ROYAL COMMISSION INTO NATIONAL NATURAL DISASTER ARRANGEMENTS

QUEENSLAND GOVERNMENT'S FIFTH IMPLEMENTATION PROGRESS REPORT

JANUARY 2024

Queensland has already experienced a challenging start to the 2023-24 severe weather season with bushfires, cyclones, storms and flooding significantly impacting the state. The Queensland Government has continued to invest in improvements to disaster management arrangements, implementing lessons learned from previous seasons, including recommendations from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNNDA) to improve our planning and preparation in the lead up to the season as well as our ability to respond, now and into the future.

In the past six months, the Queensland Government has delivered a further four RCNNDA recommendations in relation to aerial firefighting capability (recommendation 8.3), the classification, recording and sharing of fuel load data (recommendation 17.3), and national natural disaster risk information (recommendations 4.3 and 4.4), with 33 recommendations supported by the State now considered delivered. Queensland continues to work with the Commonwealth, state, territory and local governments to progress other larger, national projects through the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee and the National Emergency Management Ministers' Meeting.

- The Queensland Government has supported the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) to implement its National Aerial Firefighting Strategy 2021-26, which encourages an Australian-based aerial firefighting industry, where possible. In 2022-23, 95 per cent of leased firefighting aircraft were resident in Australia year-round, with seventy-five percent owned and operated by Australian companies. Within Queensland, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) had contract arrangements in place with NAFC for the 2023-24 bushfire season for 13 dedicated aircraft and access to over 150 call-when needed aircraft. These call-when needed aircraft are predominately Queensland-based service providers.

- Queensland has adopted a nationally consistent approach to classifying fuel load data through adoption of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) Bushfire Fuel Data Dictionary. With the implementation of the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System in 2022, Queensland is able to share information on fuel loads with the Australian, state, territory and local governments. This data sharing supports decision making for emergency services in preparation and response to areas with an increased bushfire risk.

- The Queensland Government has supported the development of natural disaster risk information products by the Australian Climate Service (ACS) and applied these tools to support operational and strategic decision making for disaster management purposes in Queensland. QFES has partnered with the ACS to continue the development of the Australian Exposure Information Platform (AEIP) and the Natural Hazard Impact and Risk Service (NHIRS), which provides a vital consistent impact modelling service for operational and strategic decision making.

An application of this service is through the Severe Wind Hazard Assessment for Queensland (SWHA-Q). The project was a collaboration between QFES, Department of Environment and Science (DES), James Cook University Cyclone Testing Station (JCU CTS) and Geoscience Australia (GA). The SWHA-Q was released on 3 August 2022.

Outputs included a publicly available assessment of the current and future tropical cyclone wind hazard for two emission scenarios using modelling out to 2100 (a first for anywhere in Australia), two scenario impact assessments for seven coastal locations, the Tropical Cyclone Preparedness Guide, and an operational tool to support preparedness decisions for tropical cyclones (the Tropical Cyclone Impact Model). This statewide assessment highlighted the risk to South East Queensland which has been explored in detail through the Severe Wind Hazard Assessment for South East Queensland Project (SWHA-SEQ).

The SWHA-SEQ was delivered in December 2022 through a partnership between Queensland Government, six coastal Local Governments, the insurance sector and a technical team led by Geoscience Australia to analyse the severe wind risk, the reduction in risk with three retrofit options and the associated cost-benefit within South East Queensland.

Figure 1: Method for the SWHA-SEQ project

This project has contributed to the implementation of national and state resilience strategies, with local government partners progressively applying the evidence base within their disaster management planning and being supported to build resilience to Tropical Cyclones in the longer term.[1] The Queensland Government continues to collaborate with the ACS to advance the capabilities delivered by the Australian Government for application at local, state and national level.

Work is continuing to be progressed to deliver the remaining 36 recommendations relevant to Queensland, noting the majority of these require national collaboration. The Queensland Government remains committed to ensuring it is best placed to continue delivering emergency services to Queenslanders and will continue to enhance efforts to progress RCNNDA recommendations at the state and national level to continually improve the disaster resilience, preparedness, response and recovery of Queensland communities.

[1] Preparing for the expected – Tropical Cyclones in South East Queensland Dr Jane Sexton, Michael Tait, Heidi Turner, Craig Arthur, David Henderson and Mark Edwards. Australian Journal of Emergency Management Volume 38 No. 4 October 2023 (accessible from https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/ajem-october-2023-preparing-for-the-expected-tropical-cyclones-in-south-east-queensland/)