Why a volunteer search dogs framework?

The Australian Government has made a commitment to the creation of an Australian Search Dog Framework which will recognise and coordinate the resources and efforts of volunteers who work with search dogs across Australia. This forms part of the Government’s plan for improved emergency response, particularly specialist community assets.

The Attorney-General’s Department, through Emergency Management Australia (EMA), was tasked with the development of the Framework, which has been completed in consultation with Australian volunteer search and rescue dog associations and jurisdictional emergency service organisations.

Search dogs have a proven track record of increasing the chances of finding lost or missing persons as well as locating trapped persons following a structural collapse. These dogs rely on their highly discriminating sense of smell to detect buried or hidden people, even in chaotic environments where there are distractions and noise. These specialist dogs undertake rigorous and costly accreditation activities with their handlers to ensure this capability is readily available during emergencies or disasters.

The Framework is intended to guide future decisions for volunteer search dog organisations. It is intended to encourage the development of solutions and increase the ability of volunteer search dogs to be utilised within the emergency management and response system.

The adoption of the principles and actions outlined in this Strategic Framework and the establishment of formal agreements between volunteer search dog organisations and emergency services organisations will improve collaboration in the face of disasters and strengthen the national, collective capability.
What are volunteer search dogs?

Volunteer search dog is the term for a search dog and a handler who belong to a volunteer group or association. State and territory emergency service organisations have responsibility for all operational decisions regarding the use of volunteer search dogs in a search capacity. The volunteer search dog must either be accredited to the appropriate level required by the state or territory emergency services organisation or must have an understanding with the appropriate state or territory emergency service organisation.
Why are volunteer search dogs important?

As a nation which prides its self on the success of volunteerism, there is a small and dedicated volunteer search dog community, based on a number of search dog organisations. Naturally, this presents an array of challenges for this capability to continually enhance. The challenges relate to a lack of formal agreements between state and territory emergency service organisations that utilise volunteers search dogs, governance, finance, training and deployment opportunities, as well as the inconsistency with jurisdictional and national standards.
Types of search dogs

There are many types of search dogs. Understanding the functions of each type will ensure the most efficient use of search dog assets.

AIR SCENT DOGS—The air scent dog is the type most frequently encountered. This dog finds lost people by picking up traces of human scent that are drifting in the air, and looks for the “cone” of scent where it is most concentrated.

TRACKING DOGS—A tracking dog is trained to follow the path of a certain person. It physically tracks the path of the person, without relying on air scenting.

DISASTER DOGS—A disaster dog is trained to find human scent in very unnatural environments, including collapsed structures and areas affected by tornados, earthquakes and other disasters. This dog is trained to work on unstable surfaces, in small, confined spaces and other settings not usually found in the bush.

CADAVER DOGS—A cadaver dog reacts to the scent of a dead human. The dog can be trained for above ground and buried cadaver searches. Although many dogs have the potential to detect human scent, whether dead or alive, the cadaver dog is trained to locate only human remains.

WATER SEARCH DOGS—A water search dog is trained to detect human scent that is in or under the water, focusing on the scent of the bodily gases that rise up.

AVALANCHE DOGS—An avalanche search dog is trained to detect human scent that is in or under snow, subsequent to an avalanche. These dogs are trained to detect the scent buried deep in the snow, sometimes, three metres or more.

Types of Search Dogs

- **air scent**—locating humans lost in large outdoor environments
- **tracking**—locating a specific human by following their track
- **disaster dog**—locating humans in collapsed buildings or structures
- **cadaver**—locating deceased humans and remains in a variety of circumstances
- **water search**—locating deceased humans and remains in a variety of underwater circumstances
- **avalanche**—locating humans buried in the snow
A strategic framework for volunteer search dogs

The application of the strategic framework will provide direction for volunteer search dog organisations in working towards increased recognition and utilisation by state and territory emergency service organisations.

The strategic framework comprises:

- **Principles** that underpin the ability for volunteer search dogs to be used by state and/or territory emergency services organisations, and
- **Actions** that can provide pathways to better integrate volunteer search dog operations into state and/or territory emergency services organisations.

### PRINCIPLES

- Capability Recognition
- Resource Coordination

### ACTIONS

1. Formation of a National Volunteer Search Dogs Association
2. Nationally agreed Terms of Reference
3. Creation of an online Capability Forum
4. Harmonisation of Standards
5. Capacity Building
6. Volunteer Recognition
7. Stakeholder cooperation
8. Jurisdictional arrangements
9. Exercise and training access
10. Deployment arrangements
11. Strategic communication
1. Capability Recognition

A major challenge for Australian volunteer search dog associations is the perceived lack of formal capability recognition within the emergency services organisations and the broader emergency management community. Volunteers absorb most of the costs related to training, equipment, maintenance and upkeep for themselves and their dogs. Handlers engage in hundreds of hours of training, for themselves and their dogs, in a variety of emergency and search activities and situations. It is important to strengthen capability recognition in the broader emergency management sector.

In order to consider deployment opportunities for volunteer search dogs it is important to understand Australia’s tiered emergency management arrangements, as outlined within the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements.
**States and Territories**

States and territories have primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment within the bounds of their jurisdiction. States and territories will draw on their own jurisdictional resources when responding to a disaster, then possibly from another jurisdiction and for significant disasters, from the Australian Government. Where volunteer organisations are used as part of an emergency response, this is undertaken in line with agreed arrangements between the volunteer organisation and the relevant state or territory. An example would be a state recovery coordinator and the services provided by Australian Red Cross.

When it comes to the resources deployed within their state boundaries, states and territories have responsibility for all operational decisions. In a major disaster, states and territories will need to determine if, and in what form, additional assistance is required to deal with an event.

**Australian Government**

When the total resources (government, community and commercial) of an affected jurisdiction cannot reasonably cope with the needs of the situation, assistance from the Australian Government can be sought through the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN).

The Australian Government provides support to a state or territory where Australian Government assistance has been requested or offered and accepted. The Australian Government exercises no command or control functions over state responses to emergencies.
International events

Australian disaster response capabilities are first and foremost for the protection of Australia and its offshore territories. When the Australian Government provides assistance to an international event, such as through the provision of an Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) or Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT), this may comprise expertise from the Australian Government, state and territories or a combination of both. When a state and/or territory resource is deployed internationally by the Australian Government, the state and/or territory emergency response team members are appointed as Australian Government employees under the Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (the Act). The Act provides for workers’ compensation coverage for employees of the Australian Government.
2. Resource Coordination

In an increasingly complex emergency management environment with an ever expanding number of stakeholders, it is essential that multi-agency efforts are coordinated to ensure the most effective use of resources.

There is a need to provide a coordinated capability within any organisation and across sectors to allow the capability to be utilised in the most effective and efficient manner.

To operate effectively in this environment, organisations need an ability to make strategic decisions in a dynamic, time pressured environment. This includes the ability to effectively network, communicate and maintain relationships with different organisations whilst potentially coordinating limited resources and balancing differing priorities and demands.

This coordination function in emergency management ensures that organisations manage and share information and resources to achieve positive outcomes. It is an important principle across emergency service organisations, non-government organisations (NGO’s) and other bodies engaged in emergency management.

This is particularly important with niche specialisations, such as search dogs, where irregular use can result in a decrease in understanding of current practices and requirements of both emergency service organisations and the specialisation.
The actions

The following actions will provide pathways to better integrate volunteer search dogs into emergency service organisations.

1. **Formation of a National Volunteer Search Dogs Organisation**

The formation of a single national representative body by the volunteer search dog sector can provide an agreed centralised structure and culture and assist with resource/training requirements. Any coordination model for search dogs needs to work in harmony and reinforce the existing national emergency management arrangements. The National Volunteer Search Dogs Organisation will have the details of all the volunteer search dog organisations, their current arrangements and capabilities, including their training, accreditation and deployment. This can be provided to jurisdictions to better understand how to utilise their skills and resources. The organisation will provide a single national body to represent the sector in ongoing engagement with emergency service organisations and the broader emergency management sector.
2. **Nationally agreed terms of reference need to be developed**

The Terms of Reference will describe the purpose and structure of the National Volunteer Search Dog Organisation, its roles and responsibilities, membership, the organisation’s principal committee, deliverables, stakeholder involvement and engagement and meeting schedules.

Creating a detailed Terms of Reference is critical, as they define the:

- Vision, objectives, scope and deliverables
- Stakeholders, roles and responsibilities
- Resource and quality plans

The Terms of Reference can include success factors, risks and restraints.
3. **Creation of a Connect! web page for volunteer search dog organisations**

Through the Australian Emergency Management Knowledge Hub, volunteer search dog organisations will have access to a Connect! web page, to place research, resources and news relevant to volunteer search dog groups. This page can include statistics, information, photos, videos and media. The Connect! page will also enable members to share ideas and resources. Through the page, members will be able to quickly and accurately identify those teams qualified and ready for domestic and international deployment.

4. **Harmonisation of standards**

Volunteer search dog organisations are to work with jurisdictions to meet an agreed set of core standards for training and accreditation, for example, working to the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) guidelines. This will provide greater consistency across the board for the capability. The volunteer search dog organisations need to identify a strategy to harmonise classification standards across all levels and types.
5. **Capacity building**

Volunteer search dog organisations can create a register of their organisation’s operational capacity, and have it placed on the Connect! web page. This register will allow organisations to see ‘at a glance’ which search dogs are accredited and available when needed for deployment. A well organised structure will help to ensure that coordination and cooperation are achieved and that local and national needs are addressed rapidly.

6. **Volunteer recognition**

Volunteer search dog organisations are to work with both the jurisdictional emergency service organisations and their own organisations to promote the value of search dog volunteers. The value of volunteering is immense and irreplaceable. One of the best ways to demonstrate the importance of volunteering to the Australian community is to ensure volunteers’ contributions are recognised, valued and accounted for. This recognition should be consistent and ongoing.

Recognition can be both extrinsic and intrinsic. Extrinsic recognition includes tangible, outward forms of recognition such as pins, certificates and awards. Intrinsic recognition involves less tangible, inward forms of recognition including the pride of accomplishment, self-satisfaction and the volunteer’s personal belief on accomplishment.

If volunteers feel undervalued, they may leave an organisation resulting in a loss of corporate knowledge and skills. This may impact an organisation’s ability to provide high quality service.

7. **Stakeholder cooperation**

Volunteer search dog organisations need to foster ongoing relationships between their organisations and their relevant state and/or territory emergency services organisations. Volunteer search dog organisations need to promote capability inclusion with emergency service organisation training and exercising.

Emergency service organisations and state and territory governments need better information on the capability of volunteer search dog organisations through inclusion into jurisdictional and national working groups, training, exercises and access to better data.
8. Jurisdictional arrangements

Volunteer search dog organisations need a sound understanding of their state and territory emergency management arrangements and the requirements for training, accreditation, inoculations, workplace health and safety for both domestic and international deployments. This will assist volunteers to meet emergency service organisation requirements in order to be eligible for deployments. There will be different standards depending on each capability type and jurisdictional needs.

9. Exercise and training access

Volunteer search dog organisations will work with state and/or territory agencies to better share information regarding exercise and training opportunities. Attendance at these training events will strengthen awareness within emergency service organisations and state and territory governments on the capability of volunteer search dog organisations.

10. Deployment arrangements

Deployment requirements for local, national and international deployments can be placed on the ‘Volunteer Search Dogs’ knowledge hub forum. Volunteer organisations will need to meet these requirements to be considered for deployment.

11. Strategic communications

Volunteer search dog organisations need to develop a strategic communications plan. This strategic planning will help ensure relationships between volunteer search dog organisations and emergency service organisations are strengthened and maintained. This will also build awareness of search dog capabilities and assist with gap analysis.
This section provides a broad overview of capability in 2014. It is subject to change.

SEARCH AND RESCUE DOGS AUSTRALIA INC (SARDA)

SARDA, incorporated since 1994, currently trains Disaster Search dog teams for deployment in Urban Search and Rescue (USAR). SARDA has established a strong relationship with Emergency Services and the Victoria Police Dog Squad.

SARDA Victoria

SARDA Victoria has five operational teams in Victoria capable of deploying nationally and internationally.

SARDA Queensland

SARDA has six USAR canine teams training for operational certification to deploy with Queensland Fire and Emergency Service USAR Taskforce.
Southern Cross Search Dogs Victoria Inc

Initially named as the Australian Swiss Search Dog Association Inc. founded in 1995, the organisation was renamed as Southern Cross Search Dogs Victoria Inc. in March 2014. Originally they trained teams for Wilderness Search and Remote Alpine Wilderness Search (including avalanche search) and in 2000 the organisation switched to Urban Search and Rescue (USAR). They have developed a very close working relationship with the USAR Task Force of both Victoria and since 2006 with South Australia providing qualified Canine USAR teams certified to the advanced level. The organisation includes trained assessors (Cert. 4) and instructors in all of the above three disciplines. Current capability includes one Canine USAR team—advanced level and six Canine USAR Novice teams in-training.

WA State Emergency Services (SES) Dogs

The Western Australian State Emergency Service Canine Section is a volunteer organisation that trains air scenting Area Search Dogs and scent specific Tracking Dogs. They have three operational Area Search Dogs and one operational Tracking Dog, with several more dogs in various stages of training. They do not train Urban Search and Rescue Dogs (USAR dogs.)

WA SES train and assess to the UK International Search Dog standard which is also used by New Zealand. Their assessments are conducted by a panel of assessors from the SES Canine Section and the Western Australian Police Dog Squad.

Search Dogs Australia Inc

Search Dogs Australia Inc is a non-profit organisation consisting of trained volunteers and their dogs to assist authorities to search for missing persons. Their canines are trained in Tracking/Trailing, Area Search, Water Search and Cadaver. The Tracking/Trailing dogs are scent specific as are the Area Search dogs.
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