The Institute for Integrated Economic Research-Australia

Australian Security Leaders Climate Group

Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper – Submission

Preamble

We applaud the intent of the Department's public consultation on the 'Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response' and appreciate the opportunity to provide feedback. We will endeavour to answer some of the questions posed whilst also addressing examples of the broader system level concerns we have identified.

Background

The Institute for Integrated Economic Research-Australia (IIER) – Australia. IIER- Australia was founded in 2018. It conducts and supports research to contribute to an improved understanding of how Australians can plan for, and navigate, the significant transitions in Energy, Environment and Economic Systems over forthcoming decades whilst maintaining the stability and security of our society.

The Australian Security Leaders Climate Group (ASLCG). ASLCG was formed in 2021 to reframe the climate debate and make climate an immediate security priority in Australia by assessing the full level of oncoming risk and building resilience for local and global protection.

Existential Risk

The scientific evidence is that the world will reach 1.5°C in the next decade, irrespective of any emission reduction initiatives taken in the meantime, and likely 2°C before 2050 even with higher-ambition emission reductions. Currently, global emission-reduction commitments will lead to around 3°C of warming.

The 2022 UN report *Our World at Risk: Transforming Governance for a Resilient Future*, warns of the risk of collapse because "risk creation is outstripping risk reduction": disasters, economic loss and the underlying vulnerabilities that drive risk, such as poverty and

inequality, are increasing just as ecosystems and biospheres are at risk of collapse. Global systems are becoming more connected and therefore more vulnerable in an uncertain risk landscape.

This Existential Risk and associated vulnerabilities are not amenable to the learn from-failure approach of conventional risk management, nor can reliance be placed on the institutions, moral norms, or social attitudes developed from our experience with managing other sorts of risks. Climate change now presents a grave, and potentially existential, threat to society and human security. Higher levels of warming will stretch us beyond our capacity to respond.

Australia has responsibilities as a global citizen and a duty to protect its own people. Many of the solutions are at our disposal. Australia can act now and needs to act now. Responding adequately to the climate threat is fundamental to the survival of the nation. Unless rectified, this will place even greater pressure on the Australian Defence Force (ADF), and emergency, and disaster relief agencies, to pick up the pieces in the face of accelerating climate impacts.

The Need for a National Risk Assessment and Resilience Strategy

The needs highlighted in your consultation paper are endorsed. However, in our view the discussion paper lacks the context of a national resilience strategy. Prior to developing a national capability to address a widening gap in response and early recovery from disasters, it is essential to conduct a risk assessment to define the context and goals for the strategy. In this specific case:

- A National Risk Assessment is being developed but not publicly discussed.
- A declassified version of the climate-security risk assessment completed by the Office of National Intelligence (ONI) in 2022 has not been released.
- The Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment, and Water (DCCEEW) is leading a National Climate Risk Assessment, as a part of the National Risk Assessment process. However, the first component, a qualitive assessment, is scheduled for release in late 2023 with a complete quantitative assessment in late 2024. (https://www.dcceew.gov.au/climate-change/policy/adaptation/ncra)

Assessing risk and prioritising subsequent actions needs to be broader than simply creating a new capability to address current needs as the entire disaster management system is currently under significant stress. A 'designed' approach to the change we need to make; it is about more than just the pieces, it is about how we develop, operate, and sustain our societies in a more complex interconnected global context. A national resilience strategy is urgently required to address our nations complex needs.

National resilience is not a gift bestowed to us from our heritage, that can be magically called upon in times of distress. This submission considers national resilience to be a complex system of integrating parts. Common factors which impact our national resilience are like pieces of a

jigsaw puzzle strewn across the ground. The problem is that there is no integrated design of how these components are linked or how they should function together in our nation. This described below at Figure 1.
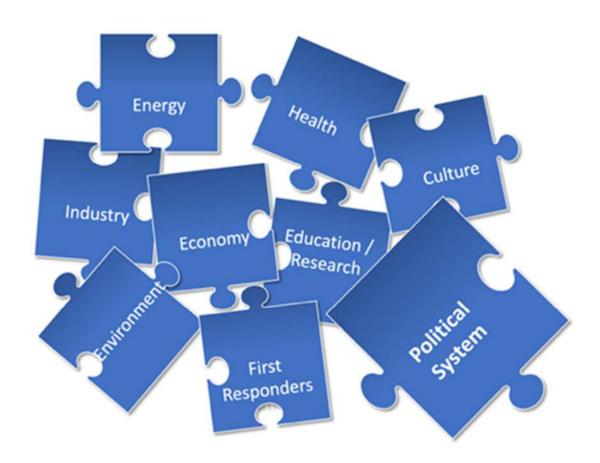
FIGURE 1 – RESILIENCE THE JIGSAW PUZZLE

What is evident in looking at the pieces of the *Figure 1 The Jigsaw Puzzle*, is that they are individually very worthwhile. However, how do they fit together? Is there a common risk analysis that guides these reports?   Siloed activities will not necessarily address the wider scope of disasters that we are facing today, and into the future.   To present a more integrated view, an expanded National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (NDRRF) is required which addresses a broader range of risks and vulnerabilities to be addressed.   The expanded NDRRF is a lens through which the common resilience issues can be explored, as illustrated in Figure 2.

FIGURE 2 – NATIONAL RESILIENCE

Transition Plan

Noting the urgent need to build a new capability as described in your discussion paper many activities will need to be completed in a short timeframe. We urge the Department to complete a comprehensive transition plan that says how we will move from the current situation where the nation relies on ADF and emergency volunteers to a new capability that can address a hostile future environment. We must not pretend that this can be fixed by selective 'quick wins' rather we need to level with the Australian Public and demonstrate that the nation is collectively moving to an improved state of preparedness for the future.

Questions.

Question 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?

Answer 1:

- The Commonwealth cannot be simply a coordinator, it must lead; Ministers must drive reform and provide the robust organisation that States and Territories cannot provide. We conclude that there are three key characteristics or attributes that need to be strengthened in our society to meet this evolving need. These are:
    - *Shared Awareness / Goals.* With shared awareness we can act rationally and prepare accordingly because we can then define a shared goal - a common aimpoint; without it, we just react to each crisis as it occurs.
    - *Teaming / Collaboration.* We cannot solve our complex challenges by looking for incremental, stove-piped, quick wins; we need a team approach within our nation.

- *Preparedness / Mobilisation*. There is an opportunity to learn from Defence preparedness concepts and systems and to adapt and implement them across our wider society. As a nation we need to prepare for and avert future disasters / crises and not just wait to react. In addition to preparing, we must be able to mobilise the nation to address an emerging threat.

- What this means in terms of capabilities is an increase in funding and capacity at the Commonwealth level. Shared Awareness is not the enhancement of the Crisis Coordination Centre (although this is important), rather it is the knowledge which allows detailed sharing of Jurisdictional and industry capacity. For example, with the COVID-19, pandemic information sharing across the health system sector was extremely poor. The lack of transparency in the medicines supply chain and of stock levels in the "national medical stockpile" led to panic buying and hampered the ability of hospital pharmacists to plan for future COVID variant surges.

- Multi-jurisdictional teaming requires new approaches to Australia's broader whole-of government crisis mechanisms with an emphasis on long range planning and building greater capacity to respond to multiple acute and systemic shocks brought on by climate change. This leads to a renewed commitment to collaborate that acknowledges the difficulties of Federation but does not use this as an excuse for inactivity.

- The concept of mobilisation is a requirement for new resources that are not the same as the emergency responder capability which we rely upon currently.

Question 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?

Answer 2:

- The Commonwealth must first recognise that there is increasing probability of climate related disasters, and a one-off investment is not enough. This acknowledges an increase in frequency and intensity of events that may be concurrent and diverse in nature and that expected seasonal events are now occurring outside traditional times. This means there must be systematic and ongoing change across the disaster management cycle.

- The key pressure point is repeated response across multiple jurisdictions which exhausts first responders. Our current national resources can be overwhelmed with two concurrent cyclones well separated, and complexity can increase where response in one disaster may compete with recovery from another disaster in another location. The Commonwealth needs to develop a comprehensive schedule of priority for varying disasters which is shared with communities. Transparency is key to building trust.

- Australia is part of the region, and a difficult question is: How does Australia position itself to ensure domestic capabilities can be surged internationally? What are the most important consequences (regional/domestic)? There is a need have a better domestic model of capability and consequence that enables improved decision making on international surge of domestic disaster capabilities.

- The pressure point does not start at the response - it is reflective of inadequate Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and investment. Infrastructure Investment is a vexed question within itself, but Infrastructure investment must be consistent with DRR requirements. As a starting point new projects should not reinforce and increase disaster risk. The complexity of new climate scenarios, and interaction of the built and natural environments means this can be a complex interconnection.
- The Commonwealth should have an understanding/audit of all assets/contracts supporting the complete disaster management cycle. The States and Territories require the governance and procurement systems to allow decentralised activity by industry and local governments. Further, an assessment of legacy or lagging standards that do not anticipate changes in disasters and provide adequate protection to communities is also required.

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

Answer 3:

- Reconstruction and preparedness activities should focus on a 'build forward wiser' philosophy and include such activities as investing in improved sustainable and resilient systems, adopting new standards, and development of adaptive technologies.
- The Commonwealth must acknowledge that there is a lack of honesty about our collective futures, and a large group of Australians feel disempowered and forgotten. The most vulnerable do not have the agency for personal resilience or capacity to address the inequalities of power and wealth. There is a 'shared responsibility' which needs new partnerships between groups who have not worked together before, and who may have been adversaries.
- Leaders have the responsibility for providing the environment and tools to enable trust. Truth underpins strong positive stories and the narrative needs to be factual and where necessary direct. The aim is to encourage a national narrative where it is one consistent narrative with thousands of stories told to different audiences at different time.
- It may be possible to effect change by embracing a 'Resilience by Design' approach, meaning systematic design and ongoing building of resilience through a collaborative methodology across Australian society. The aim should be to map vulnerability and consequences in the Australian ecosystem and shift focus from purely tasks underway to potential future problems and desired outcomes.
- Community based resilience is potentially the most powerful, most enduring, and most achievable form of resilience. National frameworks and leadership will certainly assist, but resilience is unlikely to be achieved from top-down directives and distant leadership alone. Leaders of traditional and large institutions have better training, access to resources and better understanding of complexity, but the hubris attached to 'big' leadership can stifle community stakeholder engagement. Local leadership uses trusted networks and is directly accountable to its constituency in a way

national and international leaders will never be able to achieve. Investment in local leadership, able to prepare their communities for shocks, is key to future resilience.

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

Answer 4:

- Embed the goal of future planning and testing in Government process to better anticipate, respond to, recover from, and adapt to the inevitable disruptions in forthcoming decades.
- The employment of anticipatory governance: "systematic embedding and application of strategic foresight throughout the entire governance architecture, including policy analysis, engagement, and decision making."
- Institutionalisation of strategic foresight to include:
  - establishing dedicated foresight institutions and frameworks; and
  - building a foresight culture within existing institutional structures.
- Improve the lessons learned capacity and data capture. This will allow improved risk management informed by previous disasters. Risk assessments must be continually updated and tested against realistic and catastrophic scenarios. It is important to remember that reflective lessons need to be consistent with risk identified by foresight.
- Recognise climate change disaster management is an important regional cooperation issue. Assist regional forums, institutions, and mechanisms to help develop national level disaster management capability and capacity acknowledge the right of all nations to 'manage our own disasters'.
- Conduct a joint 'Australia and Near Neighbours Climate Risk Assessment' to provide a baseline of known risks and impacts which enable ongoing monitoring of climate risks, evaluation of the effectiveness of adaptation action, and evolution of responses over time.
- Australia has a record of responding to crises with volunteers. As commendable as these hyper-local response actions are, they do not build resilience, and are certainly not sustainable. Unfortunately, local humanitarian responses tend to be lauded by the media and politicians as examples of the resilience of Australians, whereas in practice, they reflect a convenient and available resource able to work around a systemic failure of national resilience planning.
- Australians, Australian communities, and Australian governments need to undertake formal crisis preparation, within a national resilience framework, as a matter of urgency.

Question 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?
  - 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?

Answer 5:

- Defence may offer some lessons on future thinking and resilience, as a primary role of Defence is preparedness. Preparedness refers to a set of actions that are taken as precautionary measures in the face of potential disasters, which can include both physical preparations and training for emergency action.
- Preparedness is a concept/process in military planning and operations that comes from an understanding of the evidence to support good decision making to mitigate risk. Trade-offs at all levels need to be assessed, communicated, and adjusted as circumstances change. The price of resilience is a willingness to bear the cost of preparedness, and this relies on evidence of the costs (and who incurs them) and the benefits that preparedness generates (and who the beneficiaries are).
- The system of the Defence Reserve Forces could also be explored as a model for the development of a Crisis Response Corps. For example, there are well established training regimes, graduated call-out procedures, compensation for participants as well as employers, all within an established legislative and regulatory framework. Such a model should not be construed as undermining or diminishing the volunteerism that is part of the Australian psyche, but rather a means of building a capability to improve our national resilience.
- Similar roles have been seen abroad such as the inter world war years' US Conservation Corps. Most recently, President Biden has proposed the formation of a Climate Corps with an approximate budget of $10 billion. The Executive Order directed that the initiative should 'aim to conserve and restore public lands and waters, bolster community resilience, increase reforestation, increase carbon sequestration in the agricultural sector, protect biodiversity, improve access to recreation, and address the changing climate'.
- This cannot be a solution that calls on further volunteers or relies upon some form of conscription. Volunteers are sourced from a diminishing pool that is ageing while more is expected from the dedicated volunteer and philanthropic networks. The economy is built around two income families with limited capacity to be volunteers. This drying up of useful volunteers is already hurting the nation. Thus, we need a different approach, and this underpins the AUSS+IE scheme for a universal service scheme that is highly incentivized towards harnessing skills and energies of our young people. This is an example of the state and society having an agreed contract. It must be some form of compact beyond the volunteer (expected good will) where

the state and society have an agreed series of responsibilities and something that benefits each.

- This workforce needs to understand disasters and has the necessary muti disciplinary and leadership skills to work with emergency management and multi-jurisdictional teams in high pressure and contested environments. It needs training and leadership.
- Encouragement (financial?) to individuals and or Companies that allow people to complete disaster related tasks without being pulled back too early because of 'work' pressures.
- Disaster management requires experienced people not just school leavers who may not have the experience to deal with difficult problems.
- This capability should be planned and exercised not only for response but all aspects of disaster management.
- The emphasis has shifted from seeing the private sector's role as a donor to being more actively engaged in sharing expertise and capacity, both to reduce suffering and to help rebuild communities following a disaster, as well as to play a critical role in disaster risk reduction through prevention and preparedness.
- Unfortunately, in Australia there has been relatively little effort to understand the potential for contributions by specific industries, or to develop models of engagement that recognise the need for local action and ownership while being replicable, scalable, and justifiable in business terms. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, a construction company already operating in an area affected by a disaster is ideally positioned to contribute labour, materials and equipment that can save lives and reduce suffering. In addition to proximity, the company is likely to have the advantage of pre-established local networks and supply chains, relationships with local government, and a unique understanding of regulatory frameworks that may be lacking in the humanitarian agencies arriving on the scene. The distribution of food, water, medical supplies, and shelter materials can be undertaken much more rapidly and efficiently by a large workforce that is immediately deployable and knows the local area. Assets such as earthmoving equipment can immediately be used for clearing debris. Company vehicles can be used for the distribution of humanitarian assistance. Generators can supply temporary power, and company offices and satellite communications can prove critical in assisting the coordination of the response.

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

Answer 6:

- We believe the ADF is uniquely qualified to operate and internally deploy in difficult places. The short notice and capabilities cannot be replaced. The Discussion paper acknowledges that it is not the intention to declare Defence a 'no-go' area for aid to the civil community.
- Defence could advise/assist the training of a civilian cadre of personnel to be despatched in support of a HADR operation – Defence providing the transport and logistics, the civilian staff remaining on the ground to deliver the support. Continuing,

but targeted support, to the civil community could also benefit Defence in developing crucial skillsets in environments difficult to simulate or emulate in a military only domain.

- During the Black Summer bushfires, the worst of nature brought out the best in humanity and many examples of people overcoming and adapting to survive. One notable example was the community's total dependence on digital technology such as mobile phones, social media and information apps which proved very convincingly to be a single point of failure as access to the mobile data and phone networks were denied as towers succumbed to the devastation of fire, wind and in some cases flood. The similarities between that which nature imposed upon the community and a cyber-attack denying the community access to digital networks should not be allowed to pass without providing some valuable training and adaptation of Australian owned systems capable of mitigating these very offensive effects. If the commercial industries stood up an improved communications capability and cyber defence, then this will mean the ADF will not have to deploy emergency communication capabilities.

Question 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?

Answer 7:

The Commonwealth Government must always provide the leadership which binds the Nation. This requires a constant program of support to other jurisdictions and agencies, with funding during disasters and recovery but more importantly to comprehensive preparedness activities. This does not negate the need for other Governments and agencies to address shortfalls within their domain of responsibility.

Question 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?

Answer 8:

To Be Determined.

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Submitted by:

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