

INDEPENDENT BUSHFIRE GROUP

MEDIA RELEASE – 16 November 2020

Call for NSW budget to fund more capacity to attack remote fires while they are small

With the NSW budget out tomorrow, the Independent Bushfire Group strongly encouraged the NSW government to back the NSW Bushfire Inquiry by making significant provision for new aircraft and remote area fire crews so we can extinguish more lightning strike fires immediately after ignition when they are small.

The Independent Bushfire Group (IBG) is a group of non-aligned bushfire practitioners who advocate for better fire management with a focus on practical firefighting, science and evidence-based practices to adapt to our worsening fire climate.

IBG spokesperson Geoff Luscombe said, “We welcome the recently announced new funding to upgrade bushfire brigade equipment and support mental health of volunteers after last season’s shocking fires. However, the biggest help for volunteer fire fighters would be to quickly extinguish lightning strikes in remote areas before they grow into large fires. Both the NSW Bushfire Inquiry and Royal Commission recognised this need.”

“Fires can only be brought under control in a narrow range of conditions, by crews working on the ground. These conditions most often occur when the fire is smallest, and for lightning strikes, this is often in remote locations. Climate change is reducing that window of opportunity. We need the capacity to put crews on the ground with air support in those windows – promptly and regardless of how remote they are.”

“Last year many remote lightning fires were put out, as they are every year, but some went on to become the biggest, most destructive fires of the season. Their names are burned into our collective heartache: Bees Nest, Gospers Mountain, Green Wattle Creek, Currowan and others”.

“If we could get more or most of those fires out, then imagine how much could be saved. There would be fewer massive fire operations with much less expense, damage, and stress to communities and fire fighters.”

“Some of these fires got away because there weren’t enough specialised resources like remote firefighting teams and supporting aircraft. The new helicopters for the Rural Fire Service and extra remote firefighters for the National Parks and Wildlife Service will help but are not enough to knock all these fires on the head. We need to radically rethink our investment in remote firefighters and tactical aircraft like medium fixed-wing bombers,” Mr Luscombe said.

“Earlier this year the NSW government announced significant investment in procuring a very large air tanker but last season showed us that this type of aircraft is not much use in stopping remote area lightning strikes from developing into large fires. In many cases medium size aircraft including scooper planes and helicopters are more effective when coupled with ground firefighters than the deployment of large tanker aircraft.”

Mr Luscombe added, “We need to remember that aircraft don’t put fires out, only on ground firefighters do that using the right tool for the right situation.”

The Independent Bushfire Group’s report to the NSW Bushfire Inquiry is available [here](#).

The **Independent Bushfire Group** is a group of non-aligned bushfire practitioners, fire managers, land managers, fire researchers and ecologists with over 450 years of collective experience across a range of landscapes. The IBG advocates for better fire management with a focus on practical firefighting, science and evidence-based practices so we can adapt to our worsening fire climate.