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ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL  
RESOURCES COMMITTEE



NO. 057

10 May 2007

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Hon. John Pandazopoulos, MP  
Chair  
Environment and Natural Resources Standing Committee  
Parliament of Victoria  
Level 8, 35 Spring St  
Melbourne 3000

Dear Mr Pandazopoulos,

**INQUIRY INTO THE IMPACT OF PUBLIC LAND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES ON  
BUSHFIRES IN VICTORIA**

Thank you for very much your letter of 30 March 2007 to Mr Euan Ferguson, Chair of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre inviting submissions to your Inquiry on the above topic.

I write on behalf of Board of Directors of the Centre, and would like to provide the attached information for consideration by your Committee.

The National Aerial Firefighting Centre would be pleased to provide any further information that you may require. Please contact:

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National Aerial Firefighting Centre  
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email [info@nafc.org.au](mailto:info@nafc.org.au)

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Naomi Brown', written over a horizontal line.

**NAOMI BROWN  
COMPANY SECRETARY**

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Submission of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre

to the

Parliament of Victoria  
Environment and Natural Resources Committee

**Inquiry into the Impact of Public Land Management Practices on Bushfires in Victoria**

May 2007



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**BACKGROUND**

- i. In 2003, participating Australian States and Territories formed the National Aerial Firefighting Centre Ltd (NAFC) with the aim of improving the effectiveness and efficiency of aerial firefighting in Australia by facilitating cooperation and collaboration, including the sharing of aircraft resources, between States and Territories. The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) is in-effect a cooperative of State and Territory Governments.
- ii. NAFC was initiated primarily because State and Territory agencies with responsibility for bushfire mitigation and suppression have recognised that particularly in the case of highly specialised, relatively scarce resources such as firefighting aircraft, there is much to be gained by a cooperative, coordinated approach across the nation.
- iii. Shortly after NAFC was formed, a single Resource Management Agreement (RMA) was executed between NAFC and the Governments of member States and Territories. The RMA provides a straightforward legal mechanism to share resources.
- iv. NAFC has established a National Fleet of contracted, highly specialised firefighting aircraft, which are made available to State and Territory fire agencies. These aircraft supplement specialised fire aircraft contracted directly to, or owned by, individual States and Territories. Some States now choose to obtain all specialised fire aircraft through NAFC. The NAFC contract arrangements allow the aircraft to be shared between jurisdictions and moved around the country to address bushfire risk.

- v. One of the main benefits of the arrangement is that it provides access to increased capacity for aerial fire suppression at times of peak bushfire activity. It is not practical or cost-effective for each State and Territory to have the necessary resources for all situations – NAFC arrangements provide the ability to share resources and provide much needed surge capacity.
- vi. Recognising the benefits of a collaborative, cooperative approach, the provision of the National Fleet is also supported by the Australian Government. Under the current funding agreement approximately half of the fixed costs of the fleet are met by the Commonwealth, with the remainder met by Member States and Territories. Agencies utilising the aircraft meet operating costs. For the past three years the Australian Government's base contribution amounted to \$5.5m annually (exclusive of GST).
- vii. Funding support from the Australian Government is provided through a formal agreement between the Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTaRS, who administer the arrangement on behalf of the Commonwealth) and NAFC.
- viii. In recent years, the National Fleet has comprised around 23 specialised aircraft. For the 2006/07 fire season, given the high bushfire risk, the fleet was increased to 31 aircraft with additional funding support of \$2.5m from the Australian Government.
- ix. In the 2005/06 season alone, National Fleet aircraft made 8,567 firebombing drops delivering an estimated 18,160,230 litres of suppressant/retardant.
- x. Currently all Australian States and mainland Territories participate in NAFC, with the exception of the Northern Territory.
- xi. NAFC also plays a key role in ensuring standardisation of operating practices for use of aircraft in fire management across Australia. Appropriate standardisation is an important requirement for sharing of aircraft and support resources, and also to ensure safety of operations.

## **PRESENTATION**

The Board of Directors of NAFC would like to make the following points for consideration by the Inquiry.

1. Use of aircraft to assist in the suppression of bushfires in Australia is a proven, efficient and cost-effective technique, providing valuable protection to the community.
2. The Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre has confirmed that aerial firefighting is an effective and efficient tool, provided that it is properly integrated, managed and supported.
3. In recent years, there have been significant improvements in aerial firefighting, by providing a national capability through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC). The collaborative approach also ensures optimum value for the investment made in aerial firefighting.
4. Australian Government funding has been a significant factor in catalysing the success of the NAFC arrangements.
5. Firefighters are likely to face extended, hotter fire seasons in the future, with more days of extreme fire danger. Forested rural-urban interface areas around population centres and water catchments are particularly at risk. There is an imperative to continue the current, efficient national arrangements, and in future to provide the enhanced capabilities necessary to meet forecast increased demand.

6. The NAFC arrangements have been a significant success, and represent an excellent example of cooperation and collaboration between governments to achieve a better result for the community. The model is simple and practical and works well.
7. This effective business model is likely to have wider applicability, in particular to national coordination of fire management resources other than aircraft.
8. The business model is also likely to be applicable to activities other than fire suppression. As an example, there is potential to share resources for activities such as hazard reduction burning. Achievement of hazard reduction often depends on time-critical access to surge capacity and would thus benefit from co-ordinated national resource sharing arrangements.