



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?

My experience is based on my involvement in a community led response and recovery in the Northern Rivers in 2022 and with broader community resilience building. My experience with disaster funding is that it has been heavily politicised in AUstralia, which adds to the trauma of disaster-affected people. Examples include the exclusion of Lismore Council from a disaster resilience funding round, despite being the most flood prone city in Australia. Soon after, Lismore was impacted by the worst flood in its post-settlement history in 2022. Post-disaster funding grants were also politicised, with some areas of the NOrthern Rivers such as Ballina and Lismore being eligible for initial post-flood payments and others not. This was deeply offensive to those who had experienced flooding throughtout their towns and houses in the broader Northern Rivers region. This funding was later offered to a wider geographical scope in the Northern Rivers but the psychological damage of residents was unnecessarily exacerbated by the feeling of being a political play toy. There have to be ways of ensuring strict criteria for funding dispersal based on risk and need regardless of who is in government.

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

At present, Australia spends 98% of its disaster related funding on response and recovery (see: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/defending-australia-from-disasters/#:~:text=Yet%2C%20in%20Australia%2C%2098%25,relief%20rather%20than%20building%20re%20silience>). My experience of disaster related funding is that there is a very large boost of post-disaster funding, with much media and fanfare, followed by a withdrawing of promises and a drying up of funds. Examples include the resilient homes fund in NSW which at present has reduced its funding tranches by half, leaving many people out of pocket because they were told to go ahead with house raising, retrofitting etc as they would be reimbursed. Again, this adds to trauma and financial hardship from disaster victims. Australia has to turn around the proportion of funding spent on disaster risk reduction and resilience building. The NSW flood inquiry emphasised the need for increased community led response training and capacity building. But this takes a narrow view of the community development that is required to truly build resilience. There are some excellent examples in the NOrthern Rivers of community led efforts to increase disaster resilience, such as Plan C's 'Community Carer and Responder' program - <https://www.ccrnetwork.org/>. Yet these community initiatives are drying up because of a lack of funding available for community resilience building.





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Also, at present, houses are still being built across flood plains in NSW. The state government is overriding local government decisions to prevent this. We can't keep putting a bandaid on disaster risk - increasing disaster response capabilities while creating risk in the first place.

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

No response provided.

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

It is clear that local governments play a pivot point during and post-disaster - both vertically with state and federal funding and support, down to linking with community level associations and understanding needs. They also link horizontally with NGOs, private sector etc. Local government efforts are under resourced for that role. Their community recovery and resilience officers are often on short term contracts and dependent on disasters to keep them going. What is needed to improve information flow and enhance networks for resilience building and preparedness is ongoing support of local government efforts. Byron Council for example, has an extremely small rate payer base of 17,500. Yet supports millions of tourist visitors each year. The Council is struggling to afford the post-disaster road repairs needed for communities to access their houses and work places in the hills behind Mullumbimby.

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

No response provided.

