



AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION

**Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster
Resilience**

20 February 2022

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ALGA Submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is the national voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the country. In structure, ALGA is a federation of State and Territory Local Government Associations. This submission should be read in conjunction with any separate submissions received from State and Territory Associations as well as individual councils.

ALGA was established in 1947 and throughout its history has been closely involved in issues of national significance affecting the local government sector. ALGA has enjoyed a close, productive working relationship with the Commonwealth Government as part of Local Government's important role in the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from emergencies.

The Committee's focus is primarily on the role of the Australian Defence Force in responding to disasters. While ALGA directs some comments to this issue, we do not have an endorsed ALGA Board position on this issue. We take the opportunity to make comments more broadly on the role and needs of local government in disasters and in the face of more frequent and intense disaster events.

More detail on ALGA's key points below is contained in Attachment 1. Motions submitted by councils to our National General Assembly in 2021 and 2022 on emergency management issues are contained in Attachment 2.

Local government in Australia makes a substantial contribution to disaster relief, recovery and management.

There is evidence to show that councils need additional support to undertake the enormous task of better preparing their communities for disasters and rebuilding after extensive damage to public and private infrastructure.

Councils urgently need further funding assistance to reduce disaster risks, and mitigate the impacts of future disaster events.

They need funding assistance to be able to invest in new technologies, increase road resilience and begin to tackle the huge road repair and reconstruction task.

For smaller regional rural and remote councils, additional funding is imperative for them to be able to rebuild their communities and to increase community resilience to future disasters. Smaller councils have least access to local tax revenue and rely heavily on federal funding for financial viability.

ALGA has called on state and territory jurisdictions to fully implement Recommendation 11.1 of the Royal Commission into Natural National Disaster Arrangements - *“that where State and Territory Governments delegate responsibilities to local government, they need to ensure that they retain oversight and understanding of the capabilities and capacity of local government to perform these responsibilities, and to provide support as necessary”*.

ALGA seeks funding over 3 years, at a total cost of \$5.7 million from the Commonwealth to increase local government preparedness for disasters across the country.

ALGA also calls for a new targeted mitigation fund for local government to build infrastructure to a more resilient standard. We call for \$250 million per year over 4 years to immediately enable disaster affected councils to repair their infrastructure and ensure new infrastructure is built to a more resilient standard.

The Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) need to build betterment into recovery and reconstruction. ‘Build back better’ should be a core value and overriding principle of the DRFA.

Please contact Monica Telesny, Director Policy,

if you require further information.

Yours sincerely

ALGA President

ATTACHMENT 1

Background

Local Government in Australia makes a substantial contribution to disaster relief, recovery and management. This includes direct financial support as well as in-kind support and assistance. Local Governments are established and governed by State and Territory Government legislation, which means the roles and responsibilities undertaken by councils vary between jurisdictions and between councils depending on their capacity and the natural disaster risks faced by their communities.

Councils need to prepare for the unavoidable impacts of climate change (adaptation) and have a significant role in reducing the degree of climate change impacts which may occur (mitigation) and exposure to disaster risk by their communities.

However, there is a mismatch between the amount of local government infrastructure exposed to climate change risks and the resources that local government have to carry out effective adaptation to manage these risks. Australia's efforts to address and respond to climate change is not taking full advantage of the opportunity for partnership and collaboration with local government.

Councils look after one-third of all public assets in Australia, around \$530 billion including roads, bridges, buildings, land, machinery and equipment, but collect but about 3.5 per cent of total Australian tax revenue via rates. The remaining 96.5 per cent of all taxes are collected by state and federal governments. ([National State of the Assets Technical Report – Our Assets, Our Opportunity, 2021](#)).

Boosting the capacity of local government

ALGA welcomes the commitment of the Government to providing up to \$200 million per annum to build disaster resilience and to reduce disaster risk. ALGA has repeatedly called for dedicated mitigation funding in its Budget Submissions, Federal Election campaigns and submissions to inquiries over many years, and we are pleased the Labor Government has responded to our advocacy by committing to a permanent mitigation fund – the Disaster Ready Fund. However, while this funding is a good start, there is an urgent need for dedicated funding for local government, particularly after recent disaster events which impacted the majority of councils across the nation, so that councils are funded to undertake urgent mitigation works to prepare their communities for the future.

The recent series of disasters across Australia have had major impacts on the majority of our councils. In 2022 there were 46 disasters declared, with 524 disaster support declarations across 316 local government areas.

There is no doubt that councils need additional support to undertake the enormous task of better preparing their communities for disasters and rebuilding after the extensive damage after the flooding. Many are already seriously financially challenged with some not financially viable.

Flooding across the east coast saw more than 82,000km of roads impacted in NSW, Queensland, Victoria and South Australia. In January 2023, Western Australia and the Northern Territory were also impacted by serious flooding.

The cost of repairing flood-damaged council roads across eastern Australia alone has been estimated to cost \$3.8 billion (ALGA and the Australian Road Research Board). The extensive damage and repair estimate highlights the need for a fundamental rethink of road construction, maintenance and funding. Roads need to be built to a more resilient standard, which will ultimately be more expensive. Councils urgently need further funding assistance to be able to invest in new technologies, increase road resilience and begin to tackle the huge road repair and reconstruction task.

In addition to the road repair task, councils also need to deal with other damaged community infrastructure – community buildings, levees, sport and recreational facilities, as well as landfills/transfer stations and in NSW and Queensland, water infrastructure, which is the responsibility of councils in those states.

For smaller regional rural and remote councils, additional funding is imperative for them to be able to rebuild their communities and to increase community resilience to future disasters. Smaller councils have least access to local tax revenue and rely heavily on federal funding for financial viability.

Councils very much appreciate the assistance provided through the Australian Defence Force (ADF), but it was clear during the 2019-2020 bushfires that there could have been far more clarity in deploying and tasking the ADF response effort. Understanding what the ADF was able to do to help communities was not well understood, and how the ADF could be best utilised. Councils stressed the need for more cooperation and collaboration and a better understanding of ADF capabilities.

ALGA is pleased that the Royal Commission has recommended improvements to existing arrangements for obtaining ADF assistance.

State and Territory Government support for local government

While State and Territory Government have primary responsibility for managing disasters, they delegate roles and responsibilities to local government. The Royal Commission was very clear in their recommendation 11.1 – that where State and Territory Governments delegate responsibilities to local government, they need to ensure that they retain oversight and understanding of the capabilities and capacity of local government to perform these responsibilities, and to provide support as necessary.

They also need to recognise that the capability and capacity of local governments to undertake their delegated responsibilities varies across the country and depends on both their size, rate base and the resources available to them.

Following the devastating series of cascading disaster events, councils need support from both State/Territory and Commonwealth Governments more than ever to rebuild their communities.

Cooperation and collaboration between Australian, state, territory and local governments is vital in national natural disasters, particularly in disasters that affect multiple communities and multiple jurisdictions concurrently.

Currently Local Government in the Northern territory does not have legislated responsibility for Emergency Management under the NT Emergency Management Act. However, the Local Government Association of the Northern Territory (LGANT) is in discussions with the NT Government to formally recognise the role LG plays in responding to disasters.

Increasing disaster risk preparedness across local government – funding proposal

ALGA has sought funding from the Commonwealth to increase preparedness for disasters in councils across the country.

The impact of and preparedness for disasters is different for each community. Some councils have developed risk management frameworks, whilst others have not. The extent and impact of recent bushfire and flooding disasters reinforces the importance of councils having an accurate understanding of the risks facing their communities and have the capability to reduce existing and future disaster risk.

While there are differences in legislative and delegated requirements across jurisdictions, all councils can benefit from better preparedness and risk reduction actions.

ALGA has proposed a network of funded officers across state and territory Local Government Associations and at the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). This network of officers will engage with councils in their respective state or territory to provide a range of assistance depending on councils' level of risk maturity. The outcomes would include:

1. For councils with no current risk reduction strategy, to encourage and assist these councils to undertake an assessment of their current and future disaster risk and to identify achievable ways to address and reduce that risk in collaboration with their communities with the resources available.
2. For councils which have a higher level of maturity and existing risk reduction strategies, access to resources and knowledge to update their existing disaster risk

reduction strategies. An important component of the project for these councils would be a greater focus on working with their communities and emergency management committees to raise awareness, and to build capability and partnerships with their communities.

3. Facilitating information sharing, collaboration, resource sharing and engagement with local communities to raise awareness for the need to address risks and build local resilience.
4. Co-ordinated resources to bolster the capacity of local government but not duplicate or conflict with existing state or territory government programs.

ALGA seeks funding over 3 years, at a total cost of \$5.7 million. This is a fairly modest amount of funding for national benefit.

Betterment

The need for betterment in rebuilding our road infrastructure has been mentioned earlier.

With the forecast of more frequent and more intense disasters, all infrastructure will need to be made more resilient.

The Royal Commission recommended the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) be streamlined to create a simpler application process.

The DRFA needs to build betterment into recovery and reconstruction. The application process for betterment should be an integral part of the DRFA process. 'Build back better' should be a core value and overriding principle of the DRFA.

While there will be some additional cost of construction to build an asset to a better standard, betterment will undoubtedly save the state and commonwealth long term funding and create much safer assets for local communities.

The LGAQ simply asks that the NRRRA address the recommendations of the Commission and structure 'build back better' as a core value and overriding principle of the DRFA. We would also ask that local government (via ALGA) has a seat at the table in discussions and changes.

Funding should shift from simply re-instatement of assets to a process where, in a single application from a council is able to provide costs for re-instatement, and (where it is possible) costs for improved infrastructure that will demonstrate increased resilience.

ALGA calls for a new targeted mitigation fund for local government to build infrastructure to a more resilient standard. We call for \$250M per year over 4 years to immediately enable disaster affected councils to repair their infrastructure and ensure new infrastructure is built to a more resilient standard.

ALGA also acknowledges the need for priority focus in the short term on the reconstruction of regional infrastructure but, in the longer term, ALGA strongly calls for targeted local government mitigation funding, to enable communities to prepare for future events.

Coordination of Philanthropic organisations working in the resilience / recovery space

Addressing the consideration of alternative models, including repurposing or adapting existing Australian and civil volunteer groups, not for profit organisations and state-based services, it would benefit Local Government if there were greater clarity and coordination in relation to what capability can be offered by philanthropic organisations in the context of an emergency / recovery.

Our Western Australian Association of Local Government (WALGA) has suggested the development of a Philanthropic Framework that will:

- Establish clear roles, responsibilities, functions, and governance arrangements for engagement with philanthropic and private organisations.
- Establish engagement principles with an emphasis on governance and assurance.
- Develop a communications strategy to promote the Framework across the emergency management sector.
- Align with and support relevant outcomes from the review of the State Recovery Framework and other synergies across the recovery field.

ATTACHMENT 2

Motions to the 2022 National General Assembly

ALGA NGA Resolutions 2021

14 Bellingen Shire Council, NSW This National General Assembly calls on the Federal Government to release the \$4 billion in unallocated Emergency Response Funds to the 537 State and Territory Local Government Councils across the nation to increase local community capacity to implement sustainable and effective community disaster recovery, preparedness and resilience initiatives. **Carried**

51 Tweed Shire Council, NSW The National General Assembly calls on the Federal Government to provide a significant and transformational funding stream for regenerative landscape management as an economic stimulus and job creator, that is easily accessible for rural landholders (including consideration of US and EU models of farm payments) to maintain and restore rural lands and provide the large scale change that is required to mitigate the increasing natural disasters that Australia is experiencing with Climate Change. **Carried**

84 Parkes Shire Council, NSW The National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to initiate a "Natural Disaster Preventative Measures Fund" to provide financial assistance to Local Government for planning mitigation strategies for extreme natural disaster events. **Carried**

85 Shoalhaven City Council, NSW This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to accept and implement the recommendations of the Royal Commission on National Natural Disasters pertaining to an enhanced role for the Commonwealth in coordinating the established levels of state, territory and local council response, and affording Commonwealth assistance as requested by established local and state authorities. This will ensure a national response to emergencies that will facilitate our communities' resilience following disasters. **Carried**

ALGA NGA Resolutions 2022

42 Balonne Shire Council QLD This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to review current governance arrangements and commit appropriate levels of funding to provide improved operational and maintenance support to the owners of flood-warning infrastructure in order to minimise the impacts of natural disasters. **Carried**

43 Newcastle City Council NSW 1 This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to work with ALGA and state and territory governments to urgently develop an additional, apolitical funding stream which provides local governments with the resources needed to mitigate the current and longer-term impacts of extreme weather events on local physical and social infrastructure. 2 Recognises the significant influence of climate change in natural disasters, and reaffirms its support of

Australia's commitment to the Paris Agreement to limit global temperature increase to 1.5 degrees. **Carried**

46 East Gippsland Shire VIC This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to expand the scope, reduce the evidence required, implement fairer, and more consistent, processes between states for seeking funding under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. **Carried**

48 Shire of Morawa WA This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government: 1. To request that all state and territory governments fully implement recommendations 11.1 and 11.2 of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and provide further resources and assistance to local governments to increase their capacity and capability to effectively discharge the considerable emergency management 15 responsibilities devolved to them. 2. To provide leadership and coordination to state and territory governments in responding to recommendations 11.1 and 11.2 of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disasters. **Carried**

53 Newcastle City Council NSW This National General Assembly calls on the Australian Government to:

1. Formally recognise we are in a state of climate emergency;
 2. Appoint a minister for climate change/emergency to champion climate change efforts across the country;
 3. Establish a national climate change taskforce to enable a whole-of-government approach to climate action; and
 4. Commit to actively work with local government, industry, and communities to:
 - a) reduce waste production;
 - b) put in place interim targets and steep emissions reduction during this decade as part of the net zero commitment, and in line with global efforts to limit warming to 1.5 percent as agreed to at the United National Climate Conference, COP26 Glasgow
 - c) support the development of renewable energy industries;
 - d) provide incentives to all sectors to change to more efficient technologies;
 - e) significantly increase urban vegetation cover and rehabilitate degraded rural environments;
 - f) increase support for households to access energy efficient demands;
 - g) adopt a partnership approach with local government to identify and invest in local climate change mitigation and adaptation projects, including through the creation of a new \$200 million Local Government Climate Change Response Fund; and
 - h) provide funding for a new Climate Change Disaster Fund, funded to a level equivalent to 10 percent of council operational budgets, to increase resilience of Australian local governments and their communities to the impacts of climate change.
- Carried**