



Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Q1. What experience have you had with Commonwealth disaster funding support?

WIRES CEO, Leanne Taylor, management and rescue personnel were included in initial discussions with the Commonwealth government about allocation of funds for disaster response.

Q2. How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

Changes to the current funding approach are essential to ensure support for communities, our unique wildlife, and reducing disaster risk. These changes are identified across two themes:

1. Disproportionate emphasis post-disaster recovery funding. The Productivity Commission previously noted that 'Governments overinvest in post disaster reconstruction and underinvest in mitigation that would limit the impact of natural disasters.' An ongoing reactive approach continues to impact capacity building and the development of long-term resilience and recovery approaches. A necessary shift to building capacity will increase preparedness and reduce post-disaster impacts and socio-economic costs.
2. Disasters happen in communities and require consideration of operational and ecological components. These considerations include incorporating the protection of natural assets and wildlife emergency response and recovery into emergency management procedures, planning and management.

The focus of this response is on (2) and will address lessons learned with the 2019-20 bushfires, institutional and operational responses and the challenges these posed for the volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation sector and the communities they serve.

On-the-ground experiences and challenges highlight that incident control organisations and procedures at best de-emphasised real-time wildlife rescue and care. The direct outcome was ongoing pain and suffering for unimaginable numbers of animals during - and for weeks after - the worst of the fires had eased. These decisions also directly impacted on individual and community safety and well-being, recovery, and resilience.

Incident control procedures, including operational capacity and government funding which underpin it, require refocus. Incorporation of a Technical Advisor Wildlife (TAW) in incident management teams as a business-as-usual (BAU) mechanism is a central component of organisational, procedural and operational changes. Consistent with Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System (AIIMS) principles and



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121 Marcus Clarke Street, (PO Box 133) Canberra ACT 2601
Level 10, 10 Felix Street, (PO Box 15084) Brisbane QLD 4000



plans, a TAW will increase capacity and effectiveness for reducing risk to wildlife, those who care for them, and the local communities amongst which they live and are valued. Including wildlife organisations in emergency planning was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into National Disaster Arrangements.

In addition to a TAW as BAU, Commonwealth funding to reduce disaster risk could be effectively used for:

- * preparing local communities with networked technological support and services for rapid identification of risk and deployment of appropriately qualified personnel,
- * the development and integration of local wildlife emergency response plans and wildlife support roles (eg. Wildlife Emergency Response Teams – WERTs),
- * the establishment and deployment of a network of wildlife emergency response assets such as mobile triage/hospital ambulances, trailers, vans and lorries,
- * wildlife emergency response training programs for firefighters, including volunteers, nationally,
- * training of local veterinarians to assist in disasters, and
- * facilitation of water and food supplementation to support wildlife affected by habitat loss to aid recovery post-disaster.

An adequately resourced and supported volunteer wildlife rescue and rehabilitation sector is an essential component of supporting communities through disasters and providing emergency response. Commonwealth funding across operational, technical and capacity mechanisms for real-time emergency and post-disaster response are fundamental requirements for sector sustainability and ongoing effectiveness. Resourcing was a key finding of the Royal Commission.

Q3. Please describe your understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes.

WIRES understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding includes the provision of a mix of approaches, across

- * Direct funding to project proponents – on an emergency basis,
- * Tied funding to State Governments through traditional funding arrangements, and
- * Grant programs to fund Local Government under grants conditions and processes.

Q4. Are the funding roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events clear?

Drawing on the experiences during the 2019-20 bushfires, WIRES found that the funding roles of Commonwealth, States and Territories, and Local Governments to be unclear - having a broader impact on operational effectiveness.

By extension, there are inconsistencies in available information, funding, accessibility and processes. Different interpretations regarding the intention of funding channels persist within and across levels of government, and these directly impact procedures, awareness of funding availability and eligibility. Required processes at each level can be further clarified and streamlined to increase their effectiveness



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and reduce the burden on organisations. Organisations already provide essential services in communities in the context of disasters and emergency response.

Q5. Is there any further information you would like to provide?

No response provided.



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