



*"Driven to Search  
Searching for Excellence"*

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Official Submission paper for

## **Department of Home Affairs & NEMA**

### **Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response**

Given the accelerated rate of major climate events, such as major bushfires and flooding, thus causing immeasurable tolls to human life, Australia is currently way behind the rest of the world when it comes to our ability to safely, effectively and quickly deploy suitably trained resources to search for persons missing whilst these disasters are unfolding, as well as after the initial threats have passed and in the aftermath of the cleanup.

Current emergency management arrangements are extremely convoluted where search is involved and a simple, clear and concise agency responsible for search operations is required in order for adequate personnel, specifically trained, that can effect rescue when and where required.

Currently, during times of crisis, each individual agency is managing the impacts tasked to them. Effectively leaving search for victims in fires, floods, landslides, disasters of any type, up to the agencies up to already stretched resources that are not adequately trained in the environment for which they are operating in, nor trained effectively to safely undertake these complex operations efficiently and effectively.

At present, AFAC and its member organisations provide volunteers and staff to Law Enforcement agencies, to undertake search operations when and where requested. However, the USAR Taskforces currently funded by the Federal Government utilise K9 search capabilities from organisations such as NSW Police or QFES volunteers in Qld. The standards for these capabilities vary dramatically, as to the level of training and assessment, and subsequently are not utilised to their fullest potential. Also, Not for Profits and NGO's are not in the position to be members of any of these organisations due to financial imposts and other factors, thus not given any options for there views to be expressed or considered.



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Given the dramatic decrease in volunteer numbers over the past several years and given the probability of it to continue to follow this trend, it has been proven that 1 Canine Search team, in conjunction with a certified UAV pilot and the correct Drone, is the equivalent of 140 volunteers undertaking search operations. It is a requirement that as Emergency Services look forward to future disasters, we need to utilise technology, AI, thermography, canines and be able to do more with less staff/volunteers. These procedures have been developed, trialed and proofed by several NGO's associated with ASDF across Australia.

There is a massive disconnect between the NATSAR council, which is primarily made up of Law Enforcement, and those that develop the standards for Search, and the members under AFAC responsible for the training and deployment of the resources to assist Law Enforcement. Bridging this gap would greatly improve productivity and cohesion of all services. Ensuring that Law Enforcement are part of AFAC and AFAC and non AFAC members get a place on the decision making processes of the NATSAR council.

By developing a National strategy utilising the capabilities currently on offer by these NGO's, particularly the Australian Search Dog Federation, providing Commonwealth support to develop these services will ensure that there is a National approach to responding concurrently to numerous smaller disasters utilising locally developed capabilities as well as providing the strategic ability to upscale. Unfortunately, it has been shown that once an agency becomes too large, it begins to lose its effectiveness as well as its ability to react swiftly in fast changing environments. The ASDF model is designed to compliment the current Emergency Management arrangements in ALL states and territories and also replaces the need for the ADF to become embedded in Search operations.

## **Preparedness**

One National agency should be developed to support all Search operations in Australia to ensure standardization in training, capability development and deployment. This one agency should oversee all search operations to ensure a smooth transition between Emergency Services and Law Enforcement where current barriers exist. Some of these operations were previously undertaken by the ADF due to ongoing challenges encountered by the individual NGO's and not for profit organisations.

The Australian Search Dog Federation Inc currently has access to fully certified and trained;



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- Canine Handlers and Canines (both Live find and Cadaver(Human Remains)),
- Drone Pilots and specialist UAV's,
- Light fixed wing and rotary aircraft and pilots versed in Emergency operations, as well as
- A dedicated Unit of communications specialists for when all Comms have been decimated.
- Vessels and operators trained in floodwater operations and utilising canines under these conditions.

These assets are currently available in 6 states across Australia and can be relatively easily scaled with adequate funding and resourcing. At present there is no other National agency or organisation with access to these wide ranging resources or skillsets.

With further development and growth across the nation for

- Training of members across Australia to ensure that they are all receiving the same identical training
- Development of a Training Academy dedicated to all forms of Searching for missing persons in ALL environments ie fires floods landslides, natural and man made disasters
- Training of personnel in how to deploy all forms of search ie K9, UAV and air observers, sonar and maritime.
- Training in remote deployment/harsh environments to ensure no local resources are required to operate
- Predeployment of resources in the event of foreshadowed disasters as per BoM or other known organizational briefings
- INSARAG ASR 5 type situations that are at present not adequately supported on a National level or under the Major Structural Collapse sub plans (NSW). Ie Police do NOT currently have Cadaver (human remains) dogs certified in disaster environments, nor trained in human bone, cremains type disaster events.
- Development of a custom Search and Recovery training academy to support Water search, Urban Search and Rescue as well as Aerial operations

## **Response**

At present, Agencies pre deploy assets a generally great cost and are labour intensive, usually taking away Fire & Rescue members away from their core roles, Police pre deploy to ensure Law and Order however crossover into Search tasks when they're most effective in



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the management of the disaster and ensuring Rescues are undertaken. SES and RFS volunteers are usually short staffed and struggle to ensure their core roles and responsibilities are undertaken.

By utilising highly trained, and effective tools and specialists, such as ASDF, ensures that we are enabling these current agencies to undertake their core roles as per each DISPLAN. Current resources can be best utilised in core roles and ensure that the ADF are a last resort for domestic operations in the event that NEMA was to recognize and fund the ASDF.

With multiple 2, 3 and 4 person teams stationed strategically around or near the disaster area, these highly specialized members can undertake and cover the same search zones as approximately 300 agency members. This ensures that local Agencies are enabled to utilise these members more effectively within their core responsibilities.

By quickly and safely utilising training, technology (new and old) and experience to swiftly clear these areas using current (modified) ASR 1/ASR 2 operations to ensure that emergency personnel can focus on their individual core roles. Once these person/s are located the Agencies responsible can dedicate the required resources to effective a safe and swift rescue.

## **Recovery**

At present, given the current climate, should an event such as what has recently occurred in Maui occur here in Australia, Law Enforcement both State and Federal, are currently not equipped to cope with the search for human remains in such environments.

Whilst ASR 5 recovery efforts are generally led by local Law Enforcement, with the assistance of the AFP and specialist Disaster Victim Identification specialists, Australian police do not currently have any specialist Human Remains detector dogs that they are currently under their control. These single purpose specialist canines are managed by NGO's and Not for Profits from around the country with the bulk of them trained and certified to ASDF standards. As part of these standards it is imperative that ( replicating the FEMA standards for disaster dogs) that these specialized canines are single purpose dogs.



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With extended operations in the events of ASR 5 operations, canine search is not a current capability available in the current response environment due to its very specialized training requirements, and subsequently is not funded accordingly. These canines when operating in these environments play not only a key role in assisting in locating victims of disaster, but provide the public with a knowledge that the Government and Emergency Agencies are prepared and are doing their utmost to ensure that the situation is currently managed accordingly. It is ASDF's plan that recovery efforts in this regard are undertaken and completed as soon as practicable to ensure that further Recovery efforts can be undertaken to ensure a smooth transition back to pre-disaster restoration.

## **Summary**

The Australian Search Dog Federation, given adequate funding and inclusion within the Framework currently has the ability and potential to replicate the abilities of the ADF within the search environments on mainland Australia pre, during and post disaster events. ASDF currently offer services not afforded to any Agency currently within the Australian Disaster Framework. By providing single purpose, highly trained Cadaver (Human Remains) dogs to a single standard across Australia. These highly skilled and trained dogs and Search Technicians, in conjunction with the wide ranging asset support for Search Capabilities in Australia, including but not limited to Air, Sea and Land capabilities, provide a unique capability of diverse operations.

By utilising one central training facility, bringing together resources and training them as a singular structure, ensures that these capabilities are available in every State and Territory at a moments notice, however, are very much scalable depending on the event or events unfolding. It also allows for the ability to scale the search capabilities across the events in an efficient and effective manner by utilizing the complete delegation of available resources.

Given adequate operational funding, this model of operations is also extremely effective outside of the Disaster environments by providing additional cost effective resources into assisting the respective Law Enforcement agencies and AFP in the search for the Long Term missing persons. This is currently an unrecognized and unregulated area by most Law Enforcement agencies within the Commonwealth.



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By providing funding to ensure the longevity and effectiveness of this proposal, the Commonwealth Government could then assist and support the funding of this arrangement through additional private business sponsorships of aircraft, drones, dog care and medical as well as the potential to ensure continued financial assistance through the Proceeds of Crime. Utilising illegally obtained funds from respective Law Enforcement both State and Federal into providing disaster management relief.

It is only through Discussion papers such as this, that ideas are able to be freely discussed. With the opportunity for all agencies to welcome discussion on systematic change into the future, is when we can achieve great outcomes for the Australian community in times of disasters.

Chris D'Arcy

President – Search Dogs Sydney Inc

President – Australian Search Dog Federation