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National Resilience Taskforce  
Department of Home Affairs

[NationalResilience.Consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au](mailto:NationalResilience.Consultation@homeaffairs.gov.au)

## **RE: ALTERNATIVE COMMONWEALTH CAPABILITIES FOR CRISIS RESPONSE**

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) is thankful for the opportunity to comment on the Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper.

DFES welcomes the support to progress national initiatives such as:

- The National Aerial Firefighting Centre
- The Australian Fire Danger Ratings System
- The National Resource Sharing Centre
- The Australian Warnings System

There have been significant benefits for the emergency services sector from these initiatives, particularly the collaboration they have driven across states and territories. Future challenges affecting our sector are well documented and this continued collaboration can only ensure we are better prepared for them.

This following response is not definitive. The recent National Disaster Preparedness Summit in Canberra discussed many other initiatives that DFES would support for serious consideration and review. However, this submission deals with a suite of important issues that have been raised and developed in response to recent emergencies and disasters in Western Australia.

Also thank you for granting an extension to allow DFES to present an informed submission.

### **First point of entry status for northern Western Australian ports**

In 2023, flooding in the Kimberley region cut off road access to the major towns of Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Kununurra.

During the response, it became evident that sea transport via barges and container vessels was necessary to maintain the supply of vital goods to these remote towns.

Container vessels that regularly call at nearby Pilbara and Northern Territory ports are the obvious solution for transporting goods from interstate and international locations in the event of an emergency and to provide a secondary supply chain to the region. These vessels are currently restricted from providing this solution because ports within the region have not received a Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry biosecurity determination that allows for the importing of cargo – even though the ports have been trading locations since the 1800s.

A First Point of Entry determination identifies the type of goods that are permitted by the Commonwealth Government to be discharged from vessels at a particular port. If Kimberley ports received this determination, vessels would be able to supply remote regional communities with essential goods by sea when the road network is not serviceable.

### **Developing a National Disaster Risk Profile**

The Australian and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) is proposing to develop a risk profile that combines current natural hazard disaster risk, overlaid with vulnerability data, to enable governments to make informed decisions about the allocation of resources, the development of future investments in capabilities and risk-reduction activities and to guide data-driven policy development. It would create efficiencies, improve situational awareness and help inform collective efforts to manage disaster risk. The profile would be designed to support decisions by all levels of government.

The profile will seek to bring together existing data held by Australian governments and the private sector. It would support work already underway, including the National Climate Risk Assessment, the Second National Action Plan, the Systemic Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System and work on insurance data through the Hazards Insurance Partnership (HIP).

### **Communications and Technology**

Emergency services require a common and reliable way to communicate with voice and data. The Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) will provide this service, including in remote areas. DFES supports the continued development of this service.

Investment in existing and emerging communications technologies such as Low Earth Orbiting Satellites will further improve communications capabilities for emergency services and ensure their effective provision across Australia.

The sector would also benefit from an improved common collection and consolidation of intelligence information into a shared, national common operating picture and operational intelligence platform. This could be further supported by an artificial intelligence-enabled national resource tracking and sharing system to improve resource availability and the utilisation of emergency service assets, particularly where emergencies impact multiple states or territories.

## **National Emergency Management Stockpile (NEMS)**

A NEMS workshop was held in Canberra on 29-30 June 2023 to inform the development, delivery and operation of the stockpile and the establishment of a Stakeholder Reference Group (SRG). DFES has been involved in the SRG and would welcome further development of this initiative.

## **Aerial Firefighting and Transport Capability**

Due to a combination of changing climatic conditions and overlapping northern and southern hemisphere fire seasons, the availability of aerial firefighting aircraft is becoming increasingly challenging. This has seen countries that have not used firefighting aircraft in the past entering and competing in a small global market. A sovereign fleet of firefighting aircraft is a worthy capability and one that the Commonwealth Government has already supported through the provision of the National Large Air Tanker.

This could be further expanded to incorporate other aerial firefighting capabilities and heavy-lift air transport capabilities to assist with the response to impacts from tropical cyclones and flooding that occurs in northern WA. Access to suitable Australian Defence Force aircraft when they are retired should be considered to support the development of this national capability.

## **Build future community resilience**

Emergency management protocols need to build and enhance resilience at the individual, community and government levels by developing knowledge, skills and abilities. Community education to make emergency management part of the school curriculum will bring generational change and normalise community participation and resilience.

A national approach to the curriculum that better prepares the next generation to better manage their own resilience could be considered. This may also transition into a national approach to cadet-type programs that empower young people to be involved in, and take responsibility for, improving the resilience of their community.

## **Emergency Management Capability Development**

The management of large-scale emergencies above the incident management level could be further improved with the establishment of a national emergency management development capability. Modelled on the former Emergency Management Australia Institute at Mount Macedon in Victoria, it could provide national capability development through excellence in education and knowledge management and would drive common understandings of emergency management to improve the management of emergencies at the local, state and national level.

## **Incentives for Volunteering**

Australia relies on volunteers to resource emergency response. In WA, 91 per cent of responses to emergency situations are by volunteers. A contemporary policy position is

required on the volunteer workforce and the ability to maintain capability during prolonged situations. It is suggested that the Commonwealth Government examine potential incentives for volunteering – in conjunction with states and territories – to encourage and promote this type of community service.

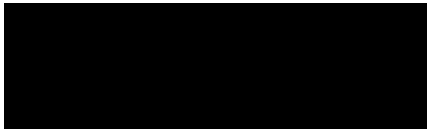
### **National Recovery Capability**

An increase in the frequency of significant events not only impacts on the available response capability but also on the resources available to ensure communities recover in the shortest possible time. Recovery almost always occurs over a longer period, further challenging the resilience of Australia's emergency management sector.

The development of a national recovery capability could ensure enough available human resources to support impacted communities. Sharing these resources across states and territories could be done in the same way response resources are currently managed through the National Resource Sharing Centre. Supported by emergency management capability development proposed earlier in this paper would ensure effective recovery management is available for all communities across Australia.

DFES welcomes the opportunity for further discussion on the matters raised in this paper and should you have any questions or need more information please contact my Office at [Commissioner.Office@dfes.wa.gov.au](mailto:Commissioner.Office@dfes.wa.gov.au).

Yours sincerely



**DARREN KLEMM AFSM  
COMMISSIONER**

29 September 2023