

# National Emergency Management Agency

## Senate Estimates Opening Statement

23 May 2023

### Part 1 | Context and our recent work

Thank you Chair and the committee for allowing me to make an opening statement.

As you will note, there's been little reprieve in the disaster space since the last time we met, in fact, the 2022-23 High-Risk Weather Season can largely be characterised by cascading, consecutive and compounding disaster events.

From the Kimberley region at the top end of Western Australia to the Gulf of Carpentaria, south to Meander and the Macquarie River in Tasmania, Australians have experienced record flooding events that have damaged households, communities, connections, and economies.

NEMA has continued to co-ordinate assistance to all levels of government and the community. At the same time we have been listening, learning and refining our systems so we are better placed to deliver on the agency's mandate.

Over the last 8 months NEMA has:

- Agreed to a total of **\$3.23 billion** for Category C/D measures (with a Commonwealth contribution of **\$1.617 billion**).
- Convened **70 meetings** through the National Coordination Mechanism, of which **8** specifically coordinated recovery support and temporary accommodation across the country.
- Activated the Crisis Coordination Team **6** times for domestic events and **2** times for international events.
- Actioned **39** requests for non-financial Australian Government Assistance including **2** international requests.



- Supported international partners through a variety of mechanisms including deployment to:
  - Geneva and Moldova in support of the Ukraine.
  - Tonga for HAZMAT response following Tongan earthquake.
  - Türkiye following the earthquake.
  - New Zealand following Tropical Cyclone Gabrielle.
  - Vanuatu following Tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin.
- Led the mid-term review work around taking stock of Australia's progress to-date in implementing on the Sendai framework for disaster risk reduction domestically.
- Established the Hazards Insurance Partnership which brings together government and the insurance industry to work together in addressing insurance affordability and availability.
- Launched an independent review into Australia's disaster funding arrangements and governance.

In the past 12 months, the Australian Government has paid **\$1.5 billion** directly to individuals who have been affected by natural disasters.



## Part 2 | Consultation

Disasters are nothing new to Australia. But climate change is increasing the frequency and ferocity of these events, and communities across the country are feeling the brunt.

Successive governments have worked together to respond to disaster events while supporting recovery, however, we can always do things better.

We have been listening to our stakeholders, applying best practice to lead effectively, and learning from experts across the emergency management landscape, research institutions and the private sector to refine our systems.

The insights we've garnered through this period may mean we need to do things differently in the future. We know however, the most effective response can only be achieved in consultation with communities and key stakeholders.

We have prioritised meeting with disaster-affected people, consulted with colleagues across government at the national, state and local level, and engaged with industry, infrastructure, charities, philanthropic and insurance industries, as well as other sectors, to better understand how to effectively lead in this continually evolving and complex landscape.

Throughout these conversations, we've heard 3 key messages:

Firstly, NEMA needs to coordinate the Australian Government's response, to ensure all relevant Federal agencies are working collaboratively to get communities back on their feet.

Secondly, while recognising that the primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment from natural hazards lies with the states and territories, the Australian Government has an important role to play in uplifting and enabling these efforts. State and territory governments have told us how NEMA can better support them: we need a more unified, coordinated and integrated system; with specialist expertise in Commonwealth support, such as the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.



Finally, NEMA must provide leadership in setting consistent national standards for how we effectively respond to disasters in the crisis phase, as well as championing efforts to build disaster resilience.

### **Part 3 | Focussing on risk reduction**

To be prepared for the future, we cannot just focus on the here and now – we need to look ahead.

The first round of the Disaster Ready Fund has been over-subscribed and we are working with partners from the Commonwealth and states and territories, to finalise funding for projects. This funding is designed to help curb the devastating impacts of natural hazards while creating more resilient communities.

Our focus isn't just on Australia though. Disasters do not recognise country borders and communities across the planet are facing climate change in different ways, while experiencing differing levels of disasters.

This makes developing and sustaining relationships with our international peers as equally as important as working with our domestic partners.

Recognised frameworks like the Sendai Framework, help countries to collectively improve disaster resilience and address the global issue of climate change.

Through mechanisms like the Australian Government's Disaster Assistance Response Team, we will continue supporting our international partners just like we recently did in response to recent events like the earthquakes in Turkiye.

Closer to home, continued support to New Zealanders will mirror the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payment and the Disaster Recovery Allowance which will bolster the relationship between Australia and New Zealand and support regional disaster resilience.

### **Part 4 | conclusion and our ongoing focus**

I am excited by what lies ahead, and am confident that we, at NEMA, have a shared sense of purpose with our local, state and territory government colleagues and stakeholders across the country to – ultimately - improve the disaster resilience of Australian communities.

I now welcome your questions.

