



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Q1. What experience have you had with Commonwealth disaster funding support?

I have had around 8-10 years experience with the Commonwealth disaster funding support through my role as an emergency management coordinator with local government and having to work through fires, floods, storms and other declared events and claims and processes. I have worked closely with a number of state government organisations who have administered support to recovering communities through this funding.

Q2. How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

There are a number of ways the funding support could be improved. One would be to allow some forms of betterment when re-establishing road and roadside assets. These can be impacted on 3-4 occasions in the space of a year and with them having to be returned to the same standard, it does not seem like a wise use of funds. Councils can add cost to ensure betterment but when the communities are impacted getting a road up to a passable and transportable state is the first priority. The details, approvals and management of making a road or roadside better after flooding can take so long and it cannot be accommodated for many overstretched and under resourced councils trying to manage numerous claims in the timelines required. Building back better to flood proof or storm proof infrastructure and communities would assist in work only needing to be done once and paid for once instead of continually having to be returned to the same standard through continuous emergency works claims after each event. Other options to reduce disaster risk on communities would be to underground powerlines in high risk areas. Communities rely on power to survive, to be resilient and to receive alerts and messages and manage in emergencies. As we see more and stronger wind and storm events with trees falling and affecting power to communities it does not allow resilience building to occur. It would also be cost affective in the long run. We have communities in our municipality that can loose power a number of times a week due to trees falling over lines. There may be the options to fund further mitigation priorities including drainage studies, battery and solar installations in smaller communities etc which could then form future plans and capital investments. Other funding support for communities and local governments could be around community emergency planning, resilience planning and action plans - these need to be resourced, facilitated and developed over years to ensure they reduce disaster risk as disasters occur.





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Q3. Please describe your understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes.

My understanding is that it is a cost sharing mechanism across all agencies to ensure that communities recover from emergencies. There is an excruciating amount of evidence required including before, during and after for all aspects of an emergency event before any claims can be assessed or approved. This is something that causes a lot of angst for many councils and communities as getting those photos, images and details when responding to an emergency event and a disaster is in most instances unsafe for staff and responders but without it many councils are unable to claim restoration of basic assets including roads, roadside clean up etc. This is a common theme across many councils even when it is a significant event which has been covered extensively over news and current affairs programs but still councils are unable to claim on many road rehabilitation etc as we do not have those images every 50 metres or so of the damage or a tree over the road because it was often moved by the community, by emergency services, by contractors, by the ADF or by council during or whilst the emergency is occurring and community members are trapped and getting a photo is not a priority at the time. Other understandings are around what is deemed acceptable for an access or driveway in the city or metro area is sometimes very different in the country or in a rural area but without all photos and the understanding of assessors many of these claims are deemed ineligible and community members have to clean up their own emergency access to homes etc. Funding was provided to many of our councils through the disaster funding arrangements through grants from Emergency Recovery Victoria but key elements of some of the community led recovery projects was them wanting to upgrade the halls and community centres they spent days in whilst trees were over roads but these were all ineligible, no heaters to keep them warm, no generators to run the locations - these were not allowed but were the most important need on cold, frost, wet storm nights . The criteria and eligibility guidelines need to be re-assessed as building resilience is to ensure people can light, heat and communicate from a community recovery hub or similar build during the worst of the event or to run recovery from but any asset is not allowed to be purchased to build this resilience using commonwealth disaster funding.

Q4. Are the funding roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events clear?

They may be clear but they are different across jurisdictions and can cause confusion. Announcements about funding through the commonwealth and state need to be made as early as possible after an event and then that would ensure local governments can focus on communities and refer them to already announced funding programs including clean ups, psychosocial support and support funding etc.

Q5. Is there any further information you would like to provide?

- Need to prioritise funding for communities that have had continuous impact over a number of events - councils can apply for grants relevant to areas flooded to undertake future flood mitigation works and even have matched funding in budgets and still miss out. Mitigation is key for some of the areas that we have continually being impacted.

- Community Recovery Hubs - or community buildings that they will go to in an event or when emergency services cannot access should be allowed to be funded to build to standard and to have heating, cooling, generators, backup communications nbn etc these are key to resilience building.





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- Community Emergency Planning - fund it, resource it and see what happens. Through the June 2021 storms we have funded 2 of these programs with a facilitator for 9 months and now they are incorporated, they have an action plan and will look at grant opportunities - these groups will be instrumental if further emergencies or disasters occur but will undertake planning for their communities.



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