



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Consent option: Publish Anonymously

Submitted by: Anonymous

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

G [REDACTED] Shire Council (GSC) has experience with Commonwealth Disaster Funding support in response to the recent flood event in October 2022. We have been preparing works estimates and reimbursement claims documentation and navigated complex application processes for both Category A and B funding.

Our staff have been actively involved in relief and recovery efforts, including support activities, community engagement, and the establishment of Relief Centres and Community Recovery Committees. We have diligently gathered data and evidence to submit the necessary comprehensive applications for immediate works and REPA funding.

The recovery from the 2022 flood event has required a large coordinated in house and contractor response to re-open roads. There is a significant difference other grant programs which are more focused on project outcomes rather than specific pre-construction evidentiary requirements.

The DRFA places a significant administrative burden on local governments. They are responsible for managing the funding application process, ensuring compliance with reporting requirements, and navigating complex financial procedures. The administrative workload diverts resources and attention away from not only BAU activities, but also other recovery activities potentially slowing down the overall recovery process. In addition to this, while Councils bear the burden of complying with this administrative burden, the DRFA does not allow for admin support to compile and enter claims.

Without current experience in navigating the complex process, it is overwhelming and financially risky to commence reconstruction efforts post disaster - the emphasis should be on addressing the immediate need of disaster affected communities with the trust of government. Too much emphasis is being placed on the pre- and post-disaster condition of the road rather than returning it to its pre-disaster function. The current process is limiting the ability of rural enterprises to resume their normal activities and simultaneously reducing efficiencies and increasing costs.

Council is carrying an unknown quantum of financial risk in that we have submitted over \$1 million of claims for Category A & B funding which have not been assessed in several months. As a result, we don't know the value of what might be deemed ineligible, and our ability to search for additional supporting evidence, should it be required, is ever diminishing.





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

The DRFA is vital for the physical and emotional recovery of the communities within G [REDACTED]. This assistance could be improved further by:

- Allowing flexibility as part of a community led recovery process by ensuring greater access to community groups and private landowners, and the provision of equipment or resource grants to enable communities to gather the necessary evidence for supporting claims.
- Continuing to focus funding on long-term resilience strategies, allowing Councils to proactively invest in sustainable risk reduction and mitigation measures. The recent Disaster Ready Fund is an example of this type of initiative; however, co-contribution requirements are difficult to meet for small rural Councils with limited rate bases and budgets.
- Reviewing funding applicability to include enhancements to critical infrastructure during response and reconstruction activities. The approach to betterment is inconsistent in the application but moreover, misses the point that these essential public assets are legacy assets not built to the current engineering standards. It is essential that modern safety treatments be incorporated in asset restoration, because without adding modern resilience treatment to these assets they will most likely fail again in the future.

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

GSC currently has over \$1 million worth of outstanding Category A & B claims associated with the October 2022 flood event.

It is our experience that the processes involved in accessing DRFA funding are complex and time-consuming. They require comprehensive data collection, including financial documentation, photographs, cost estimates, pre-condition evidence and damage assessments.

The administrative burden of paperwork and documentation can be challenging and often requires significant human resources which Council struggles to find. Streamlining the application process and reducing paperwork would be extremely beneficial.

Understanding the eligibility criteria for different funding categories is a vital aspect of the process. Due to the staff churn, it is difficult to retain the corporate knowledge relating to the complicated DRFA processes meaning staff must try to identify and learn all the intricacies to ensure all the requirements are met. Overall, providing detailed evidence of pre- and post-condition and expenditure is a time-consuming aspect of accessing DRFA funding.

GSC values the funding arrangements and agrees that public money must be properly disbursed and auditable. However, we find the current evidentiary requirements an impediment to the reconstruction works and claims process, onerous when compared to other funding streams and causes significant delays to the recovery process for our road network and hence communities.

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

The roles and responsibilities are not clear. The rules and guidelines have changed multiple times since the event occurred in October 2022, leading to confusion and additional work.





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Understanding the funding rules and how they are assessed by the State can be challenging, contradictory and subject to change. In Victoria, DTP has been given the task of assessing claims in the first instance but appears to be woefully under resourced. Assessors are still working through claims for events from 1-2 years previously.

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

It is important that the funding and guidelines are fit for purpose, depending on the nature and scale of event. This includes the timely deployment of fit for purpose funding streams to enable an efficient and timely recovery.

Guidelines for some Category A works do not meet the needs of residents. For example, driveways damaged by the flood which are subsequently accessible only by four-wheel drive are not eligible for funding. This does not provide for access by emergency services in the event they have to respond to incidents such as fires or medical emergencies.

There is a lack of appreciation at the Commonwealth and State levels regarding the time and effort required to compile a claim that meets assessor's requirements for full reimbursement.

Council is carrying an unknown quantum of financial risk for claims which have not been assessed in several months. DTP needs increased resourcing to cope with the assessment of estimates for planned works as well as claims for completed works.

