

7 March 2013

Ms Sophie Dunstone  
Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications  
PO Box 6100 Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Ms Dunstone,

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications Inquiry into recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events – Question on Notice**

I am writing further to the public hearing held by the Committee at Melbourne on 20 February in relation to this inquiry, at which I gave evidence.

Senator Waters asked for a response on notice to the question of what learnings should be taken from the 2011 floods in Queensland, and I provide this response below.

The Committee will of course be familiar with the work of the Commission of Inquiry into the Queensland Floods of 2011. The Commission produced an interim report containing 175 recommendations, and a final report with 177 recommendations.

Many of these recommendations related to local operating conditions and did not necessarily have broader national application. AFAC members were nonetheless keen to consider the recommendations of the Commission of Inquiry to assess the extent to which its findings were relevant to their business.

The AFAC State Emergency Services Community Safety Group considered the recommendations of the interim report at its meeting in September 2011 and those of particular relevance nationally were identified. The issues that were flagged for national attention were:

- Adequacy of local disaster management plans
- Conduct of community education programs providing local information about flooding
- National public education program about the dangers of driving into floodwaters
- Nationally consistent community engagement messaging
- Provision of flash flood warnings by Bureau of Meteorology
- Preparation of evacuation protocols
- Provision of information to culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- Provision of information to tourists.

Many of these issues fall to be dealt with at a local level and the expectation would be that AFAC member agencies would address them as required within their

jurisdictions. In relation to the Bureau's involvement with flash flood warnings, AFAC continues to engage with the Bureau to keep members informed of progress in this area. We also continue to discuss nationally consistent community engagement messaging, whilst recognising that messaging has to be appropriately tailored for local conditions.

The recommendations in the final report dealt largely with land use planning and management issues such as planning instruments, flood plain management, development considerations, building controls and essential services. There were also recommendations on land swaps, insurers and mining, and dam management.

Many of these recommendations do not relate directly to the business of AFAC member agencies, but we would take this opportunity to note that they do reinforce the concerns expressed in our submission to the present Inquiry about land use and planning issues.

There were some recommendations in the final report (chapter 15) that dealt with response issues: however these were by and large specific to conditions and arrangements in Queensland. AFAC as a national body recognises the accountability that its members have to their state governments and accordingly would not express any view on state-specific issues.

In summary, the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry reports were consistent with other reports on natural disasters in Australia in recent times in identifying issues around community engagement and land use planning as matters of first-tier importance for governments and agencies to address. There was also specific reference to the need for enhanced flash flood warnings, which is an issue that AFAC is keen to see funded and progressed at a national level.

Yours sincerely,

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**PAUL CONSIDINE**  
***Manager, Operations, Urban Fire and SES***