



Private Tyler Moseley-Greatwich, of 10th/27th Battalion, Royal South Australia Regiment, helps Minka Macauley feed an orphaned baby koala at the Kangaroo Island Wildlife Park. Photo: Corporal Tristan Kennedy

Operation Bushfire Assist 2019-2020

Updated at 8.30am

The bushfire crisis is the Australian Defence Force's main effort, with several thousand full-time and reserve personnel providing direct support in the field, at sea, in the air and from Defence bases across fire-affected regions.

The call out of up to 3000 reserve personnel will occur over the course of the crisis. They will be deployed throughout New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia and Tasmania, and Victoria. It is essential that the ADF response can be sustained for as long as Government directs.

Defence has established three Joint Task Forces:

- **Victoria:** The ADF is supporting state authorities to undertake rapid damage assessments in regional Victoria as well as providing targeted assistance in support of firefighting efforts and isolated and remote communities.
- **New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory:** The ADF is contributing emergency assistance, with a focus on supporting state authority damage assessments and initial recovery efforts.
- **South Australia and Tasmania:** Based on the Army's 9th Brigade, the Joint Task Force is currently forming. The JTF will also support authorities in Tasmania. Immediate support is being provided to Kangaroo Island.

Currently, more than 1000 reservists are attached to the three joint task forces deployed in support of Operation Bushfire Assist. This number is growing daily.

Defence has appointed a Two-Star Emergency ADF National Support Coordinator, Major General Justin 'Jake' Ellwood, to work in support of state and territory authorities.

Detailed support

Victoria – Joint Task Force (JTF) 646

- **JTF establishment:** JTF 646 is based on Army's 4th Brigade, with support elements from across the ADF.
- **Central hub:** RAAF Base East Sale is the central hub for the Defence response in southern areas, and is being used as a staging point to receive the flights evacuating vulnerable persons from Mallacoota.
- **Evacuation support:** More than 170 people were evacuated by rotary and fixed-wing aircraft on January 5. Sorties are continuing until all people who wish to evacuate have been transported to RAAF Base East Sale. HMAS *Choules* is in the immediate vicinity to assist in continuing the evacuation should air operations need to be suspended.
- **Supplies:** The ADF has delivered 18,000 litres of fuel to Omeo for generators powering the town. Working with state authorities, Defence contacted 18 cut-off communities, flying in emergency food, water, fuel and medical supplies as required. Eight communities were visited on January 5 and 10 on January 6.
- **Personnel preparations:** On January 6, the JTF commenced redistribution of forces in the northern (Alpine) and southern (Coastal) areas of operation, in order to ensure both Army Support Battalions are force-assigned and capable to undertake a variety of support tasks. On January 7, the JTF commenced the preparation of a staging area for about 100 international firefighters in the vicinity of Omeo.

- **Navy support:** On January 5, HMAS *Choules* (crew of 179) arrived in Westernport with about 1100 evacuees. On January 6, *Choules* returned to Mallacoota to unload diesel fuel and a fuel management team to sustain the operation of generators providing electricity to Mallacoota. On January 7, *Choules* embarked about 260 people from Mallacoota for evacuation to HMAS *Cerberus*.
- **Helicopter support:** Two S-70A Black Hawk helicopters and an MRH-90 Taipan helicopter are based out of RAAF Base East Sale and have been involved in transporting firefighters around the fire grounds, evacuating injured and vulnerable people from hazardous locations and delivering food, water and critical equipment to locations where it is needed, including the Bremm River and Genoa areas. Three CH-47F Chinook helicopters are operating from RAAF Base East Sale to provide support to firefighting operations as well as provide humanitarian assistance to remote and isolated communities. On January 7, the ADF recommenced aviation activities, including the evacuation of personnel from Mallacoota, provision of satellite phones to cut-off communities, and distribution of stores to isolated areas.
- **UAS support.** Army deployed a Small Unmanned Aerial System (Wasp) to RAAF Base East Sale on January 6 to conduct reconnaissance operations in support of JTF 646.
- **Mobility operations:** The JTF is providing engineer personnel and equipment to supplement state capabilities to clear and reopen roads in fire-affected areas of Victoria as well as general engineering tasks to remove debris from public areas and clear fire breaks and fire trails.
- **Damage assessments:** The ADF is providing support to Victorian authorities to undertake rapid damage assessments in regional Victoria. The ADF is enhancing the search and rescue assessment capacity with additional vehicles and drivers.
- **Air Force support:** Air traffic controllers are providing a flight information service at the Bairnsdale Airport to support local authorities to manage the high volume of air traffic currently utilising the airport.
- **Fixed-wing support:** On January 5, a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft conducted route reconnaissance from Sale to Mallacoota to assess engineering requirements. This aircraft is continuing reconnaissance of fire grounds, operating from RAAF Base Edinburgh in South Australia. Three C-27J Spartan aircraft assisted in the evacuation of personnel from Mallacoota to East Sale since January 5. In the next 24-48 hours, support flights are planned using two C-17A Globemasters from RAAF Base Amberley, two C-130J Hercules from RAAF Base Richmond and three C-27J Spartans from RAAF Base East Sale. The Spartans will assist in the evacuation of personnel from Mallacoota to East Sale if weather allows. A P-8A Poseidon will conduct a reconnaissance flight over fire-affected areas.
- **Base support:** RAAF Base East Sale is supporting Defence aircraft providing emergency responses. Both it and RAAF Base Williams are prepared to provide accommodation if required.
- **Health and pastoral support:** Air Force will establish a Role One Medical Facility at RAAF Base East Sale. Pastoral care will also be provided to support JTF operations. Each JTF will be staffed with appropriately credentialled mental health professionals to provide proactive and reactive mental health support.

- **JTF establishment:** JTF 1110 is based on the Army's 5th Brigade, with support elements from across the ADF. The JTF is assembling its forces at Holsworthy Barracks and other bases.
- **Central hub:** Holsworthy Barracks is the central hub for the Defence response in NSW and is being used as a staging point for logistics, engineering and health support.
- **Engineer support:** The JTF has conducted engineering reconnaissance to build a clearer picture of the expected route clearance and recovery operations that will be required. Engineers will be in position in Maitland, Mudgee, Nowra and the Southern Highlands to commence recovery tasking. Fire trail clearance is under way at Mudgee from January 6-10.
- **Recovery operations:** The ADF will provide personnel and equipment to undertake initial recovery tasks as identified and assessed by the NSW Government, based on advice from specialist ADF advisers. These tasks will be in Tamworth, Wollondilly, Nowra, Mudgee, Maitland and Wingecarribee and began on January 6.
- **Logistics support:** Logistics Support Detachments have been deployed to provide support in Casino, Glen Innes, Wilberforce, Tamworth, Tumut and Moruya. Food, water and humanitarian aid has been delivered to these areas.
- **Navy support:** HMAS *Adelaide* is off the coast of Eden ready to commence relief and evacuation operations according to the most pressing need. Navy liaison officers have disembarked *Adelaide* and deployed to Bega and Moruya to coordinate support. Navy liaison officers are also established in Eden and Wonboyn. *Adelaide* is carrying 400 personnel, including the crew, logistics and engineering capabilities, as well as 300 tonnes of relief supplies. *MV Sycamore* is off the coast of Merimbula ready to begin evacuation operations.
- **Helicopter support:** Army and Navy are providing rotary-wing support through a combination of MRH-90 Taipan, MH-60R Seahawk and EC-135 helicopters for fire mapping, surveillance, and search and rescue operations supporting the NSW Rural Fire Service throughout the Hunter, Greater Sydney, Illawarra and Southern regions. On January 7, rotary-wing assets conducted a reconnaissance flight over Cabramurra.
- **Fixed-wing support:** On January 6, a P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft conducted reconnaissance over the South Coast of NSW. This aircraft is operating from RAAF Base Edinburgh in South Australia. On January 7, flights were made from Port Macquarie to Merimbula and back again to support the relief of 20 firefighters.
- **Base support:** Airbase access and support is being provided for Large Aerial Tanker and spotter aircraft at RAAF Base Richmond. The base has made preparations to receive and accommodate evacuees if required. A Striker Vehicle and crew have been made available to support NSW Rural Fire Service helicopter 'hot-refuelling' at Picton Showgrounds. The Fuel Farm and Medical recommenced operations at RAAF Base Williamtown on January 6. The base is prepared to provide accommodation if required. Refuelling support continues to be provided at RAAF Base Wagga, and the base is providing accommodation support as required. Accommodation and meals are being provided for NSW Rural Fire Service personnel at HMAS *Albatross*. Marrangaroo Training Area has been made available for Rural Fire Service operations.
- **Provision of equipment:** 400 stretchers have been provided to the evacuation centres at Moruya and Batemans Bay. A fuel tanker has been sent to the Milton showground.
- **Health and pastoral support:** Army will mobilise and set-up a Role One Medical Facility at Holsworthy Barracks. Pastoral care will also be provided to support JTF operations. Each

JTF will be staffed with appropriately credentialled mental health professionals to provide proactive and reactive mental health support. A healthcare team has been established in Batemans Bay.

- **Liaison:** NSW Police has assigned Assistant Commissioner Michael Willing to Joint Task Force 1110 to strengthen communication and coordination with the ADF.

South Australia and Tasmania – Joint Task Force (JTF) 1111

- **JTF establishment:** JTF 1111 is based on the Army's 9th Brigade, with support elements from across the ADF. The JTF is forming its forces from units in South Australia and Tasmania.
- **Central hub:** Keswick Barracks is the central hub for the Defence response in South Australia and Tasmania.
- **Recovery operations::** A damage assessment team was deployed to Kangaroo Island on January 5, comprising two high-clearance 4WD vehicles capable of carrying a driver and three staff. On January 6, more than 110 Army reservists from the 10th/27th Battalion, Royal South Australia Regiment, and a convoy of Army vehicles with supplies travelled from Keswick Barracks to Kangaroo Island in preparation for initial recovery efforts. The convoy included Protected Mobility Vehicles, Unimogs and G-Wagons.
- **Water supply:** From January 7, portable water filtration infrastructure is being deployed to the Middle River Water Treatment Plant for the treatment of raw water to potable (human consumption) levels. The ADF brought in bottled water as interim measure. Army personnel have assisted in the construction of a State Emergency Services camp, rescued injured wildlife and distributed bottled water and bulk water to Kingscote Airport.
- **Stock assistance:** Defence personnel, including a veterinary officer, will assist local efforts to euthanise stock and wildlife.
- **Airbase support:** From January 6, RAAF Base Edinburgh is prepared to accommodate evacuees as required.

Reserve call out arrangements

- Call out of Reserves has been authorised by the Governor-General, as part of the wider call out of the ADF.
- The call out is focused on 4th, 5th, and 9th Brigades, as well as elements of the 6th Combat Support Brigade and 17th Sustainment Brigade, who are forming the basis of the three Joint Task Forces.
- The call out will involve up to 3000 Reservists and commenced progressively from January 5. Reservists will be contacted by their units.
- For more information about the call out, visit the Defence Reserves Support [website](#).

Future support

- On January 8, a fourth Chinook is expected at RAAF Base East Sale.
- On January 8, Army engineers will stage forward to Canberra.
- Due to the significant impacts to livestock, the ADF will provide support for the essential task of livestock disposal in affected areas, at the request of state authorities and where the ADF's unique capabilities are best suited.

International assistance

- The New Zealand Defence Force and the Singapore Armed Forces are providing support through military assets and personnel. ADF planners are currently engaging with their New Zealand and Singaporean counterparts on the specific details of that assistance.
- Two Singapore Armed Forces CH-47 Chinooks are deploying to RAAF Base East Sale in support of operations in Victoria.
- The first of three New Zealand helicopters has arrived at RAAF Base Richmond and will deploy on January 8.
- New Zealand has extended its offer of assistance to include a C-130 Hercules aircraft and an air load team.
- Papua New Guinea has offered, and we have accepted, additional engineer support in the form of around 100 personnel. Defence planners are looking at integrating these personnel into the Joint Task Forces.
- Fiji has offered support to provide an engineering platoon to assist, which is being progressed.
- Defence has received additional offers from other international partners and expects these to be progressively developed as need and circumstances evolve.

Concluded support

Since September 5, Defence has provided the following support to firefighting efforts:

- The Australian Defence Force provided support to firefighting efforts near Canungra in south-east Queensland from September 5-21, 2019. This assistance included support to firefighting helicopter operations, the provision of accommodation and meals to firefighters, geospatial intelligence for fire mapping, and support to the incident control centre.
- From November 8 to February 1, the Royal Australian Air Force is providing contingency airlift support to move large groups of firefighters and their equipment between interstate locations.
- A RAAF 737 Boeing Business Jet transported ACT Rural Fire Service firefighters from Canberra to Port Macquarie on November 8.
- A RAAF C-130J aircraft transported firefighters and their equipment from Adelaide to Port Macquarie on November 9.
- A RAAF C-130J Hercules aircraft transported firefighters and their equipment from Hobart to Port Macquarie on November 10.
- A RAAF C-130J Hercules aircraft transported firefighters and their equipment from Essendon and Mildura to Armidale on November 12.
- A RAAF KC-30A multi-role tanker transport aircraft transported 150 firefighters and their personal equipment from Melbourne Airport to Sydney Airport on November 14.
- Two RAAF KC-30A multi-role tanker transport aircraft transported 258 firefighters and their personal equipment from Sydney Airport to Melbourne Airport on November 15.
- A RAAF C-17A Globemaster aircraft transported 165 firefighters and their equipment, using two flights, from Melbourne to Coffs Harbour on November 17.
- A RAAF C-17A Globemaster aircraft transported 130 firefighters and their equipment from RAAF Base Richmond to Melbourne. The same aircraft then transported an additional 130 firefighters and their equipment from Coffs Harbour to Melbourne on November 18.

- A RAAF C-17A Globemaster aircraft transported 130 firefighters from Melbourne to RAAF Base Richmond on November 19.
- A RAAF C-130J Hercules aircraft transported 140 firefighters and their equipment from Melbourne to Coffs Harbour on November 20.
- A RAAF C-130J Hercules aircraft transported 167 firefighters and their equipment from Coffs Harbour to Melbourne on November 21.
- A RAAF C-130J Hercules aircraft transported 108 firefighters and their equipment from Coffs Harbour to Melbourne on November 24.
- On November 18, 21 and 22, Army supported Queensland Fire and Emergency Services helicopter operations at Borneo Barracks, near Toowoomba.
- From November 11-13, Singleton Army Barracks provided accommodation and catering support to about 200 firefighters from the Victorian Country Fire Authority.
- From November 12-14, a Navy and Army aviation liaison capability worked within the NSW Rural Fire Service State Operations Centre to ensure ADF air support was appropriately coordinated.
- From November 12-14, two MRH-90 Taipan helicopters from the Navy and two S-70 Black Hawk helicopters from the Army provided movements for Rural Fire Service strike teams and, if required, the rescue of civilian personnel.
- From November 12-13, the Navy provided two MH-60R Seahawk helicopters to fly night missions from Sydney and Coffs Harbour to facilitate the operation of Rural Fire Service air observers. Two EC135 helicopters continued support on November 14.
- Two EC135 helicopters from the Navy and two S-70 Black Hawk helicopters from the Army flew in support of NSW Rural Fire Service impact assessments on November 14.
- ADF personnel from Kokoda Barracks, Canungra, and the 7th Brigade, Brisbane, provided engineering support to assist Queensland Fire and Emergency Services to clean up fire breaks near Beechmont.
- From November 12-13, Kokoda Army Barracks, Canungra, provided evening meals for 40 firefighters.
- On November 14, RAAF Base Pearce provided support to aerial firefighting aircraft from the Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services under DACC arrangements.
- From November 12-16, RAAF Base Williamtown provided refuelling and water re-supply support to a Large Aerial Tanker from the NSW Rural Fire Service.
- From November 13-17, Army Tiger Armed Reconnaissance Helicopters supported Queensland Fire and Emergency Services conducting night fire mapping. On November 17, a Tiger provided support to search for isolated persons in a high-threat fire area. Queensland Fire and Emergency Services safely recovered the individuals.
- From November 13-23, RAAF Base Richmond provided accommodation and catering support for varying numbers of between 150 and 300 firefighters, as well as providing workshop/maintenance hangars for up to 50 fire appliances and support vehicles.
- On November 18, the 7th Brigade provided a platoon to support Queensland Police and Queensland State Emergency Services to search for a missing person around Mount Glorious, Queensland. The missing person was located on the morning of November 18.
- From November 18-19, the Army's Borneo Barracks near Toowoomba established a helicopter-landing site, overnight parking and refuelling capability for firefighting and support to civilian rotary-wing aircraft.

- From November 20-21, two Australian Army MRH-90 Taipan helicopters conducted night fire mapping in south-east Queensland in support of the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services.
- On November 21, a NSW Rural Fire Service Large Aerial Tanker was refuelled at RAAF Base Edinburgh after a mission was completed in South Australia.
- From November 22-27, Army provided logistics support to the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services incident control centre, hosted on Borneo Barracks, Cabarlah.
- On November 26, RAAF Base Gingin provided 18,900 litres of water to two water bombers fighting a fire in the vicinity of Yanchep.
- From November 26 to December 21, Army provided NSW Rural Fire Service with ground logistic support for the movement of vehicles, stores and equipment in Wauchope.
- From December 2-6 and December 10-11, Army provided rotary-wing support to the NSW Rural Fire Service from Holsworthy Barracks to support search and rescue and firefighting intelligence.
- On December 3-4, HMAS *Albatross* was used to provide catering and accommodation for the NSW Rural Fire Service at Naval Air Station Nowra.
- On December 4, RAAF Base Pearce provided 12,000 litres of water to two water bombers fighting fires in the vicinity of the City of Swan, Perth.
- On December 9, ADF Joint Operations Support Staff-Victoria personnel were established in the Victorian Government State Control Centre following State Tier 3 Red notification for forecast catastrophic fire conditions.
- From December 10-11, a Navy helicopter provided support to the the NSW Rural Fire Service for 24 hours to fly day and night missions from the Naval Air Station Nowra to facilitate the operation of Rural Fire Service-trained air observers.
- On December 15, RAAF Base Pearce provided support to aerial firefighting aircraft from the Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services under DACC arrangements. Some 60,000 litres of water and 17,870 litres of fuel was provided for the firefighting efforts in the vicinity of Collie and 18,000 litres was provided for firefighting efforts in the vicinity of Yanchep.
- On December 16, RAAF Base Pearce provided support to aerial firefighting aircraft from the Western Australian Department of Fire and Emergency Services. About 3000 litres of water was provided to fight a fire in the vicinity of Brand Highway.
- From December 19-23, two Navy helicopters operated from Nowra to provide daytime search and rescue, as well as night-time fire mapping and support missions to the NSW Rural Fire Service.
- On December 20, support was provided from RAAF Base Edinburgh, South Australia, to refuel two Large Aerial Tankers fighting fires near Cudlee Creek and Munno Para. This support continued on the morning of 21 December.
- From December 20-23, an additional Joint Operation Support Staff Liaison Officer was deployed to the South Australia Country Fire Service Incident Management Team at Mount Barker to provide direct advice.
- On December 21-22, RAAF Base Williamtown provided fuel and movements support for two NSW Rural Fire Service fire scanner aircraft under a standing DACC 4 Memorandum of Understanding request.
- From December 27-30, 2019, 14 ADF personnel deployed within New South Wales Rural Fire Service incident management teams and are now finalising reports detailing possible

options for ADF support during initial recovery operations after the bushfire threat has passed. Defence is expecting a request for assistance from New South Wales authorities and is preparing forces for such a request.

- On January 3, two Navy ships evacuated about 1100 isolated persons from Mallacoota.

Overview

- The ADF is not trained, equipped or certified to undertake ground-based or aerial bush firefighting and does not get involved in the direct act of fighting bushfires outside Defence property.
- The state and territory governments have primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment, and for coordinating and planning emergency responses or recovery actions in disaster-affected areas within their jurisdiction.
- The ADF is able to support the states and territories, within resource limitations, in accordance with Defence Assistance to the Civil Community arrangements as part of a whole-of-government response, where state or territory capacity or resources do not exist, or are not available in sufficient time.
- Defence has arrangements in place to call out ADF reservists if required to supplement regular personnel.
- Defence is working with Emergency Management Australia to identify what other ADF capabilities, such as aviation, logistics, transport, engineering and accommodation support can be provided to aid firefighting efforts in eastern Australia.
- Defence is postured to provide further airlift support and is prepared to provide assistance in areas such as aerial fire reconnaissance, logistical support (ground transport, accommodation, meals etc.) and engineering (field work) upon request from state or territory governments.

For Defence images of the bushfire emergency support, go to:

<http://images.defence.gov.au/S20192970>

Videos of the ADF's continuing role in the bushfire crisis can be viewed via Department of Defence Australia's YouTube channel at:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCImSPZM64f-WDZ_WREdXLfQ