



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Submitted by: Forbes Shire Council

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

Claims under the Disaster Funding Arrangements for Essential Public Assets.

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

We are using the buzz word "Betterment", but this is really the crux of investment required. Until a recent small allocation – that Forbes wasn't eligible for – most funding has been like for like. It makes it difficult to foster and lead resilience in our community and our infrastructure when the same problems occur again and again because all we can afford as councils are to do what we are funded for. This is not a great message. Forbes has identified a list of key betterment projects and are ready to implement them if funding is provided.

It is also unhelpful that the assistance provided relates often to direct inundation for flood. This is important assistance, but many businesses have experienced loss of access and therefore income – for deliveries, customers, staff, etc. – and there is no assistance available for this aspect of a disaster.

It would also be helpful if the funding for recovery and preparedness was over longer timeframes. The turnaround time is difficult especially when flood repair projects aren't the only projects we have underway and we have business as usual to attend to. Access to trades and staff also makes things very difficult when councils are in competition with the general public for the same trades and services, with the same levels of urgency.

It would also be appreciated if funding could support and acknowledge work already undertaken – councils are regularly asked to undertake activities such as prepare a disaster recovery plan for one round of funding and then some rounds later can be asked to develop – or given funding for - a resilience plan. Redoing a plan that sounds like the same plan as was undertaken last disaster is a hard sell in any community and also discredits the funder. Council would appreciate the opportunity to tailor the support it gets, to its community. Council might determine that instead of funds for a plan, it needs a position within its org structure, or it needs incentives, or capacity building activities. As councils we know our community and what works.

It would assist if the funding application process could be streamlined and be of immense benefit if payments were made up front and reconciliation took place following completion of the work.





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

Council has a detailed understanding of claims under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements for essential public assets, but little knowledge of the other areas.

Training or workshops for new or inexperienced employees would be of benefit as it has been over 5 years since this training has been provided.

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

Definitely not. Council was surprised, for example, that the Recovery Centre was Council's remit and Council had to wear many of the costs for this. It sometimes also seems that the state and federal levels of government are not on the same page (i.e. with Recovery Officer appointments) – it felt like neither level of government was open to accepting the responsibility for making the decision that our shire had missed out.

There is also a definite lack of clarity as to who was responsible for evacuation centres, the process of handover from disaster to recovery phase and a definite lack of data on impact. Council was expected to collect and know a lot of this information and councils just don't have the resources to complete this work, particularly when dealing with the incident ourselves.

The funding roles are incredibly unclear as there are so many different avenues and processes to make claims for various aspects of the event and recovery. There is so much red tape but very little guidance.

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

It is Council's firm belief that until the Western Shire Precinct is "Betterment", the low-to-moderate flooding from undeclared dam releases will continue to have a significant impact.

