

Senate Estimates Opening Statement

Reporting period 1 September 2023 – 31 December 2023

Thank you Chair and Committee for allowing me to make a statement today.

This Higher-Risk Weather Season has clearly highlighted the vulnerabilities of Australian communities to a range of weather-related events.

However, we also recognise that many communities are still in recovery across the country well before this current season.

Since July 2022, 73 declared disasters have impacted over half of Australia's Local Government Areas.

In the last quarter alone, Australians have combatted bushfires in Western Australia, and faced cyclones, severe storms and flooding across Queensland, the Northern Territory, Victoria, and New South Wales. Heatwaves have also been a challenge for communities and energy systems around the country.

Our systems and first responders have been tested, however, through the strong partnerships forged by NEMA, we have faced these events with coordinated, whole-of-nation responses.

Financial support is flowing in response to the recent disasters in Queensland, Victoria and the Northern Territory.



This is in addition to previous support that has been rolled-out to assist communities in times of crises. Working with state and territory governments, since July 2022, we have:

1. delivered almost \$99 million in support through the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment
2. provided just under \$22 million in financial relief to people through the Disaster Recovery Allowance
3. supported small businesses and primary producers in Victoria and Queensland with cost-shared funding, and
4. committed approximately \$1.16 billion in Category C/D measures to Victoria and Queensland.

Recovery requires more than financial support; it takes holistic assistance to support a holistic recovery. In response to recent disasters NEMA is:

- continuing to facilitate requests for assistance, which led to the deployment of the Australian Defence Force to Far North Queensland and South East Queensland, and their assistance in the evacuation of Wujal Wujal
- supplying shelter and essential services like water treatment systems through our Humanihuts in Far North Queensland
- deploying volunteers from Disaster Relief Australia who worked alongside the ADF to assist impacted communities, and



- embedding expert teams with local authorities to conduct damage assessment to support recovery efforts and enable practical and targeted Australian Government assistance.
- We will maintain on-the-ground support for as long as needed through our coordination and planning network.

NEMA is actively applying lessons learned to better serve communities into the future.

As experienced during the South East Queensland storms and Tropical Cyclone Jasper, fast moving, intense, complex weather phenomena are challenging our warning systems, emergency management agencies and the community.

Evidence of this can be seen through the recent After Action Review on Tropical Cyclone Jasper and South East Queensland.

This review included input from local government, Queensland response authorities, the Bureau of Meteorology, and NEMA.

Key themes from the review include that:

- community expectations of warnings and emergency advice has increased with the presence of social media and past lived experiences
- weather forecasting and warnings are complex, and this particular event was especially complex



- speed to action and speed to decision is particularly important when supporting communities before, during and after crises
- there are opportunities for greater alignment between the Bureau's products and the Australian Warning System
- disaster management arrangements are most effective when state, district and local components are synchronised, and
- there is a need for additional training for local, district and state emergency managers and decision makers to increase familiarisation of warning products.

Relief and recovery have been prominent themes recently, but we've also remained focussed on our mission of enabling more secure, stronger and resilient Australian communities.

Our focus on preparedness, prevention and mitigation to combat natural disaster risk has seen us:

1. launch Round 2 of the Disaster Ready Fund which will deliver up to **\$200 million** of funding for risk reduction and resilience
2. deliver **16** Higher-Risk Weather Season preparedness briefings to key sectors with over 2,100 attendees
3. facilitated **14** Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committees



4. work with our partners to deliver projects like the New Fitzroy River Bridge in Western Australia
5. build the National Emergency Management Stockpile - which has seen Humanihuts deployed to disasters in FNQ
6. improve insight sharing through the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee, and
7. deliver the final recommendations of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

NEMA plays a critical role in leading the national approach to future challenges.

Preparing our systems, capabilities, and communities, is key to a disaster-resilient future. This year NEMA will:

- Deliver on the NEMA-led strategic reviews related to funding arrangements and emergency management capabilities
- Continue working with our partners including the states and territories, local governments, industry, not-for-profits, community-based organisations, and our international partners to deliver initiatives that drive disaster risk reduction, and
- prepare for the upcoming Higher Risk Weather Season to ensure our systems and people are ready to support Australian communities when they need it most.

Thank you, I now welcome your questions.

