

Hon Steven Marshall MP

Premier

Hon Corey Wingard MP

Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Correctional Services

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\$48.5m boost for South Australia's emergency services following Independent Bushfire Review

The State Government has released the full Independent Review into the 2019/20 South Australian Bushfire Season and, along with it, a \$20.3 million action plan for delivering on the recommendations made in the report.

The 2019/20 bushfire season was one of the worst the state has ever endured with the devastating loss of lives, homes, properties, livestock and wildlife during blazes in the Adelaide Hills, Kangaroo Island, Yorke Peninsula, Eyre Peninsula and the South East.

In the immediate aftermath the State Government announced an independent review to be conducted by former Australian Federal Police Commissioner Mick Keelty with the support of the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM) and experts from across our emergency services sector.

The intent was to look at how the state responded and what lessons could be applied for future bushfire seasons.

The review found that across the emergency services sector the response was remarkable considering the conditions faced were the worst on record.

It also made 15 recommendations including the need for investment in enhanced technology like Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) systems, turnover protection systems, new trucks and a single source of truth and information for community and stakeholders.

In response, the State Government has committed to implement a significant number of immediate action items.

This funding response is worth \$20.3 million and includes new trucks and equipment for volunteers, better protection for our critical assets, enhanced communications and technology and improved information before and during bushfires.

A further \$16.7 million in federal and state funding will be invested over five years for the South Australian Disaster Risk Reduction Grants Program.

The South Australian Metropolitan Fire Service will also receive \$11.5 million for new urban appliances – taking the total package for the SA emergency services to \$48.5 million.

A further response into the remaining actions will be delivered by 30 September.

Premier Steven Marshall said it's important to implement change as quickly as possible.

“Last summer was horrendous for our state with huge losses never experienced by our communities before,” the Premier said.

“As a government we took swift and immediate action to ensure we’re as best placed to respond to and recover from bushfires going forward.

“We were the first jurisdiction in the country to announce a review and we’re the first to start implementing the changes needed to ensure a safe and resilient South Australia.

“It is vital that we take what we can from the trauma we have already lived through and apply any learnings for future bushfire seasons.”

Minister for Emergency Services Corey Wingard said to be able to get started on an action plan so soon will position us well ahead of the upcoming bushfire season.

“I received the report from Mr Keelty just over two weeks ago and already we’ve been able to put together a response for ensuring our state learns from the devastating events of last summer,” Minister Wingard said.

“As a government, we’re committed to addressing these critical recommendations because there’s no point in requesting a report only to leave it sitting in a drawer gathering dust.

“The outcome of a similar review under the previous government resulted in the establishment of SAFECOM – which was a source of criticism in Mr Keelty’s review.

“This Government acknowledges the need for change and will seek to amend legislation to appoint an independent chair of the SAFECOM board.

“We will also commence consultation with all our volunteers and emergency services personnel on how SAFECOM as a department could be structured.

“It’s important to recognise that the losses in 2019/20 would have been far greater if not for the dedication and courage of our wonderful volunteers.”

SAFECOM Chief Executive Dom Lane thanked the review team for delivering the report on time and has fully accepted the recommendation to review the organisation’s governance arrangements.

“Providing clarity of SAFECOM’s enabling and support functions to the emergency services sector will be a strong focus going forward,” Mr Lane said.

Action to be implemented for the 2020/21 bushfire season:

- 25 news trucks for the CFS fleet
- Thermal Imaging capability for CFS groups
- SAFECOM will go to market to identify AVL solutions for a field trial to be conducted during the 2020/21 bushfire season
- Additional resources within the Bureau of Meteorology to support the SEC decision makers