



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

Response ID: IRCDF_1291_74

Consent option: Publish with name

Submitted by: Wollongong City Council

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

As an entity seeking Commonwealth disaster funding support, we have experienced multiple AGRN events. Over the years, we have witnessed and responded to multiple natural disasters that have severely impacted communities, infrastructure, and the livelihood of our community.

During these challenging times, we have actively engaged with the Commonwealth's disaster funding mechanisms to access financial support and resources aimed at facilitating recovery and enhancing resilience. While the availability of such funding is vital in aiding affected regions, we have encountered some inefficiencies in the application process.

Navigating through various funding streams at both the state and federal levels has been a complex endeavour, as it required a thorough understanding of eligibility criteria and guidelines for each funding avenue. The existence of multiple funding channels has sometimes led to confusion, making it difficult to ascertain which projects should be applied for under each stream.

Furthermore, the approvals for the funding applications have, at times, taken far too long to materialise. Delays in obtaining approvals have hindered our ability to promptly initiate vital disaster recovery and risk reduction projects. Such delays have not only affected the pace of recovery efforts but have also impeded our preparedness in the face of future AGRN events.

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

- Consider support for programs and initiatives that improve preparedness and mitigate risk, rather than focusing on grants that support recovery. Presently, if Council invests heavily in routine or reactive work pre-event, no compensation is available for undertaking this work. Additionally, affecting this work lessens claimable amounts for restoration which, in some cases, may cause total restoration costs to fall below nominated thresholds.
- Consider technical support for Councils to develop or improve internal systems and tools that enable emergency response and recovery, and capture required financial and non-financial information.
- Harmonise points of contact, information requirements, format and methods of submissions, timeframes and key milestones across programs.
- Running rolling programs that support community and infrastructure resilience, separate from post-disaster asset restoration programs.





Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Council's experience with the Infrastructure Betterment Fund rolled out last year, designed to supplement asset restoration works, was that the submission required detailed information typically available following engineering investigations and benefit cost analysis. At the time, investigations into areas impacted during these events weren't mature enough to support the detail required by the submission. This lack of maturity also impacted the organisation's ability to differentiate between asset restoration and asset betterment aspects. Grants or programs that support engineering investigations into feasibility, benefit and cost, and separate programs to support construction of projects with demonstrated benefit would be a more manageable approach. Programs could also support Council procure resources (either consultants or contract engineering staff) to undertake or manage these investigations. Ideally programs wouldn't be specifically linked to natural disaster events with strict deadlines to submission.

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

The process of applying for funding is difficult due to the complexity of navigating multiple State and Federal funding streams. This has made it challenging to identify the right channel for project applications. Additionally, the lengthy approval timelines further delay progress, as we cannot start working until we receive the necessary approvals, causing setbacks in crucial disaster recovery initiatives.

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

The funding roles of the Commonwealth, states, territories, and local government during disaster events have been a complex arrangement. While there are established frameworks and guidelines in place, the clarity of these roles has varied depending on the specific disaster and the response required.

The following are just some of the funding opportunities that Council applied for/received relating to disaster events.

- * Flood Recovery and Resilience Grants (2022-23)
- * Community Local Infrastructure Recovery Package
- * Regional & Local Roads Repair Program - Outcome early February 2023
- * Disaster Ready Fund Round 1
- * Local Government Recovery Grant Program
- * Infrastructure Betterment Fund

Overlap between programs and funding bodies made management and administration of these opportunities challenging.

A clear table of roles, responsibilities and funding streams across all levels of government would be beneficial to Councils.

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

To administer the federal funding, it costs Council a significant amount to determine the projects, work out estimate and get approval for the projects nominated. Details of the cost can be provided on request.

