Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements [2020]

Date of Submission: Monday, 27 April 2020
Organisation submitting: The Habitat Advocate
Reason for Email Submission: Royal Commission website failed to accept submission.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this Royal Commission 2020.

Sincerely,
Steven Ridd
Editor
The Habitat Advocate

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Herewith is an extract of same:

![Royal Commission form]

Name: Steven Ridd
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Preferred means of contact: Phone, Email

What is your submission based on?
- I am making this submission based on my personal situation
- I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation
The application of the Erickson S-64 Air-Crane for waterbombing on bushfires, although the timing of their use was delayed by RFS management.

*Failure by the various state and federal governments to properly resource bushfire management, before, during and after the 2019 NSW Bushfire Emergency.*
1. Failure to adequately mitigate bushfire risk in the lead up to the high risk summer season (this is a joint responsibility of governments - the RFS is an agency of the NSW State Government. Custodial management of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area is the responsibility of the Australian Government. The Australian Government chooses to delegate this responsibility to the NSW Government. The Australian Government is accountable for the reported 80% destruction by bushfire of the Greater Blue Mountains World Heritage Area.

2. Failure to adequately resource known areas of bushfire risk - such as delayed deployment of sufficient Erickson S-64 Air-Cranes

3. Failure to detect ignitions quickly (less than 10 minutes)

4. Failure to respond to ignitions promptly (less than 30 minutes)

5. Failure to extinguish ignitions and so allow for uncontrolled bushfires across vast areas.

6. Failure to adequately manage the disaster recovery phase.

7. Failure to learn from any of the above - repeatedly since 1939 Black Friday.

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I submit the following three article extracts published on The Habitat Advocate website:

**Bushfire Reform 01: Total Fire Cost**
(published 8th August 2010)


...By (Total Fire Cost) I am referring to all expenditures and costs incurred by the RFS and all associated organisations involved directly and indirectly in fighting this fire, including asset loss valuations. The direct and indirect costs that I expect can be attributed to the fire, would include:

Direct and indirect operating costs incurred by the RFS from the time of first responding to the fire through to completing mopping up operations after the fire was extinguished.

Direct and indirect operating costs incurred by all firefighting authorities fighting the fire including NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) - both local and Inter-District, NSW Fire Brigades (NSWFB), Department of Environment & Conservation (NSW) - (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS)).
Direct costs incurred by organisations associated with fighting the fire such as the many interstate support agencies seconded to fight the fire, including their associated transport and accommodation costs, plus the costs of other support organisations which can directly attribute costs specifically to this fire.

Support Agencies listed in the Section 44 Report section 4.2 include the following:

Any direct operating costs of the fire not paid for by the RFS due to funding, subsidies or rebates provided by government agencies outside the RFS.

Direct expenses of related injury and accident claims of personnel directly involved in fighting the fire, including the cost of WorkCover claims, related payouts and lost time at work.

Economic loss valuations of property, plant and equipment damaged as a direct result of the fire. This includes those of owners of land and infrastructure such as DECC, Blue Mountains City Council, RailCorp, Sydney Catchment Authority, Integral Energy, Telstra, the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority and private land owners, including insurance claims.

• Ambulance Service of New South Wales
• Blue Mountains City Council (BMCC)
• Department of Defence, Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF)
• Integral Energy
• NSW Department of Community Services
• NSW Department of Land and Water Conservation
• NSW Department of Primary Industries
• NSW Health
• NSW Police Force
• NSW State Emergency Service (SES)
• Roads and Traffic Authority, NSW (RTA)
• Rail Corporation New South Wales (RailCorp)
• Salvation Army
• St Johns Ambulance of Australia
• Sydney Catchment Authority (SCA)
• Sydney Water
• Telstra Corporation Limited

This list is not exhaustive.

Importantly, here I am not seeking to obtain the broader social and environmental costs, which though relevant, would understandably be more difficult to estimate and obtain. Instead, I am merely seeking those accounting costs that can be reasonably and justifiably attributed to this fire. Such costs must be recorded respectively by each organisation as part of Australian financial accounting practices.
Recommendation:

I propose that the RFS should capture the Total Fire Costs for each major fire and, to be comprehensive, for all registered fire incidents to which the RFS responds. The expertise for this task may well require the assistance of an outside audit firm.

However, the benefit of this to the RFS and to the community will be considerable in highlighting the Total Fire Costs of fighting fires in New South Wales, which I argue we still don’t know with any reliably accuracy. I expect that for the Grose Fire for instance, the Total Fire Cost will be a considerably larger figure than the internally recorded accounting records of the RFS of $6.1 million.

Such record keeping will serve to greatly assist the effort of the RFS to attract increased funding to enable it to better:

1. mitigate the risk of bushfires
2. resource itself to better detect ignitions
3. resource itself to better suppress bushfires.

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Bushfire Reform 02: Fire Event Logging
(published 19th February 2011)


1. Purpose of Reform Initiative

This reform initiative proposes to standardise and make compulsory throughout the NSW Rural Fire Service the following requirements:

To record the complete direct and indirect costs attributed to fighting and supporting the fighting of each registered bushfire event received and responded to by the NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) across New South Wales.

For each registered fire responded to by the RFS, the combined direct and indirect costs incurred by the RFS and all associated organisations are to be incorporated into the Total Fire Cost of each registered fire.

The purpose of capturing the Total Fire Cost of each registered fire is to establish and maintain a database of the Total Fire Cost for every received and registered fire by the NSW Rural Fire Service across New South Wales.
2. **Recommended Policy**

The Fire Control Centre of each Rural Fire District in New South Wales must establish and maintain a separate Fire Event Log of each registered fire occurring, either wholly or partially, within its Rural Fire District.

A minimum Australian standard of vital fire information necessary for a Fire Event Log must be established and approved by the NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner. This standard must be reviewed annually ahead of each peak fire risk season.

A suitable training programme in Fire Event Log Procedures must be established to enable suitable fire personnel to be trained in order to competently maintain a Fire Event Log to the minimum Australian standard.

This policy should be integrated into the RURAL FIRE SERVICE Standard Operating Procedures once a process of consultation with all relevant personnel has been extensively undertaken across the entire breadth of the organisation.

Once approved, a Fire Event Log Policy and Procedures should be gazetted into the Rural Fires Act (NSW), 1997 and considered similarly for each fire authority in each Australian State.

3. **Recommended Procedures**

1. The Fire Control Centre of each Rural Fire District across New South Wales must establish a new and separate Fire Event Log upon becoming first aware of any fire within its fire district.

2. A Fire Event Log must be maintained continuously throughout the duration of a fire within a Fire District until such time as the responsible Fire Control Officer (or higher RURAL FIRE SERVICE command) declares the fire extinguished within that district.

3. A Fire Event Log must be recorded using the RURAL FIRE SERVICE central computer system, with appropriate daily data backups generated at the end of each day.

4. The Fire Control Officer for a given Rural Fire District is ultimate responsible and accountable for establishing and maintaining an accurate and thorough Fire Event Log for each fire in its district. A Fire Control Officer may only delegate the task of maintaining a Fire Event Log to a qualified fire fighter holding a current endorsement in Fire Event Log Procedures.

5. The Fire Control Officer of each Rural Fire District must endeavour to capture all information about a fire in a separate Bushfire Event Log for each fire (where possible) including, but not limited to:

   5.1. The designated name of the subject fire
5.2. Date & time of the ignition
5.3. Location of the ignition
5.4. Cause of the ignition
5.5. GIS digital map updating of the fire spread, likely path and key data
5.6. Details of the initial reporting of the fire outbreak/detection details
5.7. Lapse time to initial response & details of initial response action
5.8. Location of fire(s) & fire behaviour updates at 15 minute intervals
5.9. Local and forecast weather statistics relevant to the fire
5.10. Interstate agencies seconded
5.11. Daily updates on Total Area Burnt
5.12. Daily updates on any lives Lost
5.13. Daily updates on property lost, including number of dwellings
5.14. Daily updates on area of private property & farmland burnt
5.15. Daily updates on areas of mapped high conservation areas burnt
5.16. Daily updates on the number of fire-fighters involved
5.17. Daily updates on the number of aircraft involved
5.18. Daily synopsis on the fire(s) status
5.19. Executive decisions and actions taken, including incident declaration
5.20. Critical issues
5.21. Key operational threats & risks
5.22. Fire resource needs and shortfalls
5.23. Contact details and correspondence with assigned fire investigation
5.24. Total duration of fire activity once extinguished
5.25. Injury Summary Report
5.26. Resource Usage Summary Report by contribution agency
5.27. Register of Support Agency Involvement
6. When a fire takes the form of combined fires or multiple fire fronts within reasonable proximity in a geographic area, the responsible Fire Control Officer may order that a single Fire Event Log be maintained for the combined fires/multiple fire front.

7. Regular communication must be maintained between the Fire Control Centre and field brigades fighting a fire to facilitate logging fire activity to a minimum standard that allows communications at a minimum interval of 15 minutes.

8. Any communications failures or difficulties between firefighting crews (ground and airborne) and Fire Control, or any problems experienced in maintaining a minimum 15 minute communications frequency, must be immediately reported by the Fire Control Officer, or in the case of a major fire incident, to the Incident Controller.

9. A Fire Event Log is to be deemed the official single register of a fire event, a core operational document and a legal document admissible in a court of law.

10. As an internal document, a Fire Event Log is not automatically available for public access. The RURAL FIRE SERVICE Commissioner may at his/her discretion allow public access to such a document via a Freedom of Information Request from a member of the public.

11. The integrity and security of a Fire Event Log is paramount and is the ultimate responsibility of the Fire Control Officer assigned to a given fire. A digital copy of Fire Event Log must be provided by a Rural Fire District branch to RURAL FIRE SERVICE Headquarters within 7 days of the fire being declared extinguished. A secure and accessible database of Fire Event Logs is to be maintained by both the respective Rural Fire District branch and for all fires across NSW by RURAL FIRE SERVICE Headquarters.

4. Justifications for Reform Initiative

1. While it is acknowledged that the author is not a member of the Rural Fire Service and so privy to existing Rural Fire Service policy and procedures for recording bushfire operations, the lack of operational detail provided the Section 44 Incident Controllers Report for the Nov-06 Grose bushfire and the absence of minutes from the subsequent Inter-Agency review on 19-Dec-06, highlight shortcomings in record keeping of fire operations.

2. Perhaps much of the information reported of bushfire events is obtained from personal recollection of events from individual line personnel a considerable time after the event. For instance, the Section 44 Report into the Grose bushfire (14-Nov-06 to 3-Dec-06) is dated 8-Feb-07, two months later. There are obvious problems relying upon recollecting detailed events, the precise time and order of those events, the changing fire behaviour, the decisions made and actions taken and the changing conditions at the time. The absence of a factual minute by minute event log makes it difficult to be accurate and comprehensive in reporting major bushfire incidents. In the event of a major fire, maintaining a Fire Event Log will provide a record the performance of the four ICS functions - control, operations, planning and logistics.
3. It may well be that bushfire agencies in each Australian state have their own methods and protocols for recording fire events. It may also be that different agencies and indeed different regional branches have their own different ways of recording bushfire event data. There is likely no universal consistent standard across Australia of recording bushfire events as they occur. Some records may be better than others. There is a need to have a consistently high standard of record keeping for bushfire events across Australia.

4. Recent coronial inquests in Australia into bushfire deaths (Canberra Bushfire Jan 2003, Eyre Peninsula Fire Jan 2005), highlight the need for fire authorities need to have accurate records of bushfire events so that they are better able to defend their actions in court.

5. **Benefits of Reform Initiative**

1. The benefits of establishing and maintaining a Bushfire Event Log is to better enable bushfire management to achieve an accurate and comprehensive record of a fire – the events, decisions and actions and outcomes associated with each fire event. All relevant operational data associated with a fire will be recorded in one convenient document.

2. A Bushfire Event Log will provide a reliable source document for preparing a fire incident report. This will avoid the often difficult task of having to recall events, the order of those events, decisions made along with the fire behaviour at the time, long after a fire sometimes days or weeks later when memories have faded.

3. Recent reports and inquests have highlighted failures in fire-fighting communications, which arguably had a role in contributing to operational problems in controlling the spread, severity and impacts of fires. Compulsorily requiring a Bushfire Event Log will require regular communication between fire-fighters and Fire Control. This requirement will help drive the need to improve the reliability of operational communications during a bushfire event.

4. A Bushfire Event Log will provide an actual live record of the performance of the co-ordination, command and control functions of the ICS, including the operational sequence: Reaction, Reconnaissance, Appreciation, Plan, Issue of Orders and Deployment. This log will be highly useful at a debriefing session following a fire, allowing operational problems to be better identified. This will aid the RURAL FIRE SERVICE to increases its knowledge and understanding of rural fire fighting.

5. A Bushfire Event Log will enable bushfire management to be more transparent in reporting its operations, assisting any possible coronial investigations, for operational evaluation and improvement, analysis and to contribute firefighting practice into bushfire research. By making fire event logging compulsory, regular information must be fed back to central command in order to achieve the minimum reporting standard. This will drive a higher standard in strategic communications.
The despicable reality of government bushfire management policy across Victoria and indeed Australia is: 'You're On Your Own' - before, during and after!

It is government policy Australia-wide, played out in repeated wildfires, investigations, coroner enquiries, royal commissions in Victoria, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, Queensland, Northern Territory as it has been, is and remains.

The only way to change callous government attitude is to change government - and to keep changing the government until the government attitude to our life, assets, public responsibility and environmental responsibility changes.

Across Australia, the official bushfire management 'Stay or Go' policy has become a government euphemism for government neglect.

Bushfire and natural disaster is not just the lot of Victorians. Disaster and mass trauma is an Australian national issue, which statistically re-occurs every year and is trending climatically to get worse.

Australia needs a national force for handling national emergencies. It has to become professional to cope. It has to be given resource capability to cope, to plan, mitigate and to crisis manage the after effects of disasters. Not just bushfires, but damaging storms, floods, and any disaster situation across Australia and responsibly throughout our immediate Oceanic Region. All emergency services across Australia need to be rolled up into a single co-ordinated national and professionally paid force.

Australia needs a professional, national Emergency Management Australia.

Emergency Management Australia needs to be set up now as a fully multi-skilled, world-class professional paid force as a new forth arm of Australia’s Defence Force integrated with the Army, Navy and Airforce. It is time Australian governments cease shirking responsibility and despicably hand bailing crisis management to noble charities like the Salvation Army, Red Cross and Country Women’s Association.

Emergency Management is the task of government. This is what our taxes are for!

To be serious the annual budget needs to be what Australia is wasting on America's selfish military crusade in Afghanistan.
To do less is to continue to sacrifice local family volunteers financed by chook raffles, resourced by drip feed, only so they can helplessly piss into the flames.

To do less is to continue to see government dispense crisis management to local charities and when it is all over to present a public servant scapegoat for public stoning to pacify those who have lost everything. Else its same old, same old government neglect of its public and environmental responsibilities.

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I also submit


I also submit:

'Bushfire Reform 03: 'Formation of a 'Civil Emergency Corps'

1. Purpose of this Reform Initiative

As one solution to Australia's failing governance to mitigate and tackle national disasters (bushfires, storms, floods, drought, earthquakes, etc) I propose the complete overhaul of Australia's current state-based disparate system. This reform initiative proposes to transform and consolidate the many state-based bushfire and emergency services across Australia and Emergency Management Australia into one standardised national professional body. I propose a new national defence corps be established under new national legislation. The proposed name of that body is to be Australia's 'Civil Emergency Corps'.

The purpose of a 'Civil Emergency Corps' shall be to reach beyond rural fire fighting and to encompass the breadth of all civil emergency fields non-military in nature. The 'Civil Emergency Corps' is to be Australia's primary and sole central organisation to deal with civil emergencies including national disasters, natural or otherwise. It is to supersede and make redundant the current Emergency Management Australia - which merely co-ordinates state government responses to major civil defence emergencies "when State and Territory resources are inappropriate, exhausted or unavailable." - [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emergency_Management_Australia&oldid=32590701]
The 'Civil Emergency Corps' is to become a fourth arm of Australia's defence forces along with and having the equivalent status and 'defence power' as the Army, Navy and Air Force, yet be purely non-combative. The 'Civil Emergency Corps' will be an equal partner with our Army, Navy and Air Force, but instead of focusing on national defence against human-based threats, the Civil Emergency Corps will focus on national defence against mainly natural threats.

Under Section 51(vi) of the 1901 Australian Constitution, the clause dealing with "defence power" gives the Commonwealth Parliament the right to legislate with respect to "the naval and military defence of the Commonwealth and of the several States, and the control of the forces to execute and maintain the laws of the Commonwealth". Just as 'defence power' has allowed the Commonwealth to raise an army and navy, the term was considered broad enough to add the Royal Australian Air Force (RAAF) as a defence power in 1921. Similarly, it is argued that a new 'Civil Emergency Corps' charged with civil defence and natural disaster emergencies fits within the Constitutional definition of 'defence power'.

A special national commission should be established by the Australian Government to review and shape the purpose, functional scope, framework, organisation structure and strategies of this new corps. The initial intent is that this Civil Emergency Corps is to be modelled along the lines of the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and the Federal National Response Framework (NRF), but tailored to Australia's specific needs and circumstances and that of the Oceanic region. The design of the organisation will be based on input received from current emergency personnel, emergency experts and from the broader Australian community. Ideas from comparable organisations overseas will also be considered, such as from nations having proven effective national civil defence organisations.

Funding is to be on par, have the same budget process as, the Australian Regular Army. The days of reliance on meat trays, raffles, grants and community fund raising must end. The task is too important for petty funding. Instead, the organisation is to be professionally paid, run in a military structure and to military discipline and precision. Australians in time of need deserve no less. Like the Army it will have core full-time regulars, augmented with a part-time reserve component. It will be initially staffed by the current people already performing emergency service work. Initially the existing infrastructure (buildings, plant and equipment) shall be utilised. Over time the organisation will evolve to coming up to par with the equivalent performance standards as the Army. Its resourcing will be exponentially increased to equip it to properly anticipate, monitor, and respond to any non-military emergency.

**Essential Functions of the Civil Emergency Corps**

1. To assume all the work of the State Emergency Services, Fire Services and Rescue Agencies
2. Disaster risk, contingency and mitigation planning - land and maritime
3. Natural Disaster Response - fire, explosion, contamination, flood, drought, storm, sea surge, earthquake, biological/nuclear emergency, etc.
4. Disaster Relief
5. Disaster Recovery
6. HAZMAT Response
2. **Recommended Policy**

To transform and consolidate the many state-based bushfire and emergency services across Australia and Emergency Management Australia into one standardised federal professional body - Australia's 'Civil Emergency Corps'. The 'Civil Emergency Corps' is to be Australia's primary and sole central organisation to deal with civil emergencies including national disasters, natural or otherwise.

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This is not an exercise in administrative consolidation. It is a transformation of a disparate, outmoded and under resourced emergency infrastructure into a single centrally co-ordinated non-combat national defence organisation. It is to be continually learning organisation learning from past mistakes, such as the failings of the management of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. It is not to be a traditional hierarchical structure, but a programme-based matrix organisation, requiring exceptional leadership skills of its executive.

3. **Recommended Formation and Structure**

Incorporated into Australia's Defence Context

1. Australian Regular Army / Army Reserve
2. Royal Australian Navy / Navy Reserve
3. Royal Australian Air Force / Air Force Reserve
4. Civil Emergency Corps / Civil Emergency Reserve

**Civil Emergency Corp Structure**

In the same way as Australia's three other corps are configured, the new Civil Emergency Corps is to be comprised of 'Regulars' - full-time and professionally paid, as well as 'Reservists' who commit on a...
part-time and on demand basis, who are no-less professionally trained and paid commensurate with time served.

The organisational structure is to be headquartered in Canberra, located strategically next to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology, and as well has being networked geographically with a 'State Corps' for each State and Territory.

Regionally, this new organisation will have 'Regional Brigades' and at the local level 'Local Units'. Each component will have its share of regulars and reservists. The existing infrastructure of the various emergency services agencies would be utilised.

In addition, in order to deal with highly specialised functions, dedicated Corp Specialist Regiments will be established (see proposed list below).

1. National Government Ministry
   
   A. Minister for Civil Emergency
   B. Deputy Minister for Civil Emergency
   C. Parliamentary Secretary for Civil Emergency
   D. A 'National Command Centre' - based in Canberra next to the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM), for strategic reasons, headed by a 'Corps General Marshall'

2. State and Territory Corps
   
   Each headed by a 'Corps Brigadier'

The organisational structure is to be based on a hybrid geographical model of both Fire Brigades and State Emergency Service, decided on a region by region assessment.

3. Regional Brigades
   
   Each headed by a 'Regional Commander'

4. Local Units
   
   Each headed by a 'Unit Captain'
The regionalisation of the Civil Emergency Corps is to adopt the similar geographic structure aligned to a hybrid of that of the pre-existing State Emergency Services and Rural Fire Services.

For instance, currently across New South Wales State Emergency Service (SES), NSW is divided into 17 ‘Regions’ based on major river systems.

‘Each of the 226 volunteer units belongs to a Region, which is led by a Region Controller. Region boundaries coincide as nearly as possible with major river systems. Each Region Controller is responsible for the operational control of emergency flood and storm responses, including planning, training, operational support and other functions within their area of control. The Region Headquarters also provides administrative support to the units in its region. The Region Headquarters all have fully functioning Operations Centres and a group of volunteers who help with training, planning, operational and other functions.’


Merger and Integration:

All pre-existing emergency service organisations, with the exception of the ambulance and police services, are to be disbanded and merged and integrated into one national body, the Civil Emergency Corps.

The reason to maintain independence of the police services is due to the police function and role being more closely aligned to law and order than to dealing with civil emergencies. The reason to maintain independence of the ambulance service is due to the ambulance function and role being more closely aligned to hospital and Medicare care than to dealing with civil emergencies.

Nationally:

- Emergency Management Australia
- Care Flight Group
- Australian Volunteer Coast Guard
- St John Ambulance Service
NSW Corps:

A merger and integration of the Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Rural Fire Service, and Community Emergency Services Incorporated.

Victorian Corps

A merger and integration of the Victorian Fire Brigade, Country Fire Authority and the State Emergency Service.

Queensland Corps

A merger and integration of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, Queensland State Emergency Service and the Queensland Rural Fire Service.

South Australian Corps


ACT Corps

A merger and integration of the ACT Fire Brigade, ACT State Emergency Service and the ACT Rural Fire Service.
West Australian Corps

A merger and integration of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (which has already merged its emergency service agencies).

North Australia Corps

A merger and integration of the Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service, Northern Territory Emergency Service, Bushfire Volunteer Brigades, Rescue Co-ordination Centre (Northern Territory Transport Group).

Tasmanian Corps

A merger and integration of the Tasmanian Fire Service, and the State Emergency Service Tasmania.

Corps Specialist Regiments

- Specialist Regiments shall be established, each having its own part-time payrolled Reserve component.
'Evacuation Regiment'

- emergency field transport and logistics to effect evacuation of displaced persons and their personal effects
- assumes basic human needs provision of displaced persons (emergency accommodation, food and clothing, emergency sanitation, emergency childcare
- currently performed by charity groups like The Salvation Army, The Australian Red Cross, St Vincent de Paul Society, Anglicare Australia, Mission Australia, Catholic Mission, and others

'Utilities Regiment'

- public utility repair and rebuilding - drinking water, sewage and sanitation, electricity, gas services

'Reconstruction Regiment'

- debris clearance, demolition, salvage, engineering, construction, civil infrastructure, and relief housing, farm fencing repairs.

'Communications Regiment'

- Corps internal communications including satellite management for monitoring of bushfires and storms, (attached to Army Signals), land phone, mobile/SMS, public broadcast services, internet services, including evacuee/missing persons database and related communications, plus public relations communications
'Search and Rescue Regiment'

- assumes land search and rescue functions previously performed by various State Police special units, as well as rescue of trapped people from earthquakes, mines, landslides, etc.

'Airborne Regiment'

- Equipped with its own fleet of aircraft and special purpose airfields, this regiment will be regionally based and assume all aviation services including helicopter rescue, fire bombing, airborne evacuation transport, air search and rescue, and air-ambulance. It will integrate the various pre-existing airborne emergency services of each state, namely the NSW Police Rescue Unit, Westpac Rescue Helicopter Service (NSW), Care Flight Group, Search and Rescue Squad (of the Victorian Police), Tasmanian Air Rescue Trust, RACQ Care Flight, Capricorn Helicopter Rescue Service (Rockhampton), Royal Flying Doctor Service.

'Maritime Regiment'

- assumes functions previously performed by Coast Guard, including sea search and rescue and vessel salvage functions. It will integrate the various pre-existing maritime emergency services of each state, namely Marine Rescue NSW, Volunteer Marine Rescue (Qld), the South Australian Sea Rescue Squadron, the Volunteer Marine Rescue Western Australia, and Sea Rescue Tasmanian Inc.

'Medivac Regiment'

- The risk in times of civil emergency, is that already busy ambulance services become overstretched in being expected to provide the extraordinary levels of emergency medical needs of affected people and communities. This is unacceptable. Not a replacement of the State-based Ambulance Services, The Medivac Regiment will be dedicated to functions currently otherwise
performed in times of disaster by State-based Ambulance Services, Royal Flying Doctor Service, Army Medics, St John Ambulance and paramedics, and emergency field medicine. In addition it will provide medical emergency evacuation, hospital transfers, and specialise in proactive disease prevention, containment and vaccinations at times of pandemic and epidemic emergencies.

'Community Regiment'

• provides the full range of trauma counselling, psychological and associated mental health services, which will typically extend many months and sometimes years after exposure to a disastrous event

'Vet Regiment'

• Specialised livestock and pet recovery, animal sheltering, emergency veterinary services, emergency relief livestock agistment, stock feed provision and distribution

'Biosecurity Regiment'

• All biosecurity emergency planning and response to disease outbreaks, pandemics, epidemics, pestilence, plague, national health threats or emergencies, including mass casualty events, communicable disease outbreaks, and quarantine emergency planning and response.

Civil Emergency Strategic Partners
Australian Regular Army - Engineers, Signals (Communications), Transport & Logistics
Royal Australian Navy
Royal Australian Air Force
Australian Bureau of Meteorology
Australian Government Department of Health and Aging, Health Emergency
Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation
State and Federal Governments, Premiers Departments
New Zealand Government, Ministry of Civil Defence and Emergency Management Centrelink
CSIRO
Bushfire CRC
Seismology Research Centre, Australia
Geoscience Australia
Australian Broadcasting Commission
Department of Community Services (and State equivalents)
Major Supermarket Retailers - Coles, Woolworths, Metcash
Shipping Container company
Commonwealth Bank of Australia
Satellite Service Provider - Australian Satellite Communications Pty Ltd,
Commonwealth Serum Laboratories (CSL)
Australian Antarctic Division
Telstra
Qantas
Brambles Shipping
The Salvation Army
The Australian Red Cross
Infrastructure Australia
State Ambulance Services
State Police Services
State Health Agencies
Metcash, Coles, Woolworths
LinFox, Toll Holdings,
Departments of Community Services
Centrelink
Australia Post
State Morgues and Funeral Directors
Business Council of Australia
Small Business Council of Australia
Insurance Council of Australia
and many others.

Funding

The funding for such an organization needs to continually be drawn from multiple sources as it does now so as to share the burden, but the revenue needs to be ramped up and applied on a more ‘user-pays’ but means-tested calculation basis, including

Council rates component (indexed according to one’s properties bushfire zoning and house preparedness to mitigate bushfire damage – not how much natural vegetation one may have cleared around one’s property)

State taxes (existing, but with a portion of property stamp duty revenue allocated to this funding)

Federal taxes (existing) and Australia’s annual Defence Budget reined in away from wasteful capital expenditure on extravagant projects like the Joint Strike Fighter towards funding the more pertinent need of civil emergency funding

Property insurance premiums increased (indexed according to one’s properties bushfire zoning and house preparedness to mitigate bushfire damage – not how much natural vegetation one may have cleared around one’s property)

A blanket tax on exotic plants – eg 10% and legislation banning sales of gazetted noxious species with associated fines eg $2000
New legislation to effect a new bushfire levy imposed on property development applications eg 5% of the estimated construction value

New legislation to effect a parental financial liability for children found to have caused bushfire damage – fines mean tested up to $100,000

New legislation to given power to the EPA and local councils to fine people and organizations for illegal damage to native vegetation. The same satellite monitoring system as that used to detect ignitions would be admissible evidence. Fines mean tested up to $100,000

**Can Australia afford this?**

Well can Australia afford not to? Wait until the next disaster and then ask the question again, and again.

When Australians observe the hundreds of millions of dollars (indeed billions) of taxpayer moneys spent by State and Federal Governments in wasteful projects, the answer is a simple yes, easily.

Question the opportunity cost of the following recent examples of government inappropriate spending and waste:

**Nov 2010**: Prime Minister Gillard donates $500 million to Indonesian Islamic Schools

**Jul 2010**: A Senate inquiry into the Rudd-Gillard Government’s botched $300 million Green Loans program has confirmed that some groups of assessors hired as part of the program are still owed over $500,000 in fees due to mismanagement and poor administration procedures under the scheme with some assessors blasting the Federal Government for failing to implement proper checks and balances.

**Mar 2010**: The Rudd Government has recorded an $850 million blow-out in the cost of its household solar power program. Labor had only intended to spend $150 million over five years on solar rebates but instead splurged $1 billion in just 18 months!

**Dec 2010**: Queensland Premier Bligh committed $1.2 billion into the Tugun Desalination Plant, which has been plagued by problems since it opened last year, will be shut early next year, along with half the $380 million Bundamba treatment plant and the new $313 million plant at Gibson Island. Water infrastructure has cost Queenslanders $9 billion recently and they are entitled to know the money is being spent wisely.

**Dec 2010**: Queensland Premier Anna Bligh shelved a $192 million project involving carbon capture research. Bligh has said she is determined to make carbon capture storage economically viable and has committed another $50 million of taxpayers money to finding the answer. The Bligh government has already spent $102 million researching cleaner coal technology through the state-owned ZeroGen, a joint state-commonwealth government and industry led-research project for coal-fired power production.
Sep 2010: Victorian Premier Brumby’s Wonthaggi desalination plant will cost Victorians $15.8 billion over the next three decades, departmental figures show, leading the state opposition to accuse the government of hiding the project’s true cost.

And disaster management it is better invested up front in prevention and response, than afterward in relief and recovery.

Yes, Australia can afford it. Governments need to stop wasting taxpayer money.

4. Justifications for this Reform Initiative

Since European colonisation of Australia in 1788, successive natural and unnatural disasters have occurred, yet government preparedness and response has repeatedly fallen well short of the duty and standard expected by the Australian public. The 1939 Black Friday bushfires were perhaps the greatest wake up call to complacent governments, yet since then countless bushfires, storms, floods and other civil emergencies have seen government well behind the eight ball to cope and to exercise its civil responsibility to protect the Australian public. While in 1939, emergency management knowledge, resources, technology and techniques were primitive, in 2011 now, there is no excuse. In bushfires, storms and floods people are continuing to die, houses destroyed and vast areas of natural habitat destroyed. Only myopic denial and lack of political prevent Australian governments at all levels from fulfilling their civic governance responsibilities in civic emergency contingency resourcing and management. It is no longer tolerated for governments to hide behind the veneer of the volunteer involvement to deflect public criticism of the government neglect of civil emergency management. Australia has a litany of disasters through its recent history:

- March 1899: more than 400 die in Cyclone Martha at Cape York, far north Queensland.
- December 1916: Flood kills 61 at Clermont, Queensland
- April 1929: Northern Tasmanian floods kill 44
- December 1934: Melbourne floods kill 36 and leave 3000 homeless
- March 1935: Cyclone in Broome, West Australia kills 141
- February 1955: Hunter Valley floods kills 25 in Singleton and Maitland, NSW
- February 1967: Tasmanian bushfires kill 62, most in Hobart
- January 1974: Brisbane floods kill 14 (Cyclone Tracy 25,000 made homeless)
- December 1989: Earthquake in Newcastle, NSW kills 13
- July 1997: Landslide at Thredbo, NSW kills 18
- February 2009: Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria kill 173

and many others.

[Source: The Australian newspaper, ‘Summer, season of catastrophe’, 20110112, p.11]
Current emergency management across Australia remains grossly under-resourced, ill-equipped and typically wholly reliant upon unpaid volunteers and individual community members doing their bit. It is government negligence to the extreme.

The cost of maintaining the status quo of relying upon multiple State-based agencies continues to be in the hundreds of millions dealing with major bushfires each year. Bushfires don’t stop at State borders and invariably each summer, crews cross borders anyway to help out. Each State simply doesn’t have the resources to do an effective job when it comes to major bushfire events, or indeed major natural disasters. So the task become national anyway.

During the cooler winter months, when there a few if any bushfires, those agencies tasked in bushfire management are in the main idle, while at the same time the State Emergency Services are often overwhelmed dealing with storm emergencies. By combining all emergency services (excluding police and ambulance services) into one national body, the combined force will be better trained and resourced to tackle any form of civil emergency any time of year. The resources will be more continuously employed, have greater capacity and be at a greater state of readiness to deal with civil emergencies.

Australian governments at all levels need to stop their ‘too-little-too-late’ reactionary responses to emergency management in Australia. The Australian people, the Australian economy and the Australian natural environment deserve better. Currently, we have disparate grossly underfunded State run groups largely staffed by local volunteers - volunteer rural fire services, volunteer state emergency services, and total dependence upon various charities like the Red Cross and Salvation Army. The responsibility for emergency management throughout Australia has been run on the cheap by successive State and Federal governments since Black Friday of 1939. National Disaster Management is probably the most neglected responsibility of all government services, because to do it right involves long term planning beyond election cycles and costs so much money.

Nationally, Australia has no central organisation that deals with national disasters, natural or otherwise. The job is left to the relevant State Government concerned; somewhat a leftover remnant of colonialism. There is a token agency under the Federal Attorney General’s Department, called Emergency Management Australia, but the name is more impressive than the tasks it performs. In 2005 under the Howard Government, Emergency Management Australia was on paper “tasked with co-ordinating governmental responses to emergency incidents” and with providing training [at Mount Macedon] and policy development, yet “the actual provision of most emergency response in Australia (was)... delivered by State Governments.” [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emergency_Management_Australia&oldid=32590701]. In November 2007 under the Rudd Government, the Emergency Management Australia focus was modified, slightly: “On request, the Australian Government will provide and coordinate physical assistance to the States in the event of a major natural, technological or civil defence emergency. Such physical assistance will be provided when State and Territory resources are inappropriate, exhausted or unavailable.” - and they gave it an acronym ‘COMDISPLAN’ standing for Commonwealth Government Disaster Response Plan. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Emergency_Management_Australia&oldid=174306765 ]

That is, in lay terms, the Australian Government will only help in national emergencies when the States can’t handle a public emergency.
Such a bureaucratic attitude is hardly proactive leadership from our wealthy developed nation!

Emergency Management in Australia doesn’t even have a dedicated minister responsible. Instead, the entire responsibility is tagged on to the Federal Attorney General’s Department. Currently the task is being delegated to an ‘Acting’ Attorney-General Brendan O’Connor and shared with Minister for Human Services Tanya Plibersek. It is as if the Australian Government has a head in the sand approach to national emergencies at home, hoping they won’t happen, but when they do, she’ll be right mate! - we’ll fob our way through it as best we can with what’s lying around. What a bloody irresponsible approach to national emergency management! And all the government does is to encourage the thousands of Queensland residents affected by the flooding to lodge a claim for the Australian Government, Disaster Recovery Payment ‘AGDRP’ - another acronym!

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) met in Brisbane on 7 December 2009 and agreed to a range of measures to improve Australia’s natural disaster arrangements. COAG recognised "the expected increase to the regularity and severity of natural disasters", and so agreed to a new whole-of-nation, resilience based approach to natural disaster policy and programs." Under a Natural Disaster Resilience Program, at Federal level we now have Commonwealth funding for disaster mitigation works and support for emergency management will be approximately $110 million over four years. That funding would deliver more effective benefits by being channelled to single national body, rather than spread across multiple duplicated agencies.

The responsibility for proper governance of civil disaster management (contingency planning, mitigation, resourcing and response) by Australian governments span not just within Australia’s shores but as a wealthy nation and an international citizen, Australia owes a duty of care to countries in its region. Last September, Australia’s closest neighbour, New Zealand, suffered a devastating earthquake in Christchurch, and we don’t have to travel far back to recall the 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami that devastated coastal Sumatra, Thailand, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Currently, Australia is responding with emergency management personnel, equipment and funding to the Japanese Government following the earthquake, tsunami and nuclear plant emergencies. That response would be all the more effective, co-ordinated and resourced if under professional umbrella Civil Emergency Corps.

5. Benefits of this Reform Initiative

Only with a national, military style and fully funded organisation, can Australia expect to adequately prepare, resource and deal with national civil emergencies. The current State-based volunteer-dependent system does not have a hope of getting access to real-time satellite monitoring of the nation for ignitions, tsunamis, storms and the like, nor access to standby airborne fleet to effect military speed responses. Instead, the current system relies on an outmoded and slow truck-centric ‘mum-and-dad’ army whom, while well-intentioned and dedicated, are grossly inadequate to meet the scale of the challenge.

The increased prevalence of climate change is expected to increase the frequency and severity of natural disasters in our region, yet Australia’s readiness continues to lag decades behind the
requisite emergency management need. Only a complete transformation of Australia’s emergency management to a military-speed national defence force has a chance of adequately preparing Australia for inevitable future natural disasters and civil emergencies.

Collectively across all the existing emergency organisations, Australia already spends billions in emergency management, but is not coping and is under-performing against 21st century triple bottom line expectations

Cumulatively, Australia already spends billions in emergency management, but most of the cost is in response due to being under-prepared. In natural disaster management, mitigation and prevention where possible are better than the cost of poor response. It is cheaper economically and on lives.

A professional organisation, on the payroll is fairer to the workers involved. Government reliance on community volunteers is exploitative and the standards can never collectively match full paid professionals with state of the art resourcing. Taxes are paid by the people so that government will protect them in both military and civil defence.

A single national Corps is better positioned than multiple disjointed organisations to prepare for and respond to the ever increasing array of national disasters, but such an organisation would retain the critical advantage of regional and local personnel and resources. Economies of scale and efficiency gains from removing duplication in administration and overheads would come from a single Corps. But a key condition must be that any job losses would attract full retrenchment payouts.

Many secondary school leavers could be readily recruited into a non-combative Civil Emergency Corps service for limited services, than are attracted to the traditional three combative military corps.

Amalgamating the many disparate organisations into one will enable national standardisation of policies, procedures and techniques as well as enable best practice in effectiveness and efficiency.

By having a national, multi-skilled, professionally trained and properly resourced Civil Emergency Corps, Australia will be better placed to assist and respond to natural disasters across Australia and throughout the Oceanic region.

**Proposed mascot of Australia’s overdue 'Civil Emergency Corps' :**
Australia’s magnificent wedge-tailed eagle should be the mascot of this new organisation. It is uniquely Australian, a highly respected native bird and the eagle traditionally is a symbol for guardianship, protection, power, strength, courage, wisdom and grace. All these qualities quite apt for a Civil Emergency Corps. An appropriate motto is ‘defending our community’ - or perhaps ‘vigilant, capable, immediate’ but instead of in English or translated back to Latin, more appropriate that it be in an Australian Aboriginal language.

[Footnote: This article has been prepared based upon material in a previous article on this website published 1st January 2011 entitled 'National Disasters Best for Capable Army'].

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Australia’s Wedge-Tailed Eagle

Source: ^ [http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wedge_tailed_eagle_in_flight04.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Wedge_tailed_eagle_in_flight04.jpg)
Further Reading:

[1] 'Nat MPs push levy for disaster fund', by Joe Kelly, The Australian, January 05, 2011,


[3] 'Premier visits NSW towns in flood's path', ABC, 6th January 2011,

[4] 'Carnarvon on flood warning but levees hold', 20th December 2010, ABC

[5] 'SA has been facing 'very high' fire danger', ABC, 1st January 2011,
http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2011/01/01/3104707.htm

[6] Bushfires in Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Bushfires_in_Australia

[7] Floods in Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Floods_in_Australia

[8] Droughts in Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Droughts_in_Australia

[9] Severe Storms in Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Severe_storms_in_Australia

[10] Cyclones in Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Cyclones_in_Australia

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Saturday_bushfires

[12] Earthquakes in Australia
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:Earthquakes_in_Australia

[13] 1997 Thredbo Landslide

[14] Role of the Australian Army


[17] Emergency Management Australia, Wikipedia,

I also submit: 75 articles written that critique bushfire management in Australia, which may be found the following hyperlink:


End of Submission