

Coalition Senators' Dissenting Report

1.1 Coalition Senators support the comments in the majority report regarding the invaluable contribution and commitment of all agencies and firefighters who were engaged in the firefighting efforts during the January and February 2016 Tasmanian bushfires. Without their outstanding effort in a challenging environment the destruction caused by the fires would have been more widespread. Coalition Senators note that despite the significance of the event not one life or property was lost. We also note that Tasmania has withstood more significant fire events in the past.

1.2 Coalition Senators provide the following comments in relation to the majority report recommendations.

Recommendation 1

2.45 The committee recommends that the Australian Government:

- **recognise that climate change has increased fire conditions in south-eastern Australia and the risk to natural and cultural values in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; and**
- **report annually to the World Heritage Committee on the state of conservation in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.**

1.3 Coalition Senators acknowledge and *accept* the potential future impacts of climate change in managing fire in Australia, including in Tasmania. The Australian Government invests through programmes such as the National Landcare Programme to improve natural resource management and landscape resilience, including in the face of climate change pressures.

1.4 Coalition Senators *do not accept* the recommendation to report annually to the World Heritage Committee on the state of conservation in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. State of Conservation reporting is a formal process which is only required where the World Heritage Committee has serious concerns about the state of a particular World Heritage property. In July 2016, following the successful 2015 World Heritage Reactive Monitoring Mission visit, the World Heritage Committee announced its positive decision on the state of conservation of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area. The decision acknowledged the progress that Australia has made on addressing past requests of the World Heritage Committee, and commended the commitment of the Australian and Tasmanian Governments in accepting all 20 recommendations of the monitoring mission to the property.

Recommendation 2

3.38 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in cooperation with the Tasmanian Government:

- **recognise the need to identify the ecological and biodiversity impacts of fire on fire sensitive vegetation communities, organic soils and endemic fauna species in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area; and**
- **allocate long-term funding to the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation and/or the Tasmanian Government to assist with the development of fire assessment and modelling specifically suited to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area.**

1.5 Coalition Senators make the following comments in relation to Recommendation 2 of the majority report.

1.6 The need to identify the ecological and biodiversity impacts of fire on fire-sensitive vegetation communities, organic soils and endemic fauna species in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is an important foundation for effectively managing the Property. Responsibility for this work lies with the State Government as the Property manager.

1.7 The Tasmanian Government is spending \$250,000 to examine the impact of climate change in the World Heritage Area and strengthen fire-fighting techniques to protect the property. This research project was initiated by the Tasmanian Government. Coalition Senators understand this work will be finalised in the near future.

1.8 The Australian and Tasmanian Governments are delivering improved outcomes for the Tasmanian Wilderness using an additional \$10.2 million provided by the Commonwealth for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of the World Heritage values of the property. This funding is in addition to the \$3.4 million per year baseline funding provided between 2013 and 2018 to assist with the management of the property.

1.9 In terms of investment through CSIRO, the Australian Government is overseeing an increase in expenditure by CSIRO by \$100 million between now and 2019. CSIRO is on track to receive \$5.4 billion over the next four years, including \$3.257 billion from the Australian Government.

1.10 In 2015–16, CSIRO invested around \$100 million in climate research, comprising over \$54 million on mitigation research, over \$10 million on adaptation research and \$29 million on research to better understand the Climate.

1.11 CSIRO is recognised as a world leader in fire behaviour research and continues to define, lead and directly invest in critical research focussed on improving the management and suppression of bushfires, allowing CSIRO to provide expertise and advice to various governments, agencies and the public across Australia. CSIRO

bushfire research covers bushfire management strategies; post-bushfire survey investigations; climate modelling projections; and, development of disaster management software tools.

Recommendation 3

4.98 The committee recommends that the Australian Government, in conjunction with state and territory governments, investigate a national remote area firefighting capability, to support Australian fire agencies.

1.12 Coalition Senators do not support Recommendation 3 of the majority report.

1.13 Under Australia's constitutional arrangements, state and territory governments have primary responsibility for protecting life and property, including responding to bushfires and providing assistance for disaster affected communities. Each state and territory has emergency management legislation, plans and arrangements to respond to emergencies. The Australian Government supports state and territory governments by coordinating national efforts in building resilience through disaster research, information management and mitigation policy and practice.

1.14 Where the scale of an emergency or disaster exceeds or exhausts jurisdictional response capacity and capability, or where resources (government, community and/or commercial) cannot be mobilised in time, a state or territory may seek Australian Government assistance. The Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN) (activated by the Director General EMA [DG EMA]), facilitates the provision of non-financial Australian Government assistance to Australian states and territories, following a formal request for assistance by a state or territory. This assistance can include for example, but is not limited to, Australian Defence Force (ADF) support, satellite imagery capabilities, Australian Medical Assistance Teams and disaster victim identification.

1.15 Where civilian resources are inadequate, unavailable or cannot be mobilised in time, emergency Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) arrangements enable the ADF to contribute to save human life, alleviate suffering and prevent loss of animal life or property. Defence assistance follows a request from the relevant state or territory government to EMA in accordance with COMDISPLAN. In some circumstances, ADF support to states and territories can be approved by local ADF commanders. As a general principle, Defence support is limited to the current qualifications, skills and resources of the ADF. Firefighting, from either the ground or air, is a specialised skill that requires equipment and training that the ADF does not possess and which remains the responsibility of state and territory governments.

1.16 EMA can also support the coordination of resources between states and territories. This can be facilitated under the Arrangements for Interstate Assistance (AIA) and through the Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee (CCOSC) of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC), which is co-chaired by DGEMA, and in which all states and territories participate. The AIA enables Australian states and territories to exchange capabilities

(fire services, emergency services and land management agencies) during significant incidents. The CCOSC comprises Chief Officers and Commissioners from Australia and New Zealand fire and emergency services agencies. The CCOSC was established in December 2013 to provide expert operational advice on national issues. The CCOSC can coordinate national operational matters during significant events and provide an operational reference group for multi-jurisdictional response arrangements.

Recommendation 4

4.100 The committee recommends that the Australian Government commit to long-term funding for the National Aerial Firefighting Centre of an amount that is at least equal to the government's current contribution, rising in line with the Consumer Price Index.

1.17 Coalition Senators make the following comments in relation to Recommendation 4 of the majority report.

1.18 The Commonwealth provides \$14.8 million each year to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) to assist with the costs of leasing specialised bushfire fighting aircraft and on 29 December 2015, the Prime Minister committed to a further, one-off \$0.5 million to the NAFC to support the extension of some of these leases for the 2015-16 fire seasons. This additional funding was provided to NAFC on 13 April 2016. Aircraft leased under these arrangements were utilised in the response to these fires.

1.19 Given the very high cost of developing and maintaining specialist firefighting aircraft and the finite duration of the Australian fire season, the NAFC leases rather than purchases an aircraft fleet. Leasing aircraft allows (i) adjustments to be made to resourcing levels based on assessed risk and (iii) greater flexibility to introduce new technology.

1.20 The NAFC, in conjunction with all states and territories, monitors emerging capabilities and has an established multi-jurisdictional working group to closely assess the technical and economic aspects of its fleet. Aircraft selection is based on advice from state and territory experts and is underpinned by over 60 years of research in Australia. The NAFC also continues to work closely with overseas organisations involved in the evaluation of aerial firefighting capabilities.

1.21 In addition to the Tasmanian NAFC contracted aircraft, in excess of 20 NAFC contracted aircraft from mainland Australia were deployed to Tasmania. This fleet consisted of aircraft which remained under contract with NAFC, as well as those which were reengaged on an ad-hoc basis following the expiry of their contracts (the department does not have specific figures relating to this fleet as this detail is not currently available to NAFC). In addition to these aircraft, a Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT) and Large Air Tanker (LAT) from New South Wales, and two LATs from Victoria, conducted fire-bombing sorties in Tasmania.

1.22 Coalition Senators note that ongoing support for the NAFC will continue to be managed through normal Budget processes.

Recommendation 5

5.48 The committee recommends that the Australian Government recognise the need to enhance protection and conservation efforts in the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area by allocating increased funding:

- **to the Parks and Wildlife Service, Tasmania, for appropriate management activities and resources; and**
- **for research projects aimed at providing qualitative and quantitative data specific to climate-related and ecological threats to the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (such as dry lightning strike).**

1.23 Coalition Senators make the following comments in relation to Recommendation 5 of the majority report.

1.24 As stated under Recommendation 2, it is important to note the Australian Government is providing an additional \$10.2 million for the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and rehabilitation of the World Heritage values of the property. This funding is in addition to the \$3.4 million per year baseline funding provided between 2013 and 2018 to assist with the management of the property.

1.25 The Tasmanian Government is spending \$250,000 to examine the impact of climate change in the World Heritage Area and strengthen fire-fighting techniques to protect the property. This research project was initiated by the Tasmanian Government. Coalition Senators understand this work will be finalised in the near future.

1.26 As referred to under Recommendation 2, the Australian Government is overseeing an increase in expenditure by CSIRO by \$100 million between now and 2019. CSIRO is on track to receive \$5.4 billion over the next four years, including \$3.257 billion from the Australian Government. A substantial amount of this investment is being directed to research to better understand climate change impacts, landscape adaptation and bushfire management.

1.27 Coalition Senators acknowledge the importance of qualitative and quantitative data in managing landscapes across Australia, including in Tasmania.

Recommendation 6

5.49 The committee recommends that the Australian and Tasmanian Governments:

- **develop options to increase cooperation to ensure that the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area is protected and conserved in line with Australia's obligations under the World Heritage Convention; and**
- **work together to ensure strong provisions to protect the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area from bushfire risks are included in the *Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area Management Plan*.**

1.28 Coalition Senators do not support Recommendation 6 of the majority report.

1.29 Coalition Senators are confident the two Governments are meeting their obligations under the World Heritage Convention. Indeed, the World Heritage Committee has acknowledged in July 2016 the progress Australia has made on addressing past requests of the World Heritage Committee, and commended the commitment of the Australian and Tasmanian Governments in accepting all 20 recommendations of the 2015 monitoring mission to the property.

Senator James Paterson
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