

Submission Number: NND.001.01010

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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? Police Federation of Australia

Your Submission

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

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

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

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

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

Supporting material provided:

PFA Natural Disasters FINAL submission.pdf



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The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Introduction

The Police Federation of Australia (PFA) is the national body representing the professional and industrial interests of Australia's more than 64,000 police officers, across all state, territory and the federal police jurisdictions.

	Membership as at 31/12/19
Police Association of South Australia	4,895
Western Australia Police Union of Workers	6,587
Queensland Police Union of Employees	11,798
The Police Association (Victoria)	17,287
Police Association of NSW	16,773
Police Association of Tasmania	1,330
Northern Territory Police Association	1,551
Australian Federal Police Association	3,901
Police Federation of Australia	64,122

The PFA notes and supports submissions made by the Police Association of NSW (PANSW) and the Police Association Victoria (TPAV) to the respective Inquiries being held in those

jurisdictions and have included some issues raised in those submissions, in this PFA submission to the Royal Commission.

The PFA supports the comments of the Prime Minister when he called this Royal Commission and stated that his "...priority is to keep Australians safe...". There is no argument, that that is also the priority of Australia's Police. We therefore appreciate the opportunity to make this submission on behalf of our 64,000 members.

Police and Emergency Services

The oath of office that police swear upon attestation, makes them very different from other government workers. This oath of office, while giving police enormous powers, also places upon them great responsibility. It is this personal responsibility that differentiates the obligations of the police officer from other emergency services workers in two primary respects:

1. The oath of office obliges the officer to place him or herself into situations of physical or psychological danger where it is necessary to keep the peace or to protect the lives and property of members of the public. A police officer's obligation to the law places everything else in a secondary position.
2. The oath obliges the officer to be on duty effectively twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week making the officer obliged to intervene in any situation where they perceive an offence is being committed, regardless of whether they are on rostered duty. There are well documented instances of disciplinary action being taken against officers who have not fulfilled this duty. His/her office is one that is independently exercised and subject to no one's direction. Even though the powers of the constable are significant (including the power to take both liberty and life), the consequent obligations are heavy and under constant oversight. These obligations flow also to the officer's private life. Officers may lose their employment and their career for behaviour that in all other occupations would be considered private. In many ways, the police officer "sells" more than just his or her labour when taking the oath of office.

Providing public safety is one of the most essential activities and the cornerstone of any community. This is the key role of police together with their partner agencies in emergency services.

The police role in such emergencies covers all aspects, including the development and implementation of community safety strategies, responding during emergencies to reduce injuries, loss of life and property damage, including environmental destruction, assisting in the recovery and rebuilding of communities and enforcing the law, during any disaster.

Due to the standing of police in the community and the broader role they perform, community expectation is that police will play a leading role in the prevention, response and recovery stages. A significant part of the prevention role also includes assisting communities in building resilience.

The PFA has identified a number of issues, that we would encourage the Royal Commission to closely review, that we believe will assist in all of the facets of dealing with natural disasters, not only as experienced in the most recent bushfire season, but in many previous incidents including, fires, flooding and other natural disasters as well as major criminal/counter terrorism type incidents. COVID-19 is a current issue that has similar ramifications in which police and other emergency services play a vital role and community confidence and stability has to be rebuilt following their occurrence.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Priority Resource Procurement

In disaster situations, one of the major issues that is constantly raised by police officers across the country, is the lack of access to Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

As the vast bulk of police are state/territory based in Australia, the provision of such equipment is generally their responsibility, but as can be witnessed from numerous previous major incidents, they are often ill equipped to deal with the issue with insufficient supplies available. This is particularly the case in some of the smaller jurisdictions who may not have the capacity to stockpile such equipment.

Disasters such as the 2019-20 bushfires and now the COVID-19 outbreak sees a greater emphasis on a new federalism in policing. State and territory borders remain but are being enhanced by greater national strategies and national collaboration. These national initiatives, being driven by a national coalition of government and public safety agencies is vitally important when tackling disasters that cross state borders.

However, in policing, in many instances, when it comes to equipment, each jurisdiction still –

- Draws up its own standards and product specifications;
- Individually trials the same or similar products;
- Disparately determines potential suppliers;
- Separately writes contracts for products;
- Individually undertakes tender evaluations; and finally
- Purchases products.

In September 2007, as part of its Strategic Plan 2008 – 2015, the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Council (AFAC) identified one of its key goals was '5.4 - Cost effective use of resources and savings achieved'. One of the means to achieve this was to 'Develop and expand the Collaborative Purchasing Initiative'. Since then AFAC have moved forward with a range of cost-effective methods of procuring equipment for their respective agencies saving both the agencies and their respective governments many millions of dollars.

In 2008 the PFA recommended to Police Minister and Commissioners the establishment of a National Collaborative Purchasing Model for Police Uniforms and Equipment, however we could not agree across the jurisdictions for the implementation of such a model.

Policing has since, struggled to match AFAC's initiative.

The PFA believes, that using PPE as a means of achieving such an outcome in policing, would be beneficial for the respective jurisdictions and officers nationally. As indicated, the PFA has previously offered its support for such an outcome.

One way of achieving this, could be to ask the Federal, Parliamentary Joint Committee on Law Enforcement to undertake an Inquiry into building a national repository of Personal Protective Equipment for police for use in future national emergencies or disasters.

A Term of Reference for such an Inquiry could be to ask the Committee to examine:

1. Total annual expenditure by law enforcement agencies on personal protective equipment (PPE);
2. The scope for inter-agency collaborative procurement of policing's PPE by Australia's Commonwealth and State and Territory law enforcement agencies;
3. The scope to store such supplies to be readily available as required by jurisdictions;
4. The reduced duplication of effort likely to come from common procurement strategies, storage and agreed standards, specifications and cost sharing for the acquisition and application of such equipment and technology;
5. Potential savings which might be re-invested in front-line policing; and
6. The potential to improve the quality of such resources available to police personnel.

A collaborative approach to purchasing such commonly used equipment across police jurisdictions, particularly as we move out of the current COVID-19 crisis, would be central to the Australian government's drive to improve productivity, enhance national standards and performance and make monetary savings where feasible thus assisting in rebuilding our national economy. Any such outcome will likewise improve front line services to the community.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Royal Commission recommend the development of a model of collaborative purchasing and storage of Personal Protective Equipment for Australia's police to ensure ready availability of supplies in time of urgent need.

Occupational Health and Safety

Fatigue management was also a major issue identified by members, particularly ensuring appropriate relief after having often worked very long shifts.

A number of specific issues have been raised by both the Police Association of NSW (PANSW) and the Police Association Victoria (TPAV) in submissions to their respective Inquiries and Commissions, including:

- Numerous members were required to drive long distances before and after their shift to access and return their kits from specified locations. This forced some members to work some shifts of 16-17 hours duration. Way beyond what is acceptable in relation to fatigue management;
- Appropriate fatigue management was also identified as a major issue, as was inappropriate relief arrangements;
- Incidences of where accommodation was difficult to source for officers deployed to the bushfire zone were identified in both the PANSW and TPAV submissions;
- The need to match skill sets against the deployment types given to officers. There were instances in which officers were required to train colleagues in software and operational processes with which they had limited practical experience using or navigating;
- In planning for future operations of this nature a specialised team of highly trained experts in emergency management leadership, should be trained, who are deployed where required when responding to these types of events;
- Conflicting information coming from police command and the CFA about current risk levels in Victoria;
- Radio communications was again a major safety issue (see section re a public safety mobile broadband capability). This meant that officer safety was compromised on numerous occasions;
- There were numerous incidences of where appropriate personal protective equipment was either not available, unserviceable or not up to standard (see section on PPE and priority resource/procurement);
- Instances of police being deployed without sufficient notification to pack even the basic essentials when they were going to be away from home for a protracted period;
- Again, both NSW and VIC police identified numerous incidences of a lack of communication with members as to their entitlements. Whilst some would say in such circumstances this might be expected, police have experienced a number of

major operations, including around disasters and the likelihood of these issues arising should have been well understood at the commencement of the operation; and

- Many officers reported having to contact their respective police association to clarify their entitlements when this information should have been readily available through police command.

Police accept and understand that often in emergency situations, urgency is required and they are more than willing to make sacrifices to help people and communities be safe. However, many of the problems identified above affected the officers' ability to perform their duties effectively, their safety and their mental wellbeing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Any decisions to deploy police into an unsafe area, needs to be taken with the utmost seriousness. There should not just be an assumption of 'need';**
- **Robust plans should be developed to form part of the organised response to any event of this nature by all police forces, with protocols that ensure the plan is reviewed annually so as to remain up to date;**
- **That specialised teams, trained in emergency management be established, consisting of highly trained personnel who are subject matter experts, readily available for deployment to relevant areas requiring assistance;**
- **That all police jurisdictions review the frequency and adequacy of emergency management training for senior staff in dealing with emergency management;**
- **That fatigue management and relief procedures, include:**
 - **Systems to track factors such as consecutive hours worked, hours of rest between shifts, total time performing duties in fire affected areas, travel times before and after shifts and time living away from place of residence;**
 - **A system to track the hours crews are working, to ensure that members can be effectively rostered as well as accounted for; and**
 - **Specified thresholds which necessitate relief and rest periods.**
- **Procedures to secure suitable accommodation for all emergency services personnel deployed to areas away from their usual place of residence;**
- **A deployment and communication procedure that includes consideration of the time sensitivity of operational requirements, and unless an immediate response is required, personnel are given the time to prepare, and if staying away from home obtain necessary provisions and arrive at accommodation; and**

- **That all police jurisdictions take the necessary steps to ensure that payroll units are educated on member entitlements and are sufficiently resourced to assist members during an emergency.**

Mental Health

Research shows, that disasters pose significant mental health risk to the wider public, with increased rates of depression, PTSD and other related conditions, all of which police and other emergency services have to deal with. And there is no argument, that police and other emergency services workers themselves, are at greater risk of experiencing a mental health condition than that of the wider community. So, disasters only exacerbate the problem for police and emergency services.

The Beyond Blue's, Answering the call national survey, their "National Mental Health and Wellbeing Study of Police and Emergency Services" should be compulsory reading for the Royal Commission.

Some of the key findings of that survey included:

- One in three police and emergency services employees experience high or very high psychological distress compared to one in eight Australian adults;
- Over one in 2.5 employees and one in three volunteers report being diagnosed with a mental health condition in their life compared to one in five Australian adults;
- Employees and volunteers report suicidal thoughts over two times more often than adults in the general population and are three times more likely to have a suicide plan;
- Over half the employees surveyed experienced a traumatic event during the course of their work that deeply affected them;
- Poor workplace practices and culture are as equally debilitating, as is exposure to trauma;
- Employees who have worked more than ten years in police and emergency services are almost twice as likely to experience psychological distress and six times more likely to have symptoms of PTSD compared to those with less than two years' service; and
- Three in four employees who had made a claim for psychological injury found the current workers' compensation process to be detrimental to their recovery.

Of particular interest to the PFA, the survey identified that:

- Respondents appeared to have "poor mental health literacy";
- That they avoided telling people about their mental health condition (61% of respondents); and
- 11% of police had probable PTSD (almost three times higher than the Australian average).

As a result, over the past several years, the PFA, together with its branches, has embarked on a range of activities to educate members, their colleagues and their families about mental health and well-being issues and how to better understand and prepare themselves for their stressful daily jobs.

Many of these activities have been supported both morally and financially by a number of state and territory governments, as well as the federal government, various police departments and the respective police associations and unions.

In the case of the federal government, two recent inquiries that have some impact on the mental health and well-being of police and emergency services, have been conducted.

They include –

- The 2018 Senate Education and Employment Committees Inquiry, into ‘The role of Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments in addressing the high rates of mental health conditions experienced by first responders, emergency service workers and volunteers’.

The PFA made a submission to this Inquiry.

This Inquiry reported in February 2019 and the Government formally responded to the Report in February 2020.

- The 2018 Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health.

The PFA has made two submissions to this Inquiry.

While this Inquiry was not focused on the mental health of first responders, the PFA took the opportunity to again raise a number of issues directly related to police and emergency services workers.

The Final Report from the Productivity Commission has not yet been released.

In those submissions we raised several issues that we believe this Inquiry should strongly support.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Royal Commission support the efforts of Australia’s police associations/unions in highlighting the importance of the mental health and well-being of Australia’s first responders.

Workers Compensation

The Beyond Blue report also identified that three in four first responders found the current workers compensation process to be detrimental to their recovery.

Our own research indicates that one of the biggest issues faced by police is the adversarial worker's compensation process; with the arduous and unhelpful process of making a claim, often standing in the way of many members getting quick access to effective treatment.

The recommendations we made to the Senate Inquiry, included -

That the issue of the mental wellbeing of first responders become a standing item on the COAG agenda.

That the Committee recommend that all workers compensation systems for police deliver timely assessment for claims in a way that protects those who are distressed and psychologically unwell.

That the Committee recommend that the issue of Presumptive Legislation, recognising psychological injuries to police and other first responders, be referred to COAG with a view to the development of harmonised legislation across every jurisdiction.

That the Committee recommend that the issue of the Provisional Acceptance of claims for psychological injuries to police and other first responders, be referred to COAG with a view to the development of an intergovernmental agreement on the issue.

In our submission and when we appeared before the Senate Inquiry, we gave evidence that members had reported to us that they felt, "isolated from their employers and former colleagues" during the workers compensation process, with reports that some officers making psychological damages claims could wait up to six years to settle.

We also pointed out that research shows that people who seek compensation for PTSD are more likely to have a poorer prognosis, more severe symptoms and longer recovery time than those who haven't sought compensation and according to findings, there are plausible reasons for this pattern including:

- people seeking compensation are doing so because their psychological injury is more severe; and
- the claims process is prolonged, triggers further stress and exacerbates symptoms or otherwise hinders recovery.

Further issues we raised included:

- the process involved in many workers compensation claims have actively prevented members from returning to good health;

- they have prevented members from returning to work; and
- when members have returned to work, often times treatment is taken away thus making it difficult for members to remain at work.

It has also been suggested that in some jurisdictions, key performance indicators had been imposed on those agents tasked with processing claims, as well as performance - based bonuses to agents.

The PFA is a strong supporter of harmonised **presumptive legislation** across every jurisdiction.

In respect of presumptive legislation, we suggested that the recognition of PTSD as an occupational illness for emergency services workers would:

- Recognise the value and risks associated with the work performed by emergency services workers;
- Acknowledge the psychological toll that repeated exposure to trauma has on our emergency services workers;
- Remove barriers to obtaining treatment by providing our emergency services workers suffering PTSD with fair access to worker's compensation benefits by reversing the onus of proof so that the employer must show that PTSD was not caused by work; and
- Remove the adversarial approach to PTSD claims that will reduce the stress and anxiety already felt by emergency services workers and enable earlier treatment, so they make a speedier recovery and return to work sooner.

We also argued that the **provisional acceptance of claims** could be introduced in tandem with presumptive legislation. Such a move would go a long way to reducing the trauma on officers during the difficult process of making a workers' compensation claim for psychological injury.

Provisional acceptance of claims would allow police to access services immediately following an incident and maintain that support throughout any subsequent proceedings.

This would take some of the immediate stress away from the injured worker and their family by ensuring that the insurer commences the immediate payment of any claim, including medical expenses, but also protects the insurer by allowing them not to admit liability at this early stage.

Accepting provisional liability allows the insurer time to make a more informed decision on liability and at the same time allows the injured worker to provide more information/evidence that might be required, whilst being paid the provisional claim.

It was pleasing to note that one of the key recommendations by the Committee was, Recommendation 8 –

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government establish a national stakeholder working group, reporting to the COAG Council of Attorneys General, to assess the benefits of a coordinated, national approach to presumptive legislation covering PTSD and other psychological injuries in first responder and emergency service agencies. This initiative must take into consideration and work alongside legislation already introduced or being developed in state jurisdictions, thereby harmonising the relevant compensation laws across all Australian jurisdictions.

The Government's response, tabled in Parliament on 25 February 2020, in respect to this recommendation was - **Support in principle.**

The response went on to say,

"The Government supports a nationally consistent approach to workers' compensation arrangements and the opportunity to convene a working group, reporting to an appropriate ministerial forum, to consider the benefits of a coordinated national approach to presumptive legislation covering PTSD and other psychological injuries in first responder and emergency services agencies.

However, as workers' compensation is primarily a state and territory responsibility, any such working group would depend on the cooperation of the states and territories. Any legislative changes to address first responder mental health will also need to take into account the different characteristics and circumstances of the various schemes".

RECOMMENDATION

That the Royal Commission support the development of a national standard of practice for dealing with workers compensation claims for all members of emergency services agencies.

Further,

That the Royal Commission support the concept of nationally harmonised presumptive legislation across all jurisdictions as well as the provisional acceptance of claims for mental health injuries and to call upon all governments, where such legislation does not already exist, to participate in their development in good faith.

The creation of a dedicated national independent service provider network

In April 2019, the 'BlueHub' support network was announced by the Government with a \$2.5 million grant to the PFA to work with the Police Association Victoria (TPAV) and the Australian Federal Police Association (AFPA) to develop a 'BlueHub' support network. This network would be a dedicated independent service provider network, which would provide

clear pathways for those seeking assistance with mental health injuries, with an emphasis on early intervention, accurate diagnosis and treatment.

We are currently working on establishing a pilot centre of excellence, to be complemented by satellite support services across Victoria, as part of the trial funded by the Federal Government, with a view to ultimately creating a national network to provide appropriate evidence-based services and treatment to the people who serve our community in high stress environments.

Given the geographical coverage required to meet the needs of our members, a national approach and funding was deemed to be the best option, piloted in Victoria, but ultimately being available in every jurisdiction, to allow for specialist psychiatric and alternative therapy services, including when members are acutely psychiatrically unwell or potentially suicidal.

The 'BlueHub' initiative will focus on the delivery of evidence-based treatments to members, in a timely manner that is both cost effective and has a strong clinical governance.

The concept has been developed as acknowledgement that there is a current service delivery gap nationally where members present for treatment that is outside of the internally provided agency based psychological services or employee assistance programs. Police members are reluctant to engage with the public health system due in part to the delays in accessing accurate and reliable treatment options in a timely manner and the stigma around being forced to use the same facilities as members of the public that they may interact with in a professional capacity. The same stigma would apply to other arms of the emergency services. Significantly, of the members accessing PTSD treatments through the workers compensation system in Victoria, only 25% are receiving the recommended evidence-based treatment.

The current model of treatment seeking in most jurisdictions is heavily reliant on internal service provision and the use of Employee Assistance Programs (EAP), which have been identified as having significant shortcomings.

The 'BlueHub' concept is planned to create a centralised Hub with satellite sites operating, initially in Victoria and the ACT, and ultimately nationwide. The key 'BlueHub' facility would provide a best-practice clinical assessment framework at a dedicated site for police officers. The facility would provide a research, training and development component as a resource for practitioners in satellite locations. A quality assurance framework will be developed to ensure that all mental health practitioners aligned to the 'BlueHub' program, receive the appropriate training and support to provide evidence-based treatment to members. This oversight role performed by the 'BlueHub' concept addresses several key issues raised in various organisational reviews.

Once established, 'BlueHub' services may be able to be expanded to other emergency services, both current serving and retired at a national level. By maintaining a central management oversight structure, clinical standards can be maintained, continuous

improvement strategies can be implemented, and research opportunities can be identified and explored.

In support of our argument for the BlueHub support network, recommendation 10, from the Senate Committee, earlier referred to, stated -

The committee recommends that the Commonwealth Government establish a national register of health professionals who specialise in first responder mental health.

The Federal Government's response to this recommendation is that it be - **Noted**

The response went on to say –

“Given the localisation of many practitioners, a national register may be of limited utility, however, could be considered further as part of the National Action Plan being developed by the Department of Home Affairs”.

RECOMMENDATION

We encourage the Commission to support the ‘BlueHub’ concept as outlined, as a preferred model of providing a best-practice clinical assessment framework, including research, training and development for mental health professionals to provide services to police and other emergency services personnel.

Education and Training of Public Safety, First Responders

During the 2019/20 bushfire season, public safety agencies, including police, fire, emergency services and defence personnel, and the Australian community they serve, faced unprecedented challenges. Interoperability is essential when public safety agencies are required to respond to such disasters across the country. Interoperability, however, is dependent on comprehensive and robust education and training systems to prepare our personnel to perform effectively and together in emergencies.

Public safety agencies long ago recognised the importance of quality education and training and for over 20 years have demonstrated their commitment to building their workforce capability by the development of national training packages, qualifications and competency standards. Through collaboration and sharing professional expertise and knowledge, public safety agencies have improved their understanding of each other's systems of work and have come together to share their education and training expertise and resources. This work has reaped benefits as was evident in the recent emergencies.

The Public Safety Industry Reference Committee (PSIRC) is the body through which public safety agencies collaborate in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector. The PSIRC comprises employer and employee representatives responsible for the national training package qualifications for police, defence, fire, fire investigation, emergency

services (including operations, response and leadership), disaster recovery, biosecurity, aquatic search and rescue and community safety. The PSIRC also provides industry advice to the Australian Industry Skills Council (AISC) about public safety workforce capability needs.

The Commission would be well aware of the importance of ongoing public safety sector education and training. Police, fire, emergency services, and defence have a decades long history of working collaboratively on behalf of public safety stakeholders. It is in the best interest of the Australian community that the public safety sector continues this work together to build our national education and training and workforce capability.

This cooperative approach has enabled the public safety sector to anticipate future challenges and build a model for its education and training. This approach also supports governments and communities in preparing, responding to and recovering from bushfire emergencies and other catastrophic events.

Of particular importance to this sector, is the need to have agile systems of work that can respond rapidly in line with the seasonal nature of the industry. A lesson learned in summer 2020, should be identified, a solution proposed and a change be in place in time for preparation for the next season.

The 2019/20 bushfires demonstrated how all the public safety stakeholders worked together collaboratively, demonstrating significant improvements since the 2009 Black Saturday fires in Victoria. Many lessons have been learnt and the sector is keen to future proof national capability and train public safety responders to high standards.

However, public safety agencies, representing public safety stakeholders are required to continue to make significant financial and in-kind contributions to the development of relevant Training Packages. These financial and in-kind contributions allow the public safety sector to develop and review national industry qualifications, skill sets and units of competency using subject matter expertise. The associated costs continue to grow, particularly as the complexity, breadth and depth of disasters and incidents grow exponentially. Funding to progress this increasingly demanding and crucial work is essential. However, under the current funding arrangements, it is becoming increasingly difficult to allocate scarce resources to this activity.

As funding for this development and review is only provided in the existing VET structure to Skill Service Organisations, agencies representing the public safety stakeholders are required to self-fund the development and review work. This represents funds that would otherwise be budgeted to supporting frontline services but are now re-routed to agencies to undertake this work. Estimates suggest that this comes to **several million dollars annually**. It should be noted that this is just the development of the Training Packages and does not include the actual training cost incurred for delivering education and training to frontline personnel.

The public safety sector has for some time, questioned whether the current VET funding arrangements is as effective and efficient as it could be.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Royal Commission supports public safety stakeholders through key identified agencies reviewing the current model of funding Training Package development with the view of identifying a better, fit for purpose model.

Increase in Domestic and Family Violence Incidents After Natural Disasters

It is well recognised that family and domestic violence continues to grow as a major workload for police. Following disasters, the workload in this area, increases exponentially.

Many studies have been undertaken on the links between natural disasters and violence. This is often brought about by factors such as trauma, financial issues, unemployment and of course drugs and alcohol.

One study of note –

[Interpersonal Violence and Mental Health Outcomes Following Disaster](#)

Once the flames are extinguished, the work of police moves to dealing with the other human and traumatic effects of the fires, of which family and domestic violence is a major concern.

It is vital during this time that the appropriate domestic and family violence services and support are available in affected communities.

Public Safety Mobile Broadband Capability

It could be safely argued that there has not been an Inquiry or Inquest held in recent times, where the issue of communications both within agencies and the interoperability between agencies, has not been raised as an issue of concern. This has been particularly the case where the incident in question has occurred in a regional, rural or remote location.

For many years, public safety agencies, including, police, fire and emergency services, have been calling for the introduction of a national public safety mobile broadband capability (spectrum). For public safety agencies, effective communications are not just another business input, it is a critical input.

In fact, the *Radiocommunications Act 1992* recognises this when it says that adequate spectrum must be provided for defence, law enforcement and emergency services. Allocation and ongoing control of dedicated spectrum would give police and other emergency services the mission-critical standards they need, the access and priority they determine and the robustness, security and reliability that is essential to their responsibilities to the Australian public. Unfortunately, such access is currently determined by private telcos.

For perfectly understandable commercial reasons, the telcos do not have the design, reliability, resilience, redundancy and security required for public safety purposes. Vital considerations including guaranteed access, freedom from congestion, reliability, security, sufficient capacity and real-time priority from commercial carriers' systems have not been demonstrated and are unlikely to be able to be assured. A commercial carrier losing just a few sites where a disaster is occurring, could have tragic consequences for police and emergency services members and the public.

Since the beginning of the debate about public safety mobile broadband (PSMB), there have been numerous technological advances seeing the development of further sophisticated equipment.

Police and other first responders are now commonly wearing body worn video devices and in car videos are common in many police vehicles. Smart watches are also being worn and this advance in technology provides the capacity to live stream data from crime and disaster scenes, directly to a command centre, not only for operational reasons, but importantly, officer safety.

Communities also have access to far more technology than before. In fact, in many cases, far better technology than that available to our first responders. Sensors in streets, camera's in public places, drones and other sensor technology are just some of the equipment being deployed in the public sphere. Whilst creating a flood of data this technology can also be essential in guarding public safety.

Many public and commercial buildings are now being outfitted with various sensors and control systems to improve their operation and protect the safety of their occupants.

Another significant advancement that needs to be embraced is 'next generation 000'.

Currently emergency communications centres receive voice calls and in some instances text messages to enable the dispatch of appropriate first responders to incidents. Advances in technology will soon see those centres have the capability to receive, from the public and first responders, files, images and video clips and then to triage that information and send appropriate material direct to the scene of the incident.

PSMB will be an essential component of that process.

The Public Safety Mobile Broadband National Roadmap, endorsed by COAG in December 2018, has come about following a number of years of debate, meetings, inquiries and reports, however, real progress has been too slow.

It is agreed that Public Safety does not have the capability to build an entire national public safety network in its own right, therefore working with telcos to establish a roaming capability in many areas, poses the best alternate option. However, any system developed and agreed to by Public Safety needs to be telco agnostic and as such may require legislation to ensure an appropriate outcome and appropriate coverage.

A range of communications issues, including public safety mobile broadband, are also outlined in the PANSW submission to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry.

The PFA also supports the detailed submission and recommendations to this Commission from the University of Melbourne and the Australian Radio Communications Industry Association (ARCIA) Inc.

RECOMMENDATION

That appropriate funding, legislation and infrastructure be built-in for a public safety mobile broadband capability that covers emergency services across all jurisdictions.

Role of Defence in On-shore Disasters

The call-out of Australia's Defence Forces during the 2019-20 bushfires was widely supported by police and other emergency services as well as the general public. Likewise, with previous onshore deployments during the Black Saturday bushfires of 2009 and Queensland Cyclone and Floods of 2010. The PFA has always supported these decisions.

However, it is important, when such call-outs are enacted, the role of defence personnel is clearly defined. Like police, we are sure that other emergency services agencies would have some concern if defence chiefs or other commanders, began tasking defence personnel with roles that were the responsibility of other agencies and for which they were not appropriately trained and equipped.

In an earlier section of this submission we spoke about the role of defence in the development of training packages across the police, defence and public safety sectors. The strong relationship between all of the agencies involved in those sectors in the development of those packages, is never more relevant than when personnel from all those areas are required to provide a joint operational capacity for the safety and security of the Australian community.

It is important however, to clearly distinguish between the various roles via the introduction of clear and concise guidelines and standard operating procedures.

Over the years, while the PFA has supported various pieces of federal legislation to enhance the role of Australia's defence forces, on-shore, for example the *Defence Legislation (Aid to Civilian Authorities) Act 2006* and the *Defence Amendment (Call Out of Australian Defence Force) Act 2018*, we have raised questions about ensuring appropriate protocols and guidelines go with such legislation.

It is noted that the Acts mentioned above were more focused on the military's role in counter terrorism operations, but even in disasters, like issues could arise.

We continue to maintain an expectation that ADF personnel would only ever be deployed on home soil as a means to support and assist state and territory police and other relevant agencies and authorities when it is believed that such support is absolutely necessary in the protection of life and property.

Recognition of First Responders

There is no argument about the tremendous work of Australia's police and emergency services in past floods, fires, cyclones and other natural disasters, after which many members of those services have deservedly been recognised by various Bravery Awards. However, there are always many more members, who have likewise provided outstanding service during such events, and at other times, for which there is limited capacity for recognition.

For the past 15 years, in recognition of those outstanding, conspicuous and meritorious service and endeavours, the PFA has been proposing the introduction of some form of medallic recognition, under the Australian Honours System. This suggestion has garnered strong support by both Australia's Police Commissioners through the Australia New Zealand Police Advisory Agency (ANZPAA) and the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC).

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has the ability to recognise outstanding service through a range of awards in the Australian Honours System. Since 1989, outstanding non-warlike actions can be recognised through the Conspicuous Service decorations. However, there has been no corresponding award to recognise outstanding acts by members of Australia's police, fire, ambulance and rescue agencies. Indeed, ADF members have received Conspicuous Service decorations for their roles in support of the police, and emergency services at incidents such as the Bali bombings and natural disasters at home.

Whilst the PFA strongly supports the continuation of the current awards for Defence as well as those of the Australian Police Medal (APM) and the Australian Fire Service Medal (AFSM), the APM and AFSM are both very limited and restricted in their ability to be awarded. The award of the AFSM is so restricted that only one AFSM can be awarded for every 5,000 volunteer or part-time firefighters in an agency.

Likewise, we continue to support the National Emergency Medal (NEM), established in 2011, which was hurriedly cobbled together in response to several natural disasters, particularly the Victoria Black Saturday Fires in February 2009 and the Queensland Cyclone and Floods of December 2010. Our concerns about the NEM, which we raised with Government at the time, was that it was fast tracked to recognise all those who worked tirelessly during those previously mentioned major incidents, which meant that the NEM was only able to recognise 'operational service' and not 'outstanding service'. There is a big difference. We argued that to establish a single service medal (the NEM) means that you are unable to appropriately recognise the difference in contribution particularly by those who have done exceptional things in these exceptional circumstances.

Whilst many members of the emergency services will be rightly recognised by Bravery Awards following the recent bushfires, many more were diligently working both on operations as well as in the background performing essential roles supporting the front-line operational staff. Many of those people have been performing those roles for many years, with limited or no recognition. The proposed introduction of a Meritorious Service Award for Police and other Emergency Services would go a long way to rectify that anomaly.

In our earlier proposals, we even submitted what such a medal and ribbon design should look like (see below), using a design that draws a link between these awards and the equivalent military conspicuous service awards with the use of yellow within the ribbon.









The ribbon recognises the colours of the eligible services – police, blue; fire, red; ambulance, green; and emergency services, orange. The two principle design elements are the Federation Star for Australia and the shards of light. Light provides warmth, security, hope and life; concepts that are allegorist to the daily provision of services by Australia’s police and emergency services and yet also at the heart of exemplary service in all its contexts.

This proposal offers a unique opportunity for Government to provide a very tangible and ongoing formal recognition of the exemplary contribution that is made by police and emergency service workers, both salaried and volunteer, to the Australian community and we encourage the Royal Commission to support their introduction.

RECOMMENDATION

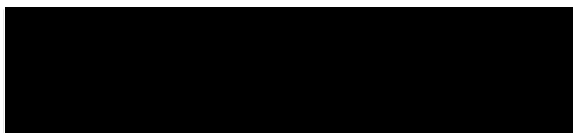
That the Royal Commission support the introduction of a Meritorious Service Award for Police and other Emergency Services.

Proposed - Australian Meritorious Service Awards

			
			
<p><u>Meritorious Service Cross (MSC)</u> The Meritorious Service Cross (MSC) recognises an act or acts of extraordinary professionalism and dedication demonstrating commitment to duty and the application of exceptional skills and judgment bringing considerable benefit or great honour to the recipient and their service.</p>	<p><u>Meritorious Service Medal (MSM)</u> The Meritorious Service Medal (MSM) recognises an act or acts of exceptional professionalism and dedication demonstrating commitment to duty and the application of an uncommonly high standard of skills and judgment bringing considerable benefit or great honour to the recipient and their service.</p>	<p><u>Commendation for Meritorious Service</u> The Commendation for Meritorious Service recognises an act of significant professionalism and dedication demonstrating commitment to duty and the application of a high standard of skills and judgment bringing benefit or honour to the recipient and their service.</p>	<p><u>Group Citation for Meritorious Service</u> The Group Citation for Meritorious Service recognises a collective act by a group of people or a defined unit which demonstrates significant professionalism and dedication, a commitment to duty and the application of a high standard of skills and judgment bringing benefit or honour to the recipient and their service.</p>

We thank the Commission for the opportunity to make this submission on behalf of Australia's Police. The PFA offers any further support to the Commission that deem appropriate including appearing to give evidence if requested.

Sincerely yours



Scott Weber
Chief Executive Officer
28 April 2020