Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Consent option: Publish with name

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

Indirectly via state/local funding (provided by NEMA). A good relationship with great NEMA Recovery Support Officers on the ground.

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

We have a significant issue on the VIC/NSW border that the States and LGA's have different approaches to disaster preparedness, disaster response and disaster recovery and reporting. This makes it difficult to implement processes to reduce disaster risk for small business and local communities, and they receive mixed messages about the planning and processes in reducing disaster risk.

If Disaster Management was developed at a Commonwealth level and the processes fed down to the state and local level this would ensure consistency for disaster warnings, disaster response and reduction of disaster risk. Disasters don't stay contained within the state borders.

Commonwealth Funding directed into development of consistent processes, comms, apps and support programs that could be developed and communicated in advance and availble to immediately rolled out at the time of a disaster would have the biggest positive impact in risk reduction.

Currently many businesses and individuals have had flood cover removed from their insurance policies or had premiums increased to an impossible level for them to afford it. This has meant that there is a significant risk to local economies for any future disasters. The Commonwealth could consider reviewing and addressing this in advance of the next disaster, when all of these businesses and individuals will need to rely on government funding to offset would have been covered by insurance previously.

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

My understanding is that the bulk of the Commonwealth disaster funding is provided to the States (which can then provide this to impacted businesses and individuals, based on their own processes and additional financial contributions), as well as to LGA's for projects. There is also significant support for required infrastructure to reduce disaster risk.

The Commonwealth also a wider focus on global issues such as climate change impacts, and national responsibilities related to the environment, telecommunications, and industry.

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

No. We were recently heavily involved in the response and recovery activity of the Oct-Dec flooding event in NSW. We led one of the recovery sub-committees under the NSW Reconstruction Authority. We had significant issues with state departments blaming each other for delays with distribution of Commonwealth Funds, or being unclear about who was responsible for what. Individuals were given conflicting information by the different departments and levels of government. We have LGA's in our region that still haven't received the quick response money (Local Government Recovery Funding) that was supposed to go out to them in Dec 2022 (it is now August 2023). This is directly related to internal state government issues and conflict.

The chain of command and action plan during the response phase was fairly clear (although some comms issues caused issues on the ground), but the recovery phase was (and still is) extremely challenging, with no clear single source for impacted individuals and businesses. There were multiple places people had to go to access support and funding, and multiple similar processes and applications and meeting required for this. This is the last thing those impacted by disasters need. Many impacted people decided not to proceed with accessing support because it was all too hard.

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

Any progress the Commonwealth can make to reduce differences between State responses to disasters would be beneficial.

An example of a state-based problem that the Commonwealth could address is that the States currently having 2 different apps to keep people updated on disasters, road closures etc. These apps use different wording and colour schemes to define the same disasters, do not utilise live data on road closures (and often include very old data), and cannot be used by people traveling across state borders. The road closure info stops at the border, even if the road continues into the next state.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute.