

ISSUE: NATIONAL LARGE AIRTANKER CRASH

Key Issues

- A National Large Air Tanker (LAT) crashed in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, on 6 February 2023.
- Both pilots were retrieved from the crash site by helicopter and taken to Ravensthorpe Airport, where they were then transferred to a local medical facility.
- The National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC) contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, was contracted on 25 July 2022, funded by the Australian Government, for a two-year period. Through sharing arrangements between states and territories the National LAT is positioned to meet the greatest risk, and commenced its service in WA on 15 December 2022.
- NEMA is working with NAFC, a unit within Australian Fire and Emergency Services Council (AFAC) to ensure the operational capability gap is covered.
- AFAC will draw upon well-established resource sharing arrangements to continue to meet the needs of emergency services across the country, including the Department of Fire and Emergency Services WA.
- In the coming days, states and territory operational Fire Chiefs and Commissioners will meet to decide how best to support our national capability for the remainder of summer.

Contact Officer: Joe Buffone

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Responsible Division: Emergency Management and Response, NEMA
QB23-000035

Date updated: 13/02/2023

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- NSW RFS have offered the services of a Large Air Tanker to Western Australia in the short term. If required, Australian Government's funding for the National LAT will be used to support this arrangement. This maintains the collective national response capability in the wake of this incident.
- There are currently six other LATs available in various states across Australia. These aircraft, in addition to the broader NAFC fleet of 161 services will support the aerial capability of Australia for the remainder of the fire season.

TALKING POINTS

- The Australian Government is grateful that two pilots involved in the National Large Air Tanker (LAT) crash in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, walked away from the crash on 6 February 2023.
- Both were retrieved from the crash site by helicopter and taken to Ravensthorpe Airport, where they were then transferred to a local medical facility.
- Australian Transport Safety Bureau investigators visited the crash site Friday 10 February 2023.
- AFAC and NAFC will continue to support fire and emergency services as required, and will assist authorities through the investigation if needed.

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- NEMA is working with NAFC, a unit within AFAC to ensure the operational capability gap is covered.
- AFAC will draw upon well-established resource sharing arrangements to continue to meet the needs of emergency services across the country, including the Department of Fire and Emergency Services WA.
- The cost of leasing a replacement aircraft is still being estimated.

BACKGROUND

- The Government funds approximately \$30 million per annum to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre (NAFC), through the National Aerial Firefighting Program.
- The grant is administered over three years (2021-22 – 2023-24). The Minister for Emergency Management may extend the grant for up to a further two years.
- State and territory governments co-fund the NAFC fleet. The annual funding required varies significantly reflecting the projected bush fire risks and aerial resources identified by each jurisdiction as necessary to mitigate those risks.
- The National Aerial Firefighting Strategy 2021-26 (the Strategy), was released publicly by NAFC in July 2021 and was considered and endorsed by the Commissioners and Chief Officers Strategic Committee at the July 2021 meeting.

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QB23-000035

Date updated: 13/02/2023

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- The Strategy included recommendations for the purchase of an additional LAT and additional Type 1 helicopters (the largest helicopters used on bushfires) in the NAFC fleet. The National LAT was procured in 2021.
 - No specific funding request has been made as yet to the Government to acquire additional Type 1 helicopters.
- The current model of leasing aircraft through NAFC, rather than purchasing an exclusive fleet, is the basis for NAFC operations in the 2022-23 bushfire season. This model supports the international sharing of specialised aerial firefighting capabilities.
- The NAFC, with state and territory operational Fire Chiefs and Commissioners, determine the composition and types of aircraft, with the exception of the LAT the commonwealth does not determine or influence the composition or type of aircraft.
- The NAFC, with state and territory operational Fire Chiefs and Commissioners, continue to review Australia's aerial firefighting needs on an ongoing basis.
- As at 31 December 2022 the national fleet comprised of 151 aircraft including the National LAT. As at 6 February 2023, following the crash of the National LAT, the national fleet now comprises of 150 aircraft including:

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Number of aircraft	Type of aircraft
5	Large fixed wing air tankers
12	Large rotary wing aircraft (Type 1)
66	Medium and small rotary wing aircraft (Type 2 and 3)
50	Fixed wing firebombers
17	Light fixed wing

Of those 150 aircraft:

- 115 are Australian owned and registered;
- one is Australian owned and foreign registered;
- 24 are foreign owned and registered; and
- 10 are Australian registered and foreign owned.

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QB23-000035

Date updated: 13/02/2023

**Home Affairs Portfolio
National Emergency Management Agency
Supplementary Estimates Hearing – February 2023**

Topic: National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements

Responsible Deputy: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator General, Emergency Management and Response

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



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Clearing Officer: Joe Buffone, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response

SB22-001373

Released by the National Emergency Management Agency under the Freedom of Information Act 1982

s22 Irrelevant Material

IF ASKED: ABOUT THE CRASH OF THE NATIONAL LAT

- The Australian Government is grateful that two pilots involved in the National Large Air Tanker (LAT) crash in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, walked away from the crash on 6 February 2023.
- Both were retrieved from the crash site by helicopter and taken to Ravensthorpe Airport, where they were then transferred to a local medical facility.
- AFAC and NAFC will continue to support fire and emergency services as required, and will assist authorities through the investigation if needed.
- The NAFC-contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, was contracted on 25 July 2022, funded by the Australian Government, for a two-year period. Through sharing arrangements between states and territories the National LAT is positioned to meet the greatest risk, and commenced its service in WA on 15 December 2022.
- NEMA is working with NAFC, a unit within AFAC to ensure the operational capability gap is covered.
- AFAC will draw upon well-established resource sharing arrangements to continue to meet the needs of emergency services across the country, including the Department of Fire and Emergency Services WA.
- In the coming days, states and territories will meet to decide how best to support our national capability for the remainder of summer.
- NSW RFS have offered the services of a Large Air Tanker to Western Australia in the short term. If required, Australian Government's funding for the National LAT will be used to support this arrangement. This maintains the collective national response capability in the wake of this incident.
- There are currently six other LATs available in various states across Australia. These aircraft, in addition to the broader NAFC fleet of 161 services will support the aerial capability of Australia for the remainder of the fire season.

Sensitivites

- The ABC is reporting that Opposition emergency services spokesperson Martin Aldridge said *'the use of large air tankers for firefighting should be paused and reconsidered... adding if the crash had occurred in a more populated area the outcome...may well have been drastically different.'*

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Clearing Officer: Joe Buffone, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response

s22 Irrelevant Material



**Home Affairs Portfolio
National Emergency Management Agency
Budget Estimates Hearing – May 2023**

KEY BRIEF

Topic: National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements

Responsible Deputy: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response Group

s22 Irrelevant Material



OFFICIAL

Clearing Officer: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response Group

s22 Irrelevant Material



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Clearing Officer: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response Group

SB23-000318

Released by the National Emergency Management Agency under the Freedom of Information Act 1982

IF ASKED: ABOUT THE CRASH OF THE NATIONAL LAT

- The NAFC-contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, known as the National Large Air Tanker (LAT), crashed in the Fitzgerald River National Park Western Australia on 6 February 2023, with both pilots walking away with minor injuries.
- AFAC and NAFC awaits the outcome of investigations by the Australian Transport Safety Bureau into the crash and will assist authorities through the investigation as required.
- In response to the crash, the NAFC Strategic Committee arranged the National LAT coverage be continued through until the end of March, by extending the service of other contracted LATs when the existing contracts were complete.
- The NAFC is working with the current National LAT contractor, Coulson Aviation, to have a substitute National LAT ready to come to Australia in December 2023 in preparation for the 2023-24 bushfire fire season.

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



**Home Affairs Portfolio
National Emergency Management Agency
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing – October 2023**

KEY BRIEF

Topic: National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements

Responsible Executive: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General,
Emergency Management and Response Group

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



TALKING POINTS

If asked: About the crash of the National LAT

- The NAFC-contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, known as the National LAT, crashed in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, on 6 February 2023, with both pilots walking away with minor injuries.
- The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (**ATSB**) released a preliminary report on the incident on 3 May 2023, with a final report due in 2024. The ATSB are reviewing:
 - Communication procedures for bird-dog¹ and LAT pilots.
 - Operator's crew resource management procedures and practices.
 - Standards and safety margins for Boeing 737 Fireliner retardant drop.
- In response to the crash, the NAFC Strategic Committee arranged the National LAT coverage be continued through until the end of March, by extending the service of other contracted LATs when the existing contracts were complete.
- The NAFC is working with the current National LAT contractor, Coulson Aviation, to provide a substitute Boeing 737, by transiting the aircraft to Australia by mid December 2023, in preparation for the 2023-24 bushfire season.

s22 Irrelevant Material



¹ The bird-dog is an intelligence-gathering aircraft, used to assess the fireground, determine the best flightpath and then lead the air tankers across the fireground and show them where to drop with a smoke generator.

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



**Home Affairs Portfolio
National Emergency Management Agency
Additional Estimates Hearing – February 2024**

KEY BRIEF

Topic: National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements

Responsible Executive: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



TALKING POINTS

If asked: About the crash of the National LAT

- The NAFC-contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, known as the National LAT, crashed in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, on 6 February 2023, with both pilots walking away with minor injuries.

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- The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (**ATSB**) released a preliminary report on the incident on 3 May 2023, with a final report due in 2024. The ATSB are reviewing:
 - Communication procedures for bird-dog¹ and LAT pilots.
 - Operator's crew resource management procedures and practices.
 - Standards and safety margins for Boeing 737 Fireliner retardant drop.
- In response to the crash, the NAFC Strategic Committee arranged the National LAT coverage be continued through until the end of March, by extending the service of other contracted LATs when the existing contracts were complete.
- The National LAT contractor, Coulson Aviation, provided a substitute Boeing 737 which commenced at Richmond NSW on 1 December 2023 for the 2023-24 bushfire season.

s22 Irrelevant Material



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- In February 2023, a LAT crashed while fighting a fire in Western Australia. This received some media interest at the time of the crash.

s22 Irrelevant Material



**Home Affairs Portfolio
National Emergency Management Agency
Budget Estimates Hearing – May 2024**

KEY BRIEF

Topic: National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements

Responsible Executive: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General,
Emergency Management and Response

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



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TALKING POINTS

If asked: About the crash of the National LAT

- The NAFC-contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, known as the National LAT, crashed in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, on 6 February 2023, with both pilots walking away with minor injuries.
- The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (**ATSB**) released a preliminary report on the incident on 3 May 2023, with a final report due in 2024. The ATSB are reviewing:
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- In response to the crash, the NAFC Strategic Committee arranged the National LAT coverage be continued through until the end of March 2023, by extending the service of other contracted LATs when the existing contracts were complete.
- The National LAT contractor, Coulson Aviation, provided a substitute Boeing 737 which commenced at Richmond, NSW on 1 December 2023 for the 2023-24 bushfire season.

s22 Irrelevant Material



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s22 Irrelevant Material



**Home Affairs Portfolio
National Emergency Management Agency
Supplementary Budget Estimates Hearing – November 2024**

KEY BRIEF

Topic: National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements

Responsible Executive: Joe Buffone PSM, Deputy Coordinator-General,
Emergency Management and Response

s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



s22 Irrelevant Material



TALKING POINTS

If asked: About the crash of the National LAT in February 2023

- The NAFC-contracted aircraft, Boeing 737 Airliner, known as the National LAT, crashed in the Fitzgerald River National Park, WA, on 6 February 2023. Both pilots walked away with minor injuries.
- The Australian Transport Safety Bureau (ATSB) released a preliminary report on the incident on 3 May 2023, with a final report due in 2024. The ATSB are reviewing:
 - Communication procedures for bird-dog¹ and LAT pilots.
 - Operator's crew resource management procedures and practices.
 - Standards and safety margins for Boeing 737 Fireliner retardant drop.
- In response to the crash, the NAFC Strategic Committee arranged the National LAT coverage be continued through until the end of March 2023, by extending the service of other contracted LATs.
- The National LAT contractor, Coulson Aviation, provided a substitute Boeing 737 for the 2023-24 bushfire season.

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Australian Government
Department of Home Affairs

Submission

For information
PDMS Ref. Number: MS22-001968
Date of Clearance: 26/08/2022

To **Minister for Emergency Management**
Subject **Final Report - Collision with terrain involving Lockheed Martin Aerial Asset on 23 January 2020**
Timing At your convenience

Recommendations

That you:

- 1. note that Australian Transport Safety Bureau’s report regarding the Lockheed Martin Aerial Asset collision on 23 January 2020 during the 2019/20 Black Summer fires has been finalised. note / discuss

- 2. note that this report will become a public document on Monday 29 August 2022 and that there are some findings that are critical of the NSW Rural Fire Service aerial firefighting operations and safety procedures. A copy of the report will be sent to your office on Monday, 29 August 2022. note/ discuss

Minister for Emergency Management

Signature.....

Date:...../...../2022

Minister's Comments				
Rejected Yes/No	Timely Yes/No	Relevance <input type="checkbox"/> Highly relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Significantly relevant <input type="checkbox"/> Not relevant	Length <input type="checkbox"/> Too long <input type="checkbox"/> Right length <input type="checkbox"/> Too brief	Quality Poor 1.....2.....3.....4.....5 Excellent Comments:

Key Issues

1. On 26 August 2022, Director General Joe Buffone, Emergency Management Australia, met with Chief Commissioner / Chief Executive Officer Angus Mitchell, Australian Transport Safety Bure (ATSB), to discuss the embargoed ATSB’s final report regarding the Lockheed Martin Airplane collision on 23 January 2020.
2. The report will become a public document on 29 August 2022 and a copy will be sent to your office.
3. The report is for your information only as this matter does not require any action within the remit of your Ministerial Portfolios.
4. There is some findings that are critical of the NSW Rural Fire Service aerial firefighting operations and safety procedures.
5. The New South Wales Rural Fire Service, the Australasian Fire and National Aerial Firefighting Centre and Coulson Aviation are responsible for progressing the outcomes and recommendations identified during ATSB’s investigation.
6. There is the potential for media interest when the report is released. ATSB are responsible for media responses to this report.

Background

7. On 23 January 2020, the crew of a Lockheed Corporation (now Lockheed Martin) EC-130Q large air tanker were conducting bushfire control operations in the Snowy Mountains region of New South Wales.
8. After assessing the initial fire-retardant drop site at Adaminaby as not suitable, the crew accepted an alternate tasking to the Good Good (Peak View) fire-ground.

9. After conducting a partial retardant drop at Peak View, the aircraft was in a left turn and climbed for about 10 seconds to about 170 feet above the drop height. Following this, the aircraft was then observed descending.
10. The aircraft was seen at a very low height above the ground, in a slight left bank, immediately followed by a significant left roll just before ground impact.
11. The 3 crew were fatally injured and the aircraft destroyed.

Authorising Officer
Cleared by: Joe Buffone PSM Director General Emergency Management Australia Date: 26 August 2022 Ph: s22

Contact Officer: Joe Buffone, Director General, Emergency Management Australia
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CC Minister for Home Affairs, Minister for Cyber Security
Secretary