

MEDIA RELEASE – 2 March 2023

Bushfire experts say that more needs to be done to address deficiencies in managing the NSW firefighting fleet.

The Independent Bushfire Group say that the recent [NSW Auditor General's report on planning and managing the states bushfire equipment](#) was a mixed bag and required action from government to address deficiencies.

The audit assessed how effectively the NSW Rural Fire Service (the RFS) and local councils plan for and manage the firefighting equipment needed to prevent, mitigate, and suppress bushfires. The RFS bushfire fleet comprises land-based vehicles, marine craft, and aircraft which are integral to the agency's overall bushfire risk management.

The report noted the confusion of roles between the RFS and local government for the maintenance of certain land-based fleet and that, despite this being raised in local government audits over several years, has not been resolved by legislative amendment putting at risk the readiness of the fleet when a fire starts.

The report noted the substantial progress made by the RFS in modernising its firefighting fleet and making it safer for fire fighters. The report noted that the average age of fire fleet has reduced from 21 years in 2017 to 16 years in 2022 but remains short of the target average age of 15 years.

Of concern were the other findings that:

There is limited evidence that the RFS has undertaken strategic fleet planning or assessment of the capability of the firefighting fleet to respond to current bushfire events or emerging fire risks;

The RFS does not have an overarching strategy to guide its planning, procurement, or distribution of the firefighting fleet;

The RFS does not have effective oversight of fleet maintenance activity across the State, and is not ensuring the accuracy of District Service Agreements where maintenance responsibilities are described.

“Of greatest concern was the observation that the RFS could not demonstrate a strategic process for acquisition of aviation fleet and early detection technologies to deliver their target of smaller fires which is to limit 80% of fires under 10ha in size.”, Independent Bushfire Group Convenor Geoffrey Luscombe said.

“The 2020 Royal Commission into National Disaster Arrangements noted that independent accountability was important to encourage the best use of resources and best possible outcomes for our communities and fire fighters. An Independent Inspector General for Emergency Management as exists in Victoria and Queensland is the best way for NSW to go”, Mr Luscombe said

The Independent Bushfire Group advocates for better fire management and recovery processes.

The **Independent Bushfire Group** is a group of non-aligned bushfire practitioners, fire managers, land managers, fire researchers and ecologists with over 400 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.

<https://independentbushfiregroup.org/>