

Introduction:

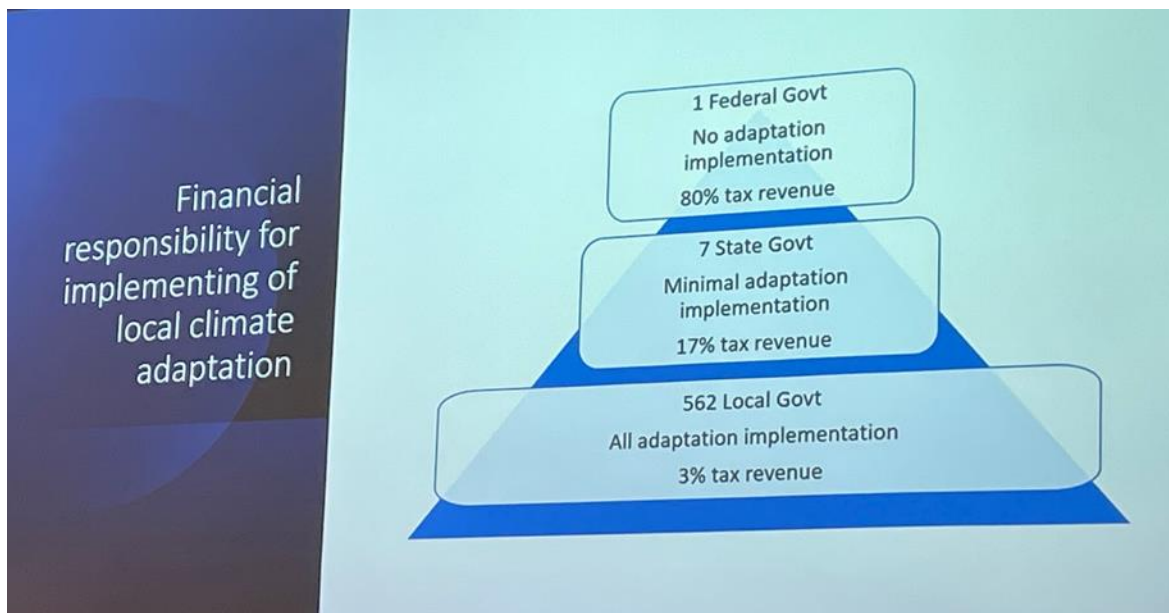
Australia has faced increasingly frequent and devastating disasters in recent years, from bushfires to floods and cyclones. Local governments are at the forefront of responding to these emergencies, but they often lack the resources and capacity to adequately prepare and recover. To address this critical issue and build a more resilient nation, the Australian Federal Government must rethink its approach to disaster response and recovery. This submission outlines key recommendations for how the Federal Government can better support communities to respond to disasters while emphasising the importance of building back better and to higher standards.

1. Comprehensive Funding for Resilience Infrastructure & Insurance Reforms:

Local governments need substantial financial support to upgrade their infrastructure to higher resilience standards, and to be able to prepare, mitigate and response to increasing climate change disasters.

Please listen to this radio interview, which calls for 30% disaster preparedness, 30% disaster mitigation and 30% response/recovery, rather than the current 90% funding for response/recovery: https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/radionational-breakfast/preparations-for-an-early-fire-season-across-the-country/102881328?utm_campaign=abc_listen&utm_content=mail&utm_medium=content_shared&utm_source=abc_listen

Local governments receive 3% of the tax revenue, but face the biggest share of climate change impact and adaptation requirements. See diagram below.



The current funding model for local governments with 'like-for-like' insurance replacement after a disaster, often doesn't meet newer higher standards, and is a waste of public money. Why

keep replacing the same path/road/bridge after a flood/fire/storm rather than making it stronger/higher/flood resilient so it can withstand the next emergency?

The Federal Government could provide grants specifically earmarked for improving critical infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and safer places for the most vulnerable rural and regional local government areas which have low rate base revenue options.

People with disabilities are often left behind, with many relief centres not meeting accessibility standards.

This funding should not only repair damages but also promote design improvements that enhance resilience against future disasters, and should fund more local government staff to help prepare their communities. You will find there are only two or three Emergency Management Officers in each rural or regional local governments across Australia. It's just not enough! Our shire in East Gippsland covers 10% of Victoria and 80% is in either national park or state forest. We have a low rate base with rate capping. We are no better prepared if black summer was to hit again this summer.

2. Long-Term Planning and Coordination:

Disaster resilience should be a long-term priority. The Federal Government must work collaboratively with state AND **local** governments to develop comprehensive disaster mitigation and recovery plans. These plans should focus on proactive measures to reduce disaster risk and ensure that communities can bounce back stronger. Ensuring consistent and coordinated efforts between federal, state, and local levels is crucial.

3. Community Capacity Building:

Local communities must be empowered to prepare and respond effectively. The Federal Government should allocate resources for community training and education programs. These initiatives can teach residents about disaster preparedness, evacuation plans, and first aid. Additionally, they could support existing community disaster readiness committees.

4. Support for Climate Adaptation:

Recognising the impacts of climate change on disaster frequency and intensity, the Federal Government must allocate funds for climate adaptation measures, such as the Disaster Ready Fund which is a welcome first step. This includes supporting local governments in implementing climate-resilient urban planning, sustainable water management and heatwave plans.

5. Research and Innovation:

Invest in research and innovation to develop new technologies and methods for disaster prediction, early warning systems, and response strategies. Supporting local universities and research institutions in this field can yield valuable insights and solutions.

6. Monitoring and Accountability:

Establish a robust monitoring and evaluation framework to assess the effectiveness of disaster preparedness and response efforts. Regular audits and reporting can ensure that funds are being used efficiently and that local governments are meeting resilience standards.

7. International Collaboration:

Collaborate with neighboring countries and international organizations to share best practices, resources, and knowledge. Disasters often transcend borders, and cooperation can enhance Australia's resilience in the face of regional challenges.

Conclusion:

The Australian Federal Government must take bold and proactive steps to better support communities in responding to disasters. Building back better and to higher standards is not a luxury but a necessity in an era of increasing climate-related threats. Local governments are the first line of defense against disasters, and they need the resources, capacity-building, and long-term planning support to fulfill this role effectively. Without these changes, communities across Australia remain vulnerable, and the consequences of inaction are far too severe to ignore. The time to act is now, and by implementing these recommendations, the Federal Government can ensure that local governments are better prepared and resourced for the challenges from climate change.

Rebecca Lamble, [REDACTED]
[REDACTED]