



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: Western Australia Local Government Association

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

The following is a summary of recommendations made in WALGA's submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding. The full WALGA submission was endorsed by WALGA State Council on 17 August RESOLUTION 231.FM/2023 and is available:

<https://walga.asn.au/getattachment/82361601-f977-48c0-a859-55b994326fba/Flying-Minute-Independent-Review-of-Commonwealth-Disaster-Funding.pdf>

Considering WALGA's experience with Commonwealth disaster funding support - WALGA recommends that:

1. The Commonwealth Government fully implement the Royal Commission's recommendations for the delivery of recovery services and financial assistance, including:
 - 11.1 Responsibility for local government disaster management capability and capacity
 - 11.2 Resource sharing arrangements between local governments
 - 22.1 Evaluation of financial assistance measures to support recovery
 - 22.3 Review the thresholds and activation process for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
 - 22.4 Nationally consistent Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements assistance measures
 - 22.5 Develop nationally consistent, pre-agreed recovery programs
 - 22.6 Better incorporate 'build back better' within the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
 - 22.7 Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements recovery measures to facilitate resilience
 - 22.8 Streamline the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements processes
 - 24.1 Accountability and assurance mechanisms at the Australian Government level
2. Minister Watt's recent announcement to advance disaster payments under DRFA is followed up by a revised process that ensures Local Governments have immediate access to funding to commence recovery works following a disaster.

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

WALGA recommends that:

3. The Commonwealth Government works with State Governments to ensure betterment is a standard requirement for DRFA.





4. Community infrastructure that cannot be insured (such as sporting oval turf) is recognised as an essential asset in the DRFA.
5. The pool of funding available for disaster risk reduction is substantially increased and that a fair allocation of grant funding is guaranteed for Western Australian Local Government risk reduction projects.
6. The ALGA pre-budget submission for the 2023/24 Federal Budget to increase the Disaster Ready Fund to \$250 million per year is implemented.
7. A specific funding pool to support Aboriginal communities to build their resilience is provided.
8. The Commonwealth Government provides a Sustainable Grant Funding Model that enables Local Governments to deliver on their shared responsibility for disaster risk reduction, resilience and recovery. This should be supported by a network of grants officers located in each State Local Government Association to facilitate the development of strategically aligned projects and successful grant applications.
9. The Commonwealth Government provides a network of officers in ALGA and each Local Government Association to assist Local Governments to plan and implement disaster risk reduction in their communities.

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

Considering WALGA's understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes – WALGA recommends that:

10. The Commonwealth implements the following measures to improve Commonwealth disaster funding grants process:

Align guidance materials and timelines on NEMA and State based websites.

- Provide certainty around the timing and criteria for grant rounds well in advance so they can be factored into planning and budgeting processes.
 - Ensure adequate timeframes for the application process so that Local Governments are not compressed to accommodate timeframes for State administration and Ministerial approval. Provide certainty around the timing of announcement for successful projects, and when funds will be made available.
 - Ensure flexibility to accommodate project delays where works can only be undertaken seasonally and may be delayed for a full year if the window of opportunity closes.
 - Clear guidance and greater flexibility around the co-contribution requirement for Local Governments applying for Commonwealth Disaster Funding grants.
11. Greater assistance is provided to Local Governments to navigate the DRFA process following disaster, including the option of a State government officer being seconded into a Local Government to support the recovery funding process.



12. ALGA's recommendations to the NEMMM meeting – Review of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, are adopted, including to
 - Expedite DRFA payments and streamline funding arrangements.
 - Alleviate administrative burdens and the onerous evidentiary requirements.
 - Increase flexibility, particularly for smaller projects, in terms of the evidentiary requirements.
 - WALGA notes that increased flexibility is particularly important in some parts of Western Australia where seasonal impacts, low availability of contractors and funding delays obstruct recovery.
 - Interest paid on overdrafts, whilst waiting for reimbursement for eligible recovery works should be an eligible DRFA expense.
13. The DRFA is amended so that the following expenses are eligible:
 - In house human resources to assist with recovery related administrative tasks
 - Cost of Local Government staff diverted to recovery when no contractors are available.
14. DRFA checks and balances are reviewed to reduce the number of layers of approval and to recognise where appropriate checks and balances already exist within Local Governments. A clear mechanism is required to arbitrate and resolve differences between the recommendations and cost assessments provided to Local Governments by the qualified independent engineers engaged under the requirements of the DRFA, and Main Roads WA officers engaged by DFES to provide technical review.
15. The Commonwealth's work through NEMA and the ANZEMC to progress reforms to the DRFA, is expedited, including a new streamlined process for activating DRFA Category C and D and for work in developing pre-agreed "off the shelf" recovery packages.
16. The State provides a financial delegation for DRFA funding for Category C and D, Community Recovery and Exceptional circumstances funding and that the Commonwealth ensure the cost sharing ratio does not become an impediment for the State to seek Category D cost sharing arrangements.
17. Additional training is provided on DRFA to support Local Governments that are not experienced with the DRFA.

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

Considering WALGA's understanding of the roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events –WALGA recommends that:

18. Equitable access to betterment funding, co-contribution requirements and thresholds and other DRFA measures is provided across Australian jurisdictions.
19. A transparent process and communication around how the level of assistance is determined under Category C and D of the DRFA between jurisdictions, and between different declared disasters.

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

WALGA, alongside the Local Governments we represent, supports the recommendations of the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements* and looks forward to the implementation of well-developed and robust funding processes which support sustainable and effective community disaster recovery, preparedness and resilience initiatives.