalgamate management areas in the newly formed branches. This will include significant changes to staffing, positions and structures. We write to outline the significant impact that these changes will have on the Clarence Valley community.

NPWS currently maintains an office on level 4 of the Government Office block at 49–51 Victoria St, a depot in South Grafton, another depot in Iluka, and a visitor information centre/ kiosk at Woody Head. The office was formerly the North Coast Regional office, and was the base for all regional specialists and technical staff, and the admin and ranger staff for two areas (Clarence North and Clarence South).

This office was occupied by approximately 29 staff when it was last subject to a refit in late 2011 (due to its relocation from level 3 to level 4).

The current proposal by NPWS includes removing one area manager position, most of the admin positions and almost all the regional and statewide specialists. In part, this is

ATTACHMENT B

because of a decision to amalgamate Clarence North and Clarence South areas, and to base the centre for the new branch's administration in Coffs Harbour rather than Grafton. It should be noted, however, that Grafton is much closer to the geographic centre of the new North Coast Branch, and so would be a more logical location.

These cuts would leave only 17 positions working out of the NPWS office in Grafton. This restructure will have a significant impact on the Clarence Valley region, including a significant loss of firefighting resources (including potentially the loss of 7 experienced crew leaders) and the elimination of all Pest Control Officers from the North Coast, bar one who will be located in Coffs Harbour. Wild Pigs, Dogs and weeds could have a significantly increased impact on farming and tourism in the region.

We ask that, as a significant stakeholder in our National Parks, Clarence Valley Council consider making representations to the Environment Minister, The Honourable Gabrielle Upton, as well as local State Member of Parliament The Hon. Chris Gulaptis MP, registering Council's concern over these proposals and the impact on the Clarence Valley Community.

A PSA representative is available to meet with staff or councillors to discuss the matter and provide more information. Asren Pugh can be contacted by telephone on 0408 263 044 or by email apugh@psa.asn.au.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully



Troy Wright
A/General Secretary

ATTACHMENT C



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: AP:jm

27 September 2017

General Manager
Kyogle Council
1 Stratheden Street
KYOGLA NSW 2474

By email: council@kyogle.nsw.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Re: Impacts of proposed restructure of National Parks and Wildlife Service on Kyogle Region

The Public Service Association (PSA) represents workers in the Public Sector across NSW, including those who work in the National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS).

NPWS are currently proposing a restructuring of the Department across NSW to amalgamate management areas in the newly formed branches. This will include significant changes to staffing, positions and structures. We write to outline the significant impact that these changes will have on the Kyogle community.

NPWS currently maintains a shopfront and office at 136 Summerland Way that includes four staff. A single admin support officer, an Area Operations Coordinator who works across the Kyogle and Murwillumbah offices, and two Rangers who use the office as a base but spend a majority of their time in the field. It should also be noted that recent years have seen the number of Rangers cut from four to two, and that previously Kyogle was the base of operations of a standalone management area. A joint management officer to support the implementation of the Gidhabul Indigenous Land Use Agreement has also been lost.

ATTACHMENT C

This office provides a valuable service to the Kyogle community, including a staffed shop front that provides information and support for tourists visiting the World Heritage Gondwana Rainforests in the region. This is particularly important as it is part of Kyogle's 'Gateway to the Rainforest' tourism branding and promotion.

The proposal by NPWS distributed for staff consultation includes removing the current admin support officer with all admin support to be located in a depot based in the industrial estate at Alstonville, which is not a public contact site. It also proposes removing the Area Operations Coordinator position that currently works across Kyogle and Murwillumbah. This would leave only two rangers working out of the NPWS office in the main street of Kyogle and would mean that the office will remain unstaffed and closed to the public for most of the time when the rangers are in the field. The PSA also fears that NPWS may determine that the office is not viable and close it permanently.

There are additional impacts of this restructure on the Kyogle region, including a significant loss of firefighting resources and the elimination of all Pest Control Officers from the North Coast, bar one who will be located in Coffs Harbour. Wild Pigs, Dogs and the significant number of environmental and agricultural weeds could have a significantly increased impact on farming and tourism in the region.

We ask that, as a significant stakeholder in our National Parks, Kyogle Shire Council consider making representations to the Environment Minister, The Honourable Gabrielle Upton, as well as local State Member of Parliament The Hon. Thomas George MP, registering Council's concern over these proposals and the impact on the Kyogle Community.

A PSA representative is available to meet with staff or councillors to discuss the matter and provide more information. Asren Pugh can be contacted by telephone on 0408 263 044 or by email apugh@psa.asn.au.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours faithfully



Troy Wright
A/General Secretary

ATTACHMENT D



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: MS:cr

Mr Atticus Fleming
Deputy Secretary
National Parks and Wildlife Service
59-61 Goulburn Street
SYDNEY NSW 2000

By email: atticus.Fleming@environment.nsw.gov.au
cc: simon.kempson@industry.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Fleming,

Re: Current NPWS vacancies

During the 2017/2018 "Future Parks" restructure, the PSA was given an undertaking that all roles in the new structure would be fully funded and filled. The official restructure documents provided to the PSA as part of the consultation period highlighted a number of vacant and temporary roles that would be filled and or made ongoing through the restructuring.

Recently, the PSA has been advised that a significant number of these roles remain unfilled (including, but not exclusive to, EBMP and other fire-related roles). By way of example, our members report numerous vacancies in the West Branch, in particular within the Darling and Lower Darling Areas. Similar reports have been made from other NPWS Branch's across the state.

The PSA has major concerns that the high vacancy rate places a higher risk on our members who are working in under resourced areas of NPWS. We also hold concerns that some Areas of NPWS may be implementing an unofficial "staffing freeze" in order to meet DPIE wide budgetary challenges. As such the PSA is seeking details of the number of vacant roles which remain unfilled, including classifications, across NPWS by close of business on Friday 29 November 2019.

Would you please contact Michael Sinclair on 0419 411 919 or by email msinclair@psa.asn.au in order to schedule a mutually convenient time for a meeting.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Sinclair
for **Troy Wright**
A/General Secretary

20 November 2019

ATTACHMENT E

Public Service Association of New South Wales

General Secretary: Stewart Little President: Kylie McKelvie

160 Clarence Street, Sydney

GPO Box 3365, Sydney NSW 2001

Facsimile: 02 9262 1623

Internet: www.psa.asn.au

ABN: 83 717 214 309

Telephone: 1300 772 679

In reply please quote: SL:MG

ESTABLISHED 1899



7th February 2017

The Hon. Gabrielle Upton, MP
Minister for the Environment, Minister for Local Government and
Minister for Heritage
Parliament House
Macquarie St
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

Congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister for the Environment, Minister for Local Government and Minister for Heritage.

The PSA is concerned about the privatisation of National Parks and the inadequate park management that results, and the attempt to downgrade and reclassify Rangers in National Parks and devalue the essential services they provide.

We are also very concerned that the Zoo is seeking to construct a five-star resort within the precincts of its Taronga facility, and the negative outcome for wildlife conservation.

We would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our concerns at your earliest convenience. Please contact Sandra Lockey of my office on (02) 9220 0982 to arrange a meeting.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Stewart Little', written over a white background.

Stewart Little
General Secretary

ATTACHMENT F



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: BT:mb

11 June 2019

Ms Trina Schmidt
Executive Director
Membership and Strategic Services
RFS Headquarters
4 Murray Rose Avenue
SYDNEY OLYMPIC PARK NSW 2127

Email: trina.schmidt@rfs.nsw.gov.au
cc: opsfeedback@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Dear Trina,

Re: Eight-Area Management Model – Request for Meeting

The lack of detail within the Change Management Plan makes it extremely difficult for the PSA and its members to provide meaningful and useful feedback so we can move forward. (The recent Operations Directorate Change Management Plan for example has significant detail and provides a clear vision moving forward.)

As such, on behalf of our members, we would like to meet with the architects of the restructure to discuss and develop a greater understanding of the vision and details to extend to our membership.

Some key areas we would like to explore during this meeting are:

- Details of what tasks the proposed Area roles will be undertaking to meet functions mentioned and service delivery
- What tasks are proposed to be transferred from districts to Areas
- There is a lack of cascading command within the proposed Area structure similar to both Head Office and Districts
- Criteria for selection of Regional (Area) Office Locations is not defined (e.g. transport hub, access to secondary education and employment opportunities)

ATTACHMENT F

-2-

- Current vacancies across to full directorate and organisation that may be available for current employees to consider
- Fire Trail functions from outside funding sources are not mentioned, and the lack of clarity with using the Environment function across multiple streams within the Operations Directorate is unclear and confusing.

The period of time that has been allowed for consultation does not appear to allow for sufficient time for detailed consultation. As such we request that it be extended to allow further details to be sent out and comment provided so the best possible base is created for the organisation moving forward.

We look forward to the opportunity to meet with you to discuss details. I can be contacted via email at btrainor@psa.asn.au.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Trainor
for **STEWART LITTLE**
GENERAL SECRETARY

ATTACHMENT G



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: BT:mb

24 June 2019

Deputy Commissioner Rogers
RFS Headquarters
4 Murray Rose Avenue
SYDNEY OLYMPIC PARK NSW 2127

Email: rob.rogers@rfs.nsw.gov.au
cc: trina.schmidt@rfs.nsw.gov.au
opsfeedback@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Dear Deputy Commissioner Rogers

Re: Eight Area Management Restructure

We write in respect to the above proposed restructure and the stipulated consultation period.

Since the announcement of this restructure, the PSA has sought the comment of members. A common theme among these responses is that of the inherent difficulty to provide feedback on a Change Management Plan that comprises of high-level, strategic proposals and very little low level 'nuts and bolts'.

While the PSA does accept that the process of a restructure creates incredible uncertainty and undue emotional anguish, and in view of the ever-approaching fire season, it is in no bodies' interests for the matter to become protracted. However, the PSA does maintain that an additional brief consultation period following the finalisation of the Change Management Plan, is necessary to allow genuine feedback on a restructure that thus far has been exceedingly difficult for members to comment on.

Further to this, the PSA reminds the Rural Fire Service of its obligations under clause 65 of the *Crown Employees (Public Service Conditions of Employment) Reviewed Award 2009* to engage in on-going, genuine consultation with the PSA.

ATTACHMENT G

-2-

Member Feedback

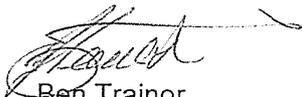
The responses received by the PSA can be summarised as follows:

- All previous restructures have ensured current officers were not disadvantaged via a reduction in grade or forced relocation. We note that these assurances have been absent in the draft materials provided thus far.
- Due to the lack of *real* information in the draft change management plan, it is disingenuous to request feedback from all staff without the requisite information being provided.
- The Draft Change Management Plan states the reason for the restructure is that districts have been afflicted by workloads, however no empirical data is provided to detail this issue.
- Some tasks (including fire investigations and hazard reductions) are being allocated to volunteers as opposed to paid staff to reduce workload.
- There is a general consensus among members that not all staff will retain their positions, rather they will have to reapply and potentially be relocated or reduced in grade.
- The restructure shows smaller areas with less staff and more responsibility.

The PSA does support the increase of 31 full time positions within the Rural Fire Service, however it is vital to give due consideration to the significant and life changing impacts of relocation. Accordingly, the PSA reminds the Rural Fire Service of his obligations under the *Crown Employees (Transferred Employees Compensation) Award*.

Please find enclosed responses received by the PSA for the consideration of the Rural Fire Service.

Yours sincerely,



Ben Trainor
for **STEWART LITTLE**
GENERAL SECRETARY

ATTACHMENT H



PUBLIC SERVICE ASSOCIATION
OF NEW SOUTH WALES

General Secretary Stewart Little
President Kylie McKelvie
ABN 83 717 214 309

In reply please quote: BT:mb

22 August 2019

Ms Trina Schmidt
Executive Director
Membership and Strategic Services
Rural Fire Services Headquarters
4 Murray Rose Avenue
SYDNEY OLYMPIC PARK NSW 2127

Email: trina.schmidt@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Dear Trina,

Re: Request for Update on Area Model Restructure

We are seeking an update as to the current status of the direct assignment and capability assessment phase of the restructure.

We understand that affected staff at Grades 6/7, 4/5 and 2/3 were to receive notification of their direct assignment to role based upon their EOI preferences in the week commencing 12 August 2019.

Further, we understand that affected staff at Grades 8/9, 6/7, 4/5 and 2/3 were to receive notification of their capability assessment this week, commencing 19 August 2019.

The PSA is being contacted by members stating that no notification has been received in respect to either direct assignment and capability assessments. We accordingly seek that the RFS provide the PSA with an update as to the current status of this phase of the restructure.

Finally, we request that once the 12/13 and 10/11 positions have been filled, that an agency wide notification be provided by the RFS identifying who has filled these positions. We are of the view that such a notification would assist on resettling the RFS after such a significant restructure by helping to re-establishing the appropriate contacts within the agency.

Yours sincerely,

Ben Trainor
for STEWART LITTLE
GENERAL SECRETARY

ATTACHMENT I

Total no. roles req'd	Role	Commencement Date	Shift Times (IE days/nights)	Duration	Agency	Notes
Glen Innes (Northern Tablelands)						
1	Operations Support Officer	ASAP	Night	3	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	Planning Officer Primary	ASAP	Night	3	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
2	Planning Support Officer	ASAP	Day	5	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	Planning Support Officer	ASAP	Night	3	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	RTC - Yarrawitch	ASAP	Day	5	RFS	URGENTLY Required
1	RTC - Coordinator (IMT)	ASAP	Day	5	RFS	URGENTLY Required
1	Logistics - Finance Support	ASAP	Day	5	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	Finance Officer Primary	ASAP	Day	5	RFS	URGENTLY Required
1	Communications Operators	ASAP	Night	3	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	Operations Support Officer	ASAP	Day	5	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
2	Air Base Operators	19/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	Resource Officer Primary	19/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	URGENTLY Required
1	FBAN	19/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	URGENTLY Required
1	Aircraft Officer	20/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	URGENTLY Required
1	Heavy Plant Supervisor	20/11/2019	Day	2	Any Agency	
1	GIS Operator	21/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Operations Support Officer	21/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	Vic Organising ABM commencing 22 and 24/11. Ops and Pln commencing 21/11
1	Rural Liaison Officer	21/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
2	Communications Operators	22/11/2019	Day	3	Any Agency	
1	Logistics - Accommodation	22/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
2	Community Field Liaison Officers	23/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
2	Logistics - Finance Support	23/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	RTC - Glen Innes	23/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Heavy Plant Operations Manager	24/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	DIC	24/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Management Support Officer (IMT Inbox)	25/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Primary Planning Officer	24/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
Kempsey (Lower North Coast)						
1	Finance Officer	19/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Logs Support - Ground	19/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Logistics Support - Ground	19/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Planning Officer	19/11/2019	Night	3	Any	
1	Logistics Catering	22/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Logistics Support - SAP Ordering	20/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Logistics - Catering	20/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Air Operations Manager	21/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Logistics Support	21/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Air Operations Manager	21/11/2019	Day	5	RFS/NPWS	
1	Heavy Plant Manager	22/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Situations Officer	23/11/2019	Day	5	NPWS	
1	Air Base Manager	24/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	GIS Officer	28/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
Mid Coast						
1	Logistics Support		Day	3	Any	
1	Public Liaison Officer		Night	3	Any	
1	Response Team Coordinator		Day	5	Any	

ATTACHMENT I

1	Situation Support (Planning)			Night	5	Any	
1	Staging Area Manager (Taree)			Day	3	Any	
1	Air Base Manager			Day	5	Any	
1	Resource Support			Day	5	Any	
1	AAS			Day	5	Any	
1	GIS Operator			Day	5	Any	
1	AAS			Day	3	Any	
2	Communications Operators			Night	3	Any	
1	Aircraft Officer			Day	5	Any	

Hawkesbury

2	Aviation Communication	ASAP	ASAP	Day	3	Any	
2	Deputy Response Team Coordinator	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
1	GIS Operator	ASAP	ASAP	Night	5	Any	
1	Management Support Officer	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
1	Response Team Coordinator	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
2	Staging Area Coordinator	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	RFS	
2	Staging Area Coordinator	ASAP	ASAP	Night	3	RFS	
2	Air Observer	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	RFS/NPWS	
1	CLO	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
2	Communications	ASAP	ASAP	Night	3	Any	
2	Communications	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
1	Planning Officer	ASAP	ASAP	Night	3	Any	
1	Planning Officer	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
2	Safety Advisor IMT	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	FRNSW	
1	Safety Advisor IMT	ASAP	ASAP	Night	3	FRNSW	
1	Situation Support	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any	
1	MLO	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	RFS	

Clarence Valley

1	Logistics Support - Accommodation	18/11/2019	18/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Operations Officer	18/11/2019	18/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Air Observer	19/11/19	19/11/19	Day	3	Any Agency	
1	Safety Advisor	19/11/2019	19/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Planning Officer	19/11/2019	19/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Operations Officer	19/11/2019	19/11/2019	Night	5	RFS	
2	Community Liaison Officers	20/11/19	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Resource Support	20/11/2019	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	DIC	20/11/2019	20/11/2019	Day	5	RFS	
1	Safety Advisor	20/11/2019	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Heavy Plant Manager	20/11/2019	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Planning Officer	20/11/2019	20/11/2019	Night	5	Any Agency	
1	Operations Officer	23/11/2019	23/11/2019	Day	5	Any Agency	
2	Air Radio Operators	23/11/19	23/11/19	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Air Attack Supervisor	24/11/19	24/11/19	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Air Operations Manager	25/11/19	25/11/19	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	Operations Officer	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any Agency	
1	DIC	ASAP	ASAP	Night	3	Any Agency	
5	Base Camp Admin Support	ASAP	ASAP	Day	5	Any Agency	

Northern Rivers

ATTACHMENT I

1	Logistics Support (Catering)	19/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Management Support	19/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Communications Officer	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Logistics Support Officer	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Operational Support Officer	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Public Liaison Officer	20/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Community Liaison Officer - Intel	20/11/2019	Day	3	Any	
1	Air Attack Supervisor	20/11/2019	Day	3	Any	
1	Air Operations Manager	21/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Aviation Radio Operator	21/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	GIS Operator	22/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Heavy Plant Supervisor	22/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Aircraft Officer	22/11/2019	Day	3	Any	
1	Safety Advisor	23/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Logistics Support (Catering)	23/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Aviation Radio Operator	23/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Air Attack Supervisor	23/11/2019	Day	3	Any	
1	Media Liaison Officer	24/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Management Support	24/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Planning Support Officer	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Operations Support	25/11/2019	Day	5	CFS	
2	Planning Officer Support	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Aircraft Officer	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
3	Airbase Operator	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Resource Officer	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
1	Resource Support Officer	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	
2	Logistics Support Officer	25/11/2019	Day	5	Any	Requested ILU to source particular personnel (CFS) 1. Andrea Geytenbeek 2. Gillian Hodge
2	Air Attack Supervisor	26/11/2019	Day	3	Any	

ATTACHMENT J

Consolidated IMT Req...
KB

 ATT00001.htm
474 bytes

From: State Operations <State.Ops@rfs.nsw.gov.au>

Date: 19 November 2019 at 4:48:45 pm AEDT

To: All Staff <AllStaff@rfs.nsw.gov.au>, MIC North <MIC.North@rfs.nsw.gov.au>, MIC East <MIC.East@rfs.nsw.gov.au>, MIC South <MIC.South@rfs.nsw.gov.au>, MIC West <MIC.West@rfs.nsw.gov.au>, Interstate Liaison Unit <InterstateLiaisonUnit@rfs.nsw.gov.au>

Subject: URGENT IMT Resourcing Requirements

Good afternoon

With the ongoing unprecedented level of fire activity across the state, we are seeking the assistance of all staff in fulfilling a number of critical IMT roles.

On behalf of the State Operations Controller and the Manager State Operations, I ask that you review the attached list and advise if you are available (with your Manager's approval) to assist.

- For IMT roles in Clarence Valley; Northern Tablelands; Lower North Coast; or Northern Rivers – please reply via email to MIC.North@rfs.nsw.gov.au
- For IMT roles in Mid-Coast or Hawkesbury IMTs – please reply via email to MIC.East@rfs.nsw.gov.au

There are a number of roles which you may be able to fill without IMT training – and I encourage you to seek these out.

Similarly, if you have undertaken IMT training, but are not yet qualified, there are also roles that you can assist with, under a Primary Officer.

This will be an ongoing request, which you will continue to receive.

For note of the MIC desks:

Please note, we need to be advised of any positions that are filled via a State resource, so we are not doubling up with interstate. Vice versa, we will advise you ASAP if an interstate person can assist with positions.

Your assistance at this time is very much appreciated.

Regards

State Resourcing Unit.

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