Senate Inquiry into Recent Trends in and Preparedness to Extreme Weather Events

LGAQ Submission

18 January 2013

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association setup solely to serve councils and their individual needs. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting and representing local councils since 1896, allowing them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places that count; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and delivering them the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

Submission

Senate Inquiry into recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events

That the following matters be referred to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry and report by 20 March 2013:

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

NO COMMENT:

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;

COMMENT:

- ✓ Of key concern to local government is access to appropriately downscaled information for local government area planning, adaptation decision making and emergency response planning. The LGAQ understands that not all data can be effectively downscaled and remain meaningful, however, where it is possible, best available information should be made available.
- ✓ To date, neither the Australian nor the Queensland State governments have committed to ensuring such data is collected and appropriately delivered to stakeholders, leaving the burden of data collection, modelling and analysis to local governments who are the least appropriately resourced level of government to do so.
- ✓ Currently, raw data collection is ad hoc, undertaken by a variety of actors using differing methodologies and beyond the capability of end users to identify what data is appropriate for their own specific purposes. A similar situation exists with data analysis and interpretation.
- ✓ End users are left vulnerable to litigation and liability claims because those contesting decision-making are able to successfully argue in court that a different methodology for data collection, modelling or analysis should have been used.
- ✓ National standards and guidelines are required.

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

COMMENT:

- ✓ Currently available cost data is often not in holistic, manageable formats that could assist councils to properly understand the potential overall costs of extreme weather events. This makes overall mitigation against community impacts difficult. Therefore the focus of most local government mitigation strategies is on the more readily measurable aspects of potential impacts (eg minimise loss of life, mitigate physical impact on homes and businesses).
- ✓ Many assessments that are undertaken post-event focus on the immediate and most debilitating human and personal/business financial impacts to assist response services in meeting these urgent needs. However, these assessments often lack a broad-based

understanding of the consequential economic losses across rural and primary industry sectors.

- ✓ The intrinsic environmental, cultural and social value of natural assets is difficult to measure before extreme weather events and even more difficult to estimate as a component of the broader community loss after the event.
- ✓ Methodologies for the measure of potential community impacts should be available that assess a wide range of community, social, environmental and economic impacts to enable the development of broad-based mitigation strategies for severe weather.
- ✓ These measures should also provide pathways to better understanding of consequential impacts following events in the broader community.

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

NO COMMENT

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;

COMMENT:

- ✓ The NDRRA determination betterment provisions provide funding for improving the resilience of specified assets (essential public assets) under specified conditions (NDRRA provisions activated by the State) after damage by a recognised event (as defined by the determination). This narrow scope has resulted in only one betterment application being approved to date. Broadening the scope of events (i.e. include heat wave and drought) and allowing mitigation works would improve the preparedness of this infrastructure.
- ✓ Heat wave and drought are specifically excluded from the NDRRA (ref: Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements Determination 2012, Part 2). Recognising these phenomena as disasters in the determination will provide resources for communities to better prepare, respond, and recover from these events.
- ✓ From a long term resilience building perspective, of the 73 councils in Queensland the LGAQ estimates that the majority of councils are not where they should be to avoid significant future impacts across all future extreme weather hazards. Approximately 2/3 of councils will have undertaken some work in a particular area e.g. bushfire, coastal hazard, etc. A few large councils are in the 'whole of organisation, holistic hazard' planning and/or early implementation stages. Approximately a dozen are approaching the planning stages. The main reasons for the current levels of adaptation activity are:
  - Lack of readily available data and data analysis;
  - Low capacity to undertake the work in many regional and low population local government areas;
  - Competing priorities for limited resources;
  - Low/no community demand for action.

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

NO COMMENT

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;

COMMENT:

- ✓ The comprehensive approach to disaster management includes prevention, preparation, response, and recovery. The LGAQ recognises that no one level of government is able to properly manage all four elements, nor can any one element be properly managed in isolation.
- ✓ A collaborative approach is needed to ensure the most effective solution. The Federal Government has critical resources to contribute through agencies including Geoscience Australia, CSIRO, ADF, and the Bureau of Meteorology. State governments are best placed to manage their assets, especially major infrastructure (rail, roads, ports, etc.) as well as the coordination and resourcing of the emergency services. Local governments are best placed to coordinate and facilitate disaster management in their jurisdiction and lead recovery operations in their community.

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;

COMMENT:

- ✓ The LGAQ recognises the Australian Government and COAG's activities to date, including:
  - Funding of research through the National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility and CSIRO Climate Change Adaptation Flagship;
  - Funding the capacity building programs: Local Adaptation Pathways Program; and Coastal Adaptation Pathways Program;
  - Increasing community and stakeholder awareness via the *First and Second Pass National Sea Level Rise Risk Assessments* and other reports;
  - Senate Inquiry into the Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation;
  - Current development of a Climate Change Adaptation Policy to augment its existing policy statement and *Developing a National Coastal Adaptation Agenda* report;
  - Recently endorsed COAG Select Council on Climate Change Committee *2012 Work Program for Management of the Coastal Zone*.
- ✓ However, the LGAQ has not been able to determine whether the Work Program for Management of the Coastal Zone has been funded or how the government intends to facilitate end user (particularly local government) participation and feedback into these projects.
- ✓ The consensus is that the establishment of systems, standards and legislative and regulatory frameworks to effectively coordinate and empower key sectors (in particular local government) is overdue.
- ✓ The COAG Select Council on Climate Change Committee recently adopted Roles and Responsibilities for Climate Change Adaptation in Australia has no authority and maintains status quo.

- ✓ State and territory local government associations would welcome departmental engagement in policy and implementation projects.

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

COMMENT:

- ✓ The framework was scheduled for review in year four. This review does not appear to have occurred. The LGAQ are not aware of any consultation with the local government sector and cannot find a revised version of the framework.
- ✓ The input to and the outcomes of the recent Productivity Commission Inquiry into the Barriers to Effective Climate Change Adaptation would suggest that several years on from the preparation of the framework, Australia still does not have a cohesive or comprehensive understanding of the range and extent of risks being faced by the community and industry or the factors influencing planning and decision making about climate change adaptation action.
- ✓ While there has been extensive (and necessary) research into all aspects of climate change and adaptation, the outcomes of this work will take a number years to filter into key operational areas of local government without better engagement of and participation by end users. This requires greater investment in participatory programs such as the Coastal Adaptation Pathways (CAP) program and unlike the CAP program, a plan and funding for ongoing engagement with participants and other relevant stakeholders to integrate and imbed program findings through peer to peer networks.
- ✓ Implementation of the framework for coastal regions requires greater focus and investment.
- ✓ A key gap in the framework is in how decision makers are to address the cross cutting issues of individual sectoral responses. Decision makers need to be appropriately equipped to be able to identify and understand the consequences of adaptation actions for a specific sector such as infrastructure and human settlements on other sectors such as biodiversity and agriculture and have the policy frameworks, information and decision support tools to avoid and mitigate such impacts. The LGAQ recommends investment in the development of integrated adaptation response governance, planning and implementation.