



Strategic Framework

2020 – 2025



This Framework was developed prior to finalisation of the report by the Royal Commission into National, Natural Disaster Arrangements.

It will be reviewed in light of the implementation of recommendations.



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Introduction

The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) was formed by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) in 2003 through a partnership between the federal government and state and territory governments to deliver cooperative national arrangements for the provision of aerial firefighting resources for combating bushfires.

NAFC is now a mature, proven capability that serves the fire and emergency sector and the nation well, saving millions of dollars annually¹ through the provision of specialised services as well as generating a range of other benefits.

NAFC’s *Strategic Framework* identifies directions over the next five years for NAFC to support the fire and emergency sector in providing the best possible service to their communities.

1 KPMG identified that through the collective purchasing of services NAFC saved in the order of \$8 million annually through the provision of centralised and coordinated services.



Photo: Wayne Rigg

Operating environment

Trends

Trends in fire and emergency management that may impact on future aviation service delivery include:

- > Greater severity of extreme weather events with longer fire seasons, more serious bushfires, storm, heatwave and cyclone events
- > Increasing demand for aviation, as aerial support becomes important in a wider range of circumstances due to climate factors, the impacts of demographic change and developments in technology and capability
- > Migration to multi-hazard, all communities, all-of-the-time approach to service delivery
- > Inter-jurisdictional resource sharing is becoming routine
- > Community expectations that governments will take a national approach to strategic resourcing for dealing with major events and emergencies
- > Increasing focus on fostering resilience of communities and being better prepared for emergencies
- > Emergency service volunteer availability under strain in some states, especially in less populated areas, while spontaneous volunteers may be more prevalent
- > Increased likelihood of overlapping fire seasons in the northern and southern hemispheres leading to competition for specialised aviation resources

Trends in the aviation sector that need to be considered when planning future service delivery include:

- > Increasingly complex operating environment with more constraining legislation
- > Significant expansion of options for optimising capability (e.g. larger, faster aircraft; increased availability of ex-military aircraft, remotely and optionally piloted aircraft)
- > Major developments in technical capabilities such as information gathering systems, communications systems, and simulation
- > Airframes or some services nearing the end of their service life
- > Increasing use of aviation firefighting resources in other countries, potentially creating pricing pressures

Strategic Directions for Fire and Emergency Services in Australia and New Zealand

In 2017, the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) and the then LCCS endorsed the *Strategic Directions for Fire and Emergency Services in Australia and New Zealand 2017–2021*. The *Strategic Directions* articulate national principles and directions that directly influence NAFC's *Strategic Framework*, while NAFC activities contribute to the sector's strategic achievements.

The *Strategic Directions* guide NAFC's goals and objectives, noting that the document identifies the national principles as:

- > Primacy of life
- > Trust and confidence
- > Interoperability through partnerships
- > Accountability

Governance

NAFC provides a cooperative national arrangement, that realises opportunities to contract and use specialised, highly mobile resources through national collaboration.

NAFC operates as a business unit of AFAC, the National Council for Fire and Emergency Services. The 2018 merger of NAFC into AFAC provided an opportunity to realise additional benefits by developing further synergies with New Zealand and the National Resource Sharing Centre. The operation of NAFC is overseen by the AFAC Board, through the NAFC Strategic Committee. The NAFC Strategic Committee comprises nominees from each Australian jurisdiction.

The Australian Government provides \$26 million annually for aerial firefighting capabilities through NAFC as a co-contribution to the funding provided by states and territories. The funding is administered through an agreement with the Department of Innovation, Industry and Science on behalf of Emergency Management Australia.

NAFC's Strategic Framework

Responsibilities

NAFC, through AFAC, is responsible for:

- > Establishing and maintaining a national Resource Management Agreement, including supporting systems and procedures
- > Managing the funding agreement with the Australian Government
- > Contracting of aircraft services and identifying potential synergies
- > Matching capability requirements to service providers
- > Developing and maintaining national support systems such as ARENA
- > Supporting aviation specific research and development, leveraging national synergies
- > Supporting collaboration groups, in particular the Fire and Emergency Aviation Technical Group (FEAT)
- > Supporting development of aviation related national doctrine

Members (States and Territories) are responsible for:

- > Identification of capability requirements
- > Approving or endorsing contract arrangements to meet member needs
- > Operational management, tasking and support
- > Operational facilitation of resource sharing
- > Operational quality assurance
- > User charges and invoice payment

CCOSC is responsible for:

- > Facilitating strategic decision making by Commissioners and Chiefs regarding inter-jurisdictional positioning and movement of aerial resources beyond cross border, bilateral arrangements
- > Maintaining the National Resource Sharing Centre to monitor situational awareness and interstate movement of aerial assets
- > Influencing the Australian Government regarding funding support

Vision

Excellence in the provision of aviation support to fire and emergency services protecting life, property and the environment.

Purpose

Our purpose is to deliver aerial support to NAFC members through national collaboration and cooperation; delivering a safe, effective and efficient aerial capability; supporting and enhancing fire and emergency management in Australia.

Operating principles

- > Procurement of aviation resources will be efficient, fit for purpose, provide value for money and result in contracts with quality companies, supporting preservation of life on the ground and in the air
- > Capabilities of fire and emergency aviation will be optimised through resource sharing, cooperation, collaboration and communication with federal, state and territory governments, international bodies and industry partners
- > NAFC will maintain the highest levels of probity and integrity
- > Use of financial, human and physical resources will be sustainable, appropriate and based on consistent assessment of risk
- > Decision making regarding the application of aerial resources will be based on evidence and research.
- > Aerial capabilities will be managed by competent, trained people and supported by robust systems and processes
- > NAFC will provide leadership across the sector and promote a culture of continuous improvement, promoting gender equality in all aspects of its business and activities

Goals

Promoting safety on the ground and in the air is paramount. While NAFC has no legal responsibilities for safe aircraft operations, safety is the overarching, principal consideration. NAFC contributes through stipulating standards for contractors, pilots and aircraft; and identifying and promoting national competencies for personnel involved in managing, supervising and supporting aviation activities.

1 — Procuring capability

NAFC contracts over 150 highly specialised services with aviation industry suppliers.

NAFC members require procurement activity which efficiently matches available resources to well defined specifications, providing value for money and quality of service.

The aviation industry, in particular the utility aviation sector, faces challenges such as ageing airframes, industry demographics, regulatory change and volatile markets.

NAFC needs to plan for generational change and the development of new capabilities. Having staff who are familiar with and prepared to further explore and innovate is an important capability multiplier for NAFC and members.

The capability of NAFC contracted services has increased significantly and is likely to continue to expand through activities such as:

- > Support to the all-hazards environment – NAFC has shifted from solely supporting bushfire operations to providing a broader emergency capability, as well as support to land management activities
- > Night operations – Night operations offer opportunities when fire behaviour is subdued due to higher humidity, cooler temperatures and reduced winds. Night reconnaissance operations provide valuable information for affected communities and for incident management
- > Remotely piloted aircraft systems (RPAS) – RPAS (UAVs, or drones) capability is developing rapidly and NAFC is seeking to harness the interest and potential of RPAS while also conscious that unmanaged RPAS activity may endanger other aerial operations
- > Simulation – Use of simulation technology promises to improve the capacity to effectively train, manage, supervise and support aviation, resulting in an increase in capability

Objectives

- > Appropriate aerial support for all hazards and all agencies is contracted, supporting states and territories
- > NAFC advocates within the aviation industry for a modern, capable fleet; good practice and fit-for-purpose aircraft
- > NAFC procures multi-role and multi-capability aircraft where appropriate from a range of quality vendors to ensure resilient capability
- > Through States and Territories, maintain local arrangements with the Australian Defence Force to enhance base support
- > Support is provided for night capability development, including implementation of appropriate risk controls
- > Support is provided for development of RPAS capability, including implementation of appropriate risk controls; maintaining detailed collaboration between the emergency management sector, vendors and regulators
- > NAFC will work with the aviation industry to identify mitigations for potential shortages in key personnel, including advocacy for gender equality in staff development and retention.
- > Use of simulation is promoted as a means of enhancing capability
- > A *National Aerial Firefighting Strategy* is developed

2 — Support to operations

A national Resource Management Agreement and national support systems and processes are maintained.

NAFC operates a national Resource Management Agreement (RMA) with all Australian jurisdictions being parties to the RMA. This provides the authorising environment for NAFC to contract resources on their behalf and to establish mechanisms for sharing of aviation resources.

NAFC provides national standards, systems and processes to support sourcing, administration and management of aviation resources. Through the development of ARENA, states and territories have the ability to identify, track, task aircraft, performance monitor, process payments and record keep, as well as improve situational awareness. ARENA provides data for analysis of aviation operations, supporting improvements in effectiveness and efficiency. ARENA also provides national visibility of aviation assets, supporting resource sharing.

The AFAC National Council manages interstate and international arrangements through the Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee (CCOSC). The CCOSC identifies operational resource requirements that may need to be deployed interstate and this is facilitated by the AFAC National Resource Sharing Centre.

Objectives

- > Maintain the Resource Management Agreement
- > Maintain national supporting standards, systems and processes, including ARENA
- > Support CCOSC, through the NRSC, to maintain national situation awareness of aviation resourcing and to facilitate sharing of aviation assets
- > Develop and provide decision support tools for resource allocation
- > Support the development of national resource sharing initiatives such as personnel registries and ARENA for Heavy Plant
- > Develop ARENA to provide increased support for in-field management of aviation resources
- > Reporting functionality is enhanced and developed, including to support efficient financial management, procurement and contracting.

3 — Specialist advice and informing expectations

Aviation is a highly visible asset with strong political influences. Aviation is, however, a limited resource which is relatively expensive, and can have significant operational limitations.

Best use of limited resources and conveying realistic limitations and shaping expectations to governments and the community in general is important.

Fire and emergency service personnel need to be well versed in the best use of aviation resources. While there are valid arguments for increased capability, the sector needs to be conscious of commercial pressure from vendors that can influence attitudes towards employing additional services that operationally may be of limited benefit.

Objectives

- > Delivery of specialist aerial firefighting advice to inform decision makers in a timely fashion
- > Improved understanding of aviation capabilities, their application and limitations in the fire and emergency sector.
- > Community education and communication strategies are developed and maintained.
- > Governments are regularly briefed.

4 — Governance and business planning

In 2019–20, Australian states and territories expended almost \$500 million on aviation resources to support fire and emergency services. \$26 million is provided annually from the Australian Government as a co-sharing arrangement with states and territories.

Fleet enhancements in recent years have seen significant increase in capabilities that provide national capacity. Large fixed wing airtankers are extremely mobile and able to take out quickly and are able to deploy across the country or operate effectively in multiple jurisdictions in the one day. Specialist reconnaissance and intelligence gathering aircraft can likewise service multiple jurisdictions and benefit from a seamless national approach to communications and data delivery.

Through the collective purchase of services NAFC saves in the order of \$8 million annually through centralised and coordinated services. The analysis also identified substantial intangible savings flowing from the collaborative approach to provision and sharing of resources facilitated by NAFC.

Objectives

- > The NAFC Strategic Committee operates effectively, with a national focus.
- > High quality, best practice and efficient procurement processes are provided.
- > Longer term funding and procurement cycles are reviewed, including options for alternative procurement models such as capital investment and inter-jurisdictional purchasing.
- > Participation of New Zealand in NAFC is considered.
- > A National Aerial Firefighting Strategy is developed and maintained

5 — Promoting research and development

Evidence based decision making is important to NAFC. Aviation activities are expensive and specialised but may impact significantly on outcomes for communities.

NAFC seeks to identify the most efficient and effective application of aerial resources, including aircraft delivery systems, that will maximise the impact of aerial firefighting on the ground.

NAFC will continue to monitor international development and best practice to provide expertise and supplement procurement activity where necessary to develop a diverse fleet.

Objectives

- > Work through the AFAC Research Committee to identify research priorities and to develop an aviation research and innovation roadmap.
- > Mechanisms are established to coordinate and collaborate on research and development activities and to actively share information, resources and lessons.
- > NAFC contracting systems and related processes promote and direct innovation.
- > Maintain international networks of expertise for the sharing of new technology and information.



Level 1, 340 Albert Street East Melbourne Victoria 3002

☎ +61 3 9419 2388 ✉ info@nafc.org.au 🌐 www.nafc.org.au