



# **Submission on Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response**

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September 2023

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## Our commitment to inclusion

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The Salvation Army Australia acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet and work and pay our respect to Elders, past, present and future.

We value and include people of all cultures, languages, abilities, sexual orientations, gender identities, gender expressions and intersex status. We are committed to providing programs that are fully inclusive. We are committed to the safety and wellbeing of people of all ages, particularly children.

Our values are:

- Integrity
- Compassion
- Respect
- Diversity
- Collaboration

Learn more about our commitment to inclusion: <[salvationarmy.org.au/about-us](https://salvationarmy.org.au/about-us)>

The Salvation Army is an international movement and our mission is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and to meet human needs in his name without discrimination.

More information about The Salvation Army is at **Appendix A**.







## Executive summary

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The Salvation Army Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Australian Government Department of Home Affairs and the National Emergency Management Agency in relation to Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response.

The Salvation Army is a well-known presence during and in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency in Australia and internationally through The Salvation Army International Emergency Services. We are grateful for government and the broader Australian community, who respond generously to our disaster appeals. This enables us to support individuals and communities in the days, weeks, months and years following a disaster. Our experience is that in the chaos following a disaster, community members seek out trusted organisations like The Salvation Army for aid, advice and support. It is a great privilege to be able to walk alongside people in their time of need.

The last decade in Australia has witnessed multiple natural disasters and events involving bushfires, floods, drought, heatwaves, extreme sea level events and other severe weather events such as hail and damaging storms. The impact of these events on Australian communities, individuals, governments, civil society and industries has been significant not only in the case of each discrete event but also cumulatively in the context of the repeated capabilities mobilised for disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (including rehabilitation and reconstruction).

The occurrence and impact of natural disasters will be further exacerbated by the increasing frequency and severity of climate events.

In this submission, The Salvation Army focuses on:

- The benefit of support provided by the Australian Defence Force;
- Opportunities to replace or supplement current ADF support; and
- Building readiness and reducing risk at the community level.

The Salvation Army's submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience also contemplates issues raised in the discussion paper.<sup>1</sup>

The Salvation Army has made **9** recommendations for consideration. A summary of these recommendations follows on the next page.

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<sup>1</sup> The Salvation Army Australia. (2023). Submission to Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience. <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=8085427a-e7f1-415e-a216-75cfa9ebbc0&subId=733844>



# Summary of Recommendations

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## Recommendation 1

2.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider establishing a military unit/s that specialise in aspects of disaster relief operations.

## Recommendation 2

2.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government provide adequate and ongoing funding for the not-for-profit sector to increase their human and capital resources to respond promptly and effectively to a disaster.

## Recommendation 3

2.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government introduce substantial leave provisions to allow Australian Public Service staff to undertake necessary training and volunteer in response to a disaster event.

## Recommendation 4

2.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government introduce tax incentives for employers that provide leave for staff to undertake necessary training and volunteer in response to a disaster event.

## Recommendation 5

3.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to develop a multimedia public information campaign on the importance of preparing and enacting a disaster plan in response to new and changing levels of risk.

## Recommendation 6

3.10 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to respond to disaster risk at the community level.

## Recommendation 7

3.11 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state governments to phase out insurance stamp duty to alleviate the stress of rising insurance premiums.

## Recommendation 8

3.12 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments and industry to incentivise hazard resilient buildings, especially in high-risk areas.

## Recommendation 9

3.13 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to increase public awareness of common issues with home and contents insurance coverage, including underinsurance. This could be included in disaster preparedness guides and a national information campaign.





# 1 Frontline Observations – the value of ADF involvement

- 1.1 The Salvation Army is a well-known presence during and in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency in Australia and internationally through The Salvation Army International Emergency Services.
- 1.2 We cannot understate the unique value that the ADF brings to a disaster situation. In widespread and in discrete events, Defence personnel and equipment have allowed us to provide supplies to otherwise inaccessible locations, and to transport people out of them.
- 1.3 Feedback from disaster-affected locations that had benefitted from ADF assistance noted the considerable difference this assistance makes. The human resources, equipment and facilities the ADF deployed provided great relief, including in assisting the emergency catering effort and providing transport for affected individuals. The support they provided bolstered community morale. This was beneficial in helping community members return to a more normal routine. We observed that the opportunity to help others in need also boosted ADF members' own sense of wellbeing.
- 1.4 The Defence Strategic Review identified the growing impact of climate change on Australia's strategic environment.<sup>2</sup> It concluded that the Australian Defence Force is "not structured or appropriately equipped to act as a domestic disaster recovery agency concurrently with its core function".<sup>3</sup> If the ADF can only be called on in the "most extreme domestic disaster operations", Australia needs to develop parallel resources – both human and capital – to ensure we are appropriately structured and equipped to act.

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“I will never forget the (looks on the) faces of the people coming off the (ADF) boats from Mallacoota (during the 2019-20 bushfires).”  
- Salvation Army Emergency Services team member  
”

“  
“[The ADF] have equipment we just don't have, stuff we couldn't dream of— field kitchens and cool rooms the size of shipping containers.”  
A Salvation Army member in regional NSW  
”

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2023). National Defence: Defence Strategic Review. <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-strategic-review>

<sup>3</sup> Commonwealth of Australia (2023). National Defence: Defence Strategic Review. <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/reviews-inquiries/defence-strategic-review>



## 2 Relief and Recovery

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- 2.1 Though state and territory governments have primary responsibility for emergency response and planning, this does not negate the benefit of national consistency and coordination. Differing capacities and capabilities also mean that there will always be need for the Commonwealth to bolster the disaster relief and recovery efforts of individual states and territories.
- 2.2 Our frontline emergency response staff identified the unique training, expertise and specialist equipment of the ADF as key to its ability to respond so effectively during a disaster event. Replicating this highly trained workforce would require significant ongoing funding.
- 2.3 Regardless of the type of structures and systems Australia develops to replace the role that the ADF currently play in disaster relief and recovery, it is essential that these are in addition to – and in support of – local emergency plans led by local communities and informed by local knowledge. Our experience is that wraparound support is needed particularly after 6 months as the long-term impact of trauma becomes evident.

### Specialist military unit

- 2.4 The Salvation Army's submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience contemplates different models in practice internationally.<sup>4</sup> These include standing or reserve military units that specialise in aspects of disaster relief operations. Investing in such a unit has the potential to make use of existing Defence training systems and structures, while not draining resources intended for "core functions". Disaster response activities could also be seen as training exercises for ADF personnel.

### **The Salvation Army Emergency and Disaster Response**

As the crisis unfolds, phase one involves Salvation Army Emergency Services (SAES) personnel feeding and providing support to first responders and evacuees and assisting with the management and service of evacuation centres according to agreements in place with state, territory and local governments. The SAES is a national 24/7 state of readiness service with 18 full-time staff and supported by volunteers.

In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, The Salvation Army's support transitions to phase two – an initial assessment and provision of emergency financial support, and then once the crisis is over, to phase three – financial support following a more detailed assessment of need.

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<sup>4</sup> The Salvation Army Australia. (2023). Submission to Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience. <https://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=8085427a-e7f1-415e-a216-75cfda9ebbc0&subId=733844>







## Role of the not-for-profit sector

- 2.5 If established, a specialist military unit would need to be supplemented by increased capabilities in the private and not-for-profit sectors.
- 2.6 The Salvation Army's experience responding to disaster events in Australia and internationally means that we are well-placed to scale up our operations with a national interoperable model to meet some of the need. With adequate funding and resources, Salvation Army Emergency Services could increase the size of its state of readiness service staff, pool of volunteers and equipment. Our Flying Padre plane and helicopter have been effectively used to deliver disaster relief in Queensland and the Northern Territory. Access to additional equipment and an increased training budget would allow us to increase our capability and capacity in the field to respond quickly to humanitarian needs.
- 2.7 The Salvation Army welcomes the focus in National Action 12 of the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework Second National Action Plan on increasing volunteerism and the recognition of the benefit of workforces that are "trained, exercised, supported, and always equipped, not just in times of crisis". This applies equally to volunteers.
- 2.8 Spontaneous volunteers are a welcome boost in times of crisis but cannot replace a well-trained workforce, whether paid or unpaid. The Commonwealth Government, and their state and territory counterparts, could play a role in incentivising volunteering through public sector leave provisions, and tax incentives to organisations that provide leave for staff to volunteer in a crisis. Volunteers who undergo training could also have this training recognised as a micro-credential.

### **Recommendation 1**

- 2.9 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government consider establishing a military unit/s that specialise in aspects of disaster relief operations.**

### **Recommendation 2**

- 2.10 **The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government provide adequate and ongoing funding for the not-for-profit sector to increase their human and capital resources to respond promptly and effectively to a disaster.**



### **Recommendation 3**

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## 3 Preparation and Risk Reduction

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- 3.1 The Salvation Army welcomes the acknowledgement in the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework Second National Action Plan that government and industry control many of the levers needed to reduce systemic disaster risks.
- 3.2 The Salvation Army also notes that the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Royal Commission) made a suite of recommendations to support national coordination arrangements and better decision-making.

### Preparing and enacting emergency plans

- 3.3 The Salvation Army's experience in recent crises is that many people were underprepared due to delaying planning or enacting emergency plans, but also due to the sheer scale and intensity of fires and floods. As a nation, we simply were not prepared for our new reality. This – as well as the disaster events currently felt by our northern hemisphere neighbours – demonstrates the need to prepare for the unexpected and act early.
- 3.4 There is a role for governments to assist individuals, families and communities to prepare for coming disaster events. While experience shows that communities who have lived through disasters are more likely to make an emergency plan in the future, this will be tempered by current and pressing concerns with the rising cost of living.

### Poverty and financial hardship

- 3.5 People already experiencing financial hardship have even less capacity to prepare for the unexpected. There is a need for governments to act at the whole-of-community level – for example, to build flood levees and conduct necessary fire/landscape management – to reduce risk to communities.

### Home and contents insurance

- 3.6 Insurance, although not a direct contributor to disasters, can substantially reduce or exacerbate the impact that disasters have on individuals and communities. Our experience delivering financial counselling services across Australia has been that rates of uninsurance and underinsurance continue to be of a significant concern.
- 3.7 People often decide not to take out insurance due to the high cost of premiums, meaning they are often those who are least able to afford to rebuild after the loss of their property. This problem is only expected to increase as we experience the effects of a changing climate, which will in turn affect 'insurability' and housing affordability.
- 3.8 There is a role for Australian governments to raise awareness of insurance-related issues, incentivise hazard resilient buildings, and increase insurance affordability by phasing out associated stamp duties.



#### **Recommendation 5**

- 3.9 The Salvation Army recommends that the Commonwealth Government work with state, territory and local governments to develop a multimedia public information campaign on the importance of preparing and enacting a disaster plan in response to new and changing levels of risk.**

#### **Recommendation 6**

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## 4 Conclusion

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- 4.1 The Salvation Army thanks the Department of Home Affairs and the National Emergency Management Agency for the opportunity to provide a written submission to the consultation on Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response.
- 4.2 The Salvation Army would welcome the opportunity to discuss the content of this submission should any further information be of assistance. Further information can be sought from [government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au](mailto:government.relations@salvationarmy.org.au).

**The Salvation Army Australia Territory**

**20 September 2023**







## Appendix A About The Salvation Army

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The Salvation Army is an international Christian movement with a presence in more than 130 countries. Operating in Australia since 1880, The Salvation Army is one of the largest providers of social services and programs for people experiencing hardship, injustice and social exclusion.

The Salvation Army Australia provides more than 1,000 social programs and activities through networks of social support services, community centres and churches across the country.

Programs include:

- Financial counselling, financial literacy and microfinance
- Emergency relief and related services
- Homelessness services
- Youth services
- Family and domestic violence services
- Alcohol, drugs and other addictions
- Chaplaincy
- Emergency and disaster response
- Aged care
- Employment services

As a mission-driven organisation, The Salvation Army seeks to reduce social disadvantage and create a fair and harmonious society through holistic and person-centred approaches that reflect our mission to share the love of Jesus by:

- Caring for people
- Creating faith pathways
- Building healthy communities
- Working for justice

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

Further information about The Salvation Army can be accessed at:

<<https://www.salvationarmy.org.au/>>

