

Australia's Bushfire Preparedness is Still Exposed – October 2020

'Could bushfires of 2019-20 be repeated without lessons learned being addressed? ARPI raises an alert that the answer is still 'yes' in October 2020. Improvements in preparedness, while showing signs of change, are not matched by fundamental preventive action, nor a move to more effective, national co-ordination. 'Who is responsible?' and 'what is happening?' remain primary concerns.

ARPI summarises the current situation as follows:

1. A clear future point of national, border-less responsibility, remains to be published;
2. Reports of disharmony exist among Federal, State and Territory Governments regarding approaches to 'risk management.' Worse still, that information is not being shared;
3. Entrenched public sector thinking is keeping 'risk' consideration to last-century 'risk management' processes which have been identified as 'mechanical, linear, silo-centric and based on risks behaving rationally.' COVID-19 has destroyed this fallacy;
4. 'Draft Propositions' published by the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements: Summer 2019/2020 Australian Bushfires, arguably do not focus sufficiently on prevention or preventive measures;
5. Bushfires arise simply from a combination of (excessive) fuel, oxygen and ignition;
6. Levels of critical fuel reduction and back-burning are reportedly well below 50% of minimum levels required for the approaching summer – ARPI awaits publication of the latest levels of achievement;
7. Reliance on a forecast 'wet summer' is high risk in both the short and longer terms as, at best, a wet summer will present a greater fuel load for 2021-22, leading to higher bushfire risks then;
8. What lessons are being learned about changes in 'nature' from the present bushfires in the USA;
9. Continuing to pursue the traditional silo-approach to the concept of bushfire risk, rather than a network-centric approach as developed and promoted by ARPI, enabling early, preventive action against bushfires at the point of vulnerability, means that governments at all levels are exposed to not having the right information at the right time - and thereby failing to act faster; and
10. ARPI also challenges governments in Australia to publicly declare their awareness of and that appropriate measures have been taken and are in place, as bushfire response strategies, to overcome what is being alleged globally (through informed 'networks') that 5G lacks resilience particularly during crises – in terms of security, reliability and sustainability.

In conclusion, 'It's Time' and 'It's Not Too Late' - but the clock and fires do not stop for indecision.

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