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National Emergency  
Management Agency

# Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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

I have interfaced with multiple NSW Community Recovery Officers (CROs). These CROs are often completing vital work within an organisation that may not fully comprehend the role. Because of this lack of internal understanding and the intensity of community facing recovery work, CROs need funded peer support and supervision. CROs have expressed to me that their positions commenced with a significant delay after the emergency and they subsequently had to work hard to build the trust of communities who had struggled to access support in the early months after the disaster.

Further, I have observed CROs building extensive knowledge, community networks and trust over several years of recovery, and feel concerned that the funding structure for CRO roles is temporary. With the impending exit of a CRO, the resilience of communities across those LGAs may be diminished.

Community members from impacted communities often wish to recover through better preparedness so they are not so vulnerable in future, yet the links and momentum established during a CROs role will be difficult to sustain after their exit. Will communities be subjected to a gap in CRO support which extends until well after the next disaster? If this happens, I imagine any new worker would be faced with an unenviable task in learning the community, building relationships and gaining trust in the face of community disenchantment and a cascading recovery context?

I would like to see ongoing Community Recovery/Resilience Officers funded by State and Commonwealth Governments embedded in councils to work across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. This would provide continuity and better prepare communities and social infrastructure to face the increasing frequency and intensity of extreme events.

Additionally, I have observed that primary producer and rural landholder grants have the potential to divide communities between people who receive and people who do not receive funding. I observed that people recently having moved into rural settings faced additional challenges meeting farm-based income eligibility requirements. The timing of their entry to the rural area and had been impacted by compounding natural disasters and prevented them from producing farm derived income. I anticipate that moving forward, this funding structure could discourage people from commencing primary production enterprises and exacerbate systemic imbalances.





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I have observed that local governments have a lot of responsibility in disaster response and recovery yet rate caps mean that they cannot afford to fund these works.

In some instances, for councils to claim reimbursement, disaster recovery works must be completed by contractors not regular staff on regular hours. This seems to result in a maladaptive approach where local staff who are committed to and know the local context cannot complete repairs.

I worked in a role funded by BCRRF – The reporting requirements and timelines were arduous and diminished the project work that could be completed. The co-funders explained that the reporting detail and frequency was due to the Federal component of the funding. Perhaps reporting requirements could be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose and more user friendly.

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

For too long disaster funding arrangements have been skewed to response and recovery instead of prevention and preparedness (Productivity Commission, 2014). One impact of this is that- in combination with a strong risk appetite in economic spheres - in a classic case of market failure, disaster risk creation is still supported and incentivised at all levels of society.

Despite the introduction of the National Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction (NDRRF) and the Disaster Ready Fund (DRF), I observe that a system of voluntary commitment to DRR does not provide value or certainty to the market and will continue to incentivise disaster risk creation. The commonwealth and other governments could assert a marginal value to Disaster Risk Reduction to provide certainty and support all levels of society (including communities) to reduce disaster risk.

The strategy I propose, Australian Disaster Reduction Scheme (ADRS) could compliment the NDRRF and DRF, mirroring Work Health and Safety and Road Safety cultural changes that have been largely effective over the last 50 years.

Work Health and Safety emerged from a world where worker safety was less valued than company profit, at a macro cost to public health (Inspire Education, 2013). By marginally valuing worker safety over profits through health and safety legislation and systemic changes, we all benefit from improved public health.

The matrix approach to worker health and safety in NSW and other states included compulsory Workers Compensation insurance, compulsory Safety Standards, compulsory reporting and compliance as well as Work Health and Safety legislation.

To marginally value Disaster Risk Reduction over profit and short circuit the current market failure, the proposed ADRS could also include a similar matrix approach for example: a broad-based Compulsory Disaster Reduction Insurance, Disaster Reduction Standards, an Office of Disaster Reduction Compliance and a Disaster Reduction Act to incentivise and embed disaster risk reduction.

The proposed Australian Disaster Reduction Scheme presents a 'desirable approach' to valuing DRR where acting first brings advantage as compared to an 'undesirable approach', that we have witnessed with climate action where acting first had been seen as a competitive risk.





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Current insurance models are unsustainable, with many postcodes projected to become uninsurable by 2030 (Climate Risk 2020). The ADRS presents an attempt to support a proactive and preventative centred system of insurance.

Standards and accountability framework was a consideration of the Royal Commission into the Black Summer Bushfires "whether accountability for natural disaster risk management" should be enhanced through a nationally consistent accountability and reporting framework and national standards (Elizabeth the Second, 2020, pp2)

Proposal of how to use funding support to reduce community disaster risk

- 1) Pilot planning and funding for a detailed cost benefit analysis and economic modelling of an Australian Disaster Reduction Scheme using updated climate, risk frameworks and economic models
- 2) Pilot planning and funding for an integrative reporting framework and DRR Standards to support the implementation of a proposed scheme aligned with the NDRRF and Sendai Framework
- 3) Auspice or multi-disciplinary project team to facilitate consultation and collaborative design (Chappelow, 2020, unpublished)

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

The National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, First National Plan of Action as well as the Sendai Framework guide national funding arrangements as well as political will and disaster context.

Commonwealth government funding is designed to drive and top up state and territory governments' arrangements.

There have been many recent structural changes for example from Home Affairs, The National Recovery and Resilience Agency and to National Emergency Management Agency. The changes seem to be positive, but still confusing to understand.

NEMA Coordination and Planning Officers have been embedded in regional communities supporting the understanding of available funding and ensure that information is shared about federal funding arrangements.

For example, I learned about the post disaster telecommunications upgrades, Primary Producer and Rural Landholder Grants as well as the Disaster Ready Fund and this review into Commonwealth Disaster Funding Arrangements from a regionally based NEMA Coordination and Planning Officer.

I was delighted to see the launch of The Disaster Ready Fund. It can fund up to 50% of a project to mitigate disasters. However, many projects that could have been thought up to improve resilience and meet the objectives of the grant could not be applied for as there was no appropriate avenue to apply for the other 50% of the funding. Local governments did not have this resource and State arrangements were already tight. The time period of round 1 of DRF was very short from 10 January – 9 March 2023 considering that organisations needed to come up with 50% of the finance for a project, or an additional funder in that period.





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

No

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

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

My answer to question 2 draws heavily and quotes from an unpublished paper of my own work, Strategy and benefit-cost ratio for a National Disaster Reduction Scheme to operate in parallel to Work Health and Safety (C [REDACTED], H., 2020, unpublished) which I would gladly share if it could support this review or the subsequent work.

