



Tablelands Regional Council

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Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

Dear Sir or Madam

SUBMISSION TO SENATE INQUIRY: RECENT TRENDS IN PREPAREDNESS FOR EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS

Please find below Tablelands Regional Council's submission to the Senate Inquiry considering Recent Trends in Preparedness for Extreme Events. The following comments are provided in response to the Terms of Reference:

B (II): the costs of extreme weather events and impacts on natural ecosystems, social and economic infrastructure and human health,

Since amalgamation in 2008, Tablelands Regional Council's recorded disaster management costs (under NDRRA) totalled in excess of \$91 Million for damage to local government assets and for counter-disaster operational expenses with the cost to all levels of government continually escalating. In addition, the tendency for State and Federal Governments to respond with 'hand outs' immediately post-disaster is becoming the norm and does little to foster the development of a resilient and self-reliant society.

B (III): The availability and affordability of private insurance, impacts on availability and affordability under different global warming scenarios, and regional social and economic impacts;

On a number of occasions, post TC Yasi the community have been vocal in raising issues regarding increasing premiums and the affordability of buildings and contents insurance. The trend appears to be one of increasing insurance premiums across the board meaning community members not at risk of flooding or storm surge to pay increased premiums on behalf of those that are. In addition, a reluctance by some insurance companies to even offer home and contents cover for flood and cyclone events is becoming far more common in Far North Queensland with many community members voicing concerns of increases of over \$1000 per year since the region was impacted by Yasi. These increases are making insurance less affordable for a greater number of community members which will lead to under insuring of private property, which in turn will increase costs to all levels of government in the response and recovery to any future disaster events.

C: An assessment of the preparedness of key sectors for extreme weather events, including major infrastructure (electricity, water, transport, telecommunications), health, construction and property, and agriculture and forestry;

The Tablelands region, an area covering 64,768km² is prone to a number of natural disaster events - isolation and flooding during the wet season, bushfires in the dry season and the annual risk of cyclones. Parts of the region lack the reliable communications infrastructure that others take for



granted. Where telephone and mobile networks are available, they have proven to be prone to failure at critical times creating problems for communities and disaster response agencies alike. Damage to the power and communications infrastructure will always impede the ability of communities to bounce-back to some form of normality following an event.

Transport routes are essential for continued supply of goods; food and equipment for our communities with many of our smaller communities in our rural and remote areas are subject to isolation during the wet season, often for an extended period. Disaster events regularly disrupt the coastal supply route which often gets closed as a result of flooding and the inland route which runs through our region is also problematic due to low level bridges which are also subject to inundation. Although, Department of Transport and Main Roads have made a commitment to upgrade these routes, continual funding of upgrades and flood proofing of State controlled roads and local roads is required to reduce the period of isolation and lessen the impact of the event on our communities.

E: The current roles and effectiveness of the division of responsibilities between different levels of government (federal, state and local) to manage extreme weather events

Tablelands Regional Council considers that the Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements provide for a division of responsibilities between different levels of government to manage extreme weather events. These arrangements have been developed from many years experience and when functioning, enable Local Disaster Management Groups to effectively support their local communities with additional support from other tiers of government as required. The division of responsibilities between different levels of government can easily be confused when State and Federal agencies fail to remember or acknowledge the key role of local government and the fact that it is local government that is best placed to support local communities.

If you have any queries in relation to this submission, please do not hesitate to contact me using the details provided at the top of this letter.

Yours faithfully

IAN CHURCH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER