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Parliament House
SYDNEY

SUBMISSION – Recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this important issue. My experience of 13 years as a local government representative in a coastal area sub tropical has given me experience in a range of issues associated with extreme weather events.

As I was only made aware of the inquiry late I apologise for the lack of supporting evidence and detail to accompany my submission but I am willing to provide further information if required.

I have lived in the Byron Shire for over 20 years and am aware of the coastlines history of cyclones, storms and coastal erosion. The Byron Shire Council implemented a planning process which is known as 'planned retreat' in 1988 that limits the level of development in the 'at risk' coastal zone. The shire had experienced a series of cyclones and storms in the 1950's and 1970's that created extreme erosion including the destruction of a village known as Sheltering Palms. The NSW undertook an extensive study that reported in 1978, Hastings to Byron Bay Study. This study informed the development of the time limited occupation of the coastal risk zones. The basis of governments' duty of care relies on informed strategic planning and the recognition of risk to public life and property requires responsible action by government in the approvals for development. I believe that risk avoidance is the key issue and that the most important aspect is appropriate strategic planning that considers known / historical risks and the modeling of potential climate change risks, primarily sea level rise. The planning process is the most effective place to address the risk potential and to ensure that risks are avoided, therefore I believe there should be a national standard for planning processes.

Over the last 20 years I have experienced a number of storm events and witnessed the damage that is caused. The shire has not been subjected to a major cyclone but based on past history it is inevitable that it will happen. I refer the committee to a study undertaken by **Dr Peter Helman – Coastal Storms** that outlines the history of storms and this presents a serious risk in terms of the current level of development in the coastal zone which has been approved since the 1970's while we have been in a low storm period.

My experience on council has provided an understanding of the importance of the early planning work that was done to restrict the bulk and scale of development in the coastal erosion zone but I believe that there needs to be a national approach to the principles of coastal zone planning to protect future residents of severe risk. I draw your attention to the significant work that was undertaken in the Senate Inquiry report '**Time to act is Now**' 2008 that makes recommendations that should be implemented to address the risks associated with coastal zone living and climate change.

Local Government is the primary authority for approval of development in the coastal zone and I hold extreme concerns for the future safety of life and property. I am deeply concerned that the NSW Government has withdrawn support the previous ALP Governments '**Sea Level Rise Planning Guidelines**' that provided guidance to councils for assessment of coastal and estuary planning.

I believe that this move by the State Government creates a risk for coastal habitation and development and for the financial security of councils in the future. The potential for future claims against local government if extreme events occur and properties are damaged or destroyed is of great concern. Councils are required to consider the 'known' factors when assessing development or when rezoning land, I don't believe that a State Government not requiring councils to undertake long term assessments would be a reasonable defence at law. I raise this in light of a court case in NSW , **Egger Vs Gosford City Council.**

Terms of reference comments.

(a) recent trends on the frequency of extreme weather events, including but not limited to drought, bushfires, heatwaves, floods and storm surges;

(b) based on global warming scenarios outlined by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation of 1 to 5 degrees by 2070:

(i) projections on the frequency of extreme weather events, including but not limited to drought, bushfires, heatwaves, floods and storm

surges,

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

(iii) the availability and affordability of private insurance, impacts on availability and affordability under different global warming scenarios, and regional social and economic impacts;

(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;

(d) an assessment of the preparedness and the adequacy of resources in the emergency services sector to prevent and respond to extreme weather events;

(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;

(f) progress in developing effective national coordination of climate change response and risk management, including legislative and regulatory reform, standards and codes, taxation arrangements and economic instruments;

(g) any gaps in Australia's Climate Change Adaptation Framework and the steps required for effective national coordination of climate change response and risk management; and

(h) any related matter.