

Natural Hazards Research Australia
Incorporating the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC
ABN 21 163 137 979



Monday, 20 February 23

The Senate
Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir/Madam

Subject: Submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Disaster Resilience

Natural Hazards Research Australia welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Australia's Disaster Resilience.

Natural Hazards Research Australia is a not-for-profit organisation, funded by the Australian Government. Our mission is to work with partners and the community on research that is useful, actionable and supportive of better decision-making to save lives and protect communities. Our partners include federal, state and local governments, key industry bodies, the private and not-for-profit sectors, research and other organisations.

Today's disasters that are caused by natural hazards, although natural at the core, in reality reflect the culmination of our collective decisions of where and how we live and how we manage and care for the world around us.

Recent floods, storms and bushfires in Australia highlight increasing pressures on emergency services and the need for a better understanding of how to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural hazard events.

The complexity of natural hazard risk is growing across Australia, as populations continue to expand into higher risk areas, combined with socio-economic pressures, interconnected infrastructure systems, and the growing impacts of climate change. It is essential that disaster management arrangements meet changing community needs.

This submission specifically addresses parts (a) iv, and (b) of the terms of reference.

Role of Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services.

Catastrophic disasters require a nationwide, whole-of-community effort across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Disaster management in Australia is primarily the accountability of state governments who have their own legislated disaster management arrangements. At the state level, numerous emergency services and functional areas exist to provide emergency management capabilities. Local governments too, play a key role in emergency management, though accountabilities vary across jurisdictions.

Much of the existing emergency service workforce are volunteers and it is essential that workforce models are based on a knowledge of the challenges and opportunities that exist for volunteers to ensure a sustainable volunteer capability. A new project is starting in 2023 at Natural Hazards Research Australia to develop a National Volunteer Sustainability Blueprint to better support the management of volunteers in the sector.

Research has highlighted that disaster management arrangements must:

- be inclusive, embracing a whole-of-community approach that places the community at the centre. This includes providing greater opportunity to involve community organisations (including Indigenous groups) and businesses.

Community organisations provide essential functions to support community resilience. They are part of the community fabric, and their core business is building community resilience. Their networks are often with those most vulnerable to disaster impacts. Recent Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre research found that 50% of community organisations had a high or very high appetite to become more involved in disaster management although, ultimately, were resource constrained. Lack of funding was the most significant barrier to their involvement.

There are opportunities to increase the participation of community organisations and improve the knowledge of emergency services regarding capabilities held by community organisations.

Businesses too, have a role to play. Business efforts are mostly focused on maintaining business continuity, and they are motivated to participate in disaster recovery. Business involvement offers many strengths including vast logistical capabilities and knowledge of supply chains; relevant resources such as plant and equipment and trained personnel; extensive and trusted national networks; and flexibility, scalability, and adaptability.

- conceptualise how traditional emergency service delivery models will be required to adjust when overwhelmed by catastrophic disasters. The role of emergency services must adjust from one that typically undertakes direct taskings, to include facilitation, leadership and support to enable community-led actions.
- enable a seamless and proactive partnership between local government, state and territory agencies, the Commonwealth, businesses and community organisations. This includes promoting interoperability and integration of plans, policies and capabilities to ensure effective surge support.

Consideration of alternative models

Research and post event inquiries have highlighted:

- opportunity to enhance connections between community organisations, businesses and government including increasing awareness of capabilities and progressing joint planning initiatives
- the need to clearly define roles of community organisations and business groups in disaster management arrangements
- inclusion of community organisations and business groups on disaster management planning committees and in disaster management training programs
- the need for specific efforts to improve the business continuity of community organisations and businesses
- the need for further promotion of interoperability and integration of capabilities.



More information on relevant research can be found at naturalhazards.com.au

If you have any questions or require further information, please contact myself.

Yours sincerely,

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