
Charles Darwin University

**Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.
Submission Number: NND.001.00636.**

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Submission Number: NND.001.00636

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What is your submission based on? I am making this submission based on my professional knowledge, qualifications or experience or on behalf of a group or organisation

What is your area of professional expertise?

If you are lodging your submission on behalf of a group or organisation, what is the name of the group or organisation? Charles Darwin University & North Australian Indigenous Land & Sea Management Alliance

Your Submission

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response worked well?

not applicable--see below

In your experience, what areas of the bushfire emergency response didn't work well?

not applicable--see below

In your experience, what needs to change to improve arrangements for preparation, mitigation, response and recovery coordination for national natural disaster arrangements in Australia?

1. This submission relates to the development of effective emergency management (EM) partnerships and arrangements with remote (predominantly Indigenous) communities particularly across northern Australia, but more generically throughout remote regional Australia.

2. First, by way of context, this submission is based on our collective experience (CDU & NAILSMA and a range of Indigenous research and community partners) with the undertaking, over the past 7 years, of an applied research & implementation program, focused on the above issues, funded through the Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC)

3. The delivery of effective EM partnerships with remote Australian communities is universally recognised as involving very significant challenges:

- Time and infrastructure resources—it is self-evident that adequate long-term resourcing and associated ongoing commitment to developing the capabilities and resilience of dispersed remote communities is typically a major barrier.
- Community governance challenges—developing effective engagement and collaborative EM planning processes with respective, often complex community governance arrangements, illustrates the magnitude of the investment required. But, as documented by BNHCRC research, targeted local communities have demonstrated that, with support, they are keen to rebuild and revitalise local community governance processes whereby the community can better engage and partner with EM agencies.
- Engagement models—despite some notable successful examples, as demonstrated by substantial experience volunteering models involving Indigenous community members are seldom found to be effective given significant disadvantaged societal circumstances (e.g. lack of employment, skills, drivers licenses, and so on). Based on other experience, including BNHCRC research, other engagement models may offer more enduring solutions—e.g. contracted service provision with Indigenous Ranger Groups associated with many northern remote communities. Such opportunities however also bring significant challenges, including provision of appropriate training (skills, leadership), building governance capability, and associated resourcing.
- COAG policy—despite development of a conceptually excellent national strategic policy position addressing the need for effective EM arrangements in remote Indigenous communities, to date this has been given no material support--see COAG (Council of Australian Governments) (2007) 'Keeping Our Mob Safe: A National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous Communities'. Attorney-General's Department, Australian Government. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/RICAC_KeepingOurMobSafe_July2007.pdf

4. The collaborative research program we have undertaken through the BNHCRC raises a number of fundamental questions which we suggest the Royal Commission would be well placed to pursue:

- How do EM agencies engage effectively and build long-term relationships with remote communities—especially in absence of adequate knowledge concerning the importance of engaging with Indigenous 'informal' community governance arrangements?
- Conversely, how do local communities develop and build effective long-term partnerships with EM agencies?
- How can EM arrangements better utilise remote community resources, skills and capabilities (e.g. Indigenous Ranger Groups)—especially given that EM agencies typically do not have the resources to effectively service the PPRR (Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery) needs of many dispersed remote communities?
- How appropriate and effective are standard Volunteer models for engaging and retaining remote community members—what are the experiences of EM agencies operating across the North?
- What are the associated costs and benefits (including financial) of different volunteer or alternative (e.g. fee-for-service) engagement models—what is the evidence?
- How can the Commonwealth and States/Territories better utilise and support (resourcing, training, building governance capacity) the demonstrable front-line capabilities of the network of (currently under-utilised) Indigenous Ranger Groups throughout remote Australia?
- How do above matters relate to, might inform and be informed by, current national discussions addressing evolving EM community engagement and Volunteer models?
- How do we develop an agreed roadmap to progress and deliver cost-effective, culturally appropriate, sustainable EM partnerships in remote communities?

5. As examples of solutions that we have formally proposed in relevant published (peer-reviewed) literature, the following three papers (submitted separately on-line) are pertinent here:

- Setting out the case for the role of publicly funded Indigenous Ranger Groups to be expanded, and appropriately supported for delivering, frontline fire management and EM PPRR activities in remote community settings (Russell-Smith J, Edwards AC, Sangha K, Yates CP, Gardener M (2020) Challenges for prescribed fire management in Australia's fire-prone rangelands – the example of the Northern Territory. International Journal of Wildland Fire 29: 339-353)
- Establishing significant economic savings to Government by supporting and developing Indigenous natural and cultural resource management capabilities rather than through welfare dependency expenditures (Sangha KK, Gerritsen R, Russell-Smith J (2019) Repurposing government expenditure for enhancing Indigenous well-being in Australia: A scenario analysis for a new paradigm. Economic Analysis and Policy 63: 75-91)
- A comprehensive framework for understanding and measuring market and non-market (environmental, community wellbeing) -based costs associated with bushfire management in northern Australia (Sangha KK, Evans J, Edwards A, Russell-Smith J (2019) Measuring environmental losses from natural disasters: a case study of costing bushfires in the Northern Territory. Australian Journal of Emergency Management 34: 31-39)

6. Finally, we note that, had COVID 19 not intervened, in early April 2020 we were going to convene a targeted workshop addressing the theme "Developing effective Emergency Management partnerships with remote north Australian communities". Accepted participants included senior (Commissioner-level) EM agency personnel and remote community leaders from across northern Australia, as well as high-level relevant national policy participants. This workshop, now postponed, has been many years in planning. We strongly recommend to the Royal Commissioners that such regional dialogues are a very necessary step towards building trust, mutual understandings, and effective partnerships in support of remote community EM arrangements.

Yours respectfully

Ricky Archer (NAILSMA)
Glenn James (NAILSMA)
Dr Bev Sithole (Aboriginal Research Practitioners Network-ARPNNet)
Dr Kamal Sangha (CDU)
Steve Sutton (CDU)
Dr Andrew Edwards (CDU)
Professor Jeremy Russell-Smith (CDU)
Ken Baulch (Lead EM Agency Enduser-Bushfires NT)

Is there anything else you would like to tell the Royal Commission?

We would be very happy to expand on the above submission if invited to do so

Do you agree to your submission being published? Yes I agree to my submission being published in my name

Supporting material provided:

JRS etal_rangelands_2020.pdf

Indigenous expenditure_Economic Analysis and Policy 2019.pdf

AJEM 2019 costing NT bushfires.pdf