

Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC progress

On 13 February 2013, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a new Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC)¹. The CRC builds on the work of the existing Bushfire CRC and adds a complementary natural hazards research program.

Since the Prime Minister's announcement, a BNHCRC Implementation Team has been working to establish the CRC. The team includes Interim Chair Naomi Brown, Interim CEO Dr Richard Thornton and personnel from the Attorney-General's Department (AGD), the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), Geoscience Australia (GA), and the Victorian and NSW governments.

Establishing the new entity

The registration of the BNHCRC Company with the Australian Securities and Investments Commission was completed in May 2013. The inaugural board members were Naomi Brown, Tony Sheehan from AGD, and David Place from SAFECOM in South Australia. The Board held its first meeting on 4 June 2013 and has since been joined by AFAC CEO, Stuart Ellis.

Research agenda

A call for research proposals resulted in 195 submissions. A 'Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC – Shaping a Research Program' workshop conducted in May 2013, considered in detail, 35 research proposals. The research clusters being considered are:

- Natural hazards prediction and monitoring
- Policy: economics and decision-making
- Resilience: people and community
- Hardening building and infrastructure
- Landscape/settlement vulnerability
- Sustainable volunteering
- Capability and agility – EM operational practice and decision-making

Next steps

All projects have submitted a project outline that specifies scope, plan, collaborators and resourcing. To ensure that projects meet end-user expectations and requirements, the BNHCRC will encourage end-users to be involved with projects or research clusters that are of particular interest. This could range from giving feedback on the initial abstracts, commenting on the proposals, discussing potential outputs, or suggesting relevant end-users who were not involved in the workshop.

BNHCRC participants will elect the ongoing Board, which will be instrumental in finalising the research program. By August 2013, all project proposals should be finalised and the first project should commence by September 2013. By then, the BNHCRC will be looking to establish formal end-users for each project. A final research program is expected by November and a major variation in both the Commonwealth agreement and participant agreement will be executed soon after. This will address any identified gaps in the initial program.

BNHCRC membership

Membership of the BNHCRC is being sought from organisations that have a keen interest in the problems caused by bushfire and other natural hazards in Australia and the broader region.

Membership may be by way of cash or in-kind or a combination of both. The cash contribution of \$150 000 or \$300 000 in-kind per year is the threshold to become a voting member. Contributions less than this enable participation in the BNHCRC, but without voting rights.

More information

Organisations wishing to participate should contact the Interim Chair in the first instance at bnhcrc@ag.gov.au. The BNHCRC will arrange for telephone or personal discussion follow-ups through Naomi Brown or Richard Thornton. Online information is at www.aemi.edu.au/bnhcrc/.

¹ Prime Minister and Cabinet website, www.pm.gov.au/press-office/47-million-crc-funding-secures-future-bushfire-and-hazard-research.