



From: ACT Multi-Hazard Advisory Council

Date: January 2023

Subject: Annual Report on MHAC Activities

Background:

Under the ACT Multi-Hazard Advisory Council's Terms of Reference, the Council must report to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services annually on the activities the Council has undertaken in the previous year.

Report:

The newly formed ACT Multi-Hazard Advisory Council (the Council) was established under the 2021 amendments to the Emergencies Act 2004 (the Act), replacing the former ACT Bushfire Council. The amendments to the Act aligned the Council with the ACT Emergency Services Agency's Multi-Hazard approach to Emergency Management in the ACT. With a newly established Council membership base, including two former members of the ACT Bushfire Council, in early 2022 the Council's initial focus was to become familiar with the relevant agencies and issues. The Council also sought to identify areas of focus for its term (to September 2024), and to develop a workplan.

The Council identified six areas of focus for its term that 'cut across' all of the natural hazards that pose risks to the ACT, and wrote of this to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services in May 2022, providing him with the list of priorities and proposing to focus on Community in the first instance:

- Community
- Agency
- Strategy
- Infrastructure and Technology
- Urban Development
- Land Management

Accordingly, during the remainder of 2022 the Council explored the issues associated with Community Resilience to natural disasters. The Council met with representatives of each of the ACT Government Directorates to identify and understand existing strategies, initiatives and plans relevant to Community Resilience. Council also met with representatives from:

- the Australia Red Cross, to discuss how the Red Cross assist the community before, during and after a disaster,
 - Professor Jackie Schirmer from the University of Canberra, to understand her work with the regional wellbeing survey
 - Dr James O'Donnell from the ANU School of Demography, to understand data available on population changes in the ACT, including the changes in social, economic and demographic composition, and their effect on wellbeing and social cohesion
 - Members from the Weston Creek Community Council, to understand their views on existing and desirable mechanisms to support the community to prepare for, and respond to, natural hazards.
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Two Council members were funded by ACT Emergency Services Agency (ESA) to attend the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Conference in August 2022, which was run in conjunction with the annual conference of the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience. The Council has worked to synthesize the information gained through all of these interactions, to distil some advice on Community Resilience which it aims to provide to the Minister in February 2023.

The Council received presentations from representatives of the ESA on areas of planning and policy work, including on the framework for Hazard Specific Sub-Plans in relation to Flood, Extreme Heat, Elevated Fire Danger and Storms. These plans are reviewed following major operational events, or as per scheduled review timelines, and are in line with the national emergency risk assessment guidelines. The Council gave input and advice to the ACT State Emergency Service on the revised ACT Flood Sub Plan.

Presentations to Council included updates on programs or initiatives the ESA had been working on throughout 2022. Some notable programs were the National changes to the Australian Fire Danger Rating System, which commenced on 1 September 2022; the program of work to implement the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan 2019-2024 and the commencement of work to develop the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan 2024-2029.

The Council also received presentations on the Territory Wide Risk Assessment, the Climate Change Risk Assessment and presentations from representatives of the Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate on its relevant areas of policy and planning work, including the development of Bushfire Operations Plans, the residual risk approach to its regional fire management planning, and the Territory Planning System Reform project. The Council provided a response to the Draft Territory Plan and also provided input to the draft Murrumbidgee River Corridor Plan.

The Council has developed two reports following its work throughout 2022, the first is its advice to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on Community Resilience in the ACT (mentioned above). The second is a report on the Status of Bushfire Management in the ACT since the major fires in 2003, provided to the Minister on 16 December 2022.

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| Recommendation: | Note the information provided in this brief. |
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