



ACT
Government

Response to the

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

March 2021



We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the ACT, the Ngunnawal people. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Introduction

The ACT Government is pleased to present its formal response to the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* (Royal Commission). This response sets out how we commit to implementing the Royal Commission's recommendations, to strengthen our emergency management arrangements in response to the changing threat of natural disasters. The ACT has also undertaken several local reviews of its emergency management and fire management arrangements. The recommendations of these reviews are being progressed in conjunction with the recommendations presented by the Royal Commission

The Black Summer bushfires of 2020-21 caused unparalleled damage and destruction across Australia. The fires burnt over 24 million hectares across Australia and caused the destruction of 3,000 homes and loss of 33 lives, including significant financial loss of over \$10 billion¹.

The ACT Government extends its deepest condolences to all individuals, families and communities that were affected by the bushfires. The ACT Government also acknowledges the significant impact the Black Summer bushfires have had on Australia's Traditional Custodians, with their unique attachment to country. Recovering from these fires will take years of combined effort, as was the ACT's experience from the devastating ACT bushfires of 2003.

The impact of the Black Summer bushfires extended to the ACT from early 2020, with the ACT being enveloped in smoke from the surrounding devastating NSW bushfires. This smoke impacted on the health of Canberrans and impacted on business, tourism and economic activity. The ACT Government moved

quickly to declare a State of Alert and activate disaster relief arrangements, including the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and a Disaster Relief Centre. This centre provided significant levels of emergency support, including for many bushfire affected and traumatised individuals and families from NSW and Victoria.

On 22 January 2020, a fire ignited in the Pialligo Redwood Park that burnt 424 hectares of farmland and threatened structures. Five days later on 27 January, a bushfire ignited in the Orroral Valley in Namadgi National Park. This bushfire burned over 88,000 hectares and caused significant damage to the environmental, cultural and heritage assets of the park. It also caused losses to valuable farmland and farming assets of the ACT's rural landowners. It was the first time a State of Emergency was declared in the ACT under the *Emergencies Act 2004*.

The ACT Government acknowledges the unprecedented emergency response at both national and local levels, including public employees, volunteers, non-government organisations, other states and territories, the Australian Defence Force, the private sector and the community. This combined effort, over many weeks, reduced the impact of the bushfires on the environment and the communities.

The ACT Government acknowledges the work of the Royal Commission and all those that provided evidence. The ACT Government is pleased to have been engaged with the Australian, state and territory governments to address several of the lessons learned from the Black Summer bushfires ahead of the 2020-21 summer season.

¹ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Recommendation	ACT Response	Comments
<p>3.1 Forum for ministers</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should restructure and reinvigorate ministerial forums with a view to enabling timely and informed strategic decision-making in respect of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. long-term policy improvement in relation to natural disasters 2. national preparations for, and adaptation to, natural disasters, and (3) response to, and recovery from, natural disasters of national scale or consequence including, where appropriate, through the National Cabinet or equivalent intergovernmental leaders' body. 	Support	<p>On 26 June 2020 the National Cabinet accepted and has implemented the recommendations of the Reviewing of COAG Councils and Ministerial Forums.</p> <p>On 13 November 2020, the National Cabinet announced the establishment of the National Emergency Management Ministers' Meeting (NEMMM) to lead and coordinate the implementation of the recommendations from the Royal Commission.</p> <p>The ACT Government notes that the Australian Government supports this recommendation and proposed to work with states and territories to identify an appropriate and more targeted forum for governments to work together on strategy national natural disaster matters.</p>
<p>3.2 Establishment of an authoritative disaster advisory body</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should establish an authoritative advisory body to consolidate advice on strategic policy and relevant operational considerations for ministers in relation to natural disasters.</p>	Noted	<p>The ACT Government views that the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) already provides a long standing, experienced and qualified authoritative body to provide consolidated advice on strategic policy and operational advice on natural disasters to ministers.</p>
<p>3.3 Revise COMDISPLAN</p> <p>The Australian Government should revise the COMDISPLAN thresholds to provide that a request for Australian Government assistance, including Defence assistance, is able to be made by a state or territory government when:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. it has exhausted, or is 'likely to exhaust', all government, community and commercial resources 2. it cannot mobilise its own resources (or community and commercial resources) in time, or (3) the Australian Government has a capability that the state or territory does not have. 	Support	<p>The ACT Government notes the Australian Government supports this recommendation and is responsible for action against it.</p>
<p>3.4 Integrating disaster management of the Australian Government</p> <p>Australian Government agencies should work together across all phases of disaster management.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government notes the Australian Government supports this recommendation and is responsible for action against it.</p>
<p>3.5 Establishing a standing resilience and recovery entity</p> <p>The Australian Government should establish a standing entity that will enhance national natural disaster resilience and recovery, focused on long-term disaster risk reduction.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government notes the Australian Government supports this recommendation and is taking action to address it.</p>

Recommendation	ACT Response	Comments
3.6 Enhanced national preparedness and response entity The Australian Government should enhance national preparedness for, and response to, natural disasters, building on the responsibilities of Emergency Management Australia, to include facilitating resource sharing decisions of governments and stress testing national disaster plans.	Support	The ACT Government notes the Australian Government supports this recommendation and is taking action to address it.
4.1 National disaster risk information Australian, state and territory governments should prioritise the implementation of harmonised data governance and national data standards.	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government recognises the benefit and importance of using data about natural disaster risks to help reduce future risk and support better emergency responses.</p> <p>The ACT Government is supportive of working with the Australian and state and territory governments to harmonise and govern the management and application of this data, whether through national data standards or other means.</p>
4.2 Common information platforms and shared technologies Australian, state and territory governments should create common information platforms and share technologies to enable collaboration in the production, analysis, access, and exchange of information, data and knowledge about climate and disaster risks.	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government is supportive of measures to provide for the timely, efficient and effective sharing of information, data and knowledge about climate and disaster risks where there is an identified business requirement and benefit.</p> <p>The manner in which this is achieved, either through common information platforms or other measures, will need to be carefully considered noting the potential resource implication involved.</p>
4.3 Implementation of the National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability Australian, state and territory governments should support the implementation of the National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability and aligned climate adaptation initiatives.	Support in principle	The ACT Government is supportive of the establishment of the National “Resilience Services” (at a Federal level) as a means of managing extensive Commonwealth data sets relating to climate and disaster risk. The inclusion of jurisdictional data sets as part of the National Resilience Services capability requires careful consideration noting the potential legal issues (associated with the harmonisation of data) and resource implications involved.
4.4 Features of the National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability The National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability should include tools and systems to support operational and strategic decision making, including integrated climate and disaster risk scenarios tailored to various needs of relevant industry sectors and end users.	Support in principle	The ACT Government is supportive of enhancing support for operational and strategic decision making. The inclusion of jurisdictional data requires careful consideration noting the potential legal issues (associated with the harmonisation of data) and resource implications involved.

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<p>4.5 National climate projections</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should produce downscaled climate projections:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. to inform the assessment of future natural disaster risk by relevant decision makers, including state and territory government agencies with planning and emergency management responsibilities 2. underpinned by an agreed common core set of climate trajectories and timelines, and 3. subject to regular review. 	Support in principle	<p>The ACT government supports the use of and application of national climate projections and notes the work across multiple Commonwealth Agencies in progressing the use of climate projections.</p> <p>The ACT recognises the importance of this work and the need to carefully consider projections, noting the potential resource implications involved in developing and implementing responses.</p>
<p>4.6 Consistent impact data standards</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should work together to develop consistent data standards to measure disaster impact.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government recognises the benefit of achieving national consistency in measuring and reporting disaster impacts.</p> <p>The ACT Government notes the previous work by the Australian, state and territory governments to progress the National Impact Assessment Framework and the National Impact Assessment Model. It is timely that the current application of these be reviewed.</p>
<p>4.7 Collection and sharing of impact data</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should continue to develop a greater capacity to collect and share standardised and comprehensive natural disaster impact data.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government is supportive of measures to collect and share standardised and comprehensive natural disaster impact data, but the purpose and benefits of doing so must be clearly identified. These should be assessed against the resource implications, noting the requirement to maintain the data's accuracy.</p>
<p>5.1 Make provision for a declaration of a state of emergency</p> <p>The Australian Government should make provision, in legislation, for a declaration of a state of national emergency. The declaration should include the following components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the ability for the Australian Government to make a public declaration to communicate the seriousness of a natural disaster 2. processes to mobilise and activate Australian Government agencies quickly to support states and territories to respond to and recover from a natural disaster, and 3. the power to take action without a state or territory request for assistance in clearly defined and limited circumstances. 	Support	<p>The ACT Government supports the provision for the Australian Government to make a declaration for a state of national emergency.</p> <p>The ACT Government notes the passing of the National Emergency Declaration Act 2020, and the provisions that require consultation between the Australian Government and the government of the impacted state and territory before a national emergency declaration is made.</p> <p>This consultation will be critical to ensure that a proposed declaration does not conflict with state or territory declaration and cause unnecessary community confusion or alarm.</p>
<p>6.1 Assessment of the capacity and capability of fire and emergency services in light of current and future natural disaster risk</p> <p>State and territory governments should have a structured process to regularly assess the capacity and capability requirements of fire and emergency services, in light of both current and future natural disaster risk.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government maintains arrangements to ensure that the capacity and capability of its fire and emergency services is proportionate to current and emerging natural disaster risks. This is undertaken within an all-hazards setting.</p>

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<p>6.2 A national register of fire and emergency services personnel and equipment</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should establish a national register of fire and emergency services personnel, equipment and aerial assets.</p>	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government supports in principle measures to increase strategic awareness of national fire and emergency services capabilities through its personnel and equipment.</p> <p>However, the purpose and benefits of establishing a national register will need to be carefully considered against the resource implications to establish and maintain the register. This is on the basis that the register will be subject to regular change.</p>
<p>6.3 Interoperable communications for fire and emergency services across jurisdictions</p> <p>State and territory governments should update and implement the National Framework to Improve Government Radio Communications Interoperability, or otherwise agree a new strategy, to achieve interoperable communications across jurisdictions.</p>	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government is supportive in principle of measures to strengthen the interoperability of communications between fire and emergency services across jurisdictions to better support emergency response.</p> <p>Noting, these measures have technical and resource implications, reviewing and updating the National Framework to Improve Government Radio Communications Interoperability will be important to understanding these implications.</p> <p>The ACT already has strong interoperability with NSW.</p>
<p>6.4 Delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband capability</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should expedite the delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband capability.</p>	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government recognises the importance and benefit of providing police and emergency services with reliable access to mobile broadband to support emergency response.</p> <p>However, the ACT notes the significant commercial, technical, financial and inter-government challenges that will need to be resolved to achieve this recommendation.</p>
<p>6.5 Multi-agency national-level exercises</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should conduct multi-agency, national-level exercises, not limited to cross-border jurisdictions. These exercises should, at a minimum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. assess national capacity, inform capability development and coordination in response to, and recovery from, natural disasters, and 2. use scenarios that stress current capabilities. 	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government recognises the benefits of conducting exercise to enhance preparedness for emergencies.</p> <p>However, as national-level exercises are resource intensive to plan, execute and evaluate, progressing action against this recommendation within existing resources will need to be carefully considered.</p>

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<p>6.6 Employment protections for fire and emergency services volunteers</p> <p>The Australian Government should consider whether employment protections under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> (Cth) are sufficient to ensure that fire and emergency services volunteers will not be discriminated against, disadvantaged or dismissed for reasons associated with their volunteer service during natural disasters.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government recognises the critical role that volunteers play in Australia's emergency management arrangements.</p> <p>The ACT Government supports measures to reduce the risk of discrimination, disadvantage or dismissal in relation to volunteer employment when volunteer duties are performed in accordance with workplace agreements and in a manner agreed with by employers.</p> <p>The ACT Government notes the Australian Government supports in principle this recommendation and is responsible for action against it.</p>
<p>7.1 Improve understanding of Australian Defence Force capabilities</p> <p>State and territory governments should take steps to ensure that there is better interaction, planning and ongoing understanding of Australian Defence Force capabilities and processes by state and territory fire and emergency service agencies and local governments.</p>	Support	The ACT already maintains a close working relationship with the Australian Defence Force (ADF) at various levels to regularly share information about ADF capabilities to support natural disaster responses.
<p>7.2 Review of Defence Assistance to the Civil Community manual</p> <p>The Australian Government should review the content of the Defence Assistance to the Civil Community manual to ensure consistency of language and application with a revised COMDISPLAN.</p>	Support	The ACT Government notes the Australian Government supports this recommendation and is responsible for action against it.
<p>7.3 Legal protections for Australian Defence Force members</p> <p>The Australian Government should afford appropriate legal protections from civil and criminal liability to Australian Defence Force members when conducting activities under an authorisation to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.</p>	Support	The ACT notes that this is a policy matter for the Australian Government.
<p>8.1 A sovereign aerial firefighting capability</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop an Australian-based and registered national aerial firefighting capability, to be tasked according to greatest national need. This capability should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. a modest, very large air tanker/large air tanker, and Type-1 helicopter capability, including supporting infrastructure, aircrew and aviation support personnel, and 2. any other aerial firefighting capabilities (eg Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR), line-scanning, transport, and logistics) that would benefit from a nationally 	Noted	<p>The ACT Government recognises the critical requirement for aerial firefighting resources and the competing international and national pressures that are placed on these resources.</p> <p>Noting the significant costs of acquiring and maintaining an Australian-based fleet, the cost versus the benefit of this approach will remain an item for assessment</p>

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<p>8.2 Research and evaluation into aerial firefighting</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should support ongoing research and evaluation into aerial firefighting. This research and evaluation should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. assessing the specific capability needs of states and territories, and 2. exploring the most effective aerial firefighting strategies. 	Support	<p>The ACT Government recognises the benefit of supporting ongoing research and evaluation into aerial firefighting to improve the national understanding of how these vital firefighting assets are best applied and managed.</p> <p>The nature and quantum of this support will need further exploration.</p>
<p>8.3 Developing the aerial firefighting industry's capability</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should adopt procurement and contracting strategies that support and develop a broader Australian-based sovereign aerial firefighting industry.</p>	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government supports measures to ensure the guaranteed availability of aerial firefighting resources to support a lengthening bushfire season across Australia.</p> <p>Whether these measures are best achieved through an Australia-based sovereign aerial firefighting fleet or other means remains an issue for assessment.</p>
<p>9.1 Supply chains – government review</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments, in consultation with local governments and the private sector, should review supply chain risks, and consider options to ensure supply of essential goods in times of natural disasters.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government maintains close working relationships with the private sector through its critical infrastructure arrangements. These arrangements were used extensively during the Black Summer bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic to share information about critical infrastructure and supply chain matters. Assessing options to mitigate risk to supply chains is an important part of the emergency management cycle.</p>
<p>9.2 Comprehensive information</p> <p>State and territory governments should include road closure and opening information on all roads within their borders on public apps.</p>	Completed	<p>Information about road closures during emergencies in the ACT is made available to the public via website, social media, and app updates.</p>
<p>9.3 Provision of information</p> <p>State and territory governments should provide information to the public on the closure and opening of roads. Information should be provided in real-time, or in advance based on predictions, where possible.</p>	Completed	<p>Timely information about road closures during emergencies in the ACT is made available to the public via website, social media, and app updates.</p>
<p>9.4 Collective awareness and mitigation of risks to critical infrastructure</p> <p>The Australian Government, working with state and territory governments and critical infrastructure operators, should lead a process to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. identify critical infrastructure 2. assess key risks to identified critical infrastructure from natural disasters of national scale or consequence 3. identify steps needed to mitigate these risks 4. identify steps to make the critical infrastructure more resilient, and 5. track achievement against an agreed plan. 	Support	<p>The ACT Government supports measure to improve the awareness of critical infrastructure and the mitigation of risks posed during natural disasters.</p> <p>The ACT remains engaged with the Australian, state and territory governments and critical infrastructure owners and operators through the national Critical Infrastructure Advisory Council to progress this recommendation.</p> <p>The ACT's own critical infrastructure arrangements and linkages also support progress against this recommendation.</p>

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<p>9.5 Improving coordination arrangements between critical infrastructure sectors and with government</p> <p>The Australian Government should work with state and territory governments and critical infrastructure operators to improve information flows during and in response to natural disasters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. between critical infrastructure operators, and 2. between critical infrastructure operators and government 	Completed	<p>This recommendation is already implemented.</p> <p>Mature coordination arrangements already exist between critical infrastructure providers and the ACT Government as well as Commonwealth Government during emergency arrangements.</p>
<p>10.1 Disaster education for individuals and communities</p> <p>State and territory governments should continue to deliver, evaluate and improve education and engagement programs aimed at promoting disaster resilience for individuals and communities.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT has legislative provisions under the <i>Emergencies Act 2004</i> requiring engagement with, and education of the community in relation to emergencies.</p>
<p>11.1 Responsibility for local government disaster management capability and capacity</p> <p>State and territory governments should take responsibility for the capability and capacity of local governments to which they have delegated their responsibilities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters, to ensure local governments are able to effectively discharge the responsibilities devolved to them.</p>	Noted	<p>This recommendation is not applicable to the ACT.</p>
<p>11.2 Resource sharing arrangements between local governments</p> <p>State and territory governments should take responsibility for the capability and capacity of local governments to which they have delegated their responsibilities in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters, to ensure local governments are able to effectively discharge the responsibilities devolved to them.</p>	Noted	<p>This recommendation is not applicable to the ACT.</p>
<p>12.1 Roadside vegetation management</p> <p>State and territory governments, working with local governments and fire and emergency service agencies, should ensure that there are appropriate arrangements for roadside vegetation management that take into account, among other things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. priority access and egress routes 2. road priority, utility and strategic value 3. cost, and 4. residual risk to national natural disasters 	Support	<p>The ACT Government maintains a <i>Strategic Bushfire Management Plan, Bushfire Operations Plan</i> and land management arrangements and contracts that provide for the effective management of roadside vegetation.</p>

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<p>12.2 Evacuation planning – Evacuation routes and seasonal populations</p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure that those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review those plans, and update them where appropriate, including in relation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. roles and responsibilities of state and territory governments, local governments and local communities 2. education and signage about evacuations and evacuation routes, including education of seasonal populations 3. the adequacy of evacuation routes; including contingencies if evacuation routes or centres are assessed as not being able to cope, and 4. the potential inability to evacuate, either by reason of circumstances or personal characteristics. 	Support	The ACT Government maintain emergency plans and arrangements provide for the periodic review of evacuation plans and update where necessary.
<p>12.3 Evacuation planning – Essential services and supplies</p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure that those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review those plans, and update them where appropriate, including in relation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. key risks that essential service outages have on communities during a severe or catastrophic natural disaster (particularly communications and power) 2. availability of essential supplies, including food and water, and 3. consequence management and compounding events such as the loss of essential services or health impacts. 	Support	The ACT Government's emergency management governance arrangements provide mechanisms for the periodic review of evacuation plans.
<p>12.4 Sheltering terminology should be made nationally consistent</p> <p>State and territory governments should, as a priority, adopt nationally consistent terminology and functions for the different sheltering facilities, including evacuation centres, Neighbourhood Safer Places, places of last resort and natural disaster shelters.</p>	Support	The ACT Government supports action to ensure national consistency in the language that is used to refer to sheltering facilities, evacuation centres and associated infrastructure.
<p>12.5 National community education</p> <p>State and territory governments should provide further community education on the function and limitations of different sheltering facilities, including evacuation centres, Neighbourhood Safer Places, places of last resort and natural disaster shelters. This education should be nationally consistent.</p>	Support	<p>Whilst this recommendation has limited application in the ACT, the ACT Government supports action, where necessary, to educate at risk communities about the function and limitations of different sheltering facilities and evacuation centres.</p> <p>The ACT recognises that achieving national consistency is achievable to a point, noting the different types of locations and functions that are used for these facilities.</p>

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<p>12.6 Evacuation planning – Evacuation centres</p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review these plans, and update them where appropriate, to account for the existence and standard of any evacuation centres and safer places (however described) in the community, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the capacity of a centre to handle seasonal population variation 2. the suitability of facilities to cater for diverse groups, including vulnerable people, and those evacuating with animals, and 3. the existence of communications facilities and alternate power sources 	Support	<p>The ACT Government emergency management governance arrangements already provide mechanisms for the periodic review of evacuation plans and arrangements to factor in the diversity of communities and the resilience of the evacuation centre.</p>
<p>12.7 Evacuation planning – Planning for evacuations across boundaries</p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review those plans, and update where appropriate, to provide for coordination between states and territories in cross-border areas and to provide cross-border access to evacuation centres.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government recognises the importance of a joint approach to planning where evacuations have cross-border implications.</p> <p>The ACT maintains close working relationships with NSW to ensure coordination and joint approaches to natural disaster planning and operations.</p>
<p>13.1 Development and implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System</p> <p>State and territory governments should expedite the development and implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System. It should ensure that there is national consistency in the visual display of the AFDRS and action to be taken in response to each rating.</p>	Support	<p>Noting the technical and resources implications of this initiative, the ACT Government remains engaged with the Australian, state and territory governments to focus this recommendation as a matter of priority pursuant to the agreement of the National Federation Reform Council.</p>
<p>13.2 Education on the Australian Fire Danger Rating System</p> <p>State and territory governments should deliver education to ensure that the public understands the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System ratings, the potential danger attached to each rating, and the action that should be taken in response to each rating.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government recognises and will support nationally agreed measures to raise awareness of the Australian Fire Danger Rating system ratings when finalised.</p>
<p>13.3 The Australian Warning System</p> <p>State and territory governments should urgently deliver and implement the all-hazard Australian Warning System.</p>	Completed	<p>The new Australian Warning System for bushfires was implemented in the ACT on 1 December 2020.</p> <p>The ACT Government has updated all its public facing platforms with the new warning symbols. Furthermore, the ACT's bushfire education campaign information for the community on the new warning system.</p>
<p>13.4 An education campaign on the Australian Warning System</p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure that the implementation of the Australian Warning System is accompanied by a carefully developed national education campaign that considers the needs of all Australians.</p>	Completed	<p>The ACT Government has implemented this recommendation.</p>

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<p>13.5 The development of national standards for mobile applications</p> <p>The Australian Government should facilitate state and territory governments working together to develop minimum national standards of information to be included in bushfire warnings apps.</p>	Support in principle	Noting the technical and resource implications of this initiative, the ACT Government supports the Australian Government facilitating collaboration between states and territories to identify how minimum standards of information to be included in bushfire warning apps can be best achieved.
<p>13.6 Exploring the development of a national, all-hazard warning app</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should continue to explore the feasibility of a national, all-hazard emergency warning app.</p>	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government recognises the potential benefit that a single national, all-hazard emergency warning app may provide.</p> <p>However, noting that most states and territories have advanced apps that reflect their operating environment and community information needs, such an app remains an aspirational goal. The development of such an app is likely to present significant inter-governmental, commercial, technical, cost sharing and risk challenges.</p> <p>Exploring options to harmonise end-user experience may be a preferred approach.</p>
<p>14.1 Nationally consistent air quality information, health advice and interventions</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. develop close to real-time, nationally consistent air quality information, including consistent categorisation and public health advice 2. greater community education and guidance, and 3. targeted health advice to vulnerable groups. 	Completed	The ACT Government has completed changes to its online public information about air quality to reflect the recently adopted national categories and public health messaging for 1-hour PM2.5 exposure.
<p>14.2 National Air Quality Forecasting Capability</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop national air quality forecasting capabilities, which include broad coverage of population centres and apply to smoke and other airborne pollutants, such as dust and pollen, to predict plume behaviour.</p>	Support in principle	The ACT Government supports measures to strengthen air quality forecasting capabilities but notes the resource implications and costs to achieve this need to be assessed against the application and benefits obtained.
<p>15.1 Australian Medical Assistance Teams</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should review Australian Medical Assistance Team capabilities and procedures and develop necessary training, exercising and other arrangements to build capacity for domestic deployments.</p>	Support in principle	The ACT Government is supportive in principle of working with the Australian, state and territory governments to ensure the capabilities of Australian Medical Assistance Teams are proportionate to their most likely operational needs.

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<p>15.2 Inclusion of primary care in disaster management</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop arrangements that facilitate greater inclusion of primary healthcare providers in disaster management, including: representation on relevant disaster committees and plans and providing training, education and other supports.</p>	Noted	<p>The ACT Government recognises the important role that primary healthcare providers can play in responding to natural disaster. However, any increase to the role of primary healthcare providers must be in response to an identified need.</p> <p>The ACT's emergency management arrangements provide effective mechanisms for the participation of primary healthcare providers in disaster planning (including cross-border), and their activation to support responses to natural disasters.</p>
<p>15.3 Prioritising mental health during and after natural disasters</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should refine arrangements to support localised planning and the delivery of appropriate mental health services following a natural disaster.</p>	Support	<p>The ACT Government recognises the impact that natural disasters may have on the mental health of communities.</p> <p>The ACT's recovery arrangements provide disaster-ready arrangements to support the delivery of appropriate mental health services following a natural disaster.</p> <p>These arrangements have been extensively exercised during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
<p>15.4 Enhance health and mental health datasets</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should agree to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> develop consistent and compatible methods and metrics to measure health impacts related to natural disasters, including mental health, and take steps to ensure the appropriate sharing of health and mental health datasets. 	Support	<p>The ACT Government supports the ongoing strengthening of health and mental health datasets to better measure mental health impacts related to natural disasters and to ensure the appropriate sharing of health and mental health datasets.</p>
<p>16.1 Environmental data</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should ensure greater consistency and collaboration in the collation, storage, access and provision of data on the distribution and conservation status of Australian flora and fauna.</p>	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government supports measure to ensure greater consistency and collaboration in the storage and sharing of data relating to Australian flora and fauna, where there is an identified business requirement or need.</p>
<p>17.1 Public availability of fuel load management strategies</p> <p>Public land managers should clearly convey and make available to the public their fuel load management strategies, including the rationale behind them, as well as report annually on the implementation and outcomes of those strategies.</p>	Completed	<p>The ACT Governments makes available to the public online its annual bushfire operations plans that describes its plan to reduce fuel.</p>

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<p>17.2 Assessment and approval processes for vegetation management, bushfire mitigation and hazard reduction</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should review the assessment and approval processes relating to vegetation management, bushfire mitigation and hazard reduction to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. ensure that there is clarity about the requirements and scope for landholders and land managers to undertake bushfire hazard reduction activities, and 2. minimise the time taken to undertake assessments and obtain approvals. 	Support	The ACT maintains a 10, 5 and 1 year hierarchy of fire planning and risk mitigation strategies, incorporating residual risk modelling. These strategies are translated into annual bushfire operations plan. The bushfire operations plan is approved and implemented on annual cycle incorporating vegetation management including gazing slashing and burning achieving a reduction in bushfire risk.
<p>17.3 Classification, recording and sharing of fuel load data</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop consistent processes for the classification, recording and sharing of fuel load data.</p>	Support	The ACT will continue to work with other jurisdictions on consistency of data, classification and sharing of information. This work is already occurring.
<p>18.1 Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience</p> <p>Australian, state, territory and local governments should engage further with</p> <p>Traditional Owners to explore the relationship between Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience.</p>	Support	The ACT Government works in close partnership with the Nggunawal community on all aspects of Land Management. The application of fire in the practice of culture on country is a high priority for the partnership.
<p>18.2 Indigenous land and fire management and public land management</p> <p>Australian, state, territory and local governments should explore further opportunities to leverage Indigenous land and fire management insights, in the development, planning and execution of public land management activities.</p>	Support	This recommendation is already being implemented with actions identified in ACT's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement and Action Plan.
<p>19.1 Communication of natural hazard risk information to individuals</p> <p>State and territory governments should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. each have a process or mechanism in place to communicate natural hazard risk information to households (including prospective purchasers) in 'hazard prone' areas, and 2. work together, and with the Australian Government where appropriate, to explore the development of a national mechanism to do the same. 	Support	<p>The ACT Government supports measures to communicate natural hazard risk information to individuals, particularly those individuals that reside in hazard prone areas.</p> <p>The ACT's release of flood maps, and door-knock campaigns for those individuals that live in bushfire prone areas are examples of how the ACT supports this recommendation.</p>
<p>19.2 Guidance for insurer-recognised retrofitting and mitigation</p> <p>The insurance industry, as represented by the Insurance Council of Australia, working with state and territory governments and other relevant stakeholders, should produce and communicate to consumers clear guidance on individual-level natural hazard risk mitigation actions insurers will recognise in setting insurance premiums.</p>	Support in principle	Whilst primarily a matter for the Insurance Council of Australia, the ACT Government supports measures to increase the transparency of how insurance premiums are set and actions that consumers of insurance can take to mitigate natural hazard risks.

Recommendation	ACT Response	Comments
<p>19.3 Mandatory consideration of natural disaster risk in land-use planning decisions</p> <p>State, territory and local governments should be required to consider present and future natural disaster risk when making land-use planning decisions for new developments.</p>	Support in principle	The ACT Government supports measures to consider present and future natural disaster risk when making land-use planning decisions for new developments.
<p>19.4 National Construction Code</p> <p>The Australian Building Codes Board, working with other bodies as appropriate, should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. assess the extent to which AS 3959:2018 Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas, and other relevant building standards, are effective in reducing risk from natural hazards to lives and property, and 2. conduct an evaluation as to whether the National Construction Code should be amended to specifically include, as an objective of the code, making buildings more resilient to natural hazards. 	Support in principle	Whilst a matter for the Australian Building Codes board, the ACT Government supports measures to ensure Australian Standards and the National Construction code support bushfire mitigation and resilience.
<p>20.1 Debris clean-up arrangements</p> <p>Governments should create and publish standing policy guidance on whether they will or will not assist to clean-up debris, including contaminated debris, resulting from natural hazards.</p>	Support	The ACT Government recognises the need to articulate its position on debris clean-up after a natural disaster. The ACT is progressing policy work against this recommendation in 2021.
<p>21.1 Arrangements for donated goods</p> <p>State and territory governments should develop and implement efficient and effective arrangements to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. educate the public about the challenges associated with donated goods, for example, the storage and distribution of donated goods, and 2. manage and coordinate donated goods to ensure offers of support are matched with need. 	Support	<p>The effective management of donated goods during and after natural disaster remains a significant challenge.</p> <p>The ACT Government recognises the need for clear messaging about donated goods, and that offers of support are matched to those in need.</p>
<p>21.2 Reform fundraising laws</p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should create a single national scheme for the regulation of charitable fundraising.</p>	Support in principle	The ACT Government is supportive of measures to strengthen, and harmonise if possible, the regulations of charitable fundraising. The ACT notes that this recommendation will need to be considered in the first instance from a legal policy perspective.
<p>21.3 National coordination forums</p> <p>The Australian Government, through the mechanism of the proposed standing national recovery and resilience agency, should convene regular and ongoing national forums for charities, non-government organisations and volunteer groups, with a role in natural disaster recovery, with a view to continuous improvement of coordination of recovery support.</p>	Support	Whilst a matter for the Australian Government, the ACT Government is supportive of measures to enhance information flows and coordination between charities, non-government organisations and volunteer groups, with a role in natural disaster recovery.

Recommendation	ACT Response	Comments
21.4 National recovery resource sharing arrangements Australian, state and territory governments should establish a national mechanism for sharing of trained and qualified recovery personnel and best practice during and following natural disasters.	Support	<p>The ACT Government supports measures, including the expansion of existing memoranda of understanding, to facilitate the easier and more timely sharing of trained and qualified recovery personnel during and following natural disaster.</p> <p>The use of the National Social Recovery Committee or the Community Outcomes and Recovery Sub-Committee of the Australian-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee may be an appropriate mechanism to support this sharing.</p>
21.5 National level recovery exercises Australian, state and territory governments should work together to develop a program for national level recovery exercises, building on the work currently underway through the Community Outcomes and Recovery Subcommittee of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee.	Support in principle	<p>Similar to the response to recommendation 6.5, the ACT Government recognises the benefit of conducting exercises to better support recovery.</p> <p>However, as national-level exercises are resource intensive to plan, execute and evaluate, how to progress action against this recommendation within existing resources will need to be carefully considered.</p>
22.1 Evaluation of financial assistance measures to support recovery Australian, state and territory governments and local governments should evaluate the effectiveness of existing financial assistance measures to inform the development of a suite of pre-effective pre-determined recovery supports.	Support	<p>The ACT remains closely engaged with the Australian, state and territory governments to progress a suite of pre-effective pre-determined recovery supports.</p> <p>The ACT Government is undertaking a phased development of a wider range of pre-approved assistance measures through an expansion of the ACT Disaster Assistance Guidelines.</p>
22.2 Appropriate sharing of personal information Australian, state and territory governments should ensure that personal information of individuals affected by a natural disaster is able to be appropriately shared between all levels of government, agencies, insurers, charities and organisations delivering recovery services, taking account of all necessary safeguards to ensure the sharing is only for recovery purposes.	Support in principle	<p>The ACT Government recognises the benefits that the sharing of personal information can have in enhancing emergency response, coordination and the provision of emergency relief and recovery services. However, the sharing of personal information should only occur with the individual's consent and in accordance with privacy laws.</p> <p>Identifying the circumstances where the sharing of information will prove beneficial and addressing these on a case-by-case basis is likely to be an appropriate action to this recommendation.</p>
22.3 Review the thresholds and activation process for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements In reviewing the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, Australian, state and territory governments should examine the small disaster criterion, and financial thresholds generally.	Support	<p>The ACT Government supports a review of the thresholds and activation process for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. As a small jurisdiction, the ACT views that reducing administrative barriers to promoting joint government responses to natural disasters where necessary is in the interests of all communities.</p>

Recommendation	ACT Response	Comments
22.4 Nationally consistent Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements assistance measures Australian, state and territory and local governments should develop greater consistency in the financial support provided to individuals, small businesses and primary producers under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.	Support	The ACT Government is supportive of developing greater consistency in the provision of financial support under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, where existing state and territory programs allow.
22.5 Develop nationally consistent, pre-agreed recovery programs Australian, state and territory governments should expedite the development of pre-agreed recovery programs, including those that address social needs, such as legal assistance domestic violence, and also environmental recovery.	Support	The ACT Government recognises the benefit of developing and maintaining pre-agreed recovery programs to support the timely and effective activation of relief and recovery programs.
22.6 Better incorporate ‘build back better’ within the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Australian, state and territory governments should incorporate the principle of ‘build back better’ more broadly into the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.	Support	The ACT Governments recognises the opportunity to build resilience, and therefore ‘build back better’ in the delivery of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.
22.7 Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements recovery measures to facilitate resilience Australian, state and territory governments should broaden Category D of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to encompass funding for recovery measures that are focused on resilience, including in circumstances which are not ‘exceptional’.	Support	As a jurisdiction that has limited requirement to call upon the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), the ACT Government supports measures to expand the DRFA to include resilience building opportunities.
22.8 Streamline the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements processes Australian, state and territory governments should create simpler Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements application processes.	Support	The ACT as part of a national effort of the Australian, state and territory governments has progressed several reforms to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements ahead of the 2020-21 summer season. Further reforms have been identified and are being progressed.
24.1 Accountability and assurance mechanisms at the Australian Government level The Australian Government should establish accountability and assurance mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements.	Support	The ACT Government notes that the Australian Government supports this recommendation.
24.2 An independent accountability and assurance mechanism for each state and territory Each state and territory government should establish an independent accountability and assurance mechanism to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements.	Support in principle	The ACT Government supports mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements. How these mechanisms are best achieved, including through existing mechanisms, remains an issue for consideration by their respective government.
24.3 A public record of national significance The material published as part of this Royal Commission should remain available and accessible on a long-term basis for the benefit of individuals, communities, organisations, businesses and all levels of government.	Support	



Response to the

Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

March 2021