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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?

From 1 November 2019 onwards, the Australian and SA governments made a wide range of disaster recovery funding available for individuals, non-profits and businesses financially impacted by the bushfires. Eleven local government areas across SA were listed as eligible for assistance measures that included personal hardship and distress assistance, personal and financial counselling, counter disaster operations, reconstruction of essential public assets, and concessional interest rate loans for small businesses, primary producers and non-profit organisations. As the sector development officer I coordinated outreach for Community Legal, Legal Aid Officers, Flinders University Law School and private lawyers that specialised on specific legal needs (on a pro bono) to conduct weekly outreach on Kangaroo Island and a monthly out reach Yorke Peninsula.

I have also worked for a period of 3 months at the multi-agency River Murray Emergency Relief Centre at Mannum and Murray Bridge in person and rostering Community Legal lawyers to assist with immediate legal help especially with insurance enquires and disseminating digital and letter box communication on how to prepare (before the flood) and how to manage legal affairs immediately after the after the flood event

I am currently delivering a project that is funded by the SAFECOM grant called "what to do before...." that is creating easy to understand practical legal tips before/during/after a natural disaster that is also being translated into multi lingual resources. I am currently producing 'grab and go' document satchels (with information on what are important documents) to be distributed for free in identified high risk LGA's across SA.

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

Broadly increasing community awareness of legal responsibility, awareness through out the disaster cycle not only promotes resilience but also the ability speed up the recovery effort.

Prevention – actions undertaken in advance. Sometimes this is referred to as mitigation. Examples include how to apply native vegetation removal laws, back-burning or construction of dams, assisting with local community groups involved in emergency / disaster management meet legal obligations and to mitigate dysfunction.





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Preparedness – provide training, education around what are important documents and why they need to be updated as they may be critical for rebuild and/or may take time. Proving insurance health checks to avoid under-insurance. Providing seminars to encourage people to have their personal affairs in order (Wills, Power of Attorney, Advance Care Directives) and creating a safe environment where community can sharing information or past experiences to prepare communities should an emergency eventuate. Conduct WHS training for Community Legal staff before the high risk season and conduct legal and trauma informed practice seminars for the the staff before attending Emergency Relief Centres.

Response – provide assistance during or immediately after an emergency at emergency relief centres. The exception being early deployment to areas well ahead of impending floods (ie letter boxing info on important documents encouraging people to take 'before' photos or videos) . Both in coordination and safety direction of Emergency Authorities and activation of our WHS and safety protocols.

Recovery – the coordinated process of supporting emergency-affected communities in reconstruction of physical infrastructure and restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical wellbeing.

The PPRR cycle required the Community Legal sector maintains a level of skills, knowledge and trauma informed practices is essential. The resources required to effectively offer require

- a) ability to coordinate and be communicated - including personnel that has the availability ability and experience to communicate through many different traditionally and digital means
- b) ability to deploy - including ability to deploy to remote areas
- c) ability to deliver trauma informed service - through training as part of continued preparation

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

National Emergency Management Agency plays a crucial role in coordinating disaster response and administering funding.

Disaster Declaration: When a disaster occurs, the government or the designated agency assesses the situation and declares a state of emergency or disaster. This declaration triggers the activation of disaster funding mechanisms.

Disaster Assistance Programs: Government establish specific disaster assistance programs to provide financial support to affected individuals, businesses, and communities. These programs may cover a range of needs, including immediate relief, infrastructure repair, housing assistance, and economic recovery. Relief Centres may be deployed set up where multi agency support may be available.

Eligibility and Application Process: Individuals or entities affected by the disaster typically need to apply through an established process, and may be required to provide necessary documentation in certain circumstances.

Assessment and Approval: Authorities review the applications to assess the extent of the damage, validate eligibility, and determine the appropriate level of assistance. This evaluation process helps ensure that funds are allocated where they are most needed.

Disbursement of Funds: Once the applications are approved, the funds are disbursed to the eligible recipients. This disbursement can occur in various forms, such as direct payments, grants, loans, or





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through contracts awarded for specific recovery projects. One-off Disaster Recovery Payment may be offered to support eligible people adversely affected by the bushfires called the Disaster Recovery Payment. Short-term income support Disaster Recovery Allowance

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

Broadly, yes

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

An independent review of the Black Summer Bushfires Legal Help

<https://www.thecaspr.org/2022/03/22/new-report-review-of-sa-bushfire-legal-services/>

It Highlighted:

An evaluation of the project's process, outputs and outcomes demonstrates area international best practice is met, but also a number of areas where attention to improvements is needed.

In descending order of importance these were:

- (1) community engagement,
- (2) service collaboration,
- (3) building trust and rapport,
- (4) staffing characteristics, and
- (5) specific services or materials

For instance, the project team were physically present in a community hub that was accessible to most in the fire-affected region, and their visits to the island were scheduled (and moved to accommodate community events) so residents came to know when to expect them. Team members also made home visits where needed, accompanied other service providers on outreach trips and provided online communication, phone advice lines and 'roadshow' tours presenting information on key issues. This flexible and multi-pronged approach to community engagement was seen to be highly effective at connecting with a wide range of groups within the community and integral to the success of the project.

Areas for Improvement

The report identified the most significant limitation of the Legal Project identified was the timing of program deployment and the project was needed much earlier than it was deployed. This highlights the importance of establishing skilled, knowledgeable and experienced Community Legal personnel that is ready to deploy, has prepared the logistics and have preexisting relationships with the community.

Currently, we comfortably have addressed the areas for improvement as our sector conducts on average 10 regional outreach per week across the State

<https://www.clcsa.org.au/outreach-calendar>





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Whilst Community Legal Centres (SA) as the peak does receive program funding for Disaster funding through SAFECOM and has a MoU with SA Government to assist at relief centres there is no funding for a coordinator to manage a state-wide coordination efforts through out the year.



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