

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission on this matter.

One of the lessons that I hope we're all taking away from Covid, is that government planning cannot neglect tail risk scenarios. A "once in a century" pandemic will occur every century and cause significantly more harm if not properly accounted for.

I'm optimistic that the government may have learned this lesson in regard to pandemics, but pandemics are only one of a broader class of risks known as catastrophic and existential risks.

Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP discusses this in his book *What's the Worst That Could Happen* and Toby Ord, an Australian philosophy at the Future of Humanity Institute at Oxford University discusses this in his book *The Precipice*.

As someone with a mathematical background, I'm concerned to see reasonable estimates that I'm more likely to die from these risks than your more traditional risks such as fires, floods and cyclones.

Both Andrew Leigh and Toby Ord are experts on this topic - so it might be sensible for the Government to reach out to them and seek their views to inform the conversation.

Instead of merely focusing on those kinds of disasters that immediately spring to mind, I would like to voice my support for all-hazards, catastrophic disaster planning.

Australia professes to adopt an "all-hazards" framework in its overarching planning documents and global discourse. However, its specific programs and initiatives often focus solely on "natural hazards." Despite NEMA's mandate being all-encompassing, it often frames its activities around specific events like wildfires and floods. Even the Minister for Emergency Management has inaccurately labeled NEMA as a "federal natural disaster management" agency, which contradicts its actual scope. Additionally, neither the Minister's highlighted achievements nor the \$400 million allocated for risk-reduction projects address human-caused or catastrophic disasters.

This discrepancy between NEMA's stated "all-hazards" role and its actions isn't new; it has been a recurring concern among stakeholders. In fact, NEMA's own "Statement of Strategic Intent" identifies this gap as the primary concern from stakeholders' perspective.

This consultation is an opportunity to adopt a more balanced approach that accounts for actual risks.

As an Australian, the origin of a disaster—whether natural or human-made—is irrelevant to me when it threatens the lives of my family or fellow citizens. What concerns me is that bureaucratic ambiguities or jurisdictional conflicts between State and Commonwealth levels could result in the neglect of significant risks that should be top priorities for the government.

I would like to propose two policy changes:

- Under the "shared responsibility model," States and Territories are adopting a "bottom-up" strategy, targeting common, localized disasters. Given this focus, it's crucial for the Commonwealth to employ a "top-down" approach, addressing broad, high-impact risks that span the all-hazards spectrum. Learning from the COVID-19 experience, managing catastrophic risks demands more than simply scaling up responses to smaller, more frequent disasters. It often requires specialized capabilities and strategies, such as understanding and adapting critical supply chains and infrastructure in real-time crisis situations. Prioritizing these larger, more complex risks at the Commonwealth level is key to optimizing our risk reduction efforts, ensuring we get the most risk mitigation per

dollar spent.

- To make impactful decisions on risk mitigation, it's counterproductive to create arbitrary categories like "natural hazards" in our policies and programs. Effective mitigation strategies often address multiple types of risks. When we confine programs to specific hazard types or allow only individual jurisdictions to lead projects, we compromise efficiency. For instance, initiatives for food security and infrastructure resilience may be overlooked, even though they offer broad benefits, simply because they aren't specialized for a single type of hazard. Governments should only focus on "natural hazards" if there's compelling evidence that such a narrow scope is necessary. Here, the emphasis is on the inefficiency of limiting policies to specific categories like "natural hazards." Such categorization could lead to neglect of strategies that are versatile but not specialized, even though versatility in risk mitigation is often more beneficial. Therefore, I advocate for a broader, more encompassing approach unless there's a compelling reason to do otherwise.

I've noticed over the years that community awareness for and concern for catastrophic and existential risks has been growing. People are much more concerned about pandemics after Covid and the threat of nuclear after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. As an individual citizen, I am unfortunately unable to protect myself from these disasters. I have to rely on the government to keep me and those that I care about safe. I hope that the government will pursue this duty diligently.

Thanks,  
Chris