

DEPARTMENT OF HOME AFFAIRS

PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY SPOKEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

Finance and Public Administration References Committee
Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20

27 May 2020

QoN Number: 01

Subject: Deputy Prime Minister briefing

Asked by: Murray Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: Did you brief the Deputy Prime Minister as the Acting Prime Minister while Mr Morrison was overseas?

Mr Cameron: My recollection is: I had some phone calls—I've certainly had phone calls directly with the Deputy Prime Minister. Whether it was in the period that he was acting as the Prime Minister, I don't know. I certainly had conversations with his office, but whether that was in that period, again I don't know.

Senator WATT: If you could you take on notice for us about the contact with the Deputy Prime Minister in that period, it would be great.

Answer:

Because Departmental telephone records only record the details of outgoing calls, the Department cannot confirm that Mr Cameron's phone calls with the Deputy Prime Minister occurred during the period the Deputy Prime Minister was acting as the Prime Minister.

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Finance and Public Administration References Committee
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27 May 2020

QoN Number: 02

Subject: Emergency Response Fund

Asked by: Murray Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: ... Mr Cameron, I have a couple of questions for you about the Emergency Response Fund which was established last year, I think. Obviously, this fund is a dedicated fund and was created with the support of the opposition to provide an additional funding source for emergency response and mitigation. You mentioned in your submission that the fund was operational from 12 December last year. Can I confirm that no funding has been allocated from that fund at this point? Mr Cameron: That is true. I recommended to the minister about a month or so ago—I would need to check the exact date of when it was, and I'm happy to come back to you with that—that at this time, given the significant investment from the Bushfire Recovery Fund that Mr Colvin administers, as you've questioned him about earlier, and the fact that the \$2 billion is yet to be fully committed, the Emergency Response Fund need not be accessed.

Answer:

On 21 February 2020, the Director General of Emergency Management Australia recommended to the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management that, at that point in time, the Emergency Response Fund not be drawn on. This advice reflected the Director General's point-in-time assessment that Bushfire Recovery Fund had not, at that point, been fully committed, and existing programs such as the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements continued to be accessed.

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Finance and Public Administration References Committee
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27 May 2020

QoN Number: 03

Subject: NACFC business case

Asked by: Murray Watt

Question:

Senator WATT: The request from the aerial firefighting body was for an ongoing funding increase so that they could deploy additional water-bombing aircraft. But the request for ongoing funding was rejected, and all that was agreed to was one-off funding for a particular firefighting season?

Mr Cameron: That's mostly right. I can run through the content of the business case—what they were actually asking for. Not all of it, in fact, is specifically for additional aerial firefighting.

Senator WATT: Yes, I'm aware of that; I've seen the business case as well. In the interests of time, if you want to give us a full description on notice that would be fine.

Mr Cameron: Sure.

Answer:

The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) business case for a funding increase to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) requested, in summary, and totaling \$10.774 million per annum:

- \$1.125 million to acknowledge the loss in values of the Commonwealth contribution due to inflation;
- \$2.162 million for the recognition of the unfavourable movement in foreign exchange;
- acknowledgement that the Large Air Tanker (LAT) and Very Large Air Tanker (VLAT) capability provides an enhanced national mobility of aerial firefighting resources which requires a Commonwealth contribution to ensure continuity of service; optimisation and proportional allocation of scarce resource utilisation to all States and Territories;
- \$7.487 million to fund a national LAT and VLAT capability in the next funding agreement, commencing 1 July 2018 at a dollar for dollar value (i.e. 50% of the mean annual standing charge of \$14.975m pa) in line with the intent of the original funding agreement that commenced in 2003; and

- agreement that the future funding agreement not specify individual aircraft, permitting NAFC greater flexibility to adjust the fleet mix to account for future changes in aerial capability, in consultation with its members and the Commonwealth.

The business case also requested:

- \$1.562 million one-off over three years for a National Aerial Resource Risk Management Model to better inform operational decisions and improve the effectiveness and efficiency of future aerial firefighting.

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PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY WRITTEN QUESTION ON NOTICE

Finance and Public Administration References Committee
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27 May 2020

QoN Number: 04

Subject: Aerial firefighting

Asked by: Janet Rice

Question:

An announcement by the Minister for Emergency Management on 14 May 2020 indicates that the Commonwealth will provide “a continual ongoing index contribution to aerial firefighting”. What date was that decision taken and approved by Cabinet?

Does the Department have any indication of when the NAFC will actually be able to procure the necessary aircraft ahead of the next fire season?

Answer:

In a statement to the Parliament on 14 May 2020, the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management, the Hon David Littleproud MP announced ongoing additional funding for aerial firefighting. It is inappropriate for the Department to comment on the details of Cabinet decision making.

The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) uses an approved public tender process for the procurement of aircraft. A standard term for contracts is 3 years with a 1 + 1 option to extend. The contract guarantees that the service will be in place for 3 years. NAFC procures all aircraft on behalf of member agencies, who determine the type of aircraft and timeframe each aircraft is required.