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# Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

**Response ID:** IRCDF\_1412\_157

**Consent option:** Publish with name

**Submitted by:** Frank Archer

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

This submission is presented in 5 parts relating to the Reviews' questions to be answered. It tends to flow as continuous argument artificially divided into the 5 questions. It argues that there is a deficiency in Commonwealth disaster funding, specifically a lack of internally looking humanitarian funding and concludes with a proposal for consideration by the NEMA.

The submission addresses the following aims of the Review:

assess how Commonwealth disaster funding measures can be redefined and enhanced to complement and support state and territory arrangements and programs, proactively improve resilience and promote disaster risk reduction to constrain growing recovery costs, and deliver a system that is effective, responsive, equitable, and accessible; whilst harnessing opportunities for increased investment and participation from all sectors to reduce risk, build resilience and make our communities safer.

And, primarily addresses the following question:

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

Specifically, this submission asks: Can the principles, standards, guidelines and resources of international humanitarian practices in disaster risk reduction/mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery and resilience be considered for adapting to be included in Australian domestic emergency management practice? This is in the context of the Reviews aim to, proactively improve resilience and promote disaster risk reduction to constrain growing recovery costs, and deliver a system that is effective, responsive, equitable, and accessible; whilst harnessing opportunities for increased investment and participation from all sectors to reduce risk, build resilience and make our communities safer, in all phases of the disaster cycle.

A subtext is: Is it time to bring together the 'disaster community' and the 'humanitarian community'? Or, from another lens, is it time to use the 'outward looking' humanitarian principles guiding DFAT, AusAID and EMA in Resilience and Disaster Risk Reduction in their excellent international humanitarian contributions, and, now 'look inward' to applying the same Principles adapted for the Australian domestic situation?





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## Disclaimer

This submission represents the views of the undersigned (Frank Archer & Caroline Spencer) who make this submission as Australian citizens and not on behalf of any organisation or agency. The undersigned were co-signatories of a similar proposal submitted to EMA in September 2020 by the Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI), which is replicated here as an updated version forms the basis of this submission. The reply from EMA indicated that initially it would be considered following the Royal Commission and later that EMA was establishing a number of agencies to further the recommendations of the Royal Commission - but no specific outcome from our proposal. One of the undersigned also contributed as a co-author to a separate related submission to this review.

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

A key paper introduces this question (84 pages), namely: AUSTRALIA (Assisting State) Disaster Management Reference Handbook August 2020, published by the USA-based Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance (CFE-DM). EMA was represented on the publication Steering Group. This USA-based publication presents the clearest, largely accurate, overview of the Australian EM system currently available at that time. Of particular relevance to the question posed to the NEMA is the observation that its description of Australia's international contribution to emergency events, our 'humanitarian contribution', contains many similarities to its description of our contribution to 'domestic' emergency events within Australia. Why are we so afraid to consider the Humanitarian context in the setting of major domestic events? It is time to end this dichotomy for the betterment of our Australian community.

This theme was included in the recommendations 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.

Recommendation 4: 5.56 The committee recommends that the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRA) 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.

We believe that it is timely to advance these recommendations.

## Background

The 2019/20 summer season bushfires can be viewed through three lenses:

A natural disaster/emergency crisis, primarily based around the extensive, devastating and prolonged bushfires, managed largely under the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements, administered by the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs and the various State and Territories' Departments of Justice, however-so-known;





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A public health emergency, caused by the air pollution, smoke smog and the subsequent health impacts and associated community uncertainty, managed under the National Health Emergency Co-ordination arrangements, administered by the Australian Government Department of Health; and the various State and Territories Departments of Health and Human Services, however-so-known; an A 'humanitarian crisis', represented by:

- o the loss of infrastructure, sometimes almost whole towns, caused mainly by the fires;
- o the number of internally displaced persons, estimated from the CCC data to be approximately 7,500 people, but others consider this number to be much greater;
- o The number of Australians directly affected and indirectly affected, reported to be approximately 14% and 75% of the population respectively;
- o The ongoing mental health, social and financial consequences, as yet unquantified but generally accepted as being a considerable; and
- o The extended and complex period of recovery, weaving the domains of infrastructure/physical, economic, natural/environmental and social elements, expected to be well in excess of 10 or even more years.

The management and guidelines for this humanitarian crisis element of the summer season are less clear.

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

In the Australia setting, the humanitarian crisis is a blind spot. Yet we support humanitarian crises in other countries through DFAT, AusAID and EMA. We ask if DFAT, AusAID and EMA could 'look inwards' as well as outwards?

A response to this question already exists in the Australian Humanitarian Partnership (AHP). The AHP uses Australian Government resources to leverage NGO networks and expertise, to deliver effective humanitarian assistance and aims to save lives and alleviate suffering by supporting partner countries, local organisations and communities to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters and other humanitarian crises (emphasis added), ie looks outwards, could it not be adapted to also look inwards?

During the 2019/20 summer season, the Darwin-based Australian Medical Assistance Teams (AUSMAT) were deployed within Australia for the first time. Also for the first time, Australia welcomed international assistance in the form of military personnel from PNG and the Pacific for our domestic emergency.

Traditionally, a Humanitarian tends to be used in the setting of international disasters and emergencies in developing countries and tends not to be used in the context of domestic natural disasters in developed countries - but are the differences all that clear? Further, there is an increasing lexicon in the Australia EM context incorporating Complex, Cascading, Compound and Catastrophic domestic disasters. A language also used by the Royal Commission. This emerging challenge can be profitably informed by learning from the international humanitarian experiences.





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Leaning (2008) reviewed the evolution of the disaster response community and the humanitarian community and the changing nature of disasters and emergencies, both domestically and internationally and identifies a common theme of internally displaced persons. This trend is also apparent in recent Australian natural disasters such as: the Victorian bushfires (2009), with their extensive loss of infrastructure and maybe 8,000 made homeless and hence displaced people in the domestic context; the Queensland, NSW and Victorian floods (2010, 2011, 2022), with their repeated & prolonged effects on the community, but no estimation of their human displacement; and, the 2019/20 summer fire season, with their destructive and disruptive impact both in Victoria and in most other Australian States and Territories and around 7,500 displaced persons. Leaning concludes that recent studies suggest that previously hidden human issues of significance emerged during similar events. Leaning suggests the humanitarian community and the disaster community will be called upon soon to work together, in situations in which the political and social stakes will be high. This view of Leaning is consistent with the descriptions of the Australian EM system as outlined in the CFE-DM document listed above.

One element not recorded in the CCC data from the 2019/20 summer season event is the number of people rendered homeless by these events. Likewise, the same deficiency occurred in 2009. We refer to this observation as what's missing in the summaries of these major national events. The notable feature of the data reported by both the Royal Commission and Victoria's IGEM is the lack of data on the people element.

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

Deficiencies noted during international humanitarian responses to events in the 1990/2000's lead to a process of review resulting in an era of Humanitarian Reform. A wide range of principles, standards, guidelines and resources are now publicly available and readily accessed. This rich resource and experience is not well known, and not applied, in the Australian context.

One example of the international influencing the national is the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. This document laid the basis for the 2018 Australian government endorsed (Australian) National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework. Australia is committed to reporting its disaster mitigation activities against the Sendai Framework Indicators on a biennial basis. The entry of the CSIRO in this process broadened the traditional fire-centric, emergency services approach resulting in acceptance of this broader perspective at home.

The following represents a limited sample of humanitarian principles, standards and guidelines that may be applicable or adaptable in the Australian context:

The International Health Regulations (2005), to which Australia is a signatory;

Internally displaced people, traditionally related to conflict and war zones, but more recently related to natural disasters, but could be applicable in Australia;

The cluster approach to emergency events co-ordination and leadership, for example

- o Health Cluster Guide (2020)
- o Protection cluster, includes diversity and gender guidelines;





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The Sphere Standards: Humanitarian Charter and humanitarian response standards to be applied in humanitarian events, not demonstrable in the Australian setting;

Core Humanitarian Standards, including accountability requirements, not demonstrable in the Australian setting;

Post Disaster Needs Assessments, not demonstrable in the Australian setting;

Research and Evaluation Frameworks;

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Framework (2020) which Australia imposes through DFAT on overseas humanitarian projects, including natural disasters, funded by Australia, yet there is no equivalent requirement on Australian government funded projects in the setting of Australian domestic natural disasters;

Resilient Cities, Safer Cities and Urbanisation all applicable within the Australian context.

These latest international standards, guidelines and principles stimulates the question: Can the principles, standards, guidelines and resources of international humanitarian practices in disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery be considered for inclusion in domestic emergency management practice?

Secondary questions need to address the following:

What principles, standards, guidelines and resources of international humanitarian practices may be relevant to the Australian emergency management arrangements?

What knowledge does the Australian emergency management community have of these international principles, standards, guidelines and resources, and, to what degree are they reflected in current Australian emergency management arrangements?

Which principles, standards, guidelines and resources of international humanitarian practices would the Australian emergency management community like to consider for inclusion in the Australian arrangements?

How is the Australian emergency management community going to effectively implement selected principles, standards, guidelines and resources from the international humanitarian practices?

How will the Australian emergency management community know when it has achieved effective implementation of selected principles, standards, guidelines and resources from the international humanitarian practices?

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

The expected benefits from answering these questions would include: Building improved Australian emergency management arrangements and practices, which will likely include improved co-ordination; reflect contemporary international standards, guidelines and principles; and, provide increased support for greater community resilience, reducing the immediate need for Government provided responses and facilitate the implementation of community-based early recovery; or, in terms of this current Review, improve resilience and promote disaster risk reduction to constrain growing recovery costs, and deliver a system that is effective, responsive, equitable, and accessible; whilst harnessing opportunities for





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increased investment and participation from all sectors to reduce risk, build resilience and make our communities safer.

The events of the 2019/20 summer season, the 2021/22 floods and COVID-19 are Humanitarian Crisis in the Australian domestic setting. Although perhaps unusual to be considered in this manner, the future will challenge us with similar events and that Australia can be more resilience if we adapt selected international humanitarian principles, standards, guidelines and resources into our domestic EM arrangements and practices.

The previously mentioned Centre for Excellence in Disaster Management and Humanitarian Assistance report identified that DFAT has partnered with the following six Australian NGOs, and their consortium partners, to deliver external / international humanitarian assistance: CARE Australia, Caritas Australia, Oxfam Australia, Plan International Australia, Save the Children Australia, World Vision. Would it not be timely to ask these, and other NGO's to help us with our internal / domestic humanitarian assistance? They offer a rich, untapped in the domestic context, yet very experienced resource.

Proposal

NEMA initiate a discussion paper addressing the question: Can the principles, standards, guidelines and resources of international humanitarian practices in disaster risk reduction, preparedness, response and recovery be considered for inclusion in Australian domestic emergency management practice? Is it time to bring together the disaster community and the humanitarian community?

The conceptual framework will be informed by, but not limited to, the National Disaster Resilience Strategy (2011), the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (2018) and the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements.

The Discussion Paper be led by a Steering Group to include two nominees of NEMA. The Steering Group would be responsible to monitor the progress of the project, including budget, sector liaison, and both formative and summative evaluation.

The Steering Group could include, but not be limited to: the undersigned, one as a previous Board Member, Vice-President and Chair of the WADEM Board of Directors and has limited experience with the Pacific Humanitarian Team, and the second as a former member of the Chapter Council of the WADEM Oceania Chapter and a member of the Editorial Board of WADEM's international peer reviewed journal. A third could be an Australian resident, with previous experience as the Disaster Risk Management Specialist (Australia Assists Program), National Emergency Management Office, in both Tonga and Fiji. Co-signatories to an associated submission to the Review on this theme.

We are happy responding to any questions, if so requested, and hope that NEMA can provide a positive response to this innovative proposal.

