

The Senate

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Select Committee on Australia's  
Disaster Resilience

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Boots on the ground: Raising resilience

August 2024

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# Terms of reference

On 30 November 2022, the Senate resolved to establish a Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience to inquire into and report on:

- (a) current preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, including:
  - (i) the role of the Australian Defence Force in responding to domestic natural disasters,
  - (ii) the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters, due to climate change, on the ongoing capacity and capability of the Australian Defence Force,
  - (iii) the impact on the Australian Defence Force in responding to domestic natural disasters, and
  - (iv) the role of Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, and the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters on their ongoing capacity and capability;
- (b) consideration of alternative models, including:
  - (i) repurposing or adapting existing Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services, and
  - (ii) overseas models and best practice;
- (c) consideration of the practical, legislative, and administrative arrangements that would be required to support improving Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters; and
- (d) any related matters.



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# Abbreviations

ACOSS	Australian Council of Social Service
ADF	Australian Defence Force
ADRF	Australian Disaster Response Force
AFAC	Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council
AGCMF	Australian Government Crisis Management Framework
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
APS	Australian Public Service
BCA	Business Council of Australia
The Bureau	Bureau of Meteorology
CAT	Community Action Team
CDEM	Civil Defence Emergency Management
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CFS	Country Fire Services
COMDISPLAN	Australian Government Disaster Response Plan
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
DACC	Defence Assistance to the Civil Community
DCC	Deployable Coordination Centre
DEMA	Danish Emergency Management Agency
DFES	Department of Fire and Emergency Services
DRA	Disaster Relief Australia
DRF	Disaster Ready Fund

DRFA	Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
DSR	Defence Strategic Review 2023
Duke of Ed	Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Australia
FEMA	Federal Emergency Management Agency
FENZ	Fire and Emergency New Zealand
FRRR	Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal
GNS Science	Geological and Nuclear Science
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
ICNZ	Insurance Council of New Zealand
KPMG	Company; global network of professionals
LGA	local government areas
LGAQ	Local Government Association of Queensland
MET	Meteorological Service
NDRRF	National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework
NEMA	National Emergency Management Agency
NEMS	National Emergency Management Stockpile
NGOs	Non-government organisations
NIBA	National Insurance Brokers Association
NIDR	National Indigenous Disaster Resilience
NIWA	National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research
NRMA	National Roadside and Motorists Association Limited

NZ	New Zealand
NZ EMAT	New Zealand Emergency Management Assistance Team
NZ NEMA	New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency
NZDF	New Zealand Defence Force
PTSD	Post-traumatic stress disorder
QFES	Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
RFS	Rural Fire Service
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
SCF	Surge Capacity Force
SES	State and Territory Emergency Service
SVA	Student Volunteer Army
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
UN	United Nations
WILPF	Women's International League for Peace and Freedom



# List of recommendations

## Recommendation 1

2.22 The committee recommends that the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and relevant guidelines be amended to enable funds to be distributed for the purpose of building betterment into recovery and reconstruction, ensuring that this funding is available to all jurisdictions.

## Recommendation 2

2.85 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national asset register to improve the efficiency of the deployment of resources in the aftermath of a disaster. The Government should consider whether it is feasible to include not only federal and state government assets, but also suitable local community, private sector and non-government organisation assets.

## Recommendation 3

2.87 The committee recommends that the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements be amended to set aside a proportion of funding to be offered to local governments up-front to help facilitate disaster recovery and resilience to ensure councils do not always have to bear the burden of financing repairs up-front.

## Recommendation 4

3.88 The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider amendments to the *Fair Work Act 2009* to legislate time off for volunteers working with registered organisations and for volunteers to be granted leave from employment, similar to the provisions provided to Reservists under the *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001*.

## Recommendation 5

3.90 In circumstances where the cost of relevant training is not covered by the organisation, the committee recommends that the Australian Government consider amendments to legislation, policy and guidelines to allow volunteers working in organisations such as State Emergency and Rural Bushfire Services to claim tax deductions for training and courses that are a part of their emergency volunteering.

## Recommendation 6

3.106 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national disaster mental health hub to coordinate and provide mental health resources, training, and support for first responders and communities

affected by disasters across the nation. This hub should serve as a comprehensive resource centre for addressing the mental health needs of all stakeholders involved in disaster response and recovery efforts.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**3.107** The committee recommends that the Australian Government design and implement consistent national trauma-informed care principles, ensuring that first responders—both professional and volunteer—receive training and support in these national principles to better address the mental health and well-being of disaster-affected individuals and communities.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**3.108** The committee recommends that the Australian Government convene a disaster resilience mental health summit to hear from all related agencies and stakeholders to identify solutions to the mental health impacts of disaster.

#### **Recommendation 9**

**4.79** The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider how it can further support Disaster Relief Australia, and other similar organisations, not only with funding beyond 2026, but also how the Australian Government can further incorporate Disaster Relief Australia into its national disaster response arrangements and boost its numbers through partnerships with the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.

#### **Recommendation 10**

**4.82** The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider ways to incentivise young Australians to participate in volunteer organisations that provide support for disaster response and recovery.

# Chapter 1

## Introduction

- 1.1 Due to climate change, natural disasters are occurring across the world with greater frequency and severity. Bushfires and floods are expected to become more frequent, and tropical cyclones are projected to decrease in number but increase in intensity. Concurrent and consecutive disaster events are also expected to occur more often, increasing pressure on the resilience of communities.
- 1.2 These changes in extreme climate variability are compelling governments to reassess their approaches to disaster preparedness, response and recovery to ensure the nation's capability and capacity to respond is not only sufficient, but also sustainable.
- 1.3 Australian communities have faced an unprecedented number of natural disaster events in the last several years. Natural disasters not only cause significant damage to infrastructure and property creating challenges for communities, governments and industry, but they also have a notable impact on the mental health of those that respond to and live through these disasters.
- 1.4 Some individuals and families lose everything in a natural disaster, and whilst communities may have enough resilience to rebuild after a disaster, the risk of experiencing back-to-back disasters is ever more plausible—stretching thin the resources and capabilities of governments to respond, as well as compounding the vulnerability of communities.
- 1.5 During the course of this inquiry, the committee heard personal accounts from communities across Australia recounting the acts of bravery, resilience and challenges they faced when disasters hit. The resourcefulness and tenacity of these communities is admirable, but it is apparent to the committee that more can be done to prepare and support communities to overcome these challenges.
- 1.6 The evidence received by the committee indicated that Australia's federal system of governance, where the roles and responsibilities for emergency management are split between three levels of government, creates a unique set of challenges revolving around coordination, communication and cooperation that must be overcome to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's disaster response arrangements.
- 1.7 The Australian Government plays an essential role in ensuring that the national emergency response arrangements are responsive to the needs of all Australians and that they are operating as effectively as possible.

- 1.8 Local communities, and the councils that represent them, must be empowered and supported to drive the development of emergency management plans that reflect the distinctive needs of their environments and communities.
- 1.9 State emergency service agencies act as the first responders who protect the life, property and environments of the communities they serve. This workforce, largely volunteer-based, must be supported to ensure their levels of resourcing and training are maintained and sustainable in the face of increased demand for their services.
- 1.10 The same can be said for the valuable role played by the not-for-profit and community services sector who are often the ones picking up the pieces after a disaster impacts a community.
- 1.11 The role of volunteers in underpinning Australia's disaster resilience cannot be understated. Volunteers contribute across all stages of disaster prevention, preparedness, and recovery by not only bolstering the number of boots on the ground, but also by fostering and nurturing important social capital and connections. However, the evidence indicates that the number of people volunteering in Australia has been declining over the past few years, at times when we need them most.
- 1.12 Additionally, questions have been raised about the sustainability of calling on the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to assist states and territories in responding to disasters given that these events are occurring much more frequently. The ADF's workforce and capabilities must be focused on their primary responsibility of the protection of Australia's national security and the defence of Australia. Whilst there is no doubt about the value of the capabilities and capacity of our women and men in uniform to assist communities in emergencies, the Australian Government must ensure that these capabilities are drawn upon only in the most extreme situations—as a force of last resort.
- 1.13 As such, funding models must be designed in a way that is flexible and adequately funds each level of government and each sector involved in disaster preparedness, response and recovery to enable them to fulfil their roles and responsibilities. The Australian Government must also be creative in implementing incentives and solutions that recognise, retain and recruit volunteers, encouraging more people to step up and help their fellow Australians in times of need.
- 1.14 This report explores these issues, highlighting the areas identified in the evidence as requiring improvement, and outlines a number of proposals to strengthen Australia's emergency response arrangements and improve Australia's disaster resilience.

## Climate change and natural disasters

- 1.15 The State of the Climate 2022 report found that Australia's climate has warmed by an average of approximately 1.47 degrees Celsius since national records began in 1910 and sea surface temperatures have increased by an average of 1.05 degrees Celsius since 1900. This has led to an increase in the frequency of extreme heat events over land and sea.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.16 According to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), 'Australia is experiencing an increase in the frequency, severity, and impact of climate change-influenced disasters'.<sup>2</sup> There have been over 200 disaster events since 2019, with 1 684 disaster declarations across 434 local government areas (LGAs). In 2022, half of Australia's LGAs were subject to a disaster declaration,<sup>3</sup> with 70 per cent of Australians living in an LGA that was impacted by a disaster event.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.17 Similarly, research by KPMG found that, in 2022, 18 million Australians were living in an LGA impacted by at least one natural disaster and that in some cases, LGAs had been impacted by multiple events over the past three years. KPMG also found that the number of people living in an impacted area was more than double the average for the past decade.<sup>5</sup>
- 1.18 However, each state and territory in Australia experiences weather events differently as each has its own climate, geography and environment which influences the type, frequency, intensity and severity of natural disasters. As such, the resourcing and arrangements in place to mitigate and respond to weather events also varies.
- 1.19 The State of the Climate 2022 report warned that in the coming decades, Australia is projected to experience:
- continued increases in air temperatures, more heat extremes and fewer cold extremes;
  - continued decreases, on average, in cool season rainfall across many regions of southern and eastern Australia, which will likely lead to more time in drought, but with ongoing climate variability that will give rise to short-duration heavy rainfall events at a range of timescales;
  - continued increases in the number of dangerous fire weather days and a longer fire season for southern and eastern Australia;

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<sup>1</sup> CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, [State of the Climate 2022](#), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), *Submission 83*, p. 4.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR), *Submission 29*, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> NEMA, [2023–24 higher risk weather seasons national preparedness summit report](#), p. 3.

<sup>5</sup> KPMG, ['70 percent of Australians impacted by natural disasters: new analysis shows investment in resilience infrastructure is needed'](#), *press release*, 15 September 2023, (accessed 28 May 2024).

- further sea level rise and continued warming and acidification of the oceans around Australia;
- increased and longer-lasting marine heatwaves that will affect marine environments, such as kelp forests, and increase the likelihood of more frequent and severe bleaching events in coral reefs around Australia;
- fewer tropical cyclones, but a greater proportion is projected to be of high intensity, with large variations from year to year; and
- reduced average snow depth in alpine regions, but with variations from year to year.<sup>6</sup>

1.20 The cost burden of natural disasters is also significant and predicted to increase. According to the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs):

The cost of natural disasters in Australia is estimated to increase from an average of \$18.2 billion in 2016 to \$73 billion per annum by 2060, even under a low emissions scenario.<sup>7</sup>

1.21 The Australian Government's Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)<sup>8</sup> paid \$3.1 billion in funding to states and territories between 1 June 2018 and 30 June 2022 to assist them in responding to natural disasters. In October 2022, the Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) projected that DRFA payments to the states between 2022–23 to 2025–26 would reach \$6.4 billion.<sup>9</sup>

1.22 Furthermore, KPMG research found that the value of insured losses caused by natural disasters in 2022 was at a record high of almost \$7 billion.<sup>10</sup>

1.23 There is also a significant human impact of the increased frequency and severity of natural disasters, as described by the Department of Health and Aged Care:

... natural disasters (and extreme weather) give rise to increased rates of stress, depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), alcohol and substance abuse, aggression and violence, suicide, and exacerbation of other underlying mental health problems. Long-term mental health impacts are also linked to the practical challenges of rebuilding after a natural

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<sup>6</sup> CSIRO and the Bureau of Meteorology, [State of the Climate 2022](#), p. 3.

<sup>7</sup> Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), *Submission 80*, p. 3.

<sup>8</sup> Note: the DRFA is the means through which the Australian Government provides funding to states and territories to share the financial burden of responding to a natural disaster, and supports the provision of urgent financial assistance to disaster affected communities. See: NEMA, '[Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements \(DRFA\)](#)', (accessed 28 May 2024).

<sup>9</sup> Australian National Audit Office (ANAO), '[Administration of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#)', *Auditor-General Report No. 23 of 2022–23*, 18 May 2024.

<sup>10</sup> KPMG, '[70 percent of Australians impacted by natural disasters: new analysis shows investment in resilience infrastructure is needed](#)', *press release*, 15 September 2023 (accessed 28 May 2024).

disaster, including experiences relating to housing, insurance and obtaining financial assistance.<sup>11</sup>

## Conduct of the inquiry

1.24 The Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience (the committee) was established by resolution of the Senate on 30 November 2022 to inquire into Australia's preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, as well as to consider alternative models for disaster response and recovery.<sup>12</sup>

1.25 The inquiry's terms of reference include:

- (a) current preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, including:
  - (i) the role of the Australian Defence Force in responding to domestic natural disasters,
  - (ii) the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters, due to climate change, on the ongoing capacity and capability of the Australian Defence Force,
  - (iii) the impact on the Australian Defence Force in responding to domestic natural disasters, and
  - (iv) the role of Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, and the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters on their ongoing capacity and capability;
- (b) consideration of alternative models, including:
  - (i) repurposing or adapting existing Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services, and
  - (ii) overseas models and best practice;
- (c) consideration of the practical, legislative, and administrative arrangements that would be required to support improving Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters; and
- (d) any related matters.<sup>13</sup>

1.26 Details of the inquiry were made available on the committee's website.<sup>14</sup> The committee contacted a number of agencies, organisations and individuals inviting written submissions by 20 February 2023. However, given the nature of the inquiry and the level of community interest, the committee resolved to

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<sup>11</sup> Department of Health and Aged Care, *Submission 16*, p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Journals of the Senate*, No. 26—30 November 2022, pp. 777–778.

<sup>13</sup> *Journals of the Senate*, No. 26—30 November 2022, pp. 777–778.

<sup>14</sup> See: Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience [website](#).

accept submissions on an ongoing basis. Submissions closed on 30 July 2024, ahead of the report tabling.

- 1.27 The committee published a total of 174 submissions. These submissions reflect a broad segment of Australian society and came from submitters from across the country. A list of submissions is included at Appendix 2.
- 1.28 The committee conducted 17 public hearings around the country. A list of the locations of the hearings and the witnesses who attended these hearings can be found at Appendix 3.
- 1.29 In addition, the committee conducted a delegation to New Zealand (NZ) from 8 to 12 April 2024 to learn from their experiences in disaster response and recovery. The committee met with a number of government agencies, representatives, non-government organisations, and research institutes. A summary of the committee's visit to NZ is at Appendix 1.
- 1.30 The committee was originally to present a final report by 14 September 2023. However, on 9 August 2023, the Senate agreed to extend the committee's reporting date to 24 April 2024. A further extension was granted until 8 August 2024.
- 1.31 The committee tabled an interim report on 14 September 2023.<sup>15</sup>

### **Interim report**

- 1.32 The interim report gave a high-level overview of the conduct of the inquiry and summarised the key themes that had been raised through the evidence received so far. The committee received evidence covering a broad range of issues, some of which were determined to be outside of the scope of the committee's work. The committee made four recommendations recognising that some reviews were already in progress elsewhere and that other committees would be better placed to investigate some of the more niche areas, including insurance and land planning.
- 1.33 The committee notes that inquiries and reviews relating to the interim report's recommendations are ongoing<sup>16</sup> or yet to be publicly released<sup>17</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience, [interim report](#), September 2023.

<sup>16</sup> See: House of Representatives Economics Committee inquiry into insurers' responses to 2022 major flood claims [website](#); Select Committee on the Impact of Climate Risk on Insurance Premiums and Availability [website](#).

<sup>17</sup> Note: The [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#) (Colvin Review) report was due to be provided to the Australian Government in April 2024. At the time of drafting this report, the Colvin Review report had not been publicly released. The [Independent Review of National Natural Disaster Governance Arrangements](#) (Glasser Review) was delivered in December 2023, but had not been publicly released at the time of writing. It is understood that the report is currently being considered by federal, state and territory governments.

## **Structure of this report**

1.34 This report contains four chapters which include the committee's views and recommendations throughout:

- Chapter 1 has provided background information on the effect of climate change on the frequency and severity of natural disasters in Australia, and outlined conduct of the inquiry, including the committee's interim report;
- Chapter 2 will define and discuss disaster resilience, and outline the challenges facing Australia's current disaster mitigation, response and recovery arrangements;
- Chapter 3 addresses the decline of volunteerism in Australia, what this means for Australia's disaster resilience, and how it can be addressed; and
- Chapter 4 discusses the role of the ADF in responding to natural disasters, before canvassing alternative disaster response models. This chapter also considers relevant international examples.

## **Acknowledgement**

1.35 The committee would like to thank all the individuals and organisations who have assisted the committee with its work, including those who wrote submissions and those who gave evidence at hearings.

1.36 In particular, the committee wishes to thank those individuals who, having themselves gone through the trauma of fires and floods, were willing to recount their still painful experiences. The committee admires the honesty and courage of those individuals in sharing their stories.



# Chapter 2

## Responding to natural disasters

- 2.1 Australia's experience of natural disasters is changing rapidly with the increasing scale, scope and duration of disaster response requirements because of the effects of climate change. This is creating significant challenges for governments by stretching the planning, resources and partnerships needed to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters.
- 2.2 This chapter discusses the challenges facing Australia's preparedness for natural disasters and the suitability of the response and recovery frameworks in place. This chapter first defines and discusses disaster resilience, before outlining the current disaster response arrangements of Australian governments and the key challenges raised by submitters and witnesses.

### What is disaster resilience?

- 2.3 The United Nations (UN) Office for Disaster Risk Reduction defines disaster resilience as:

The ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management.<sup>1</sup>

- 2.4 Natural hazards include bushfires, floods, cyclones, storms, heatwaves, earthquakes and tsunamis. These trigger disasters when they impact what people value. According to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) disaster risk is the 'potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets that could occur to a system, society or a community'. Climate change is an underlying driver of disaster risk as it alters the frequency and intensity of natural hazards, affecting vulnerability to natural hazards, and changing exposure patterns.<sup>2</sup>
- 2.5 The UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (the Sendai Framework), which has been adopted by Australia, recognises the importance of not only managing disasters, but managing disaster risk. The Sendai Framework outlines four global priorities for action to reduce disaster risk:

- (a) understanding disaster risk;

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations (UN) Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, '[Sendai Framework terminology on disaster risk reduction: resilience](#)' (accessed 3 June 2024).

<sup>2</sup> National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), '[National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework](#), 2018, p. 7.

- (b) strengthening disaster risk governance to manage disaster risk;
- (c) investing in disaster risk reduction for resilience; and
- (d) enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response, and to 'Build Back Better' in recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction.<sup>3</sup>

- 2.6 According to the CSIRO, the concept of building back better to enhance resilience requires consideration of how and where we build, and the pursuit of ongoing improvements in the standard and design of the built environment and critical infrastructure. This includes embedding disaster resilience explicitly in 'planning, agricultural and urban land use, and zoning and investment decisions, to avoid unnecessary exposure to the new hazards resulting from the impact of climate change'.<sup>4</sup>
- 2.7 Additionally, the CSIRO recognised that communities play an essential role in building resilience, stating that governments must provide communities with 'the appropriate support to understand and reduce risks within their influence and control'. This includes providing 'targeted investment in community education and engagement activities' so that people feel empowered to make informed decisions about their safety.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.8 According to Australia's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, the common characteristics of disaster resilience communities, individuals and organisations include that they function well under stress, are successful at adaptation, are self-reliant, and have social capacity. More specifically, a disaster resilient community is one where:
- people understand the risks that may affect them and others in their community: they have comprehensive local information about hazards and risks, including who is exposed and who is most vulnerable, and they take action to prepare for disasters and are adaptive and flexible to respond appropriately during emergencies;
  - people have taken steps to anticipate disasters and to protect themselves, their assets and their livelihoods, including their homes and possessions, cultural heritage and economic capital, therefore minimising physical, economic and social losses. They have committed the necessary resources and are capable of organising themselves before, during and after disasters which helps to restore social, institutional and economic activity;
  - people work together with local leaders using their knowledge and resources to prepare for and deal with disasters, drawing upon personal and community strengths, and existing community networks and structures;

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<sup>3</sup> UN, [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030](#), 2015, p. 14.

<sup>4</sup> CSIRO, [Building a disaster-resilient Australia](#), pp. 8–9.

<sup>5</sup> CSIRO, [Building a disaster-resilient Australia](#), p. 9.

- strong social networks offer support to individuals and families in a time of crisis;
- people work in partnership with emergency services, their local authorities and other relevant organisations before, during and after emergencies. These relationships ensure community resilience activities are informed by local knowledge, can be undertaken safely, and complement the work of emergency service agencies;
- emergency management plans are resilience-based, to build disaster resilience within communities over time. Communities, governments and other organisations take resilience outcomes into account when considering and developing core services, products and policies. They are adaptive and flexible to respond appropriately in disasters;
- the emergency management volunteer sector is strong;
- businesses and other service providers undertake wide-reaching business continuity planning that links with their security and emergency management arrangements;
- land use planning systems and building control arrangements reduce, as far as is practicable, community exposure to unreasonable risks from known hazards, and suitable arrangements are implemented to protect life and property; and
- following a disaster, a satisfactory range of functioning is restored quickly. People understand the mechanisms and processes through which recovery assistance may be made available and they appreciate that support is designed to be offered, in the first instance, to the most vulnerable community members.<sup>6</sup>

### **Australia's disaster resilience**

2.9 The Australian Government recognises that disaster resilience is critical to Australia's continued wellbeing and prosperity, and that disaster resilience diminishes as disaster risk, and the potential impacts, grows.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience pointed out that 'for every one dollar invested in resilience before a disaster, we can save between \$3 and \$8 in recovery'.<sup>8</sup>

2.10 The Australian Government's National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (NDRRF), a framework co-designed with representatives from all levels of government and business and community sectors, outlined the need for a

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<sup>6</sup> NEMA, [National Strategy for Disaster Resilience](#), February 2011, p. 5.

<sup>7</sup> NEMA, [National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework](#), 2018, p. 4.

<sup>8</sup> Dr Margaret Moreton, Executive Director, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 8. See, also: National Insurance Brokers Association (NIBA), *Submission 60*, p. 2.

coordinated effort to reduce the impact of disasters and improve disaster resilience:

Disaster resilience and risk reduction is a shared responsibility, but often not equally shared. While individuals and communities have their roles to play, they do not control many of the levers needed to reduce some disaster risks. Governments and industry in particular must take coordinated action to reduce disaster risks within their control to limit adverse impacts on communities. More than ever, limiting the impact of disasters now and in the future requires a coordinated effort across and within many areas including land use planning, infrastructure, emergency management, social policy, agriculture, education, health, community development, energy and the environment.<sup>9</sup>

- 2.11 Despite this acknowledgement from the Australian Government, some submitters and witnesses still believed that governments could have a greater focus on building resilience in Australia.<sup>10</sup>
- 2.12 The Minderoo Foundation, for example, stated ‘the national spend for resilience is inadequate and there is an overemphasis on response, recovery and relief, at the expense of resilience’.<sup>11</sup> The Minderoo Foundation submitted that 97 per cent of government funding is currently spent on response and recovery, with only three per cent spent on preparedness before a disaster to build resilience. It recommended that this amount increase from three to 30 per cent by 2025.<sup>12</sup>
- 2.13 Similarly, the National Insurance Brokers Association (NIBA) agreed that governments had neglected spending on pre-event mitigation and focused too much on post-event recovery. NIBA referred to a 2014 Productivity Commission report stating that governments ‘over-invest in post-disaster reconstruction and under-invest in mitigation that would limit the impact of natural disasters in the first place’. NIBA submitted that ‘more can and must be done to ensure our communities and homes are resilient in the face of natural disasters’.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> NEMA, [National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework](#), 2018, p. 4.

<sup>10</sup> See, for example: National Farmers’ Federation, *Submission 18*, p. 2; St Vincent de Paul Society, *Submission 37*, p. 2; Habitat for Humanity Australia, *Submission 44*, p. 1; GIVIT, *Submission 51*, p. 2; Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR), *Submission 54*, p. 6; Kyogle Council, *Submission 58*, p. 2; NIBA, *Submission 60*, p. 2; Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 1; Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 2.

<sup>12</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> NIBA, *Submission 60*, pp. 2 & 5.

## Disaster resilience and Indigenous communities

2.14 Indigenous communities are often disproportionately impacted by natural disasters and exposed to unique risks which presents challenges for developing disaster resilience, particularly for remote Indigenous communities. These communities often already experience high levels of social, health and economic disadvantage and poor infrastructure, and these challenges are being exacerbated by climate change.<sup>14</sup>

2.15 Deloitte submitted:

We know that First Nations communities are beyond resilient. However, these communities lack representation in disaster prediction and resilience efforts. Local and state resilience plans do not integrate nor value the knowledge that First Nations people hold about land management and disaster mitigation. Importantly, many existing plans and approaches ignore the fundamental element of trust that First Nations organisations and communities rely on and can bring in situations involving natural disasters. There is an opportunity to widen the focus and prioritise community-led resilience options and ideas.<sup>15</sup>

2.16 Building disaster resilience in Indigenous communities involves supporting opportunities to collaborate, share knowledge, and empowering cultural stewardship.<sup>16</sup> Involving groups such as Traditional Owner and Aboriginal organisations and Indigenous ranger groups is important as these groups are well-placed in terms of their location, resources, local knowledge, cultural understanding, language and networks.<sup>17</sup>

2.17 National Indigenous Disaster Resilience, a research program at Monash University, submitted that there is a need for greater attention to address the disproportionate impacts that disasters have on Indigenous people across Australia and recommended that the Australian Government:

- invest in a workforce of Indigenous Disaster Resilience practitioners;
- develop and implement an Indigenous Disaster Resilience Framework;
- create an Indigenous Disaster Resilience Unit in NEMA;

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<sup>14</sup> See, for example: Northern Land Council, *Submission 77*, pp. 1–4; Ms Prue Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer, Wunan Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, pp. 21–25; Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS), *Submission 31*, p. 3; National Indigenous Disaster Resilience (NIDR), *Submission 168*, pp. 1–9.

<sup>15</sup> Deloitte, *Submission 63*, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> See, for example: Deloitte, *Submission 63*, pp. 1, 3–4; Northern Land Council, *Submission 77*, p. 6; Indigenous Reference Group, *Submission 116*, pp. 4–6; Oliver Costello, *Submission 127*, p. 5.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example: Northern Land Council, *Submission 77*, pp. 4–7; Indigenous Reference Group, *Submission 116*, p. 5; Mr Chuck Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberly Development Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 26; Ms Sarah Parriman, Deputy Chief Officer, Kimberley Land Council, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 24.

- amend the Disaster Ready Fund (DRF)<sup>18</sup> to enable self-determination and create opportunities for Indigenous communities and organisations; and
- create an Indigenous Coordinator General position within NEMA.<sup>19</sup>

### **Committee view**

- 2.18 The committee acknowledges the importance of mitigating disaster risk and strengthening Australia’s disaster resilience, particularly in recognition that climate change is altering Australia’s experience of natural disasters by exacerbating the scale, scope, duration and succession of natural disasters occurring across the country. As reflected in the evidence, the committee is of the view that there should be a greater focus on preparedness, mitigation and resilience, shifting the balance from response and recovery.
- 2.19 The committee believes that a key approach to building resilience involves working with the natural environment instead of attempting to control or work against it, particularly when it comes to rebuilding after a disaster and the need to build back better. This involves a collaborative approach to integrating natural environment considerations into infrastructure planning and development to enhance sustainability and resilience.
- 2.20 Presently, under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)—the framework used to provide funding to states and territories to share the financial burden of responding to a natural disaster—the Australian Government provides funds for the restoration of an essential public asset only to its pre-disaster function, however rebuilding infrastructure to its original specifications will not improve resilience. The committee is of the view that the DRFA guidelines should be amended to ensure that funding arrangements support the principle of building betterment into recovery and reconstruction, ensuring that this type of funding is available across all jurisdictions.
- 2.21 The committee notes that an independent review of disaster funding arrangements was undertaken (the Colvin Review) with a final report to be provided to the Government in April 2024. However, at the time of writing, the report had not been publicly released.

### **Recommendation 1**

- 2.22 The committee recommends that the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and relevant guidelines be amended to enable funds to be distributed for the purpose of building betterment into recovery and reconstruction, ensuring that this funding is available to all jurisdictions.**

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<sup>18</sup> Note: the Disaster Ready Fund (DRF) is a federal government initiative providing funding to support projects that address the physical and social impacts of disasters on communities.

<sup>19</sup> NIDR, *Submission 168*, pp. 1–9.

2.23 The committee recognises that the disadvantage and social challenges experienced by Indigenous communities are exacerbated by climate change and that Indigenous communities, particularly remote communities, face unique challenges when it comes to mitigating risk and building disaster resilience. The committee is of the view that governments and organisations need to work with Indigenous communities to ensure that their voices are being heard and respected, noting that Indigenous knowledge of Country is invaluable in understanding local environments. Indigenous liaison officers, for example, are key contacts who can effectively communicate the needs of a particular community during a disaster. Governments must nurture Indigenous-led strategies that build the resilience of people and Country, including for land use planning, bushfire and flood mitigation, risk management, training and education, health, and emergency planning.

### **Australia's disaster response arrangements**

2.24 Under Australia's constitutional arrangements, state and territory governments have primary responsibility for emergency management. However, natural disasters do not adhere to state or territory borders and are often more widespread or exceed the capability of a single state or territory. Australia's disaster response arrangements therefore aim to bring together the efforts of all levels of government, non-government organisations, businesses, communities, and individuals to deliver coordinated emergency management.<sup>20</sup>

### **National frameworks and strategies**

2.25 Australia has several frameworks and strategies that guide the national arrangements across all phases of natural disaster management. These national frameworks are developed by consensus and endorsed by the federal and each state and territory government—usually through forums such as the National Cabinet and its associated Ministerial Council for Emergency Management. These national frameworks and strategies can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Frameworks and strategies focused on national approaches to mitigating and adapting to disaster risk and improving resilience, now and into the future, include: the NDRRF;<sup>21</sup> the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience;<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. ix.

<sup>21</sup> NEMA, [National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework](#), 2018.

<sup>22</sup> NEMA, [National Strategy for Disaster Resilience](#), February 2011.

the National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy;<sup>23</sup> and the Sendai Framework.<sup>24</sup>

- A national approach to enhancing disaster preparedness for effective response and recovery through the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework.<sup>25</sup>
- National funding frameworks, including the DRFA<sup>26</sup> through which the federal government provides funding to states and territories to share the financial burden of responding to a natural disaster, and the DRF which is a federal government initiative providing funding to support projects that address the physical and social impacts of disasters on communities.<sup>27</sup>

2.26 Additionally, the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) is the overarching policy for coordinated, whole-of-government crisis management. It describes the standing arrangements for the Australian Government's response to all crises, including natural disasters. The whole-of-government arrangements provide for situational awareness, advice and data to support decision-making, communication strategies and strategic coordination.<sup>28</sup>

2.27 There are two key mechanisms that facilitate whole-of-government coordination in response to or recovery from domestic crises including:

- the Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee which is the primary mechanism that brings together relevant Australian Government Agency representatives; and
- the National Coordination Mechanism which brings together relevant Australian Government, state and territory government and private sector representatives for coordination, communication and collaboration.<sup>29</sup>

### **Role of the federal government**

2.28 The federal government provides support to states and territories when coordinated assistance is requested, such as when the nature of the disaster has, or is expected to, exceed the sovereign capacities of the state or territory, or when

<sup>23</sup> Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water (DCCEEW), [National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2021–2025](#), October 2021.

<sup>24</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030](#), United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, 2015.

<sup>25</sup> Department of Home Affairs, [Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework](#), October 2018.

<sup>26</sup> NEMA, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements \(DRFA\)](#) (accessed 4 July 2024).

<sup>27</sup> Department of Finance, [Disaster Ready Fund](#) (accessed 14 June 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, [Australian Government Crisis Management Framework](#), September 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, [Australian Government Crisis Management Framework](#), September 2023, pp. 31–32.

the disaster affects multiple jurisdictions. This includes the allocation of resources, including from the Department of Defence (Defence). The federal government also works with states, territories, industry and the public to build national resilience against future hazards, particularly those with national consequences.<sup>30</sup>

- 2.29 It is the federal government's role to identify national priorities for the mitigation of emergencies, in collaboration with all relevant stakeholders. Additionally, the federal government provides support for emergency risk assessment and mitigation measures, in conjunction with state, territory and local governments.<sup>31</sup>
- 2.30 A key agency is NEMA which was established in September 2022 to provide a more coordinated approach to preparing for and responding to disasters. NEMA provides national leadership by maintaining crisis and response plans that can support state and territory governments responding to an emergency. NEMA also provides end-to-end oversight of risk reduction, prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.<sup>32</sup>
- 2.31 Another crucial role of the federal government is the provision of financial assistance, not only to eligible Australian residents who are adversely affected by a disaster, but also through cost sharing arrangements with states and territories to alleviate the financial burden associated with the provision of emergency relief and recovery services and activities.<sup>33</sup> The federal government has also committed to investing \$200 million per year on disaster prevention and resilience initiatives through the DRF, investing in projects such as improvements to flood levees, sea walls, cyclone shelters, evacuations centres, fire breaks and telecommunications.<sup>34</sup>
- 2.32 The federal government also plays a central role in communication and information sharing, including through:
- public information, such as public safety broadcasts;
  - vital public warnings for severe weather, bushfires, floods and tsunamis;
  - and

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<sup>30</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 5.

<sup>31</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 5.

<sup>32</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 6; NEMA, *Submission 82*, p. 3.

<sup>33</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 5.

<sup>34</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 6.

- information services such as meteorological, hydrological, geophysical and other geodata services that inform and underpin the management of emergencies.<sup>35</sup>
- 2.33 Under the *National Emergency Declaration Act 2020* the Governor-General may, on the advice of the Prime Minister, declare a national emergency if that emergency escalates to a level of national significance. Declaration of a national emergency triggers a number of statutory powers available to the federal government, including: the power to suspend, vary or substitute ‘red tape’ requirements, where doing so would be of benefit to the public or a section of the public; the power to require Australian Government entities to report on stockpiles during a national emergency; and the streamlining of statutory tests to exercise national emergency laws.<sup>36</sup>
- 2.34 In 2023, the Australian Government established the National Emergency Management Stockpile (NEMS) to provide rapid access to readily deployable critical emergency management goods and services to augment Australian Defence Force (ADF)<sup>37</sup>, and state and territory emergency response and immediate relief capabilities. The NEMS was first used in January 2024 following ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper in Far North Queensland to provide temporary worker accommodation for those helping to clean up and rebuild.<sup>38</sup>
- 2.35 The NEMS is comprised of three parts:
- (a) a NEMS Standing Offer Panel with service categories for goods, logistics and specialist services, which authorised state and territory government agencies can also access;
  - (b) a national stockpile of Australian Government-owned re-deployable assets and single-use seasonal consumables, managed under NEMA contracts with industry. This includes self-sustaining emergency shelter camps, water desalination and purification systems and high output power generation; and
  - (c) strategic partnerships and Memoranda of Understanding with other Australian Government humanitarian and crisis response capabilities.<sup>39</sup>
- 2.36 The Australian Government stated that the NEMS Standing Offer Panel is intended to ‘make it easier to source critical goods and services in preparation

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<sup>35</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 5.

<sup>36</sup> Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, [Australian Government Crisis Management Framework](#), September 2023, p. 35.

<sup>37</sup> Note: the role of the ADF is discussed in chapter 4 of this report.

<sup>38</sup> NEMA, [‘Budget 2024–25 Factsheet: National Emergency Management Stockpile Capability’](#), p. 1 (accessed 5 June 2024).

<sup>39</sup> NEMA, [‘Budget 2024–25 Factsheet: National Emergency Management Stockpile Capability’](#), p. 2 (accessed 5 June 2024).

for and during an emergency’ by providing a continuous and reliable stockpile of essential goods and services. Furthermore, the panel ‘will ensure goods and services are available at competitive price points with shorter procurement lead-times’ and will also be ‘open to state and territory governments to procure goods and services in preparation for disasters’.<sup>40</sup>

2.37 In the 2024–25 Budget, the Australian Government has allocated almost \$27 million over the next three years to further invest in the NEMS national capability.<sup>41</sup>

### **State and territory responsibilities**

2.38 As noted above, state and territory governments have primary responsibility for emergency management within their jurisdictions and are responsible for protecting life, property and environment. This is managed through the development of emergency management plans and arrangements, and includes areas of responsibility such as:

- aligning jurisdictional emergency arrangements to national frameworks;
- developing, implementing and ensuring compliance with comprehensive emergency mitigation policies and strategies in all relevant areas of government activity, including land use planning, infrastructure provision and building standards compliance;
- building and promoting resilience, including through emergency awareness and education programs;
- ensuring warning systems are in place and are effective;
- ensuring arrangements for coordinating the allocation of resources and capabilities are in place and acted upon;
- ensuring that arrangements for evacuation, refuge and relief are in place;
- maintaining adequate levels of capability, including appropriately equipped and trained career and volunteer emergency response and recovery personnel; and
- ensuring post-emergency assessment and debrief, analysis and lessons management processes are undertaken.<sup>42</sup>

2.39 Each state and territory government has slightly different disaster governance and crisis management arrangements, which integrate and implement the national frameworks and strategies differently. Most state and territory governments have a ministerial level committee responsible for emergency management. These ministerial committees enable elected government officials

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<sup>40</sup> NEMA, ‘[Growing Australia’s disaster stockpile](#)’, *media release* (accessed 5 June 2024).

<sup>41</sup> NEMA, ‘[Budget 2024–25 Factsheet: National Emergency Management Stockpile Capability](#)’ (accessed 5 June 2024).

<sup>42</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, *Australian Emergency Management Arrangements*, 2023, p. 5.

to make strategic, and sometimes operational, decisions about the management of natural disaster risk. They allow ministers to provide strategic policy oversight of measures to prevent, prepare for, respond to and recover from national emergencies.<sup>43</sup>

- 2.40 These bodies are typically supported by a strategic policy and/or operational decision-making committee, which, in most instances, is referred to as an 'emergency management committee'. These committees are often the principal bodies that allow state and territory governments to consider planning, investment and policy frameworks for natural disasters. Their membership often comprises all emergency chiefs, all government departments, and representatives, such as representatives of local government associations. These committees are also often responsible for the development and implementation of jurisdictions' emergency management plans and/or frameworks.<sup>44</sup>

### **Local government responsibilities**

- 2.41 Unsurprisingly, communities are often the ones who are the first responders at natural disasters. Local governments play an important role in emergency management, particularly because of their local knowledge and relationships with community networks.
- 2.42 Primarily, the responsibilities of local governments in emergency management operate in partnership with their respective state and territory governments to contribute to the safety and wellbeing of their communities.<sup>45</sup> The roles and responsibilities of local governments are similar to state and territory governments, but have a particular focus on their local communities, including:
- representing community interests in emergency management to other spheres of government and contributing to decision-making processes before, during and after emergencies;
  - ensuring all requisite local emergency planning and preparedness measures are undertaken and that plans are exercised on a regular basis;
  - ensuring an adequate local emergency response and recovery capability is in place, including resources for local volunteers;
  - ensuring appropriate local resources and arrangements are in place to provide emergency relief and recovery services to communities;
  - continuing to provide services to their municipalities (such as waste collection, pollution control, water provision, wastewater treatment and stormwater drainage) during emergencies; and

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<sup>43</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 76.

<sup>44</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 76.

<sup>45</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 4.

- participating in post-emergency assessment, debrief analysis and lessons management.<sup>46</sup>

## Key challenges

2.43 The committee received evidence that there are a number of areas where the current disaster preparedness and response arrangements could be improved, including support for local communities, funding for local councils, issues with coordination and communication, and funding for not-for-profits and the community services sector.

## Empowering local communities

2.44 Evidence received by the committee indicated that local communities felt that state and federal governments sometimes overlook the value of local capacity and knowledge when responding to natural disasters and building disaster resilience.<sup>47</sup>

2.45 The Australian Red Cross submitted:

Communities know their strengths and needs better than anyone else. They are best placed to develop meaningful solutions for strengthening resilience locally. With the right skills, resources, and support, they can better withstand shocks, solve problems collectively and emerge stronger after disasters. We believe it is important to acknowledge that the current model is not fit for purpose, and we ask the committee to recommend a model that empowers communities to take collective, local action.<sup>48</sup>

2.46 Dr Margaret Moreton, Executive Director at the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, warned that we need to think carefully about the help we provide communities, stating that ‘communities unfortunately often describe the help they receive as the second disaster’.<sup>49</sup> For example, the committee heard evidence from the Byron Shire<sup>50</sup> Mayor, Mr Michael Lyon, who reflected on the experience of the community during and following the 2022 floods:

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<sup>46</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, [Australian Emergency Management Arrangements](#), 2023, p. 4.

<sup>47</sup> See, for example: Mr Joe Ross, private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 14; Councillor Steve Krieg, Mayor, Lismore City Council, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, p. 4; Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 1; Mr Jelenko Dragisic, *Submission 167*, p. 7.

<sup>48</sup> Australian Red Cross, *Supplementary Submission 56*, p. 7. Note: the Australian Red Cross provides a RediCommunities program which empowers communities to develop a disaster resilience action plan as well as ongoing support to implement the plan, with a focus on localised, community owned initiatives. See: Australian Red Cross, *Supplementary Submission 56*, p. 8.

<sup>49</sup> Dr Margaret Moreton, Executive Director, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2023, p. 8.

<sup>50</sup> Note: the Byron Shire is a local government area located in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales (NSW).

If the rain fell again, hammering relentlessly for days, just like in 2022, and we were to have the same catastrophic event unfold, many of the same responses would likely repeat in Byron Shire. Ill-equipped evacuation centres would be stood up on sites, but local people in our hinterland and other areas wouldn't be able to access them. Community members would perform rescues, putting their and others' lives at risk to take families off roofs and out of landslips ... The lead agency, the [New South Wales (NSW)] Department of Communities and Justice, may arrive days late and under resourced. As the waters recede, community members will rally at halls, ready to support each other, but find a gap in the system with no organisation in place to deliver vital coordination, training, insurance or risk management ... Just like before, the community will look to each other and to us, the local council. Gaps will be filled by the community. The community will be the first responders, risk assessors, technical specialists and volunteer coordinators bearing the brunt and holding the risk.<sup>51</sup>

2.47 Mr Lyon emphasised the need for state and federal governments to support local councils to work with their communities to build resilience and undertake essential preparation that enables communities to act effectively and safely 'when, not if, the system fails'. Mr Lyon explained that local councils are doing their absolute best, they just need support to build regional disaster response models that are fit-for-purpose and tailored to the specific circumstances of the community. He stated: 'we can't do it without a meaningful commitment from state and federal governments to deliver real, on-the-ground outcomes for local people'.<sup>52</sup>

2.48 Dr Moreton agreed that communities have great capacity and strength, they just need a hand:

Local people know one another, and they know their local history and context better than any outsider can ever do. They know who's vulnerable, they know who needs help and they know who has capacity. Local Indigenous community groups know the land, know the stories and know the environment. Local organisations like fire brigades, local SES, neighbourhood houses and community services are the lifeblood of any community, and they know one another very well. Communities where these networks are strong and those community groups work together recover after an event much more quickly and with much more connection and much more enduring support.<sup>53</sup>

2.49 Similarly, Mr Geoff Davis, Councillor of the Shire of Derby-West Kimberly in Western Australia, explained that there needs to be better governance

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<sup>51</sup> Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor, Byron Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 8.

<sup>52</sup> Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor, Byron Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, pp. 8–9.

<sup>53</sup> Dr Margaret Moreton, Executive Director, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 15 March 2023, pp. 8–9.

mechanisms that allow local governments to have self-determination and to draw upon their own wisdom:

At the moment, local government, federal government, and state government always arbiter from outside. The capacity for us as a community to have leaders who can come together and sit down with the three tiers of government to make good decisions, have good input and review the impact of what we're being funded for needs to happen.<sup>54</sup>

2.50 Townsville Councillor Jenny Hill agreed that as the level of government that is closest to the community, local councils have a unique understanding of the specific needs and challenges faced by their community, as well as having a range of services and infrastructure that can be mobilised in the event of a disaster, enabling them to respond quickly and effectively. In the case of Queensland, Councillor Hill highlighted a model that she believes works whereby the local level pushes up (rather than the federal level pushing down) through local management disaster groups which manage potential vulnerabilities and implement coordinated and effective strategies to respond to disasters. These groups are locally led, have primary responsibility for managing disasters in their local government area, and are structured with key personnel from local government agencies. Councillor Hill explained that these arrangements are unique to Queensland and should be considered for other states and territories.<sup>55</sup>

2.51 Mr Christopher Barnes, Manager of Emergency Management and Public Safety at the City of Moreton Bay, also discussed the benefit of the Queensland model, explaining that with permanent staff, they are able to:

... engage local communities—specifically some of the communities that are more isolated and vulnerable in our region—to establish willing community volunteers who are known in the community and are able to deliver to those individual community members basic training in Queensland disaster management arrangements, how to establish an evacuation centre or a community hub to be able to actually have that community interface at the point of impact. The benefit of having those community disaster management teams is that they know each other—first name terms, or at least they know who lives around the corner or down that street, which has been flooded. They have their finger on the pulse, and that allows us to establish a baseline of capability at the community coalface to these disaster events, and it also means that, when we are in the response phase, we are able to tap into that network directly, when we have got the relevant communications to those communities, to actually understand what is happening ... [A]ctually having the ability to reach directly into those

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<sup>54</sup> Mr Geoff Davis, Councillor, Shire of Derby-West Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 12.

<sup>55</sup> Councillor Jenny Hill, Mayor, Townsville City Council, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, pp. 1–3. For more information on Queensland disaster management arrangements, including local disaster management groups, see Queensland Government, [The Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery Disaster Management Guideline](#), 2 March 2023 (accessed 11 June 2024).

communities with known and trusted community members has been a real key line of action for us in order to develop resilience within communities. It is certainly a scheme that we have been able to cascade to our partner local governments and highlight, and it has been subject to some good interest from other local governments as a model to take forward.<sup>56</sup>

### **Funding arrangements for local councils**

2.52 Overwhelmingly, local governments expressed a desire for greater cooperation, communication and integration, the removal of red tape, and more targeted funding to better coordinate disaster preparedness and response.<sup>57</sup> Some of the key issues and challenges described by councils are highlighted in this section, followed by some recommendations from the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA).

2.53 The Kyogle Council, a local government council in the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales (NSW), described some of the problems they have experienced in engaging with the current disaster funding arrangements:

The [DRFA] arrangements were made with absolute good intent and they are essential to the recovery and rebuilding of these communities. But their implementation is seriously hindered by systemic structural issues. There are massive delays, bottlenecks, duplication of effort and effort in the wrong areas—really a system that's completely focused on dollars rather than people at the end of the day, and that's sad. As bureaucrats it's especially sad for us because we're the ones that are expected to work our way through those systems, work together with other tiers of government and get outcomes for our communities, but we are really struggling. It is really challenging to do that within the environment that's created at the moment between the three tiers of government.<sup>58</sup>

2.54 Councillor Steve Krieg, Mayor of the Lismore City Council, highlighted the challenge of getting access to funding for important infrastructure projects at the local level because of how the funding arrangements are structured:

We've got projects like our main road into Nimbin, the second biggest town in our [local government area (LGA)], with a massive land slip; it's a \$20 million to \$30 million fix. The model at the moment is that the council bankrolls it and then the government says: 'Send the receipt in and we'll pay you back.' The total budget for our council is \$200 million. We cannot carry

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<sup>56</sup> Mr Christopher Barnes, Manager, Emergency Management and Public Safety, City of Moreton Bay, *Committee Hansard*, 22 September 2023, p. 17.

<sup>57</sup> See, for example: Mr David Menzel, President, Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, pp. 11–20; Ms Amanda Dexter, Chief Executive Officer, and Mr Wayne Neate, Director, Technical and Development Services, Shire of Derby-West Kimberly, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, pp. 3–4; Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor, Byron Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 8; Mr Graeme Kelly, General Secretary, and Mr David Ross Crawford, Delegate, United Services Union, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, pp. 20–24; Councillor Steve Krieg, Mayor, Lismore City Council, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, pp. 2–3.

<sup>58</sup> Mr Graham Kennett, General Manager, Kyogle Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2023, p. 3.

that sort of debt ... We need to do better in releasing the funds, when they're required, to get on with these fixes.<sup>59</sup>

- 2.55 The President of the Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley agreed that the structure of the DRFA causes problems for local governments, particularly the auditing process:

... as a local government, we take on the risk. We have to provide an audit of our assets before and after an event; then we get an infrastructure auditor to agree the difference and the costs of that. We then get approval. We may need to audit again, once or twice. The amount of auditing that goes on is ridiculous ... By the time you get to about your second or third audit, to get permission to do the works, you're well into the dry season ... You can't mobilise late in the dry season.<sup>60</sup>

- 2.56 The Tweed Shire Council, a local government council located in the Northern Rivers region of NSW, also discussed the challenges of navigating the bureaucracy as a local council, highlighting that the grants process is burdensome because councils are often dealing with 'multiple grants with multiple criteria, [and] multiple ways to acquit'.<sup>61</sup>

- 2.57 For the Barcoo Shire Council, a local government council located in Central West Queensland, a significant problem was that local governments are responsible for assets they own but cannot operate without permission from the state. Mr Michael Lollback, CEO of Baroo Shire Council, explained:

... every year that I do a budget, I start with a massive level of depreciation on assets that [the] council has no real use for but owns ... We have very little say on what equipment arrives. There have been instances in the past where flood boats have arrived in local government areas without any consultation with the local government, only to have them put onto that local government's books to be maintained, fuelled and depreciated ... I had a request made to me recently during the flooding of Cooper Creek: would I release the [state emergency service (SES)] flood boat to be able to go down there to transport some provisions from one side of the river to the other. Officially, whilst I own the boat, I have no permission to do that. I then had to go through the bureaucratic processes of going back to [Queensland Fire and Emergency Services] to say, 'Can I get permission for the boat that is on my books and under my ownership to be able to be used for a community move in the local area as a result of flooding?' ... [T]hat highlights the

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<sup>59</sup> Councillor Steve Krieg, Mayor, Lismore City Council, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, p. 2.

<sup>60</sup> Mr David Menzel, President, Shire of Wyndham-East Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 16.

<sup>61</sup> Mr Troy Green, General Manager, Tweed Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2023, p. 4.

complexity of council being afforded ownership of what is primarily an operational asset at a state level.<sup>62</sup>

- 2.58 One of the key issues identified by the City of Hobart in Tasmania was that the current funding arrangements favour disaster recovery rather than disaster prevention which is a problem because local government often cannot afford build disaster resilience into their infrastructure without the assistance of other levels of government. Mr Geoffrey Lang, Municipal Emergency Management Coordinator at the City of Hobart, gave the following example:

... our city's critical stormwater infrastructure, some of which dates back to colonial times, needs investment to build our flood resistance. The ratepayer base of a small capital city such as Hobart cannot improve this type of infrastructure for disaster resilience on our own. As Hobart and the nation face increasing risk of more frequent and more intense natural disasters, it is critical that more investment is directed at building disaster resilience.<sup>63</sup>

- 2.59 As the representative body for local governments, the ALGA advocated for more targeted funding assistance for local councils, stating that 'without additional funding and support, councils are simply not able to rebuild ... or adequately prepare for future disasters':

For many years we've been calling for targeted funding assistance to enable councils to undertake mitigation activities to prepare our communities for the more severe and intense disasters that we know are coming due to dangerous climate change. Our smaller regional and remote councils in particular urgently need additional funding to rebuild their communities and to increase community resilience to future disasters. Smaller councils have least access to local rate revenue, rely heavily on federal funding for financial viability and are often the least able to provide the co-contributions that disaster recovery funding weights heavily.

There is a mismatch between the amount of local government infrastructure exposed to climate change risk and the resources that local governments have to carry out effective adaptation to manage these risks. Councils look after one-third of all public assets in Australia—around \$530 billion, including roads, bridges, buildings, land, machinery and equipment—but we collect only about 3.5 per cent of the total Australian tax take, via rates. The remaining 96.5 per cent of all taxes are collected by state and federal governments.<sup>64</sup>

- 2.60 The ALGA outlined four key recommendations to assist councils to better prepare for disaster events:

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<sup>62</sup> Mr Michael Lollback, Chief Executive Officer, Baroo Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2023, p. 5. See, also: Councillor Linda Scott, President, Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p. 24.

<sup>63</sup> Mr Geoffrey Lang, Municipal Emergency Management Coordinator, City of Hobart, *Committee Hansard*, 20 April 2023, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Councillor Linda Scott, President, ALGA, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p. 19.

- (a) a new targeted mitigation fund for local governments to build infrastructure to a more resilient standard, calling for \$250 million per year over four years;
- (b) Commonwealth funding of \$5.7 million over three years to increase local government preparedness for disasters across the country, establishing a network of funded offices across state and territory local government associations and at the ALGA to work with councils to identify risks and to increase preparedness at the local government level across the country;
- (c) state and territory governments to fully implement recommendation 11.1 of the Royal Commission into the National Natural Disaster Arrangements<sup>65</sup> which recommends jurisdictions assist councils with capacity and resources to undertake the tasks that are delegated to them; and
- (d) that building back better be a core value and overriding principle of the DRFA with the disaster recovery funding arrangements to build betterment into every recovery and reconstruction.<sup>66</sup>

### **Issues with coordination and communication**

- 2.61 Submitters and witnesses raised issues with the lack of coordination and communication between both government and non-government agencies and services which resulted in confusion, duplication of efforts and other inefficiencies.<sup>67</sup>
- 2.62 The CEO of the Business Council of Australia (BCA) purported that coordination could be a lot better, particularly between the business community, charities and government, stating that, otherwise, ‘people are confused about their roles and responsibilities’, there will be double ups of donations and assistance, and the ‘community and people who need assistance are not clear about where they can get it from’. BCA underscored that ‘[d]isasters are not a time for competition; they’re a time for collaboration’.<sup>68</sup>
- 2.63 Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) submitted that there is a need for an increased level of national coordination to ensure that the work being undertaken by many organisations across Australia is coordinated, noting that disaster management arrangements are currently fragmented across jurisdictions, particularly during

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<sup>65</sup> Note: the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements was established in February 2020 in response to the extreme bushfire season of 2019–20. The report can be found [here](#).

<sup>66</sup> Councillor Linda Scott, President, ALGA, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, pp. 19–20.

<sup>67</sup> See, for example: Disaster Relief Australia (DRA), *Submission 27*, p. 5; Deloitte, *Submission 63*, p. 2; Business Council of Australia (BCA), *Submission 85*, pp. 1–2; Ms Jennifer Westacott AO, Chief Executive Officer, BCA, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, p. 19; Sydney Environment Institute, *Submission 110*, p. 19.

<sup>68</sup> Ms Jennifer Westacott AO, Chief Executive Officer, BCA, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, pp. 19–20.

the recovery phase. For example, systems used in local disaster recovery centres frequently do not communicate with their state level counterparts. DRA recommended:

Tools such as the National Emergency Management Agency's Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning process provide an opportunity for a common planning model and a common language if adopted broadly. This would see agencies come together in the planning phase of an operation to ensure the efficient allocation and sequencing of resources.

Similarly, strengthening data aggregation to provide a common operating picture provides an opportunity for increased collaboration and more efficient allocation of resources.<sup>69</sup>

2.64 The Sydney Environment Institute has been conducting research on self-organising systems to minimise future disaster risk by investigating major disaster events such as the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires and 2021–2023 East Coast floods which identified a number of issues with the coordination of disaster response arrangements. Their preliminary findings suggest that:

... in many cases, the ability of formal disaster-response agencies to coordinate with communities and other institutions broke down as they approached constraints on available labour power, equipment, fuel, and other essential resources.

The breakdown in the coordination of formal disaster response and recovery mechanisms inhibited both the efficient allocation of existing state-controlled resources and the effective utilisation of community efforts. The failure of physical infrastructure—including roads, telecommunication, and electricity networks – exacerbated these institutional failures.

Participants in our research have explained that the disintegration of formal disaster-response systems as well as existing gaps in those systems shifted the financial, psychosocial, and ecological burdens of fires and floods onto informal networks and individuals.<sup>70</sup>

2.65 The Sydney Environment Institute made the following recommendations to improve coordination and communication based on their preliminary findings:

- governments should consider how the integration of community knowledge, networks, and strategies may improve the efficacy of conventional disaster response and recovery strategies including firefighting, sandbagging, evacuations, the distribution of supplies, etc. The committee should consider policies that recognise and integrate the efforts and aspirations of communities in a participatory, transparent, and democratic way;
- the committee may consider policies that foster participatory negotiation processes communities and governments. To improve the interface between

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<sup>69</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 5.

<sup>70</sup> Sydney Environment Institute, *Submission 110*, pp. 20–23.

informal and formal disaster response and recovery efforts, governments should focus on local decision-making processes rather than prescriptive outcomes;

- additional financial and administrative support (for example regulatory changes) may enable communities to deepen the intracommunity networks that disseminate information, share responsibilities, and coordinate resources during natural disasters; and
- formal agencies should recognise the experiences of community members who understand the relationship between local ecological factors and disaster events.<sup>71</sup>

2.66 In addition to advocating for greater coordination with government and non-government organisations, BCA also raised that it is difficult to obtain accurate, reliable, and timely information about the impact to small businesses when a disaster occurs to identify who needs assistance—which is compounded by the lack of coordination. The BCA recommended that NEMA play a greater role in the coordination of disaster-relief charities, as well as in the dissemination of data to charities during the emergency and recovery-phases of a natural disaster.<sup>72</sup>

2.67 The Minderoo Foundation also discussed the need for access to more timely and accurate information, particularly on the state of community needs and disaster risk to enable volunteer and not-for-profit groups to coordinate and organise their services in a more targeted manner, ultimately helping communities to access the right support faster.<sup>73</sup>

2.68 Furthermore, the Minderoo Foundation identified that there is no national asset register containing information to identify critical infrastructure and services—such as emergency accommodation, volunteers, mental health first aid—that are available for communities to access when disasters happen.<sup>74</sup> The Minderoo Foundation recommended that a national asset register be established to improve the mobilisation of resources into communities in need immediately after a disaster event.<sup>75</sup>

### ***Communication in relation to floods***

2.69 One particular area that was raised as a concern for many communities was access to accurate and timely communication about flood warnings. This

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<sup>71</sup> Sydney Environment Institute, *Submission 110*, pp. 20–23.

<sup>72</sup> BCA, *Submission 85*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>73</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 2.

<sup>74</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 2.

<sup>75</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 2.

appeared to be predominantly an issue caused by aging and inadequate infrastructure.

2.70 Councillor Krieg from the Lismore City Council described how inaccurate the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau) flood warnings were during the 2022 Lismore floods, noting that:

As for how the system was so badly inaccurate, I couldn't answer. I have heard some of our river gauges and flood warning systems have been broken since the 1974 flood and never repaired. Some of our rain gauges have been overgrown with camphor laurel trees so that they're not giving accurate information. The data matching doesn't line up with one gauge to another gauge. If you want to see a broken system, look at the Wilsons River catchment.<sup>76</sup>

2.71 Mr Eber Butron, Chief Community Officer at Lismore City Council added:

At a broad level, what's critical in relation to flood response is the information that the emergency operations centre has. My understanding is that each local government has its flood mapping, and they don't necessarily respond and talk to each other and may use different methodologies in relation to their flood mapping.<sup>77</sup>

2.72 Reflecting on the Lismore floods, Deloitte identified a number of issues with the coordination of the disaster response, including that there was:

- an uncoordinated, under-resourced and extremely delayed response from federal, state and local governments during and in the immediate aftermath of the flood events; and
- an overwhelming lack of coordination between government agencies, civil volunteer groups, community organisations and volunteers during and in the immediate aftermath of the disaster events.<sup>78</sup>

2.73 The Minderoo Foundation agreed that there is a need for clearer flood warnings and warning systems that are well understood by the community.<sup>79</sup>

2.74 The Bureau explained some of the challenges it faces in providing accurate and timely flood warning information to communities:

... Australia has a very complex set of arrangements with respect to the flood warning network. Flood warning infrastructure varies enormously across the states. In the last budget the Australian government allocated a quantum of funding for the bureau to address some of the deficiencies that exist in the current network—primarily, two things ...

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<sup>76</sup> Councillor Steve Krieg, Lismore City Council, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, pp. 6–7.

<sup>77</sup> Mr Eber Butron, Chief Community Officer, Lismore City Council, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, p. 7.

<sup>78</sup> Deloitte, *Submission 63*, p. 2.

<sup>79</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 6.

Firstly the network itself, which is enormous, is quite antiquated in many parts of the country. By 'antiquated' I mean there are a mixture of both automatic and manual observing stations. A lot of flood height data, for example, in this country is still taken by people going out during the flood and measuring the height of a river or a stream or whatever on a stick, effectively. Obviously, that has all sorts of safety and other implications, and also is a problem for us because sometimes those volunteers can't actually get to those observing systems themselves. So there's an issue around the network itself in terms of having up-to-date technology. But also, and most importantly, the bureau only owns a very small part of that network, and so, although we're responsible for issuing flood forecasts and warnings, we don't have responsibility or accountability and control over the quality and quantity of the data that we receive to the extent that we would like.<sup>80</sup>

2.75 Furthermore, the Bureau outlined a significant government-funded project that was currently underway to upgrade flood warning infrastructure across Australia, stating:

... the government in the previous budget took a very significant initiative, which was to commence a program to upgrade the network and also, with the agreement of the states, start a program of transition whereby flood warning infrastructure, which is both river gauges and rainfall stations, would transition to ownership and maintenance by the bureau. It's a huge job. There are many thousands of bits of kit in the field. We're starting in Queensland because that's where we feel the risk is most significant, although there's risk right across the country, and over the next 10 years we will be implementing a program of upgrading the network and assuming ownership of the network into the bureau.

The program is proceeding on track. This first year has been about planning, recruitment of staff—because it's a huge job—and starting the process of agreeing arrangements for cost sharing with the states around ongoing maintenance, which was also part of the decision. We're well advanced in all of that. We're on schedule. We expect to start pouring concrete—works commence—in July [2024]. That will be in Queensland.<sup>81</sup>

2.76 The Bureau added that NEMA has also provided funding to upgrade flood infrastructure with some of that funding is going to the high-priority area of the Northern Rivers. It was noted that the Bureau is also prioritising some of its own departmental capital budget to help with the upgrade.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Dr Andrew Johnson, Chief Executive Officer and Director of Meteorology, Bureau of Meteorology, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, pp. 1–2.

<sup>81</sup> Dr Andrew Johnson, Chief Executive Officer and Director of Meteorology, Bureau of Meteorology, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 2.

<sup>82</sup> Dr Andrew Johnson, Chief Executive Officer and Director of Meteorology, Bureau of Meteorology, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 2.

### **Funding for not-for-profits and community services**

- 2.77 A number of submitters advocated for greater levels of funding for not-for-profits and the community services sector in light of the increased demand for their services in the wake of more frequent and severe disaster events.<sup>83</sup>
- 2.78 The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) expressed the view that community organisations play a vital, but often ‘under-appreciated, and under-funded role in both preparedness for, and recovery from natural disasters’.<sup>84</sup>
- 2.79 GIVIT, a not-for-profit that manages offers of donated goods, services, volunteers and funds in response to natural disasters, highlighted that the role the sector plays takes pressure off the government:
- The not-for-profit sector has a pivotal role to play, particularly at the community and individual level, in providing material emergency aid such as food, clothing, and household essentials. By allowing the charity sector to manage donations in an effective, transparent and coordinated manner, the drain on government resources at local, state and federal levels is significantly reduced...<sup>85</sup>
- 2.80 The Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) submitted that Australia has entered an era of concurrent, consecutive and compounding disasters and severe weather which has led to the increased reliance by governments on the ability of community organisations to help people and communities impacted by disasters. Therefore, ACOSS is of the view that ‘this requires a rethink of how to invest in the community sector to be able to meet the demand caused by such disasters’.<sup>86</sup>
- 2.81 In a 2021 Australian community sector survey, ACOSS found that only 35 per cent of respondents agreed that funding appropriately supported them to address emergencies, such as bushfires, in their local communities. Furthermore, many reported that government tends to rely on short-term funding arrangements that do not provide sufficient certainty for organisations to plan their workloads and effectively manage workforces.<sup>87</sup>
- 2.82 ACOSS was critical of the Australian Government’s funding arrangements stating that the DRF lacked a focus on community organisations and their role

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<sup>83</sup> See, for example: UNICEF, *Submission 52*, pp. 1–11; FRRR, *Submission 54*, pp. 1–9; Australian Red Cross, *Submission 56*, p. 4; Foodbank Australia, *Submission 86*, pp. 16–17.

<sup>84</sup> FRRR, *Submission 54*, p. 2.

<sup>85</sup> GIVIT, *Submission 51*, pp. 1–2.

<sup>86</sup> ACOSS, *Submission 31*, p. 2.

<sup>87</sup> ACOSS, *Submission 31*, p. 3.

in disaster response, recovery and resilience. ACOSS recommended that the Australian Government:

- (a) create a permanent enabling fund, the Community Sector Disaster Resilience Fund, to complement or be integrated with the DRF to strengthen the sector's preparedness and capability to respond to disasters;
- (b) create a permanent flexible contingency fund, the Community Sector Disaster Contingency Fund, to allow service providers to access additional funds to rapidly respond to specific disaster incidents; and
- (c) fund the sector to strengthen its disaster management tools and practices, providing training to organisations to conduct risk assessments and develop disaster management and service continuity plans.<sup>88</sup>

2.83 Similarly, the FRRR called for:

- simple access to financial resourcing for community organisations that is agile, flexible, and while framed in broad national policy parameters, is locally determined. Such funding should recognise the unique role community organisations play in both preparedness and recovery, as needs evolve; and
- specific consideration and investment for remote, rural and regional communities where geographic isolation amplifies the complexity of disasters.<sup>89</sup>

### Committee view

2.84 The committee welcomes the establishment of the NEMS as a means to support the rapid deployment of critical emergency management goods and services, such as emergency shelter, power, and potable water, taking some of the burden off the ADF. The committee acknowledges that the Australian Government has allocated further funding for the NEMS in the 2024–25 Budget. However, the committee is of the view that this national capability can be expanded to improve the logistics stores in each state and territory to further lift the burden off the ADF and to ensure prompt and effective assistance to disaster-affected communities across the nation. The committee would also like to see the establishment of a national asset register to improve the efficiency of the deployment of resources in the aftermath of a disaster.

### Recommendation 2

**2.85 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national asset register to improve the efficiency of the deployment of resources in the aftermath of a disaster. The Government should consider whether it is feasible to include not only federal and state government assets,**

<sup>88</sup> ACOSS, *Submission 31*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>89</sup> FRRR, *Submission 54*, p. 9.

**but also suitable local community, private sector and non-government organisation assets.**

- 2.86 The committee recognises the financial impact that the increasing number and intensity of disasters are having on local governments. The funding models are complex and there is a need for greater flexibility and better funding transitions once programs end to ensure the sustainability of the models going forward. It is apparent to the committee that the Australian Government must optimise disaster funding arrangements so that they remain scalable, sustainable, effective, equitable, transparent and accessible into the future. It was clear to the committee that local governments are experiencing challenges with the current funding arrangements, particularly in their ability to finance infrastructure repairs up-front.

### **Recommendation 3**

- 2.87 **The committee recommends that the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements be amended to set aside a proportion of funding to be offered to local governments up-front to help facilitate disaster recovery and resilience to ensure councils do not always have to bear the burden of financing repairs up-front.**
- 2.88 To better support and empower local communities from the bottom up, governments must focus on working collaboratively within Australia's federation. Instead of attempting to control from the federal level, the strengths of local communities need to be recognised and leveraged as they are often the best positioned to understand and address their unique needs. The Australian Government should aim to provide wrap-around support services that empower states and territories to represent their communities effectively. For example, by funding organisations who provide local councils with training in emergency planning and coordination, risk management, and so on. By fostering cooperation and enhancing support for local initiatives, a more resilient and responsive system that meets the needs of all Australians can be achieved. This bottom-up approach will ensure that communities have the autonomy and resources necessary to thrive.
- 2.89 The committee encourages the Australian Government to continue working with local governments, states and territories to enhance capabilities and preparedness across society, further strengthening resilience, response and recovery arrangements.
- 2.90 The Australian Government should work with states, territories and local governments to conduct a review of all emergency evacuation centres to identify any gaps and areas of need. The Australian Government could also consider utilising the collection of this information to create and maintain a publicly accessible map of emergency evacuation centres across Australia so that all

stakeholders are aware of the closest evacuation centre in the area in an emergency.

- 2.91 The committee's view that the Australian Government should encourage and support states and territories to produce timely post-disaster reports, reviews or investigations following a natural disaster. The committee notes that despite the significant impact of events like the floods in Fitzroy Crossing, no review was conducted. Encouraging a thorough investigation process post-disaster will provide invaluable insights into the event's causes, response effectiveness, and areas for improvement. This is essential for enhancing disaster preparedness, response, and resilience in the future.
- 2.92 Based on the evidence presented to the committee, it is clear there are ongoing issues with coordination and communication in disaster response and recovery. The committee sees this is a crucial element to improving the effectiveness and efficiency of Australia's disaster response framework. Many of these issues may be an unfortunate product of Australia's federal system of government and come down to the way in which the roles and responsibilities for disaster preparedness, response and recovery are structured. The committee believes that the Australian Government must continue to focus on and improve on its critical role in coordination and collaboration across all levels of government and sectors to address the concerns raised throughout this inquiry.
- 2.93 Additionally, the committee heard evidence that there have been issues with coordination and communication particularly during flood events. The committee considers that flood warning systems could be improved to ensure consistent and enhanced monitoring, with data that can be effectively communicated to higher authorities and integrated into broader emergency response frameworks. The committee encourages the Australian Government to support the maintenance and expansion of its flood gauges through continued investment in disaster-prone areas to enhance centralised monitoring, assessing and early warning capabilities. Given the challenges faced by local councils, which often lack functional rain gauges and fail to regularly maintain or check them, federal support is essential for ensuring comprehensive flood monitoring.
- 2.94 The committee believes there is scope for the Australian Government to consider how it can enhance engagement to draw on local knowledge for flood prevention and recovery by developing and implementing further strategies and mechanisms for local input. This could involve establishing community forums, conducting consultations, and incorporating traditional and Indigenous knowledge into flood management plans.
- 2.95 The committee wishes to highlight the substantial role played by the not-for-profit and community services sector in disaster preparedness, response and recovery – their efforts and dedication to improving the lives of families and communities in the most detrimental times is commended and applauded. The

committee acknowledges that the pressure on the resources, staff and volunteers of these organisations has increased substantially as concurrent, consecutive and compounding disasters become more commonplace. It is apparent to the committee that the Australian Government must ensure that the not-for-profit and community services sector feel adequately resourced and supported to meet the new levels of demand caused by these disasters. To do so requires sufficient funding certainty for these organisations to appropriately plan their workloads and effectively manage their workforces.

- 2.96 The next chapter will consider the decline in volunteerism in Australia and what that means for Australia's disaster resilience, before exploring ways to incentivise Australians to join civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services to increase the numbers of those willing to assist their fellow Australians in times of crisis.

# Chapter 3

## The decline of volunteerism

- 3.1 Volunteers are crucial to Australia’s disaster resilience, and it is important that governments prioritise the recognition, retention and recruitment of volunteers to ensure a sustainable future of volunteerism in Australia.
- 3.2 Volunteering is defined as ‘time willingly given for the common good without financial gain’.<sup>1</sup> Volunteers contribute to prevention, preparedness, and recovery activities before, during and after natural disasters. They foster crisis resilience by facilitating social connections, contributing to the development of social capital, and improving access to local supports and services. Volunteers provide this essential support through local, state and territory government services, charities and not-for-profits, informal community groups and online platforms.
- 3.3 This chapter will discuss:
- the decline in volunteerism in Australia and the challenge of coordinating offers for assistance during and after a disaster;
  - proposals for volunteer models to improve the recruitment and retention of volunteers;
  - how incentives could be used to boost volunteer numbers; and
  - the mental health impacts of first responders and volunteers during and after disasters.

### The state of volunteerism in Australia

- 3.4 According to Volunteering Australia, ‘our nation’s volunteers are the country’s backbone during crisis and emergencies’ with over one million volunteers supporting Australia’s crisis resilience, of which more than 400 000 work directly in emergency response and relief.<sup>2</sup> However, Volunteering Australia noted that it is difficult to estimate the true contribution of volunteers in crisis response efforts in Australia because most of the data is collected in general surveys or in sector-specific data collection.<sup>3</sup>
- 3.5 With some variation between states and territories, volunteers are generally involved in disaster and crisis arrangements across three broad areas, including:
- (a) state and territory government emergency management organisations— these include State and Territory Emergency Service (SES) organisations, as

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Youth Volunteering Key Statistics](#), August 2023, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> Volunteering Australia, [‘Volunteers: Australia’s backbone in times of crisis’](#) (accessed 14 June 2024).

<sup>3</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia’s crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 6.

- well as fire service organisations and ambulance organisations which have official roles in crisis response;
- (b) charities and not-for-profits which support crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery; and
  - (c) providing direct assistance as informal volunteers—informal volunteers are present across prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery, though are typically mobilised in the response and recovery phases. These volunteers are not affiliated with an emergency management organisation but may be coordinated through an informal community group or an online platform.<sup>4</sup>
- 3.6 Those volunteering in emergency response and relief include a resilient and skilled workforce of over 200 000 fire service volunteers, around 25 000 volunteers in SES and 7 500 in ambulance service organisations. An additional 200 000 volunteers are engaged in over 1 000 registered emergency and relief charities. On top of this, many thousands of often ‘invisible’ volunteers help informally and spontaneously to support communities before and after crises.<sup>5</sup>
- 3.7 Unfortunately, the number of people volunteering has been declining in Australia. Volunteering Australia estimates that whilst in 2022 the proportion of volunteers increased, it is still well below the pre-COVID rate of volunteers:
- It is estimated that in the 12 months preceding the April 2022 survey, 26.7 per cent of adults volunteered in Australia. This was a slight increase from April 2021, when it was estimated that 24.2 per cent of Australians undertook volunteer work in the preceding 12 months.
  - However, rates of volunteering are still much lower than the 12 months preceding late 2019 (i.e., pre-COVID) when 36.0 per cent of adults were estimated to have volunteered.<sup>6</sup>
- 3.8 Additionally, Volunteering Australia noted that the number of volunteers in government emergency services organisations had decreased by over 20 000 since 2015–16.<sup>7</sup>
- 3.9 Volunteering Australia’s research reported a number of factors that impacted the likelihood of a person volunteering, including:
- those who had volunteered previously are much more likely than those who have never volunteered to volunteer in the future;
  - those who live outside of a capital city had a higher volunteering rate than those who live in a capital city;

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<sup>4</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia’s crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 11.

<sup>5</sup> Volunteering Australia, ‘[Volunteers: Australia’s backbone in times of crisis](#)’ (accessed 14 June 2024).

<sup>6</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering in Australia Research: early insights from the volunteer perspective](#), April 2022, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia’s crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 9.

- Australians aged 55 years and over were more likely to volunteer than younger Australians; and
- the number of young people volunteering has been declining, reporting that the proportion of people aged 18–24 years who had volunteered formally in the previous 12 months fell from 36.5 per cent in late 2019 to 25.6 per cent in April 2021, decreasing to 25.0 per cent in 2022.<sup>8</sup>

3.10 For those volunteering in organisations related to emergency services and disaster relief, Volunteering Australia broke down the numbers by age group as follows:

**Table 3.1 No. of emergency service and disaster relief volunteers by age**

18–29 years	30–49 years	50–64 years	65+ years
17.80 per cent	26.40 per cent	19.30 per cent	36.50 per cent

Source: Volunteering Australia, [Youth Volunteering Key Statistics](#), August 2023, p. 6.

### Factors contributing to the decline in volunteers

3.11 The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience noted that research identifying the challenges of recruitment and retention of emergency management volunteers goes back three decades.<sup>9</sup> Volunteering Australia reported:

Against the backdrop of increasing demand for well-trained, regular, and committed emergency response volunteers, organisations are struggling to sustain viable volunteer workforces...

Concerns that sociodemographic changes such as work-family lifestyle, rural population decline, and preference for more flexible volunteer participation, seem to be coming to fruition and amplifying the problem.<sup>10</sup>

3.12 Similarly, research by Blythe McLennan from RMIT University stated:

Volunteer representatives depict a situation today in which emergency response volunteering is being squeezed by pressures on three sides (socioeconomic and demographic shifts, government and organisation expectations and requirements, and community needs and expectations), such that the personal burden of volunteering is increasing.

As a result, a partial mismatch may be developing between organisational expectations on emergency response volunteers, and the motivations and

<sup>8</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering in Australia Research: early insights from the volunteer perspective](#), April 2022, pp. 2–3; and Volunteering Australia, [Youth Volunteering Key Statistics](#), August 2023, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup> Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience – answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 14 March 2023, Canberra.

<sup>10</sup> Amber Tsai, Dr Toby Newstead and Dr Gemma Lewis, [Emergency volunteering: Leading engagement and retention](#), Volunteering Australia, September 2022, pp. 3–4.

incentives underpinning this volunteering, which increases the risk of a ‘breach of psychological contract’ occurring.<sup>11</sup>

3.13 The following table summarises the findings of this study on the key challenges facing volunteers today:

**Figure 3.1 Key emergency volunteering issues raised by participants**

Issue	Key aspects
<b>1. Volunteer sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Retaining volunteers</li> <li>• Recruiting (particularly younger) volunteers</li> <li>• Ageing volunteer base (in fire services)</li> <li>• Difficulty engaging and motivating volunteers</li> <li>• High volunteer workload and burnout due to low numbers</li> </ul>
<b>2. Personal burden of volunteering</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing work, family and volunteering commitments</li> <li>• Financial costs and lack of employer support (in fire services)</li> <li>• Mental health, wellbeing and safety issues</li> </ul>
<b>3. Excessive organisational requirements</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training and skills maintenance requirements</li> <li>• Excessive administration and red tape, due to professionalisation and corporatisation</li> <li>• Expanding range of volunteer activities</li> </ul>
<b>4. Widening gap between volunteers and organisations</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflicting goals, values and priorities between organisations and their volunteers, exacerbated by professionalisation, corporatisation and bureaucratisation</li> <li>• Less time for community service due to other organisational requirements</li> <li>• Greater control sought over volunteers by organisations/management</li> </ul>
<b>5. Shortfalls in volunteer management capacity</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Volunteer leadership capacity and skills</li> <li>• Management and paid staff capacity and skills to support and work with volunteers</li> <li>• Equipment, resourcing and support services for volunteers</li> <li>• Organisational leadership and strategy</li> </ul>
<b>6. Need for and resistance to cultural change</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exclusive culture and bullying</li> <li>• Resistance to cultural change among volunteers</li> </ul>
<b>7. Inadequate youth engagement and innovation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• By volunteer leadership</li> <li>• By organisations</li> </ul>

Source: Blythe McLennan, [Emergency volunteering 2030: views from emergency response volunteer representatives](#), Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre, Environmental Scan Report No. 4, 2022, p. 27.

3.14 Volunteering Australia’s research found that those aged 18 to 34 were more likely to report financial reasons for not volunteering (25.5 per cent) compared to those aged 35 to 54 years (26.7 per cent) and those aged 55 years and over

<sup>11</sup> Blythe McLennan, [Emergency volunteering 2030: views from emergency response volunteer representatives](#), Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre, Environmental Scan Report No. 4, 2022, p. 2.

(9.3 per cent). Additionally, younger Australians were more likely to report a lack of suitable opportunities as a reason they did not volunteer, indicating that younger volunteers may have more difficulty connecting with volunteering opportunities that interest them.<sup>12</sup>

3.15 These themes were reflected in evidence provided by some submitters and witnesses who discussed the factors contributing to the decline in volunteer numbers.<sup>13</sup>

3.16 Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of Queensland SES, acknowledged that communities rely on volunteer workforces to respond to disaster events and discussed the challenges in maintaining a volunteer workforce:

Unfortunately, with increased demand on these volunteer services to respond to the ever-increasing number of events and the longer duration of events, we see a negative impact on volunteer numbers. As volunteer numbers decrease we are also seeing a rise in the number of requests for assistance coming in. We are seeing more reliance on volunteers being deployed into a community to ensure that the response can continue ... We may need to consider some new models for volunteering that are more consistent with current volunteering trends.<sup>14</sup>

3.17 Tweed Shire Council highlighted the following barriers to volunteering: financial sustainability, a time poor society that trades 24/7 often with a casualised workforce, and ability (including age, skill sets, qualifications, safety and liability). Tweed Shire Council stated that volunteer arrangements need to be flexible and adaptable to overcome these barriers.<sup>15</sup>

3.18 Similarly, Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) attributed 'rigid models of volunteering that require regular attendance and training on-site' as a contributing factor to the decline in volunteer rates.<sup>16</sup>

3.19 Mr Andrew Gissing, CEO of Natural Hazards Research Australia, stated that in order to ensure a sustainable volunteering model for the future there must be a

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<sup>12</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Youth Volunteering Key Statistics](#), August 2023, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> See, for example: Mr Andrew Gissing, Chief Executive Officer, Natural Hazards Research Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, p. 2; Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director, Queensland State Emergency Service (SES), *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 31; Disaster Relief Australia (DRA), *Submission 27*, p. 4; Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 2; Mr Andrew Gissing, Chief Executive Officer, Natural Hazards Research Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, p. 1; Tweed Shire Council, *Submission 128*, p. 4.

<sup>14</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director, Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 31.

<sup>15</sup> Tweed Shire Council, *Submission 128*, p. 4.

<sup>16</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

reduction in the administration burden on volunteering as well as greater flexibility to enable people to volunteer.<sup>17</sup>

- 3.20 Anglicare Australia submitted that volunteers thrive in the long-term when the organisations they volunteer with are able to properly support them. Volunteers require a safe workplace, suitability checks, training, management and ongoing support in their roles, particularly as disasters become more frequent and intense placing a greater demand on volunteers to work for longer periods. Anglicare Australia added:

They also need to feel valued and recognised, learn new skills, and have meaningful activities to participate in. In assessing their own volunteering capacity, Anglicare Sydney has recognised that when volunteers are not activated regularly and meaningful[ly], morale and enthusiasm can wane and it can be difficult to maintain engagement. This means that outside of disasters, an ongoing program of engagement, activities, training and planning is needed to maintain volunteer capacity.<sup>18</sup>

- 3.21 Anglicare Australia argued that it is essential that the Australian Government takes a longer-term approach to building the capacity of the community sector to respond to disasters and support the growth and maintenance of a skilled and engaged volunteer workforce. Anglicare Australia called for grant funding to support volunteers, explaining that the funding needed to be not only for the training of volunteers, but also to maintain the readiness of volunteers in non-disaster periods:

Ongoing funding from the Government for the systems and infrastructure needed to effectively train, support, engage and communicate with volunteers is necessary to ensure the sustainability and growth of volunteer-supported services. For example, every person we spoke with or interviewed in our evaluation of the Anglicare [New South Wales (NSW)] South, NSW West and [Australian Capital Territory (ACT)] program recommended a full-time volunteer manager as essential for disaster response and recovery.

Yet for some of our Network members, despite the scale of their contribution, funding for volunteers is confined only to training. They do not receive funding to prepare for or maintain readiness during non-disaster periods. Funding that is provided can only be used for training of volunteers, not for the management and administration of the volunteer program. There is little recognition of the ongoing capacity required to manage, support and maintain volunteer capacity. The maintenance of disaster readiness has been self-funded by organisations, forcing some to reduce their participation in disaster response and recovery. Organisations

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<sup>17</sup> Mr Andrew Gissing, Chief Executive Officer, Natural Hazards Research Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, pp. 1–2.

<sup>18</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Submission 73*, pp. 5–6.

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reflected on the significant burden this places on especially small services, and those in regional areas.<sup>19</sup>

### **Coordinating volunteers**

- 3.22 Despite the decline in the number of volunteers in Australia, another concern raised in evidence was that there was a lot of good will across Australia to help during a disaster, but the issue of poor coordination impacted the efficacy of that assistance.<sup>20</sup>
- 3.23 The Australian Government's National Coordination Mechanism provides a degree of national coordination by including organisations involved in volunteering in discussions with relevant representatives of both government and non-government organisations to coordinate, communicate and collaborate during responses to crises.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, organisations with volunteers involved in emergency relief and recovery are also represented on the Emergency Relief National Coordination Group, established by the Department of Social Services, which provides advice to government during times of crisis.<sup>22</sup>
- 3.24 However, Volunteering Australia noted that 'support and planning for volunteer involvement is not consistently included in national crisis management frameworks'<sup>23</sup> and the model for coordinating the contributions of the charity and not-for-profit sector in crisis resilience 'has yet to be formalised'.<sup>24</sup> Volunteering Australia stated that volunteers involved in crisis response and recovery will require more comprehensive support from their organisations and from government as roles are becoming more difficult and demanding as disasters become more frequent and severe. Furthermore, coordinating and supporting these volunteers in crisis prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery will require consistent investment in the appropriate platforms and management processes.<sup>25</sup>
- 3.25 DRA noted that whilst there are many organisations with large databases of volunteers, 'there are very few who can actually put them on the ground and lead them on the day, and volunteers mobilised and well led are a fantastic

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<sup>19</sup> Anglicare Australia, *Submission 73*, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example: DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 4; Mr Jelenko Dragisic, *Submission 167*, p. 7; Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia's crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 13; Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor, Byron Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, pp. 8–9.

<sup>21</sup> Department of Home Affairs, '[National Coordination Mechanism](#)' (accessed 24 June 2024).

<sup>22</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia's crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 12. See: Department of Social Services, '[National Coordination Group](#)' (accessed 24 June 2024).

<sup>23</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia's crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 2.

<sup>24</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia's crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Volunteering Australia, [Volunteering and Australia's crisis resilience](#), May 2022, p. 13.

asset'. DRA highlighted that there is a lot of work that needs to be done behind the scenes in mobilising volunteers and matching them up with the work that needs to be done, but:

... there is no good, integrated data system in Australia where those jobs are fed into a single system and the volunteers are fed into another system and you can marry the two up. The data is just all over the place. And that can potentially keep the ADF in the field for longer than they necessarily need to be.<sup>26</sup>

3.26 The issue of coordinating volunteers is particularly prominent when dealing with spontaneous volunteers. DRA defined spontaneous volunteers as:

... individuals or small groups who are not formally associated with any organisation but self-mobilise to assist community members impacted by disasters. This type of volunteering has gained traction in recent years with the rise of social media platforms and communications technology, which has given communities greater access to real time information.<sup>27</sup>

3.27 DRA explained that spontaneous volunteers can be a 'significant force multiplier', but, despite the best intentions, if unmanaged, they can be a risk to themselves, others and property. Further, whilst many organisations hold large databases of willing volunteers, they lack the capacity and mechanisms to deploy them, making spontaneous volunteering an underutilised resource in Australia. DRA submitted that '[i]t is our experience that there is no shortage of volunteers, but rather a lack of infrastructure that allows them to participate how and when they can'.<sup>28</sup>

3.28 The Byron Shire Mayor agreed, highlighting the need for improved coordination of spontaneous volunteers:

We know that effective spontaneous volunteer coordination is absent, and this is a statewide issue. If evidence demonstrates repeatedly that community members converge on disaster sites to offer help then we have two options. We can coordinate these volunteers through established systems and accrue the many benefits of the community participating in local action, or we can fail to deliver effective coordination and see some benefits but also harm to individual volunteers and community members, damage to property, disruption to formal responses and, ultimately, a failure to meet community expectations. So we need increased first responder capacity through emergency services and resourced coordination of spontaneous volunteers who show up on the doorstep of our buildings. We need to improve preparedness through local systems and training and, in disasters, teams of paid coordinators that can onboard and oversee volunteers with direct coordination costs met by council and then

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<sup>26</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 36.

<sup>27</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>28</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

reimbursed through the existing [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)]. We wonder how this is not happening already.<sup>29</sup>

3.29 Mr Camp also flagged that another issue with coordinating spontaneous volunteers is that they often lack training, do not fully understand the hazards and risks associated with emergency work, have no protective clothing or equipment, and they may have an injury or illness that a coordinator needs to be aware of prior to deployment.<sup>30</sup> Others also raised the issue of insurance coverage when deploying spontaneous volunteers.<sup>31</sup>

3.30 Mr Jelenko Dragisic, who previously worked as CEO of Volunteering Queensland and as Regional Manager at the Australian Red Cross, noted a pattern of local communities being flooded with a large number of agencies and people who want to provide recovery assistance but are sometimes turned away because the mechanisms to coordinate the influx of offers to help are not there. Mr Dragisic explained:

The problem lies in the fact that the ‘army’ of helpers can be overwhelming ... The capacity for agencies to manage such an influx is limited for several reasons. Firstly, because agencies are busy with the job at hand. Secondly, and less well known, is the fact that, despite good will, people who wish to help still need some level of training and management before they go out into affected areas and have contact with communities.

Furthermore, many people make calls and offer to help but their motivations may be twofold. Along with a genuine desire to help, many people act out of anxiety and a need to mitigate their own emotions. This is a complex issue which remains unaddressed.<sup>32</sup>

3.31 Mr Dragisic reflected on his experience in establishing a call centre to facilitate volunteers during the 2011 Queensland Floods:

My team at [Volunteering Queensland] set up a call centre which, with assistance from a few good corporate collaborators, operated from several locations across Australia. The call centre was specifically designed to manage the influx of callers offering to help. It is worth noting this was the largest such operation ever conducted in Australia, leading to the development of a database of over 80,000 volunteers ...

A big part of the reasoning behind my development of this database was to ensure that people were able to register their readiness to help initially, but more importantly to establish long term relationships with these potential

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<sup>29</sup> Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor, Byron Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, pp. 8-9.

<sup>30</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director, Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 34.

<sup>31</sup> See, for example: Mr Geoffrey Evans, Chief Executive Officer, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 37; Ms Alison Smith, Chief Executive Officer, Local Government Association of Queensland, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2023, p. 3; Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor, Byron Shire Council, 27 June 2023, p. 9.

<sup>32</sup> Mr Jelenko Dragisic, *Submission 167*, pp. 7-8.

volunteers and educate them about the way disaster response and recovery work; specifically, the fact that it is not all about cleaning up after a disaster. Many people need assistance months after the event (sadly, for many this extends to years) which means that agencies that provide assistance are in need of helpers, volunteers etc, in later stages. By having this system in place, we were able to provide long term assistance to agencies in need of volunteers.<sup>33</sup>

- 3.32 A representative from Richmond Valley Council suggested that existing non-government organisations and community groups are best placed to coordinate spontaneous volunteers as local governments do not have the capacity to manage volunteers as they are busy with other critical activities such as road access and sewer function. Community groups, on the other hand, manage volunteers on a daily basis and have the foundations to build on to manage spontaneous volunteers in the response and recovery phases of emergency management.<sup>34</sup> The representative added that there are some ‘tried and true models around’ that can be built on—‘why reinvent the wheel’?<sup>35</sup>

### **Proposed volunteer models**

- 3.33 The committee heard a number of proposals for different types of volunteer models to address the need for more boots on the ground to respond to natural disasters. This section highlights a few of these proposals, including the expansion of already established programs and the establishment of new programs. Each of the models targets a different aspect of disaster preparedness, response and recovery, including boosting disaster response and emergency services, resilience building in peacetime, and the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

### **Expanding the SES model**

- 3.34 As states and territories are primarily responsible for emergency management within their jurisdictions, the SES model is a core component of state emergency management frameworks. A significant proportion of the SES workforce is made up of volunteers. Due to the increasing frequency and severity of natural disaster events due to climate change, combined with the decline in volunteer numbers, the resources of SES are being tested. As the statutory authorities responsible for emergency management, it has been argued that these entities should remain a central component of Australia’s emergency response framework and improve their access to appropriate capability and capacity.

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<sup>33</sup> Mr Jelenko Dragisic, *Submission 167*, pp. 7–8.

<sup>34</sup> Ms Angela Jones, Director Community Service Delivery, and Local Emergency Management Officer, Richmond Valley Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, pp. 9–10.

<sup>35</sup> Ms Angela Jones, Director Community Service Delivery, and Local Emergency Management Officer, Richmond Valley Council, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 11.

3.35 The committee heard that a number of SES have introduced reforms to create more flexible arrangements for volunteers in response to the changing socioeconomic circumstances that put pressure on people's ability or desire to allocate time to volunteering. Additionally, many SES have programs aimed at engaging youth as a part of a strategy to boost volunteer numbers and build resilience in their communities. Additional government support for such programs and consideration of how these strategies could be coordinated and interoperable across states and territories could prove beneficial in building Australia's disaster resilience and getting more boots on the ground.

3.36 The Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), the national council for fire, land management and emergency service authorities in Australia and New Zealand, advocated that Australia's current disaster resilience model is not broken and noted that the concept that more resources might be required to deal with increased demand is a familiar and intuitive one, and would be best addressed by reinforcing existing arrangements rather than trying to reinvent them.<sup>36</sup> AFAC explained:

As the statutory authorities with responsibility, under the laws of the various Australian jurisdictions, for emergency preparedness and response, AFAC consider that its members are and should remain the backbone of emergency response in Australia and should be the vehicle through which continuous improvement is delivered ... In AFAC's view there is no undiscovered, alternative model for structuring emergency and disaster response that would provide previously unrealised benefits for the community. The current system provides an agile, community-based workforce for disaster and emergency response that is interoperable across the country and can be, and often is, deployed across jurisdictional boundaries to provide national resilience.<sup>37</sup>

3.37 AFAC purported that the challenges and complexities facing the SES in responding to more frequent and severe disaster events is well understood by the sector and argued:

There is no value in duplicating state and territory arrangements with a federal emergency response workforce, whether provided through the ADF or otherwise. If federal funds are available to strengthen Australian response capability and capacity, these should be disbursed by way of funding to existing entities that promote resilience such as the AFAC National Resource Sharing Centre, by funding activities that support national capability such as the development of a national deployment management system and underwriting the costs of interstate deployments of personnel and equipment, or by way of subsidies to state and territory agencies to provide improved training and equipment to their workforces.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), *Submission 72*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> AFAC, *Submission 72*, pp. 7 & 9.

<sup>38</sup> AFAC, *Submission 72*, p. 9.

3.38 Similarly, the NSW SES Deputy Commissioner, Mr Daniel Austin, stated that the agency's wealth of experience in emergency preparedness and response, as well as highly trained and skilled volunteers and staff, makes the agency and the current state-based emergency management framework 'the best vehicle to meet the future challenges of climate change and the impacts of disasters on communities, and to improve Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters'.<sup>39</sup> Mr Austin proposed:

Improvements to Australia's disaster resilience could be achieved by building on the current training and recruitment of SES volunteers and the agency's capabilities, and an expansion of programs to educate and collaborate with communities at risk of flooding. There are also new opportunities, such as re-evaluating the roles of spontaneous volunteers to support a coordinated emergency response.<sup>40</sup>

3.39 The Western Australian (WA) Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) which coordinates the WA SES agreed, stating:

DFES support the current disaster resilience model and arrangements that have proven effective, noting enhancements that focus on capability development, through standard approaches to training, knowledge, and data sharing would be of benefit for all jurisdictions faced with the challenges of increased events.<sup>41</sup>

3.40 On the argument for improved access to equipment, AFAC suggested that a nationally funded training and equipment program would be a valuable addition to improve the capability and capacity of SES:

A good model for this last proposal can be seen in the [United Kingdom (UK)] government's former New Dimension program, in which central funds were used to purchase equipment that could contribute to national resilience and response. Local agencies accommodated and could use this equipment for 'business as usual', but it remained subject to recall if required to combat national emergencies. By way of example in the Australian context, swift water in-water rescue capability has often been stretched in recent flood events. A nationally funded training and equipment program designed to increase this capability in state and territory agencies, on the understanding that this capacity would be made available for interstate deployment in case of need, would be one way to address this.<sup>42</sup>

3.41 The Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) noted that they are one of the largest volunteer organisations in the state with around 34 000 volunteers. QFES acknowledged the challenges of maintaining a sustainable emergency volunteer service due to compounding effects such as an ageing population, the

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<sup>39</sup> Mr Daniel Austin, Deputy Commissioner, NSW SES, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> Mr Daniel Austin, Deputy Commissioner, NSW SES, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p. 1.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) WA, *Submission 88*, p. 5.

<sup>42</sup> AFAC, *Submission 72*, p. 10. See, also: South Australian Country Fire Service, *Submission 67*, p. 3.

housing and cost-of-living crisis and rigid volunteer models, but submitted that their volunteering strategy is working to address those challenges by exploring and investing in more flexible volunteering options for communities—making sure that systems are in place to attract, retain and support volunteers now and into the future.<sup>43</sup>

- 3.42 The NSW SES also discussed revisions to their approach to managing their volunteer workforce and capability to create a more flexible model and highlighted their Volunteering Reimagined program and Community Action Team (CATs) program. The Volunteering Reimagined program offered more flexible pathways for community to volunteer with the NSW SES by creating different tiers of volunteering. This initiative resulted in their volunteer workforce growing by more than 21 per cent between September 2017 and January 2019. The CATs are able to be onboarded with more generalist skill to operate low risk equipment such as sandbags and are not required to attend regular weekly training. The program also provides caches of equipment to high-risk remote and isolated communities. NSW SES submitted that the CATs have been an effective way to enable a flexible volunteer presence in remote communities and invaluable in providing community information and support.<sup>44</sup>
- 3.43 In addition, a number of SES and Country Fire Services (CFS) across the country offer youth cadet and internship programs which were reported to be successful in developing a positive culture of service and contribution to community, building resilience in young people, and enhancing awareness of and skills in emergency services, with many involved in the youth programs continuing to volunteer as adults in these organisations. These programs are targeted at school age students from ages 11 to 18 and could be considered for further investment and expansion across all states and territories.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Ms Joanne Greenfield, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Queensland First and Emergency Services, *Committee Hansard*, 12 April 2023, pp. 10 & 14.

<sup>44</sup> NSW State Emergency Service – answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 13 April 2023, Sydney.

<sup>45</sup> See: Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director, Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 35; Queensland Fire and Emergency Service – answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 12 April 2023, Brisbane; Mr Brett Loughlin AFSM, Chief Officer, South Australian Country Fire Service, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2023, p. 2; South Australian Country Fire Service – answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 21 April 2023, Adelaide; Mr Christopher James Beattie, Chief Executive Officer, South Australian State Emergency Service, *Committee Hansard*, 21 April 2023, p. 13; Ms Fleur O'Connor, Northern Territory Emergency Service, *Committee Hansard*, 19 September 2023, p. 7; NSW SES – answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 29 June 2023, Tweed Heads, p. 2; NSW State Emergency Service, [Cadet Program Guidelines](#), media release (accessed 26 June 2024).

### A Volunteer Ready Reserve

3.44 A new model suggested by Mr Camp, Regional Director of Queensland SES, involves the Commonwealth funding the training of a 'ready reserve' of volunteers that can be deployed in any state and territory. Mr Camp proposed that one option to help with the increased demand for volunteers in response to the increasing number and duration of disaster events is to:

... have people trained, equipped and held in reserve to be deployed into areas when required—a ready reserve for each state and territory. This ready reserve could operate under strict guidelines about training, maintaining their skills and their commitment to deploying. To do this effectively we will need funding to recruit, train, exercise and deploy these volunteers, as the states cannot afford this in most cases. The Commonwealth funds training and exercises for counterterrorism. It should be easy enough to run a similar program in conjunction with the states and territories to ensure we have a well-trained and exercised volunteer response resource across the country. The outlay by Commonwealth to support this process will be returned when volunteers can once again be the greatest asset in response to these events across Australia and support their communities. When we look at the process that was followed for terrorism, where the Commonwealth funded training, exercises, extra resources, stockpiles and coordination services, I believe this will work for our volunteer services and other state based services in being able to respond better ... To attempt the concept I have described, we will require access to Commonwealth funds that are easy to access and ongoing. The funding should extend to facilities to house current and projected [SES] volunteer organisations in their communities. The extra funding will also need to extend to fleet so that we can have a surge fleet ready to respond.<sup>46</sup>

3.45 Additionally, Mr Camp suggested that such a Commonwealth funded and supported model would enable interoperability as the training curriculum will mean everyone across the country is operating under the same system and using similar equipment.<sup>47</sup>

3.46 Under the current model, state and territory SES volunteers are deployed not only for major natural disaster events, but also 'for every other job that comes in during the year' including community education and engagement. Mr Camp explained:

Across the year, that might mean that they are overworked and, come time for a deployment, they don't have the time to ask their employers for time off, whereas, with the ready reserve that I'm proposing, we can look at the different volunteerism model, and they can sign up to do a certain amount of training and a certain amount of currency through the year so that their skills remain high. And these people don't go to every single thing that

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<sup>46</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of the Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 31.

<sup>47</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of the Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 31.

happens with the SES. When something big happens, they're called upon to go and help. We might get 30 people from Townsville willing to deploy. If we had these ready reserve units, we might get another 60. The people who do this literally every day, every week, would become the team leaders, and the ready reserve would be the boots on the ground.<sup>48</sup>

### **The Australian Resilience Corps**

3.47 The Australian Resilience Corps is a 'new model for volunteerism'—a national volunteer network established in November 2021 by the Minderoo Foundation, one of the largest philanthropic organisations in Australasia, and founding partner NRMA Insurance.<sup>49</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director of the Minderoo Foundation, explained that the Australian Resilience Corps was established as a new volunteer force to fill a gap in the national system to lift resilience to disasters in peacetime—in between disasters:

There are institutions and structures like [Regional Fire Services (RFS)] and SES for the immediate response phase. And for the relief and recovery phase there are organisations like the Red Cross and DRA. DRA is part of the solution; it is not all of the solution. That is why we set up the Resilience Corps, despite investing \$9.8 million in DRA, and we have a fantastic working relationship with DRA. They do amazing work. But it is building resilience in peacetime, when there is not a disaster, that is absolutely crucial, and that is the bit that we are focused on. The method we are using is the disaster index. Being data driven, we identify the at-risk community. Over a 12-month period ... we developed a framework for engaging the local community. So it is a workshop where the community lead it, they define the areas that they need help in to lift resilience, and then the Corps is mobilised as additional arms and legs ... We are not trying to replace any existing volunteer organisation; it is a coordination mechanism.<sup>50</sup>

3.48 The Minderoo Foundation submitted that the Australian Resilience Corps connects volunteers to where help is needed, working with and through existing community-led organisations and non-government organisations (NGOs) on the ground to help communities and local councils prepare for natural threats, like fires and floods, before they occur. Minderoo's target is to galvanise 125 000 Australians by the end of 2025.<sup>51</sup> Mr Turner told the committee:

We think we can be for the country the engine to recruit an enormous number of volunteers that can get exposed to volunteering in peacetime, because not everyone wants to be in front of a fire, or is able physically to be

<sup>48</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of the Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 32.

<sup>49</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 3; Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 2.

<sup>50</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 3.

<sup>51</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 4; Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 4.

a part of that relief and recovery phase ... We think that the Resilience Corps can also be a recruitment pipeline for DRA, SES and RFS. But the thing we have fed back to NEMA is the importance of that coordination mechanism and really good operational data, before, during and after, and making sure there is consistent communication with the community, in both directions.<sup>52</sup>

- 3.49 The model is inspired by organisations in the United States (US) such as AmeriCorps and Federal Emergency Management Agency's (FEMA) Corps which helps communities in the US prepare for and respond to disasters. Critically, volunteers serving within FEMA Corps are incentivised with training and employment opportunities with the US federal government.<sup>53</sup>
- 3.50 Mr Turner explained that their volunteers are predominantly sourced from the corporate sector, noting that 'there are about 860 000 hours a year of unused corporate [volunteer] hours'. He added that the program is expanding to university and TAFE students. The Minderoo Foundation has received in principle support from the Group of Eight universities to promote the Australian Resilience Corps to their student bodies and has had meetings with the Department of Education to talk about providing incentives for university and TAFE students to volunteer with the Australian Resilience Corps.<sup>54</sup>
- 3.51 Volunteers complete online training on resilience, de-risking property, landscape management, and disaster-specific mental health. Volunteers are mobilised through 'musters' where 30 or 40 people, facilitated by NGO partners and community leaders, are sent to work on the disaster preparedness priorities defined by the local community to reduce the impact of a disaster in the future. Musters can include activities such as fuel load clearing, planting vegetation to prevent flood and fire risk and de-risking properties for vulnerable people. As the volunteers are facilitated by existing NGOs, things like insurance are dealt with by the NGO.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore:

... where there is a need for certification and training, we draw on organisations like DRA or even SES or [Rural Fire Service (RFS)]. When we go in and volunteers are, for example, clearing fuel load, [we ensure] that is [done] with a prior discussion with RFS to make sure that the work that is being done is the most useful.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 5.

<sup>53</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 4.

<sup>54</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, pp. 3–4.

<sup>55</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, p. 4; Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 3.

<sup>56</sup> Mr Adrian Turner, Director, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience, *Committee Hansard*, 18 May 2023, p. 5.

3.52 The Minderoo Foundation made a number of recommendations to government, including, for example:

- that the Federal Government and the philanthropic sector co-fund the Australian Resilience Corps including its administrative functions and in community ‘muster’ activities delivered in at-risk communities;
- encourage student volunteering from universities, TAFEs, and high schools by providing course credits and incentives to students to join the Australian Resilience Corps;
- encourage the public service (at all levels) to complete resilience training with the Australian Resilience Corps and actively volunteer;
- promote the Australian Resilience Corps to state hazard and emergency management agencies and state-based disaster volunteering organisations as a recruitment and talent source;
- provide incentives to industry bodies such as Royal College of General Practitioners and National Veterinary bodies to promote the Australian Resilience Corps to their members; and
- support formal recognition of disaster resilience/preparedness volunteerism through a dedicated award modelled on the National Emergency Management Medal.<sup>57</sup>

#### **A National Emergency Responder Corps (Youth Program)**

3.53 In its submission, the Duke of Edinburgh International Award – Australia (Duke of Ed) proposed the establishment of a National Emergency Responder Corps (Youth Program) to:

... create a reliable volunteer recruitment pipeline for all emergency responding agencies that will substantially increase the number of trained emergency responders (volunteers) throughout Australia by engaging school leavers to undertake emergency responder training and concurrently complete the requirements of the Duke of Ed Award (Silver or Gold level).<sup>58</sup>

3.54 For background, the Duke of Ed program was designed as an organising and accrediting framework for non-formal education and learning. The award program has over 55 000 young Australians involved. The Duke of Ed Framework has three levels including Bronze, Silver, and Gold. Each level is made up of four sections which include physical recreation, skills, voluntary service, and an adventurous journey. At the Gold level participants also undertake a purposeful activity in a residential setting in the company of others who are not their usual companions. The award aims to equip and empower participants to achieve their personal best, take ownership of their own goals and life choices, and become actively engaged with their community and the

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<sup>57</sup> Minderoo Foundation, *Submission 69*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>58</sup> The Duke of Edinburgh’s International Award – Australia (Duke of Ed), *Submission 89*, p. 2.

- workforce.<sup>59</sup> The proposed National Emergency Responder Corps (Youth Program) is separate to its award program, but draws upon some of its elements.
- 3.55 The proposed National Emergency Responder Corps (Youth Program) does not require the establishment of a new agency as it would be managed by the Duke of Ed and delivered through existing participating state emergency agencies via their current boarding and training programs, including providing volunteers with the required personal protective equipment. The Duke of Ed has outlined a requirement for \$10 million in federal funding to run a three year pilot with up to 5 000 emergency responders registering and completing the program.<sup>60</sup>
- 3.56 The proposed program will target school leavers of 18 years and over to opt in to train and engage in emergency services work for a minimum two years, through one or more of the current volunteer emergency services organisations, as well as engaging in a minimum of two preparedness activities within community. After the two year training period, a condition or opt-in of the program is that participants will be on an availability list for three years, if they do not choose to stay as a volunteer with the respective emergency agency. The National Emergency Responder Corps (Youth Program) aims to achieve:
- (a) the stimulation of volunteering in the emergency services by youth under 25 years;
  - (b) resilience development through skilling up the community, especially through practical skill development, leadership and experience of young adults;
  - (c) enabling young adults to better contribute to preparing their homes and community in the event of a natural disaster/emergency event;
  - (d) an increased pool of regular volunteers (with a lower age profile) trained in a range of emergency service organisations to respond during an extended or major emergency; and
  - (e) an increased pool of trained young people supporting the extended Recovery Phase that follows all major fire and storm/flood related events.<sup>61</sup>
- 3.57 The Duke of Ed suggested that federal, state and territory governments could endorse school leavers to undertake the program, perhaps by being incorporated in TAFE or university offers, by including the option to select and opt in to undertake the Emergency Responder program, and potentially offering a level of TAFE fee or Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) rebate.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Duke of Ed [website](#) (accessed 27 June 2024); Duke of Ed, *Award handbook*, 2023 edition 1.1, p. 13.

<sup>60</sup> Duke of Ed, *Submission 89*, pp. 3 & 9–10.

<sup>61</sup> Duke of Ed, *Submission 89*, pp. 2 & 5.

<sup>62</sup> Duke of Ed, *Submission 89*, pp. 5–6.

3.58 The Duke of Ed added that, as a partner of the Minderoo Foundation, it will be able to incorporate the work of the Australian Resilience Corps (discussed above) submitting that:

This connection will serve to efficiently build Australia's largest network of volunteers, to build a culture where volunteer partners, corporates and community members participate in resilience activities to reduce the impacts of fire and flood across Australia. This could therefore further support the recruitment of regular volunteers for the various emergency service organisations throughout Australia as volunteers who work in preparedness activities could also support response and recovery efforts, where required.<sup>63</sup>

3.59 The National Emergency Responder Corps (Youth Program) would incorporate the following elements from the Australian Resilience Corps:

- the six online training modules currently available for training Australian Resilience Corps volunteers; and
- commit participants to a minimum of two preparedness activities with the Australian Resilience Corps within community.<sup>64</sup>

### **New Zealand's Student Volunteer Army**

3.60 International examples can be useful to explore for their potential to address some of the problems identified in Australia's volunteering frameworks. One particular youth-led program that has been successful in boosting volunteer numbers was brought to the committee's attention during its delegation to New Zealand.

3.61 The Student Volunteer Army (SVA) is a student movement born from a Facebook page which started following the 2011 Christchurch earthquake where 11 000 students mobilised to assist with the clean-up effort. Today, SVA is a network of tens of thousands of volunteers driven by a desire to help their communities. They have 'evolved to become leaders of second wave crisis response, helping communities recover after disaster'.<sup>65</sup> Over the past decade, the SVA has supported clean-up and recovery after eight major national crises from collecting and delivering groceries during the COVID-19 lockdowns in 2020 to operating major clean-up operations after the Auckland Anniversary weekend floods, closely followed by Cyclone Gabrielle in 2023. SVA seeks to develop community resilience and preparedness, as well as support community recovery, by:

- providing our university clubs with ongoing training, resources and equipment to respond safely and quickly in a crisis;

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<sup>63</sup> Duke of Ed, *Submission 89*, p. 2.

<sup>64</sup> Duke of Ed, *Submission 89*, p. 2.

<sup>65</sup> Student Volunteer Army, '[About SVA](#)' (accessed 28 June 2024).

- recruiting and mobilising high volumes of volunteers to support and deliver a wide range of tasks in multiple locations across Aotearoa [New Zealand]; and
- working with local and national bodies to deliver safe and effective spontaneous volunteer management in a crisis situation.<sup>66</sup>

3.62 The network has no military affiliation and is focused on facilitating community action through youth engagement, preparing for disasters, and service. The volunteers are supported by the registered charity Student Volunteer Army Foundation.

3.63 The SVA also has a Service Award program which is nationally recognised and designed to acknowledge the volunteering of intermediate and secondary school students. The five level pin system celebrates the diverse acts of service that students partake in within their local communities. By volunteering and working toward the SVA Service Award, students can add essential skills to their resumes, whilst building confidence and networks.<sup>67</sup>

### **Incentivising volunteers**

3.64 It was clear that the factors contributing to the limited numbers of volunteers in Australia was an ongoing problem and that people believed there needed to be consideration from governments on how they could attract, retain and reward volunteers through legislated employment and tax incentives.

3.65 An RMIT and Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre study found that strengthening incentives such as tax incentives and volunteering leave arrangements were a part of what participants in the study perceived as a preferred future for emergency response volunteering.<sup>68</sup>

### **Employment incentives**

3.66 Evidence received by the committee suggested that legislated employment benefits and support for employers would encourage more volunteers to get involved.<sup>69</sup> Some suggestions included paid leave or time off for volunteering, employment protections, corporate volunteering, and an Australian Public Service (APS) volunteering surge workforce.

3.67 Ms Jennifer Westacott AO, CEO of the Business Council of Australia (BCA), told the committee that BCA would be happy to play a greater role in encouraging

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<sup>66</sup> Student Volunteer Army, '[Crisis Response](#)' (accessed 28 June 2024).

<sup>67</sup> Student Volunteer Army, '[SVA Service Award](#)' (accessed 28 June 2024).

<sup>68</sup> Blythe McLennan, [Emergency volunteering 2030: views from emergency response volunteer representatives](#), Bushfire & Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre, Environmental Scan Report No. 4, 2022, pp. 41–42.

<sup>69</sup> See, for example: Commissioner Rob Rogers AFSM, Commissioner, New South Wales Rural Fire Service, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p. 18.

businesses to promote opportunities for their employees to contribute to community service. Ms Westacott suggested they could showcase good examples of employers providing volunteers leave and flexible working arrangements in a 'best practice guide'.<sup>70</sup> Ms Westacott highlighted that, during the 2019–20 Black Summer bushfires, some in the business community provided generous leave arrangements such as 'a minimum of 20 days paid volunteering leave'.<sup>71</sup>

3.68 Mr Camp acknowledged that there are some businesses that already offer time off for volunteers, but that it is not across the board. Mr Camp supported the proposition that legislating time off for volunteering, similar to the legal requirement for Army Reservists to be given two weeks off, would be a positive approach.<sup>72</sup>

3.69 AFAC acknowledged that a challenge for volunteers is juggling their day jobs with their volunteering, stating that it needs to be easy for employers to release people and that it is really important for volunteers to have protections for their employment in place to keep volunteer numbers strong. AFAC gave the example that in NSW there is a 'system where we can issue a direction that their employment cannot be affected by them volunteering for the state'.<sup>73</sup>

3.70 The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, which was established in February 2020 in response to the extreme bushfire season of 2019–20, identified that whilst some states such as NSW and WA had legislated employment protections for volunteers, it was suggested that employment protections should be increased and standardised across jurisdictions as a volunteers' employment should not be negatively impacted by their volunteering depending on the state or territory they are volunteering in:

Legislative changes to the Fair Work Act to ensure that individuals are not discriminated against, disadvantaged or dismissed for reasons associated with their volunteer service with an emergency service organisation would harmonise employment protections for volunteers across the country. Legislative changes would also have the effect of acknowledging the value provided by volunteers.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Ms Jennifer Westacott AO, CEO, Business Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, p. 22.

<sup>71</sup> Ms Jennifer Westacott AO, CEO, Business Council of Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, p. 19.

<sup>72</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of the Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 32.

<sup>73</sup> Mr Rob Webb, Chief Executive Officer, AFAC, and Ms Carlene York, President, AFAC, *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, pp. 15–16.

<sup>74</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, pp. 182-183.

- 3.71 Based on his experience engaging with corporate volunteers through DRA, Mr Geoffrey Evans expressed that he was surprised at just how willing corporate Australia is to donate time despite there being a lack of infrastructure to enable them to do it.<sup>75</sup>
- 3.72 The Royal Commission found that the impact of extended periods away from work was not just felt by the volunteers, but also by the businesses for which they work. It was noted that greater support, recognition and incentives for the employers to make the release of volunteers easier or less impactful on business, such as financial assistance to cover the wage of volunteers who are away for extended periods (particularly for small business), would be beneficial and support volunteer participation. It was also acknowledged that whilst states and territories offer payroll tax exemptions on wages paid to some employees while performing their volunteering duties, such as fire and emergency services volunteers, they are often poorly promoted and are of only minor benefit to employers.<sup>76</sup>
- 3.73 Telstra and TPG Telecom told the committee that they support a number of corporate volunteering opportunities. Ms Lisa McTiernan from Telstra stated:
- Telstra has a volunteering program where we offer our staff the opportunity of a volunteering engagement of their choice. That's open to every staff member within the company, and we can set up some specific volunteering opportunities. Staff can get together, in their teams or as a business unit, and go off and do some volunteering as a collective ... [and offer] discrete volunteer leave for staff engaged in voluntary emergency services such as the [Country Fire Authority (CFA)], the New South Wales RFS and SES and so on. So we absolutely support our staff undertaking volunteer opportunities where possible.<sup>77</sup>
- 3.74 The Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs) explained that there is already an Australia Public Service (APS) Surge Reserve where the Commonwealth 'has the capacity to rapidly deploy Commonwealth public servants into critical roles (primarily administrative roles) to address demand for government services or support, particularly during times of crisis'. Home Affairs noted that the department recently supported the APS Surge Reserve during the 2022 Queensland and NSW flooding events with 147 staff assisting with disaster payments.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 36.

<sup>76</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 184.

<sup>77</sup> Ms Lisa McTiernan, Government Relations, Telstra, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 18. See, also: Mr Ross Mitchell, Head, Government Relations, TPG Telecom, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 25.

<sup>78</sup> Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), *Submission 80*, p. 4.

3.75 However, Home Affairs told the committee that they were considering other ways that the Commonwealth could provide support, such as through a Commonwealth surge capability:

... there may be potential for the Commonwealth government to provide support in different ways, whether that be coordination of existing organisations from local to state and territory government, or scoping the potential of a Commonwealth surge capability.

As you would probably be aware, and we did mention it in our written submission, there is already an APS surge capability that we have used in relation to crises over the last two years, but that is a very specific feature. In terms of administration, we're looking at whether the Commonwealth can do anything extra to assist people on the ground when disasters do occur.<sup>79</sup>

### **Tax incentives**

3.76 Whilst there were mixed opinions about whether paying volunteers was an appropriate incentive to encourage more volunteers to step up, many suggested that tax incentives could be a good option to recognise the service provided and support volunteers.

3.77 Mr Camp described paying volunteers as a 'slippery slope', stating that volunteers normally do it for altruistic reasons, because they want to help their community and make a difference, 'if we start paying them, we may not get the people there for the right reason'.<sup>80</sup>

3.78 On the other hand, Mr Ian Cumming from British Maritime Technology was of the view that there is altruism in paid service, and it is not a disconnected behaviour to be paid and volunteer:

I think that we need to recognise volunteerism is changing ... I think there is a recognition that volunteering is diminishing within the Australian context. So, recognising all of those societal behaviours, I think that the model of a paid part-time organisation allows for a more localised effect to be gained at a time pre disaster. I think that could look like the [Army] Reserve looks ... [A]s a nation we need to be mature about what the future is going to look like to us, how often these volunteers will be called on in the future and how we need to be as a society prepared to be responsible for some of the work they do. Responsibility will go to keeping their families alive and well paid and fed whilst they are preparing and helping for a disaster that is likely.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> Ms Kendra Morony, First Assistant Secretary, National Resilience Taskforce, Home Affairs, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 15.

<sup>80</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of the Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 32.

<sup>81</sup> Mr Ian Cumming, Senior Principal Engineer, Climate Risk and Resilience, British Maritime Technology, *Committee Hansard*, 22 September 2023, p. 4.

3.79 Nonetheless, a number of submitters and witnesses suggested that payment to volunteers could be in the form of other benefits such as a tax deductible equipment, licenses, certification and training, or university fee relief, rather than a direct payment for services. The evidence indicated that allowing volunteers to claim the costs of equipment, certification and training provides an incentive for important preparatory steps to be undertaken by not only taking the cost burden off the volunteer who is already donating their time and service, but that it also assists volunteer organisations to encourage more people to get the qualifications they need to support the effectiveness and safety of their operations. Some of these suggestions are outlined below.

3.80 Tweed Shire Council reflected on the spontaneous volunteers who stepped in to respond during a recent flood event, submitting:

The question for Government is how to harness this enthusiasm for preparedness in future events, to engage with volunteers to meet surge capacity but not impose considerable commitment on individuals in competition with their day-to-day activities/family commitments ... It may also provide opportunities for State and Federal Governments to consider the offering of various incentives for participation, such as reduced boat licence/ registration fees, tax offsets/deductions, fuel vouchers etc.<sup>82</sup>

3.81 Mr Greg Fisk from British Maritime Technology expressed that incentivisation has to happen to get volunteer numbers up, particularly in getting younger Australians involved, and was open to suggestions such as university fee relief or other cash incentives.<sup>83</sup>

3.82 Mr Camp explained that some SES locations already receive a small stipend to volunteer each year based on the length of service they have had and suggested that another option would be tax incentives for equipment because volunteers sometimes have to buy their own equipment, but are currently not eligible for a tax deduction because they are volunteers.<sup>84</sup>

3.83 The Water Services Association of Australia, the peak industry body representing the urban water industry, submitted that the water sector would support:

... the provision of greater federal funding and support for the training and deployment of state-based volunteer responders; NGO's and community volunteers, for example, through the provision of tax-exempt payments for volunteers when training or on emergency response operations. These staff could then provide the logistics support necessary to underpin the

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<sup>82</sup> Tweed Shire Council, *Submission 128*, p. 3.

<sup>83</sup> Mr Greg Fisk, Senior Principal Consultant and Global Lead, Climate Risk and Resilience, British Maritime Technology, *Committee Hansard*, 22 September 2023, p. 4.

<sup>84</sup> Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director of the Queensland SES, *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 32.

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deployment of industry response and recovery capabilities into a disaster area.<sup>85</sup>

### Committee view

- 3.84 The committee recognises the invaluable contributions of volunteers across state emergency services, industry, charities, non-government organisations and volunteer groups. The committee is concerned about the declining number of people volunteering in emergency response and relief and commends the efforts of organisations to boost their numbers by implementing more flexible volunteering arrangements and promoting volunteering through youth programs.
- 3.85 The committee sees value in the Australian Government considering the development of a national, or supporting and expanding state-based, youth programs that provide social interaction and training in disaster related activities, with opportunities for certificate-based learning (for example in chainsaws, boat maintenance, firefighting, abseiling, event management, logistics, communications, and information technology). The program(s) should be promoted through schools, universities and youth associations such as the Police Citizens Youth Clubs, Scouts and Guides. Additionally, it is important that such a program establishes a strong reputation as a quality program that not only does good work but is also a fun group that young people want to be associated with. If a national program is preferred, it should create links with state-based organisations such as the SES and Rural Bushfire Service.
- 3.86 The committee heard evidence that there were a number of issues with coordination and communication within and across volunteer communities and that there is a need for the innovative models of coordination to prevent the duplication of efforts and wasting of precious resources. The committee notes that there were calls for a nationwide database that could mobilise volunteers by matching them up with the work that needs to be done. The committee expects that the Australian Government will continue to work with all volunteers involved in disaster mitigation, response and recovery to improve coordination across civil society.
- 3.87 The committee encourages the Australian Government to investigate ways to strengthen the volunteer workforce, including the introduction of employment incentives and volunteering schemes in the public and corporate sectors. For example, the committee believes that options for developing a leave policy and a tax deductibility policy to provide full time workers with protections when called up for three or more days of disaster emergency support, similar to the protections provided to Defence Reservists under the *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001*, should be investigated.

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<sup>85</sup> Water Services Association of Australia, *Submission 142*, p. 6.

#### Recommendation 4

- 3.88 The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider amendments to the *Fair Work Act 2009* to legislate time off for volunteers working with registered organisations and for volunteers to be granted leave from employment, similar to the provisions provided to Reservists under the *Defence Reserve Service (Protection) Act 2001*.**
- 3.89 Additionally, for volunteers working in SES, Rural Bushfire Service or other recognised community groups, the committee suggests that the Australian Government consider providing tax deductible courses that can be used as part of their emergency volunteering, but it should not be a cost covered by the organisation.

#### Recommendation 5

- 3.90 In circumstances where the cost of relevant training is not covered by the organisation, the committee recommends that the Australian Government consider amendments to legislation, policy and guidelines to allow volunteers working in organisations such as State Emergency and Rural Bushfire Services to claim tax deductions for training and courses that are a part of their emergency volunteering.**

#### Mental health

- 3.91 Getting boots on the ground is important, but looking after the mental health of the first responders and volunteers supporting communities is critical for the sustainability and success of any volunteer framework. Evidence received by the committee indicated that there needs to be clearly defined mental health programs tailored specifically for responders to natural disasters. These programs must be free or low-cost, trauma-informed, and focused on prevention rather than as a post-disaster activity. Australia's first responders and volunteers cannot be left behind.
- 3.92 Volunteering Australia stated that 'mental health and suicide prevention services are critical during major emergencies'.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Lifeline Australia, a crisis telephone support service engaging 10 000 volunteers across Australia, submitted that there is 'consensus that climate change-related disasters are indeed interlinked with mental health and wellbeing'.<sup>87</sup>
- 3.93 The Australian Red Cross expressed that the psychosocial impacts of disasters are significant and linger long after the physical infrastructure in communities is repaired. However:

... they are not well recognised within the emergency management sector or broader community, which means that mitigating or addressing

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<sup>86</sup> Volunteering Australia, '[Volunteers: Australia's backbone in times of crisis](#)' (accessed 14 June 2024).

<sup>87</sup> Lifeline Australia, *Submission 15*, p. 6.

psychosocial harms arising from disasters are not prioritised in policy or funding. It also means that the emergency management sector misses opportunities to minimise psychosocial impacts throughout activations.<sup>88</sup>

- 3.94 Fortem Australia highlighted that Australian communities are highly dependent on first responders, the majority of whom are volunteers, to save lives and protect property when disaster strikes. Fortem Australia explained that supporting the resilience and overall wellbeing of first responders during and after disasters can safeguard their ongoing capacity to respond in times of need. Fortem Australia outlined the mental health impact on first responders and their families:

For many first responders and their families, working in disaster affected regions often comes at a deeply personal cost. Layered on top of traumatic and already highly demanding duties, disaster response works adds an additional burden to individuals on the frontline.

The mental health impact of supporting disaster affected communities often has a long tail, with many first responders experiencing significant psychological distress months or years after responding to a disaster event.

Due to this burden and the long tail impact, there is an urgent need to establish a nationally coordinated and consistent approach to supporting the mental health readiness, response and recovery of first responders working in disaster affected regions.<sup>89</sup>

- 3.95 The X Factor Collective Foundation (now rebranded as the Benefolk Foundation)<sup>90</sup>, a national charity supporting the mental health of staff and volunteers in the social sector, also discussed the burnout experienced by emergency response volunteers.<sup>91</sup> Feedback from civil leaders indicated that their teams are exhausted which impacted on service delivery, and that their organisations do not have the extra capacity to provide staff and volunteers with appropriate training to enable them to respond effectively to the trauma experienced during and after disaster events. The X Factor Collective Foundation asserted that these responders need fit-for-purpose mental health training and support—specifically, support that is not generic in workplace mental health but focused on frontline and accidental responders dealing with traumatised clients and communities. The training also needs to be free or low-cost as many of these organisations do not have the budgets for mainstream

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<sup>88</sup> Australian Red Cross, *Submission 56*, p. 4.

<sup>89</sup> Fortem Australia, *Submission 106*, p. 3.

<sup>90</sup> See: [Benefolk Foundation website](#) (accessed 1 July 2024).

<sup>91</sup> See, also: Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS), *Submission 31*, p. 3; Foodbank Australia, *Submission 86*, p. 11.

providers, as well as the need for the training to be easily accessible and flexible with multi-mode delivery.<sup>92</sup>

- 3.96 Both Lifeline Australia and Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (Phoenix Australia) concurred that due to the impacts of climate change compounding disasters, it is necessary that Australia implements ‘a comprehensive preparedness, response, and recovery workforce model addressing mental health and wellbeing, alongside immediate physical and economic risks’.<sup>93</sup> Lifeline Australia submitted that the approach must incorporate workforce mobilisation of the mental health and crisis support workforce with a particular focus on volunteers.<sup>94</sup>
- 3.97 The Salvation Army and the X Factor Collective Foundation emphasised that this support should be tailored and responsive to community needs, particularly in regional and rural areas.<sup>95</sup>
- 3.98 The importance of trauma-informed training, support and services was something that was raised by a number of submitters and witnesses.<sup>96</sup> Phoenix Australia submitted:

Another critical aspect of building the capacity of the disaster recovery workforce, is ensuring that they have access to a range of evidence-based, trauma-informed and culturally appropriate wellbeing support options when required ... A matched and stepped approach to supporting worker mental health is a widely used public health approach and is supported by the evidence as best-practice. This approach recognises that interventions are most effective when the level of mental health support is matched to the individual’s needs at that particular point in time, i.e. universal interventions made available to all workers to prevent or minimise the impacts of exposure to [potentially traumatic events], early and low intensity support for workers with emerging or low level mental health issues, and specialist mental health and return to work support for those who develop more entrenched and significant mental health issues. Therefore, when considering disaster workforce models, it is vital to also ensure that culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and evidence-based support options are made available across all levels of the matched and

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<sup>92</sup> The X Factor Collective Foundation, *Submission 57*, pp. 4–5.

<sup>93</sup> Lifeline Australia, *Submission 15*, p. 6; Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health (Phoenix Australia), *Submission 40*, p. 2.

<sup>94</sup> Lifeline Australia, *Submission 15*, pp. 6–9.

<sup>95</sup> Salvation Army, *Submission 42*, p. ix; The X Factor Collective Foundation, *Submission 57*, p. 5.

<sup>96</sup> See, for example: Ms Julia Keady, Executive Director, The X Factor Collective Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 66; Phoenix Australia, *Submission 40*, pp. 3–4; Salvation Army, *Submission 42*, pp. 16–18; Ms Monika Wheeler, Chief Executive, Healthy North Coast, *Committee Hansard*, 28 June 2023, p. 46; Mrs Sandra Elton, Manger, North Townsville Community Hub Inc., *Committee Hansard*, 21 September 2023, p. 20; Ms Elly Bird, Executive Director, Resilient Lismore, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 21.

stepped care approach, and for all stages of their career lifecycle (including their transition out). However, other inquiries have found that the current public mental health services lack sufficient knowledge regarding trauma and disasters, and are not tailored to adequately support this workforce.<sup>97</sup>

### 3.99 Phoenix Australia recommended:

With the increasing frequency and intensity of disasters, there is an urgent need to take a proactive and systemic approach to better prepare and support the wellbeing of the disaster workforce in order to ensure its ongoing capability and capacity to respond to compounding disasters. This can be achieved through:

- supporting disaster organisations to put in place organisation wide practices that mitigate risks to mental health and protect wellbeing. This requires both a system wide and whole-of-organisation approach ranging from improved policies and leadership practices, to upskilling the workforce in disaster relevant practice;
- providing a range of culturally appropriate, trauma-informed and evidence-based support options for those in the disaster workforce. This should take a matched, stepped care approach; and
- ensuring these improved organisational and support practices are considered for the broader disaster workforce (including those in professions not typically considered high-risk).<sup>98</sup>

3.100 The X Factor Collective Foundation highlighted that they provide ‘resilient responders’ training which helps participants understand and build skills around trauma, resolving trauma and healing from trauma for themselves and for others. They have been providing this training in the Northern Rivers in NSW, but would like to be able to offer it to local communities all over Australia.<sup>99</sup> They have also established a Community Well which is a free wellbeing and resilience resource hub built specifically for charities, not-for-profit organisations, social enterprises, and all those that work and volunteer with them, but need help to promote it. Ms Annette Herschtal, Manager of Resources and Advocacy at the X Factor Collective Foundation, stated that they would love to partner with the government on these projects to ‘make the wellbeing of the social sector a national priority, because their resilience is out resilience’.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> Phoenix Australia, *Submission 40*, pp. 3–4.

<sup>98</sup> Phoenix Australia, *Submission 40*, p. 4.

<sup>99</sup> Ms Julia Keady, Executive Director, The X Factor Collective Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 65.

<sup>100</sup> Ms Annette Herschtal, Manager, Resources and Advocacy, The X Factor Collective Foundation, *Committee Hansard*, 27 June 2023, p. 65; Benefolk Foundation, ‘[The Community Well: Social Sector Wellbeing & Resilience Hub](#)’ (accessed 1 July 2024).

### **Committee view**

- 3.101 During the course of the inquiry, the committee heard concerns about the lack of appropriate and accessible services to support the mental health and wellbeing of disaster response workers, volunteers, their families, and communities. A number of organisations, community groups and associations also outlined the important work they do in providing mental health support programs for volunteer and frontline workers, but highlighted that they needed more support to continue and expand these services. The committee recognises the importance of this work and believes that it is imperative that the Australian Government continue to focus on building mental health resilience and support for disaster affected communities, as well as for first responders, including the disaster workforce and volunteers.
- 3.102 The committee sees value in the establishment of national disaster mental health hub, similar to the X Factor Collective Foundation’s wellbeing and resilience resource hub. A national disaster mental health hub would provide all stakeholders involved in disaster response and recovery across the country a one-stop shop of relevant and specifically-tailored resources to support their mental health, wellbeing and resilience—before, during and after disaster events.
- 3.103 The committee recognises the integral link between social resilience and social strength in mitigating the impacts of natural disasters, therefore initiatives aimed at building stronger and more resilient communities must be prioritised.
- 3.104 The committee notes the Australian Government’s ongoing program of work to better support the mental health and wellbeing of first responders and disaster impacted communities across Australia. In particular, the committee acknowledges:
- the National Disaster Mental Health and Wellbeing Framework launched in June 2023, which guides how mental health and wellbeing can be supported before, during and after disasters; and
  - the National Mental Health Plan for Emergency Services Workers: 2024 - 2027: A commitment to continued action that was endorsed at the National Emergency Management Ministers’ Meeting in August 2023, which aims to address the specific challenges faced by emergency services workers and the essential role they provide in supporting disaster impacted communities.
- 3.105 To build on this work already underway, the committee makes the following recommendations.

### **Recommendation 6**

- 3.106 The committee recommends that the Australian Government establish a national disaster mental health hub to coordinate and provide mental health**

resources, training, and support for first responders and communities affected by disasters across the nation. This hub should serve as a comprehensive resource centre for addressing the mental health needs of all stakeholders involved in disaster response and recovery efforts.

#### **Recommendation 7**

**3.107** The committee recommends that the Australian Government design and implement consistent national trauma-informed care principles, ensuring that first responders—both professional and volunteer—receive training and support in these national principles to better address the mental health and well-being of disaster-affected individuals and communities.

#### **Recommendation 8**

**3.108** The committee recommends that the Australian Government convene a disaster resilience mental health summit to hear from all related agencies and stakeholders to identify solutions to the mental health impacts of disaster.



# Chapter 4

## Consideration of alternative models

- 4.1 Due to the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters, the Australian Government must find a solution to building up the number of readily deployable personnel to assist communities during and after disaster events. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) is a valuable resource that can be called upon to assist during a disaster when other resources have been exhausted. However, it is not sustainable to rely on their deployability in the context of a world where more frequent disaster events are commonplace, as their time and resources must be focused on their primary and essential role in defending and protecting Australia's national security.
- 4.2 This chapter will first discuss the current role of the ADF in responding to natural disasters, before exploring alternative models that could increase Australia's deployable capacity to respond to natural disasters without relying on the ADF, including international examples.

### Role of the Australian Defence Force

- 4.3 The ADF sits within the Department of Defence (Defence) portfolio whose mission and purpose is to defend Australia and its national interests in order to advance Australia's security and prosperity.<sup>1</sup>
- 4.4 Whilst the ADF's primary role is to defend Australia, the ADF is able to assist states and territories during the response to and recovery from natural disasters. Defence is tasked to be prepared to provide domestic disaster relief through the Chief of Defence Force Preparedness Directive.<sup>2</sup> The ADF has a range of capabilities and resources that are useful in the natural disaster context, including providing logistics, communications, transport by sea, land and air, as well as the deployment of personnel. Importantly, it must be noted that the ADF does not have the capability nor resources to fight bushfires and is not trained to do so, except in the specific area of naval fires. The ADF provides this support in accordance with the processes outlined in the Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) manual.<sup>3</sup>
- 4.5 State and territory governments must request ADF assistance before the Australian Government can authorise ADF deployment, unless where a state or territory government is incapacitated. A request must be made in accordance

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Defence (Defence), '[Defence mission](#)' (accessed 28 May 2024).

<sup>2</sup> Defence, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 188.

with the DACC manual and the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN).<sup>4</sup>

- 4.6 The DACC manual outlines the types of assistance Defence can provide and the thresholds to make requests for assistance. The threshold for a request for assistance during or after a significant crisis is where the scale of an emergency or disaster exceeds or exhausts the response capacity and capabilities of a state or territory or where resources cannot be mobilised in sufficient time. Whether a request is authorised will depend on the circumstances of the request and consideration of Defence's present operational, fiscal and policy setting.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, whether a cost is incurred by a state or territory for DACC assistance will depend on what type of assistance it is categorised as. For example, the categories of local emergency assistance (DACC 1), significant crisis response or relief assistance (DACC 2), and local non-emergency assistance of a minor nature (DACC 4) do not incur costs. However, the significant recovery assistance (DACC 3), significant non-emergency assistance (DACC 5), and support to law enforcement (DACC 6) categories will incur costs unless a waiver is approved.<sup>6</sup>
- 4.7 The COMDISPLAN outlines the coordination arrangements for the provision of non-financial assistance from the Australian Government in the event of a disaster or emergency within Australia or its territories.<sup>7</sup> Before a request is made under COMDISPLAN:
- a jurisdiction must have exhausted all government, community, and commercial options to cope with the situation; or
  - a jurisdiction is unable to mobilise its own resources in time; or
  - the Australian Government has a capability that the state or territory does not have.<sup>8</sup>

### **Increased deployment and expectations of the ADF**

- 4.8 The domestic operations of the ADF have increased over the past few years in response to natural disasters. Defence submitted:

The use of both full-time and part-time Defence personnel to support the Australian community since 2019 has been at an unprecedented scale,

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<sup>4</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 194.

<sup>5</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, pp. 194-196; Defence, [Defence Assistance to the Civil Community Manual \(DACC manual\)](#), 21 December 2023, p. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Defence, [Defence Assistance to the Civil Community Policy](#), 31 August 2021, pp. 7-12.

<sup>7</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 194.

<sup>8</sup> Australian Government, [COMDISPLAN 2020: Australian Government Disaster Response Plan](#), p. 5.

duration and frequency ... Since 2019 over 35 100 ADF personnel have deployed in domestic disaster relief operations, some multiple times.<sup>9</sup>

- 4.9 The 2019–20 bushfires, in particular, saw an unprecedented number of ADF personnel and equipment used to support civilian emergency services and was considered the largest ever mobilisation of the ADF in response to a domestic disaster. The ADF received requests for assistance from New South Wales (NSW), Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia (WA), South Australia (SA) and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT).<sup>10</sup> Operation Bushfire Assist 2019–20 lasted almost six months, cost approximately \$68.6 million<sup>11</sup> and, at its peak, the ADF had tasked around 6 500 personnel, including 3 000 reservists under compulsory call-out orders.<sup>12</sup>
- 4.10 The Reserves are a surge component of the ADF and give the ADF the ability to scale up its forces. This was the first time the ‘Calling out the Reserves’ powers were used for a national disaster under the *Defence Act 1903*.<sup>13</sup> The effect of the call-out order was that Reserve forces, who usually provide service to the ADF on a voluntary basis, were obliged to provide full-time service for the duration of the call-out order.<sup>14</sup>
- 4.11 Due to the increased frequency of ADF deployments, it has become somewhat of an expectation that the ADF will always provide assistance in responding to natural disasters. This has called into question the sustainability and suitability of the ADF’s role in disaster response, recognising that the ADF’s primary role must be national security.
- 4.12 In its submission, Defence commented on the impact of the increased deployment of the ADF on its capacity to fulfil its operational requirements for its primary mission:

... the increased scope, scale and duration of Australian Defence Force (ADF) commitment to domestic disaster relief has resulted in workforce pressure on both permanent and reserve ADF capacity, which may incur reduced capability within some areas. Increased utilisation of ADF resources during domestic natural disasters has required Defence to reprioritise its workforce to meet Government direction, reducing capacity

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<sup>9</sup> Defence, *Submission 25*, p. 3.

<sup>10</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 189.

<sup>11</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, p. 200.

<sup>12</sup> Nicole Brangwin and David Watt, ‘[The state of Australia’s defence: a quick guide](#)’, *Parliamentary Library research paper series 2022–23*, 27 July 2022, pp. 11–12.

<sup>13</sup> *Defence Act 1903*, Division 3 of Part III, subsection 28.

<sup>14</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, [Report](#), 28 October 2020, pp. 190-191.

and opportunity to train, maintain and sustain its workforce to meet the operational requirements of its primary mission.<sup>15</sup>

- 4.13 The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recognised the valuable role that the ADF played in response to the 2019–20 bushfires, but highlighted that there was a misconception that the ADF was always readily available and equipped to respond in all aspects. The Royal Commission’s October 2020 report stated:

There appears to be a lack of understanding about the role, capacity and capability of the ADF in relation to natural disasters ... Understanding of ADF capabilities and processes needs to be improved to ensure that it is used effectively.

...

The ADF has finite capacity and capability. The capacity and capability of the ADF to respond to natural disasters can be affected by its commitment to its priorities, both domestic and international.<sup>16</sup>

- 4.14 The President of the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) was of the view that there is an ‘expectation by the community now that the ADF will be there from day one’, so it is important that there be an education campaign ‘to show the community that the states and agencies have the capability to respond, to ensure that the community has confidence in what the states can do’.<sup>17</sup>
- 4.15 The Defence Strategic Review 2023 (DSR)<sup>18</sup> also emphasised that the ADF must be considered a capability of last resort and called upon only once all jurisdictional and commercial capabilities have been exhausted.<sup>19</sup> The DSR asserted that Commonwealth, state and local governments must work in partnership to ensure that the necessary plans, resources and capabilities are in place to deal with all but the most extreme domestic disaster operations.<sup>20</sup>
- 4.16 The Australian Government agreed in-principle with the recommendations of the DSR.<sup>21</sup> Since this agreement, the Australian Government has funded

<sup>15</sup> Defence, *Submission 25*, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, *Report*, 28 October 2020, pp. 186 & 189.

<sup>17</sup> Ms Carlene York, President, Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC), *Committee Hansard*, 19 April 2023, p. 14.

<sup>18</sup> Note: the Defence Strategic Review (DSR) assesses the current strategic environment facing Australia and makes recommendations about how Australia can adapt to the new strategic reality by reassessing its defence capability priorities and processes.

<sup>19</sup> Australian Government, *Defence Strategic Review 2023*, p. 41.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Government, *Defence Strategic Review 2023*, p. 41.

<sup>21</sup> Australian Government, *Defence Strategic Review 2023*, pp. 109–110.

initiatives such as the National Emergency Management Stockpile (NEMS), discussed in chapter 2 of this report, to ‘augment the response support that the ADF provides to states and territories in national emergencies and to help reduce our reliance on the ADF to support domestic response and relief efforts’.<sup>22</sup>

### Evidence received about the role of the ADF

4.17 Overwhelmingly, those who commented on the role of the ADF expressed appreciation and gratitude for the efforts of the ADF in responding to natural disasters and assisting impacted communities.<sup>23</sup> For example, witnesses provided the following accounts of community responses to the arrival of the ADF following the Fitzroy Crossing floods:

**Mr Buffone:** I can give you an anecdotal aspect around the importance of how the community feels about the ADF. When I went to Fitzroy Crossing and spoke to the elders recently, their words were—and it was actually quite an emotive statement but really touching: ‘When we saw the helicopters land and when we saw the uniforms come out, our hearts warmed and we felt safe’.<sup>24</sup>

**Mr Berger:** During the recent flooding, the ADF provided not only material support but also a reassuring presence. I will never forget iconic images of Fitzroy Crossing children watching, wide-eyed and full of excitement, the arrival of ADF Chinook helicopters.<sup>25</sup>

4.18 A small number of submitters suggested that a dedicated capability within the ADF would be the best approach to resolving the primary and secondary roles of the ADF.<sup>26</sup> For example, the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) recognised that the ADF have access to a level of equipment and expertise that is often significantly more advanced than what is available at the local community level, as well as possessing a range of applicable skills and knowledge of how to operate safely in extreme environments, and submitted:

Demand on the ADF will undoubtedly increase with the increasing frequency of natural disasters leading to an increased need for enhanced

<sup>22</sup> National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), ‘[Budget 2024–25 Factsheet: National Emergency Management Stockpile Capability](#)’, p. 2 (accessed 5 June 2024).

<sup>23</sup> See, for example: Mr Chuck Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberly Development Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 26; Councillor Linda Scott, President, Australian Local Government Association, *Committee Hansard*, 13 April 2023, p. 19; Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ), *Submission 20*, p. 7; Mr Joe Buffone, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response, NEMA, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 1.

<sup>24</sup> Mr Joe Buffone, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response, NEMA, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 1.

<sup>25</sup> Mr Chuck Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Development Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 26.

<sup>26</sup> See, for example: LGAQ, *Submission 20*, pp. 9–10; Police Association Victoria, *Submission 11*, pp. 2–6.

support to States regarding disaster response and recovery. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.<sup>27</sup>

4.19 On the other hand, the majority of submitters agreed that the deployment of the ADF should complement existing local and state capabilities, rather than being relied upon to respond to civil emergencies.<sup>28</sup> Submitters stated that:

- our current expectations of the ADF's role are both unrealistic and unsustainable;<sup>29</sup>
- it is not appropriate for the ADF to be constituted as a standing emergency response agency with specific obligations to respond to civil emergencies;<sup>30</sup>
- ADF deployments should be complementary to, but not a replacement for, local response activities but we need to ensure that they are appropriately funded, resourced, and trained;<sup>31</sup>
- existing state agencies need additional investment to enhance their operational response capability rather than funding the development of a strengthened civilian response capability in the ADF;<sup>32</sup> and
- that calling on the ADF to respond is the most expensive option.<sup>33</sup>

4.20 The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Australia submitted that given the increasing need for additional capability to respond to natural disasters, Australia cannot rely on ad hoc assistance from the ADF which may not always be available. The use of the ADF in domestic natural disaster response should be restricted to exceptionally severe situations. Instead, WILPF Australia stated that Australia needs a reliable way of preparing for and responding to disaster events and suggested that the Australian Government establish a fully funded statutory, independent civilian disaster response agency with well-trained staff that draws on existing agencies and services.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> LGAQ, *Submission 20*, pp. 9–10.

<sup>28</sup> See, for example: LGAQ, *Submission 20*, p. 4; AFAC, *Submission 72*, p. 7; United Professional Firefighters Union of WA, *Submission 93*, p. 5; Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Submission 94*, p. 1.

<sup>29</sup> Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *Submission 94*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> AFAC, *Submission 72*, p. 7.

<sup>31</sup> LGAQ, *Submission 20*, p. 4

<sup>32</sup> NSW Rural Fire Service - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 13 April 2023, Sydney, pp. 2–3.

<sup>33</sup> Australian Red Cross, *Submission 56*, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Australia, *Submission 114*, p. 3.

4.21 The Tweed Shire Council praised the effectiveness of the ADF's assistance to communities during disasters, but accepted that:

... the response model incorporating the ADF to initially provide surge capacity is likely untenable into the future, and we need to develop an alternative model. In looking to address an alternative model, I believe identifying the desirable characteristics that the ADF bring, along with some of the challenges communities face in working with out-of-area assistance, will assist us to develop a model—or models, as I do not believe that one size will fit all. A model needs to be embedded within our local and/or regional area, be flexible, be practised, and have ongoing resources and funding to ensure the sustainability of the program.<sup>35</sup>

4.22 Similarly, Sandpiper Australia, a charity supporting rural doctors, argued that:

... an established network of rural responders across each State and Territory provides a ready-made disaster response network and is inherently more robust, immediate and able to respond to local needs than relying on an ADF response alone.<sup>36</sup>

4.23 The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) stated that it is looking at the sustainability of the current disaster response model and how those arrangements can be supplemented and enhanced to reduce some of the pressure and demand on the ADF. NEMA acknowledged that although the ADF will remain a critical part of Australia's disaster response architecture:

... it's important that we set that up and build capabilities that not only support states when they reach those thresholds but also prepare us for a catastrophic event that we might not even imagine right now—in particular, when we have consecutive, concurrent and compounding events. Think about the scenarios that we see: quite often it's not a single event but multiple events that are happening, and we've seen that through this [2023] season ...

What we do need to do, though, is have a look at how we make sure that we fully utilise all capabilities across civil society but then have a surge capability such that the Commonwealth can actually fill any gaps should that occur. That can be through a Commonwealth capability or even reaching into international partners to support us. So, it's this sort of escalating and scalable system.<sup>37</sup>

### **Committee view**

4.24 The committee commends ADF personnel for their extraordinary efforts in supporting communities in response to natural disasters and wishes to highlight how valued their contributions are.

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<sup>35</sup> Ms Doreen Harwood, Enterprise Risk and Emergency Management Officer and Local Emergency Management Officer, Tweed Shire Council, *Committee Hansard*, 29 June 2023, p. 2.

<sup>36</sup> Sandpiper Australia, *Submission 140*, p. 7.

<sup>37</sup> Mr Joe Buffone, Deputy Coordinator-General, Emergency Management and Response, NEMA, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, pp. 2 & 6.

- 4.25 However, the committee agrees with the findings of the Defence Strategic Review and the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements that the primary role of the ADF is to protect Australia's national interest and to defend Australia, therefore the ADF should only be called upon as a last resort to respond to natural disasters when all other capabilities have been exhausted.
- 4.26 The committee believes that the Commonwealth's capabilities and national capacity must be enhanced to ensure Australia is prepared to face the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters due to climate change and to reduce its reliance on the ADF in times of disaster.
- 4.27 It is apparent to the committee that alternative models need to be explored to bolster Australia's capacity to respond to natural disasters without relying on the ADF.
- 4.28 The remainder of the chapter will canvass evidence of alternative models for disaster response and recovery that could be considered by the Australian Government, including international examples.

### **Alternative models**

- 4.29 This section explores non-military alternative models at the national level that could relieve the ADF from the increasing pressure to respond to natural disasters in Australia, including the already established Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) and proposals for a National Guard.

### **Disaster Relief Australia**

- 4.30 One model, worthy of considering how it could be scaled up, is already operational in Australia and providing an alternative disaster relief capability to the ADF—DRA.
- 4.31 DRA was founded in 2016 and brings together the skills and experience of military veterans with emergency services specialists to rapidly deploy disaster relief teams in Australia following natural disasters, providing veterans a model of continued service to the nation. DRA's model of deploying veterans and first responders in disaster recovery provides a flexible mechanism by which the latent talent of Australia's veterans can be harnessed and repurposed to support and mobilise communities impacted by disasters. It also provides veterans with a 'renewed sense of purpose and identity, which has positive mental health benefits'.<sup>38</sup>
- 4.32 Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO of DRA and ex- firefighter and soldier, stated that the organisation is made up of about 75 to 80 per cent of veterans who are 'incredibly well skilled and suited to the disaster recovery environment' and the other 20 to 25 per cent are emergency services workers and volunteers. Mr Evans

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<sup>38</sup> Disaster Relief Australia (DRA), *Submission 27*, pp. 1, 3 & 5.

added that the application of military methodology and know-how to disaster resilience is proving to be a very powerful tool.<sup>39</sup> An additional benefit of having a workforce made up of emergency services personnel and veterans is that these groups ‘speak the language’ of the State Emergency Services (SES), Rural Fire Service (RFS), Country Fire Authority (CFA) and ADF which helps with the effective coordination and integration of DRA staff on the ground. Mr Evans gave the following example:

... if we have liaison officers on the ground working with the local council authorities who are getting an ADF element, local councils generally have no idea of what the ADF is. For example, if they're getting a combat engineer regiment, they don't know what that is. We can provide them assistance and explain, 'That regiment can do just about anything,' and they'll say, 'Right – fantastic.' So it allows the ADF to come in faster and hit the ground running. I saw a case in Queensland where a company of 8/9 RAR [(Royal Australian Regiment)] turned up at the local council and were sent home because there was no work for them to do. There was plenty of work; the council just didn't know what a company of 8/9 RAR was. It was a massive waste of resources, whereas we could have assisted them ... [and] if we're ahead of the ADF we can let them know what they're coming into so they know what to bring and we can let the local councils know what is coming.<sup>40</sup>

4.33 DRA states that it aims to be the ‘force of choice’ in disaster recovery, reducing demand on the ADF. DRA described its capabilities as matching that of an ADF deployment at DACC Level 3, that is, recovery from a civil emergency or disaster which is not directly related to the saving of life or property but involves longer term significant recovery activity. Their capabilities include:

- general duties disaster recovery work;
- incident management;
- damage and impact assessment;
- aerial damage assessment and mapping;
- debris management and access restoration;
- logistics management and aid delivery;
- spontaneous volunteer management;
- work order management;
- expedient home repairs; and
- building community resilience.<sup>41</sup>

4.34 Mr Evans explained DRA has adopted a flexible model where volunteers can ‘join DRA today and deploy tomorrow’, recognising that many of their volunteers come from a military background with skills and experience, negating the requirement for additional training. Mr Evans also noted that the majority of recovery tasks they undertake are actually quite low skilled, as

<sup>39</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 35.

<sup>40</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 38.

<sup>41</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, pp. 2–3.

opposed to what a response agency might need to do which requires a higher level of skilled training. Whilst some level of screening and training is required for spontaneous volunteers, Mr Evans stated:

We have found we need to be very careful of locking volunteers into a trade model where they need to complete X number of courses to be able to deploy onto the ground ... every time you introduce a data point on their sign-up form or a training qualification, you introduce an attrition rate.

...

This is one of the things, as you well know, Chair, that upsets veterans: the lack of recognition of skill and experience. So we don't turn up and say: 'We're going to put you through a whole heap of training for things that you already know how to do'. We will use your existing skills base and then upskill you where we need to. That's been incredibly successful. We find that if we can empower people like that and get out of their way, that we lead the field in so many different areas because of it.<sup>42</sup>

4.35 Additionally, DRA claims that it offers a solution to some of the problems outlined in chapter 3 about spontaneous volunteers, stating that veterans:

... are inherently leadership trained and have proven to be adept at leading spontaneous volunteers, corporations and community groups, including volunteer emergency services organisations, in disaster recovery.<sup>43</sup>

4.36 As of March 2023, DRA has been involved in 56 recovery missions, deploying around 4 500 volunteers since early 2017.<sup>44</sup> DRA deploys at the request of local or state government agencies, integrating with local government disaster recovery centres.<sup>45</sup> Mr Evans explained that DRA usually deploys in a platoon of about 25 to 30 people who are on the ground for seven days before rotating them out with another platoon, this will occur for approximately six to ten weeks, or until DRA's funding or volunteers are exhausted.<sup>46</sup>

4.37 DRA also has arrangements and relationships with other non-government organisations, with the ability to operate independently or as a part of an integrated taskforce.<sup>47</sup> However, Mr Evans emphasised the importance of joint planning for disaster preparedness, response and recovery, stating that NEMA is best placed to take on the role of joint planning and coordination from the national level to ensure that different organisations from across the preparedness, response and recovery stages are engaged in the necessary

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<sup>42</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, pp. 36 & 42.

<sup>43</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 4.

<sup>44</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 35.

<sup>45</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

<sup>46</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 41.

<sup>47</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 1.

sequence to respond effectively to a disaster event—‘like you would a military mission’.<sup>48</sup> Mr Evans explained that there is currently no department or agency that plays this kind of role, but noted that:

... the National Emergency Management Agency have a joint planning tool that they've developed and are just going to start rolling out. We'd identified this as a gap and were going to move to a joint planning model as well. But it's much better done by NEMA; it'll just be a question of how much of each jurisdiction takes it up. It gives you a common framework for planning, it gives you a common operating language and it would be a very, very valuable tool depending on how many people take it up and in which jurisdiction.<sup>49</sup>

4.38 The Australian Government committed \$38.3 million over four years from 2022-2023 to DRA to support the recruitment, deployment, equipment, and training of an additional 5 200 DRA volunteers.<sup>50</sup>

4.39 DRA made the following recommendations in its submission:

- (a) upon successful completion of the current pilot project, the Australian Government expand funding for DRA beyond 2026;
- (b) incorporate DRA into the Joint Transition Authority's Strategic Plan for transitioning ADF members to continue to serve the nation;
- (c) governments provide paid volunteer leave for public servants to deploy with DRA;
- (d) the ADF consider engagement with volunteer organisations such as DRA as part of its transition program; and
- (e) incorporate DRA into national and state-based disaster relief and emergency management legislation, emergency plans and arrangements.<sup>51</sup>

### **A National Guard**

4.40 When referring the inquiry, the Chair of the committee, Senator Jacqui Lambie, proposed the establishment of a National Guard—a domestic arm made up of young Australians not working or studying to help the ADF meet the requirements of non-traditional missions such as assisting with natural disasters.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, pp. 37–38.

<sup>49</sup> Mr Geoffrey Evans, CEO, Disaster Relief Australia, *Committee Hansard*, 14 March 2023, p. 38.

<sup>50</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 3; NEMA, '[Disaster Relief Australia](#)' (accessed 2 July 2024).

<sup>51</sup> DRA, *Submission 27*, p. 6.

<sup>52</sup> Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience—appointment, *Senate Official Hansard*, 27 October 2022, p. 1778.

4.41 The committee received little evidence during the inquiry on the prospect of a National Guard, although often referred to by other names such as National Service, Home Guard or Civilian Corps.

4.42 For example, Mr Ian Symons, who served in CFA Victoria for 35 years, submitted:

More frequent events indicate a need for a new approach through establishment of either a [United States (US)] style Home Guard or a form of National Service that might be para-military in style but directed at community preparedness and response during major emergencies ... something akin to the US Home Guard that could employ a paid training scheme and an expectation of continued service of some type, similar to the Defence Reserves, as a way of supplementing emergency response resources. Of course there would be extensive establishment, administrative and operational costs associated with setting up such an organisation.<sup>53</sup>

4.43 Without mentioning a National Guard specifically, Defence stated in its submission:

The establishment of a scalable and deployable civil contingency workforce to support national crisis response and recovery could provide an alternative option to utilising the ADF workforce by increasing the threshold for requests. This could reduce operational tempo, training disruption and relieve workforce concurrency pressure, delivering an increase in workforce availability and corresponding maintenance of ADF capability for employment in its primary role.<sup>54</sup>

4.44 Mr Neil Smail, a retired Commonwealth public servant and diplomat, proposed a similar concept to a National Guard, which he called the Volunteer Disaster Corps in recognition of the Volunteer Defence Corps which was used during World War Two for 'enrolled men [sic] otherwise unable to join the regular services to undertake "home guard" duties'. Mr Smail recognised the need for a secondary responder organisation that sits between emergency services, including the SES, and recovery services, generally run by state, territory and local governments—a role usually taken on by the ADF.<sup>55</sup>

4.45 Mr Smail proposed that the new service would be a Federal Government program, with the Minister for Home Affairs as the responsible minister, designed to have trained and equipped volunteers based in cities and towns across Australia, able to provide immediate assistance post-disaster. Whilst the service should be volunteer-driven, paid staff managing administration would be positioned at the local level, possibly local government staff paid by federal

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<sup>53</sup> Mr Ian Symons, *Submission 118*, p. 2.

<sup>54</sup> Department of Defence (Defence), *Submission 25*, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup> Mr Neil Smail, *Submission 136*, p. 1.

funding to the local council. Higher level management would be within the federal agency, but also positioned locally.<sup>56</sup>

4.46 Members of the service would commit to attending training and skills exercises, with possible links to TAFE. The Volunteer Disaster Corps would provide:

... for example, water treatment equipment, large generators, flood-lighting, rough territory transport, foodstuff and medical supplies delivery, radio communications and urgent "make safe" engineering. Skills obtained by volunteers would be recognised by documented certification, useful when applying for paid employment. It would be funded by all levels of government but with close, formal links to local councils.<sup>57</sup>

4.47 Mr Smail suggested that vehicles and equipment be positioned at local government facilities, such as secure yards, which could be loaned or leased to the new service. Additionally, instead of the ADF disposing of useful equipment—such as Unimogs (all terrain off-road vehicle), bobcats or mobile cranes—through private auction sales, these could be transferred to or purchased by the new service.<sup>58</sup>

4.48 Another idea was proposed by Mr Raymond Whitehead, who previously served in the Army and Defence. He asserted that the major reason the ADF is called upon to aid communities is generally for its specialist equipment and logistics, suggesting the establishment of a national Australian Disaster Response Force (ADRF).<sup>59</sup>

4.49 In this proposal, Mr Whitehead submitted that veterans would make up the force given they possess a lot of the specialist skills needed to do this type of work. Additionally, he stated 'it would make economic sense to have it [co-located] and administered under the Defence portfolio to take advantage of shared services and capability acquisition'.<sup>60</sup>

4.50 Mr Whitehead outlined two main roles for his ADRF proposal:

- first, to provide heavy logistic and tactical support to local frontline services, including such things as: communications and IT support, medical support through deployable hospitals, heavy logistics support. It would also have access to equipment such as helicopters of different sizes, specialist observation and situational awareness aircraft, a fleet of transport planes, and tactical and strategic water bombers; and

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<sup>56</sup> Mr Neil Smail, *Submission 136*, pp. 2–3.

<sup>57</sup> Mr Neil Smail, *Submission 136*, p. 2.

<sup>58</sup> Mr Neil Smail, *Submission 136*, p. 2.

<sup>59</sup> Mr Raymond Whitehead, *Submission 141*, pp. 1–3.

<sup>60</sup> Mr Raymond Whitehead, *Submission 141*, pp. 1–3.

- second, to have an international deployment capability for disaster recovery—principally for the South Pacific, but deployable to anywhere in the world. The international role would include an enhanced maritime search, rescue, and recovery role. The force would also maintain a fleet of vessels to provide aid and blue water search and rescue.<sup>61</sup>

4.51 Mr Whitehead recognised that this was a major initiative but expressed that costs would be minimised by co-locating it within Defence to take advantage of the existing Defence estate, Defence and civil procurement, vacant infrastructure, and so on. Mr Whitehead noted that this ‘would also require very strong ministerial oversight to keep the Defence hierarchy under control and not cost shift’.<sup>62</sup>

### **International examples**

4.52 Countries around the world employ different models utilising civil and military resources to support national responses to significant disasters. This section will discuss a few international examples that could be considered or adapted for the Australian context.

#### **United States**

4.53 The US civil contingency model is threefold, comprising the National Guard<sup>63</sup>, Surge Capacity Force (SCF)<sup>64</sup> and Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) Reservists.<sup>65</sup> The National Guard partners with FEMA during crises, and the SCF supplements FEMA if the capacity is exceeded.

4.54 The National Guard is the primary combat reserve of the US Army and Air Force that serves both community and country by conducting overseas combat missions and counterdrug efforts, but also responds to domestic emergencies. The National Guard collaborates with and supports civilian authorities and traditional first responders in responding to disasters, strengthening and expanding the local disaster response capability when overwhelmed. The US President or any state governor can call on the National Guard for assistance.<sup>66</sup>

4.55 The National Guard comprises volunteers who agree to ‘activations’, which can involve fulltime service in a voluntary or involuntary capacity. Its personnel

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<sup>61</sup> Mr Raymond Whitehead, *Submission 141*, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Mr Raymond Whitehead, *Submission 141*, p. 2.

<sup>63</sup> US National Guard [website](#) (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>64</sup> US Department of Homeland Security, ‘[Surge Capacity Force](#)’ (accessed 12 June 2024).

<sup>65</sup> US Government Federal Emergency Management Agency, ‘[Reservists \(On-Call\)](#)’ (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>66</sup> Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs), *Submission 80*, p. 5; Virginia Commonwealth University, ‘[The role of the National Guard in disaster response](#)’, 12 May 2021 (accessed 3 July 2024).

generally 'cannot opt out of involuntary action. This is because the military has ordered' personnel to active service. The National Guard involves initial training of eight to 12 weeks (depending on civilian work commitments and military training requirements), monthly drills for 48 periods per year (i.e. one weekend a month), and annual training for two weeks a year.<sup>67</sup> The US has 54 separate National Guard organisations for each state, of which 53 operate as state or territorial organisations (the Washington DC National Guard remains federal) and are controlled by the governor, unless control passes to the US President.<sup>68</sup>

- 4.56 According to the US Department of Defense, there are more than 300 000 National Guard troops that are trained and ready to assist in disaster response, including evacuations, communications, delivering supplies and maintaining order. In addition to the peoplepower, the National Guard also deploys equipment such as helicopters, boats and high-water vehicles.<sup>69</sup>
- 4.57 The SCF was established in 2006 following devastating effects of Hurricane Katrina, a Category 5 hurricane that caused over 1 000 fatalities and damages estimated at US\$161 billion, particularly in New Orleans. The Secretary of Homeland Security is authorised to activate SCF to change the federal response to a catastrophic disaster, and federal employees will be deployed to help support response and recovery efforts.<sup>70</sup>
- 4.58 FEMA Reservists are a temporary, on-call paid workforce that may be deployed depending on the needs of the disaster and the position of the reservist. Reservist employees are hired from diverse backgrounds and career paths to meet operational needs including emergency management, IT, logistics, human resources, environmental protection, analytics, external affairs, grants management, engineering, customer service, and more. The reservist program is divided into 23 different cadres organised by operational responsibilities with each cadre having various positions, from specialist to leadership level that each play vital roles in supporting disaster operations. Reservists are often deployed at short notice and are usually deployed for a period of 30 days.<sup>71</sup>
- 4.59 There are also a number of incentives for signing up as a FEMA Reservist including: a limited time offer of a US\$500–\$2 500 signing bonus under certain

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<sup>67</sup> US National Guard [website](#) (accessed 3 July 2024); Military One Source, '[Joining the Military as a Reservist: Eligibility, Obligation and Benefits](#)', 1 February 2024 (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>68</sup> Congressional Research Service, '[Defense Primer: Reserve Forces](#)', 11 June 2024 (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>69</sup> US Department of Defense, '[We prepare. You should too.](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>70</sup> US Department of Homeland Security, '[Surge Capacity Force](#)' (accessed 12 June 2024).

<sup>71</sup> US Government Federal Emergency Management Agency, '[Reservists \(On-Call\)](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

circumstances; health benefits; paid work travel and accommodation; and annual merit-based increases based on performance. FEMA Reservists are also covered by the *Uniformed Services Employment and Reemployment Rights Act*, protecting them from discrimination and providing job protections when they are deployed to disasters, emergencies, and critical trainings on behalf of FEMA.<sup>72</sup>

- 4.60 Mr Greg Fisk from British Maritime Technology was supportive of the US model and its potential application in Australia, stating at a committee hearing:

If you look at the National Guard model in the United States, it is a federally funded program, but it sits within the states. The National Guard can be called out by the governor of the states, the equivalent of our premiers. So, it's very much a local support mechanism that's federally funded and it's very much an intergovernmental cooperation scheme where the feds front most of the money but the benefits are happening and the ability to influence the agenda is happening at the state level. That's very attractive to me in the context of being able to have something that's sort of bottom up but paid from the top down.<sup>73</sup>

- 4.61 Our Future Northern Rivers & Lismore Citizens Flood Review Group submitted that the coordinated approach of the US FEMA framework would 'be of great benefit to the nation' in dealing with natural disasters, stating that there is no need to re-invent the wheel.<sup>74</sup>

## Denmark

- 4.62 Denmark has a conscription-based military national service requiring men aged from 18 years to complete four to 12 months of training and may be called on for military service. However, because enough men choose to serve voluntarily, a lottery system means that not all men have to serve. Women have been permitted to serve military service on a voluntary basis since 1998, however Denmark has recently announced it plans to implement conscription for women as well.<sup>75</sup> There is also an option to serve conscription in a non-military position instead, such as at the Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA). DEMA is an agency under the Ministry of Defence that works to prepare society for, prevent and respond to major accidents and disasters.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> US Government Federal Emergency Management Agency, '[Reservists \(On-Call\)](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>73</sup> Mr Greg Fisk, Senior Principal Consultant and Global Lead, Climate Risk and Resilience, British Maritime Technology, *Committee Hansard*, 22 September 2023, p. 4.

<sup>74</sup> Future Northern Rivers & Lismore Citizens Flood Review Group, *Submission 124*, p. 7.

<sup>75</sup> Miranda Bryant, 'Denmark plans to conscript women for military service for first time', *the Guardian*, 14 March 2024 (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>76</sup> See: Danish Emergency Management Agency (DEMA) [website](#) (accessed 12 June 2024).

4.63 According to the Department of Home Affairs (Home Affairs):

The DEMA heads Denmark's national emergency service, which consists of five national emergency centres with permanent employees, conscripts and volunteers, as well as a Volunteer Centre. The Emergency Centres can also assist the local emergency services, the police and other authorities at larger or longer-term instances in Denmark where there is an eminent need for additional personnel or special equipment.<sup>77</sup>

4.64 Each of the national fire and rescue centres is manned by approximately 26 officers, 60 specially trained conscripts and 40–100 volunteers. While there are approximately 200 officers and 400 conscripts available nationwide at any time, DEMA is able to rapidly upgrade this capacity with up to 1 150 conscripts, officers and volunteers in case of major incidents.<sup>78</sup>

4.65 DEMA states that conscripts are 'the backbone of DEMA's operations'. In the nine months of service, they are trained in:

- firefighting;
- advanced First Aid;
- urban search and rescue training;
- response and basic training for accidents involving hazardous chemicals and CBRN (chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear defence) incidents;
- physical training; and
- rescue service.<sup>79</sup>

4.66 DEMA notes that most conscripts obtain a special driver's license during their training and once training is complete, individuals are qualified as a trained rescue specialist.<sup>80</sup>

## Germany

4.67 Germany's military, Bundeswehr, offers a civil contingency capability for disaster response and recovery through a volunteer national service program called 'Your year for Germany'. The German Defence Minister, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, stated that the program was established after seeing 'that there were young people who were interested in joining the Bundeswehr but didn't want to tie themselves down'. When the program launched in 2021, it received 9 000 applications for the 1 000 spots available.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Home Affairs, *Submission 80*, p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> DEMA, '[Response to accidents and disasters](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>79</sup> DEMA, '[Response to accidents and disasters](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>80</sup> DEMA, '[Become a conscript](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>81</sup> Alex Berry, '[Germany launches new army volunteer scheme](#)', 4 June 2021 (accessed 3 July 2024).

#### 4.68 Home Affairs submitted that:

This program is targeted at young citizens, with volunteers trained to support the country during natural disaster or health crises. Volunteers spend a year in the 'Bundeswehr' (military service), but after six months of service will practice 'homeland protection' and participate in crisis operations. The program complements Germany's existing civil service program ('Voluntary Social Year'), where citizens can volunteer for training and work in social institutions including aged care and hospitals.<sup>82</sup>

#### 4.69 According to the Bundeswehr:

Having received their assignment-related training, [volunteers] are employed as designated reservists in the region where their roots lie and where they are well connected.<sup>83</sup>

#### 4.70 The Bundeswehr also has a Territorial Reserve which serves Germany in its home region and are responsible for homeland security tasks, including disaster relief specialists networked at the local level who can provide support to civilian organisations during disaster events. Reservists are under the command and control of the regional territorial commands.<sup>84</sup>

### **New Zealand**

#### 4.71 Similar to Australia's NEMA, New Zealand has a National Emergency Management Agency (NZ NEMA) which provides leadership and coordination across NZ's emergency management system. Depending on the emergency, NZ NEMA leads or supports the response and recovery. It works with central and local government, communities, iwi<sup>85</sup>, and business to make sure responses to and recoveries from emergencies are effective and integrated.<sup>86</sup>

#### 4.72 NZ NEMA encourages people to volunteer through their local civil defence organisation, which are operated by local councils. NZ NEMA provides a volunteer coordination role through its Civil Defence Emergency Management (CDEM) which is delivered through a lattice of partnerships: local councils, emergency services, community agencies and the wider community. CDEM provides guidance for volunteer coordination including on preparation, community engagement, and flexibility and collaboration, as well as training programs and other useful materials such as checklists, task descriptions, resources and fact sheets.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Home Affairs, *Submission 80*, p. 5.

<sup>83</sup> Bundeswehr, '[Territorial Reserve](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>84</sup> Bundeswehr, '[Territorial Reserve](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>85</sup> Note: iwi are kinship groups in New Zealand Māori society.

<sup>86</sup> New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency (NZ NEMA), '[About: National Emergency Management Agency](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>87</sup> NZ NEMA, '[Volunteer coordination in CDEM](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

4.73 On the other hand, unlike Australia, NZ NEMA operates an Emergency Management Assistance Team (NZ EMAT) which:

... is a deployable capability within the emergency management system. EMAT was established in response to recommendations to create a 'fly-in team' to enhance responses to natural disasters and other emergencies.

EMAT's purpose is to provide specialist capability enhancement to assist and support affected regions and their Incident Management Teams to manage an emergency. EMAT helps ensure that New Zealanders receive a consistent level of support in any emergency, wherever and whenever it happens.

EMAT consists of 46 specialist Emergency Managers with a mix of attributes, skills and experience to go wherever required, without delay, to work with and support local, regional or national teams as they manage emergencies. EMAT members are able to operate fully self-sufficiently for the duration of their deployment.<sup>88</sup>

4.74 The EMAT cadre is drawn from personnel working in a wide range of qualifying agencies, including central and local government agencies, the emergency services and NZ Defence Force (NZDF). These personnel have significant experience in crisis response and emergency management in a range of settings in NZ and overseas.<sup>89</sup>

4.75 NZ EMAT has 50 mobile Deployable Coordination Centres (DCC) which can be requested to support a lead agency that requires additional coordination facilities at a local or regional level. DCC Caches are located in strategic locations around NZ and can be rapidly deployed. The DCC are maintained by Fire and Emergency New Zealand Urban Search and Rescue. Each DCC is a 20ft 'high top' side-opening shipping container that holds a wide range of equipment to establish a fully equipped 50-person coordination centre. The shipping container is also equipped with lights and power outlets, and serves as a responder briefing and equipment maintenance area.<sup>90</sup>

4.76 Also similar to Australia's model, the NZDF can be engaged under the *Defence Act 1990* to perform any public service or aid a civil power in a time of emergency by deploying at short notice manage wild fires, search and rescue, and related operational outputs. National level support from the NZDF during an emergency is requested through the National Controller via a NZDF Liaison Officer. The degree of support and the tasks to be conducted will be agreed

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<sup>88</sup> NZ NEMA, '[New Zealand Emergency Management Assistance Team \(EMAT\)](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>89</sup> NZ NEMA, '[New Zealand Emergency Management Assistance Team \(EMAT\)](#)' (accessed 3 July 2024).

<sup>90</sup> NZ EMAT, [Deployable Coordination Centre \(DCC\) Caches](#), p. 1.

between the Controller and the NZDF and should be in the form of a general task or a desired effect rather than a specific resource or capability.<sup>91</sup>

### **Committee view**

- 4.77 The committee notes the Australian Government's ongoing partnership with DRA, including its investment of \$38.3 million in DRA to provide relief and recovery support to Australian communities and lessen our reliance on the ADF during disasters.
- 4.78 The committee commends DRA on its leadership and efforts to create an alternative disaster response model to take some pressure off the ADF and to mobilise and coordinate skilled volunteers to assist communities to recover from natural disasters. The committee sees this model as scalable and would like to see the Australian Government provide DRA with additional support to expand its operations beyond the \$38.3 million in funding provided over four years from 2022–2023.

### **Recommendation 9**

- 4.79 The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider how it can further support Disaster Relief Australia, and other similar organisations, not only with funding beyond 2026, but also how the Australian Government can further incorporate Disaster Relief Australia into its national disaster response arrangements and boost its numbers through partnerships with the Australian Defence Force and the Department of Veterans' Affairs.**
- 4.80 The committee received minimal commentary on the prospect of establishing a National Guard in Australia and believes that further investigation is warranted, including into the suitability of international examples of national civil emergency services, such as those explored in this chapter, in the Australian context.
- 4.81 Nevertheless, the committee is of the view that the Australian Government should, as a matter of priority, consider ways to incentivise young Australians to volunteer in disaster response and recovery efforts to support communities across Australia.

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<sup>91</sup> NZ Government, [Guide to the National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan 2015](#), part 5, pp. 2–3.

**Recommendation 10**

**4.82 The committee recommends that the Australian Government consider ways to incentivise young Australians to participate in volunteer organisations that provide support for disaster response and recovery.**

**Senator Jacqui Lambie  
Chair  
Jacqui Lambie Network  
Senator for Tasmania**



# Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds' CSC additional comments

- 1.1 There is a need for better community preparedness and resilience, particularly in high-risk areas like floodplains in Western Australia. This includes rethinking design criteria for infrastructure and exploring relocation options for vulnerable communities.
- 1.2 There is an urgent need for enhanced community preparedness and infrastructure improvements to better withstand and recover from natural disasters and critical areas for action, including infrastructure redundancy, port and airstrip upgrades, and the integration of local knowledge into disaster management strategies.
- 1.3 Strengthening telecommunications resilience through robust communication networks and backup power solutions are integral to ensuring continuous lifesaving connectivity during emergencies.

## Social resilience

- 1.4 By investing in initiatives that strengthen community bonds and empower individuals, we can enhance our Nation's collective ability to withstand and recover from natural disasters effectively.
- 1.5 Effective disaster response is not just about physical infrastructure but also about fostering robust social networks that can support individuals during and after crises.
- 1.6 We must recognise the integral link between social resilience, and social strength, in mitigating the impacts of natural disasters, prioritising initiatives aimed at building stronger and more resilient communities.
- 1.7 Fostering social cohesion and resilience within communities plays a crucial role in enhancing overall disaster resilience. Therefore, implementing measures that promote community engagement, social support networks, and inclusive decision-making processes to bolster social resilience are needed.

**Senator REYNOLDS:** ... one of the things also that struck me is really the link between social resilience, social strength and social cohesion and the ability to be resilient to natural disasters. From the council's perspective, do you see that, if we can build stronger, more resilient communities, then there's a link between the two?<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 27.

**Mr Vanderzeil:** It's hard to tell which comes first, a strong community or a strong disaster response. We see in strong disaster response that our community binds closer together. We become more resilient over time.<sup>2</sup>

### **Infrastructure redundancy in Australia's Northwest**

- 1.8 The Committee took significant evidence during the public hearings in Western Australia that the infrastructure in Northwest Western Australia is not resilient.

#### **Road**

- 1.9 By addressing infrastructure deficiency across the Northwest of Western Australia, we can enhance the safety and efficiency of travel along our critical highway network, particularly during flood events.

**Mr Berger:** ... at the risk of stating the obvious, the Great Northern Highway is the only paved road through the region. As we've seen this year, an interruption to that sole arterial line disrupts logistics networks that stretch thousands of kilometres to cities in the south ... for the better part of three years now, the East Kimberley has been the longest cul-de-sac in the world.<sup>3</sup>

- 1.10 There is an urgent need to conduct a thorough review of the condition and capacity of all single-lane bridges along National Highway One, particularly in Western Australia. This review should prioritise upgrading bridges, taking into account their vulnerability to floods.

**Mr Raymond:** ... if Highway 1 was closed by bridge failure between Sydney and Brisbane, how long do you think it would take before the bridge was replaced? I very much doubt it would be 17 months, which is what we're currently looking at, with that road closed for about eight months in total.

...

On the WA side, we've got a whole series of bridges and sections of road that are built at a level far below the point they need to be for Highway 1. It really is only a matter of time before we see the same thing happen again on other bridges through the system.<sup>4</sup>

- 1.11 Responding to the overwhelming calls from the Kimberley region, the Tanami Road and the Outback Way funding must be re-prioritised and brought forward. This will significantly enhance connectivity, transportation efficiency, and emergency response capabilities in Northwestern Australia.

**Mr Chafer:** ... We were very excited with the Tanami Road being funded—\$444 million. We have just been to Canberra and were told that the \$444 million has now been bumped out of the forward estimates. That is a

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<sup>2</sup> Mr Sebastian Vanderzeil, Vice President, West End Community Association, *Committee Hansard*, 22 September 2023, p. 36.

<sup>3</sup> Mr Chuck Berger, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Development Commission, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Mr Daniel Raymond, Chief Executive Officer, Ord River Cooperative, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, pp. 26–27.

real concern for us because, if that road were sealed—we are actually closer to Adelaide than we are to Perth by a few hundred kilometres—we wouldn't have suffered as much in terms of running out of food and getting other goods and services here. So that's a bit short-sighted. I think that needs to be back in the forward estimates; that road needs to be done as a matter of urgency.<sup>5</sup>

- 1.12 Given the responsibility of the State Governments including the Western Australian State Government for the repair, maintenance, and improvement of the Tanami Road, I urge increased funding allocation to expedite these critical projects. Furthermore, I call for a review of recent Federal Budgets to ensure that adequate resources are allocated to support the development of vital outback infrastructure.

**Ms Smith:** ... If the Tanami Road had been sealed or at least made wet season proof we would have had secondary road access into the East Kimberley and the loss of the [Fitzroy] bridge wouldn't have affected us as severely as it has.<sup>6</sup>

**Mr Edwards:** I'm here today to talk to you about the importance of Tanami Road ... During the flooding, as you know, the East Kimberley was completely cut off by road.<sup>7</sup>

## Port

- 1.13 Strengthening port infrastructure is crucial for facilitating efficient emergency response efforts and safeguarding regional connectivity and trade activities.
- 1.14 There is an urgent need for a more resilient port system, particularly at ports such as Wyndam Port and Derby Port. Proactive measures must be taken to tackle issues related to the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service (AQIS), biosecurity, and customs to ensure uninterrupted access during weather-induced emergency situations.

**Mr Chafer:** We don't have a first port of entry anywhere in the Kimberley ... The issue in terms of food is that you have the quarantine issue getting your fresh fruit and veggies in.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Mr Tony Chafer, Deputy President, Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 11.

<sup>6</sup> Ms Clare Smith, Chief Executive Officer, East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce and Industry, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 35.

<sup>7</sup> Mr Malcolm Edwards, President, Shire of Halls Creek, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> Mr Tony Chafer, Deputy President, Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, pp. 18–19.

### **Airstrips and airports**

- 1.15 Upgrading and maintaining airstrip and airport facilities is critical for enhancing disaster response capabilities and ensuring timely assistance to affected communities.
- 1.16 A comprehensive review of airstrips in northern Western Australia is required to assess their capacity to support essential air operations during disaster scenarios. This review should prioritise evaluating the infrastructure's ability to accommodate required aircraft and facilitate the efficient transportation of supplies and personnel during emergencies.

**Mr McConachy:** The airstrip at Fitzroy Crossing partially went under water. When the ADF brought one of the Spartans in to land on it, it damaged the runway. They did three touch-and-goes and got sent away because the water table was so high. It restricted what we could fly in there because of the damage that was caused to the airstrip.<sup>9</sup>

### **Utility infrastructure in remote communities**

- 1.17 Ensuring continuous access to sewerage, water, and power during emergencies is crucial for safeguarding the well-being and safety of residents in remote areas.
- 1.18 The vulnerability of sewerage, water, and power infrastructure in remote and disaster prone communities should be reviewed, and investment made in utility infrastructure upgrades and adopting innovative technologies to mitigate the impact of disasters on these essential services.

**Mr Ross:** I am the director of the Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation ... To date, it's been about 134 days that, in our Bunuba communities, about 34 houses haven't had power or water reconnected to them ... The issue for us has been just trying to get back home and get our families back.<sup>10</sup>

### **Aligning infrastructure with nature**

- 1.19 National infrastructure planning often lacks a holistic perspective, failing to acknowledge the interconnectedness of our natural systems. Rivers do not conform to administrative boundaries such as shire boundaries or state borders.
- 1.20 We must work with the natural environment instead of controlling or working against it. This involves integrating natural environment considerations into infrastructure planning and development to enhance sustainability and resilience.

**Mr Neate:** ... Mount Anderson floodway is a classic example. In the first eight years that I was in this position, it washed away seven times. There

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<sup>9</sup> Mr Michael McConachy, Managing Director, Aviair, and Managing Director, Helispirit, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 42.

<sup>10</sup> Mr Joe Ross, Private capacity, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 13.

were three large culverts, and the approaches washed away each time because they just built up with silt.<sup>11</sup>

- 1.21 For instance, in Townsville, along the southeastern bank of the Ross River, a housing development was proposed below the flood level within a floodplain.

### **Enhance engagement with local knowledge for flood prevention and recovery**

- 1.22 By harnessing local expertise, we can improve the effectiveness and resilience of flood prevention and recovery initiatives.
- 1.23 There is a requirement to develop and implement strategies to enhance engagement with local communities and their knowledge for flood prevention and recovery efforts. This may involve establishing community forums, conducting consultations, and incorporating traditional and indigenous knowledge into flood management plans.
- 1.24 To better support and empower local communities from the bottom up, we must shift our approach to work collaboratively within our Federation rather than against it. Instead of persistently attempting to control everything at the federal level, we need to recognise and leverage the strengths of local communities, who are best positioned to understand and address their unique needs.
- 1.25 In Fitzroy Crossing, the Committee heard that local people knew weeks in advance of authorities that an enormous volume was accumulating in the Dimond and Margaret Rivers.

**Ms Parriman:** Aboriginal people should be listened to a little bit more. They know country. They know how the water moves—rainfall might cause flooding down there, but where is that going to go? It's just being able to collaborate a little more on that.<sup>12</sup>

**Mr Davis:** ... Fitzroy is the flood capital of the world, and the meetings are held in Derby. That means that local people can't have input into it, and it means that people like Wayne then have to represent us. No disrespect to Wayne, but he doesn't live in Fitzroy Crossing. For people like the pastoralists, who want access, I think the mechanisms of how you do your planning and you're setting up are not sufficient to be able to engage the local people well enough, particularly the Indigenous gang.<sup>13</sup>

- 1.26 In Fitzroy Crossing, the Committee heard about the disconnect between Government visits and actual community needs with some describing a feeling

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<sup>11</sup> Mr Wayne Neate, Director, Technical and Development Services, Shire of Derby-West Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Ms Sarah Parriman, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Land Council, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 24.

<sup>13</sup> Mr Geoff Davis, Councillor, Shire of Derby-West Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 6.

as if they were in a fishbowl with many official visitors travelling to the disaster impacted community just to look at them and then move on again.

**Mrs O'Donnell:** I appreciate that we have a State Government and I respect the government, but, gee whiz, we had every minister possible visit. Fitzroy Crossing had more ministers in five weeks than they have had in 50 years.<sup>14</sup>

**Ms Carter:** ... Initially we had every Commonwealth and state government minister flying in here every second day saying, 'We feel for you; we know what you're going through, and we are in it for the long haul' — and then fly out again. We haven't seen or heard from them since.<sup>15</sup>

## **Riverine hydrography mapping**

- 1.27 Flooding is a natural occurrence in the North of Australia, which has long been characterised by vast riverine deltas that alternate between handling large volumes of water and experiencing dry periods.
- 1.28 By gaining a deeper understanding of water flow patterns at various flood levels, we can improve our ability to design and build towns that are more resilient to these conditions. This knowledge will enable us to create infrastructure and communities that can better withstand and adapt to the challenges posed by flooding.
- 1.29 Comprehensive research and studies are required to enhance our understanding of water flow dynamics and flood patterns in Northern Australia's riverine deltas. The studies should have a focus on:
- Hydrological modelling to predict water flow and flood behaviour at various levels, considering historical data and climate change projections.
  - An impact assessment of different flood scenarios on infrastructure, ecosystems, and communities to identify vulnerabilities and resilience opportunities.
  - Local community knowledge integration incorporation to complement scientific data and provide a holistic understanding of flood management.
  - Investigate urban planning and design strategies that enhance the flood resilience of towns and communities, including building approvals on flood plains and adaptive building techniques.
- 1.30 In Brisbane, the Committee heard the area has been developed with a significant focus on residential high-rises, some of which are located on flood plains. Concerns have been raised about the risks associated with living in high-rise

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<sup>14</sup> Mrs Vicki May O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> Ms Emily Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 24.

buildings in flood-prone areas, particularly regarding the challenges faced if essential services like elevators and power are disrupted during a flood.

### **Implement improved flood warning systems**

- 1.31 There is a need to establish an early warning system for tropical lows in the Kimberley region, similar to those used for cyclones and fires. We must ensure consistent and enhanced monitoring, with data that can be effectively communicated to higher authorities and integrated into broader emergency response frameworks.

**Mr Thomson:** ... When the rains began on the 27th, that system was over the Northern Territory, but it was predicted to come back and there was heavy rainfall—record rainfall, in fact, being predicted for the Kimberley at that point in time. It's a very important point to make because I think there was sufficient warning. I'll be contending today that there wasn't enough mobilisation at that early stage of the disaster. In fact, I'll also contend that tropical lows are often the most damaging systems in the north. Everyone gets very wound up—excuse the pun about cyclones—but cyclones are a fact of life. They cause intensive damage in a very narrow range, usually. But tropical lows are usually the cause of considerable flooding.<sup>16</sup>

### **Explore temporary accommodation options**

- 1.32 Strategies must be developed to quickly relocate people to safe locations during emergencies and facilitate their prompt return once conditions stabilise. We must investigate alternative solutions to temporary evacuation accommodation. One example heard by the Committee in Fitzroy Crossing was the "humanihut".
- 1.33 Importantly, a return plan to local communities for displaced individuals following an evacuation due to natural disaster is essential.

**Ms Dexter:** People are still displaced across the Kimberley as far as Perth, Broome, Port Hedland et cetera. Every accommodation centre in Derby was utilised: the Spinifex Hotel, the Mud Crab, the King Sound and the Lodge. We had people who were evacuated put into hotel facilities with alcohol and a whole range of different things, with no wrap-around services and no support, and no real sense of what was going on. There was no daily direction. In actual fact, at one point, it was owned up that people didn't even know who was here; they didn't actually have a list.<sup>17</sup>

**Mr Haerewa:** When we knew that the evacuees were going to go to Derby, I was in contact with the two state ministers, Ministers Dawson and Cook, pleading with them not to allow evacuees to go through to Derby because the road between Broome and Derby was going to be cut off. Their words to

<sup>16</sup> The Hon. Neil Thomson, MLC, Member for the Mining and Pastoral Region, Western Australian Parliament, *Committee Hansard*, 15 May 2023, p. 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ms Amanda Dexter, Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Derby-West Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 2.

me were, 'It is only going to be for a short time until we can find somewhere else to put them.' That created all sorts of consequences and social issues that the town couldn't handle at the time.

**CHAIR:** How far is Derby from Fitzroy Crossing?

**Mr Haerewa:** Derby is about 260 kilometres from Fitzroy Crossing. But the most important factor was that we were being cut off from Broome as well, so we were an island within an island.<sup>18</sup>

## Health risks

1.34 There is a need to address health risks associated with secondary impacts of floods. We must develop and implement a systematic approach to prevent mosquito-borne diseases, mould, and waterborne illnesses following flood natural disasters.

**Mr Williams:** ... We also have secondary impacts like disease outbreaks because mosquitoes are a vector for other illnesses. Unfortunately, there was a child who passed away in Fitzroy Crossing from a fairly significant virus, Japanese encephalitis virus. In a normal wet season those risks are prominent, even without the sort of incident that happened at Fitzroy Crossing this year.<sup>19</sup>

1.35 Retention of medical records upon evacuation is important. The Committee heard about community members being evacuated post flood to another city thousands of kilometres away, receiving medical care there and then returning back to their community with a gap in medical history.

**Ms O'Donnell:** The Derby Aboriginal Health Service were asked to provide health checks on those people, but, firstly, we had no record of their medical records. ... So, you just picked up 80 people and put them in Derby without thinking that they—

**Senator DAVEY:** Eighty vulnerable people ... who are already traumatised and confused because they've been taken from their homes.<sup>20</sup>

## Preservation of records in disaster-prone rural and remote communities

1.36 There is a need to develop a plan for the preservation of records in a natural disaster event with a focus on Indigenous Communities. A need to establish a comprehensive plan to safeguard important records and cultural heritage in rural and remote areas, especially in Indigenous communities vulnerable to natural disasters. This plan should include strategies for digitisation, secure

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<sup>18</sup> Mr Geoff Haerewa, President, Shire of Derby-West Kimberley, *Committee Hansard*, 16 May 2023, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Mr Keith Williams, Acting Chief Executive Officer, Shire of Broome, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Mrs Vicki May O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Ltd, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 16.

storage, and community engagement to ensure the preservation of valuable records and cultural artifacts for future generations.

**Ms Parriman:** ... the women's resource centre had boxes of family records that they needed to get out of Fitzroy. They weren't having any success getting prioritised on flights. 'Kimberley Land Council, how can you help us? We need to be able to get this out.' Those sorts of things.<sup>21</sup>

### **National stockpile location**

- 1.37 A National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) stockpile needs to be located in Western Australia to ensure swift and effective disaster response and recovery efforts in the region.
- 1.38 Western Australia is prone to a range of natural disasters, including cyclones, bushfires, and floods. Having a stockpile within close proximity ensures rapid deployment of essential supplies and equipment to affected areas, minimising response time and enhancing the effectiveness of emergency operations.

### **Telecommunications resilience**

- 1.39 By leveraging advanced technologies, we can improve the reliability and efficiency of communication networks during emergencies, ensuring timely and effective response efforts.
- 1.40 There is a need to expand on the role of NBN Co and other telecommunication services in disaster resilience.

**Senator REYNOLDS:** ... these events and the scale of these events are not unforeseen and are entirely predictable—not exactly where they will be, but there are areas that are more prone than others. So, if you know that there is a possibility of a wide outage, why aren't you doing more now to make these towers more resilient or looking for options?<sup>22</sup>

### **Backup power solutions**

- 1.41 There is a need for a mandate requiring backup power solutions to be installed on critical telecommunications infrastructure located in disaster-prone areas. This measure will enhance the resilience of communication networks during emergencies and ensure continuity of essential services for affected communities.
- 1.42 For example, in Parkerville, Western Australia, a three-day telecommunications outage caused by a freak storm in January 2024 highlighted the critical need for backup power. The absence of communication during this period posed significant risks, including potential new fires from lightning strikes, endangering both the community and volunteer fire brigades.

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<sup>21</sup> Ms Sarah Parriman, Deputy Chief Executive Officer, Kimberley Land Council, *Committee Hansard*, 17 May 2023, p. 23.

<sup>22</sup> Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 15.

**Mr Parkin:** ... The single biggest risk to the NBN network in the event of natural disaster is the resilience of the commercial power networks. Whenever we have a major event beyond our own infrastructure, power, power, and power become the three major priorities for our immediate focus and response.<sup>23</sup>

**Mr Sutherland:** ... Loss of mains power is a primary cause of Telstra network outages during natural disasters. To provide resilience against the loss of mains power, we invest in backup power systems, including batteries, generators and solar power generation.<sup>24</sup>

### **Emergency services coordination**

- 1.43 There is a need to include telecommunications providers in emergency services coordination meetings and designate telecommunications as a critical service in a disaster situation.
- 1.44 Collaboration and coordination between telecommunications companies is encouraged to collectively provide backup power solutions for shared infrastructure in disaster-prone areas.
- 1.45 By working together, these companies can ensure the resilience of communication networks and minimise disruptions during emergencies providing a lifesaving service.

**Mr Osborne:** ... Certainly, there's an opportunity for improvements in arrangements, but it needs to be something that is managed across mobile companies. It's no good throwing money independently at us or at Telstra where we have those shared sites. The better solution is to have site resilience, and that way everyone who would normally make communications through that site will have resilience, rather than picking winners.<sup>25</sup>

### **Explore investment opportunities in disaster communication technologies**

- 1.46 Investing in developing affordable technologies and satellite networks is essential to enhance disaster communication and response capabilities in disaster-prone areas where telecommunications infrastructure is often inadequate during crises. Examples of potential solutions include:
  - NBN Co Fly-Away Kits: Portable satellite communication kits that provide connectivity in disaster-affected areas.
  - Telstra's Cells on Wheels (CoWs): Mobile cell towers that can be deployed quickly to restore communication services.

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<sup>23</sup> Mr Phil Parkin, General Manager Network Operations, NBN Co Limited, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 10.

<sup>24</sup> Mr Peter Sutherland, Group Owner, Enterprise Managed Services, Telstra, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 14.

<sup>25</sup> Mr Alexander Osborne, Head, Regulatory, TPG Telecom, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 22.

- Hybrid Power Cubes: Modular power solutions combining multiple energy sources to ensure continuous power supply.
  - Innovative Technology Solutions: Exploring other advanced technologies to support critical sites during disasters.
- 1.47 Mr Alexander Osborne, Head of Regulatory at TPG Telecom, highlighted global trends in alternative power supplies that support critical telecommunications infrastructure:
- Mr Osborne:** ... The other trend around the world that we're seeing, and you mentioned this earlier, are things like power cubes. There are a variety of different types of alternative power supplies available. In fact, Vodafone in Germany has rolled out 750 wind turbines on 52 of its cell towers in Germany. Similarly, Deutsche Telekom has rolled out a solution with Ericsson to have self-sufficient power supply sites. Things like power cubes, solar cells, wind, alternative fuel generators, hydrogen generators and so on are useful things to do for things that are critical sites. Typically, in the network we would have sites that we would class as critical. They are a hub site for further sites that are daisy chained down the stream. If you keep the power to those critical sites, it means that you have fewer sites at the end of the daisy chain that you might have to roll a generator out to.<sup>26</sup>
- 1.48 Investing in these technologies will improve resilience and reliability in disaster response, ensuring that critical communication infrastructure remains operational when it is most needed.

**Senator the Hon Linda Reynolds CSC**  
**Senator for Western Australia**

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<sup>26</sup> Mr Alexander Osborne, Head, Regulatory, TPG Telecom, *Committee Hansard*, 1 March 2024, p. 22.



# Appendix 1

## New Zealand delegation

- 1.1 This appendix provides a summary of the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience's (committee) delegation to New Zealand (NZ) which occurred from 8 to 12 April 2024.
- 1.2 The committee members who attended the delegation included Senator Jacqui Lambie (Chair), Senator Tony Sheldon (Deputy Chair), and Senator Perin Davey (member).
- 1.3 The committee met with a range of stakeholders who each play an important role in NZ's disaster preparedness, response and recovery. The committee is grateful to have had the opportunity to meet with such a vast array of organisations, agencies and representatives and appreciated the openness of these individuals in sharing their expertise, knowledge and valuable experiences in dealing with natural disasters in NZ. The committee also thanks the Australian High Commission for facilitating such an insightful program.

### Tuesday, 9 April 2024

#### National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research

- 1.4 The committee met with the National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) and the following representatives:
  - Dr Rob Murdoch, Deputy Chief Executive;
  - Dr Andrew Tait, Chief Scientist for Climate, Atmosphere and Natural Hazards; and
  - Mr Geoff Baird, General Manager of Communications.
- 1.5 NIWA is a government-owned research organisation that is independently operated. Its purpose is to conduct leading environmental science to provide understanding of climate and the atmosphere and increase resilience to weather and climate hazards to improve safety and wellbeing of New Zealanders. It has 14 research and monitoring sites across NZ, as well as one in Perth, Australia.<sup>1</sup>
- 1.6 NIWA provided the committee with an overview of the impacts of climate variability in Australia and New Zealand and the challenges climate variability presents for disaster resilience. It was clear that NZ faced similar challenges to Australia. NIWA also discussed how climate modelling can be used to estimate the impacts of natural disasters and prepare for disaster events. NIWA noted that with artificial intelligence, they are able to forecast weather up to 35 days in

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<sup>1</sup> National Institute of Water and Atmospheric Research (NIWA) [website](#) (accessed 12 July 2024).

advance. NIWA emphasised that forecasting was key information for emergency planning and response.

- 1.7 Additionally, NIWA provided insights into the modelling of flood events and how this modelling can be used to gauge the impacts of weather events, including how this modelling can be used to assess and consider risk. Similar to the situation in Australia, NIWA noted that their flood mapping ability is also constrained by resourcing.

### **New Zealand Defence Force, Strategic Engagements Branch**

- 1.8 The committee met with the New Zealand Defence Force (NZDF), Strategic Engagements Branch and the following representatives:

- (Navy) CAPT Steve Lenik;
- (Airforce) GPCAPT Richard Deihl, Director of Operations;
- (Army) Lt COL Scott Cordwell;
- Group Captain Andrew Hoffman, Australian Defence Adviser to NZ, Australian High Commission; and
- Major Darren Smith, Assistant Australian Defence Adviser to NZ, Australian High Commission.

- 1.9 The NZDF outlined their role in responding to natural disasters and other national emergencies, as well as their relationship with Australia and Pacific neighbours. As discussed in chapter 4 of this report, the NZDF can be engaged under the *Defence Act 1990* to respond to national emergencies, by deploying at short notice to manage wild fires, search and rescue, and related operational outputs. The NZDF maintains experts who can assess the scale of a disaster and determine what personnel and equipment are needed.

- 1.10 The committee discussed NZDF's capabilities, the interaction between defence and other government bodies, and the role of volunteers and the Reserves in the context of responding to natural disasters. The committee learned that the NZDF attend a weekly weather report working group meeting for the purpose of sharing information across government. The meeting is led by the NZ National Emergency Management Agency (NZ NEMA), with other attendees including the Meteorological Service (MET) which provides weather forecast information, and Geological and Nuclear Science (GNS Science) which provides advice on earthquake information.

### **Student Volunteer Army**

- 1.11 The committee met with Ms Emily Byrne, now former Chief Executive of the Student Volunteer Army (SVA). As discussed in chapter 3 of this report, SVA was established in the wake of the 2010 Christchurch earthquake and mobilises student volunteers to respond to disaster events and assist their communities. The model is managed through university clubs which allows them to have hubs spread across the country, with the ability to come together and coordinate

nationally. Their model is based on Find + Build + Act + Share/Reflect (find a problem, build a solution, act and implement the plan, and reflect and learn).

- 1.12 Ms Byrne provided the committee with insights into how spontaneous volunteers can be harnessed, and the valuable contributions they can make to the community in the recovery phase, as well as building ongoing volunteerism throughout NZ. They discussed the programs being delivered in schools to build a culture of volunteering and giving back to the community.
- 1.13 Some of the challenges encountered by SVA that were discussed included: the health and safety of volunteers; liability; linking with community groups and emergency management; the need for funding to be able to harness technology to make registration of volunteers and tasks more efficient; and the need for ongoing funding, rather than constantly expanding and contracting based on grant funding. Ms Byrne noted that they are not currently funded by government but are working on building a relationship with NZ NEMA.

#### **New Zealand Red Cross**

- 1.14 The committee met with the CEO, Ms Sarah (Norm) Stuart-Black QSO, and General Manager, Emergency Management and International, Mr Sean Stewart, from the NZ Red Cross. The Red Cross is a well-known humanitarian organisation across the globe.
- 1.15 The NZ Red Cross has a role under the government's National Civil Defence Emergency Management Plan 2015. This plan sets out the roles and responsibilities of everyone involved in reducing risks and preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies. Under the plan, the NZ Red Cross assists with things such as psychosocial support, financial assistance, running evacuation centres, and household goods and service. It was noted that NEMA was considering how the NZ Red Cross could play a role in coordinating volunteers.
- 1.16 The NZ Red Cross emphasised their culture of 'compliment, not compete', stating that it is important that groups focus on how they can work together to achieve outcomes for communities. The NZ Red Cross noted they faced some challenges with raising revenue and managing public perception of the role and capacity of the NZ Red Cross.

#### **New Zealand Police**

- 1.17 The committee met with Deputy Commissioner Jevon McSkimming, Operational Services at the NZ Police and gained a better understanding of NZ Police's role in responding to disasters.
- 1.18 Unlike Australia, NZ does not have state governments and has just two tiers of government—the national government and local governments. The committee noted that because NZ was not constrained by as many levels of government as Australia, there were less entities to engage with which had benefits of

streamlining disaster response. Additionally, the NZ Police is a national force, rather than state-based which allowed for greater consistency and coordination at the national level.

- 1.19 The importance of empathy from government bodies when responding to disasters, as well as the need to invest in both the perception of safety and actual safety (to be safe, you have to feel safe), resonated with committee members.

### **Fire and Emergency New Zealand**

- 1.20 The committee met with:

- Mr Kerry Gregory, Chief Executive;
- Mr Bryan Dunne, Deputy Chief Executive; and
- Mr Nick Pyatt, Principal Advisor Operational Capacity.

- 1.21 Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ) was established in 2017 after the urban and rural fire services combined into a single, integrated fire and emergency services organisation. Its objectives are ‘reducing the incidence of unwanted fires and the associated risk to life and property’ and ‘protecting and preserving life, and preventing or limiting injury, damage to property, land and the environment’.<sup>2</sup> One of the main functions of FENZ is undertaking urban search and rescue.

- 1.22 The committee learned about the operation of FENZ and its role in responding to disasters, including that they have a mandate to be part of the local response and are often the first organisation on the scene. FENZ outlined their support to local governments with emergency management and acknowledged the importance of local organisations in responding to disasters in their communities.

- 1.23 Like Australia, FENZ have a workforce made up of both paid employees and volunteers. The committee learned that volunteers are not paid an allowance for up to 24 hours of service, and beyond 24 hours they receive an honorarium. Volunteers have operation skills maintenance requirements and must undertake core training. FENZ have been grappling with a similar issue identified by Australia’s fire and emergency services whereby they rely on the goodwill of employers to release their employees to volunteer in the emergency response space, including how to incentivise employers.

- 1.24 The committee also had an insightful discussion about risk management and how we can encourage individuals in the community to engage with risk, particularly the risks associated with the location they decide to reside in.

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<sup>2</sup> Fire and Emergency New Zealand (FENZ), ‘[What we do and why we do it](#)’ (accessed 15 July 2024).

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**Wednesday, 10 April 2024**

**Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery**

- 1.25 The committee met with the Hon Mark Mitchell MP, Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery, who shared stories about NZ’s experience of disaster recovery and response with the committee. It was noted that NZ is one of the world’s most likely countries to be hit by weather events, second to Bangladesh.
- 1.26 The Minister noted that a government inquiry was underway into the adequacy of NZ’s emergency management system on the North Island which was to be released on 23 April 2024.<sup>3</sup> The report found that NZ’s emergency management system did not have the capacity or capability to deal with significant, widespread events impacting multiple regions at once, and that the areas of preparedness, communication and infrastructure capacity required improvement.<sup>4</sup>
- 1.27 It was noted during the meeting that there was somewhat of a ‘post code lottery’ in the level of emergency recovery and response—highlighting some of the challenges facing NZ’s emergency management system.
- 1.28 The important role of iwi—kinship groups in Māori society—in emergency response due to their strong networks and ability to be proactive in the community, was emphasised. However, NZ’s emergency management legislation currently does not recognise a formal role for iwi, but it was noted that there is a proposal for iwi to join local governance bodies in discussions about how to best get them a seat at the table.

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<sup>3</sup> Note: the report has since been released and is available at [www.dia.govt.nz/Government-Inquiry-into-the-Response-to-the-North-Island-Severe-Weather-Events](http://www.dia.govt.nz/Government-Inquiry-into-the-Response-to-the-North-Island-Severe-Weather-Events) (accessed 15 July 2024).

<sup>4</sup> Henry McMullan, “[“Significant shortcomings” in emergency management system – report](#)”, 1News, 23 April 2024 (accessed 15 July 2024).

**Figure 1.1 Meeting with the Minister for Emergency Management and Recovery**



*Pictured: Senator Tony Sheldon, the Hon Mark Mitchell MP, Senator Jacqui Lambie, and Senator Perin Davey*

### **Opposition spokesperson for emergency management**

- 1.29 The committee also met with the Opposition (Labour Party) spokesperson for Emergency Management, Camilla Belich MP, the Hon Kerian McAultry MP, former Minister for Emergency Management, and Rachel Boyack MP, Chair of Governance and Administration Committee.
- 1.30 Mr McAultry shared his experiences as Minister for Emergency Management during Cyclone Gabrielle and the Auckland flooding response and recovery effort. The group also shared their views on the challenges that NZ faces in responding to and recovering from frequent weather events and the importance of formally acknowledging the fundamental role local iwi play in response and recovery efforts.

### **New Zealand Earthquake Commission**

- 1.31 The committee met with the NZ Earthquake Commission which is now known as the Natural Hazards Commission following a change in legislation in July 2024.
- 1.32 Chief Executive, Tina Mitchell, and Head of Risk Reduction and Resilience, Sarah-Jayne McCurrach, provided the committee with an understanding of the role and operations of the NZ Earthquake Commission which was established in 1945 as a unique response to NZ's active geological environment.
- 1.33 The Earthquake Commission is one of the world's leading providers of natural disaster insurance and are dedicated to reducing the impact on people and property when natural disasters occur. It administers the Natural Hazard fund

to ensure that everyone in NZ with a home insurance policy has a baseline level of cover.

- 1.34 It was highlighted that NZ has an extremely high property insurance rate (95 per cent) compared to other countries.

### **Insurance Council of New Zealand**

- 1.35 The committee met with the Hon Kris Faafoi, Chief Executive, and Sarah Knox, Consumer Affairs Manager, of the Insurance Council of NZ (ICNZ). ICNZ represents fire and general insurance companies and performs a key role in informing and educating consumers about key insurance issues and risks. ICNZ provided the committee with a better understanding of the insurance market in NZ and NZ's risk profile.
- 1.36 During the meeting, it was highlighted that risk mitigation by individuals and councils has a significant impact on insurance. It was noted that NZ faces similar issues as Australia in land planning and building in areas such as flood plains which can significantly impact insurance as well.

### **New Zealand National Emergency Management Agency**

- 1.37 The committee met with NZ NEMA, including the following representatives:
- Dave Gawn, Chief Executive;
  - Tania Gerrard, Chief Māori Advisor;
  - Jenna Rogers, Deputy Chief Executive of Strategic Engagement;
  - Stefan Weir, Chief of Staff;
  - Savanah Dantin, International Engagement; and
  - Malcolm Miller, Risk and Delivery Team.
- 1.38 The committee heard about NZ NEMA's role and operations, including within locally led response and recovery efforts. NZ NEMA is similar to Australia's NEMA by providing leadership and coordination across the emergency management system.
- 1.39 The importance of investing in resilience was highlighted, noting that response and recovery costs NZ 4.3 per cent of gross domestic product (GDP), annualised over the last 20 years. The representatives also shared their personal experiences in responding to recent emergencies, such as the North Island weather events of February 2023.
- 1.40 NZ NEMA discussed the important role of the Māori people in responding to natural disasters, particular in first response, noting that there is a challenge in building resilience. It was indicated that some local authority civil defence emergency management (CDEM) groups have a Māori or iwi officer on board, but not all of them, and that NZ NEMA was looking to improve this engagement.

- 1.41 During the meeting, the challenges associated with volunteers was discussed including the management and coordination of volunteers, incentivising volunteers, and ensuring employers support their employees to volunteer.
- 1.42 The committee was taken on a tour of the National Crisis Management Centre which is maintained to be ready for an emergency at any time with its own emergency water, food and power supply, an independent IT network and telecommunications system, and seismic protection for earthquake loadings, amongst other essentials.

**Figure 1.2 The National Crisis Management Centre press room**



*Pictured: Senator Tony Sheldon, Senator Jacqui Lambie, and Senator Perin Davey*

## Thursday, 11 April 2024

### Geological and Nuclear Science

- 1.43 The committee met with GNS Science and received a tour of the National Geohazards Monitoring Centre. The representatives present at this meeting included:
- Chelydra Percy, Chief Executive;
  - Dr Graham Leonard, Natural Hazards and Risk Theme Leader;
  - Dr Bruce Girdwood, Data Science & Geohazards Monitoring Manager;
  - Mr Chris Costley, Principal Communications Adviser; and
  - Mr Clinton Zirk, Geohazard Operation Centre Manager.
- 1.44 GNS Science operates the National Geohazards Monitoring Centre which opened in 2018. It is one third funded by the government, one third by competitive science grants and one third commercial funding. The centre provides around-the-clock eyes on monitoring of geohazards in NZ, including

earthquakes, tsunamis, volcanoes and landslides. It is the first facility of its kind to monitor four hazards in the one facility. GNS Science's role is to monitor and respond to natural hazards, understand where the event has occurred, potential consequences of the event and pass along the information to the relevant party.

- 1.45 GNS Science explained to the committee the importance of their work in building community resilience and discussed their contribution to our understanding of geohazards, stewardship of national policy, improving natural hazards risk management systems, producing trusted science advice, and knowledge exchange.
- 1.46 GNS Science noted that they work with Australian institutions, such as Geoscience Australia and universities, on climate and coastal hazards research, including wild fires, floods and storm surges.

**Figure 1.3 The National Geohazards Monitoring Centre, GNS Science**



*Pictured: Dr Bruce Girdwood, Senator Tony Sheldon, Senator Perin Davey, Senator Jacqui Lambie, Chelydra Percy, Dr Graham Leonard, and Mr Clinton Zirk.*

### **NZ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet**

- 1.47 The committee met with the NZ Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Cyclone Recovery Unit. The Chief Executive Climate Recovery, Katrina Casey, and Executive Director Strategic Policy and Legislation, Anna Wilson-Farrell, explained the role of the unit in providing strategic oversight and coordination of recovery efforts.
- 1.48 The Cyclone Recovery Unit was established in March 2023 as the Government's response and recovery from the North Island extreme weather events, specifically Cyclone Gabrielle which caused approximately NZ\$13.5 billion in damages in February 2023. Their main purpose is to lead, coordinate and

monitor severe weather recovery across government. The unit supports local engagement with communities, iwi, businesses, local government, regional groups and others to coordinate planning and reporting as well as provide advice on system risk and assurance.

### **New Zealand Treasury**

- 1.49 The committee met with NZ Treasury, including Steve Cantwell, Principal Advisor, and Dan Jury, Senior Analyst, from the Financial Markets Branch.
- 1.50 NZ Treasury discussed the upcoming legislation that would change the Earthquake Commission into the Natural Hazards Commission and aims to update and modernise the NZ insurance market.
- 1.51 Treasury noted that NZ's focus has tended to be on earthquakes, but the more varied weather events being experienced on the North Island have given rise to a renewed focus on other disaster events, and that these risks are perceived as being more similar to the risks faced in Australia.

### **Christchurch City Council**

- 1.52 The committee met with Christchurch City Council's Executive Leadership Team, including Mary Richardson, Interim Chief Executive, and Andrew Rutledge, General Manager for Civil Communities.
- 1.53 The Christchurch City Council shared their experience in leading response and recovery efforts as a council and their relationship with NZ NEMA. They discussed the challenges they faced with managing volunteers, rebuilding, improvements to infrastructure, and managing their relationship with the central government. Regarding spontaneous volunteers, the council said they had learned it is better to coordinate and empower them rather than trying to control them like they did in the past.
- 1.54 The council also discussed the importance of focusing on supporting the most vulnerable people in the community, promoting awareness about climate change and risk, building community capacity to deal with events, learning lessons from disaster events, and ensuring recovery is in a form that is future-proof.

### **Regional CDEM Group Recovery Managers**

- 1.55 The committee met with Brenden Winder, Christchurch CDEM Manager, and Richard Ball, Canterbury CDEM Group Recovery Manager.
- 1.56 CDEM groups identify hazards and risks, prepare Civil Defence Emergency Management plans, make arrangements for the declaration of a state of emergency in the group's area, as well as arrangements for cooperation and coordination with other CDEM groups. There are sixteen CDEM groups across NZ and comprise of a committee of elected councillors from each council within

regional boundaries. CDEM Groups are required to consult with the public on the development of their plans.

- 1.57 A recovery manager coordinates and facilitates immediate, medium and long term recovery activities. Recovery Managers can be appointed at national, group and local level. CDEM Groups must appoint a suitably qualified and experienced person to be a Group Recovery Manager and may appoint one or more Local Recovery Managers.
- 1.58 The CDEM Group Managers discussed the critical role of CDEMs in response and recovery efforts, the challenges they face and the importance of local relationships and partnerships. CDEMs play an important role in advocating for the community's recovery needs and funding as they have limited direct authority or resources. Canterbury CDEM emphasised that a plan is only as good as people's knowledge of it. Plans therefore need to be widely understood and agreed, integrated at all levels, have role clarity, personnel trained, and the structures and processes agreed. Insurance was also a key issue raised whereby it was noted that infrastructure is rebuilt like for like because that is what you are insured for, even if it is not appropriate for future resilience.

#### **Quake City – Canterbury Museum**

- 1.59 The committee received a personalised private tour of Quake City at Canterbury Museum.
- 1.60 Quake City is a special exhibition designed to help understand the events that unfolded during the earthquakes in Christchurch and Canterbury in February 2011. It includes numerous displays and features hands-on displays, videos and treasures rescued from the rubble after the earthquakes.
- 1.61 Through the tour the committee gained insight into what it might be like to experience an earthquake, the immediate aftermath and the ongoing recovery effort. They had the opportunity to hear personal stories and experiences of locals and saw examples of ingenuity and comradery from the local community in the recovery effort.

#### **Friday, 12 April 2024**

##### **NZ NEMA Chief Science Adviser**

- 1.62 The committee met with NZ NEMA's Chief Science Adviser, Professor Tom Wilson. Professor Wilson's research is focused on disaster risk assessment and rural disaster resilience and, through his role at NZ NEMA, he supports the effective use of science within emergency management policy and practice.
- 1.63 Professor Wilson provided the committee with insight into the important role of science in disaster preparedness and building resilience, as well as the risks that NZ faces and the challenges in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disaster events. Some of Professor Wilson's key points included:

- there has been a degradation of resilience due to dependence mentality;
- risk is compounding and relative vulnerability is growing;
- socio-economic pressures are also compounding, increasing the complexity of responses and putting pressure on traditional risk transfer mechanisms;
- repeated disasters have an impact on social cohesion;
- the importance of planning specifically for severe or catastrophic events – some plans cannot be scaled up for significant events; and
- the need to use science for better planning and response.

### **Canterbury CDEM Group**

1.64 The committee met with following members of the Canterbury CDEM Group:

- James Thompson, Canterbury CDEM Group Manager and Controller;
- Andrea Williams, Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu Senior Adviser;
- Jamie Ruwhiu, Program Manager, Whanau and Emergency Response for Ngāi Tahu; and
- Gavin Treadgold, Regional CDEM Planner.

1.65 The committee learned more about the Canterbury CDEM Group which covers the largest geographical area of CDEM Groups and deals with a wide range of significant hazards and risks. The committee gained a better understanding of the variation between CDEM Groups across NZ and the importance of building local relationships. The Group's plans to support Ngāi Tahu, the principal Māori iwi of the South Island, was also discussed.

1.66 During the meeting, the role of volunteers was canvassed, including the challenges of managing spontaneous volunteers and opportunities to leverage the deployment of the public service in times of emergency.

### **Justice Precinct Emergency Services leadership**

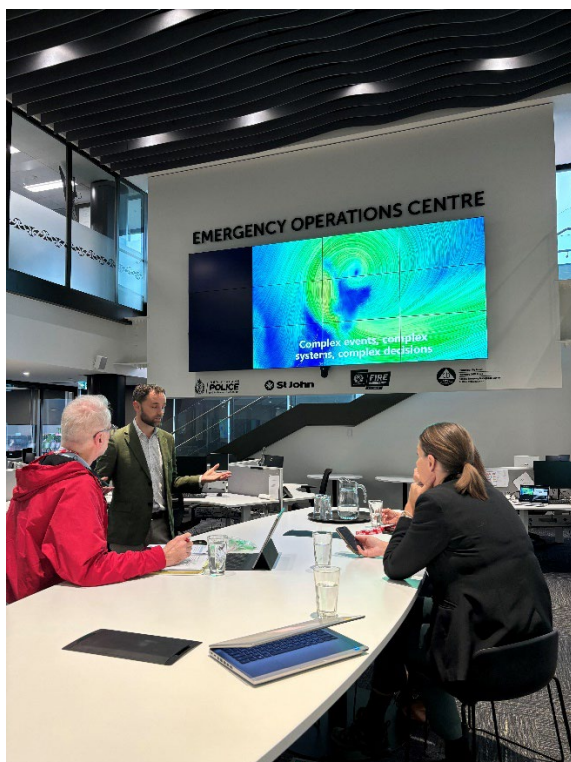
1.67 The committee met with Inspector Bryan Buck, Operations Manager for Canterbury Police District, joined by James Thompson and Gavin Treadgold from Canterbury CDEM Group.

1.68 The Christchurch Justice and Emergency Services Precinct (the Precinct) brings together all justice and emergency services in one purpose-built, leading-edge precinct in Central Christchurch. It is a \$300 million anchor project led by the Ministry of Justice and comprised of three buildings—the Justice Building, the Emergency Services Building and a car park for operational vehicles.

1.69 The Precinct leadership gave the committee some background on the history of the justice precinct, highlighting that the co-location of responders facilitates relationship building and coordination during 'peace time' (in between disaster events). This allows them to leverage those relationships during emergencies.

1.70 The committee also received a tour of the emergency operations centre and gained an understanding of how it came to be within the justice precinct.

**Figure 1.4 The Emergency Operations Centre, Justice Precinct**



*Pictured: Senator Tony Sheldon, Professor Tom Wilson, and Senator Perin Davey*

### **Ngāi Tahu representatives**

- 1.71 The committee met with Andrea Williams, Te Runanga o Ngāi Tahu Senior Adviser, and Jamie Ruwhiu, Program Manager, Whanau and Emergency Response for Ngāi Tahu.
- 1.72 As noted above, Ngāi Tahu is the principal Māori iwi of the South Island. In this meeting, the committee learned more about the Ngāi Tahu and the critical role they play in responding to emergency events throughout the South Island. The challenges Ngāi Tahu experience with interacting with the bureaucracy of government was discussed, as well as the importance of recognition, relationship-building, cultural competency and working in partnership.

### **University of Canterbury and QuakeCoRE**

- 1.73 The committee met with Professor Brendon Bradley, Dr Tom Logan and Professor John Hopkins from the University of Canterbury's Centre for Earthquake Resilience (QuakeCoRE).
- 1.74 QuakeCoRE is located at the University of Canterbury and aims to transform the earthquake resilience of communities through innovative research, human capability development and national collaborations. QuakeCoRE focuses on establishing multi-institutional national research programs that are internationally networked to implement pathways of earthquake resilience through system-level science.

1.75 The committee gained a better understanding of the practical outcomes of collaborative research in discussing the innovative and collaborative research model of QuakeCoRE. The collaborative model reduces competition between universities and provides better value for taxpayer funding compared to funding lots of independent research projects.

## Appendix 2

### Submissions and additional information

#### Submissions

- 1 LtCol (Retd) Brian C Kay
- 2 Centre for Disaster Studies
- 3 FNQ Growers
- 4 Regional Development Australia NT
- 5 The Good Ancestors Project
- 6 Australian National Audit Office
- 7 Moreton Bay Regional Council
- 8 Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman
  - Attachment 1
- 9 WA Government
- 10 Australian Consumers Insurance Lobby
- 11 The Police Association Victoria
- 12 Museums & Galleries of NSW
- 13 Geoscience Australia
- 14 Trust for Nature
- 15 Lifeline Australia
- 16 Department of Health and Aged Care
- 17 Local & Independent News Association (LINA)
- 18 National Farmers Federation
- 19 Federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA)
- 20 Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)
- 21 Gippsland Emergency Relief Fund Inc
- 22 Dr Adrian d'Hagé
- 23 Townsville Lot Owners Group
  - Attachment 1
- 24 Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre Inc (NNIC)
- 25 Department of Defence
- 26 Caravan Industry Association of Australia
- 27 Disaster Relief Australia
- 28 Mr James Milligan MLA
- 29 Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience
- 30 Strata Community Association Queensland
- 31 Australian Council of Social Service
- 32 Queensland Fire and Emergency Services
- 33 Miss Miranda Booth
- 34 Attorney-General's Department
- 35 Housing Industry Association

- 36 Natural Hazards Research Australia
- 37 St Vincent de Paul Society National Council
- 38 Greenpeace Australia Pacific
- 39 NSW Rural Doctors Network
- 40 Phoenix Australia - Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health
- 41 Hon Martin Aldridge
- 42 The Salvation Army Australia
- 43 Tasmanian Council of Social Service (TasCOSS)
- 44 Habitat for Humanity Australia
- 45 National Disaster Recovery Organisation
- 46 RSPCA Australia
- 47 Isolated Children's Parents' Association Australia
- 48 Australian Banking Association
- 49 Australian Local Government Association
- 50 Surf Life Saving Australia
- 51 GIVIT
- 52 UNICEF Australia
- 53 Volunteering Australia
- 54 Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal
- 55 Townsville City Council & Townsville Local Disaster Management Group
- 56 Australian Red Cross
  - 56.1 Supplementary to submission 56
- 57 The Xfactor Collective Foundation
  - 57.1 Supplementary to submission 57
- 58 Kyogle Council
- 59 The Community Broadcasting Association of Australia
- 60 National Insurance Brokers Association
- 61 National Association for the Visual Arts
- 62 NRMA
- 63 Deloitte
- 64 Australian Climate Service
- 65 Mr Mark Coulton MP
- 66 Friends of the Earth Australia
- 67 South Australian Country Fire Service
- 68 Australian Automobile Association
- 69 Minderoo Foundation
  - Attachment 1
- 70 ACT Government
- 71 BMT
- 72 Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Ltd (AFAC)
- 73 Anglicare Australia

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- 74 United Firefighters Union of Australia
- Attachment 1
- 75 IAG
- Attachment 1
- 76 Rural Doctors Association of Australia
- 76.1 Supplementary to submission 76
- 77 Northern Land Council
- 78 Ms Caroline Dawson
- 79 Suncorp Group
- 79.1 Supplementary to submission 79
- 80 Department of Home Affairs
- 81 NSW State Emergency Service
- 82 National Emergency Management Agency
- 83 Australian Centre for Rural Entrepreneurship (ACRE)
- Attachment 1
- 84 National Indigenous Australians Agency
- 85 Business Council of Australia
- 86 Foodbank Australia
- 87 Save the Children and 54 reasons
- Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2
  - Attachment 3
  - Attachment 4
- 88 Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) WA
- 89 The Duke of Edinburgh's International Award Australia
- 90 Mr Ray Bange OAM
- Attachment 1
- 91 Rural Aid
- 92 Shipping Australia Limited
- 93 United Professional Firefighters Union of WA
- 94 Australian Strategic Policy Institute
- 95 Margaret Shaw OAM
- 96 The ARC Centre of Excellence for Climate Extremes
- 97 Northern Territory Government
- 98 Mr Chris Ainsworth
- 99 QLD Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management (IGEM)
- Attachment 1
- 100 National Waste Recycling Industry Association
- Attachment 1
- 101 Tasmanian Government

- 102 Carpentaria Land Council Aboriginal Corporation
- 103 University Centre for Rural Health
- 104 Kaldor Centre for International Refugee Law
- 105 PHN Cooperative
  - Attachment 1
- 106 Fortem Australia
  - 106.1 Supplementary to submission 106
- 107 Shire of Carnarvon
- 108 City of Hobart
- 109 International Association of Emergency Managers
- 110 Sydney Environment Institute
- 111 National Legal Aid
- 112 Shire of Wyndham and East Kimberley
- 113 Public Safety Training & Response Group
- 114 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom Australia
- 115 Southern Cross University
- 116 Northern Australia Indigenous Reference Group
- 117 Christian Venues Association
- 118 Mr Ian Symons
- 119 Dr Taha Chaiechi
- 120 Lismore a Way Forward
- 121 NSW Reconstruction Authority
- 122 St John Ambulance Australia
- 123 Byron Shire Council
- 124 Our Future Northern Rivers & Lismore Citizens Flood Review Group
  - 124.1 Supplementary to submission 124
- 125 Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service Ltd
- 126 Northern Rivers Autism Association Limited
  - Attachment 1
- 127 Oliver Costello
- 128 Tweed Shire Council
- 129 Clubs Australia
- 130 Name Withheld
- 131 Australian National Veterans Arts Museum
- 132 Crisis Resilience in MS (Murdoch University Research)
- 133 Delegation of the European Union to Australia
- 134 Ms Wendy Harper
- 135 National Transport Research Organisation
- 136 Mr Neil Smail
- 137 CREST NSW
- 138 Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN)
- 139 West End Community Association

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- 140 Sandpiper Australia
- 141 Mr Raymond Whitehead
- 142 Water Services Association of Australia
- 143 Australian Risk Policy Institute
- 144 City of Darwin
- 145 Mr Kevin Parkes
- Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2
  - Attachment 3
  - Attachment 4
- 146 Holding Hands Under Ground Incorporated
- 147 Royal Norwegian Embassy
- Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2
  - Attachment 3
- 148 Dr George Walker
- 149 Veterans, Emergency Services, and Police Industry Institute Australia
- Attachment 1
- 150 Engineers Australia
- 151 Crisis Cleanup Australia
- 152 Mr John Bentley
- 153 Mr James Redgrave
- 154 Cyclone Testing Station, James Cook University
- Attachment 1
  - Attachment 2
  - Attachment 3
  - Attachment 4
- 155 Australian Veterinary Association
- 156 Dr Anthony Bergin
- 157 Optus
- 158 Colin Moloney
- 159 Australian Association of Social Workers
- 160 Fire Brigade Employees Union of New South Wales and the United Firefighter's Union of Australia, Union of Employees, Queensland
- 161 HopgoodGanim Lawyers
- 162 Australian Business Volunteers
- 163 NSW Wildlife Information and Rescue Service Inc (WIRES)
- 164 Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine (ACRRM)
- 165 Australian Association of Psychologists Incorporated
- 166 Toll Aviation
- 167 Mr Jelenko Dragisic
- 168 National Indigenous Disaster Resilience

- 169 Name Withheld
- 170 Name Withheld
- 171 Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- 172 Laing O'Rourke
- 173 Name Withheld
- 174 Australian Rural Leadership Foundation

### **Tabled Documents**

- 1 National Indigenous Australians Agency opening statement, tabled at a public hearing 14 March 2023, Canberra
- 2 Correspondence from Minister Watt to the NSW Farmers Far North Coast, tabled at a public hearing 29 June 2023, Tweed Heads
- 3 Leedal River Flows document and photos, tabled at a public hearing 16 May 2023, Fitzroy Crossing
- 4 Nindilingarri document, tabled at a public hearing, 16 May 2023, Fitzroy Crossing
- 5 NBN Co Limited opening statement, tabled at a public hearing 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 6 Telstra opening statement, tabled at a public hearing 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 7 Images of Telstra assets impacted during natural disasters, tabled at a public hearing 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 8 TPG Telecom Opening statement, tabled at a public hearing 1 March 2024, Canberra

### **Additional Information**

- 1 PhD Thesis provided to the Committee
- 2 Exmouth Chamber of Commerce additional information
- 3 Additional information provided by Lismore City Council
- 4 Lismore Way Forward Flood Data
- 5 United Services Union additional information
- 6 Flood Recovery Study provided by Dr Hanabeth Luke
- 7 Additional information provided by NSW Farmers Far North Coast Branch
- 8 Additional information provided by North Townsville Community Hub
- 9 Additional information provided by Healthy North Coast (PHN North Coast) and PHN Cooperative
- 10 Additional information provided by Kurilpa Futures Group
- 11 Additional information provided by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services - Hazards, Disasters and Your Community Handbook (2003)
- 12 Additional information provided by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services - Curriculum review
- 13 Additional information provided by the Queensland Fire and Emergency Services - Draft proposal

- 14 Canadian Defence Energy and Environment Strategy - provided by BMT
- 15 DHA and NEMA Alternative Management Capabilities for Crisis Response - provided by BMT
- 16 Emergency Management Strategy for Canada - provided by BMT
- 17 UK Defence Climate Change and Sustainability Strategic Approach - provided by BMT
- 18 US Defense Climate Adaption Plan - provided by BMT
- 19 Letter from the Civil Aviation Safety Authority, received 25 January 2024

### **Answers to Questions on Notice**

- 1 Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 14 March 2023, Canberra
- 2 Bureau of Meteorology - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 14 March 2023, Canberra
- 3 Department of Home Affairs - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 14 March 2023, Canberra
- 4 Department of Defence - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 14 March 2023, Canberra
- 5 NSW State Emergency Service - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 13 April 2023, Sydney
- 6 Australian Local Government Association - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 13 April 2023, Sydney
- 7 NSW Rural Fire Service - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 13 April 2023, Sydney
- 8 Queensland Fire and Emergency Service - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 12 April 2023, Brisbane
- 9 South Australian Country Fire Service - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 21 April 2023, Adelaide
- 10 Tasmanian Government - answers to questions on notice from a public hearing 20 April 2023, Hobart
- 11 Business Council of Australia - answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 20 April 2023, Melbourne
- 12 South Australian State Emergency Service - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 21 April 2023, Adelaide
- 13 National Indigenous Australians Agency - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing. 14 March 2023, Canberra.
- 14 National Indigenous Australians Agency - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing. 14 March 2023, Canberra.
- 15 National Indigenous Australians Agency - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing. 14 March 2023, Canberra.
- 16 Western Roads Federation - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 18 May 2023, Perth

- 17 Department of Defence - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 18 May 2023, Perth
- 18 Department of Fire and Emergency Services - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 18 May 2023, Perth
- 19 Minderoo Foundation - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 18 May 2023, Perth
- 20 NSW SES - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 29 June 2023, Tweed Heads
- 21 Townsville City Council & Townsville Local Disaster Management Group – Cr Jenny Hill AM, Mayor of Townsville and Chair of the Townsville Local Disaster Management Group - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 21 September 2023, Townsville
- 22 Moreton Bay City Council - answer to questions on notice from a public hearing, 22 September 2023, Brisbane
- 23 Department of Defence - answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 21 September 2023, Townsville
- 24 Northern Territory Government - answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 19 September 2023, Darwin
- 25 Bureau of Meteorology - answers on notice from a public hearing, 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 26 Tech Policy Design Centre, ANU on behalf of TPG Telecom – answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 27 TPG Telecom - answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 28 Telstra – answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 29 NBN Co Limited – answers to questions on notice from a public hearing, 1 March 2024, Canberra
- 30 Bureau of Meteorology - answers on notice from a public hearing, 1 March 2024, Canberra

# Appendix 3

## Public hearings

***Tuesday, 14 March 2023***

**Committee Room 2S3**

**Parliament House**

**Canberra**

*National Emergency Management Agency*

- Mr Joe Buffone, Deputy Coordinator General of Emergency Management and Response

*Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience*

- Dr Margaret Moreton, Executive Director (via videoconference)

*National Resilience Taskforce*

- Ms Kendra Morony, First Assistant Secretary National Resilience Taskforce

*CSIRO*

- Dr Jaclyn Brown, Research Director, Climate Intelligence Program (via videoconference)
- Dr Daniel Metcalfe, Director-Environment

*Bureau of Meteorology*

- Dr Peter Stone, Group Executive, Business Solutions

*National Indigenous Australians Agency*

- Ms Lauren Gray, Branch Manager, Environment
- Ms Yvonne Uren, Branch Manager, Health and Wellbeing
- Mr Kevin Brahim, Group Manager, West and South Group (via videoconference)
- Ms Bec Smith, Branch Manager, Kimberley (via videoconference)
- Mr Tom Dyer, Branch Manager, NT Policy (via videoconference)

*Disaster Relief Australia*

- Mr Geoffrey Evans, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Anastasia Bougesis, Government Relations

*Department of Defence*

- Air Vice Marshal Stephen Chappell DSC CSC OAM, Head of Military Strategic Commitments
- Ms Amanda Toms, Acting First Assistant Secretary Strategic Policy

***Wednesday, 12 April 2023*****Leichardt Room****Hotel Grand Chancellor****Brisbane***Local Government Association of Queensland*

- Ms Alison Smith, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Michael Lollback (via teleconference)

*Queensland Fire and Emergency Services*

- Ms Joanne Greenfield, Deputy Commissioner
- Mr Stephen Smith, Acting Deputy Commissioner, Fire and Rescue Service

*QLD Office of the Inspector-General Emergency Management*

- Mr Alistair Dawson, Inspector-General of Emergency Management  
Queensland

*National Disaster Recovery Organisation*

- Mr Wayne Smith, Chief Executive Officer

***Thursday, 13 April 2023*****Sydney Masonic Centre****Sydney***NSW State Emergency Service*

- Mr Daniel Austin, Deputy Commissioner

*NSW Rural Fire Service*

- Commissioner Rob Rogers AF SM, Commissioner

*Australian Local Government Association*

- Cr Linda Scott, President

***Wednesday, 19 April 2023*****Collins Room****The Savoy Hotel****630 Little Collins Street****Melbourne***Natural Hazards Research Australia*

- Mr Andrew Gissing, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Iain MacKenzie AFSM, Chairperson

*Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council Ltd*

- Mr Rob Webb, Chief Executive Officer
- Ms Carlene York, Board President

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*Business Council of Australia (via teleconference)*

- Ms Jennifer Westacott, Chief Executive Officer

***Thursday, 20 April 2023***

**Chancellor Room 6**

**Hotel Grand Chancellor**

**Davey Street**

**Hobart**

*Hobart City Council*

- Mr Geoff Land, Manager City Infrastructure
- Mr Christopher Kuchinke, Manager City Resilience

*Communications Electrical Plumbing Union (Tasmania)*

- Mr Michael Anderson, Secretary

*Tasmanian Government*

- Mr Todd Crawford, Acting Deputy Secretary Policy and Delivery,  
Department of Premier and Cabinet
- Mr Jonathan Higgins, Deputy State Controller

***Friday, 21 April 2023***

**Crystal Room**

**Stanford Plaza**

**150 North Terrace**

**Adelaide**

*South Australian Country Fire Service*

- Mr Brett Loughlin, Chief Officer
- Mr Shane Richardson, Advisor

*South Australian State Emergency Service*

- Mr Chris Beattie, Chief Officer

***Monday, 15 May 2023***

**Kimberley Grande Resort**

**20 Victoria Highway**

**Kununurra**

*The Hon. Neil Thomson MLC, Private capacity*

*Shire of Wyndam and East Kimberley*

- Mr Tony Chaffer, Deputy President
- Mr David Menzel, President
- Mr Alfred Nagaiya, Senior Economic Development Officer

*Wunan Foundation*

- Ms Prue Jenkins, Chief Executive Officer

*Kimberley Development Commission*

- Mr Chuck Berger, Chief Executive Officer

*Ord River Co Operative*

- Mr Daniel Raymond, Chief Executive Officer

*East Kimberley Chamber of Commerce*

- Ms Clare Smith, Chief Executive Officer

*MC Corporation*

- Mr Matt Smith, Chief Executive Officer

*Aviair/Helispirit*

- Mr Michael McConachy, Managing Director

***Tuesday, 16 May 2023******Fitzroy River Lodge******277 Great Northern Highway******Fitzroy Crossing****Shire of Derby and West Kimberley*

- Mr Geoff Haerewa, President
- Ms Amanda Dexter, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Wayne Neate, Director, Technical and Development Services
- Mr Geoff Davis, Councillor

*Shire of Halls Creek*

- Mr Malcolm Edwards, President

*Kaluwan*

- Mr Joe Ross, Director, Bunuba Dawangarri Aboriginal Corporation

*Fitzroy Womens' Centre*

- Ms Emily Carter, Chief Executive Officer, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre
- Ms Sue Thomas, Strategic Policy Lead, Marninwarntikura Women's Resource Centre (via teleconference)

*Nindilingarri Cultural Health Service*

- Ms Maureen Carter, Chief Executive Officer

*Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation*

- Mr Antonio Giometti, Chief Executive Officer

- Mr Peter Murray, Chairperson

*Leedal Pty Ltd*

- Mr Patrick Green, Chairman
- Mr Wayne Bergmann
- Mr Phillip Hams

***Wednesday, 17 May 2023***

**Oaks Broome Hotel  
99 Robinson Street  
Broome**

*Shire of Broome*

- Mr Christopher Mitchell, Deputy Shire President
- Mr Keith Williams, Acting Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Stephen Kipkurgat, Manager, Health, Emergency and Rangers

*Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services*

- Mrs Vicki O'Donnell, Chief Executive Officer

*Kimberley Land Council*

- Ms Sarah Parriman, Deputy Chief Executive Officer

***Thursday, 18 May 2023***

**Doubletree Hilton Northbridge  
100 James Street  
Perth**

*Minderoo Foundation*

- Mr Adrian Turner, Director

*Western Roads Federation*

- Mr Campbell Dumesny, Chief Executive Officer

*13 Brigade (Army)*

- Colonel Craig Madden, Deputy Commander

*Department of Defence*

- Air Vice Marshal Stephen Chappell, Head, Military Strategic Commitments

*RAAF Curtin/Derby Base*

- Wing Commander James Collisson, Senior Australian Defence Force Officer

*Department of Fire and Emergency Services*

- Mrs Melissa Pexton, Deputy Commissioner
- Mr Rick Curtis, Executive Officer

- Mr William Blackshaw, Superintendent

***Tuesday, 27 June 2023***

**Gawandii Room**

**Ballina Surf Club**

**Lighthouse Parade**

**Ballina**

*Social Futures*

- Mr Tony Davies, Chief Executive Officer

*Byron Shire Council*

- Mr Michael Lyon, Byron Shire Mayor
- Mr Mark Arnold, General Manager
- Ms Sarah Boule, Recovery Coordinator

*Richmond Valley Council*

- Ms Angela Jones, Director Community Service Delivery

*Resilient Lismore*

- Ms Elly Bird, Director

*Wardell Core*

- Mr Joel Orchard, Executive Director

*Young Change Agents*

- Ms Margaret O'Brien, Co-Founder and Chief Executive
- Ms Emma Wilson

*Holding Hands Under Ground Inc (HHUG)*

- Ms Ella Rose Goninan, Co-Director

*Ms Arrabella Doublas, Private capacity*

*Southern Cross University/Living Lab*

- Mr Benjamin Roche, Vice-President, Engagement

*Rotary Club of Ballina*

- Mr Colin Lee, Flood Coordinator
- Ms Donella Kinnish, Flood Recovery Housing Project Manager

*Xfactor Collective Foundation Ltd*

- Ms Julia Keady, Executive Director
- Ms Annette Herschtal, Resources and Advocacy

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**Wednesday, 28 June 2023**

**Invercauld House  
163 Invercauld Road  
Goonellabah**

*Lismore City Council*

- Councillor Peter Colby
- Councillor Electra Jensen
- Councillor Steve Krieg
- Mr Eber Butron, Chief Community Officer

*Ms Janelle Saffin MP (via teleconference), Private capacity*

*United Services Union*

- Mr Graeme Kelly, General Secretary
- Mr Ross Crawford, Delegate

*Mr Kevin Hogan MP (via teleconference), Private capacity*

*Ms Tamara Smith MP (via teleconference), Private capacity*

*Healthy North Coast*

- Ms Monika Wheeler, Chief Executive

*A Way Forward*

- Mr David Tomlinson, Convenor
- Ms Hannah Bethwick, Member
- Ms Annie Kia, Member
- Dr Hanabeth Luke, Member
- Prof Jerry Vanclay, Member

**Thursday, 29 June 2023**

**Twin Towers Conference Centre  
2 Wharf Street  
Tweed Heads**

*Tweed Shire Council*

- Councillor Meredith Dennis, Deputy Mayor
- Mr Troy Green, General Manager
- Mr Danny Rose, Acting Director, Engineering, and Manager, Roads and Stormwater
- Ms Doreen Harwood, Enterprise Risk and Emergency Management Officer and Local Emergency Management Officer
- Ms Charlotte Neilson, Coordinator Flood Restoration

*Kyogle Council*

- Mr Graham Kennett, General Manager
- Mr Peter Kelly, Community Recovery Officer

*NSW State Emergency Service*

- Mr Gregory Swindells, Acting Assistant Commissioner and Director

*Murwillumbah Community Centre*

- Ms Wendy Constantine, Manager
- Ms Eva Sans Orio, Community Services Coordinator
- Ms Evelyn To, Flood Recovery Worker

*Murwillumbah CORE and Hub 2484*

- Ms Kerry Pritchard, Operations Manager

*Tweed Residential Park Homeowners Association*

- Mrs Sandy Gilbert, Advocate

*Ms Sylvia Roylance, Private capacity**NSW Farmers' Far North Coast Branch*

- Mr Craig Huf, Chair

*Tweed Chamber of Commerce*

- Mr Warren Polglase, President

*Nimbin Neighbourhood and Information Centre*

- Ms Natalie Meyer, Manager

*Ocean Shores Community Association*

- Mrs Jan Mangleson, President

***Tuesday, 19 September 2023******Vibe Hotel Darwin Waterfront******7 Kitchener Drive******Darwin****Northern Territory Emergency Services*

- Ms Fleur O'Connor, Director

*Regional Development Australia Northern Territory*

- Dr Deepika Mathur, (via teleconference)

*Northern Territory Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Logistics*

- Mr Garry Fischer, Director, Emergency Management
- Ms Kirrily Chambers, Executive Director, Infrastructure Planning and Operational Support

- Mr Robert Pemble, Executive Director, Civil Services
- Mr Anthony Woodcock, Executive Director, Maintenance
- Ms Claire Brown, General Manager, Transport and Civil Services

*Australian Red Cross*

- Mr Andrew Coghlan, Head of Emergency Services Strategy (via teleconference)
- Ms Annette Plowman, Emergency Services Manager

*Local Government Association of the Northern Territory*

- Mr Sean Holden, Chief Executive Officer
- Mr Jefferey McLaughlin, Mayor, Barkly Regional Council

*City of Darwin*

- Mr Kon Vatskalis, Lord Mayor, Darwin Council
- Mr Chris Kelly, Executive Manager Corporate and Customer Service

*Northern Territory Government*

- Mr Scott Perry, Acting Director, Emergency Management Unit, Department of Chief Minister and Cabinet

***Thursday, 21 September 2023***

**Hotel Grand Chancellor**

**334 Flinders Street**

**Townsville**

*Townsville City Council*

- Cr Jenny Hill, Mayor
- Mr Zachary Dawes, Acting Team Manager, Emergency Management
- Mr Matthew Richardson, Acting Local Disaster Coordinator; and General Manager, Property, Fleet and Emergency Management

*Fortem Australia*

- Mr James Maskey, Director of Policy

*North Townsville Community Hub*

- Mrs Sandra Elton, Manager

*Australian Defence Force - Commander JTF 646M 3 Brigade*

- MAJGEN Stephen Jobson, Commander, Aviation Command

*State Emergency Service - Northern Region*

- Mr Daryl Camp, Regional Director
- Mr Paul Cannon, Acting Controller
- Mr John Forde, Area Controller

**Friday, 22 September 2023**  
**Brisbane Airport Conference Centre**  
**2 Dryandra Road**  
**Brisbane**

*BMT*

- Mr Ian Cumming, Senior Principal Engineer, Climate Risk and Resilience
- Mr Greg Fisk, Senior Principal Consultant and Global Lead, Climate Risk and Resilience

*PHN Cooperative*

- Mrs Elizabeth Reay, Chief Executive Officer, PHN Cooperative
- Ms Libby Dunstan, Chief Executive Officer, Brisbane North
- Ms Julie Sturgess, Chief Executive Officer, Country to Coast Queensland

*Moreton Bay City Council*

- Mr Christopher Barnes, Manager, Emergency Management and Public Safety

*Public Safety & Training Response Group*

- Mr Trevor Arnold, Operations Manager
- Mr Anthony Lind, Special Projects Manager

*Prof. Ray Bange OAM, Private capacity*

*West End Community Association*

- Ms Melissa Hilditch, Manager, Community Plus Queensland
- Mrs Melinda McInturff, Community Resilience Coordinator, Community Plus Queensland

*Resilient Kurilpa*

- Ms Helen Abrahams, Volunteer
- Ms Mary Maher, Volunteer

*Kurilpa Futures Group*

- Mr Peter Griffin, Member
- Mr Maurice McCallum, Member

*West End Community House*

- Mr Sebastian Vanderzeil, Vice President

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***Friday, 1 March 2024***

**2R1**

**Australian Parliament House  
Canberra**

*Bureau of Meteorology*

- Dr Andrew Johnson, CEO and Director (via videoconference)

*NBN Co Limited*

- Mr John Parkin, Chief Operations Officer
- Mr Phil Astle, General Manager, Network Operations

*Telstra*

- Mr Jim Skouteris, Principal Operate and Maintain InfraCo
- Ms Lisa McTiernan, Government Relations
- Mr Gerard Tracey, Principal Engineer - Network Connectivity Service, Global Networks & Technology
- Mr Peter Sutherland, Group Owner, Enterprise Managed Services

*TPG Telecom*

- Mr Alexander Osborne, Head of Regulatory
- Mr Ross Mitchell, Head of Government Relations
- Mr Angus Clearie, Manager Mobile Core Solutions and Architecture (via videoconference)
- Mr Clinton Fick, General Manager Core Network Applications (via videoconference)