

Dutton and Pezzullo's bushfire emergency failure

By John Menadue

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The responsibilities of Home Affairs Minister Peter Dutton (left) and Emergency Management Australia Secretary Mike Pezzullo for events such as the bushfire crisis, are clearly set out (Screenshots via YouTube)

The role of the Department of Home Affairs is clear.

The Administrative Arrangement Orders (AAOs) set out Commonwealth ministers' and departments' responsibilities.

The role of the Department of Home Affairs is set out:

'Part 8, The Department of Home Affairs. Matters dealt with by the Department...

Commonwealth emergency management; Natural disaster relief, recovery and mitigation and financial assistance including payments to the States and Territories and the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment.'

[These AAO's were signed and sealed by Peter

Cosgrove on 29 May 2019. They are repeated on 5 December 2019, signed and sealed by David Hurley and operative from 1 February 2020.]

One would expect that Peter Dutton would be front and centre in almost every respect of the bushfire emergency. But he is nowhere to be found, as far as I can ascertain.

Dutton is not at all shy about his public profile — attacking asylum seekers or misleading us about boat arrivals, South African farmers or African youth gangs in Melbourne. But on the bushfire emergency, he is as silent as the grave.

Dutton and Pezzullo's culpability for the bushfire crisis [@IndependentAus](https://t.co/46LkDeml6q)

— [?] Angelo Angeli (@Cobra1A) [January 14, 2020](#)

As Abul Rizvi [pointed out](#) in January:

Around 18 months ago, Urgency Management in Australia (EMA), a division of the Department of Home Affairs, warned in its National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework that climate change was exposing the country to natural disasters on

'unimagined scales, in unprecedented combinations and in unexpected locations ... As a result, the cost of

disasters is increasing for all sectors of society — governments, industry, business, not-for-profits, communities and individuals”.

So what did Dutton and Pezzullo do in response to this very clear warning?

Very little is the answer according to Mark Crossweller, the senior public servant responsible for developing the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework. While \$130.6 million over five years was allocated to the Framework, Crossweller told the Australian Financial Review (AFR) that it had been impossible to get proposals adopted “so that significant work can be done in preparation and mitigation.”

Nothing concrete has been done with the \$130.6 million according to the AFR.

There are possible explanations for Dutton’s and Pezzullo’s failure in the bushfire emergency.

The first is sheer incompetence and the collapsed morale in the Department of Home Affairs. Abul Rizvi has cited numerous examples of just that.

The second explanation is, as an insider in [Emergency Management Australia](#) (EMA) told me, the focus in EMA has been the possible threat of terrorism to the neglect of other threats like bushfires. Presumably, this focus has been at the direction of Dutton and Pezzullo. This is consistent with the way we know that Dutton and Pezzullo have operated for many years — frighten us about the threat of terrorism because that delivers more political dividends.

Or is there just confusion in the Government

about who is responsible? Is there shared responsibility with the Minister for Agriculture and Water David Littleproud?

At least one thing is very clear and that is the responsibility of the Department of Home Affairs for Commonwealth Emergency Management. It has failed in that responsibility.

Home Affairs Minister [#PeterDutton](#) buried an official climate risk action plan for 18 months, reports [@FinancialReview](#) <https://t.co/i4Lai0N3lm>

— Hugh Riminton (@hughriminton) [January 11, 2020](#)

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Dutton quips about Pacific Islands facing climate change <https://t.co/ECVq2ITS4x> via [@YouTube](#). Australians aren’t laughing as bushfire laps at there doorsteps either

— Jaye Hanson (@JayeHanson13) [November 11, 2019](#)

