



POLICY NO. 1/2018

Aviation Support to Bush Firefighting

Policy Cancellation

The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy No. 1/2005 – Aviation Support to Bush Firefighting is hereby cancelled and replaced with this policy.

This policy was adopted by the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee at their 83 Meeting on 15 March 2018. Refer to Minute No. 83.12.

Rationale

Aviation support contributes to the effective management and suppression of bush fires. This policy outlines the arrangements for the sourcing, dispatching and operational management of aviation assets.

Background

Aircraft have specific fire suppression tactical advantages providing rapid detection and response as well as access to bush fires in remote and inaccessible areas.

Firefighting authorities in New South Wales have long utilised aircraft for a range of fire management tasks. When used effectively, aircraft are a valuable tool providing a range of fire suppression options that support the ground based firefighting effort in line with Incident Control strategies. Aircraft are a limited, expensive resource with a vast range of technical specifications and as such it is important to have a coordinated approach to the sourcing, dispatching and operational management of these assets. During times of heightened firefighting activity, it is necessary to centralise the coordination of aircraft to ensure the effective and efficient use of this resource due to potential limitations in supply.

Aircraft are used for a variety of fire management roles in New South Wales, including:

- Fire detection
- Crew transport
- Crew insertion and extraction
- Emergency extraction of at-risk personnel during incidents
- Visual and electronic reconnaissance

- Command, control and communications
- Fire suppression
- Aerial ignition (prescribed burning and back burning operations)

Aircraft used for fire management in New South Wales are sourced in a variety of ways. The NSW Rural Fires Service and NSW Office of Environment & Heritage own aircraft that can be used for fire management activities. In addition, a range of aircraft are available on exclusive use contracts during the fire season through the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), and additional aircraft are approved on a Call When Needed Standing Offer arrangement (administered by the NSW Rural Fire Service) that can be engaged as the need arises from commercial operators throughout the State. These arrangements provide fire authorities with a high level of flexibility to access suitable aircraft and they also necessitate the application of comprehensive and consistent standards to ensure safe and effective operations.

To support aerial fire management operations, a range of aviation fuel trucks, specialist equipment (such as aerial incendiary capability, Infra-red camera's and remotely piloted aerial systems) as well as mixing and loading capabilities are also available through the NAFC and Call When Needed arrangements. There is also a range of emerging technology associated with Remotely Piloted Aerial Systems (RPAS) that is likely to benefit bush firefighting operations in the future.

Aerial fire management operations require the use of personnel with specialised knowledge and skills to ensure aerial operations are conducted in a safe, effective and efficient manner. To support this requirement, a suitable aviation training structure is required with interagency involvement in the development and delivery of training programs.

Policies

Safety

1. Safety is the primary consideration in all aspects of aerial fire management operations, as outlined in the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy 3/2000 "Coordinated Fire Fighting Operations, Health and Safety".

Procurement management

2. The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) will coordinate the management of aerial firefighting procurement including Call When Needed arrangements and NAFC contracts. Call When Needed procurement arrangements will be managed in accordance with NSW Government Procurement Policy Framework. NAFC contracts will be managed in accordance with the NAFC Resource Management Agreement. Aerial firefighting contracts include aircraft, fuel trucks and specialist equipment collectively referred to as "equipment". Aerial firefighting contract resources can be accessed by all fire authorities on a user pays basis.

Aircraft and aviation equipment management system

3. ARENA is a web based national aviation management system developed and maintained through NAFC. The system stores all details of aircraft, fuel trucks and related aviation specialist equipment. NSW agencies will use the aviation information management system

ARENA to store all information and provide approvals for all aircraft, fuel trucks and specialist equipment that are the subject of a contractual agreement through NAFC or Call When Needed arrangements.

ARENA shall be the system used for all dispatches of aviation assets.

State Air Desk and dispatch arrangements

4. At all times NSW RFS aviation assistance will be coordinated by the State Air Desk. The Operational Management of the State Air Desk is outlined in the State Air Desk Operational Management Procedures. ARENA will be used as the primary method to ensure timely and cost effective dispatch of approved aviation resources.

The principles of dispatch procedures used by the State Air Desk will ensure that for any immediate (urgent) request for resources, the fastest response to the incident scene matching the request will be dispatched. Where a request is made for a planned aviation resource tasking (non-urgent / required for a later time or date) the most cost effective resource will be dispatched

5. Other agencies may dispatch aviation resources direct outside of periods when the coordinated arrangements (clause 6) have been activated. At all times agencies will ensure they use the ARENA system to identify the fastest response for immediate requests and the most cost effective response for a planned request.

It is the responsibility of the State Air Desk or agency dispatchers to ensure that the dispatch and release of aviation resources is in accordance with the various contractual arrangements in place.

6. When there are significant levels of fire activity, usually associated with one or more Section 44s, periods of significant lightning activity or the declaration of total fire bans (TOBANs), the Manager of the State Air Desk (SAD) or delegate will consult with relevant agencies to implement what will be known as the 'coordinated arrangements'. These arrangements will ensure that all requests for aviation resources are prioritised and allocated in a manner which provides the best support and value for money to the NSW community.

From the commencement of 'coordinated arrangements' the agencies will ensure that for bush firefighting purposes the dispatch and allocation of all aircraft, fuel trucks and specialist equipment will occur in coordination with the rostered State Air Operations Manager at the State Air Desk to ensure maximum efficiency and priority to those incidents with a greater risk of actual or potential threat to life and/or property.

Aviation operational management

7. Base locations for aircraft will be varied according to seasonal and daily fire risk assessment to optimise initial suppression response time. The agencies will coordinate the identification of suitable bases and aviation resources in liaison with the State Air Desk.
8. The identification of local infrastructure and support for aerial reconnaissance and fire suppression operations will be incorporated in Bush Fire Management Committees' Section 52 Plan of Operations.

9. All aerial fire management operations will be conducted in accordance with the Inter-Agency Aviation Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), and during class 3 incidents relevant Incident Management Procedures (IMPs) and Operational Management Procedures (OMPs). The operational management structure of aerial firefighting will be consistent with the Australasian Interagency Incident Management System (AIIMS) doctrine.

Strategic direction and Industry consultation

10. The agencies will contribute to the strategic direction and capability of aerial fire management activities through the Aviation Advisory Committee (AAC) and the tactical direction and capability of aerial fire management activities (including the review and update of Inter-Agency Aviation SOPs) through the Inter-Agency Aviation Working Group (IAAWG). The IAAWG is a sub-committee that reports to the AAC.
11. The NSW Rural Fire Service Commissioner has a forum through which the Aviation Industry can provide input to inform matters relevant to Aviation Operations.

Aviation training and accreditation

12. Personnel performing management, operational or support tasks for aviation operations will be appropriately trained and certified according to training and assessment strategies for aviation specialist qualifications and to national competency standards where these exist. Training development and delivery will be done cooperatively and cost-efficiently through the training subcommittee of the Inter-Agency Aviation Working Group (IAAWG).

Procedures

The NSW RFS Commissioner should, in consultation with other agencies, prepare such procedures and protocols applicable to the operation of the SAD to allow the practical application and execution of this policy.



Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM

Chair 5-4-18