

## **MINISTER WATT OPENING STATEMENT**

The Albanese Government is committed to improving the country's disaster preparedness, response and resilience capability. And we have been taking major steps to achieve this.

As many of you would be aware, Australia is currently in the midst of the 2023-2024 Higher Risk Weather Season.

Traditionally October to April is the peak time for natural disasters, though as we've seen in the past, this doesn't mean we don't see major events in other parts of the year, and we must remain prepared.

Firstly I want to acknowledge the ongoing efforts of the National Emergency Management Agency. The Coordinator-General Brendan Moon, Deputy CGs Jill Charker and Joe Buffone and their staff have worked tirelessly, particularly over the Summer as we responded to tropical cyclones, floods, storms, heatwaves and bushfires across large parts of the country.

In many of these events, through NEMA, we also provided planning support as well as response and recovery personnel and resources.

NEMA is a young department – having merged Emergency Management Australia and the National Recovery and Resilience Agency in September 2022 to create a single, enduring, end-to-end agency.

I congratulate NEMA on the significant work they've undertaken in that time to provide national leadership and support response efforts.

I, of course, also recognise and thank the efforts of a number of organisations who have gone above and beyond since this committee last met. This includes; not-for-profit and volunteer personnel, the Australian Defence Force and other Commonwealth agencies, and State and Territory Governments and agencies.

### **DISASTER RECOVERY**

Natural disasters have impacted 7 out of 8 Australian States and Territories in the past year and half alone.

More than half of Australian Local Government Areas have experienced a natural disaster since July 2022 – many, more than once.

In that time, the Albanese Government has financially supported 73 natural disaster response efforts.

Together with State and Territory Governments, the Albanese Government cost-shares a range of help for Councils including road repairs and clean up efforts. In many cases we've also provided grants or payments for individuals, small businesses, primary producers, non-profits and sporting clubs.

The Albanese Government has also cost-shared over \$2.6 billion in extraordinary bespoke support for 11 of the most severe events.

We have also provided \$166 million directly into the bank accounts of Australians impacted by major disasters through the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment and Allowance.

And a benchmark of the Albanese Government is that we don't turn our back after a disaster - that we continue to work with lead agencies in the months and years after a disaster to advocate and get the best result possible for locals.

## **PREPAREDNESS**

With the intensity and frequency of natural disasters only set to increase due to a changing climate, we have commissioned a number of reviews into funding and governance arrangements, as well as resourcing arrangements, so that we can implement long-term, fit-for-purpose plans.

And I note the Discussion Paper into the future of Commonwealth disaster capability has released its public submissions today, to look at how we resource disasters from a national perspective in the years to come.

The Albanese Government is shifting the dial to preparedness, rather than just response – with more investment in disaster mitigation and resilience through the Disaster Ready Fund, and Risk Reduction programs.

## **DISASTER READY FUND**

When we came to Government we were met with a long laundry list of disaster mitigation and resilience projects that State & Territory Governments and Local Councils had developed, and had been seeking a national partner to help deliver.

We have begun to make progress on that backlog through the creation of the Disaster Ready Fund, which delivers up to \$200 million a year from the Federal Government. It's mostly co-funded by delivery partners so that we can invest in around \$400 million annually for projects that proactively keep communities safer.

Round 1 projects are underway, and Round 2 is currently open for submissions.

While we would be significantly further along in these projects if this work had begun a decade sooner, it's good to see national leadership and investment in this important work.

## **CONCLUSION**

I appreciate the open and constructive way all members of the Parliament have engaged with my office and my Department. And I look forward to continuing that relationship as we face future disasters.