



Australian Government

National Emergency  
Management Agency

# Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

**Response ID:** IRCDF\_1141\_46

**Consent option:** Publish with name

**Submitted by:** Public Safety Training and Response Group

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

Veteran owned and operated, Public Safety Training and Response Group, is an Australian solutions-focused organisation dedicated to solving real-time problems. We are a team of expert responders equipped to overcome an extensive range of emergency situations and deliver industry relevant and nationally accredited public safety training and response certifications.

Organisational senior management are embedded in state based response units and have significant experience in the emergency and disaster field.

At an organisational level, Public Safety Training and Response Group is establishing pathways to become more integrated with emergency service organisations and those involved in disaster resilience, response and recovery.

Public Safety Training and Response Group has invested considerable time and effort investigating current models of disaster support. We believe that this research enables the group to provide data, information and informed opinions regarding best practice in this space.

Positive impact of Commonwealth disaster funding (a selection):

- \* Infrastructure - Large scale projects such as the Northern Rivers project - a commonwealth approach that enables larger scale funding to be made available to build disaster resilient infrastructure.
- \* Data Collection - Commonwealth funding directed towards data collection and analysis enabling communities to better understand strategic management, warning signs and disaster timelines.
- \* Volunteer Support - in response to dropping volunteer rates, Commonwealth funding has enabled the growth of several organisations that promote alternative forms of volunteerism, boosting the number of volunteers able to assist in disaster recovery.
- \* National Emergency Management Agency - a national body enabling the coordinated delivery of Commonwealth assistance that provides the states and territories with a single point of contact.

Opportunities for future Commonwealth disaster funding (a selection):

- \* Assets - funding the purchase of, or coordinating the access to, large assets (e.g. low loaders, water tankers, earthmoving equipment, etc.) to community disaster response units. It is important that this





Australian Government

National Emergency  
Management Agency

opportunity is perused as many smaller communities are not positioned to procure and maintain assets that are critical for large scale disaster preparedness and response.

\* Alternative Models - recent Department of Defence reports have highlighted the high costs of continued Australian Defence Force (ADF) involvement in disaster response - funding allocated to enable the development of an augmented cross jurisdictional disaster response capability would provide a pathway to reduce ADF involvement.

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

Commonwealth funding is currently used to enable many communities to better prepare for natural disasters and improve resilience. The Public Safety Training and Response Group believes that an increased focus on data collection and asset availability is paramount to supporting communities to reduce their disaster risk profile.

### Improved Data Collection

#### 1. Sensors and Measurement Methods

Understanding and knowledge of climate conditions and geographical specifics is fundamental to both preparing for and enabling strategic, targeted responses during disasters. Data from field mounted sensors used in conjunction with accurate modelling based on historic events, enables close monitoring of the local environment. This assists with land management, such as monitoring fuel loads, and provides the community with location-specific, up to date information supporting proactive interventions to improve resilience.

In the event of a disaster data capturing systems provide real time predictive information for incident controllers, thereby improving their decision making.

Improved modelling capabilities coupled with the ability to process larger volumes of data through the use of artificial intelligence could further improve disaster response and outcomes.

#### 2. Drone Technology

Where field sensor technology is not appropriate, unmanned aerial vehicles (drones) can be used for data collection - both for regular land care monitoring and in the event of a disaster.

As with the fixed in place sensors, this data can be used to assist decision making, triaging available emergency services and assets facilitating improved response and community outcomes.

The use of Commonwealth funding to support drone programs also provides indirect community benefit through the creation of local jobs, including Indigenous employment opportunities. Indigenous drone operators could continue to live on country and use drone data alongside their extensive local knowledge to assist in building resilience before an event, providing intelligence to emergency services during an event and mitigating the effect of disasters on their community post event.

### Asset Availability

Commonwealth disaster funding from the Disaster Ready Fund Round One, tended to target infrastructure upgrades and capital projects - essential elements to reducing disaster risk.





Australian Government

National Emergency  
Management Agency

Enabling communities to purchase or have access to large assets (e.g. earthmoving equipment, transport equipment, water tankers, etc.) is an additional enabler for community preparedness.

Large assets are often expensive to purchase and maintain but give the community the capacity to perform functions (such as land clearing) that help reduce disaster risk.

It would be beneficial to consider a funding model that would enable a system of ownership or rental of large assets that were available across the commonwealth for disaster preparedness and response. This is a move towards a resilience model rather than the current recovery model (where the funding focus is largely post event).

If these assets were available or on-call during periods of peak demand, the load on the Australian Defence Force, who are often turned to in the event of a disaster due to their collection of assets and personnel, would be reduced.

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

The Public Safety Training and Response Group's understanding of the Commonwealth disaster funding process has been developed from public information released by the Australian Government rather than the direct experience of being a funding recipient.

As such, it is our understanding that whilst there can be specific Commonwealth funding made available following a disaster, the majority of funding is provided through the Emergency Response Fund (Disaster Ready Fund).

Each State and Territory has the opportunity to apply for funding through this fund's application process.

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) collaborates with state and territory governments to determine effective disaster mitigation and management projects that build and develop community resilience and preparedness. The presence of NEMA is fundamental to the effective dissemination of Commonwealth funds as it enables a non-jurisdictional, whole of Australia approach to disaster management.

Whilst the above model is an effective means of funding projects, efficiencies could be discovered via funding arrangements that support organisations able to operate across state boundaries. This would assist in avoiding duplication of services and enable a coordinated and targeted delivery.

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

The differing nature of individual state, territory and local government capabilities means that both the operational roles, funding mechanisms and responsibilities of each body is opaque at best. The level of funding able to be provided by each body is often variable further complicating delivery and giving rise to a lack of clarity as to who will provide funding during a disaster.

For example, local councils in rural areas may not be in a position to provide financial assistance to their rate payers while councils with greater numbers of rate payers and income streams may have a substantial capacity to support their community.





Australian Government

National Emergency  
Management Agency

The type of disaster also has a significant effect on the ability of local and state/territory government to deliver the level and type of response needed for the duration of the initial event and the subsequent recovery period. For example, local or state/territory governments provide support for local emergency workers but if the Australian Defence Force is called to assist, the commonwealth covers the cost of deployment unless other arrangements are made.

The increasing frequency and unpredictability of disaster events coupled with population growth in disaster prone areas will likely result in a greater dependence on Commonwealth funding for disaster preparedness and response. State and territory governments are likely to lack sufficient funds to meet their disaster resilience and response commitments, as indicated recently by the Country Fire Association of South Australia at the Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Disaster Resilience.

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

The review should consider a Collaborative Integrated Public Private Emergency Response Model as a possible method of promoting effective and efficient use of resources to assist the Commonwealth in maximising disaster response, deployment flexibility and resilience while minimising disaster funding requirements.

The model involves a collaborative approach with existing community and state/territory based emergency services, augmenting community response capability to mitigate risks and improve response to disasters. The model welcomes the involvement of private enterprises to supply and maintain additional assets and trained personnel and provides a framework for an optimised response capability. This in turn reduces dependence on the ADF and offers several advantages over the current response:

- \* Assets: via public private arrangements; assets normally supplied by the ADF can be stationed strategically across Australia to assist communities prepare and respond to disasters. This strategic positioning enables efficient use of assets such that they are made available to all communities.
- \* Personnel: specifically trained for disaster preparedness and response, on standby, able to be deployed Australia-wide - this is their core mission; also enabling surge capacity to assist local services as required.
- \* Australia-wide: although resources, such as the PUA Public Safety Training Package, the Australian Interservice Incident Management System and the National Position Catalogue exist, adoption and ongoing use by emergency services is limited. This model aims to provide critical, cross border (non-jurisdiction specific) emergency disaster response capabilities delivered in a cost-effective manner, not subject to the multiple government registration, regulatory and jurisdictional limitations imposed on state professional, volunteer and charitable emergency response groups.
- \* Community Resilience Building: partnerships with existing service providers to more effectively build community preparedness, resilience and response capabilities.

It should be noted that emergency services already rely on a proportion of private contractors to fulfil their state based obligations.





**Australian Government**

**National Emergency  
Management Agency**

Given the existing funding arrangements and contracts in place, it is estimated that a transition plan would consist of a 48–60-month engagement and exit process to ensure that current emergency services are maintained, and all stake holders involved are fully informed.

In response to the growing concerns regarding the nature of future disasters and the geopolitical situation in our region, this approach provides the Government with a strategic option to ensure the preparedness of Australian communities into the future.



**Australian Government**  
**National Emergency Management Agency**

121 Marcus Clarke Street, (PO Box 133) Canberra ACT 2601  
Level 10, 10 Felix Street, (PO Box 15084) Brisbane QLD 4000