



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

Response ID: IRCDF_840_7

Consent option: Publish Anonymously

Submitted by: Anonymous

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

My experience focuses on the NDFA Category B Works as a professionally registered and practising Civil Engineer.

The process is so pernicious that it appears to be intentionally designed to shift financial burden from natural disasters response to LGAs, potentially threatening their financial sustainability - defeating the exact purpose of the arrangement.

Furthermore, it is also astonishingly flawed to require that essential public assets are restored to the conditions that led to their failure in the first instance, ensuring public funds are wasted when the next disaster inevitably event occurs.

The detrimental experience of this process is compounded when the officers attempting to deliver these disaster response works are also likely to be personally impacted by the natural disasters. This combination gives effect to a doubling down of trauma that can drive the officers with experience in this process away from wanting to be involved in it again in the future.

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

Through opportunities such as the Disaster Ready Fund to pro-actively adapt to the increasing impacts of climate change.

Post disaster through, the NDFA the approach to betterment is inconsistent in application but moreover misses the point that these essential public assets are legacy assets built to the engineering standards applicable at the time of their construction. It is recognised that modern safety treatment be incorporate in asset restoration but without adding modern resilience to these assets to withstand the increased effects of climate change, they are doomed to fail again.

Part of the adaption to climate change should include a thorough assessment of the need for the reinstatement of that asset in its current alignment. It may be a better use of public funds and a more sustainable solution to relocate a road from a landslip plagued location but that is not eligible for funding.





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

My understanding and experience is built on overseeing the Category B works response and claim process following a number of disaster events since 2019.

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

No. The NDFA's funding allocation can be inconsistent, leading to uncertainty for LGAs. The amount of funding provided may vary from one disaster event to another, making it difficult for local governments to plan and budget effectively. In some cases, local councils may receive insufficient funding to cover the full costs of recovery efforts, putting additional strain on their resources.

LGAs are wedged between being legislatively required to reinstate public access as soon as practicable but not knowing if it will be able to afford the reconstruction works as reimbursement claims are eroded through administrative traps.

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

Being a practising registered Civil Engineer in Public Works I consistently manage the disbursement and acquittal of many streams of discretionary grant funding from both state and federal governments, including jointly funded programs such as the Black Spot road safety funding. None of these funding streams will remove funding because an on the ground emergency response did not stop to take a metadata enabled photo in a specific position before commencing works. None of these funding streams will remove funding because a specific sub-component of the total works was not evidenced with a meta data enabled photo during construction.

Why is the emphasis on reconstructing of essential public assets on highly administratively complex process and not on delivering the assets as fast as possible to return communities lives to pre-disaster states?

Losing the road access to people's properties has dramatic impacts to their amenity and lives and local government has a legislative responsibility to return that access as soon as practicable.

However, the NDFA places a significant administrative burden on local governments. They are responsible for managing the funding application process, ensuring compliance with reporting requirements, and navigating complex financial procedures. The administrative workload can divert resources and attention away from crucial recovery activities, potentially slowing down the overall recovery process.

The roles of claim assessors who have no connection to the disaster, other than lines on a spreadsheet and specific evidentiary requirements is excessive. Full credit to the state road authorities on ground funding assessors whom spend the time with LGAs to qualify the claim - why is their advice overruled by faceless claim assessors who have no regard to the communities we are trying to reconnect?





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My suggest approach would be to utilise the claim assessors as certifying engineer for works completed, they already do so with cost estimates.

The time-frames do not scale with the size of the disaster. We could have one, 70, or 200 landslips from a single event and be required to meet the same timing deadlines.

Similarly, the time-frames for preparing certified cost estimates are not sufficient given how they are used through the claim process. They do not, nor can they ever, include all the base rates necessary to restore essential assets. That evidence and variance must be provided to individual line items and that new line items cannot be added later is in-congruent with a best practice risk-based approach to construction costs. Based on the use of cost estimates through the claim process they are best considered a fixed rate contract. A contract that must be formed when it is not practicable to have completed the necessary investigative works inform it.

This all combines an almost insurmountable evidentiary and administration burden with inflexible time-frames.

