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Submission Number: NND.001.01073

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? [redacted]

Your Submission

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

See Attachment

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

See Attachment

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 Attachment

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

See Attachment

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

Supporting material provided:

[redacted] Submission Royal Commission 2020.docx

[redacted]

Re: Submission to Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements on behalf of [redacted].

The [redacted] formed in 1979 is a sub-committee of the [redacted]. The [redacted] provides an avenue for forestry managers to coordinate plantation fire risk management within the [redacted] region, which incorporates the lower south east of South Australia and the south west of Victoria. The [redacted] members include [redacted]. Representatives of the fire agencies Country Fire Service SA (CFS,) Country Fire Authority, Victoria (CFA) & Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic) attend [redacted] meetings as they provide a valuable opportunity to consult with all of the forest managers. In total the [redacted] members manage around [redacted] of plantations, its value in the order of several billion dollars. It is a vital source of high-quality sawlogs, pulp logs and chip supplying the region's vibrant timber processing industry. Approximately half of the plantation forest resource is located in [redacted], the remainder located adjacent in [redacted] making it Australia's largest [redacted] estate.

[redacted] members have registered fire brigades within the CFA and CFS. The benefits of having the skills, and detailed local knowledge, of forest industry members available to participate directly in fire response has been evident to all stakeholders. Collectively the [redacted] members train over 350 personnel annually to undertake fire suppression and support roles. The industry also maintains over 80 front line fire vehicles and have access to many contractors with additional equipment that can be utilised if required.

The [redacted] have developed a mutual-aid automatic dispatch system whereby if a fire is reported within or near to a plantation, the designated company will turn out even if it is not their plantation that is at risk. This rapid deployment combined with resources from other agencies, and aircraft when available helps to minimise losses to fire for both the plantations and the surrounding rural areas. Forest companies have developed very strict industry guidelines to manage the risk of forestry operations causing fire ignitions. These use the forest fire danger rating to stipulate when each plantation operation will stop work and if too high, the whole forest will be closed.

The [redacted] also funds a spotter plane when needed and individual companies fund fire towers that improve the early detection increasing the rapid firefighting effort. Each company has its own Fire Management Plan that outlines how they manage fire in their area.

Some of the other fire preventing initiatives instigated by the [redacted] include:

- Annual map book production showing plantation details
- Heat testing exhausts on all harvesting equipment
- All small engines to have spark arresters
- No slash burning after winter
- Fire units to follow slashers if slashing is needed after the grass starts to cure.
- Patrol areas where camping is known to occur before high FFDIs especially TFBs
- Assist with Fuel Reduction Burning in native forests

Term of Reference '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;

Training

[redacted] members have registered brigades with the CFA, CFA or both, and need to meet the prescribed training standards for their personnel. Many of the personnel are engaged seasonally and therefore exposed to a constant churn of personnel and therefore training of new recruits.
This is compounded by differing standards of training to meet the mandated requirements in each State, adding to the training burden. A further level is added for some organisations that have interests or associations with other regions in Australia, again requiring a different standard of training. Most States train to the national standards, but require different modules for a plantation fire fighter, and inter-State recognition of prior learning is not streamlined.

RECCOMEDATION 1: The role of plantation fire fighter (and other roles) be standardised and recognised in all States and training records stored in a National database

All incidents are managed by an Incident Controller, but the direction of fire line crews on incidents of any size is undertaken by Sector Commanders and Strike Team Leaders. This is a critical point of effective fire suppression and the minimisation fire size and asset losses. The training of these roles is essential for both the plantation industry and other authorities.

RECCOMEDATION 2: Sector Commander and Strike Team Leader training be readily available to the plantation industry and follow the principles of Recommendation 1

Communication

When a region has multi-day large or multiple incidents occurring, an Incident Control Centre (ICC) is established to manage these incidents. Plantation resources and personnel fall within the Command and Control structures for these incidents, while maintaining their own company management structure. This can lead to a breakdown in communication from the ICC to plantation company management structure which can result in confusion for personnel on the fire line.

RECCOMEDATION 3: Strengthen the process of information flow from ICC's to other stakeholders involved with suppression activities

The authorities in each State have established radio systems that are used on the fire ground. [redacted] members are required to use this equipment on the fire line and cover the costs in purchasing, installing and maintaining this equipment. Each State also utilises different types of radio systems that can cause duplication of requirements for some companies with interests in multiple States. This also complicates the use of fire line equipment for interstate deployments.

RECCOMEDATION 4: Authorities to provide financial support for industry brigades to maintain mandated communication systems and States work towards using identical or compatible communication systems

Mobile phones are an essential in running business, maintaining communication with employees and provide access to critical information when away from the office. Smart phones and tablets allow rapid sharing of maps, incident shift plans and fire intelligence. During incidents, mobile phones are seen as vital in the efficient management of incidents but are often found to be ineffective due to poor coverage. There was also evidence that mobile phone systems have failed due to communication and power failures at critical times.

RECCOMEDATION 5: Additional funding be provided for mobile phone black spot programs in fire prone regions and areas carrying significant planation resources, including improvements to communication and power infrastructure supporting these networks

Upon the report of a fire, each State has established a system for the automated notification of industry brigades, usually via a Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) system. Unfortunately these differ across each State and the effectiveness of each system can vary due to the quality and features of the system used.

RECCOMEDATION 6: Standardise notification systems across the States to improve the accuracy and timeliness of incident notifications to industry brigades

PHOENIX modelling

PHOENIX fire modelling has been seen to be an effective tool in the prediction of fire spread for fire planning and management. The underlying fire spread metrics used are tailored to native forest and grassland fuel types and do not perform as well for plantation fuel types. Plantation models have been developed for some regions but have not been widely utilised by all States. The use of these models will improve the predictive capability and aid the planning and suppression of incidents involving plantation fuel types.

RECCOMEDATION 7: Fund the additional development, testing and adoption of plantation fire spread modelling by State authorities

A useful PHOENIX product has been developed and utilised by members of the [redacted]. It consists of modelling the possible impact of fires based on a fixed ignition grids and using the Bureau of Meteorology forecast gridded weather data for each day. Across a region, this product indicates the potential for the impact of fires, allowing for the best positioning of resources for that day.

RECCOMEDATION 8: Investment in the development and access to PHOENIX modelling products useful to the plantation industry

Use of firebombing aircraft

Firebombing aircraft have been used to great effect as a tool to support ground crews for the rapid control of fires. The [redacted] support the use of regionally based aircraft available for rapid deployment when fires are detected. There have been instances where the nearest aircraft has not been utilised due to the management of aircraft residing with each State.

RECCOMEDATION 9: Dissolve State borders so that the closest aircraft responds to a fire when detected

With the extensive use of bombing aircraft over many seasons, it would be timely to undertake research and performance testing to establish the effectiveness of the aerial resources. This analysis can then be used to and develop better guidelines for the future use of aircraft under Australian conditions.

RECCOMEDATION 10: Undertake research into the effectiveness of aerial resources and revise guidelines for their use

It has been noted that bombing aircraft are one part of the fire suppression story. In plantation fuels, follow-up by ground crews is required to fully extinguish and secure fire perimeters. One of the preferred control measures used by [redacted] members is to undertake direct flank attack on the fire using hose lay techniques. In some instances active fire bombing has required crews to pull back from these lines for safety reasons, resulting in the loss of hoses and an increase in fire perimeter.

RECCOMEDATION 11: Research and develop guidelines for use of aircraft in conjunction with ground crews undertaking direct suppression activities to optimise fire control

Worker compensation for plantation fire fighters

Many of the fire fighting activities undertaken by [redacted] personnel are undertaken away from their plantations, on private property or Crown Land. In all incidents, the [redacted] personnel are under the direction of a registered CFA or CFS member, in all resects acting in the same way as a volunteer member. In Victoria, these personnel are protected for worker compensation in the event they are injured in the course of undertaking the authorised suppression activities when outside of their management areas. Currently this is not the same in South Australia, and

therefore can be seen as both an inequity for [redacted] members and barrier to active participation outside of their management areas.

RECCOMEDATION 12: Establish workers compensation in all States for plantation personnel undertaking authorised fire operations outside of their managed plantations

Term of Reference '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;

Native vegetation fuel management (Adjacent to plantations, roadside, private scrub)

The [redacted] supports the management of fuels in native vegetation across the landscape to protect life, the community and all assets, including plantations. Most fires that cause damage to plantations originate from outside of plantations. Often this is exacerbated by the presence of native vegetation adjacent to plantation or along roadsides. Roadside vegetation is also a great risk during a fire for crews (and public) to have safe access and egress in the event of a fire, and this can persist after a fire front has passed with falling limbs and trees. Many treatments are available for the modification of fuels and the removal of dangerous trees, but the approval process (especially regarding environmental legislation) to undertake effective works are onerous and inefficient, leading to low areas of effective treatment occurring.

RECCOMEDATION 13: Develop easy/efficient approvals processes to treat roadside and private native vegetation fuels and hazardous trees

[redacted] members have participated in prescribed burns undertaken by government authorities to assist in achieving the burn area targets and enhance the protection of their assets. They also see these opportunities as a valuable opportunity to train staff in fire suppression techniques in a controlled environment, especially for new personnel that may not have attended a fire.

RECCOMEDATION 14: Establish programs to enable plantation crews (esp. new personnel) to participate in prescribed burns to gain experience (including the protection of workers contained in Recommendation 12)

If you require any further details relating to the information contained within this submission, please do not hesitate to contact us.

[redacted]
Chair – [redacted]