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# Senate Inquiry into preparedness for extreme weather events

## Save the Children Submission

*“Protecting children in the face of extreme weather events”*

January 2013

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### About Save the Children

Save the Children is the world’s leading independent international organisation for children. We work in more than 120 countries towards a world in which every child attains the right to survival, protection, development and participation. Through our work, Save the Children delivers immediate and lasting improvements to children in Australia and overseas.

Recognised for our commitment to accountability, innovation and collaboration, we work with other organisations, governments, non-profits and a variety of local partners while maintaining our own independence, without political agenda or religious affiliations.

Save the Children is committed to reducing children’s vulnerability to emergencies, ensuring their right to survival and development after an emergency, and providing the support children and their families need to quickly recover and re-establish their lives, dignity and livelihoods.

### Background

On 28 November 2012, the Senate referred the following terms of reference to the Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications for inquiry and report. The terms of reference relate to recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events.

**Terms of Reference for 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;
- (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,
  - (ii) the costs of extreme weather events and impacts on natural ecosystems, social and economic infrastructure and human health, and
  - (iii) the availability and affordability of private insurance, impacts on availability and affordability under different global warming scenarios, and regional social and economic impacts;
- (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;
- (d) an assessment of the preparedness and the adequacy of resources in the emergency services sector to prevent and respond to extreme weather events;
- (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;
- (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;
- (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
- (h) any related matter.

## Objectives: Specific Response to the Terms of Reference

Save the Children's response to the Terms of Reference will be related to specific parts of the Terms of Reference. This will include highlighting positive aspects of where we see the Government has made efforts to address specific challenges, where the gaps may be and where Save the Children believe we are in a position to support.

Taking this into account, it is important to note the following cross-cutting points which highlight the need for a response:

- Extreme weather events in the first instance can appear as “natural” however they can also be the consequence of human activity. These “natural hazards” are increasing in frequency and intensity, which is likely to increase as climate change impacts intensify. Globally, governments must work together to reduce the risks of man-made extreme weather events.
- The average number of disasters caused by natural hazards globally has increased from 200 since the 1980s, to more than 400 today. The frequency of these disasters is predicted to increase by as much as 320% in the next 20 years.
- Half of all people affected or killed by disasters are children. Children between the ages of 0-8 years represent the highest percentage of affected populations in today's global emergencies (UNICEF, 2007). Save the Children estimates that up to 175 million children per year will suffer the consequences of extreme weather events such as cyclones, droughts and floods.
- It is clear that extreme-weather related hazards in Australia are also increasing, and with them there is increased risk of disasters and of severe impacts to children. Save the Children has been at the forefront of the emergency response for children throughout many of these disasters.
- Save the Children is concerned that the threat of extreme-weather related hazards directly impacts on children's right to safety and survival. Children must be protected from opportunistic abuse, neglect and exploitation – all of which can occur in an emergency and disaster situation. They are also particularly vulnerable to psychosocial impact and require particular care and support post event.
- Save the Children has been advocating to all levels of government including Federal, states and territories and local councils to undertake appropriate disaster risk reduction and emergency response. This includes specific plans for children in emergency management and ensuring that there are specific protections in place for children before, during and after an emergency.

The following are Save the Children's responses to specific parts of the Terms of Reference with a child-focused approach:

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

**Positive actions taken by the Government:**

- It is important to note that, from a child-focused perspective, examples can be found of proactive approaches to including the specific needs of children in Emergency Preparedness Plans. This can be seen at State level in Victoria and in certain Local Government Areas (LGAs) that have realised the importance of including this in their emergency/preparedness plans and are taking actions to do so.
- Save the Children is currently working with the Victorian Government on a national project to ensure the specific needs of children are considered in emergencies. In Victoria, Save the Children has also been invited to be a member of the Victorian State Social, Health and Community Recovery Planning Sub-Committee to ensure that the Government can respond to the needs of children.

**Challenges in relation to preparedness and the adequacy of resources available**

- Save the Children is concerned that currently there is no specific plan for children in Australia when disaster and emergency strikes. Emergency management plans in each state and territory are designed for a number of matters, including the mobilisation of health and welfare agencies, shelter and refuge for individuals in disaster areas.
- Save the Children have been engaging state emergency management bodies and LGAs to request that the specific needs of children be incorporated into all plans, and have offered to support in regards to this. The challenge relates to coordination and that Save the Children often face barriers in getting the point across to state emergency management bodies.
- There is little systematic guidance for standard operating procedures in response to hazard impacts and to the roles and responsibilities of those who have a duty-of-care to children in a variety of settings. There is no explicit planning for safe family reunification, for educational continuity or for the limited and guided use of schools as temporary shelters

**Suggested solutions**

- *Ensure the specific needs of children are built into state emergency plans:* Since 2009, Save the Children has been advocating for specific needs of children to be included in disaster management plans. For example, Save the Children made a submission to the Queensland Floods Commission of Inquiry recommending changes to the emergency management plans. The specific needs of children include:
  - a. Physical safety in schools and childcare facilities
  - b. Family reunification planning
  - c. Educational continuity
- *Ensure state emergency bodies and council/shires are actively seeking support:* Save the Children have actively approached state emergency bodies and city councils (for example, Queensland – Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ) and Logan City

Council, New South Wales – Ministry for Police and Emergencies (MPES)) to ensure that the specific needs of children are addressed in the emergency plans. However, other experiences have not been as successful. Should the request be the norm and coming from the state emergency management agencies and councils, Save the Children feel that this would provide more effective and timely responses in meeting the specific

- *Ensure Save the Children are mentioned as a partner/service provider in state and council plans:* There have been instances where Save the Children have been unable to support relief and recovery centres without permission to join the facility from either the local council or government while facilities were being established. To prevent this happening in the future, we have requested that state governments include Save the Children, along with many other non-government organisations, in their disaster management plans in order for our staff to reach children and their families that require assistance in a timely manner.
- All State Government Disaster plans should:
  - a. Include standard operating procedures to protect children separated from their parents and to expedite family reunification for all schools and childcare programs and facilities;
  - b. Provide guidance for standard operating procedures for schools and childcare centres in the event of disaster;
  - c. Link to education sector and local school disaster management plans;
  - d. Elaborate educators duty-of-care responsibilities to students in case of disaster and need to shelter-in-place until families can be reunified;
  - e. Comply with or exceed international minimum standards for education in emergencies (Interagency Network for Education in Emergencies Minimum Standards for Education: Preparedness, Response Recovery, 2010);
  - f. Plan to limit the use of schools as temporary shelters, and to assure educational continuity;
  - g. Assure adequate child protection measures in all evacuation and recovery centres;
  - h. Consider schools as “essential services” required for community recovery;
  - i. Include provision of services for children in evacuation and recovery centres including the provision of Child Friendly Spaces; and
  - j. Include provision of psychosocial first aid for children and caregivers following a disaster and counselling for those at high-risk or who exhibit symptoms of post-traumatic stress.

**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**

**Positive actions to build upon:**

- Save the Children began global programming in child-centred disaster risk reduction in 2004 and now works in more than twenty countries, with the majority of those countries in Asia and the Pacific. Working in partnership with inter-governmental agencies such as the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR), UNICEF, and UNESCO, coalitions such as Children in a Changing Climate and the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies, and with other NGOs (Plan International, World Vision, Child Fund, Oxfam) provide numerous examples of child participation in Climate Change Adaptation.
- Save the Children is a supporting member of the Children in a Changing Climate Coalition, which launched The Children's Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction in 2011, as the result of consultations with more than 600 children in 21 countries. The Charter's priorities for disaster risk reduction were developed by children and are for children. The results of the consultation provide that children's top priorities are access to education and safer schools. Children also identified their main needs as: protection, participation and access to information, community infrastructure and ensuring that disaster risk reduction initiatives reach the most vulnerable groups.

**Challenges in relation to Australia's Climate Change Adaptation Framework**

- Australia's National Climate Change Adaptation Framework does not mention children, families, or schools anywhere in its consideration of building understanding and adaptive capacity, nor in reducing sectoral and regional vulnerability.
- In the context of building understanding and adaptive capacity, coordinated delivery of key messages as part of broader disaster risk reduction and response preparedness efforts are of vital importance.
- The framework as it stands, does not include the *Education and Child Care sector* in its consideration. Reducing vulnerabilities in this sector is vital both for the physical protection of children and care personnel, as well as for planning of continuity of education and childcare. These are a vital component of disaster recovery; a pre-requisite for parents returning to work, and therefore vital to building resilience. The addition of this sector, and the consultation that that will include with children themselves will add both richness and realism to the accomplishment of the goals of the Framework.

**Suggested solutions**

- Potential areas of action should include delivery of information to the public and to the education sector, an area that Disaster Resilient Australia School Education Network DRASEN and civil society organisations can support. Develop and implement key messages for public education as part of broader disaster risk reduction messaging to children and families.

- The definition of ‘decision-makers’ in the Framework should be expanded to include children and recognition of the need for education and training should consider how to integrate that with existing efforts in disaster risk reduction and environmental education in schools as well as with key messaging for public education.
- Liaison with National Health and Medical Research Council and Sport and Recreation Ministers’ Council to incorporate research and action with a focus on children
- Australian children’s perspectives on the Children’s Charter should be sought through a broad consultative process throughout the country. Based on these inputs, Australia should consider endorsing the Children’s Charter for Disaster Risk Reduction and play a leadership role globally in considering and reaching out to children.
- Potential areas of action in the *Education and Child Care Sector* are that the Australian Education Ministers’ Conference will develop and implement a National Action Plan on Disaster Risk Reduction and Climate Change that includes
  - Research on climate change impacts on education and child care and identify key vulnerabilities
  - Identifying the capacity of the education and child care systems to plan for and respond to these vulnerabilities, including links to emergency services and education sector and child care disaster management policies; and
  - Incorporating the potential for climate change and disaster impacts on education into education sector policy, caregiver training, and curriculum.
- In the area of ‘natural disaster management’, an additional potential area of action is to undertake research on the impacts of hazards and climate change on children, and families with the goal of improving their effectiveness.

## ***h.) any related matter: “Links between State Disaster Management and the Education Sector”***

### **Positive actions to build upon:**

- The Disaster Resilient Australia School Education Network (DRASEN): The Attorney General’s Department, Australia Emergency Management Institute and “Disaster Resilient Australia” coordinated the inauguration of the Disaster Resilient Australia School Education Network (DRASEN) in December 2012. DRASEN’s aims are to provide strategic advice on disaster resilience and emergency management policy and directions for alignment to the new Australian Curriculum and school education programs delivered by relevant bodies.
- Internationally and regionally (with support from AusAID), a framework for comprehensive school safety developed by Save the Children with inter-governmental (including UNICEF and UNESCO) and non-government organisations (Plan) is helping to assure a focus on three key areas:
  - a. Safe school facilities (including site selection, disaster/climate-resilient and ‘green’ design and construction, non-structural safety and maintenance);
  - b. School disaster management (including site-based planning with staff, parent and student involvement, standard operating procedures, staff training, school-wide drills); and
  - c. Disaster risk reduction education through curricular and extra-curricular activities.

### **Challenges in relation to current linkages**

- Currently, the links between State Disaster Management and disaster management in education in both state and federal governments are unclear. There is little systematic guidance for standard operating procedures in response to hazard impacts and to the roles and responsibilities of those who have a duty-of-care to children in a variety of settings. There is no explicit planning for safe family reunification, for educational continuity or for the limited and guided use of schools as temporary shelters.

### **Suggested solutions**

- Government should partner with DRASEN to meet these objectives:
  - a. To develop and maintain a coordinated approach to enhancing disaster resilience and emergency management education through school programs.
  - b. To facilitate on-going working partnerships between the emergency management agencies and school education communities.
  - c. To support current school curricula in such a way as to encourage understanding and application of Australia’s agreed approach to emergency management (prevention, preparedness, response & recovery) and the key messages for the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.
- DRASEN’s role is: to promote a national perspective and a coordinated approach to the integration of all hazards and disaster resilience education in schools, to advocate for all hazards and disaster resilience education in schools and to provide



educational advice on all hazards and disaster resilience issues and act as a reference group for input into national curriculum developments and associated projects, policy etc.

## How Save the Children can provide assistance

Save the Children specifically focuses on:

- reducing physical and environmental risks and reducing disaster impacts;
- putting into place early warning systems with clear consensus-based and action-oriented plans and messages that reach everyone;
- promoting resilience and adaptive capacities of local communities; and
- developing response preparedness to help people to help themselves and each other.

Save the Children has pioneered child-centred disaster risk reduction, which puts children at the forefront of these activities. Our approach recognises the specific vulnerabilities that children face in disasters, which often differ to those faced by adults. Practically, this means that we are able to respond and plan for children appropriately through our programs and policies. Save the Children recognises that children are not one homogenous group. Children will have varied needs depending on their age, gender, cultural background and for children with disabilities.

Save the Children has vast Domestic and International experience and expertise in Disaster Risk Reduction, Climate Change Adaptation and Emergency Preparedness and Response. Save the Children has experience consulting and coordinating with state and council bodies on ensuring the needs of children are considered before, during and after emergencies.

Save the Children have been responding to Australian Emergency Response since 2009 using a signature programs including setting up Child Friendly Spaces.

- Save the Children's Child Friendly Spaces (CFS) model is based on both child rights programming and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and is guided by Save the Children's Child Protection in Emergencies: Priorities, Principles & Practices. By providing a child-focused and child-friendly environment, CFS help reduce the range of distressing effects for children following a crisis by establishing a sense of security.
- CFS help create familiar and routine activities by providing a safe, fun and professionally staffed area for children to normalise their lives as much as possible during a disaster. They also provide support to parents by giving them time to undertake essential rebuilding activities, such as lodging insurance claims, identifying alternative shelter and accessing essential government services.
- Save the Children's national Mobile Play-scheme program has enabled the rapid deployment of qualified staff with significant resources to set up CSFs. The program utilises specially fit out Mobile Play Buses which can travel to affected areas and provide support to communities. Buses were first deployed after the devastating Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria and in Healesville and Alexandra, and have been used in several emergency responses since.
- The benefits of planning and implementing CFS in evacuation and recovery centres are many:
  - a. As a child protection model, CFS help protect children from physical harm and psychosocial distress and allow an opportunity for them to continue learning, playing, socialising and developing during and immediately after a disaster.

- b. Children are able to cope psychologically better in a disaster if structure and routine can be created, assisting them to return to a sense of normalcy despite ongoing changes and disruption around them.
- c. CFS offer the community the chance to recover from a disaster more effectively as parents and caregivers can address immediate needs (emotional, housing, financial, medical) knowing that their children are safe and being cared for.
- d. By supporting parents and helping them reduce their stress levels, children are less likely to be vulnerable to potential emotional and physical harm – therefore acting as a preventative child protection model. CFS can also enhance the capacity of families to care for children by helping parents understand how to talk to their children about recent experiences, their current fears and plans for the future.
- CFS deliver child protection support through qualified staff that have early childhood or social work experience. All staff have relevant working with children and/or police checks.
- Save the Children commissioned RMIT University and an independent research provider to capture feedback on how key stakeholders perceived the delivery of CFS following the Queensland floods and Cyclone Yasi. Feedback from stakeholders noted that the CSF:
  - a. Alleviated the chaos: *“The Child Friendly Spaces gave the parents one less thing to worry about!”*, Australian Red Cross.
  - b. Provided respite for parents: *“The Child Friendly Spaces allowed parents some quiet time. The staff were a God-send for parents”*, Emerald Shire Council.
  - c. Were ideally located: *“Both parents and children could see each other. This helped both...it was brilliant-outstanding...”*, Department of Communities.
  - d. Engaged children: *“The spaces were a happy diversion from a traumatic event”*, Australian Red Cross.
- A number of these stakeholders commented that they thought it would be valuable to ensure agencies consult with Save the Children on the development of preparedness and response plans to ensure the needs of children are incorporated in any future disaster response.

Temporary Shelters and CSF all need to have policies, codes of conduct, and implementation guidelines for employees and volunteers in order to protect children from abuse and exploitation when they are at their most vulnerable. For example, a policy could be adopted such as Save the Children’s Child Protection Policy, Code of Conduct and Implementation Guidelines for its employees and volunteers. In addition, ongoing training and education should be provided by child protection specialists as a model for maintaining awareness and reducing the risks of harm to children in emergencies.

- Children need tailored emergency support to ensure their needs are not overlooked in emergency response and recovery planning. It is also vital that child protection is incorporated into emergency planning to reduce the risks faced by vulnerable children in emergencies.
- CSFs are examples of a tailored emergency intervention that provides children with a protected environment where they can participate in organised activities to play, socialise, learn and express themselves as they rebuild their lives.

Since the 2009 Bushfires in Victoria, Save the Children has reached over 3,350 children and their families with the provision of CFS. Save the Children has established CFS in Evacuation and Recovery Centres in the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, during the 2011 flooding in Queensland, for the community of Warmun (WA) after floods led to the entire town being evacuated for 4 months, during Cyclone Yasi, in the 2012 Victorian and New South Wales floods, in Townsville after a short-lived super-cell storm in 2012, and following the recent wildfires in Tasmania, Victoria and New South Wales.