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community deserves
to be a liveable one

Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper

Submission to the Australian Government.

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About the Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ)

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) is the peak body for local government in Queensland. It is a not-for-profit association established solely to serve councils and their needs. The LGAQ has been advising, supporting, and representing local councils since 1896, enabling them to improve their operations and strengthen relationships with their communities. The LGAQ does this by connecting councils to people and places; supporting their drive to innovate and improve service delivery through smart services and sustainable solutions; and providing them with the means to achieve community, professional and political excellence.

Partners-in-Government Agreement

The LGAQ on behalf of all 77 Queensland local governments is a signatory to a three-year partners-in-government-agreement with the State of Queensland.

The Agreement details the key principles underlying the relationship between the state and local governments and establishes the foundation for effective negotiation and engagement between both levels of government.

The agreement acknowledges that local government is the closest level of government to the community, affecting the lives of everyday Queenslanders and acknowledging Local Government as a genuine partner in the Australian government system.

The intent of the agreement was to continue the tradition of working in genuine partnership to improve the quality of life for all Queenslanders to enjoy. By identifying the roles and responsibilities of each party, it provides a solid foundation for effective negotiation and engagement between both levels of government.

The LGAQ is committed to working with the Queensland Government and will continue to be a passionate advocate for councils, to serve our joint jurisdiction for the people of Queensland.

Rural and Remote Councils Compact

The Rural and Remote Councils Compact¹ signed on 25 June 2021, complements the existing Partnership in Partners-in-Government agreement in place between the LGAQ and the Queensland Government to provide a platform to ensure issues of priority for these communities are properly considered by the Government when developing policies, programs, and legislation.

The Rural and Remote Councils Compact, pledges to amplify the voice of and improve outcomes for the state's 45 rural and remote councils and their local communities by enhancing engagement between both levels of government.

¹ <https://knowledgebaseassets.blob.core.windows.net/images/9c61cdc2-3cfa-eb11-94ef-002248181740/Rural%20and%20Remote%20Councils%20Compact%20-%20signed%20copy.pdf>

Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper

Executive Summary

The Local Government Association of Queensland (LGAQ) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs on the Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Paper.

The LGAQ, as the peak body representing the state's 77 councils, plays an important, daily role in ensuring that the shared interests, perspectives, and position of Queensland councils are accurately communicated back to policy makers.

Disaster management arrangements in Queensland have proven to be highly effective and are arguably nation-leading, yet the significant increase in the frequency and scale of disaster events does continue to regularly test the capacity of the disaster management system at a local, district, state, and national level.

Queensland communities have welcomed the help of the Federal Government and Australian Defence Force (ADF) in times of need and are grateful to them for the work they do.

The ADF possesses a set of unique capabilities and resources that are highly valued and advantageous to effectively respond to domestic natural disasters.

ADF personnel possess a range of applicable skills and knowledge regarding how to operate safely in extreme environments and are deployed as self-sufficient units.

The ADF has access to a level of equipment and expertise that is often significantly in advance of what might generally be available at the local community level.

Should this unique ADF disaster capability and capacity for extraordinary catastrophic disaster response be reduced, the Federal Government will be faced with a significant gap in its ability to support the impacted communities that it must seek comparable alternative arrangements.

The cost to date for ADF assistance has not been worn by impacted councils. Future ADF or alternative arrangements should continue to come at no cost to disaster-impacted councils.

It is critical, that their deployment continues to occur within the proven and effective Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA) and Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMG) structure.

Any ADF deployments should be complementary to, but not a replacement for, local response activities. Any ADF deployment should occur at the request of, and in coordination with, the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) so that the highest and best use of that resource can be achieved.

We emphasise the importance of Queensland councils remaining a lead agency in disaster management and the need to ensure that they are appropriately funded, resourced, and trained.

We look forward to ongoing engagement regarding the review, and would encourage the opportunity for further, deeper consultation with our members.

Recommendations /Priorities for Action

The LGAQ has made 11 recommendations which are summarised below:

- **Recommendation 1:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to provide financial support to local communities to assist them to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.
- **Recommendation 2:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to invest at scale in resilience and betterment programs and understanding of risk due to the significant dividends and material reductions in the time, community impact and cost involved in recovery when disaster strikes.
- **Recommendation 3:** The LGAQ recommends that in challenging circumstances where the existing disaster management workforce will need bolstering to ensure response and recovery actions, the ADF increases its future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.
- **Recommendation 4:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports the national expansion of the Council-to-Council (C2C) program with eligibility formalised for cost recovery under DRFA, including the ability to deploy additional local government expertise into impacted areas. Expanding this program to a national level may be particularly beneficial for disasters of significant scale of for communities situated along state or territory borders.
- **Recommendation 5:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government develops a mechanism for supporting identification and mobilisation of resources appropriate for supporting impacted areas, cross jurisdictions.
- **Recommendation 6:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports ongoing professional development and information sharing for disaster management professionals to further enhance beneficial local community outcomes. Queensland councils recommend the Federal Government re-establishes a national disaster management centre of excellence. Queensland, as the Australian state most prone to natural disasters, would be a natural location for such a facility. Complementary

facilities such as the proposed swift water rescue facility slated for Redland City Council local government area would further support training opportunities not only nationally, but potentially for Pacific nations as well.

- **Recommendation 7:** The LGAQ recommends further cross-jurisdictional disaster management exercises and training be conducted to assist in developing cross-jurisdictional networks and building a greater understanding of disaster management arrangements, capacities and capabilities across jurisdictions.
- **Recommendation 8:** The LGAQ recommends a continued focus on ensuring access to disaster advice, support and financial assistance for residents and businesses located in remote locations or for whom technical, cultural or language barriers may be present..
- **Recommendation 9:** The LGAQ recommends greater investment in community education and preparedness to help communities understand their disaster risk. Investments such as those being made in the Flood Marker Network (FMN) are great examples of how better-informed communities can better manage their disaster risks.
- **Recommendation 10:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government increase funding and support for initiatives that keep insurance premiums affordable. Initiatives such as the Northern Australia Re-Insurance Scheme are acknowledged, and investing further in such schemes will assist with moderating insurance premiums in higher risk locations and help keep insurance premiums affordable.
- **Recommendation 11:** The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports measures to grow volunteering numbers and participation to stem the alarming decrease in volunteers nationwide.

Introduction

Local governments play a critical role in disaster management in Queensland.

The Queensland Disaster Management Arrangements (QDMA) outline a proven method for managing disasters across the realm of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR).

Within this model Queensland councils actively support the establishment of Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMG's) that work to advance a locally led, multi-agency response to any disaster and which operate across the full spectrum of PPRR.

As the level of government closest to their communities, Queensland councils frequently engage with many State and Federal government agencies, government-owned corporations, not-for-profit and volunteer organisations, to advance local disaster management activities and to respond when disasters strike.

We acknowledge the Australian Defence Force (ADF) and Federal Government agencies have previously been deployed in Queensland in response to natural disasters. Queensland is home to several ADF bases, some of which are in close proximity to communities that have been directly impacted in recent years by large-scale disaster events.

It is essential that local, district, State and Federal disaster arrangements are complementary and work seamlessly, to ensure the best outcome for local communities.

Of similarly high importance are the relationships and communication that must exist between all levels of government before, during and after disaster events.

The QDMA are outlined in Section 4A of the *Queensland Disaster Management Act 2003*. These now well-established arrangements – through each phase of prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery – are the primary responsibility of local governments, within their local government area.

Queensland is the most natural disaster-prone state in Australia, and the QDMA has demonstrated its success, flexibility, and capacity to be applied in a variety of circumstances, including during the Covid-19 pandemic.

The LGAQ welcomes the opportunity to provide input on Commonwealth's Discussion paper in response to the following questions:

- 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?
- At a national level, what are likely to be the key pressure points or challenges for the Commonwealth responding to competing and concurrent crises?
- How could the Commonwealth build community resilience and capability so they are better able to respond to and recover from national-level crises?

- What changes in the current system are necessary to help Australia have the right capabilities and capacity to handle concurrent crises?
- 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? -- How could a Commonwealth workforce surge capacity be replicated in a scalable, efficient and effective way?
 - How could we harness the critical role of volunteers and civilian groups under this model? -- How do these models supplement, but not replicate, existing models operating at a state and territory and local level?
 - What role could industry / the private sector play? How can the Government attract increased investment in emergency management from the private sector?
 - What gaps currently exist in state and territory emergency management capability?
- Are there sectors that could replicate the capabilities provided by the ADF?
- 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?
- 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?

Response

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?

As mentioned above, local governments play a critical and crucial role in disaster management in Queensland.

Disaster management arrangements in Queensland have proven to be highly effective and are arguably nation-leading, yet the significant increase in the frequency and scale of disaster events does continue to regularly test the capacity of the disaster management system at a local, district, state, and national level.

Within this model, Queensland councils actively support the establishment of Local Disaster Management Groups (LDMGs) that work to advance a locally led, multi-agency response to any disaster and which operate across the full spectrum of PPRR.

As the level of government closest to their communities, Queensland councils are best placed to help their communities prepare for, respond to and recover from disaster but they cannot do it alone and frequently engage with many State and Federal government agencies as well as with government-owned corporations and not-for-profit and volunteer organisations to advance local disaster management activities.

This engagement, and the relationships built are integral to building capacity and capability long-term so it is crucial these shared partnerships continue to be strengthened.

Funding to assist local communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters is also critically important and with its greater share of taxation revenue, the Federal Government is the best placed of all levels of government to provide this financial support.

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to provide financial support to local communities to assist them to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.

Recommendation 2: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to invest at scale in resilience and betterment programs and understanding of risk due to the significant dividends and material reductions in the time, community impact and cost involved in recovery when disaster strikes.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends that in challenging circumstances where the existing disaster management workforce will most likely need bolstering to ensure future response and recovery actions can continue to be provided in as timely and meaningful fashion, the ADF increase their future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.

Recommendation 4: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government support the national expansion of the Council-to-Council (C2C) program with eligibility formalised for cost recovery under DRFA, including the ability to deploy additional local government expertise into impacted areas. Expanding this program to a national level may be particularly beneficial for disasters of significant scale of for communities situated along state or territory borders.

Recommendation 5: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government develop a mechanism for supporting identification and mobilisation of resources appropriate for supporting impacted areas, cross jurisdictions.

Recommendation 6: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports ongoing professional development and information sharing for disaster management professionals to further enhance beneficial local community outcomes. Queensland councils recommend the Federal Government re-establishes a national disaster management centre of excellence. Queensland as the Australian state most prone to natural disasters would be a natural location for such a facility. Complementary facilities such as the proposed swift water rescue facility slated for Redland City Council local government area would further support training opportunities not only nationally, but potentially for Pacific nations as well.

Recommendation 7: The LGAQ recommends further cross jurisdiction disaster management exercises and training, as this would assist in developing networks and building a greater understanding of disaster management arrangements, capacities and capabilities across jurisdictions.

Recommendation 8: The LGAQ recommends access to disaster advice, support and financial assistance for residents and businesses located in remote locations or for whom technical, cultural or language barriers may be present needs to remain at the forefront of considerations.

Recommendation 9: The LGAQ recommends that investments in community education and preparedness also contribute meaningfully to helping communities understand their disaster risk, investments such as those being made in the Flood Marker Network (FMN) are great examples of how better-informed communities can better manage their disaster risks.

Recommendation 10: The LGAQ recommends that Federal Government financial support for the Northern Australia Re-Insurance Scheme continues, to assist in moderating insurance premiums in higher risk locations, and that other initiatives to help keep insurance premiums affordable are also supported.

Recommendation 11: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports measures to grow volunteering numbers and participation to stem the alarming decrease in volunteers nationwide.

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

Climate change predictions indicate that future natural disasters will become more frequent with greater severity, therefore significantly impacting the capacity and capability of existing disaster and emergency management agencies. The existing disaster management workforce will most likely need bolstering to ensure future response and recovery actions can continue to be provided in as timely and meaningful fashion. It is in this challenging circumstance where the ADF could increase their future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity.

Queensland communities and their respective local governments that have previously been beneficiaries of the assistance of the ADF in responding to domestic natural disasters have generally expressed their appreciation to the ADF.

Impacted communities are often reported to have found comfort when ADF deployments and activities are visible in impacted areas, this is particularly so when these deployments occur in a timely fashion. 'Boots on the ground', deployed effectively can be incredibly important for providing impacted communities with heightened levels of comfort and confidence that the response and recovery tasks are being taken seriously by government. This support often occurs in a situation that can seem overwhelming for impacted residents and thus lend material support to the recovery journey. Impacted communities will generally welcome legitimate offers of support.

It is also important to highlight that community resilience should not inadvertently be affected or diminished by creating any unreasonable reliance or expectation on the ADF. Clear operational expectations, communicated effectively to local communities, as to when ADF may be deployed and at what stage they may be stood down would be beneficial in helping to set community expectations.

When a disaster event overwhelms local and State resources and capabilities, the ADF has an opportunity to play a critical role.

For example, during the monsoon event of February 2019, the ADF aided Winton Shire Council and the Winton LDMG through a combination of the supply of human resources, physical resources (machinery) and expertise (engineering, mapping etc) to assist in preparedness, response, and recovery. For this community, at this time, this capability was incredibly important and unlikely to have been able to have been easily sourced from anywhere else. The ADF's involvement at Winton for this event was valued by that community.

Demand on the ADF will undoubtedly increase with the increasing frequency of natural disasters leading to an increased need for enhanced support to States regarding disaster response and recovery.

Given that each state and territory have different disaster management arrangements, it would also be important that there is an operational awareness of the individual state disaster management arrangements and how to engage with those idiosyncratic arrangements most effectively. Liaison Officers are able a valuable avenue to provide a direct connection between the arrangements to understand needs and capacities.

A coordinated national 'ready reserve' of volunteers, trained in disaster recovery and able to be easily mobilised, could also be established within each state and territory to aid impacted communities during the immediate clean-up post event impact. Whilst similar mechanisms exist regarding emergency services (particularly firefighting), there are only limited examples across the broader functions of disaster recovery.

In Queensland the LGAQ coordinates a Council to Council (C2C) program within the auspices of the QDMA. This program is designed to coordinate the deployment of local government specialist skills, equipment, and workers to impacted areas from non-impacted areas to help restore essential community assets and aid with local recovery efforts. Costs for this program are eligible for reimbursement under DRFA.

Expanding this program to a national level may be particularly beneficial for disasters of significant scale of for communities situated along state or territory borders. This program has run successfully for many years and has been utilised following every major disaster event in Queensland.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends that in challenging circumstances where the existing disaster management workforce will most likely need bolstering to ensure future response and recovery actions can continue to be provided in as timely and meaningful fashion, the ADF increase their future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.

Recommendation 4: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government support the national expansion of the Council-to-Council (C2C) program with eligibility formalised for cost recovery under DRFA, including the ability to deploy additional local government expertise into impacted

areas. Expanding this program to a national level may be particularly beneficial for disasters of significant scale of for communities situated along state or territory borders.

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

Ensuring that local councils are appropriately financially resourced to employ the necessary staff to undertake disaster management duties is a practical and important consideration.

The 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements recognised that State and Territory governments should ensure local governments have the support and resources they need to carry out their responsibilities.

The QDMA has demonstrated itself over many years to be particularly effective in generating locally led approaches to disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery and are considered best practice. Adopting the QDMA as a national standard may be worth consideration.

In addition to professional skills the availability and motivation of community members to be involved in volunteer capacities is also critical to the disaster function. From Rural fire brigades to the State Emergency Service to Volunteer Marine Rescue/Coast Guard to Red Cross to general community and church groups that support disaster events in many ways deliver real value when deployed.

A coordinated national 'ready reserve' of volunteers, trained in disaster recovery and able to be easily mobilised, could also be established within each state and territory to aid impacted communities during the immediate clean-up post event impact. Whilst similar mechanisms exist in regard to emergency services (particularly firefighting), there are only limited examples across the broader functions of disaster recovery.

The Association would encourage the Federal Government and ADF to consider becoming more involved in disaster management exercises and training, particularly at the LDMG level, as this would assist in developing local networks and building a greater understanding of disaster management arrangements within the region.

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to provide financial support to local communities to assist them to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.

Recommendation 11: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports measures to grow volunteering numbers and participation to stem the alarming decrease in volunteers nationwide.

Recommendation 7: The LGAQ recommends further cross jurisdiction disaster management exercises and training, as this would assist in developing networks and building a greater understanding of disaster management arrangements, capacities and capabilities across jurisdictions.

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

A risk-based approach to Federal Government disaster funding is strongly encouraged.

Continuing Federal Government investment at scale in resilience and betterment programs pays significant dividends and helps to materially reduce the time, community impact and cost involved in recovery when disaster strikes.

Recommendation 6: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports ongoing professional development and information sharing for disaster management professionals to further enhance beneficial local community outcomes. Queensland councils recommend the Federal Government re-establishes a national disaster management centre of excellence.

Recommendation 10: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government increase funding and support for initiatives that keep insurance premiums affordable. Initiatives such as the Northern Australia Re-Insurance Scheme are acknowledged and investing further in such schemes will assist with moderating insurance premiums in higher risk locations and help keep insurance premiums affordable.

Recommendation 11: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government supports measures to grow volunteering numbers and participation to stem the alarming decrease in volunteers nationwide.

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?

Queensland councils recognise that responding to natural disasters is not a primary function of the ADF, however the ADF does possess a set of unique capabilities and resources that are highly valued and advantageous.

The ADF is known to hold resources, knowledge and capabilities that can effectively respond to domestic natural disasters.

ADF personnel possess a range of applicable skills and knowledge regarding how to operate safely in extreme environments and are deployed as self-sufficient units.

The ADF has access to a level of equipment and expertise that is often significantly in advance of what might generally be available at the local community level.

The level of organisational discipline and general capability, including the skills of ADF personnel, is also highly valued.

Should this unique ADF disaster capability and capacity for extraordinary catastrophic disaster response be reduced, the Australian Government is faced with a significant gap in its ability to support the impacted communities that it must seek alternative comparable arrangements.

While it is accepted that this may impact upon their business-as-usual activities, when local and State resources are depleted or exhausted during disaster events, the opportunity for the ADF to provide some support contribution will be critical to the response and recovery of local communities.

Access to ADF resources in previous Queensland events is observed to have been at different scale and scope reflecting difference in approach over the years and the nature of disaster impacts.

It would be broadly considered important that any ADF deployments be complementary to, but not a replacement for, local response activities. Any ADF (or alternative) deployment should occur at the request of, and in coordination with, the Local Disaster Management Group (LDMG) so that the highest and best use of that resource can be achieved.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends that in challenging circumstances where the existing disaster management workforce will need bolstering to ensure response and recovery actions, the ADF increase their future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.

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

Under the QDMA, the ADF's assistance is presently activated via a Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) request. This approach is particularly encouraged as it allows for a locally led and coordinated response (the cornerstone of the QDMA) to determine when best ADF support is required or necessary. This existing model ensures that ADF resources are allocated to where they are required most and can provide the greatest benefit to the community recovery effort.

When ADF resources are deployed without a DACC request having been made – as has previously occurred – difficulties can arise resulting in less-than-optimal outcomes for impacted communities and the associated response and recovery agencies. Maintaining the DACC model and operating within the principles of the QDMA is considered both necessary and advantageous.

The potential to rapidly deploy – or even pre-deploy resources – as is done with other emergency service workers, is a further worthwhile consideration. Often it is in the immediate response to a disaster when access to additional expertise and capability can be of most advantage.

In Queensland, disaster events such as floods and cyclones afford emergency service agencies the opportunity to effectively pre-deploy to expected impact areas.

Should pre-deployment be considered as a plausible consideration, the LGAQ would strongly recommend that this only occur in consultation with LDMGs to ensure maximum situational awareness and to ensure that dependencies or additional resourcing needs are understood prior to deployment. Critical resources such as fuel, shelter, food and water are often in short supply – any deployment should seek not to aggravate local shortages.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends that in challenging circumstances where the existing disaster management workforce will need bolstering to ensure response and recovery actions, the ADF increase their future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.

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

In addition to professional skills, the availability and motivation of community members to be involved in volunteer capacities is also critical to the disaster function.

From rural fire brigades to the State Emergency Service to Volunteer Marine Rescue/Coast Guard to Red Cross to general community and church groups that support disaster events in many ways deliver real value when deployed.

Compared with the mid-1980s, Australians have half as many close friends and know half as many of their neighbours. This has a material impact on community resilience and places additional burdens on both government and community organisations.

Civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state (and local) based services have a vital role to play in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters.

In Queensland many of these organisations are trusted by and work closely with the community and are therefore well placed to offer support.

Councils and communities rely heavily on volunteers for disaster management arrangements and many of these organisations are reflected in local disaster management plans which are regularly reviewed by LDMGs.

These groups will often have defined responsibilities and, in Queensland, are often well practiced in delivering their services.

Queensland councils greatly value the relationships and partnerships they hold with community organisations involved in supporting disaster management activities.

Many councils will hold MOUs or partnership agreements with selected community organisations for the provision of disaster aligned services.

The increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters is placing greater strain on capacity and capability of community organisations to continually respond and recover from events.

There is no longer a “disaster season”. Disaster events occur year-round and long-term events such as global pandemics (such as COVID-19) has greatly fatigued the disaster and emergency management system.

Of growing concern to Queensland councils is the availability and sustainability of the broader volunteer workforce. Often within disaster impacted communities it is the volunteers themselves that may often find themselves personally impacted which results in staffing shortfalls and other operational complications. In the smallest of Queensland community's residents may also often volunteer across several different organisations – for example it is not unusual for an SES volunteer to also be a rural fire fighter.

In Western Queensland, the number of volunteers to assist in preparedness, response and recovery is known to be reducing. Local SES controllers are regularly recruiting for additional members, and this human resourcing gap is a known and ongoing issue.

When disaster occurs at scale, even the most sophisticated and well-resourced of community groups can have their capacity exceeded. Recent experiences from the February 2022 flood event have shown that the capacity of volunteer and not-for-profit groups to respond during large-scale events that impact multiple local government areas and regions can become extremely stretched. Access issues can further amplify the acute nature of response and recovery. Swift response by these groups can be impacted by factors outside of their control.

Insurance for volunteers has proven to be a complex area. Many community organisations struggle to understand the nuance of their insurance cover and how it applies during any disaster activation. Queensland councils similarly are bound by the insurance covers they can procure. Often guidance is required to be sought from the insurance agency to ensure clarity. A national standard or system for managing insurance for volunteers would be beneficial, as too would be a system that was truly cost effective.

Queensland councils have a strong preference that community groups seeking to support disaster impacted communities do so in a coordinated way through the LDMG. Community groups that operate outside of these arrangements run the risk of duplicating or complicating local response and recovery efforts and potentially causing unintended consequences. Queensland councils are also wary of any community groups that seek to ‘profit’ from disasters or who wish to be paid for services delivered when no prior arrangements or agreements have been established.

Queensland local governments recognise that civil and volunteer groups would benefit from additional Federal and State support.

Local governments only have very limited capacity to do this, and this limited capacity is particularly amplified in smaller, rural and remote councils who possess either a limited or zero rate base.

Additional resources and funding are often needed regardless of the frequency and severity of natural disasters.

Recommendation 11: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government support for maintaining and growing local participation in volunteering will be needed to redress the current decline.

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

Importantly, for the benefit of all, it is considered essential that local, district, state and federal disaster arrangements are complementary and work seamlessly. Local communities will likely expect nothing less.

Of similarly high importance are the relationships and communication that must exist between all levels of government – local, state, federal.

Depending on location, there can be multiple groups activated, or active, within a disaster declared area.

Of concern to local government is the need to ensure that work being undertaken is visible to the LDMG and complementary to broader response and recovery activity.

While respecting that some groups will often self-deploy, engaging firstly and in coordination with the LDMG or council will often ensure the best outcome for the impacted community.

Well-meaning groups, through their very presence in a disaster-impacted area, can place additional pressures on already impacted communities or bring forward additional resourcing demands that can prove difficult to meet.

Often there can be periods of limited resource including consumables such as fuel, generators, food and water as well as more significant resources such as accommodation and vehicles.

The most welcomed groups are those who can be broadly self-sufficient and whose engagement is carefully considered in consultation with the LDMG so as to support councils to better coordinate the provision of community support.

Disaster management arrangements in Queensland have proven to be highly effective and are arguably nation-leading, yet the significant increase in the frequency and scale of disaster events does continue to regularly test the capacity of the disaster management system at a local, district, state, and national level.

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

Queensland's Disaster Management Arrangements describe a shared responsibility across government, non-government, private industry and communities.

The Federal Government is encouraged to attract increased investment from industry/the private sector by demonstrating the benefits to national resilience through partnership and responsibility sharing arrangements.

Ensuring adequate and affordable insurance is available is also important but this also requires Federal Government intervention.

Recommendation 10: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues its financial support for the Northern Australia Re-Insurance Scheme to assist with moderating insurance premiums in higher risk locations, and that other initiatives to help keep insurance premiums affordable are supported.

What gaps currently exist in state and territory emergency management capability?

Queensland is particularly well served by the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA) which works in close partnership with local government and state agencies and provides a significant amount of support and coordination regarding key funding programs. The value that this agency provides cannot be understated.

Queensland councils hold a high level of comprehension regarding the roles of each level of government and should continue to be consulted on these roles.

It is recognised that State and Territory governments should *ensure local governments have the support and resources they need to carry out their responsibilities.*

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continue to provide financial support to local communities to assist them to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.

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

One of the most fundamental elements of the Queensland disaster management system are the benefits provided as a consequence of relationships being developed across the disaster management system.

A genuine commitment from all stakeholders to the development of relationships has proven to be effective for disaster response. It is important that these opportunities are developed outside of a disaster activation.

The importance of exercises and a commitment to the PPRR model which encourages work to be progressed outside of simply response and recovery have proven to be effective.

ADF possess a range of applicable skills and knowledge regarding how to operate safely in extreme environments, while possess unique equipment that is also considered highly advantageous.

While strengthening volunteer capacity, national mechanisms for resource sharing and engaging industry, there remains ADF resources that cannot be replicated.

What other mechanism could be put in place to support communities is an area of keen interest to councils.

Indeed, Burke Shire Council, which is recovering from one of the worst flooding disasters in the shire's history, has raised the establishment of a rapid response team, separate to the ADF, to help communities when disasters occur.

The Council has placed this on the agenda for debate at the LGAQ's Annual Conference in Gladstone in October through the moving of a motion calling on the State and Federal Government to 'establish a rapid response team with relevant skill sets who, in the face of significant and/or catastrophic disasters, can be deployed to assist local governments whose workforce capabilities and skill sets may be overwhelmed'.

Should this be supported, it will become part of the LGAQ's policy platform moving forward.

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?

When a disaster event overwhelms local and State resources and capabilities, the ADF has an opportunity to play a critical role. The ADF has access to a level of equipment and expertise that is often significantly in advance of what might generally be available at the local community level. The level of organisational discipline and general capability, including the skills of ADF personnel, is also highly valued.

Senior ADF personnel have also previously been appointed to the role of State Disaster Coordinator within Queensland to good effect and have exercised good engagement with councils. Councils have reported to the LGAQ their general satisfaction with military personnel appointed to such roles.

Continuing Federal Government recovery and hardship relief and investment at scale in resilience and betterment programs pays significant dividends and helps to materially reduce the time, community impact and cost involved in recovery when disaster strikes again.

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to provide financial support to local communities to assist them to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.

Recommendation 2: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to invest at scale in resilience and betterment programs and understanding of risk due to the significant dividends and material reductions in the time, community impact and cost involved in recovery when disaster strikes.

Recommendation 3: The LGAQ recommends that in challenging circumstances where the existing disaster management workforce will need bolstering to ensure response and recovery actions, the ADF increase their future presence in disaster response and recovery to help augment any emerging gaps in capacity. The Federal Government may well consider the advantages of developing a capability within the ADF specifically focused on disaster response and recovery, particularly the coordination and control of ADF personnel and assets.

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

Restoring Financial Assistance Grants to a level equal to 1 per cent of Federal Government taxation revenue will ensure councils nationally have the capability to support local communities, including with disaster management activities.

It is highlighted for the benefit of the review that in Queensland it is often the smallest and most remote of councils that are regularly impacted by natural disasters, this includes many First Nations communities located on the Cape, in the Gulf and in the Torres Strait. It is these small, remote and first nation councils that are often the most financially constrained and highly reliant on State and Federal funding to meet their operational costs.

Of highest and most significant priority is the need for continuing investment in disaster resilience. The Federal Government is best placed to ensure the delivery of disaster resilience funding. The continuing investment in resilience, particularly resilient infrastructure and betterment, will ensure future recovery will be faster and less expensive.

Of similar importance is ensuring that councils are appropriately financially resourced to employ the necessary staff to undertake the disaster management duties assigned to them. The Committee is encouraged to review the 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements which recognised that State and Territory governments should *ensure local governments have the support and resources they need to carry out their responsibilities*.

The guiding principles and priorities for action of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 must also be considered in determining Australia's Disaster Resilience.

Recommendation 1: The LGAQ recommends the Federal Government continues to provide financial support to local communities to assist them to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters.

Conclusion

The LGAQ again thanks the Federal Government for the opportunity to contribute a submission to the Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper.

The important role Queensland councils play in disaster management as part of a locally led, multi-agency model, as articulated in the QDMA, is of particular importance and the Association is keen to reinforce this fact and further would endorse such a model being considered for adoption at a national level.

In its deliberations, we would encourage the review to consider the following:

- Report from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020)
- Outcomes of IGEM's current review of the QDMA;
- The Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 with a focus on the guiding principles and priorities for action;
- COAG's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience; and
- Feedback provided by the LGAQ on behalf of Queensland local governments individual submissions provided directly by Queensland local governments; and,
- Resolutions from Queensland Local Government, submitted and carried at LGAQ annual conferences.

As detailed above, the LGAQ believes it is imperative that, with the increasing advent of natural disasters and the subsequent increasing impacts on local communities' it is essential that councils are properly funded, resourced and trained to deliver on their disaster management responsibilities across the full spectrum of prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPPR).

We again call on the Federal government to restore Financial Assistance Grants to 1 per cent of Federal taxation.

Councils emphasise that Federal arrangements must also work seamlessly within existing state, district and local arrangements. The LGAQ would encourage the mirroring of the QDMA as an effective model.

We emphasise again that locally led responses are critical to the success of any disaster activations and must unequivocally involve LDMGs to ensure resources are deployed as effectively as possible.

The LGAQ and Queensland local governments would appreciate being kept informed on any recommendations they may resolve in regard to positive improvements and benefits that will assist in building stronger and more highly resilient local communities.

Contact Details

Please do not hesitate to contact [REDACTED] [REDACTED] [REDACTED] should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission.

Appendix

LGAQ Policy Statement

The LGAQ Policy Statement² is a definitive statement of the collective voice of local government in Queensland. The relevant policy positions of local government in the context of disaster management are as follows:

1.10.1.1 Negotiation and Consultation

- 1.10.1.1 The LGAQ provides the principal avenue of communication between local government and the federal and state governments and other state bodies. The LGAQ evaluates, where appropriate, state government policies and programs, develops policies for submission to the federal and state governments, and negotiates where appropriate with those governments in relation to those policies and programs.
- 1.10.1.2 The LGAQ should be consulted by the state and federal governments and their departments, authorities and officers, with adequate time available for response, before taking legislative and administrative actions that affect local governments individually or collectively.

2.1.2 Legislation/Compliance

- 2.1.2.1 Legislation affecting local government in Queensland should be framed in recognition of the diversity of capacity, size, resources, skills and physical location of local governments, and should not be drafted under a “one size fits all” model.
- 2.1.2.2 Additional compliance placed on local government by the state government should take into consideration risk management and materiality and the value of transparency to the community and should not be based on simply aligning local government with the state government.

2.2 Intergovernmental Relations

2.2.1 Constitutional Recognition

- 2.2.1.1 There should be an acknowledgement and guarantee of the Commonwealth’s power to directly fund local government in the Constitution Act of the Commonwealth of Australia as a means of recognising the existence and importance of local government as a sphere of responsible government in Australia.

2.2.2 Partnerships, Empowerment and Autonomy

- 2.2.2.2 Local government acknowledges the value of long-term community planning to develop priorities and inform specific projects and programs. Any state government based long term planning, must recognise the diversity of Queensland local government

² <https://www.lgaq.asn.au/downloads/file/531/2022-lgaq-policy-statement>

and accept the right of individual councils to determine a fit for purpose arrangement that reflects their individual circumstances and capacity to respond.

- 2.2.2.4 Federal and state governments must continuously be informed of the restrictions placed on local governments to rate and charge for services by any additional taxes, compliance standards and other regulations imposed by the Federal Government and the state.

3. Finance and Administration

3.1 Funding Assistance

3.1.1 Federal Funding

- 3.1.1.1 Untied federal funding for local governments should continue.

3.5 Funding Assistance

3.5.1 Liability Exposure

- 3.5.1.2 Local governments support the introduction of a legislative exemption from liability for advice given or acts done or omitted to be done in good faith in respect to the management of natural hazards, including flood, bushfire, landslide, storm tide inundation and coastal erosion.

3.6 Climate Risk Management

- 3.6.2.3 Local government urgently seeks appropriate levels of funding and resourcing assistance to develop Climate Risk Management Strategies, undertake detailed risk assessments for priority risks and prepare and implement local government area wide action plans for the immediate, medium and long-term protection and benefit of communities.

3.7 Disaster Management

3.7.1 Community Disaster Resilience and Disaster Mitigation

- 3.7.1.1 The federal and state governments should commit to continued funding of the Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP) as a fund to assist local governments to undertake community resilience building projects to reduce the impacts of identified natural disaster risks on communities. The current provision under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018 for the application of under-spend variances to mitigation projects is considered to be inadequate in terms of likely quantum of funding and does not offer any funding certainty to support proper mitigation investment planning and project delivery. A dedicated mitigation funding program, as identified by the Productivity Commission, is a superior means to rebuilding more resilient infrastructure and should be funded on a 40:40:20 basis between federal, state and local

government. The local government share should be flexible up to a limit depending on the capacity of the individual council involved and no more than 20 per cent.

- 3.7.1.2 Priority should be given to communities which are more likely to be affected by natural disasters based on historical records and predictive models.

3.7.2 Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)

- 3.7.2.2 Local governments understand that they will be able to use their day labour workforce, plant, machinery and equipment for reconstruction works on council-owned essential assets where this provides better value for money outcomes than by using contractor services.
- 3.7.2.4 Where a council experiences a disaster event under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), for all essential public assets – whether they be a road, bridge, water supply or wastewater treatment assets or other essential public assets – they be treated as eligible for assessment on the same terms under the DRFA Guidelines.

LGAQ Annual Conference Resolutions

The LGAQ is committed to member driven advocacy and working with members to build stronger local government and more resilient local communities.

Annual Conference resolutions endorsed by the LGAQ's member councils guide and inform the Association's advocacy on behalf of the sector and the local communities councils represent.

These resolutions represent the top policy positions and funding priorities councils believe are critical to ensuring Queensland flourishes and our communities thrive.

Resolutions passed by members relevant to disaster management include:

2021 Annual Conference Resolution 7:

That the LGAQ calls on the Federal Government to provide \$200 million per year for four years for targeted disaster mitigation and to future-proof community infrastructure.

2020 Annual Conference Resolution 66:

The LGAQ lobby the State and Federal Governments to streamline their disaster recovery funding arrangements to maximise recovery effectiveness.

2019 Annual Conference Resolution 54:

That the LGAQ lobby the State and Federal Governments to increase the Disaster Resilience Fund to enable additional Betterment Program works to be carried out.