



Submission cover sheet

Inquiry into the Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026

Submission number: 004

Submitter: Forestry Australia

Date authorised for publication: 5 August 2026

**National Office**

PO Box 2585, North Ringwood, Victoria 3134

P: 03 7065 4250

E: admin@forestry.org.au

W: www.forestry.org.au

ABN: 48 083 197 586

ACT & Region

Prof Peter Kanowski, Chair

Fenner School of Environment & Society, ANU

30 July 2026

Standing Committee on Legal Affairs
ACT Legislative Assembly
Canberra

e: LAcommitteeLegal@parliament.act.gov.au

Dear Committee Chair and Members

Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026

Forestry Australia is the professional body representing over 1000 members who are forest scientists, professionals and managers operating in all aspects of forest and natural resource management, across Australia and internationally. We appreciate the opportunity to make a submission on the topic of the ACT Emergencies Amendment Bill 2026.

Our focus in this submission is the bushfire-related responsibilities of the Multi-Hazards Council. The McLeod Report into the 2003 Canberra bushfires noted that a Bushfire Council was first established in the ACT following the 1939 fires; its role was strengthened as a result of the McLeod Report recommendations, and expanded to that of a Multi-Hazards Council in 2021. The statutory role of the Council in providing advice to the Commissioner and Minister, and their obligations to consult with the Council, provide a mechanism for drawing on expertise and community representation to support both the natural hazards-related responsibilities of the Emergency Services Agency and the legitimacy of that work. Should the Amendment be passed, it appears that the role of the Council in those respects would be substantially diminished.

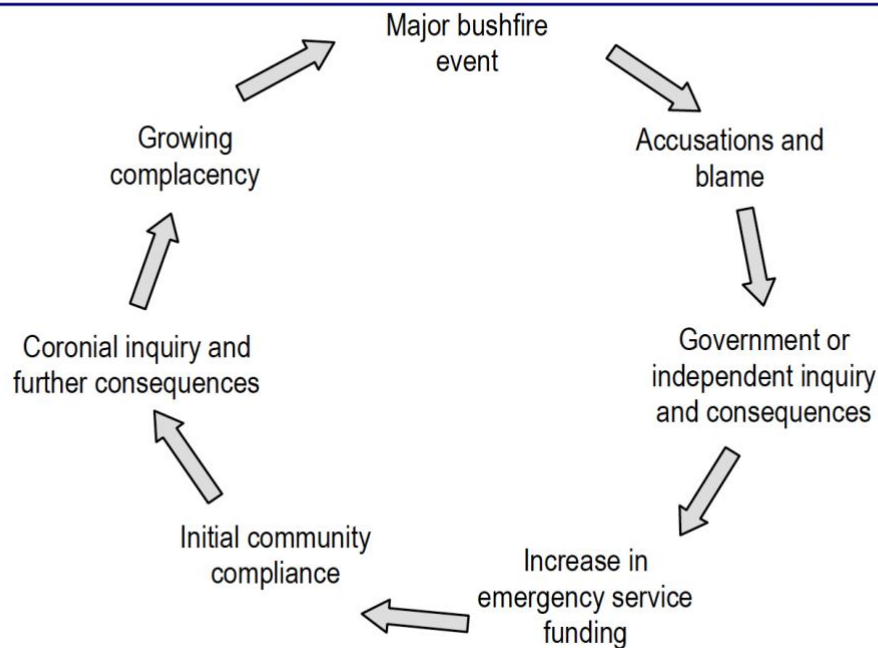
The proposed Amendment seems paradoxical in the light of the widely-accepted trajectory of bushfire risk in South-Eastern Australia, of a higher frequency of extreme and catastrophic fire risk days, and a concomitant increase in the likely frequency and severity of bushfires. The Black Summer bushfires of 2019-2020 illustrated this phenomenon. The Amendment also seems counter to the intention of the *National Risk Reduction Strategy*¹, including its Guiding Principle of Inclusive Engagement, which states "All sectors connect with diverse stakeholders to ensure inclusive decision-making leading to more effective solutions."

The 2004 COAG *National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management*², of which I was a panellist, identified what it termed a "bushfire cycle" (reproduced below) following major bushfire events in Australia. The Inquiry noted a common progression from event to forgetting and complacency, in both governments and the community. The proposed Amendment appears to be consistent with the pattern observed by the Inquiry.

¹ <https://www.nema.gov.au/about-us/governance-and-reporting/strategies-and-frameworks/disaster-risk-reduction>

² <https://apo.org.au/node/2359>

Figure 13.1 The bushfire cycle



(reproduced from COAG National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management, 2004, p229)

As a former member of the ACT Bushfire Council (2005 - 2010), I am conscious of the challenges for both the Council and the Emergency Services Agency in ensuring that the Council plays the most constructive and useful role possible. Whatever the reasons for the proposed Amendment, it seems unlikely - in the light of the points we make above - that the best solution to these challenges is to diminish the utility of the Council. Given the particular risks of bushfires to the ACT and Canberra, and the particular challenges of bushfire risk reduction and response compared to those of other natural hazards, a better solution might be to differentiate bushfire hazards from the wider range of natural hazards, and return to a model that provided bushfire-specific advice to the Commissioner and Minister about those elements of their responsibilities.

Forestry Australia would be pleased to discuss this submission and related matters with the Committee.

Yours sincerely

Peter Kanowski
Co-Chair, Forestry Australia, ACT & Region