

Responses considered by the Chair and Local Disaster Coordinator for the Burdekin Local Disaster Management Group.

To help us address the challenge outlined in this discussion paper, you may wish to consider the below questions:

1. Acknowledging the primary role of state and territories in emergency response, what longer-term capacities and capabilities does the Commonwealth need to develop to meet the challenges of the evolving strategic environment?

The Commonwealth needs to develop strategies to assist volunteers to support established volunteer groups that are already working in emergency response. In Queensland our Council relies heavily on support from the Burdekin SES/Rural Fire groups. The group finds that changes are needed with recruitment and retention of volunteers, as the number of volunteers locally is declining, and the average age is increasing.

The Commonwealth needs to provide incentives/incentive schemes for fit and healthy Australians from the age of 18 onwards to want to volunteer their assistance.

For consideration of developing incentives, please see suggestions below:

- taxation relief for joining the SES/Rural Fire
- non taxable incentive payment for volunteering during disaster events
- offer variable roles with different level of training competencies for volunteers e.g. provide office support, fully trained, part trained

In organising SES/Rural Fire volunteers, please see suggestions below:

- On completing a level of competency, the volunteer need not attend weekly training sessions
- The volunteer must attend monthly, complete a minimum number of volunteer hours to maintain their skills and knowledge

All of the suggestions above would strengthen volunteer numbers and their capabilities to assist with response and recovery following a disaster event.

With previous major disaster events there were spontaneous volunteers who will be a group that need to be organised by existing disaster response agencies (for example – Volunteering QLD) as these agencies already have a chain of command, training programs, resources and alignment with the local LDMG.

Past events have shown that smaller regional communities have strong networks and relationships to support family, friends and others in the response and recovery following an event. Should this capability be exhausted the Burdekin Local Disaster Management Group would seek assistance from the District DDMG.

2. At a national level, what are likely to be the key pressure points or challenges for the Commonwealth responding to competing and concurrent crises?

One key challenge for the Commonwealth is that disaster events are getting more intense, and have the capability of affecting multiple Local Government areas at one time.

Communities remember that in previous severe disaster events, politicians have visited affected areas and in discussions with residents have committed to providing assistance. This Commonwealth support has

been provided through financial commitments and provision of ADF personnel to assist with response to the clean up.

Should the ADF support no longer be available, the Commonwealth will need to educate the Australian people so that complaints are not being directed at the LDMG. Most people, actually all people will expect support from the ADF as so often Australia sends ADF personnel to assist other countries in times of disasters.

In most cases natural disaster events have been declared prior to impact, and the response time between requests for activation and approvals can vary and lead to confusion and undue pressure on local governments in responding to the disaster. Timeliness in responding to requests from LDMGs for activations is crucial.

3. How could the Commonwealth build community resilience and capability so they are better able to respond to and recover from national-level crises?

The easiest and best way to build community resilience is through the LDMG and this would be made more comprehensive with financial support from the Commonwealth. The *Get Ready* program presently available in Queensland is proving to be successful. It is acknowledged that there should be a methodology where the performance of the LDMG can be assessed to ensure their residents are becoming more resilient.

Local Governments are perfectly positioned to provide resilience to the wider shire. Local Governments all face similar problems with drainage, bushland or infrastructure. Although all councils are unique a streamlined approach to all councils facing the same hurdles could see reduced costs, sharing of ideas, methodologies or best practices in resilience and risk-mitigation activities.

The Commonwealth needs to ensure insurance companies provide affordable insurance to cover areas where disaster events are a common occurrence and funding is provided to assist families to build back better after an event. Everyone needs to restore their livelihoods in a timely manner to a new normal past a devastating event.

Please consider the following areas where the Commonwealth can assist:

- support buy back for houses historically allowed to build in flood areas
- financial support to ensure older (pre 1982) households are more resilient e.g. replace roofs, upgrade windows, shutters, gutter guards and water tanks
- assistance with clearing of land for bushfire mitigation
- incentive to purchase generators and upgrade household switchboards to reduce demand for urgent power restoration

4. What changes in the current system are necessary to help Australia have the right capabilities and capacity to handle concurrent crises?

Queensland's current system where local capacity is exhausted prior to requesting assistance from the District, which when exhausted seeks assistance from the State and they ultimately approach the Commonwealth for assistance. Should there be concurrent events, the Commonwealth needs to address the most urgent and critical needs.

Australia has a paid, fully trained and easy to mobilise workforce with access to equipment that can be deployed when and where necessary. The ADF are trained, organised with chains of command and resources and could easily align with the LDMG response.

5. What models could the Commonwealth explore to replace or supplement support currently provided by the ADF during domestic crisis? –

- What does the right mix of Commonwealth capabilities look like?

The capabilities of a community are firstly supported by the LDMG and Local Government who are supported by QPS, QFD and the QAS including SES volunteers, community volunteers with District, State and then Commonwealth providing ADF in extreme situations.

- How could a Commonwealth workforce surge capacity be replicated in a scalable, efficient and effective way?

The Commonwealth should support local volunteer agencies e.g. SES/Rural Fire to develop strategies and personnel that would enable scalability in disaster events. This would include use of other SES/Rural Fire groups across the State being deployed as required to help and assist. Most LGs in Queensland already have SES/Rural Fire resources.

Should an different external workforce be brought in to an affected local government area there needs to be clear understanding that local arrangements are followed and adhered to to ensure a coordinated response.

- How could we harness the critical role of volunteers and civilian groups under this model?

For any disaster event a process needs to be established to engage with volunteers and civilian groups. The present disaster management arrangements need to be adhered to – LDMG to DDMG to SDCC to Commonwealth needs to be maintained.

If volunteer and civilian groups are to be used who makes the decision, who gives direction, and who do they answer to.

- How do these models supplement, but not replicate, existing models operating at a state and territory and local level?

The current disaster management arrangements work well in Queensland and should continue to be followed.

- What role could industry / the private sector play? How can the Government attract increased investment in emergency management from the private sector?

The private sector and industry need to have the capacity to manage their own facilities, businesses and staffing following a disaster event – noting that the LDMG in each Local Government area would need to be aware of their arrangements. Any investment that a private sector/ industry makes should be in building their own capacity to deal with an event.

When working in the private sector / industry the Commonwealth should develop an incentive program to encourage staff to join Local Volunteer groups e.g. SES/Rural Fire. The private sector / industry should be able to release their staff for deployment in volunteer duties with the Commonwealth subsidising the employer or compensating the employee through tax incentives. Also for consideration is financial contribution to the employee volunteering during an event similar to the current ADF Reservist scheme.

- What gaps currently exist in state and territory emergency management capability.

The gaps become evident during large scale events that affect more than one Local Government area. This is heightened when the event affects a larger city / multiple Local Government areas and is prolonged.

Gaps exist in regional communities when:

- displaced persons with a disability have limited choices to relocate and source assistance
- aged persons have limited support and choices to relocate and source assistance
- carers are impacted and unavailable to assist
- local volunteers are impacted and unavailable to assist
- communities are isolated and only accessible with air and boat resources.

6. Are there sectors that could replicate the capabilities provided by the ADF?

No

7. What are the critical functions the Commonwealth Government should continue to perform in disaster relief and recovery, in support of local, state and territory governments?

The most important function supplied by the Commonwealth Government is financial support. After an event local governments are responsible for the construction, management, upkeep and rebuild of local roads and community infrastructure. Local Government recovery groups work in collaboration with State Government agencies to assist with organising community centres, collating information on infrastructure and industry to inform good decisions around the "new normal".

The present disaster arrangements in place in Queensland are well documented and should remain and only when the State Government requests assistance should the decision be made on what is needed. Confusion and misunderstanding by the community and by State/Federal elected members on the role of Local Governments in managing disaster events. Previous examples of this misunderstanding occur when a State/Federal member attends the affected area and makes promises.

LDMGs with their local governments are an integral part of the emergency planning process, and play an important role in risk mitigation, land-use planning and land management. They are also able to support response and recovery with the use of Council's resources and equipment during the response phase and through the delivery of community services, such as evacuation centres, relief centres and places of refuge.

The ADF assistance should continue in any extreme disaster events and be coordinated by the LDMG. The ADF personnel are well respected, well resourced, well trained and have a strong lead command. Their presence in the community following a catastrophic disaster event gives the people a sense of support to feel valued in their tragic circumstances and assists with the emotional recovery of the affected community.

This would be difficult to achieve through a private volunteer provider.

8. What legislative, regulatory or policy changes could be undertaken to make it financially viable for other sectors to contribute to a Commonwealth crisis response capability?

Insurance companies should be made to make a financial contribution from their profits to a Commonwealth fund that supports response and recovery during a disaster event

Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response

Queensland residents already pay a levy for Emergency Services etc via Council rates, perhaps a compulsory insurance similar to vehicle CTP could be collected through an electricity account or similar. This is a fairer system which would see all residents contribute to resilience and recovery activities.

All donations to a Commonwealth Disaster Response and Relief Fund are to be tax deductible for all industry, businesses and the general population.