

## STATEMENT FROM WESNET AS CONTRACT MANAGER AND EMPLOYER FOR THE AWAVA SECRETARIAT BASED IN CANBERRA.

As you may know, the AWAVA Secretariat is located in Canberra, which has been subject to unhealthy and often hazardous smoke conditions from the bushfires for several weeks. The AWAVA staff members, their families and communities are impacted by the bushfires in various ways, and the AWAVA team members need to be attentive first and foremost to the health and well-being of themselves and each other. Over the last fortnight, all of the AWAVA staff team have been involved in supporting people in the community who are susceptible to the effects of smoke, heat exhaustion and the fires more generally. We expect this work will need to continue.

The AWAVA team will still be working but will also be managing and balancing a number of other critical priorities. The AWAVA staff have stated: "as the Secretariat, our workload was already under pressure from the unnecessary and damaging Family Law Inquiry. Now, in the context of the bushfires and climate emergency, we cannot operate on a 'business-as-usual' basis. We will endeavour to maintain our contributions to joint projects, but we will need to adjust our work so that it does not undermine our own health in the context of the bushfires and smoke, and so that we are able to support the well-being of our families and communities. We will respect the similar needs of other people we interact with through our work."

Even before the current bushfire emergency, AWAVA and WESNET were dismayed at the lack of collaborative Government action to change the systems that enable and perpetuate violence against women, the lack of meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as all the other harms affecting marginalised people. The current bushfire emergency brings a sharp reminder of the interconnectedness of different issues affecting women in Australia. The AWAVA team will bring this to bear in supporting the Alliance as it develops its future plans for policy advocacy. This will include articulating the links between violence and the impacts of climate change, and our commitment to a holistic approach to human safety, human rights and a healthy and safe environment.

WESNET recognises that the ACT Government declared a State of Alert in early January which remains in place for bushfires and which also recognises the unhealthy air quality. WESNET fully supports our staff to keep themselves safe and well during this terrible situation until the environmental conditions become healthy and safe again.

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