

Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience – City of Hobart Submission

Executive Summary

- The City of Hobart is one of the most bushfire-prone cities in Australia.
- More frequent and more extreme weather events are intensifying the risk posed by existing and evolving natural hazards.
- It is critical that communities receive coordinated support from all levels of government in order to build and maintain resilience.
- Local governments play a crucial role in identifying critical infrastructure, measuring risk and educating communities.
- Current funding arrangements favour disaster recovery rather than disaster prevention, reducing economic incentives for local governments to invest in community resilience.
- There is a critical need for investment in integrated and coordinated multi-agency emergency management training and development across all jurisdictions.
- It is essential that local governments receive additional support and funding to improve community readiness, response and recovery from State and Federal Governments.

Introduction

The City of Hobart welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on Australia's Disaster Resilience from a Tasmanian perspective. As the level of government closest to our community, the City of Hobart plays a critical role in risk reduction, readiness, response and recovery from natural disasters. We achieve this by working constructively with State and Federal Government agencies, non-governmental organisations, non-profits and volunteer organisations.

Hobart/Nipaluna is Australia's second oldest city with an estimated population of 56,084 residents who reside near the River Derwent or within the urban centre surrounded by native bushland.

The [Tasmania Fire Service](#) recently completed state-wide bushfire mapping and found approximately 98 per cent of Tasmania's land area is designated as bushfire-prone with the City of Hobart being one of the most bushfire-prone cities in Australia.

Background

Climate modelling completed by the [National Environmental Research Program](#) states that in Tasmania under a high emissions scenario, we can expect to see a steady increase in fire danger with and overall lengthening of the fire season culminating in an increase in the number of days at the highest range of fire danger associated with weather conducive to dangerous fire.

Climate change is altering the risk and hazard profiles for local governments and communities, with more frequent, more extreme weather events intensifying the risk posed by existing and evolving natural hazards.

The overall increase in a likelihood of natural disasters has significant social, environmental and political implications which will influence policy, emergency planning, funding and allocation of resources to all levels of government. It is critical that communities receive coordinated support from all levels of government in order to build and maintain resilience.



The role of state-based services in preparing to, responding to and recovering from natural disasters and the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters on their ongoing capacity and capability

Local government has critical responsibilities in emergency management, response and recovery.

In 2018, Hobart recorded over 236.2 millimetres of rain in a single day. The subsequent flooding affected infrastructure, businesses, residences, university campuses and the electricity grid and resulted in damages of \$135.2 million. The City of Hobart completed damage assessments and repaired and rebuilt council owned assets at a cost of \$28.9 million to the City.

The [Local Government Association Tasmania](#) estimates that costs associated with natural disasters are expected to increase to \$39.3 billion per year nationally by 2050 – this equates to around \$600 million in annual costs for Tasmania.

The 2020 [Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements](#) Report noted that the practice of state and territory governments delegating some of their responsibility for disaster preparedness, response and recovery to local governments is only effective if local governments are sufficiently resourced to meet those responsibilities. Therefore, it is essential that local governments receive additional support and funding to improve community readiness, response and recovery from State and Federal Governments.

The [2015 Productivity Commission Report into Natural Disaster Funding](#) emphasised that current funding arrangements favour disaster recovery rather than disaster prevention therefore reducing economic incentives for state, territory and local governments to invest in community resilience.

As the [Australian Local Government Association](#) has previously stated, community infrastructure such as sporting, recreational and community facilities, and landfills and transfer stations are not considered 'essential' public assets under the existing Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA). Additionally, the DRFA does not automatically support impacted local governments to recover and rebuild council assets that are able to withstand future extreme weather events.

Despite the increasing risk of natural disasters driven by climate change and the significant cost of response and recovery, there is currently no baseline funding to support dedicated local government staff positions to deliver specific resilience actions.

Given the increasing role for local government in disaster management, and the potential increasing role of other civil and volunteer groups considered by this Committee, there is a critical need for investment in emergency management training and development.

The City of Hobart emphasises that the Australian Government is best placed to increase investment in disaster resilience and betterment to ensure disaster recovery is quicker, effective and less costly. We welcome further opportunities to engage with all levels of government and non-government organisations to support improved disaster resilience.

Consideration of alternative models, including repurposing or adapting existing Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations and state-based services

All levels of government have a duty to build community resilience to natural disasters. The 2020 Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements Report emphasised the crucial role local governments play to identify critical infrastructure, measure risk and educate communities.



What the City of Hobart is doing

The City of Hobart undertakes a wide spectrum of activities to support disaster resilience for our community, from the prevention perspective in risk reduction and building community readiness; to the response and recovery from natural disasters at the other end of the spectrum. Additionally, the City of Hobart protects and renews critical community infrastructure to build community resilience, funds climate change mitigation and adaptation activities and risk measurement. These activities are funded at significant cost to residents and ratepayers.

An exemplar of a community development approach to building community resilience is the *Sparkling Conversations, Igniting Action project*. In late 2022, the City of Hobart in conjunction with three neighbouring municipalities was awarded grant funding from the Preparing Australia Communities Program to build bushfire resilience by better preparing neighbourhoods for future bushfire threats.

The *Sparkling Conversations* project is trialling a new community-focused approach to disaster preparation that targets some of the obstacles preventing people from preparing their homes for bushfire and to learn how councils can help community to openly have these discussions.

The *Sparkling Conversations* early learnings indicate the key leadership role local government can play (when adequately resourced) in behaviour change, risk measurement and risk mitigation to build community resilience to bushfires and other natural disasters. Programs such as these are worthy of ongoing funding.

Conclusion

As Australia faces increasing risk of more frequent and more intense natural disasters, it is critical that more focus, planning and investment is directed at building disaster resilience.

The City of Hobart encourages the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience to acknowledge the concerns and matters highlighted in submissions by several local government organisations. Local government is well placed to deliver resilience actions, but we can only be successful if we are allocated adequate funding and resources to support our communities.

