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I am making this submission as	General public
Submission type	Personal
Organisation making the submission (if applicable)	
Your position in the organisation (if applicable)	Consultant
Consent to make submission public	Public
Your story	I was with the NSW Rural Fire Service for 24 years as both a volunteer and as staff. I have held various positions, in a number of areas, with experience hazard reduction, community education, preparedness, development assessment, fire management planning , training and incident management. I have been involved with bush fire preparedness and mitigation with experience in Bush Fire Risk Management Plans since 1997 as well as experience in planning and conducting prescribed burns and the training of personnel on both prescribed burn planning and conduct prescribed burning. I developed the Bush Fire Emergency Evacuation Guideline for the NSWRFS to support vulnerable developments in the event of a bush fire. I have nearly 20 years of experience working within incident management teams in various roles, and I am qualified in a number of functional areas (incident control, operations, planning and logistics). I was the coordinator of the multi agency incident management training for the NSWRFS for 3 years prior to taking

	redundancy in August 2018, due to the relocation of the training functions to Dubbo. My experience extends to have developed training packages for the RFS, including incident management, bush fire mitigation, community safety. I have continued to work in the area of bush fire management and incident management trainer as a consultant where I have worked in ACT and QLD.
1.1 Causes and contributing factors	
1.2 Preparation and planning	Bush fire mitigation and preparedness requires a multi facet approach from building location, construction materials, standards, to vegetation management of creating and maintaining cleared and managed areas around buildings, strategic prescribed burning, land management burning, and community preparedness. Hazard reduction burning is a very generic term and both the media and public have a very generalised understanding, yet it is often the primary issue highlighted for the cause of bush fires and property losses. This often results in government pushing for a quotas, connecting fire service budgets with area burnt, of which still does not address the issue pf properties not prepared. Prescribed burning, (burning of vegetation under predetermined conditions of fuel moisture, fuel loadings and weather conditions) has become lest strategic and more about area burnt for government reporting purposes. It appears that hazard reduction burning is more about quantity rather than quality. The focus on prescribed burns needs to move away from amount of area burnt and needs to become more strategic to provide fuel reduced areas around developments. This does not disregard the land management burning that is conducted across national parks and reserves, state forests, agricultural lands. These burns are planned and conducted in accordance of the land management strategies for those lands, and should continue as per their management plans. The strategic area that needs to be focused on, is the area of land around development extending out to around 150 metres or natural barrier. This area is where the focus of strategic prescribed burns should be to provide a buffer of fuel reduced bush land between properties and a large bush fire. Bush Fire Risk Management Plans have areas identified as Strategic Fire Advantage Zones, however they have moved from managing the area to have less than 5 tonnes per hectare (which was generally un achievable due to environmental requirements) to managing the fuel to be less than “high” in accordance with “Overall Fuel Hazard”. Environmental legislation and codes, do not allow for these areas to be managed to have minimal ground fuel and are often required to have generally 7 to 15 years between burns, depending on vegetation types and classifications etc, thus allowing fuel loadings to build. The purpose of a Strategic Fire Advantage Zone is “To provide strategic areas of fire protection advantage which will reduce the speed and intensity of bush fires, and reduce the potential for spot fire development; To aid containment of wildfires to existing management boundaries”, however current burning regimes provide no real strategic advantage as they do not provide a regularly managed fuel reduced area. There needs to be an area around properties, suggested up to 150m or to a natural fire barrier such as water way or cliff line etc, and allow prescribed burns to be conducted more frequently, potentially every 1 to 2 years, depending on fuel loadings. Recommendation – smaller, more regular burns allow for less resources and more flexibility in conducting burns. To support burning operations, there needs to be increased opportunities to have private fire services either conduct burns on private lands and also to assist agency burns. Recommendation – allow for areas surrounding development up

	to 150m to be regarded as Strategic Fire Advantage Zones allowing burning to be approved with more regularly burns between 1-5 years, depending on fuel loads, rather than a predetermined fire regime based on a vegetation community. The Bush Fire Environmental Assessment Code to be amended to allow for approval of burns for reducing the fine & ground fuels through low intensity burns. Recommendation: Allow & encourage private fire companies to conduct and assist with prescribed burning in accordance with any approval to burn provided to the land owners. Allow for agencies that have a land management role to engage private fire services to assist and conduct burns on agency land. This is not aimed at reducing the burning conducted by the volunteer brigades of the NSWRFS but to assist, supplement and conduct those burns that they may not be able to do. Recommendation: Develop a register of private fire services that may be engaged to assist with prescribed burning and fire suppression activities. Planning for Bush Fire Protection was introduced to build the capacity of developments to with stand the impacts of bush fire and to assist with provisions of access and water supply for fire fighting purposes. This has, in my belief, proven to be very effective and a leading policy in fire management. However, there is no requirement for maintaining these initial standards that were implemented at construction stage. It is the lack of property and building management that creates an environment around a structure that allows embers to take hold and cause damage or potentially complete destruction of a building. There should be something in place that encourages the maintenance of property and buildings in bush fire prone areas, and to penalise those that don't. Why can't the insurance companies have policy in place that takes into account both construction standard and ongoing maintenance where by there are reductions in policy premiums for those that comply. There should be annual inspections, at a cost such as the annual fire statements for buildings, where a qualified person inspects and rates the property on behalf of the insurance company or fire service. Other countries have similar opportunities with insurance companies conducting inspections. Possibly where a property is no maintained, it is submitted to the NSWRFS for as a hazard complaint.
1.3 Response to bushfires	Use of Aircraft: There has been a significant increase in the use of the Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT) however there is only one limited study to show it's effectiveness in different vegetation types and fire intensity nor the cost effectiveness. Deployment of aircraft should have strategies identified within Incident Action Plans, and need to include how that strategy is supported by ground resources, and backed by cost benefit analysis. In numerous deployments of aircraft, in particular the VLAT and LAT, the strategy was to simply "slow the fire". The intent to have time to deploy ground or other strategies such as time of day for a fire to reach a specific location or "trigger point' where some other action/strategy was to be instigated. The cost of operating these types of aircraft, cost of retardant and supporting costs are substantial and is suspected to be the highest cost involved in fire suppression. The cost benefits in aircraft deployment and strategies need to be reviewed, policies developed on how to conduct the cost benefit analysis (cost of aircraft deployment verse assets to be protected etc). Due to the substantial costs involved and the potential for the strategy to be in effective, there needs to be more accountability and justification. Unfortunately it appears that the governments are inclined to make decisions on contracting and deploying VLAT and LAT aircraft based on social media and other media commentary

	rather than a strategy to use the right aircraft for the specific tasking. Recommendation: The use of aircraft (LAT and VLAT) to have a cost benefit analysis conducted, during major incidents, to ensure that proposed strategies, cost of aircraft, ground support strategies and the consequences are properly considered. Incident Management Teams to include a finance officer that is able to support the planning and operations in conducting cost benefit analysis on strategies within an Incident Action Plan. Use of Private Resources: Fire services contract aircraft, logistics such as accommodation, catering, transport, why not utilise private fire companies that have a range of resources to support fire operations? I am aware of 6 different fire fighting vehicles that were available throughout the fire season that could have supported agency resources. These resources could have been used such as on air bases to free up other fire agency resources. Within these private fire companies, there are a number of qualified and experienced firefighters that could have been utilised on fire appliances, remote fire crews or other taskings, to support fire operations. Over the past 18 months there have been a number qualified and experienced Incident Management Team personnel that left the fire services for different reasons. These persons could have been contracted to assist and supplement the numerous incident management teams across the state. There were a couple of these persons that continued as volunteers of the NSW Rural Fire Service, where others did not. Those that did remain as volunteers did undertake various roles in incident management teams, however there was no 'call out' or avenue for those to make themselves available. Some of these had over 20 years of experience with the NSW Rural Fire Service. Recommendation: Have a resource database, similar to that of the Heavy Plant Register of private fire companies with their resources, availability, IMT personnel etc. There should be a similar contractual arrangement where these resources may be engaged and deployed to a fireground. These resources can assist in impact assessments and other type of incidents such as storms and floods.
1.4 Any other matters	After Action Reviews – After action reviews of major incidents should be conducted by non agency personnel that are experienced in fire operations. The intent is to be able to have a non biased approach to reviewing strategies & decision making reasoning. The intent is to have an open and honest review without any focus of blame and utilised as lessons learned to assist with policy and training review to build and improve fire responses. There needs to be a system for the collection of 'lessons' from After Action Reviews that are reviewed with consideration to review current practices and policies and amend as new 'lessons' are identified. Currently there is no system that allows for this within the NSWRFS. There needs to be greater acceptance of the use of experienced fire consultants to assist agencies with reviews of after action reports to provide non biased advice.
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