

Call for Expressions of Interest

T9-A1: National SES Fitness for Role assessment review

Expressions of Interest due **5pm AEDT, 21 November 2025**
to research@naturalhazards.com.au



Overview

Natural Hazards Research Australia (hereafter the Centre) is seeking Expressions of Interest from project teams for the following project:

T9-A1 National SES Fitness for Role assessment review

Project description

Australia's State Emergency Services (SES) are now two years into implementing the national minimum physical fitness for role program – the SES Fitness for Role program. It is timely to revisit the original research underpinning the job task analysis and assessment design, with two primary objectives:

- To introduce a new criterion of 'safety critical' into determining minimum physical fitness requirements, and to identify and detail any required program changes.
- To review the national skill sets and assessment designs included in the program (with an increased priority on two of the skill sets and three of the existing assessment designs) and provide details of any required changes to the program.

The research will use the same research approach, rigour and independence as the initial research.

For skill sets and assessments where there is a need already identified for review, the project will initially focus on a review (and update as required) of the job task analysis and fitness requirements for:

Skill sets:

- Road crash rescue
- Land-based swift water rescue

Assessments:

- In-water safety
- Carry
- Hold

This research will support an important national workforce safety initiative that is being applied in SES agencies across Australia and will ensure there is a contemporary, updated understanding of the minimum fitness requirements for members undertaking any of the 13 SES roles included in the Fitness for Role program, and ensure the validity and relevance of each of the required fitness assessments.

Estimated duration

The estimated timeframe of this project is 1-2 years.

Budget

The maximum budget for this project \$500,000 (ex GST)

The research team should note that this is a competitive process. Expression of Interest submissions will be assessed on value for money and justification for any funds requested.

Related national research priorities¹

- Future workforce
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¹ Natural Hazards Research Australia (2022) National research priorities for disaster risk reduction and community resilience to the impacts of natural hazards, accessible at www.naturalhazards.com.au/sites/default/files/2022-05/NatHazResAus_ResearchPriorities_FA02.pdf

Related Centre research priorities for 2024–26²

→ Operational response and innovation

Supporting organisations

- Australian Capital Territory State Emergency Services
- New South Wales State Emergency Services
- Northern Territory Emergency Services
- Queensland State Emergency Services
- South Australian State Emergency Services
- Tasmania State Emergency Services
- Victoria State Emergency Services
- Department of Fire and Emergency Services (Western Australia)

Centre contact

For any questions regarding this Call for EOIs, please email research@naturalhazards.com.au.

Online project briefing

For more information or questions, an online project briefing webinar will be held at **1:00pm AEDT on 5 November 2025**

Submission of EOI

EOIs must be prepared using the Centre's [EOI submission form](#) and [Budget Template](#). EOIs are to be submitted to research@naturalhazards.com.au by **5:00pm AEDT on 21 November 2025**

² Natural Hazards Research Australia (2024) *Biennial Research Plan 2024–26*, accessible at <https://www.naturalhazards.com.au/sites/default/files/2024-07/NHRA%20ResearchPlan24%E2%80%9326%2004.pdf>

Statement of requirements

Background and context

The AFAC National SES Fitness for Role Implementation Group (SES FFRIG) is responsible for coordinating and implementing the national Physical Fitness for Role (SES FFR) program across Australia. Reporting to the AFAC SES Operations Group (members are Chief Officers or equivalent from each SES agency), the implementation group was formed following completion of the foundation research phase of the project (SES Fit for Task Final Research Report, Aug 2023).

The national SES FFR project has been a significant and ongoing collaboration across SES agencies nationally, extending over many years and supported by the Australian Council of State Emergency Services (ACSES), the Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC) and Natural Hazards Research Australia (the Centre) and its predecessors the Bushfire CRC and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC (BNHCRC). Since the completion of the research and the official national launch of the SES FFR program, SES leadership from all agencies remains fully committed to the national implementation of the program and this has seen SES agencies collaborating strongly to implement the program.

In June 2025, the AFAC SES Operations Group reaffirmed their commitment to national implementation of the program from 1 July 2025, to ensure the safety of SES members across Australia.

During implementation, several questions have arisen that can only be resolved through additional research. This research is expected to test and expand the evidence base and resources that underpin the program to ensure it remains current and relevant.

The priority areas that require further exploration through this project are:

- To introduce a fourth criterion (safety critical) to the set of criteria used to identify the core tasks for each of the 13 national roles and ensure that any necessary changes (including modified or new fitness assessments) are made to the program framework and supporting documents.
- Evaluating changes to the rescue equipment used for road crash rescue (transition from hydraulic rescue tools to battery-powered rescue tools) and ensuring that any necessary changes to minimum fitness requirements for this role are made to the program framework and supporting documents.
- To review one of the most physically demanding tasks undertaken by SES members, casualty recovery, including using a rescue litter. This has been an area of significant discussion on the validity of the design and verification of the Carry Assessment. The project is required to reaffirm or recommend changes to the fitness requirements and associated assessments for members participating in casualty recovery using a stretcher.
- To review alternatives for the in-water safety assessment that can be safely completed in older swimming pools that have a bulkhead that elevates the edge of the pool above the level of the water in the pool. The existing assessment requires pools that have the pool deck and the water at the same level.
- Providing answers to these questions and updating the program resources will have national importance and support the continued success of the implementation of the Fitness for Role program.

Reference documents:

- [SES Fit for Task Final Research Report](#) - August 2023
- [Hazard Note 4: A national evidenced-based SES program to reduce injury](#), Natural Hazards Research Australia - August 2023
- Fitness assessment guides (will be made available on request)

Project description

Australia's State Emergency Services (SES) are now two years into the implementation of the minimum physical fitness for role program – known nationally as SES Fitness for Role. It is now timely to revisit the original research underpinning the job task analysis and assessment design with three primary objectives:

- To introduce a new criterion of 'safety critical' into the determination of minimum physical fitness requirements and to provide details of any required changes to the program.
- To undertake a priority review of two of the national skill sets included in the program and two of the existing assessment designs and provide details of any required changes to the program.
- To undertake a review of the remaining skill sets and assessments to ensure consistency with any amended fitness criteria and current agency practices.

The research is expected to use the same research approach, rigour and independence that was used for the initial research.

This project will provide an opportunity to ensure that essential safety requirements are incorporated into the program and that the evidence base that underpins the program remains current and captures the minimum physical fitness demands of the current roles and agency practices for each of the national skill sets.

The project will review, and update as required, the job task analysis and required fitness assessments for all the national skill sets, with the following skill sets being a priority, because of known changes to agency practices and equipment since the initial research was completed, that may influence the minimum fitness requirements for members with those skill sets.

Skill sets:

- Road crash rescue
- Land-based swift water rescue

The project will review, and update as required all the fitness assessments, with the following fitness assessments being a priority, where issues have been identified with these assessments during national implementation of the program and a review, reconsideration, and perhaps redesign of the assessments is required.

Assessments:

- In-water safety
- Carry
- Hold

Once completed, the project will ensure there is a contemporary, updated understanding of the minimum fitness requirements for members undertaking any the 13 included SES roles included in the Fitness for Role program, and ensure the validity and relevance of each of the required fitness assessments.

This research will support an important national workforce safety initiative that is being applied in SES agencies across Australia.

The primary aims of this project are to:

- Incorporate a fourth criterion into the SES-FFR methodology, which provides for the inclusion of safety critical requirements, including the methodology to determine how this criterion will be applied.
- Update the evidence base for the program, by refreshing and updating the role-based job task analysis (including the addition of a fourth Criterion) for all 13 skill sets included in the national program.
- Undertake a detailed review of the following national skill sets, and if indicated, update the required fitness assessments for all skill sets, with a priority for these skill sets:
 - Road crash rescue
 - Land-based swift water rescue
- Undertake a detailed review and reaffirm/update the design of all the fitness assessments, with a priority for these assessments:
 - In-water safety assessment
 - Carry assessment
 - Hold assessment.
- Ensure that the job task analysis of all national skills sets is reviewed using the updated criterion (inclusion of safety critical) and reaffirmed or updated.
- Develop, validate and verify any additional or updated fitness assessments where indicated by the updated job task analysis.
- Provide updated reference materials that enable the SES FFRIG to update the SES FFR framework and assessment guides.
- Produce a documented guide that will be sufficiently detailed to capture the methodology utilised for this project, which will be used to inform future reviews, including the process to be followed for the addition of new skill sets in the National Fitness for Role program.
- Provide the SES FFRIG with guidance and recommendations for maintaining the quality and effectiveness of the national program. This should include:
 - Recommendations (supported by evidence and guidance) for when and how to undertake a periodic review of the program for quality assurance.

This research is expected to be completed using the same research methodology, rigour and independence that were utilised in the initial research, to ensure the evidence base for the SES FFR program remains current, relevant and contemporary.

It is expected that the research team, in consultation with the SES FFRIG will develop guidance to inform future updates to the program and the addition of new skill sets to the program.

Addition of a new task criterion

Each of the tasks identified for the 13 national roles included in the program was analysed using three criteria that were required to be met for a task to be considered important from a minimum physical fitness perspective:

1. Operationally important, and
2. Physically demanding, and
3. Frequently occurring.

The SES FFRIG now require an additional (fourth) criterion to be added to the evaluation of tasks that are undertaken by SES members. That will mean that the criteria become:

1. Operationally important, and
2. Physically demanding, and
3. Either:
 - a. Frequently occurring, or
 - b. Safety critical

The existing job task analyses for each of the 13 skill sets will need to be reviewed and updated as required to ensure the new criteria are correctly applied.

Review and update the evidence base and assessments for the national skill sets

All of the national skill sets are to be reviewed, with two of the skill sets identified as a priority for the detailed review of the job task analysis and required fitness assessments. These skill sets are prioritised as a result of changes to equipment and a potential increase in physical fitness requirements for the skill sets. Those priority skill sets are:

- Road crash rescue
- Land-based swift water rescue

The project is required to undertake a detailed review of the requirements for the roles and, if required, to update (develop, validate and verify) the fitness assessments required for these roles.

Reviewing the job task analysis for the skill sets, will include incorporating changes to the nature and scope of the tasks undertaken, and changes to the equipment and/or operating environment that is used for those tasks. That information will then be used to update fitness assessments to ensure that they remain reflective of the roles and tasks of the SES workforce nationally. This will maintain the credibility and currency of this important national physical fitness program that continues to be actively applied in SES agencies across the country.

For the Road crash rescue skill set, it is anticipated that the research team will:

1. Review the criteria used to develop the skill-set based assessment program and the current alignment of the assessment tasks with the agreed criteria.
2. Update the job task analysis and identify and develop updated assessment criteria, including the use of road crash rescue tools (there is a specific interest in the impact of the introduction of heavier battery-operated tools to replace the traditional hydraulic rescue tools):
 - a. revisit the job task analysis to measure the criterion tasks associated with heavier battery operated RCR tools
 - b. adjust assessments accordingly for that component if required
 - c. advise on the impacts of this change to the broader fitness assessments.

For the Land-based swift water rescue skill set, it is anticipated that the research team will:

1. Review the criteria used to develop the skill-set based assessment program, and the current alignment of the assessment tasks with the agreed criteria.
2. Update the job task analysis and identify and develop updated assessment criteria, especially the inclusion of the safety critical criterion (there is a specific interest in the national training requirements for members to be able to demonstrate a rescue swim):
 - a. revisit the job task analysis to using the updated criteria
 - b. adjust assessments accordingly for that component if required
 - c. advise on the impacts of this change to the broader fitness assessments.

Review all the fitness assessments to ensure relevance and provide valid alternatives for required fitness assessments where specific facilities are not always available.

All the fitness assessments are to be reviewed, with three assessments identified as a priority for a detailed review. Those priority assessments are:

1. The in-water safety assessment (conducted in a swimming pool)
2. The carry assessment
3. The hold assessment.

Review alternatives for the in-water safety assessment that can be safely completed in older swimming pools that have a bulkhead that elevates the edge of the pool above the level of the water in the pool. The existing assessment requires pools that have the pool deck and the water at the same level.

- The current assessment requires members wearing their operational uniform and a personal flotation device to get themselves out of a swimming pool unassisted. When there is a bulkhead, the physical effort that is required increases significantly and is no longer a measure of minimum fitness levels.
- It is expected that the project will develop alternatives to conducting self-rescue assessment tasks whilst wearing a personal flotation device as a component of the in-water safety assessment:
 - Any alternative assessment design will need to align with the evidence developed as part of the foundation research.
 - Must be able to be conducted on pools with a bulkhead that is up to 40cm higher than the level of the pool water.
 - Must not disadvantage individuals with appropriate levels of fitness and demonstrated operational capability.

One of the most physically demanding tasks undertaken by SES members is casualty recovery, including using a rescue litter. This has been an area of significant discussion on the validity of the design and verification of the Carry assessment. The project is required to reaffirm the existing fitness assessment or recommend changes to the fitness requirements and associated assessments for members participating in casualty recovery activities.

- The current assessment requires members to do a single-handed carry of a 24 kilogram object on flat ground. The demonstration is to be done with both hands.
- The project team is expected to undertake an independent review of the task analysis that informs the carry assessments and confirm if the carry assessment is applicable and that the assessment weight remains relevant.

The Hold assessment is linked to the Road crash rescue skill set and will need to be reviewed based on the findings from the review of the Road crash rescue skill set, and the introduction of heavier battery-powered rescue tools.

Update the program reference materials and resources

As part of the project, the SES FFRIG expects that the research team will update, or provide information to allow the SES FFRIG to update, the relevant materials and resources:

- Research team will update the program evidence base and resources based on the research outcomes, to reflect all agreed changes, including:
 - a. evidence database
 - b. assessment resources
 - c. job task analysis
 - d. providing the information in an agreed form that will enable updating of the SES Fitness for Role framework.

Inclusions:

1. Desk-based research
2. Interviews and workshops with subject matter experts
3. Site visits to multiple SES agencies across several states and territories, including measuring physical effort parameters for SES members undertaking tasks where new, or additional evidence is required
4. Coordinating an evaluation of any proposed new or modified assessments with SES members
5. Validation and verification of agreed additions or changes to assessments, to be undertaken with several SES agencies
6. A peer-reviewed final report, including updated resources
7. Human Research Ethics approvals where required
8. Working with volunteers in data collection and evaluation, which will require additional flexibility, including weekends and out of hours.

The project is already being actively implemented within agencies and strong collaboration is expected to ensure seamless integration of this research into the national program.

Exclusions:

- Developing a new approach to determining required fitness for SES roles. Whilst improvements to the methodology are encouraged, the same fundamental principles used in the original research need to be applied to this project.

Expected outputs

Core outputs

- Literature review – to the extent needed to identify any updates required to the approach used for the SES FFR program
- Updated job task analysis and assessment matrix
- Updated program resources that support the translation of research to practice, utilising the existing approach
- A peer-reviewed final report – including identification of future research opportunities, and access to all data generated as part of the project
- A documented guide that will be sufficiently detailed to inform and support future reviews and updates of the National Fit for Role program
- Stakeholder presentation/s
- Participation in assessment sessions at multiple SES locations, with volunteers, where changes or additions to any of the fitness assessments are identified
- Academic publication/s in high-ranking international journals (or an agreed equivalent publication)
- Please detail other innovative outputs that your team can deliver to address the outcomes below.

Additional outputs

- Project plan and plain language statement
- Quarterly progress reports
- Project evaluation report
- Relevant communications outputs, including but not limited to a presentation and a poster

Collaborative approach

Researchers are expected to undertake the research using a collaborative approach to assist in the translation and transfer of knowledge to end-users and to ensure the project meets their needs.

The SES FFRIG are highly engaged with this project, which recently won an industry award recognising the value and quality of the work that has been undertaken. The project team will be expected to work closely with nominated SES FFRIG representatives.

Researchers are encouraged to outline their approach to ensuring effective collaboration which could include embedding researchers within end-user organisations for a period of time.

Anticipated outcomes

Readiness and physical fitness for task are important aspects of being a volunteer. The ability to perform tasks safely and assist our communities helps ensure individuals and teams can reduce the incidence of avoidable injuries.

Safety is a shared responsibility between individuals and the organisation. The National SES Fitness for Role assessment review project aims to provide a simple and consistent assessment tool for SES volunteers and agencies across the country that will inform SES agencies and volunteers of the minimum physical demands required to safely undertake SES tasks.

This research will support an important national workforce safety initiative that is being applied in SES agencies across Australia and will ensure there is a contemporary, updated understanding of the minimum fitness requirements for members undertaking any of the 13 included SES roles included in the Fitness for Role program, and ensure the validity and relevance of each of the required fitness assessments.

The project is expected to deliver outcomes that will:

- Strengthen and update the evidence base for the Physical Fitness for Role program
- Provide an updated assessment matrix
- Update program resources
- Equip the SES FFRIG with clear, summarised project outcomes to inform updates to the SES FFRIG program framework
- Establish a methodology/guide (based on the approach used for this project) that will provide sufficient detail to allow future reviews and updates to the program
- Generate research data in a format that can be readily used by the SES FFRIG to guide decision-making.

Quality control and reporting

The project will be overseen and supported by a Project Management Committee (PMC) comprising the Principal Researcher, a Centre representative, and at least one stakeholder representative from the SES FFRIG. Composition of the PMC will be determined in consultation with the Principal Researcher.

Reports

The Centre expects that the outputs delivered by this project will meet the highest scientific standards and will be suitable for publication on the Centre website and in industry newsletters, as well as in high-quality scientific journals.

The successful research organisation/s must co-develop with end-users a project plan and project summary using the Centre's templates. The project summary should explain in plain language what the project is about, what questions it intends to answer and describe the expected practical outputs that will make use of the research findings. The project plan must be approved by the PMC and will become an attachment to the contract.

Reports (and any supporting material) must be submitted to the PMC's satisfaction and will be subject to review by PMC members. The project team will be required to ensure an internal peer review process is undertaken prior to the final report being submitted.

Milestone reporting

The project team must report all milestone deliverables and engagement activities into the Centre's Project Management System. This will include sufficient justification for the completion of milestones to the satisfaction of the PMC and the Centre.

Communication

To further assist with quality assurance, it is expected that:

- regular PMC meetings will be held
- the project team will use a consultative approach, documented in quarterly reports
- the Principal Researcher will give periodic presentations to key stakeholder groups to gain critical feedback on project milestones.

Additional quality control processes may be agreed as part of the project planning process.

Contractual arrangements

A copy of the Research Services Agreement, the proposed form of contract for the purposes of this project, [can be found here](#).

The Centre reserves its rights to make amendments to the form of contract.

This agreement should be reviewed by applicants as part of the EOI submission.

If you would like to request amendments to any of the terms and conditions set out in the proposed form of contract, details of the proposed changes and the reason the changes are requested must be included in the EOI submission form. Requests for any changes will be at the sole discretion of the Centre.

Selection as a shortlisted or preferred provider does not give rise to a contract (express or implied) between the shortlisted or preferred provider and the Centre for the supply of goods or services. No legal relationship will exist between the Centre and the shortlisted or preferred provider until such time as a binding contract in writing is executed by both parties.

In the case of consortiums, the Centre requests that one consortium member be nominated as Lead Research Provider and take responsibility for subcontracting other parties.

Submitting an Expression of Interest

Application and review process

Project selection and approval will be a two-stage process. The first stage is evaluation of the EOIs that are received. The second stage is development of a project proposal, where a preferred provider will be selected and offered an opportunity to co-develop a detailed project proposal with input from key stakeholders.

Key dates

23 October 2025	Call for EOIs opens
5 November 2025	Online project briefing
21 November 2025	Due date for EOIs

Submission requirements for this EOI

Project teams responding to this EOI are required to submit their response using the Centre's [EOI submission form](#) and [Budget Template](#). Submissions must include:

- a statement of capability (max 600 words), including the proposed contributions of each research team member to the project
- a statement (max 400 words) about the diversity of the project team
- a statement (max 400 words) about the project's inclusion and respect of First Nations peoples, philosophies, cultures, rights and/or knowledges
- an outline (max 1000 words) describing how the project team intends to approach the project, strategies for effective collaboration and an indicative methodology
- an indicative schedule of work and interim milestones/project outputs as described in this document
- a proposed project budget in line with the budget envelope provided, including details of any in kind contribution from research organisation/s – a detailed budget to be provided using the downloadable [Budget Template](#) provided on the Centre's website
- a clear statement (max 400 words) describing the outcomes that will be delivered for this project and how they will be used by stakeholders
- a clear statement (max 400 words) describing the outputs that the proposed approach to this project will deliver and how the findings could translate into practice
- a statement (max 500 words) demonstrating the project team's relevant industry and stakeholder engagement
- a risk management statement (max 500 words)
- any requested changes to the Centre's proposed form of contract
- up to two-page CVs for each proposed project team member.

Additional information

In responding to this Call for Expressions of Interest, advice should be provided on any known or anticipated impacts of COVID or other pandemic restrictions or human resource risks on the timely delivery of the project. Where appropriate, risk management for the impacts of pandemic restrictions should be incorporated into the EOI.

Frequently asked questions

Additional information provided to individual respondents will also be published on the Centre's website to ensure access to all interested parties. Respondents are encouraged to check the website for any additional information via these published FAQs, prior to the closing date.

Online project briefing

An online webinar scheduled for **1:00pm AEDT, 5 November 2025** will provide a more detailed briefing of the project and the opportunity for interested parties to pose specific questions.

Registrations for this webinar can be made via the project page on the Centre's website. Once completed, a recording of this webinar will be posted to the website to ensure all interested respondents have access to this information.

Evaluation criteria

After the closing date, the Centre will review submitted EOIs against the evaluation criteria below. The evaluation criteria provide an indication of those matters that should be included in the EOI and supporting material – details are provided in the table below.

The Centre reserves the right not to offer the work, or only allocate a proportion of the available funding, if a proposal does not meet the Centre's needs. The Centre reserves the right to invite any other specific researchers as it sees fit to submit proposals before or after the closing date.

Mandatory evaluation criteria

- Registered Australian Business: The Respondent holds a valid Australian Business Number (ABN) or Australian Company Number (ACN)
- Public Liability Insurance: The respondent has or will obtain appropriate insurance
- Demonstrated experience in research and research translation for the physical health and performance of a workforce: Demonstrated expertise in translation of research into relevant workplace fitness practices in physically demanding workplaces

Evaluation criteria	% weighting
Research capability: the capacity and capability to deliver an excellent research project in an Australian environment	20
Project approach: a demonstrated understanding of the project requirements and a proposed project approach and methodology that is appropriate, feasible and robust Relevant outline of a collaborative approach to assist in the translation and transfer of knowledge to end-users and to ensure the project meets their needs	20
Project outcomes and outputs: demonstrate a high-level understanding of the intentions of the project and how outputs/outcomes translate to practice	20
Industry engagement: strong track record of industry engagement with the ability to support and influence Australian disaster management at a national or state/territory level through interaction with key stakeholders	20
Value for money: value with money refers to an application representing an efficient, effective, economical and ethical use of Centre resources. Consideration of the relevant financial and non-financial costs and benefits of each application including, but not limited to: → the quality of the application and activities represented by the technical assessment → fitness for purpose of the application in contributing to Centre objectives → the potential Research Provider's relevant experience and performance history → whole of life costs (in-kind, other costs, risks, legal risks)	20