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Australian Government
Bureau of Meteorology

Bureau of Meteorology submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Legislation Committee

Review of the operation of the *National Emergency Declaration
Act 2020*

March 2021



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Bureau of Meteorology Submission to the Senate Legal and Constitutional Affairs Committee's Review of the operation of the National Emergency Declaration Act 2020

The Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee.

The Bureau of Meteorology

The Bureau is Australia's national weather, climate and water information agency. It operates under the authority of the *Meteorology Act 1955* (Cth) (Meteorology Act) and the *Water Act 2007* (Cth) (Water Act), which together describe a range of functions that underpin delivery of information, advice, forecasts, warnings and associated services to meet Australia's needs.

The Bureau is an Executive Agency under the *Public Service Act 1999* (Cth), and a non-corporate Commonwealth entity under the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* (Cth). The Bureau operates under the Agriculture, Water and the Environment portfolio and reports to the Minister for the Environment generally, and to the Minister for Resources, Water and Northern Australia on water matters. The Bureau also provides weather, climate and water information to the Minister for Agriculture, Drought and Emergency Management.

Response

The Bureau recognises that the intent of the *National Emergency Declaration Act 2020* (the Act) is to enhance the Commonwealth's ability to respond to and recover from declared national emergencies, within the Commonwealth's constitutional power. The Act seeks to provide the Australian Government with powers to declare a national emergency and mobilise Commonwealth resources in service of managing such an emergency.

Given its functions under the Meteorology Act and the Water Act, the Bureau has a key role in providing intelligence to help inform the decision to declare a national emergency.

This intelligence derives from the Bureau's services, including monitoring weather systems and events, issuing routine and special forecasts, and providing warnings for severe weather events, tropical cyclones, floods and tsunamis. With a 24/7 national operational service, the Bureau is well placed to provide this intelligence capability and support.

The Bureau's operational services will be enhanced by the provision of outposted decision support meteorologists to the Crisis Coordination Centre (CCC). In establishing these

outposted support capabilities, the Bureau will support the development and documentation of decision-making processes required for a national emergency declaration. These documented processes will consider the potential impact of weather events, including cascading and concurrent events, with clearly articulated role responsibility and accountability.

The ultimate responsibility of the Bureau continues to be the provision of timely forecasts of weather, hydrology and climatology, in line with its functions under the Meteorology Act.

The Bureau is responsible for establishing and delivering the services of Climate and Resilience Services Australia (CaRSA) to Emergency Management Australia (EMA) and the National Resilience, Risk and Recovery Agency (NRRRA). CaRSA, a virtual disaster risk information and services centre, will be an essential component of the functionality of the Act. CaRSA will provide EMA and NRRRA with the capacity to convert hazard information into exposure, vulnerability and impact at forecast and near-real time-frames. Forecast and near-real time information of this type will be essential to informing the declaration of a national emergency under the Act.

In addition to supporting the decision-making processes for the declaration of a national emergency in the CCC, the Bureau has staff embedded within Australian Defence Force Joint Operations Command – Meteorological Intelligence Support Unit to assist in the preparation for, and response to, a national emergency.