



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into the Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026

Submission number: 001

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Date authorised for publication: 5 August 2026

From:
To: [LA Committee - Legal](#)
Subject: Sub to Emergencies amendment bill
Date: Thursday, 30 July 2026 11:35:34 AM
Attachments: [image001.png](#)

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Inquiry into the Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026

Submission by Gregor Manson BSc(Forestry)

I am unable to see/find any 'purpose and explanation' for the proposed amendments to the Emergency Act 2004. With out this explanation it is difficult to respond in detail to the proposed amendments. However in the absence of that explanation and purpose I provide following comments for your consideration.

Extreme weather seasons occurred cyclically around 15 years up to the 1980's and now it is 5 to 10 years. In addition biosecurity and other risks have also seen core drivers change.

The adage of " knowledge, experience and application" remains essential for meeting best practice management standards for disasters/emergencies together with attendant Planning, Preparation, Response and Recovery best practice standards.

The lessons learnt from the disastrous 2003 bushfire in ACT may be expressed simply as:

KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERINCE WERE NOT APPLIED IN THE ACT BUSHFIRE MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS FOR SOME 10 YEARS PRIOR TO THE EVENT AND THAT LEAD TO SIGNIFICANT GAPS IN PLANNING,PREPAPRATION AND RESPONSE CAPABILITY.

The lack of independent expert review and oversight of bushfire risk management reporting directly to Minister/Cabinet let the Government and community down pre 2003..

The ACT Government accepted the coroner's report and acted on the expert review advice and established the Emergencies Service Act 2004.

The ESA Act 2004 had a number of specific checks and balances that seek to avoid a repeat of the 2003 scenario above. Those checks and balances cut across all risks ensuring appropriate reviews and maintaining regular collegiate behaviours to support best possible preparedness for any emergency be it biotech, flood, fire et al. These proposed amendments will effectively cease those checks and cease independent review and advice to Minister.

The previous ESA Act amendments to effectively 'abolish the bushfire advisory committee' has led to and seen some ten years of inaction to plan, prepare and respond to best practice standards. There has been negligible risk reduction and response preparation. Any look at the expert submissions and reports to the 2020 and recent 2026 Assembly bushfire related reviews demonstrate clearly negligible risk management actions in Brindabellas, City edge (BAZ) and rural properties actions remain unreported. Any expert review of the Orroral Valley 2020 bushfire also demonstrates a complete return to pre 2003 scenario. The coroners report was a farce arriving some five years after the event and still no access to submissions is available after six years. The MHAC reviews and recommendations 'have been ignored" and the last publicly available meeting minutes are December 2023 on ESA website..

The disbanding of Bushfire Advisory committee in 2015ish and now this proposal for disbanding MHAC is contrary to Assembly's previous acceptance of lessons learnt/ described in 2003 reports. An agency can implement an ad hoc advisory committee anytime to assist it's development and management of specific risks. However the key major risk oversight must be legislated. This allows the Minister to be independently assured/advised by an expert panel without vested interests.

Occasionally senior public servants miss the key requirements of implementing legislation – Our emergency services can avoid this by having statutory expert panel oversight and direct Ministerial reporting. This is a win win providing expert advice to the ESA and checks and balances to the Assembly/Community

It is astonishing that anyone with an ounce of senior emergency management experience would suggest the dissolving of an expert advisory committee with direct access to community input and as an independent o advisor to the Minister without constraints.

The function of statutory committees is to ensure oversight and provide broad board member experience to support the prime elements of legislation to protect as best as possible the community.

I have discussed this amendment proposal with many senior executives involved in emergency management and all agree this is not appropriate and some have shown where this approach has been taken in other States a shambles resulted where senior bureaucrats got it wrong and nobody brought it to Ministers attention. I am happy to provide detailed examples if requested like NSW RFS fire trucks debacle.

It is critically essential for those in executive roles to have an 'independent expert advisory panel' to review and endorse risk plans, business plans, operational plans and review and report progress against those plans directly to the public and to directly to the Minister and broader Elected Government members.

I put it to you personally, from my 40 years' experience, that it is simply not possible for one Chief Officer or Commissioner to have all the knowledge, experience and application skills to run major natural disaster planning, preparation and response. The community is paying for ESA through rates and taxes and the costs for committees' advice is less than a single Large Aerial Tankers drop of retardant, approximately \$60,000p.a. The community are getting some 300 years of expert advice for virtually no cost. My experience is that committee members also contribute/donate hundreds of free hours to provide support.

My experience with the ACT Bushfire Advisory Committee in 2006-9 was an extraordinary level of support and advice and expert rigorous review of plans, policies and operations. You always felt you were aware of what was going well and what areas needed a hand up.

Lastly I have written to Assembly members recently outlining that the ESA Commissioner under an FOI request advised that ESA and MHAC do not maintain a risk consequence plan/table for natural disasters for ACT and no triage policy for bushfire response. Of the now informal identified risks only bushfire has a strategic plan that is available for public view i.e. no flood plan. no storm plan et al. See attachment 1 none of these subplans are public – one may ask do they actually exist??- reporting on subplan operational plans is also invisible assuming they occur.

My advice is that ACT government should provide a simple structured approach to a statutory advisory processes like an all-encompassing MHAC, SEMSOG, and less formal individual risk advisory panels for flood , biosecurity et al as appropriate to ensure support to Chief Officers and provide overt community input.

Gregor Manson BSc(Forestry)

Gregor Manson began his 40-year career in the Agro-Forestry industry including time as an RFS volunteer in central west NSW. Later he joined NSW NPWS in Blue Mountains as Chief Ranger and then Superintendent from 1985 to 1995. He progressed to other senior executive roles across state and federal government focused on natural resources and emergency management, including NPWS Director for Snowy Region, Executive Director of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park Authority and Commissioner of Emergency Services for the Australian Capital Territory. Gregor has a very strong track record in managing fire in the landscape, during many significant fire incidents and as an emergency controller. He has also played a significant role in developing training manuals and fire protection plans, teaching incident management skills and as a member of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Authorities Council and the Australian Emergency Management Committee and as a Director of the National Aerial Firefighting Centre. Gregor's focus has been on improving science-based land management, risk management and strategic planning. He has been a strong advocate for local planning through an all-of-agency approach, to build community ownership and resilience in managing risks and developing responses.

Attachment 1

