



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

A national approach to national disasters

The Commonwealth Government response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

November 2020



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Director
Public Affairs and Media
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
1 National Circuit
Barton ACT 2600

Foreword

The scale of the Black Summer bushfires was unprecedented.

It represented new demands on all levels of government.

With our summers getting longer, hotter and drier, it was right that governments across the country united to establish this national inquiry.

We did so because we must learn from this experience. We must understand the changes needed to build our national resilience and better prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters in the future.

This is the Commonwealth Government's response to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.



The Royal Commission received evidence from more than 270 witnesses, almost 80,000 pages of tendered documents and more than 1,750 public submissions. This reflects the breadth of organisations involved in our national natural disaster arrangements, and the many Australians who have personally experienced disaster impacts.

Many of the Royal Commission's Recommendations identify what needs to be done, not how it needs to be done. The Commissioners have entrusted implementation to those who are best placed to effect improvements.

Collectively we must now meet this challenge.

The Royal Commission has recommended a clearer role for the Commonwealth Government, and a clear, robust and accountable system to better prepare for the future.

The Commonwealth Government will introduce legislation to declare a national emergency, to ensure the Commonwealth can act decisively in times of national crisis.

The Commonwealth Government will establish a new resilience, relief and recovery agency by 1 July 2021, to coordinate and align Australia's national capability to build resilience, better prepare for natural disasters, and recover from all hazards.

Emergency Management Australia will have an enhanced role, functions and capabilities to support state and territory efforts to prepare for and respond to disasters.

And to meet the significant information challenges in managing national disasters, the Commonwealth Government will also establish 'Resilience Services', a climate and disaster risk information service. 'Resilience Services' will be operational by 1 July 2021 to support our national preparedness, response, relief, recovery and resilience efforts.

The Commonwealth Government will work collaboratively and constructively with state and territory governments to implement those Recommendations requiring a unified response.

I thank the Commissioners for the exemplary manner in which they conducted their hearings. They drew out the reforms needed to address issues that are complex and interconnected. I thank all those supporting the Commissioners for their effort to conduct the inquiry with such speed and focus.

I am confident these Recommendations will ensure our national natural disaster arrangements are the best they can be. I am committed to a cohesive, unified national effort to deliver the change that has been envisioned.

These efforts will enhance our national resilience and future preparedness – and in so doing, help keep Australians safe.

The Hon Scott Morrison MP

Prime Minister of Australia

A national approach to national disasters

The 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires were a national trauma. The bushfire season brought devastation across our nation, the loss of 33 lives, the destruction of 3110 homes, unimaginable loss of wildlife and impacted communities across Australia. This loss would have been greater without the extraordinary effort of our volunteer and career-fire fighters, and dedicated emergency services personnel.

Yet the scale of these fires demonstrated the limits of our current arrangements. Collectively, we must reflect on the experience and learn from it. Where arrangements work well, we must build on them. Where change is needed, we must have the courage and humility to do things differently. The crisis was a wake-up call to us all for bold, unified action.

The Royal Commission's 80 Recommendations provide an ambitious, yet pragmatic, blueprint for action to ensure our national natural disaster arrangements are the best they can be.

The Royal Commission calls for a national approach, a greater role for the Commonwealth Government (with states and territories retaining primary responsibility for protecting life, property and the environment within their jurisdiction), strategic leadership directed at building resilience, greater resource sharing, improved national data, better support for individuals to understand and manage disaster risk within their control, and recognises whole-of-nation effort is needed on multiple fronts.

These reforms are nation building. The Commonwealth will work cooperatively with others to implement Recommendations that need a shared response.

The Commonwealth wants to ensure the resources of the nation are harnessed and applied in appropriate, proportionate and equitable ways to secure the safety, and relief from suffering, of all Australians. We do so with the recognition that due to our changing climate we will collectively face more frequent and intense natural disasters in the future, while being as prepared as possible for less frequent, but profoundly catastrophic natural events.

The states and territories have developed capabilities to deal with natural disasters within their jurisdictions, specifically adapted for their respective environments. The Commonwealth does not seek to replicate these capabilities. However, the Commonwealth, as the national government, possesses and can develop certain operational and strategic capabilities that the states and territories do not have. These Commonwealth, state and territory capabilities are complementary. Their exercise should be coordinated in a considered and timely manner to optimise the safety and security of Australian lives and property.

The 2019 bushfires tested the resilience of the Australian public, and highlighted the public's expectations of Commonwealth Government leadership in nationally significant emergencies. After events like the Black Summer bushfires, it is clear that the public expects the best available support the nation can give in relieving their suffering. Which particular arm of Government is responsible, or due the credit for providing assistance, is of much less importance.

A power to declare a national emergency

The Royal Commission concluded that the Commonwealth Government has the power to, and should, play a greater role in relation to natural disasters on a national scale. For such disasters, the Royal Commission found that the Commonwealth should be able to declare a state of national emergency, supported by clear legislation. This includes the ability to take unilateral action, whether or not a state has requested assistance, subject to a high threshold. The Royal Commission found such a declaration would be the catalyst for a more coherent, pre-emptive and expeditious mobilisation of Commonwealth resources.

The Commonwealth Government welcomes this Recommendation which recognises that such a declaration is necessary in an ‘all hazards’ approach to national natural disaster events, including those beyond fires and floods.

A legislated National Emergency Declaration would help to address the challenges faced by the nation, including by facilitating Commonwealth coordination and contribution to emergency response. States and territories would be engaged, and their agreement sought in a ‘two key’ process to determine that such a declaration was necessary. But the Commonwealth must retain the option to act unilaterally to make such a declaration in the national interest where the nature of the impending disaster is beyond the capability of the states and territories to manage.

In response to this Recommendation the Commonwealth will prepare legislation for introduction into Parliament that would enable the declaration of a national emergency. The initial legislation will be progressed over several phases. The first phase will establish the declaration power and focus on streamlining the exercise of existing Commonwealth powers to support the rapid response to, and recovery from, a national emergency. The Commonwealth will work with states and territories in the following phase to examine actions it could take to complement actions by the states and territories, once a declaration has been made.

A national resilience and recovery agency to champion resilience and risk reduction

Australians should expect to receive relief and support swiftly, irrespective of where they live. In a national scale disaster, relief and recovery support should be delivered consistently and equitably. A national approach to disaster recovery – that better coordinates all levels of government and other key partners such as charities – is required to raise the standard of support for communities across the board.

The Royal Commission found that a standing national resilience and recovery agency should be established to drive long-term resilience policy outcomes. Because recovery is a core part of resilience, it also found that such an agency should be responsible for the Commonwealth Government’s disaster recovery work.

It also found the National Bushfire Recovery Agency (NBRA) is a ‘compelling illustration’ of the value of national coordination, and the remit of the NBRA could well be expanded to encompass resilience. The Commonwealth views the accomplishments of the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Response and Recovery Agency (NDNQFRRA) in similar terms.

The Commonwealth Government supports this Recommendation. The Commonwealth will establish a national resilience, relief and recovery agency to commence operations no later than 1 July 2021. This new agency will coordinate and align Australia’s national capability to build resilience, better prepare for future natural disasters, and recover from all hazards.

Improving on what we currently do: better information, coordination and collaboration in times of crises and beyond

This past summer has reminded us that our national security is about our preparedness, responsiveness and resilience to natural disasters and the environment we will live in today, over the next decade and well beyond.

The Royal Commission has found that for Australia to be more resilient to national natural disasters there needs to be a much clearer picture of where the nation stands as a whole. This is necessary to help governments and all decision makers to manage climate and disaster risks. That is why the Royal Commission has recommended the Commonwealth Government play a national leadership role in coordinating national data, information and standard setting.

The Commonwealth Government agrees with the Royal Commission that to do this effectively requires a step-change in how we collect, share and use data and information on natural disasters and climate risk. There needs to be greater harmonisation and transparency of how we collect, access, assess and apply authoritative risk information. This is vital for governments, business and the community to understand the risk we face, to communicate it, make strategic and operational decisions, support effective recovery and plan for a resilient future.

This is a significant undertaking. The Royal Commission recognises it will take time and require collaboration from all levels of government.

Much activity is already underway across governments at all levels, within industry, not-for-profits and the community. This collective effort must be coordinated and effective to make the best use of available resources, reduce duplication and realise improvements to available data and information, in the national interest.

In response, the Commonwealth Government will establish ‘Resilience Services’, a climate and disaster risk information service for Emergency Management Australia and the new national resilience, relief and recovery agency, by 1 July 2021. This service will support these agencies to lead the national effort to enhance our national preparedness, responsiveness and resilience to natural disasters, now and into the future.

‘Resilience Services’ will better connect and leverage the Commonwealth’s extensive data, information and capabilities to manage climate and disaster risk, including those of the Bureau of Meteorology, the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The Commonwealth Government looks forward to working with state and territory governments, and the private sector, to deliver a truly national capability to enable decision makers to better manage disaster risk.

The Royal Commission also sees a greater role for Emergency Management Australia in this work as it applies to the immediate response to crises, building on its central role in coordinating the Commonwealth Government’s response to, and activities during a crisis. Emergency Management Australia will continue to be the Commonwealth entry and coordination point for requests from jurisdictions for Commonwealth support. However, the Commonwealth will implement changes to Emergency Management Australia in order to enhance its roles, functions and capabilities.

Responses to the Recommendations of the Royal Commission

Set out in the following pages are the Commonwealth Government’s responses to each of the 80 Recommendations of the Royal Commission. The Commonwealth has either ‘Supported’ (33) or ‘Supported in Principle’ (25) the majority of Recommendations. The only Recommendations that the Commonwealth has ‘Noted’ are those that are directed to the states and territories. The Commonwealth did not disagree or ‘not support’ any of the Recommendations.

The Commonwealth Government thanks the Royal Commission for inquiring into these matters. We look forward to implementing many of the Recommendations to improve our national arrangements to reduce risk, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. This is vital to reduce harm and suffering, and uphold public trust and confidence in our national arrangements, for the benefit of all Australians.

Commonwealth Response to the Final Report of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 3.1 – Forum for Ministers</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should restructure and reinvigorate ministerial forums with a view to enabling timely and informed strategic decision-making in respect of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Long-term policy improvement in relation to natural disasters 2) National preparations for, and adaptation to, natural disasters, and 3) Response to, and recovery from, natural disasters of national scale or consequence <p>including, where appropriate, through the National Cabinet or equivalent intergovernmental leaders’ body.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth recognises the value of restructuring and reinvigorating existing ministerial forums as set out in this recommendation, through a dedicated body for emergency management issues.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will work with state and territory governments to agree an appropriate, and more targeted, forum for governments to work collaboratively on strategic decision-making in response to national natural disasters.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 3.2 – Establishment of an authoritative disaster advisory body</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should establish an authoritative advisory body to consolidate advice on strategic policy and relevant operational considerations for ministers in relation to natural disasters.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation and agrees to work with state and territory governments to ensure consolidated advice on strategic policy and operational considerations is available for ministers.</p> <p>Instead of establishing another layer of bureaucracy through a new advisory body, the Commonwealth would initially propose strengthening existing Commonwealth and state and territory advisory groups and mechanisms with appropriately skilled and experienced individuals who could achieve the objective underpinning this recommendation. The Commonwealth proposes to work with states and territories to deliver this effect without the need to form another body.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 3.3 – Revise COMDISPLAN</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should revise the COMDISPLAN thresholds to provide that a request for Australian Government assistance, including defence assistance, is able to be made by a state or territory government when:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) it has exhausted, or is 'likely to exhaust', all government, community and commercial resources 2) it cannot mobilise its own resources (or community and commercial resources) in time, or 3) the Australian Government has a capability that the state or territory does not have. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 3.4 - Integrating disaster management of the Australian Government</u></p> <p>Australian Government agencies should work together across all phases of disaster management.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 3.5 – Establishing a standing resilience and recovery entity</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should establish a standing entity that will enhance natural disaster resilience and recovery, focused on long-term disaster risk reduction.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation and welcomes the finding of the Royal Commission that the National Bushfire Recovery Agency and the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Relief and Recovery Agency are compelling illustrations of the beneficial role the Commonwealth can achieve through its leadership in recovery from natural disasters.</p> <p>In response to this recommendation, the Commonwealth will establish a national resilience, relief and recovery agency to commence operations no later than 1 July 2021.</p> <p>This new agency will coordinate and align Australia’s national capability to build resilience, better prepare for natural disasters, and recover from all hazards.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 3.6 – Enhanced national preparedness and response entity</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should enhance national preparedness for, and response to, natural disasters, building on the responsibilities of Emergency Management Australia, to include facilitating resource sharing decisions of governments and stress testing national disaster plans.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will implement changes to Emergency Management Australia in order to enhance its roles, functions and capabilities, including, where appropriate, assisting the states and territories in resource prioritisation decision-making.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 4.1 – National disaster risk information</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should prioritise the implementation of harmonised data governance and national data standards.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>Data standards and the open sharing and transparency of climate, disaster risk and impact information is essential for reducing risk, crisis-related planning, community and economic recovery, and building resilience.</p> <p>The Commonwealth has committed to establishing a new virtual climate and disaster risk information and services centre, ‘Resilience Services’, by 1 July 2021. ‘Resilience Services’ will connect and leverage the Commonwealth’s extensive data, information and capabilities to manage climate and disaster risk, including those of the Bureau of Meteorology, the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. Resilience Services will deliver harmonised disaster risk data governance within the Commonwealth to support the information needs of Emergency Management Australia and the new national resilience, relief and recovery agency. It will assist in supporting long-term risk reduction and adaptation to natural disasters.</p> <p>The Commonwealth welcomes the opportunity to work with state and territory governments to implement harmonised data governance and national standards for national disaster risk information.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 4.2 – Common information platforms and shared technologies</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should create common information platforms and share technologies to enable collaboration in the production, analysis, access, and exchange of information, data and knowledge about climate and disaster risks.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth has committed to establishing a new virtual climate and disaster risk information and services centre, ‘Resilience Services’, by 1 July 2021. ‘Resilience Services’ will connect and leverage the Commonwealth’s data, information and capabilities to manage climate and disaster risk, including those of the Bureau of Meteorology, the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government welcomes the opportunity to work with state and territory governments to create common information platforms and share technologies to enable collaboration in the production, analysis, access, and exchange of information, data and knowledge about climate and disaster risks.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 4.3 – Implementation of the National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should support the implementation of the National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability and aligned climate adaptation initiatives.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will establish ‘Resilience Services’ at the federal level, based on findings of the National Climate and Disaster Risk Information and Services Capability pilot and aligned climate adaptation initiatives. Resilience Services will better connect and leverage the Commonwealth’s extensive data, information and capabilities to manage climate and disaster risk, including those of the Bureau of Meteorology, the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government notes the state and territory governments hold datasets relevant to disaster risk and information planning. The Commonwealth welcomes an opportunity to work with state and territory governments to further progress implementation of this capability to deliver a truly national approach.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 4.4 – Features of the National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability</u></p> <p>The National Disaster Risk Information Services Capability should include tools and systems to support operational and strategic decision making, including integrated climate and disaster risk scenarios tailored to various needs to relevant industry sectors and end users.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government will establish ‘Resilience Services’ at the federal level, based on findings of the National Climate and Disaster Risk Information and Services Capability pilot and aligned climate adaptation initiatives. Resilience Services will better connect and leverage the Commonwealth’s extensive data, information and capabilities to manage climate and disaster risk, including those of the Bureau of Meteorology, the CSIRO, Geoscience Australia and the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The capability will focus on meeting the information needs of Emergency Management Australia and the new national resilience, relief and recovery agency.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government welcomes an opportunity to work with state and territory governments to further progress implementation and establish a truly national capability.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 4.5 – National climate projections</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should produce downscaled climate projections:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) to inform the assessment of future natural disaster risk by relevant decision-makers, including state and territory government agencies with planning and emergency management responsibilities 2) underpinned by an agreed common core set of climate trajectories and timelines, and 3) subject to regular review. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation. The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation and welcomes the opportunity to work with state and territory governments to better understand their information needs and how such projections can inform planning and emergency management decision-making.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 4.6 – Consistent impact data standards</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should work together to develop consistent data standards to measure disaster impact.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation, noting it also is directed at the states and territories.</p> <p>Data standards and the open sharing and transparency of climate, disaster risk and impact information, is essential for reducing risk, crisis-related planning, community and economic recovery, and building resilience.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming disseminator and recipient of such information. This may better inform and guide Commonwealth agencies, requested by states and territories to render assistance in a crisis event or events. It will also support long-term risk reduction and adaptation to natural disasters.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s commitment to establish ‘Resilience Services’ is an important step towards developing consistent data standards to measure disaster impact.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 4.7 – Collection and sharing of impact data</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should continue to develop a greater capacity to collect and share standardised and comprehensive natural disaster impact data.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation and would welcome an opportunity to work with state and territory governments to implement it.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government’s commitment to establish ‘Resilience Services’ is an important step towards achieving a greater capacity to collect and share standardised and comprehensive natural disaster impact data.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 5.1 – Make provision for a declaration of a state of emergency</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should make provision, in legislation, for a declaration of a state of national emergency. The declaration should include the following components:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the ability for the Australian Government to make a public declaration to communicate the seriousness of a natural disaster 2) processes to mobilise and activate Australian Government agencies quickly to support states and territories to respond to and recover from a natural disaster, and 3) the power to take action without a state or territory request for assistance in clearly defined and limited circumstances. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports and welcomes this recommendation which recognises that such a declaration is necessary in an ‘all hazards’ approach to national natural disaster events, including those beyond fires and floods.</p> <p>In response to this recommendation the Commonwealth will introduce into Parliament legislation to enable the declaration of a national emergency. The initial legislation will establish the declaration power and focus on streamlining the exercise of existing Commonwealth powers to support the rapid response to, and recovery from, a national emergency.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will subsequently work with states and territories to examine actions that the Commonwealth could take to complement actions by the States and Territories once a Commonwealth declaration has been made.</p> <p>A National Emergency Declaration will facilitate expeditious national responses, allowing provision of capabilities beyond the capacities of individual states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 6.1 – Assessment of the capacity and capability of fire and emergency services in light of current and future natural disaster risk</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should have a structured process to regularly assess the capacity and capability requirements of fire and emergency services, in light of both current and future natural disaster risk.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 6.2 - A national register of fire and emergency services personnel and equipment</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should establish a national register of fire and emergency services personnel, equipment and aerial assets.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle the objective of this recommendation but notes that acquisitions and management of operational response capabilities are primarily the responsibility of states and territories.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 6.3 – Interoperable communications for fire and emergency services across jurisdictions</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should update and implement the National Framework to Improve Government Radio Communications Interoperability, or otherwise agree a new strategy, to achieve interoperable communications across jurisdictions.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 6.4 - Delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband capability</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should expedite the delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband capability.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation and notes work is already underway, through the roadmap agreed by the Council of Australian Governments in December 2018 to roll out the Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) capability. In order to expedite this rollout, agreement will be needed on the Commonwealth’s spectrum offer to the states and territories as well as completion of proof of concept trials.</p> <p>The Commonwealth is ready to work with states and territories to expedite these outcomes and is also exploring additional opportunities and technologies, such as satellite communications, that might augment a PSMB capability into the future.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 6.5 – Multi-agency national-level exercises</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should conduct multi-agency, national-level exercises, not limited to cross-border jurisdictions. These exercises should, at a minimum:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) assess national capacity, inform capability development and coordination in response to, and recovery from, natural disasters, and 2) use scenarios that stress current capabilities. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation. National multi-agency exercises are important for building communications links and understanding among jurisdictions of each states’ and territories’ capabilities and processes, including non-government and private sectors, which is knowledge essential for more seamless cooperation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will establish and mature an exercising capability within Emergency Management Australia. This capability will serve a range of essential purposes, including testing national disaster plans. The Commonwealth will also engage with states and territories to build a national multi-agency exercise regime, through existing Commonwealth and state and territory forums, noting it is a complex undertaking if exercises are to be productive.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 6.6 – Employment protections for fire and emergency services volunteers</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should consider whether employment protections under the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> (Cth) are sufficient to ensure that fire and emergency services volunteers will not be discriminated against, disadvantaged or dismissed for reasons associated with their volunteer service during natural disasters.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation, but notes there are already substantial provisions in place which provide employment protections for emergency management volunteers.</p> <p>The <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> (Cth) has broad coverage across Australia for national system employers and employees. State or territory laws that provide for emergency services duties operate concurrently with the Fair Work Act (s27).</p> <p>In relation to participation in voluntary emergency management activity, the <i>Fair Work Act 2009</i> expressly provides for the operation of state and territory laws where those laws provide entitlements that are more beneficial (s112).</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 7.1 – Improve understanding of Australian Defence Force capabilities</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should take steps to ensure that there is better interaction, planning and ongoing understanding of Australian Defence Force capabilities and processes by state and territory fire and emergency service agencies and local governments.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Australian Department of Defence has already reviewed the Defence Assistance to Civil Community (DACC) Framework and has established operational architectures in the jurisdictions to enhance interaction, participate in planning and provide greater awareness of ADF capabilities.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 7.2 – Review of Defence Assistance to the Civil Community</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should review the content of the Defence Assistance to the Civil Community to ensure consistency of language and application with a revised COMDISPLAN.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Australian Department of Defence in conjunction with Emergency Management Australia has already undertaken a comprehensive review of the Defence Assistance to Civil Community (DACC) manual and has publicly released the manual for the first time.</p> <p>The Department of Defence and Emergency Management Australia will continue to work together to further refine the manual.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 7.3 – Legal protections for Australian Defence Force members</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should afford appropriate legal protections from civil and criminal liability to Australian Defence Force members when conducting activities under an authorisation to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Defence Legislation Amendment Bill 2020 has been introduced into Parliament. Once passed, the Bill will address protections and immunities for Defence personnel and streamline the process for call-out of the reserve for natural disaster responses.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 8.1 – A sovereign aerial firefighting capability</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop an Australian-based and registered national aerial firefighting capability, to be tasked according to greatest national need. This capability should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) a modest, very large air tanker/large air tanker, and Type-1 helicopter capability, including supporting infrastructure, aircrew and aviation support personnel, and 2) any other aerial firefighting capabilities (e.g. Light Detection and Ranging (LiDAR), line-scanning, transport, and logistics) that would benefit from a nationally coordinated approach. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government acknowledged, before the Royal Commission, the maturity, experience and effectiveness of the operational response capabilities of the states and territories. The Commonwealth has no desire to replicate or replace these capabilities, including in aerial firefighting.</p> <p>The Commonwealth notes the suggestion at paragraph 65 of the Royal Commission Report concerning a role for Emergency Management Australia; but it is comfortable with the present arrangements of the states and territories involving the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC).</p> <p>The Commonwealth will continue its annual contribution of \$26 million to the NAFC, indexed from 2020-21.</p> <p>The Commonwealth encourages states and territories to work collaboratively and with industry to build Australian-based aerial fire-fighting capacity, consistent with their sovereign obligations to maintain appropriate operational response capabilities.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 8.2 – Research and evaluation into aerial firefighting</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should support ongoing research and evaluation into aerial firefighting. This research and evaluation should include:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) assessing the specific capability needs of states and territories, and 2) exploring the most effective aerial firefighting strategies. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>On 23 July 2020, the Commonwealth Government announced \$88.1 million to extend and scale-up funding for critical research into bushfires and natural hazards.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would support the use of some of these funds, and/or some of the Commonwealth’s annual contribution of \$26 million to the NAFC, indexed from 2020-21, for research into aerial firefighting capabilities.</p> <p>However, before any decision or long term commitment is made regarding particular aircraft in the fleet, ownership and strategic operation, it is imperative we have a full and evidence-based understanding of the capability actually required.</p> <p>The Government sees this recommendation as being pivotal to informing decisions on the future of aerial firefighting to deliver an operationally effective fleet that is scalable, adaptive and provides value for money.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 8.3 – Developing the aerial firefighting industry’s capability</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should adopt procurement and contracting strategies that support and develop a broader Australian-based sovereign aerial firefighting industry.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 9.1 – Supply chains – government review</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments, in consultation with local governments and the private sector, should review supply chain risks, and consider options to ensure supply of essential goods in times of natural disasters.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth is prepared to work with states and territories to examine national supply chain vulnerabilities which could prove critical to coordinated and timely responses to nationally significant natural or other disasters.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 9.2 – Comprehensive information</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should include road closure and opening information on all roads within their borders on public apps.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming recipient of such information as it may inform Commonwealth agencies, requested by states and territories to render assistance in a crisis.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 9.3 - Provision of information</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should provide information to the public on the closure and opening of roads. Information should be provided in real-time, or in advance based on predictions, where possible.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming recipient of such information as it may inform Commonwealth agencies, requested by states and territories to render assistance in a crisis.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 9.4 – Collective awareness and mitigation of risks to critical infrastructure</u></p> <p>The Australian Government, working with state and territory governments and critical infrastructure operators, should lead a process to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) identify critical infrastructure 2) assess key risks to identified critical infrastructure from natural disasters of national scale or consequence 3) identify steps needed to mitigate these risks 4) identify steps to make the critical infrastructure more resilient, and 5) track achievement against an agreed plan. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>An ‘all hazards’ approach to protecting critical infrastructure is already in place for many critical sectors, such as telecommunications.</p> <p>Building on this, the Commonwealth has commenced work with critical infrastructure owners and operators to identify critical infrastructure and systems of national significance, and assess key risks and mitigations, including for nationally significant incidents. Ensuring our critical infrastructure is resilient remains a priority for the Commonwealth.</p> <p>To support this, on 12 May 2020 the Government committed \$37.1 million through the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) package to improve the resilience of Australia’s communications networks in bushfire and disaster prone areas.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 9.5 – Improving coordination arrangements between critical infrastructure sectors and with government</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should work with state and territory governments and critical infrastructure operators to improve information flows during and in response to natural disasters:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) between critical infrastructure operators, and 2) between critical infrastructure operators and governments. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will continue to work with states and territories and critical infrastructure owners and operators, including on communications, to ensure Australia has a coordinated response to disasters.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 10.1 – Disaster education for individuals and communities</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should continue to deliver, evaluate and improve education and engagement programs aimed at promoting disaster resilience for individuals and communities.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth considers that such education programs should include a Commonwealth dimension. This is particularly to cover community expectations and knowledge of how, for example, the Australian Defence Force delivers requested assistance in a crisis, and the recovery services available through Commonwealth agencies – in addition to existing state and territory mechanisms.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 11.1 – Responsibility for local government disaster management capability and capacity</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should take responsibility for the capability and capacity of local governments to which they have delegated their responsibilities in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, to ensure local governments are able to effectively discharge the responsibilities devolved to them.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 11.2 – Resource sharing arrangements between local governments</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should review their arrangements for sharing resources between their local governments during natural disasters, including whether those arrangements:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) provide sufficient surge capacity, and 2) take into account all the risks that the state or territory may face during a natural disasters. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 12.1 – Roadside vegetation management</u></p> <p>State and territory governments, working with local governments and fire and emergency service agencies, should ensure that there are appropriate arrangements for roadside vegetation management that take into account among other things:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) priority access and egress routes 2) road priority, utility and strategic value 3) cost, and 4) residual risk to national natural disasters. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming recipient of this and other hazard reduction information from the states and territories as it relates to strategic planning and preparedness.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 12.2 – Evacuation planning – Evacuation routes and seasonal populations</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure that those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review those plans, and update them where appropriate, including in relation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) roles and responsibilities for state and territory governments, local governments and local communities 2) education and signage about evacuations and evacuation routes, including education of seasonal populations 3) the adequacy of evacuation routes; including contingencies if evacuation routes to centres are assessed as not being able to cope, and 4) the potential inability to evacuate, either by reason of circumstances or person characteristics. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming recipient of this and other crisis planning information and a participant in planning in support of the states and territories. This particularly relates to strategic planning and preparedness and is relevant for Commonwealth agencies like the Australian Defence Force, which may be requested to provide assistance.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 12.3 – Evacuation planning – Essential services and supplies</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure that those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review those plans, and update them where appropriate, including in relation to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) key risks that essential outages have on communities during a severe or catastrophic natural disaster (particularly communications and power) 2) availability of essential supplies, including food and water, and 3) consequence management and compounding events such as the loss of essential services or health impacts. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming recipient of this and other crisis planning information and a participant in planning in support of the states and territories. This particularly relates to strategic planning and preparedness and is relevant for Commonwealth agencies like the Australian Defence Force, which may be requested to provide assistance.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 12.4 – Sheltering terminology should be nationally consistent</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should, as a priority, adopt nationally consistent terminology and functions for the different sheltering facilities, including evacuation centres, Neighbourhood Safer Places, places of last resort and natural disaster shelters.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth supports the development of common/more universal terminology and planning concepts, and would be a welcoming recipient of this and other crisis planning information from the states and territories as it relates to strategic planning and preparedness, particularly for Commonwealth agencies like the Australian Defence Force, which may be requested to provide assistance.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 12.5 – National community education</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should provide further community education on the function and limitations of different sheltering facilities, including evacuation centres, Neighbourhood Safer Places, places of last resort and natural disaster shelters. This education should be nationally consistent.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth considers that such education programs should include a Commonwealth dimension, particularly to cover community expectations and knowledge of how, for example, the Australian Defence Force delivers requested assistance to affected communities during a crisis in support of state, territory and local governments, as well as the recovery services available through Commonwealth agencies as well as existing state and territory mechanisms.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 12.6 – Evacuation planning – Evacuation centres</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review these plans, and update them where appropriate, to account for the existence and standard of any evacuation centres and safer places (however described) in the community, including:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) the capacity of a centre to handle seasonal population variation 2) the suitability of facilities to cater for diverse groups, including vulnerable people, and those evacuating with animals, and 3) The existence of communications facilities and alternate power sources. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth should be a participant in planning in support of the states and territories. This particularly relates to strategic planning and preparedness and is relevant for Commonwealth agencies like the Australian Defence Force, which may be requested to provide assistance.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 12.7 – Evacuation planning – Planning for evacuations across boundaries</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure those responsible for evacuation planning periodically review those plans, and update where appropriate, to provide for coordination between states and territories in cross-border areas and to provide cross-border access to evacuation centres.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would be a welcoming recipient of this and other crisis planning information and a participant in planning in support of the states and territories. This particularly relates to strategic planning and preparedness and is relevant for Commonwealth agencies like the Australian Defence Force, which may be requested to provide assistance.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 13.1 - Development and implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should expedite the development and implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System. It should ensure that there is national consistency in the visual display of the AFDRS and action to be taken in response to each rating.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 13.2 – Education on the Australian Fire Danger Rating System</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should deliver education to ensure that the public understands the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System ratings, the potential danger attached to each rating, and the action that should be taken in relation to each rating.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 13.3 – The Australian Warning System</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should urgently deliver and implement the all-hazard Australian Warning System.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 13.4 – An education campaign on the Australian Warning System</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should ensure that the implementation of the Australian Warning System is accompanied by a carefully developed national education campaign that considers the needs of all Australians.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 13.5 – The development of national standards for mobile applications</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should facilitate state and territory governments working together to develop minimum national standards of information to be included in bushfire warning apps.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth supports the objective of this recommendation and looks forward to build on existing collaboration with states and territories to improve national hazard information, including bushfire warning apps, through the Australian Data and Digital Council.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 13.6 – Exploring the development of a national, all-hazard warning app</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should continue to explore the feasibility of a national, all-hazard emergency warning app.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes the recommendation and supports in principle the underpinning objective of the recommendation. This is presently an aspirational goal and would require an evolutionary approach given states and territories each have, to a varying degree, sovereign mapping tools and systems to accomplish this function.</p> <p>The Commonwealth is aware of work underway in some states on national multi-hazard services.</p> <p>The Commonwealth is prepared to discuss this recommendation with states and territories with the possible objective of building a longer term roadmap that moves both the Commonwealth and states and territories collectively toward this goal.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 14.1 – Nationally consistent air quality information, health advice and interventions</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) develop close to real-time, nationally consistent air quality information, including consistent categorisation and public health advice 2) greater community education and guidance, and 3) targeted health advice to vulnerable groups. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government is contributing to the development of a national air quality framework as a member of the Environmental Health Standing Committee (enHealth - a sub-committee of the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee). Together with environment agencies, enHealth has developed a nationally agreed one hour air quality framework including categories and general health messaging to be implemented by all states and territories through their existing channels. A national 24-hour air quality framework is currently being developed by enHealth.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 14.2 – National Air Quality Forecasting Capability</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop national air quality forecasting capabilities, which include broad coverage of population centres and apply to smoke and other airborne pollutants, such as dust and pollen, to predict plume behaviour.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government is accelerating the roll-out of a prototype national bushfire smoke forecasting capability developed by the CSIRO. This project includes transition to an ongoing operational capability and public access to smoke forecasting information using air quality related applications.</p> <p>The Commonwealth seeks state and territory cooperation to expand this capability’s application to that envisaged by the recommendation, including to other airborne pollutants.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 15.1 – Australian Medical Assistance Teams</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should review Australian Medical Assistance Team capabilities and procedures and develop necessary training, exercising and other arrangements to build capacity for domestic deployments.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation, noting this has already been deployed domestically in support of COVID-19, and also involves the states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 15.2 – Inclusion of primary care in disaster management</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop arrangements that facilitate greater inclusion of primary healthcare providers in disaster management, including: representation on relevant disaster committees and plans and providing training, and education and other supports.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government will enhance the role of Primary Health Networks in local disaster response, in particular through engagement with state and local emergency response coordination mechanisms.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 15.3 - Prioritising mental health during and after natural disasters</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should refine arrangements to support localised planning and the delivery of appropriate mental health services following a natural disaster.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The National Mental Health Commission is leading the development of a National Natural Disaster Mental Health Framework by June 2021 to guide action and investment on mental health during natural disasters, as part of the Commonwealth’s \$76 million mental health bushfire recovery package. Preparatory work on the framework will inform preparations for this coming 2020-21 summer season. The Commonwealth also provided \$13.4 million in May 2020 for Primary Health Networks to provide critical localised emotional and mental health support for bushfire affected individuals announced as part of \$650 million support package.</p> <p>The Commonwealth has further ensured that Medicare-funded mental health services have been available via telehealth to support Australians impacted by the recent flood, bushfire and COVID-19 pandemic events.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 15.4 – Enhanced health and mental health datasets</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should agree to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) develop consistent and compatible methods and metrics to measure health impacts related to natural disasters, including mental health, and 2) take steps to ensure the appropriate sharing of health and mental health datasets. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation and would welcome the opportunity to work with the states and territories to implement it, building on the work underway in response to COVID-19.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 16.1 – Environmental data</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should ensure greater consistency and collaboration in the collation, storage, access and provision of data on the distribution and conservation status of Australian flora and fauna.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth, with all states and territories, has agreed to establish a common method for the assessment and listing of threatened species.</p> <p>The common assessment method will maintain the current high level of scientific rigour in the assessment and listing of threatened species across Australia, while promoting a more consistent, efficient and harmonised process.</p> <p>The Commonwealth welcomes further discussion with states and territories to fully implement this recommendation.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 17.1 – Public availability of fuel load management strategies</u></p> <p>Public land managers should clearly convey and make available to the public their fuel load management strategies, including the rationale behind them, as well as report annually on the implementation and outcomes of those strategies.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective underpinning this recommendation. It further notes it is primarily directed at states and territories.</p> <p>Fuel load management strategies have landscape-level implications. Greater transparency is in the national interest.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 17.2 – Assessment and approval processes for vegetation management, bushfire mitigation and hazard reduction</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should review the assessment and approval processes relating to vegetation management, bushfire mitigation and hazard reduction to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) ensure that there is clarity about the requirements and scope for landholders and land managers to undertake bushfire hazard reduction activities, and 2) minimise the time taken to undertake assessments and obtain approvals. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p> <p>Fire prevention activities only require federal environmental approval if they are likely to have a significant impact on a nationally protected matter, and they are not specifically exempted by the national environment law.</p> <p>The Commonwealth urges states and territories to cut red tape for landholders and land managers to allow them to adequately manage fire hazards on their lands and share hazard reduction data widely and transparently.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 17.3 – Classification, recording and sharing of fuel load data</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should develop consistent processes for the classification, recording and sharing of fuel load data.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government is committed to working with states and territories as a priority to develop consistent processes to classify, record and share fuel load data.</p> <p>The Commonwealth has commenced work with the states and territories on the National Bushfire Information Capability (NBIC). The NBIC will be led by the CSIRO in partnership with the Department of Home Affairs and in close collaboration with the NSW Rural Fire Service and Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 18.1 – Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience</u></p> <p>Australian, state, territory and local governments should engage further with Traditional Owners to explore the relationship between Indigenous land and fire management and natural disaster resilience.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) works closely with Indigenous land managers, funding 127 Indigenous ranger groups across Australia to manage natural and cultural values of Country, including fire management. NIAA and Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) also support Traditional Owners to manage more than 74 million hectares of land under the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) program. Indigenous rangers and IPA managers undertake fire management as part of their regular activities for a range of benefits including natural disaster resilience on Indigenous and state held land.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s National Bushfire Recovery Fund provides \$2 million to empower Traditional owners to share knowledge and build understanding of traditional indigenous fire management practices, as part of the \$149.7 million support for native wildlife and habitat restoration following the 2019/20 fires.</p> <p>The Commonwealth urges the states and territories to similarly invest in exploring the relationship between indigenous land management and natural disaster resilience.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 18.2 - Indigenous land and fire management and public land management</u></p> <p>Australian, state, territory and local governments should explore further opportunities to leverage Indigenous land and fire management insights, in the development, planning and execution of public land management activities.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) works closely with Indigenous land managers, funding 127 Indigenous ranger groups across Australia to manage natural and cultural values of Country, including fire management. NIAA and Commonwealth Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (DAWE) also support Traditional Owners to manage more than 74 million hectares of land under the Indigenous Protected Areas (IPA) program. Indigenous rangers and IPA managers undertake fire management as part of their regular activities for a range of benefits including natural disaster resilience on Indigenous and public lands.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s National Bushfire Recovery Fund provides \$2 million to empower Traditional owners to share knowledge and build understanding of traditional Indigenous fire management practices, as part of the \$149.7 million support for native wildlife and habitat restoration following the 2019/20 fires.</p> <p>The Commonwealth urges the states and territories to similarly leverage Indigenous land and fire management insights, in the development, planning and execution of their land management activities.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 19.1 – Communication of natural hazard risk information to individuals</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) each have a process or mechanism in place to communicate natural hazard risk information to households (including prospective purchasers) in ‘hazard prone’ areas, and 2) work together, and with the Australian Government where appropriate, to explore the development of a national mechanism to do the same. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government agrees with the Royal Commission – governments cannot entirely protect the public from natural disasters. The Commonwealth supports the principle that households in ‘hazard prone’ areas should have access to information that helps build resilience.</p> <p>The Commonwealth urges states and territories to provide households with information that helps them to build their resilience to natural disasters, and would welcome the opportunity to work with other jurisdictions to ensure such information is communicated nationally.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 19.2 – Guidance for insurer recognised retrofitting and mitigation</u></p> <p>The insurance industry, as represented by the Insurance Council of Australia, working with state and territory governments and other relevant stakeholders, should produce and communicate to consumers clear guidance on individual-level natural hazard risk mitigation actions insurers will recognise in setting insurance premiums.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government is committed to building the resilience of Australian communities to natural disasters and putting downward pressure on insurance premiums.</p> <p>The Commonwealth urges insurers to provide clear consumer guidance on actions to reduce natural hazard risk that will lower insurance premiums.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 19.3 – Mandatory consideration of natural disaster risk in land-use planning decisions</u></p> <p>State, territory and local governments should be required to consider present and future natural disaster risk when making land-use planning decisions for new developments.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation, noting it is directed to state, territory and local government.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 19.4 – National Construction Code</u></p> <p>The Australian Building Codes Board, working with other bodies as appropriate, should:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) assess the extent to which AS 3959:2018 Construction of buildings in bushfire-prone areas, and other relevant building standards, are effective in reducing risk from natural hazards to lives and property, and 2) conduct an evaluation as to whether the National Construction Code should be amended to specifically include, as an objective of the code, making buildings more resilient to natural disasters. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth would welcome the opportunity to work with the states and territories to implement this recommendation, and notes the work already underway by Building Ministers to adapt the built environment to future climate and hazard conditions.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 20.1 – Debris clean-up arrangements</u></p> <p>Governments should create and publish standing policy guidance on whether they will or will not assist to clean-up debris, including contaminated debris, resulting from natural hazards.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s commitment to cost-share disaster related debris removal and clean-up activities is publicly available in the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. In addition, the Commonwealth is reviewing the DRFA to develop an ‘off-the-shelf’ debris clean-up assistance package for severe and catastrophic disasters.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 21.1 – Arrangements for donated goods</u></p> <p>State and territory governments should develop and implement efficient and effective arrangements to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) educate the public about the challenges associated with donated goods, for example the storage and distribution of donated goods, and 2) manage and coordinate donated goods to ensure offers of support are matched with need. 	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth, with states and territories, is planning to develop guidance on managing resource supports, including the coordination of donated goods.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 21.2 – Reform fundraising laws</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should create a single national scheme for the regulation for charitable fundraising.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth responded to a similar recommendation in the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Legislation Review 2018.</p> <p>In its response (released 6 March 2020) to recommendation 28 of the Review, the Commonwealth noted that:</p> <p><i>The panel’s proposal for a single national scheme involved a referral of powers by the states. Any referral of powers would require agreement of the states.</i></p> <p><i>In light of this hurdle, the Government will continue to work closely with the states and territories (via relevant cross-jurisdictional fora) to streamline and harmonise charities regulation in three important areas.</i></p> <p><i>First, the ACNC has led a cross-jurisdictional process since 2013 which has succeeded in streamlining reporting requirements for charities which are incorporated associations in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. These reforms allow registered charities to report financial and governance information to the ACNC alone. Queensland is moving towards similar reforms.</i></p> <p><i>Second, state and territory officials are also working with the ACNC to explore options to further reduce the regulatory burden on the sector. This includes considering possible cross-border recognition arrangements for charitable fundraisers.</i></p> <p><i>Finally, the Government is consulting with states and territories on the development of a common statutory definition of charity across jurisdictions to replace 45 existing definitions. This will reduce complexity and regulatory burden for charities when seeking tax concessions.</i></p> <p>In relation to the cross-border recognition model referred to above, the Commonwealth notes the NSW Government released a discussion paper on a proposed cross-border recognition model for charitable fundraisers for public consultation on 31 August 2020.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 21.3 – National coordination forums</u></p> <p>The Australian Government, through the mechanism of the proposed standing national recovery and resilience agency, should convene regular and ongoing national forums for charities, non-government organisations and volunteer groups, with a role in natural disaster recovery, with a view to continuous improvement of coordination of recovery support.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation and welcomes the finding of the Royal Commission that the National Bushfire Recovery Agency is a compelling illustration of the beneficial role the Commonwealth can achieve through its leadership in recovery from natural disasters.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s experience through the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Relief and Recovery Agency has demonstrated the critical need for integrated support between levels of government, and with non-government organisations, for affected communities.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 21.4 – National recovery resource sharing arrangements</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should establish a national mechanism for sharing of trained and qualified recovery personnel and best practice during and following natural disasters.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports the objective of this recommendation and welcomes the finding of the Royal Commission that the National Bushfire Recovery Agency is a compelling illustration of the beneficial role the Commonwealth can achieve through its leadership in recovery from natural disasters.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s experience through the National Drought and North Queensland Flood Relief and Recovery Agency has demonstrated the critical need for integrated support between levels of government, and with non-government organisations, for affected communities.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 21.5 – National level recovery exercises</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should work together to develop a program for national level recovery exercises, building on the work currently underway through the Community Outcomes and Recovery Subcommittee of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports in principle this recommendation.</p> <p>National multi-agency exercises are important for building communications links and understanding among jurisdictions of each states’ and territories’ capabilities and processes, including non-government and private sectors, which is knowledge essential for more seamless cooperation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will establish and mature an exercising capability within Emergency Management Australia. This capability will serve a range of essential purposes, including testing national disaster plans. The Commonwealth will also engage with states and territories to build a national multi-agency exercise regime, through existing Commonwealth and state and territory forums, noting it is a complex undertaking if exercises are to be productive.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 22.1 – Evaluation of financial assistance measures to support recovery</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory and local governments should evaluate the effectiveness of existing financial assistance measures to inform the development of a suite of pre-effective pre-determined recovery supports.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation and is working collaboratively with the states and territories to review the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 22.2 – Appropriate sharing of personal information</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should ensure that personal information of individuals affected by a natural disaster is able to be appropriately shared between all levels of government, agencies, insurers, charities and organisations delivering recovery services, taking account of all necessary safeguards to ensure sharing is only for recovery purposes.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth supports this recommendation, and welcomes the opportunity to work with those identified in the recommendation to explore ways of implementing it.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 22.3 – Review the thresholds and activation process for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements</u></p> <p>In reviewing the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, Australian, state and territory governments should examine the small disaster criterion, and financial thresholds generally.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>There is scope within the review of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to identify, and progress, this recommendation.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 22.4 – Nationally consistent Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements assistance measures</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory and local governments should develop greater consistency in the financial support provided to individuals, small businesses and primary producers under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth supports Australians impacted by disaster being treated more consistently and fairly under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.</p> <p>The Commonwealth is currently working with the states to develop options on how the program could deliver more equitable, needs-based, assistance for all Australians in time for the 2020-2021 high-risk weather season. One option being explored for the 2020-21 season is to establish benchmarks within the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Determination to encourage greater consistency.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 22.5 – Develop nationally consistent, pre-agreed Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should expedite the development of pre-agreed recovery programs, including those that address social needs, such as legal assistance domestic violence, and also environmental recovery.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth is currently working with the states and territories to develop options on how the program could deliver more equitable, needs-based, assistance for all Australians in time for the 2020-2021 high-risk weather season. One option being explored for the 2020-21 season is to establish benchmarks within the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Determination to encourage greater consistency.</p> <p>Additionally, the Commonwealth is currently exploring the potential for legal assistance under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 22.6 – Better incorporate ‘build back better’ within the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should incorporate the principle of ‘build back better’ more broadly into the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>Through the review of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, work is being undertaken to develop national guidance on how the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements can be used to make infrastructure more resilient through the rebuilding and restoration process.</p> <p>The Commonwealth provided \$450 million for local economic recovery projects from the \$2 billion National Bushfire Recovery Fund. The Prime Minister approved an exemption from Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Clause 4.5.3 to allow new infrastructure or infrastructure enhancements, as well as new growth initiatives to be supported by this funding.</p> <p>The Commonwealth will establish Resilience Services, which will provide the Commonwealth with future-focussed disaster risk information to inform decisions about how to ‘build back better’ effectively.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 22.7 – Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements recovery measures to facilitate resilience</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should broaden Category D of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to encompass funding for recovery measures that are focused on resilience, including in circumstances which are not ‘exceptional’.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The Commonwealth’s Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements are already being used to fund a range of recovery measures that are focused on resilience, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • infrastructure betterment funds • community resilience grants programs • hazard mapping and warning programs, and • public awareness and education campaigns.
<p><u>Recommendation 22.8 – Streamline the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements processes</u></p> <p>Australian, state and territory governments should create simpler Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements application processes.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation and is working collaboratively with the states and territories to review the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, including to streamline processes where possible.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 24.1 – Accountability and assurance mechanisms at the Australian Government level</u></p> <p>The Australian Government should establish accountability and assurance mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports establishing accountability and assurance mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements.</p>

Recommendation	Government response
<p><u>Recommendation 24.2 – An independent accountability and assurance mechanism for each state and territory</u></p> <p>Each state and territory government should establish an independent accountability and assurance mechanism to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government notes this recommendation and supports the objective underpinning it. It further notes it is directed at states and territories.</p>
<p><u>Recommendation 24.3 – A public record of national significance</u></p> <p>The material published as part of this Royal Commission should remain available and accessible on a long-term basis for the benefit of individuals, communities, organisations, business and all levels of government.</p>	<p>The Commonwealth Government supports this recommendation.</p> <p>The material published as part of this Royal Commission is a publicly-funded national resource and should remain available and accessible on a long-term basis for the benefit of all Australians.</p>