



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Submitted by: Executive Manager Corporate and Customer Service, City of Darwin

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

The City of Darwin ("COD") have some experience submitting DRFA claims with the most notable being the claim following Cyclone Marcus. COD does proactively engage with NEMA and predecessor agencies, as well as relevant Northern Territory Government agencies as part of annual cyclone preparation.

The COD have also applied for several grants; however, seem to be required to apply for this Commonwealth funding through the Northern Territory Government.

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

When COD respond to the disasters, it redirects significant resources to achieve a strong focus on public safety and the restoration of critical services including access to COD public places and central hubs such as library services to ensure the most vulnerable members of the community can access support services.

The redirection of finite human resources, along with the immediacy of the response means that it is difficult to monitor and collect the evidence required to submit a DRFA claim. This was exacerbated by COD having limited understanding of the DRFA claim process and blending, rather than isolating, disaster recovery expenditure within our BAU processes, as many local governments do to be expedient.

This instinctive structure to our response and recover was highly successful and efficient; however, the focus action and positive outcomes actually made it difficult to 'prove' the disaster related expenditure, especially when compiling a claim months after the event. This is not a sustainable funding arrangement because COD are paying significant unbudgeted expenditure on behalf of the NT Government or the Commonwealth with limited confidence this can be recovered.

The COD believe that the DRFA claiming processes could be streamlined for local government with the provision of a claims manager from NEMA that can work with COD during a disaster to maximise the claim, or allow for greater flexibility and acceptance of evidence noting that evidence may be difficult to capture and expenditure quantified when utilising our existing plant, equipment and labour to respond to disaster events.

The DRFA claim also does not take into account 'ongoing' additional expenditure following a disaster. For example: The requirement to store and treat disaster related waste is not immediately quantifiable.





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While tonnage of disaster related waste can be calculated, albeit with some difficulty, the longer-term financial impact due to shortened waste cell life is significant but under current DRFA guidelines it is difficult to 'prove'. This may also occur in relation to the degrading, but not loss of other infrastructure/assets, eg. roadways, footpaths, drainage etc. In the case of waste, this results in COD absorbing a significant loss that is prompting consideration of whether COD can absorb waste in an emergency situation from other municipalities, noting that COD has the only waste management facility in the Northern Region of the Northern Territory.

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

There are several streams of funding and while, over the years the names have changed, the streams are largely the same. Funding is available 'post disaster' to recover expenditure and there are several other streams for the purpose of reducing the risk of a disaster occurring, preparing for a disaster with a view to reduce its impact along with funding to equip communities to adequately respond to disaster events.

Typically, disaster funding to local governments is administered by state and territory governments, even though significant funds come from the Commonwealth Government. This means that COD is required to engage with both the Northern Territory Government and Commonwealth Government. This adds complexity and duplication of processing resulting in additional costs and delays.

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

No. A clearer understanding of what can be claimed and how this is to be presented for recovery is needed. Local government need a direct link and confidence that 100% of this expenditure will be recovered from the combination of Commonwealth and Northern Territory Government funds.

There may also be confusion at the Territory level. The COD see successful grant applications awarded to large interstate Councils (often in the tens of millions); however, the COD have been advised by the Northern Territory Government that we are required to put our applications through them. COD consider the NTG as competitors for the same grant funding and believe applications for this funding should flow freely between COD and the Commonwealth.

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

Local Government provide critical frontline services and are considered the closest Government to the community.

Providing a streamlined, efficient and low threshold for funding approvals will be the fastest way to ensure the right support is provided to the community. Local Government will have the highest proportion of funding providing an operational outcome with very limited (if any) being utilised on expensive consultancies or strategic policy – the funding will result in quantifiable outcomes, therefore, greater local government specific funding arrangements should be considered.

