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# Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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

I have been trying since Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister to obtain disaster funding support. The response has been disgustingly negligent. One example includes several attempts to contact David Littleproud when he was the Emergency Management Minister, to which one of the staff annoyingly conceded that 'because I am not a constituent of his, there would be very little luck that Mr. Littleproud would respond to my request'. It was disappointing as a registered voter, as well as being a Disaster Management Specialist, studying a Masters in Emergency Management - with a focus on community-led response and the establishment of a disaster force of surge resources, personnel and supplies to get such a reply.

The Albanese Government has been the only one to date, in particular the National Emergency Management Agency where I have actually received feedback and follow up correspondence. However, there has been little assistance provided in the way of funding or collaboration for the proven, award winning work that we have done since 2008. Each time I write to people within the local, state and federal governments, I complete a follow-up weeks/ months late to be told that the name of the department or person in the role has changed, to which I have to start all over again.

Sometimes, I will get a response from someone who is lower in position respond to the email forwarded to them, asking for some information (although I provided every singular detail about how we are a solution to disasters and how we work - which they have obviously not read), or simply receive a generic response that we are doing a great job, however the government already have great initiatives in place and to perhaps try one of the many grants available (to which I have already applied for many and all grants available with no luck, and/ or response). More often than not I do not even get a response at all.

I do not want a hand out, our business works to truly show collaboration and win-win relationships do work if governments and private sector organisations work together. Elon Musk is a perfect example of this, saving the United States Government hundreds of millions in space launches each year. My business plan and structure has been described to stakeholders in government I have spoken to that we are after a start-up fund/ loan, so that we can scale our community initiatives that prepare communities, assist in a faster response and longer term recovery, with the ability to establish a long term ability to repay the government at least \$8-\$15 for each dollar that is invested in our business. However, when we sign up 1,000,000 members each paying an initial \$200 (\$10 put aside to the government) and between \$15 - \$45 a month subscription (\$1 each month per membership put aside to the government), with a \$1



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million dollar investment from the government, the reader can do the math on what the government could expect in return..

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

According to the Treasury website, Australia is expected to spend \$291 Billion on the COVID-19 response, and is expected to spend up to \$368 Billion on the AUKUS agreement, not including expected cost blowouts and possible geographical issues. These could be argued as reactionary responses to the pandemic and the threat to our region due to issues that I don't need to discuss further in this paper. However, with disasters knowingly costing our economy \$38 Billion dollars each year, expected to increase to \$73 Billion a year by 2060, it is confusing yet obvious to any educated Australian that the government spending 97% on disaster response and only 3% on mitigation and resilience makes little sense and is severely sending the nation down the sh\*tter, particularly with these events affecting every community and supply chain and level of government.

It has been great to see a recent announcement by the Queensland Government to invest \$1 Billion on their emergency services, however, any tuned in voter would note examples of funding announcements being promised not being delivered on, such as an announcement to fund Koala research, which ultimately went to the Dreamworld theme park for a new ride. Or the announcement by the Morrison government establishing an Emergency Response Fund post the 2019-2020 bushfire event, which released little funding and actually earned around \$800 million, to which the current government scrapped and instead announced \$1 Billion over 5 years (perhaps using the interest earned from the Morrison Emergency Response Fund?).

If the government was to step up and invest at least 10% of the COVID-19 response or AUKUS deal on a known problem that our nation is guaranteed to face in the future, it would be a small step in the right direction.

Our business needs initial start-up funding to scale an already proven, award winning (2017 Resilient Australia Award - Queensland) concept that puts the ownership of disaster mitigation, response and recovery into the hands of home owners, communities and businesses by speaking face-to face with stakeholders, establishing and practicing adequate resilience based off their needs, using software to categories their risk and needs they'll have in a disaster that can be shared with agencies so that those who need help the most receive it quicker.

We have established kindy and young people programs in Queensland as well as an Emergency Management Academy being trialled at a Queensland high school that give young people knowledge about disasters and their role in an emergency, nationally recognised certificates in first aid and first response (including drone operations), which can also be provided to the likes of The Red Cross and Disaster Relief Australia.

When you have a prepared and educated community, those skills can be applied during times of no disaster as well as times of crisis. Can you imagine a nation of drone operators/ first responders ready and willing to assist in a crisis? It has certainly worked in Ukraine.





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

It has changed many times since I began my research. National Disaster Management has changed names from AusAID to the department of Home Affairs/ Foreign Affairs and back again to now the National Emergency Management Agency. The Queensland State Government has also changed the names of organisations such as the Fire Department from Queensland Fire and Rescue Service and Queensland Fire and Emergency Service to now changing to the Queensland Fire Department, with the State Emergency Service, Rural Fire Service and other agencies changing hands more than I'm sure they care to count. The community do not care what the agency or department is called as long as the needs of the community are met when an emergency or disaster occurs. These agencies provide little, or depending on their numbers and budget, limited mitigation and resilience activities prior to disaster events. This is where my business comes in to support by educating the community and by providing a membership service that meets their mitigation, response and recovery task requests, a sort of 'Uber' or 'roadside assistance' for disaster management.

As it currently stands, the local Councils can apply for funding for initiatives through to their state agency that manages disaster funding, such as the Queensland Reconstruction Authority in Queensland, who then submit these applications to the National Emergency Management Agency for consideration. Councils and the State Government can also apply for, or receive funding independently from the federal government, depending on the disaster that has impacted a community. Again this can be debated in regards to announcements, as the Lismore community were offered \$700 Million for flooding response home buybacks/ funding and are currently frustrated/ hitting hurdles and red tape in their immediate - long term recovery needs.

The federal and state governments also can offer one off payments to individuals post a disaster event, however from experience assisting Cyclone Debbie victims in 2017, not all those who need the immediate assistance payments are eligible or paid funds that could assist (one example included a lady who 'earned too much' according to the powers that be, however by the time she requested our assistance, she hadn't worked or been paid in 2 weeks and was a truly broken person after speaking to a Queensland Government 'Community Recovery' employee. After my intervention with these people, and convincing, the lady was eventually paid the funding around 10 days later!).

With my business, members earn resilience dollars and can cash these in at anytime, however we encourage them to save the points for when a disaster strikes so they have IMMEDIATE funds to spend at Coles, Woolworths, Bunnings and any other retailer that may assist them with these urgent needs. Our members also are encouraged to establish an emergency account for the unexpected, with the knowledge that the government won't always release funds during every disaster. A bushfire that damages property with lives lost will most likely allow cash payments compared to a localised hail storm that causes the same financial damage.

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

I have just returned from the 2023 Australian and New Zealand Disaster and Emergency Management Conference, where the Mackay Councillor Justin Englert (also the former State Emergency Service Local Controller) discussed how legislation between the local and state government is blurred. It is also a fact





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that a review into the State Emergency Service was withheld from release, with the Mackay Mayor Greg Williamson frustrated that those who provide assistance to the community are kept in the dark on hope to improve in the future.

The same can be said for funding. I have spoken to many people in my time studying emergency management. Local communities believe that the Local, State and Federal governments are responsible for funding. Local councillors have said on different occasions that either the state or federal government is responsible, and people within the Federal agency, whatever it has been called at the time of the conversation have said that the Local and State government are responsible.

I have experienced many times in conversation or experience when responding how frustrating it is to receive funding, or not enough funding being provided depending on what electorate is requesting the assistance. When there are hundreds of councils and regions in Australia scrambling for crumbs currently on over, there is no wonder \$1 Billion over 5 years will get us no where.

As a business applying for any funding, we aren't even left with scraps of crumbs to work with to assist communities, even with unlimited data out there proving that private sector organisations are quicker and are able to provide more resources that current stakeholders in a disaster. There are grants such as the Advance Queensland 'Ignite Ideas' fund, however this is for any idea to advance Queensland employment and initiatives (which I have applied for around 6 times now), not a dedicated disaster start up fund. An organisation called 'Beaten Zone' has only recently been established where Army stakeholders and investors have seen the need for urgent funding to assist start ups that can make our defence force more lethal and to fund groups that can give the nation a better change of winning a war. They have only been established a few months, however are already hosting 'pitching' events where the winner will receive \$500,000.

In the 10+ years I have been studying and applying for grants, I have NEVER seen a pitching fund or grant such as this where any stakeholder or government department has offered up funds for a business such as mine to improve our chances to mitigate, respond or recover from disaster events. Even when I have requested to even speak with my local council about how we can improve disaster management, I have been declined the opportunity, without reason. Could it be assumed they don't even want to hear how the National Emergency Management Agency could possibly fund us through an application to the Queensland Reconstruction Authority without costing council a cent, when their own applications are being denied?

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

I believe the Federal Government need to urgently provide 5% to 10% of funding being provided to the AUKUS agreement to initiatives in Australia that will improve our education, building standards and innovative initiatives to prepare for future disasters. The saying goes that for every dollar spent or resilience, you receive \$8 to \$15 in return on that investment. As a start-up business seeking funding, at least I can guarantee such returns for any investor in us. How much of a financial return can be truly proven publicly of the COVID-19 response or AUKUS agreement in the long term? I do not argue against these initiatives, I only ask that adequate funds be guaranteed by legislation for events that we KNOW will occur on an increasing level in the future. Our skills, personnel, innovations, products and services are needed, useful and are exportable.





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I have had better responses from the governments of Canada, New Zealand, California, Hawaii and the United Kingdom than my own government. This includes a response from Buckingham Palace after I requested to name a High Speed Disaster Vessel after the late Her Majesty the Queen Elizabeth II. We also aim to name a Hospital High Speed Disaster Vessel after the Princess of Wales. Having our own aviation assets, specialised heavy vehicles and response light vehicles, training academies and disaster vessels will assist our power in the region, save the tax-payer money on utilising the defence force, and will save the Australian Defence Force money and wear-and tear on defence assets so they can do the job they are meant to do, whilst spending the saved money on assets Australia needs to defend herself.

I have spoken to thousands and thousands of stakeholders, businesses, insurance companies, current and former defence and emergency service workers who want to see us established and I also have the proven data to make this work to change and improve disaster management for generations to come, I just hope this submission gets one person in power who make the decisions on disaster funding something to think about. We are currently establishing a seed-funding round to raise \$6 million ourselves, and are currently door knocking many homes in Mackay, with individuals, families, tourism operators and businesses signing up as members, so I have no doubt we will be successful and establish our own pitching programs to assist other disaster innovators out there to improve community resilience. I just hope any level of government can step up to scale us quicker so we can catch up on decades of under funding and mishandling.

