

**Submission Number: NND.001.00912**

**Submission Of:**

**Your Details**

Email address:

Phone:

Preferred means of contact: Email

What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise?

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation?

**Your Submission**

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

The incredible dedication of the individuals to do the best job they can despite the challenges - perhaps even because of the challenges. A willingness to overcome issues and get the job done.

See Attached document for detailed submission.

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

Poor support for Divisional Controllers.

See Attached document for detailed submission.

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

See attached document for detailed submission.

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

See Attached document for detailed submission.

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published anonymously

Supporting material provided:

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.docx

### Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Submission by [REDACTED] relating the matters to be considered by the Royal Commission.

Introduction:

I am a Bushfire Firefighter in Western Australia with 26 years' experience in fighting in the Perth Hills region. I was honoured to be able to participate in a deployment of Western Australian Firefighters to northern New South Wales in October/November 2019 and to Balladonia in Western Australia in January 2020. The welcome given by the locals in New South Wales to the deployees clearly indicated their need for fresh firefighters to relieve exhausted local Brigade members. These deployments, and others I was a member of within Western Australia, gave some insight into the issues faced by individuals and by all levels of various firefighting organizations within Australia, in dealing with major fire events. Much goodwill by participants at all levels of firefighting enables a very high morale and work effort. However, it appears to me that this goodwill and high morale masks a lag in the development of a closer understanding of capabilities and expectations between the host agency members and deployed agency members.

*Item 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;*

Submission for Item a) based on the likely increased need to support Brigades, local to major incidents, due to reduced recruiting rates and ageing memberships:

1. Common firefighting hose fittings. To facilitate easy interoperability all firefighting appliances, regardless of origin, should have common fittings. This will ensure that all firefighters are familiar with the use of fittings and; enable improve the flexibility of unit deployment by allowing the use mixed crews and teams.
2. Common Radio arrangements. To facilitate cross agency firefighter efficiency, effectiveness and safety a common radio communication environment is needed. A hot fireground is not a suitable place to learn a new radio system.
3. Common Mapping System. To facilitate dealing with any natural disaster and to eliminate the need to translate any directions or locations, to be supplied to, and used exclusively by, all agencies across Australia. This should be both electronic and paper in form.
4. Interstate and Inter-Agency Training and Exercising. To facilitate cross agency, including cross state, capability in Incident Management. This would primarily improve the understanding of local conditions to non-local firefighters; and also, to improve the understanding of the capabilities of non-local firefighters by the local incident controllers. This will improve the effectiveness of communications between members regardless of type, especially as personal contacts are established and developed. Such exercising will enable skills relating to managing deployment to be developed in individuals and agencies either as the host or the deployed agency and their members. Development of appropriate methods of calling for deployment between and withing agencies; arrangements for suitable travel, accommodation, food and refreshments, etc. will all ensure a more efficient use of deployed resources.
5. All agencies should hold a reserve of units to enable scaling up of response to incidents. This reserve is beyond the operational reserve that is used for unit replacements for repairs, servicing, etc. This could be sourced from serviceable units retired at the end of their normal lifespan and held for 2-3 seasons before being sold.

And also, there is a need to strengthen aspects of the implementation of Incident Control:

6. Improve the Resourcing of Divisions at Incidents. To ensure that Divisions in the IC structure are able to do their work efficiently and effectively the Divisional Controller needs support in the Logistics and Planning and even Operations. Too often they are expected to carry out the role remote to the Incident Control Point without even a scribe.

*Item 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;*

Submission for Item b) is focused on these points: In the various Australian Fire Seasons there has and always will be a bushfire risk:

1. Firstly, Australia has high bushfire risk environment. Citizens must know that and be knowledgeable of that risk and prepare to make decisions immediately they are required.
2. It is essential that all Australians (and visitor to Australia) maintain a full awareness of any bushfire situation regardless of whether they are at home, at work, travelling or 'down the coast'.
3. It is the responsibility of all individuals to be responsible for their own safety their responsibilities towards the safety of the wider community and to behave accordingly, even when they cannot do what they want, when and how they want.
4. These are both the civic and personal duty of all persons at all times, regardless of the distractions of day-to-day life.

*Item 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 obstacles 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 management 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;*

Submission for Item c) relates to all the parts of the item:

1. The States and the Commonwealth may agree to permit the Commonwealth to have the power to take agreed actions in situations of natural disasters when agreed conditions occur. This must also include the full responsibility for its funding. For example, the Commonwealth on declaring a National State of Emergency for declared National Disaster, may be given the ability to take control of agency units and direct them. In doing so the Commonwealth would be responsible for all financial aspects of their operation, including; transportation of units and crews; all onsite support of units and crews; liability for damage or loss of units; and liability for injury or death of crews employed.
2. Such capability, as described in the previous submission or and other capability recommended, on behalf of the Commonwealth will require open (as in public), and honest, communication

between the Commonwealth, States, Territories, Local Governments and the Australian Community to ensure an efficient and effective implementation and use. Working out the details in the face of a natural disaster is not appropriate.

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

Submission for Item d) relates to the work done by many thousands of Australians who, in many cases at great personal cost, worked to extinguish the fires that form part of this natural disaster and the need to recognize that work appropriately:

1. The Australian National Emergency Medal now has four clasps each representing service in dealing significant natural disasters within Australia. All of these represent events in a single State and are relatively constrained in time and space. The events of the fires of the 2019-2020 Southern Australian Fire Season occurred over an extended time period and across many States. The four clasps so far declared are occurring approximately once every two years. With a fifth declared for the fires of the 2019-2020 Southern Australian Fire Season, and with the high likelihood of additional clasps in the future, it is very likely that Emergency Service personnel will very likely exceed the reasonable number of five clasps on the medal ribbon and bar. In recognition of the significance of the 2019-2020 Southern Australian Fire Season fires in comparison to previous clasps, and the limiting factors of the National Emergency Medal, it is recommended that a National Emergency Campaign Medal be established and awarded to those whose service achieved so much in bringing them under control rather than issuing the fifth clasp to the National Emergency Medal.
2. Also recommend that such a National Emergency Campaign Medal be automatically awarded to those persons who were killed or sustained significant injury in the service of the interests of the States and the Nation, regardless of the nature or length of that service or the origin of those persons.

*Item e) the findings 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 2019-2020 bushfire season, to avoid duplication wherever possible;*

Submission for Item e) and also for Item j) reflects on the eerily similar wording used official reports as far back as the 1962 Dwellingup Fires in Western Australia:

1. Ensure that the lessons presented in these reports and the resultant recommendations are woven tightly into the recommendations of the report of the Commission to ensure that the message that the Commission wishes to impart is clear, and consistent. These historical recommendations are being repeated with good reason, because they have been, and continue to be, ignored; to the detriment of all Australian communities irrespective of the lines drawn on maps, just as bushfires (and most forms of natural disaster) ignore the lines drawn on maps.

*Item 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:*

- i. land management, including hazard reduction measures;*

Submission for Item h) i.: If the Land Holder (i.e. the person/organization responsible for the 'care' and 'maintenance' of the land) does not implement Hazard Reduction measure then inevitably Nature will do it for them. The Land Holder may not like the outcome.

ii. *wildlife management and species conservation, including biodiversity, habitat protection and restoration;*

No submission for Item h) ii.

iii. *land-use planning, zoning and development approval (including building standards), urban safety, construction of public infrastructure, and the incorporation of natural disaster considerations;*

Submission for Item h) iii.: All these elements must be standardised across Australia and based on a common method of assessing risk.

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

No submission for Item g).

*Item h) the need to establish mechanisms to facilitate the timely communication of information, or the furnishing of evidence, documents or things, in accordance with section 6P of the Royal Commissions Act 1902 or any other relevant law, including, for example, for the purpose of enabling the timely investigation and prosecution of offences;*

No submission for Item h).

*Item i) the need to establish appropriate arrangements for information-sharing in relation to any other inquiries or reviews, in order to support concurrent inquiries or reviews as well as your own, in ways consistent with relevant obligations, and in ways that avoid unnecessary duplication, improve efficiency and avoid unnecessary trauma to witnesses.*

See submission for Item e).