

Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management
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I agree to my submission being treated as outlined in the “Guide to providing submissions” on the IGEM website.

Dear Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management Review Team,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the 2018 Queensland Bushfires Review. This submission is made on behalf of the Queensland Conservation Council Inc. (QCC). QCC was established in 1969 and is the peak environment conservation organisation in Queensland, with some 50-member groups including ten regional councils, as well as thousands of supporters.

We note that the review is focused on key preparedness and response elements for both bushfires and hot weather events, with scope to reflect on the heatwaves in Far North Queensland in November 2018. QCC recognises the tragedy of recent extreme weather events, with loss of life, extensive property damage and the loss of areas of the state’s natural heritage that will take hundreds of years to recover.

The cumulative impacts of climate change, including unprecedented extreme temperatures and increased variability in rainfall that have led to the warming and drying of previously humid, subtropical areas¹. Further information on this issue can be found in the Climate Council’s recent report *Escalating Queensland Bushfire Threat: Interim conclusions* and *Be prepared: Climate Change and the Queensland Bushfire threat*.

The impacts of climate change have destabilised Queensland’s historically fire resilient rainforests such as those in the Eungella National Park and Deepwater National Park and led to the catastrophic fire conditions experienced. Alternatively, the value of healthy natural ecosystems found in conservation areas and beyond contribute to community resilience to disasters such as bushfires. For example, littoral thickets (an endangered plant species found in rainforests along the east coast of Australia) have natural fire retardant qualities that benefit both the natural ecosystems and surrounding populations.

¹ <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41558-019-0397-9>

If we are to reduce the risk of fire and extreme heat, climate action needs to become a priority. The 2017 Queensland Climate Adaptation and Climate Transition Strategies acknowledge the threat of climate change and commit to meeting zero-net emissions by 2050, in line with the Paris Agreement. The majority of the public have felt the bushfires and heatwaves and know climate change is the cause.

On the frontlines of climate change are the people in communities throughout Queensland who care for sick and injured wildlife. For example, in Cairns during the extreme temperatures late last year, 23,000 spectacled flying foxes literally fell from the sky and died from heat exhaustion. The heatwaves are estimated to have effectively killed one-third of the national population of spectacled flying foxes and left communities reeling with the scale of the mass deaths.

The impacts on nature and wildlife are traditionally not represented in the disaster management space. Human, property and industry interests have been the predominant focus, continually failing to recognise the valuable ecosystem services that the natural environment provides. This submission calls for a more integrated disaster management approach that includes the preparation of high-value ecological communities for extreme weather events. When responding to bushfire and hot weather events, consideration needs to be given to natural communities (e.g. rainforests, woodlands and wildlife) along with those that provide care and support for them.

In order to understand the local environmental impacts and recommendations to improve preparedness and response of natural systems to bushfires and hot weather events, we recommend that your office seek advice from:

1. Mackay Conservation Group (Eungella National Park);
2. Gladstone Conservation Council (Deepwater National Park);
3. Capricorn Conservation Council (Byfield National Park and Carnarvon National Park); and
4. Cairns and Far North Environment Centre (Spectacled Flying fox)

QCC would also like to see the outcomes of this review process include recommendations for:

1. Application of and research into traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land management practices;
2. A whole of government response to climate change mitigation, beginning with a rapid transition to a zero net emissions economy;
3. Consideration of the contribution of carbon emissions and climate change to the conditions that facilitated these natural disasters;
4. Consideration of the impact of the loss of ecological communities (such as the spectacled flying foxes and rainforest) on the health, wellbeing and livelihoods of Queenslanders; and



5. Consideration of ecological communities - particularly ecosystems with a high biodiversity value, when responding to climate disasters such as bushfires and heatwaves.

We anticipate this review will deliver a robust set of recommendations reflecting that human-caused climate change, not environmental conservation measures, is the main driver behind the bushfires and extreme weather events such as those impacting on Queensland communities alongside our unique biodiversity and ecosystems upon which they rely.

Yours sincerely,

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