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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?

This submission has been developed by:

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- * Emeritus Prof. Frank Archer OAM, Monash University
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All the submitters have extensive experience in Australia and internationally (as practitioners and researchers in government and NGOs as well as in Universities), in providing post disaster support, and in developing emergency management and disaster resilience policies and programs.

What follows are some comments about how the Commonwealth approach to disaster funding support, and to the programs that funding supports, could be reframed.

Shift the paradigm

Part of this experience is that one of the submitters (Mark Duckworth) was present at the June 2001 Council of Australian Governments (COAG) when it commissioned a wide-ranging review of disaster relief and mitigation. (<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/gas/documents/coag080601.pdf>)

COAG stated:

"The Council agreed to commission a wide-ranging review of how Australia deals with natural disasters".

Through this important review governments will jointly assess the effectiveness of programmes to reduce the risks associated with disasters, and to help communities manage, respond, and recover from them. In doing so, the review will identify options for improving on existing arrangements."

A high-level officials group reported to COAG in August 2002. (Council of Australian Governments, Natural Disasters in Australia: Reforming mitigation, relief and recovery arrangements. This Report was completed in August 2002, endorsed in principle by COAG in late 2003 and published in 2004.)





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The review group explained their view that the aim of disaster relief and recovery was to: "Build community resilience by constraining and, over time, reducing damage and costs to the community and all levels of government through cost-effective mitigation recognising of course that major unforeseeable disaster events will continue to occur." (p. viii)

Most importantly the Report recommended a "Paradigm shift to Disaster Mitigation", and that Governments should:

- * agree on a Disaster Mitigation Australia Package
- * focus on mainstreaming disaster mitigation into government policies widely. "Mainstreaming " means the systematic inclusion of mitigation considerations into a wide range of normal government and private practices to gain incremental and sustained benefits in improved disaster resilience in Australian society" (page 25).

This Report set out clearly how important it was to invest upfront in measures that will reduce future harm. In this way mitigation would become an essential component of an emergency management strategy and mainstreamed into government policy.

This paradigm shift never occurred. It is still needed today.

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

Example of successful recent post disaster recovery programs:

Australian Business Volunteers (ABV)

ABV takes a partnership approach to working alongside communities from grassroots up to a federal level to strengthen community-led disaster readiness and resilience. Straddling the perceived divide between community, business, and academia, ABV is uniquely placed to bring the varied traditional and non-traditional actors together for sustainable community outcomes. Our focus is on capacity development and networks, coordinating inputs to community and regional projects through highly skilled volunteers who work to build the capability of individuals and entities for sustainable, long-term outcomes. Communities trust us to listen to their priorities and help them deliver their vision of a sustainable, resilient community. ABV's priority is to walk alongside community, providing support where it is needed and as determined by the community, building on their existing social capital.

ABV's model for disaster resilience building is community-led, based on building capability and empowering place-based communities to recognise their own strengths to lead and make their own decisions. Our framework draws from international development best practice, disaster recovery and resilience theory and frameworks, world class volunteer management, business continuity planning, trauma informed engagement, and place-based planning approaches. Our model is aligned with the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, focusing on increasing engagement and investment in efforts to reduce exposure to disaster risk and build community resilience.

We support local priorities through:

- * Coordinating highly skilled business volunteer support and mentoring
- * Facilitating integrated place-based planning





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- * Economic development scoping to build economic resilience
- * Accessing local and external networks
- * Building cross-sectoral collaborative partnerships across traditional and non-traditional actors including corporate, public sector and academia

Fire to Flourish

Fire to Flourish is a five-year collaborative program led by Monash University to advance community-led disaster recovery and long-term resilience. Working at the intersection of community development and disaster resilience, the program partners with communities to co-create the foundations for a thriving future.

The Fire to Flourish program is guided by six foundation principles which shape how our team works together and how they work in communities and with stakeholders:

Be community-led: Ensuring the community shapes, drives and owns the program. Their voices are foregrounded in its design and delivery.

Foreground Aboriginal wisdom: Respecting the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, learn from their ways of knowing and being, and foster strong collaborations and partnerships.

Enhance inclusion and self-determination: Strengthening the participation, capabilities and outcomes for people who are often underrepresented or marginalised.

Be strengths-based and trauma-informed: Respecting people's lived experiences. We recognise and build on community strengths, and support collective healing.

Be holistic and impactful: Contributing collaboratively, and with evidence, to improve people's lives and influence changes in system conditions that hold problems in place.

Learn, adapt and evolve: Responding to changing contexts, we will continually improve the program's design and delivery, and collectively advance knowledge and practices.

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

The divisions between international Humanitarian principles and Australia's approach to domestic emergency management should be removed.

Dr Jennifer Leaning in her article "Disasters and Humanitarian Crises: A Joint Future for Responders?" (2008 Vol 23, No.4 Prehospital and Disaster Medicine 291-294) reviewed the evolution of the "disaster response community" and the "humanitarian community" both domestically and internationally.

Leaning said "... these two enterprises have taken very different paths, in terms of strategic approaches, operational elements, norms, and contextual frameworks. The disaster bureaucracies of the developed world sit within formal state structures and rely on public funds to employ national professionals at the local, state, and federal level to carry out a whole array of planning and preparedness responsibilities." In contrast the "The humanitarian NGOs work closely with the designated humanitarian agencies of the UN, as well as with the institutions of the Red Cross movement, but are militantly not coordinated by any governmental or institutional body. Independence, impartiality, neutrality""these are the guiding principles of action."





Recommendation 4 of the 2021 Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee Final Report on Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20 is:

5.56 The committee recommends that the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRRA) develop and implement a set of operating principles which are guided by Australia's current humanitarian and foreign aid principles. The principles should establish the role and function of the Agency and outline the ways in which the Agency will provide assistance which is trauma informed, people centred, and community led.

5.57 The values that would inform the development of these operating principles would be the universal values of humanitarian assistance "impartiality, non discrimination, political neutrality and cross cultural awareness.

At the July 2023 Melbourne Emergency Management Conference, we led a session on "How Australian disaster resilience can learn from international humanitarian programs." At the end the emergency management practitioners present agreed to the following:

* Note that the 2021 Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee Final Report on Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20". recommended the development and implementation of:

"a set of operating principles which are guided by Australia's current humanitarian and foreign aid principles" [and that the] values that would inform the development of these operating principles would be the universal values of humanitarian assistance "impartiality, non-discrimination, political neutrality and cross-cultural awareness";

* Note that a number of recent post disaster recovery programs with Australian communities are already using techniques applied from overseas Humanitarian initiatives;

* Support seeking ways to apply the language, standards, and approaches from Humanitarian principles to recovery activities following Australian domestic emergencies.

Examples of humanitarian standards that could be adapted for use within Australia are:

* Sphere The Core Humanitarian Standard on Quality and Accountability (CHS)
<https://www.spherestandards.org/humanitarian-standards/core-humanitarian-standard/>

* Australian Humanitarian Partnership Disaster Ready program (partnership between DFAT and Australian NGOs) <https://australianhumanitarianpartnership.org/preparedness>

* The cluster Approach: see United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) (<https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/en/coordination/clusters/what-cluster-approach> and <https://emergency.unhcr.org/coordination-and-communication/cluster-system/cluster-approach-iasc>)

* Sphere Minimum Economic Recovery Standards
<https://speherstandards.org/resources/minimum-economic-recovery-standards-mers-english/>

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

Clarify government objectives in Disaster Recovery and Resilience Building





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Building resilient communities is important as they are more likely to adapt in positive and healthy ways to changes or challenges in natural, economic, or social circumstances.

The 100 Resilient Cities program defines resilience as the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses, and systems to survive, adapt and grow no matter what kinds of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience.

Connected communities are resilient communities because they are ready to look after each other in times of crisis, whether that be a flood, a bushfire, or an incident of violent extremism. They function reliably and well when under stress; successfully adapt; are self-reliant; have high levels of social support, social cohesion, and social capacity. These social support systems include neighbourhood; family and kinship networks; intergenerational supports; good links between communities, institutions, and services; and mutual self-help groups.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, which the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed in 2011, points out that:

"achieving [community] resilience will require sustained behavioural change, the results of which should be seen across a number of years and political cycles (page 3).

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience also sets out that one characteristic of a resilient community is that:

...people work together with local leaders using their knowledge and resources to prepare for and deal with disasters. They use personal and community strengths, and existing community networks and structures (page 5).

Social cohesion and community resilience require continued investment by communities, governments, service providers, academics, philanthropists, businesses, and individuals to keep them strong. Governments alone cannot make or keep society cohesive or communities resilient. This is a shared responsibility for all of us.

The consequences of disasters lead to a set of complex issues that are inter-connected and can be difficult for those in the middle of them to fully understand. Therefore drawing on broad expertise and creating a range of initiatives which are locally owned and led by communities is critical. Initiatives driven by governments alone will not succeed, nor will any approaches that are solely driven from the 'top down'.

Objectives

We therefore propose that the following objectives and principles (based on Victorian Government (2015) Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities) be applied to emergency management program development and delivery:

The objectives of this approach is to create initiatives that will:

- * Empower communities, to address economic, social, and cultural issues that may be impediments to individual or communities to build community resilience.





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- * Develop our understanding of the driving factors that strengthen or undermine social cohesion and community resilience.
- * Support a socially cohesive Australia underpinned by social justice and equity in which all its people have a sense of belonging, acceptance and worth, and have equal opportunity to participate meaningfully in all aspects of society.
- * Increase inter-community and inter-cultural interaction and understanding, building the recognition that shared values and the foundations of common humanity transcend cultural and religious difference.

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

Principles

1. Trust building

How we do this work is just as important as which initiatives we undertake. These are complex issues which require a high degree of collaboration and trust between governments and communities; between different communities; and between individuals and civil society.

2. Shared responsibility

No one sector, community, institution, or organisation can solve these issues alone, nor can one single age cohort. This needs us to reach beyond established institutions and leaders and existing programs.

Government should engage with a broad range of stakeholders to identify the common interests and benefits achieved by working together. This will help to secure broad ownership of strategies and goals and engender long-term commitment to being part of the solution. Ensuring the indigenous stakeholders and practices as well as culturally and linguistically diverse stakeholders, women and men and non-binary stakeholders as well as youth, elderly and socially vulnerable members of community are engaged is important as part of ensuring true shared responsibility.

3. New ways of working together

Initiatives will be co-created with a broad range of stakeholders to ensure they build on existing community strengths and reflect the local context.

Government needs to encourage and support communities, government agencies, businesses, service providers, philanthropic foundations, young people, academia, and others to work together to identify key challenges and opportunities and create innovative initiatives together. This approach requires equity among stakeholders and supports regular communication and the building of trust through positive partnerships that are grounded in place-based planning that makes sense to the different communities around Australia.

Too often government agencies assume that communities have the time and resources to be fully involved in community led preparedness and recovery efforts. However, doing this properly will also require government agencies to give communities adequate and flexible resources and funding for them to be involved as equal partners in developing and implementing programs and plans.





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Key to this is committing to co-operative approaches including (adapted from Burkett An introduction to co-design, Centre for Social Impact (UNSW)/Knode):

- * Co-creation: the systematic process of creating new solutions with people not for them; involving citizens and communities in policy and service development.
- * Co-design: the process of designing with people that will use or deliver a product or service.
- * Co-production: delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professions, people using services, their families, and their neighbours.

A measured willingness to take some risks with new and innovative ideas, and a tolerance for some failures is essential. This innovative, experimental approach is increasingly being used around the world to address social issues where the solutions are unclear and where no single entity has the authority or resources to bring about the necessary change.

4. Community-based Infrastructure and Funding.

Funding by government should be based on these principles. Consistent with this, the process and design of community infrastructure should promote innovation and be done with communities not to them. Funding should meet community needs and the application processes and accountability requirements should not be unduly onerous.

