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# Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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**Consent option:** Publish with name

**Submitted by:** Volunteering SA&NT

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

Through our membership and close relationship with Volunteering Australia (VA) and the volunteering peaks in other states and territories, we have contributed to VA submissions to the Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience, the second National Action Plan to implement the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework and the Pre-Budget Submission 2022-23. These submissions have called on the Commonwealth Government to consider the following:

- \* the establishment of a standing forum that includes volunteer involving organisations (VIOs), involved in national disaster resilience.
- \* funding increases (commensurate with inflation and the cost-of-living) for recruitment, training, management, and support for volunteers engaged both through a formal response connected to recovery organisations and informally in the community.
- \* the development of an overarching national-level strategy that coordinates, supports, and plans for the role of volunteers in emergencies.

VSA&NT is also a member of CEON (the CEO network of State/Territory Volunteering Peaks), and a member of the National Policy Group of volunteering peaks that discusses policy responses to national emergencies and the place of VIOs and volunteers in recovery efforts.

On a state level, VSA&NT has an agreement and a role with the State Government through the Guidelines for Managing Spontaneous Volunteers for the registration and management of volunteers. Our role is to provide a brokerage service, assist in screening and training of volunteers and to provide a list of spontaneous volunteers to recovery agencies who may require additional volunteers.

In the research space, VSA&NT is also involved with a proposed study by the University of Adelaide that seeks to address the reduction in volunteer numbers experienced by the CFS by identifying and minimising the obstacles to sustainable and inclusive CFS volunteering.

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

A nationally coordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies



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To contribute to community preparedness as the frequency of emergencies impacting Australian communities increases, and with a cognisance of the crucial role of volunteers in emergency responses, there is a need for a nationally coordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies. Volunteering Australia proposed in their 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission for the inclusion of volunteering in the emergency management approach to Australia's disaster management response. This proposal also included the creation of the new National Emergency Management Agency, new funding for Disaster Relief Australia to support recovery efforts, and the establishment of a Special Envoy for Disaster Recovery. VSA&NT supports the call by VA for this nationally coordinated approach to ensure consistency of information, preparedness and responses informed by state and territory plans and the work of volunteering peaks.

Linked to this nationally coordinated response, VSA&NT also proposes that the Commonwealth invest in the state and territory volunteering peaks to build the capacity, capability and preparedness of volunteering involving organisations that are involved in disaster relief. This will facilitate the preparedness of VIO's to engage and activate their volunteers in emergency situations. In South Australia, this includes government lead and control agencies and functional support groups (government and non-government organisations) assisting in disaster relief, recovery, and rebuilding efforts. Our current role providing a brokerage service for recovery agencies means that VSA&NT is best placed to extend our role to building the capacity and capability of lead, control, and functional agencies.

To determine which agencies and organisations are working on the ground in emergency responses in each state and territory, we suggest the Commonwealth Government works with the volunteering peaks in each state and territory, to map the VIO's who currently work in emergencies and disaster recovery or who could contribute to recovery and rebuilding efforts.

#### Promotion and awareness raising

With the increasing impacts of climate change and need for a coordinated response, we propose the Commonwealth Government work with the states and territories on a national promotional campaign that regularly highlights:

- \* The role and value of volunteers in emergency responses.
- \* The roles of VIOs involved in preparing, activating, and managing volunteers involved in emergency responses.
- \* The role of volunteering peaks in coordinating state-based capacity and capability building of VIOs involved in emergency responses and in volunteer recruitment.

This campaign has the potential to raise awareness and build understanding about preparedness for emergencies and the role of VIOs in recruiting, training, and managing the volunteers assisting with recovery and rebuilding efforts.

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

In South Australia, the management of spontaneous volunteers features in key guidelines attached to the State Emergency Management Plan. On a national level, there are references to the role of volunteers in emergency responses, but no in-depth acknowledgement of volunteers or VIOs as a crucial part of emergency management or the resourcing requirements necessary to engage and prepare





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emergency related volunteers. VSA&NT would like to see, as part of a nationally coordinated approach, consideration of the role of volunteers and the role of VIOs in engaging, preparing, and managing emergency-related volunteers. Connected to this acknowledgment, state-based responses could align with the national approach and a funding commitment by the Commonwealth Government for state and territory peaks to build VIO capacity and for VIOs to engage and manage volunteers would be part of this national approach.

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

As previously discussed, VSA&NT supports the call by VA for the Commonwealth to provide an overarching national, co-ordinated approach to volunteer engagement in emergencies that articulates the crucial role of volunteers in recovery and rebuilding efforts and guides the roles and responsibilities of state and territory governments. This coordinated approach would include funding for volunteering peaks to increase the capacity and capability of key VIOs to recruit and manage volunteers and funding for VIOs to manage volunteers commensurate with inflation and cost-of-living.

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

Diversity of voices

In developing a nationally consistent approach and relationships with the states and territories, we recommend engaging with a diversity of voices to ensure greater representation and buy in from the broader Australian community. This engagement could include multicultural peak organisation and advocacy groups, student organisations, youth peaks, faith-based organisations, First Nations populations, LGBTIQ+ organisations and advocacy groups, people living with disabilities and organisations and individuals living and working in rural and remote communities.

Increased volunteer grants for VIOs

The 2022 Volunteering in Australia report commissioned by Volunteering Australia found that while 71 per cent of organisations reported that they provide reimbursement to volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses, 25 per cent do not. This lack of reimbursement acts as a significant barrier to volunteers, especially amongst younger people with 25.5 per cent of people aged 18 to 34 years, in the research, reporting 'financial reasons' as a reason they did not volunteer. More broadly, just over half (54 per cent) of all volunteers reported incurring out-of-pocket expenses through their volunteering role.

VIOs are also under significant financial strain, which impacts their ability to deliver services and engage their volunteers safely and appropriately.

With funding constraints for organisations and cost of living pressures being felt by volunteers, more resourcing for Volunteer Grants (in line with inflation and the cost of living) will need to be made available to enable key organisations to attract, train, manage, equip, and reimburse volunteers. Linked to this, we again call for funding for volunteering peaks to build the capacity of VIOs to effectively engage, support and manage the preparedness of volunteers for emergency responses.

