



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Consent option: Publish with name

Submitted by: Sarsfield Community Association committee member

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

I am a professional grant writer with many years experience.

In addition, my husband and I lost our house in Sarsfield, Victoria, during the Black Summer Bushfires.

Prior to the fires, I had been a long-term member of the volunteer Sarsfield Recreation Reserve Committee of Management (the 'hall committee').

After the fires, while remaining on the hall committee, I joined the volunteer Sarsfield Bushfire Community Recovery Committee (now known as the Sarsfield Community Association).

Sarsfield was badly impacted by the fires. Out of 280 homes prior to the fires, 200 were physically impacted (losing sheds, fencing, etc) and 80 were destroyed.

The Sarsfield Community Association and the Sarsfield Hall Committee worked together to submit an application through the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery funding stream. As a committee, we were fortunate to have funding to have professional grant writers prepare this application. I was involved only as a committee member, however as a grant writer myself, I was contracted by other groups to prepare funding applications. The applications which I prepared were successful. My point is that I am very experienced in reading funding guidelines and submitting applications which adhere to those guidelines.

Our application was for funding to replace our ageing hall, which had been constructed 60 years ago by community members using a secondhand school shelter shed and a caravan park kiosk. Engineers reports had indicated that it was in poor shape and was no longer be suitable for community gatherings. The hall continues to be essential to the recovery of the community, not only as an important community gathering place, but also as a distribution centre for food, water, and vital information in the days, weeks, and months following the fires.

I was at the committee meeting where we discussed whether to submit Sarsfield's application under the name of the Hall Committee or the Sarsfield Community Association. The decision was made to name the Hall Committee as the applicant, as the funding was for a new hall. The text of the application made it clear that the submission was a joint one from both groups.





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Halls and recreation reserves in Victoria are situated either on Crown land or local government owned land. From a community point of view, there is no difference - both assets are managed by volunteer committees, usually on a shoestring budget. Sarsfield's recreation reserve is on Crown land, which meant that our ABN showed us to be a 'State Government Entity'. Due to this ABN classification, our application was declined. Had our application been submitted using the name of the Community Association, it may have been successful.

I have been in touch with other professional grant writers, lawyers, and other experts. The guidelines were clear. Our organisation's application, and those of others who were declined because their halls or recreation reserves were on crown land, were clearly eligible.

The judgement that volunteer community committees are 'State Government Entities' because their assets are situated on Crown land has caused untold distress to impacted communities and individuals.

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

Communities are very good at understanding the local conditions, population needs, and disaster risk.

However, pitting communities against each other in a competitive funding process is tantamount to actively aiming to cause division between local communities who should be able to work together. It also uses enormous amounts of volunteer time and energy, which could be much better used in working with community members to educate, prepare and reduce the risk and impacts of future disasters.

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

No response provided.

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

In the Black Summer Bushfire Recovery funding stream, assumptions were made that land owned by the Crown (in the form of the Victorian state government) was ineligible for recovery funding despite the level of impact of the communities.

It was very difficult for those of us who had lost our homes, and who were trying to support our communities while simultaneously dealing with the complexities of personal, family, and physical recovery from the fires, to see funding go to communities who had very little physical impacts of the fires.

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

Please understand that volunteer committees who manage community assets are not 'State Government Entities' even if their ABN shows that the land on which they are situated is Crown land instead of local government land. Both types of land are set aside for community use and managed by hard-working volunteers.

Please never allow anything like this to happen to impacted communities again.

