



# ADF WILDERNESS FIREFIGHTING UNIT

## Waterbomber Unit for Defence Force

Protecting Australia's remote areas and communities

As the effects of global warming continue to bite, Australia needs the best possible response to tackle the increasing threat posed by bushfires. The Greens will establish a wilderness firefighting unit within the Australian Defence Force, and purchase three amphibious waterbombers to bolster Australia's aerial firefighting capacity.

The recent fires in Tasmania's precious wilderness, which burned through non-fire adapted forests, should be a wakeup call for our leaders.

For thousands of years, bushfire has been part of the Australian landscape, but the effects of global warming mean more days of extreme heat, drier summers and more dry lightning.

As a result of these factors, already vulnerable Australian landscapes are facing increased frequency and severity of bushfires.

Australia needs to adopt a world's best practice approach to aerial firefighting, and use every means at our disposal to support the efforts of our brave firefighters.

### > RECENT TASMANIAN FIRES

The wildfires that raged through Tasmania's wilderness, including vast areas of the Tasmanian Wilderness World Heritage Area (TWWHA) in January and February of 2016 were just the latest in what is becoming commonplace in Australia.

What made these fires different though was that much of what was burnt was rainforest. These were Gondwanan landscapes that until this year, have not have experienced a fire event since before the last ice-age.

Ultimately fire burnt through 72,000 hectares of Western Tasmania, including 22,000 hectares (around 1.4 percent) of the TWWHA.

With climate change, these kinds of extreme bushfire events are becoming the new normal.

In response to these fires, New Zealand Defence Force personnel were called into assist on the frontline, while Australian Defence Force personnel provided logistical and support services.

### > INCREASING AUSTRALIAN DEFENCE FORCE'S FIREFIGHTING CAPABILITY

The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has argued it has no bush-firefighting capability<sup>1</sup>, but what it can and often does provide in support of natural disaster response is its resources and expertise in logistics<sup>2</sup>. It also has some of the best trained and most capable personnel our country has for operating in emergency and hazardous situations. And they are a valuable public asset.

This coming financial year Defence has a Budget of around \$38bn (and around \$168bn over four years).

In that budget is 'Air Force Capabilities', which includes training and assets, funded at around \$28bn for this coming financial year. Wildfire response is also specified as one of the Australian Air Force's firefighting duties<sup>3</sup>. The budget also includes over \$22m in 2016-17 for "support for the Australian community and civilian authorities as required by Government"<sup>4</sup>.

As part of this policy, some frontline Army personnel would also be trained up in extreme and remote area bushfire fighting. This expense would also be would also be part of the ADF's civilian support budget, along with 'Army Capabilities', which is funded at around \$7.4bn for this coming financial year (and at around

<sup>1</sup> Baines, R. 2016, *Tasmanian Bushfires: TFS chief rejects claims ADF offers of assistance were rejected during firefighting efforts*, The Mercury, viewed 23 May 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-10/tasmanian-fire-authorities-rejected-offer-of-military-assistance/7154258>

<sup>2</sup> Australian Army 2015, *Disaster Relief at Home*, ADF, viewed 23 May 2016, <http://www.army.gov.au/Our-work/Community-engagement/Disaster-relief-at-home>

<sup>3</sup> Australian Air Force, *Jobs: Fire Fighter*, ADF, viewed 23 May 2016, <http://www.defencejobs.gov.au/airforce/jobs/FireFighter/>

<sup>4</sup> ADF 2015, *Budget 2016-17*, ADF, viewed 23 May 2016, [http://www.defence.gov.au/Budget/15-16/2015-16\\_Defence\\_PBS\\_Complete.pdf](http://www.defence.gov.au/Budget/15-16/2015-16_Defence_PBS_Complete.pdf)

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\$30bn over four years). The Australian Army already has a proud and valued history of domestic natural disaster relief efforts<sup>5</sup>, but as Emergency Management Australia's Director-General, Mark Crossweller informed a recent Senate Inquiry into the 2016 Tasmanian Fires, "the Australian Defence Force has been clear in pre-season briefs that they're not skilled for arduous, direct firefighting"<sup>6</sup>.

A remote area bushfire/wildfire fighting capability in the nation's defence force would be consistent with other jurisdictions, such as the United States of America, Canada and New Zealand (whom we often rely on for support during extreme remote bushfire events), all of which have a remote area bushfire/wildfire capability in their career and volunteer forces for use alongside civilian firefighting resources.

## > AMPHIBIOUS WATERBOMBERS

Waterbombers are large, long-range, high capacity fixed-wing aircraft designed for aerial firefighting. Depending on the make, they can scoop anywhere between 6,000 and 15,000 litres of water at a time, to drop onto fires. Amphibious waterbombers can refill in flight, scooping water from lakes or even oceans in the right conditions. Amphibious waterbombers are therefore able to drop water, refill and return to the fire much quicker than aircraft that have to refill on the tarmac. That makes them particularly more effective in remote areas, and is why they are used in locations comparable to Australia like Canada.

Due to the nature of these aircraft, and the specialist maintenance that would be required, it makes sense that a waterbomber aircraft be owned and managed by the Australian Defence Force (ADF), alongside its existing Hercules and Poseidon aircraft.

## > EXTRA FIREPOWER FOR NATIONAL AERIAL FIREFIGHTING CENTRE

The Greens will have the Australian Defence Force purchase three waterbombers to add to its fleet, through a competitive tender process. The cost would depend on which aircraft was chosen for the fleet, but as a guide, three Bombardier 415 Superscoopers would cost around \$150 million.

A crew of Air Force personnel will be trained to operate the aircraft for aerial firefighting operations, alongside Army personnel trained in on-ground remote area firefighting.

The aircraft and its personnel will then be made available to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), to be contracted around the country as required to major and catastrophic

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<sup>5</sup> Australian Army 2015, *Disaster Relief at Home*, ADF, viewed 23 May 2016, <http://www.army.gov.au/Our-work/Community-engagement/Disaster-relief-at-home>

<sup>6</sup> Baines, R. 2016, *Tasmanian Bushfires: TFS chief rejects claims ADF offers of assistance were rejected during firefighting efforts*, The Mercury, viewed 23 May 2016, <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-02-10/tasmanian-fire-authorities-rejected-offer-of-military-assistance/7154258>

remote bushfire events, which are becoming commonplace in the Australian environment.

On-ground Army firefighting personnel will be made available to states and territories, as needed and appropriate, on a needs-basis through agreements with the Federal Government.

These personnel and resources will work alongside our outstanding professional and volunteer civilian firefighters who work at the frontline of climate change in Australia. Because as Peter Marshall, Secretary of the United Firefighters Union Victoria has said, "there is no [climate change] sceptic on the end of a firehose"<sup>7</sup>.

The Greens will also double the number of civilian career firefighters by 2030. This initiative is detailed and costed in our *Living With Global Warming* policy, which can be found at: <http://greens.org.au/living-global-warming>.

## > REGIONAL HUMANITARIAN AND DISASTER RESPONSE CAPACITY

The addition of three waterbombers to the Australian Defence Force fleet will also increase the Australian Government's capacity to meet our responsibilities in providing a humanitarian and disaster response (HADR) capability to the Asia-Pacific region, such as the recent wildfires experienced by Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

## > SENATE INQUIRY INTO ADF ROLES IN EXTREME BUSFIRE EVENTS

The Greens will move for a Senate Inquiry into an agreed role for the Australian Defence Force in natural disasters caused by future and evolving extreme weather events, including wildfire response.

The Greens will propose a long-term shift in the domestic focus of the Australian Defence Force in terms of emergency management. The Australian Defence Force already has a role in disaster management, and assets are routinely purchased to provide domestic capability as need is forecast, or arises.

In 2012, after a commissioned report that found the Navy was unable to help in the aftermath of Queensland's Cyclone Yasi, the Gillard Government bought a C-17 Globemaster cargo plane at a cost of \$280 million and an amphibious off-shore support ship for \$130 million. These extra assets per purchased to support humanitarian and disaster relief operations both domestically and in the region

This policy will be further informed by the outcomes of the Senate Inquiry.

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<sup>7</sup> United Firefighters Union of Australia Tasmania Branch 2016, *Submission to the Inquiry Into: The response to, and lessons learnt from, recent bushfires in remote Tasmanian wilderness*, Australian Parliament House, viewed 23 May 2016, <http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=b3747847-cce6-443c-99ac-9547df7282c8&subId=413041>