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Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response – consultation

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission in response to the *Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response* Discussion Paper, specifically regarding the Australian Government capabilities required to support state and territory-led crisis response and recovery efforts, as an alternative to the Australian Defence Force (ADF).

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges that the Defence Strategic Review released in April 2023 highlighted that the ADF's role in providing assistance to the civil community following natural disasters comes at a cost to force preparedness, readiness and combat effectiveness.

With the increased frequency, intensity and concurrency of disasters, it is imperative the Australian Government and states and territories work together to develop national resilience and response measures for adverse climate events at the local level to reduce the need for ADF support, except in extreme circumstances.

Tasmanian context

Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements

In recent years, Tasmania has been faced with unprecedented events that have tested our limits and shaped a new way forward in managing disaster resilience, response and recovery. The frequency, duration and potentially compounding nature of events is only anticipated to increase in the future, due to climate change.

Tasmania's comprehensive and all-hazards approach to emergency management is outlined in the Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements (TEMA), which details our preparedness measures and describes how we respond to and recover from emergencies.

Tasmania has surge capacity arrangements to ensure the timely deployment of resources during a crisis, including interoperability arrangements across Tasmanian Government agencies as well as arrangements in place to seek interjurisdictional support if required.

While the Tasmanian Government has responsibility for responding to a disaster within the state, if our resources are insufficient or overwhelmed, Australian Government assistance may be requested.

Tasmania has previously requested ADF assistance during recent emergency events including:

- The COVID-19 pandemic – to:
 - maintain the provision of essential emergency care services at the North West Regional Hospital following an outbreak amongst its staff in April 2020, in partnership with an Australian Medical Assistance Team (AUSMAT);
 - assist a number of aged care facilities following outbreaks in February 2022;
 - support logistics for the storage and management of additional Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) purchased in response to the pandemic;
 - assist in COVID-19 call centres; and
 - support with enforcing quarantine compliance throughout the pandemic.
- 2018-19 Tasmanian bushfires – provision of emergency bedding for the Huon Valley Council and accommodation support to the firefighting effort.
- 2016 Tasmanian floods – provision of high clearance vehicles to assist with the movement of people and resources through flooded areas.
- 2013 Dunalley Fires – provision of strategic airlift support to move a portable generator to power the affected area.

Tasmania has also received emergency surge support from national volunteer organisations including Disaster Relief Australia during the mid-2022 cyclonic winds.

Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy

Tasmania understands the importance of disaster risk reduction and resilience and is actively investing in and working to build the collective resilience of Tasmanians in the face of future disasters. This is provided through a range of measures that are guided by the Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy.

This includes community engagement, education and awareness initiatives to improve community flood and bushfire resilience through risk reduction, better preparedness and planning.

Australian Government support considerations

The *Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response* Discussion Paper aims to ensure that the Australian Government has the right tools to manage national-level crises and can effectively support jurisdictions during major emergency responses.

Below are some issues for the Australian Government to consider in its disaster resilience and response support for Tasmania and other jurisdictions:

National funding programs

National resilience funding programs, such as the Disaster Ready Fund and the Natural Disaster Risk Reduction Grants Program, enable Tasmania to continue to progress disaster resilience initiatives that align with the objectives of state-level plans such as the Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy.

National funding programs are paramount in supporting projects that strengthen community resilience to prepare for, respond to and recover from natural disasters, along with leading change, coordinating effort and supporting disaster preparedness, response and resilience capability building.

Continued investment in resilience, with consistent funding available to jurisdictions on an ongoing basis, is critical for Tasmania to effectively build its disaster resilience and to allow organisations to build resilience projects into future work programs.

Capacities and capabilities

While states and territories are the primary first responders, it is important for the Australian Government to put in place agile and scalable mechanisms for jurisdictions to access surge resources and additional support during emergency response efforts if required. Tasmania is interested to understand what the new threshold is for ADF support via the Defence Assistance to the Civilian Community arrangements.

The provision of longer-term Australian Government capacities and capabilities to meet challenges of the evolving strategic environment may include:

- The continuation of the provision of national coordination mechanisms in nationally significant events, which are useful for information sharing, coordinating activities and standing up resources quickly.
- Building the ability of the Australian Government to support multiple jurisdictions for protracted periods of time through response and into recovery if required. The ADF is unique in offering a national footprint of staging areas and quantity of trained personnel that can, on reduced notice, be rapidly deployed with an established command and control structure and enabling communications and can be replaced throughout the response and recovery phases to reduce the risk of fatigue.
- Development of a nationally coordinated volunteer operation, noting that any effort to achieve this should not be to the detriment of local volunteer organisations. This could include support for building the capacity and capability of national volunteer organisations such as Disaster Relief Australia. This should not detract from investment in local volunteer workforces such as enhancing State Emergency Service capabilities across Australia.
- The need to maintain readily available access to vessel support when required to assist with mass evacuations from isolated areas and the provision of essential supplies in particular where port facilities are not available or have been damaged.
- Expansion of available fleet vehicles to support emergency response, provision of essential supplies and the movement of people, including rough terrain vehicles, a rotary and fixed-

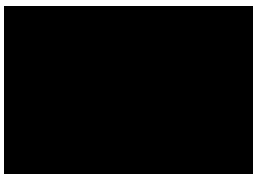
wing air fleet capable of advanced and prolonged fire-fighting capabilities and supporting heavy lift.

- Increased focus on the assistance that may be provided through the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN). There are a number of surge capacity plans in place that can be triggered under the request of the COMDISPLAN, including the National Framework for Public Sector Surge Mobility, which was established in July 2020 to assist surges during the COVID-19 pandemic. The National Framework complements the Australian Public Service Mobility Framework and state and territory mobility frameworks and policies by providing support for interjurisdictional temporary moves.
- The need to maintain access to the National Emergency Call Centre Surge Capability when required.
- The development of a national surge capacity plan identifying flexible, appropriate and feasible mechanisms to identify additional capabilities, resources, logistics and communications support during emergency situations to support jurisdictions and the continuity of critical functions. Through the development of a national surge capacity plan, gaps in surge capacity may be identified and addressed prior to an emergency.
- Ensuring all jurisdictions can readily and easily access the Australian Government's national stockpile of emergency management assets and consumables.
- Exploring ways to assist in addressing legacy exposure risks and issues surrounding vulnerable coastal locations that are more at risk of extreme damage from bushfires, coastal inundation, landslides and rising coastal aquifers to help educate communities and assist in adapting to changing coastal exposures.

Thank you again for the opportunity to be involved in this consultation process. We acknowledge the importance of identifying alternative options for Commonwealth capacities to support state and territory-led responses and enhance Australia's resilience to natural disasters.

We look forward to continuing to work with the Australian Government, other jurisdictions and our communities to continue to build disaster resilience, as well as enhance the capability and capacity to plan for, withstand and recover from emergencies.

Yours sincerely



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