

2022 SENATE ESTIMATES PRESENTATION
SENATOR THE HON MINISTER WATT

Since being appointed as Minister for Emergency Management in June, our country has witnessed devastating loss of life, and communities, farmers and businesses have been displaced or are struggling to stay viable due to devastating storms and floods.

Throughout Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania thousands of people are trying to recover and rebuild; while others can't even return home to assess the flood damage.

We have also seen serious events in other states and territories.

At we sit here, hundreds remain in the midst of an emergency, and my thoughts are with people in Victoria and Southern NSW sitting in relief centres or cleaning up their homes as rivers continue to rise across the states.

In the past month alone, we have had 106 activations of Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements- 43 in NSW, 17 in Tasmania and 46 in Victoria - this gives you some idea of the scale of the current disaster.

The Government will always step up and do the right thing, standing with communities through the crisis, and through recovery. We will continue doing what is required to support Australian communities before, during and after natural disasters.

That is one of the reasons we established the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), whose staff are, as I speak, supporting communities across Eastern Australia who are in varying stages of recovery from this year's events, including those currently playing out in NSW, Victoria and Tasmania.

I am in regular contact with my state and local colleagues, as well as emergency response authorities.

Similarly, the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) remains in close contact with state and territory government departments and their emergency services, as we all work together, coordinating and leading the response.

The Australian Government National Situation Room and Crisis Coordination Team are providing national situational awareness, information and data and coordinating the Australian Governments' response to support States and Territories during these difficult times.

At the request of the state governments, we've deployed Australian Defence Force (ADF) personnel to assist in flood preparations, and in search and rescue and clean-up.

There are approximately 350 ADF personnel currently working in Victoria, and 150 in NSW.

As floodwaters recede, we're sharing satellite imagery data with the states to help them understand the impact of the flooding. State governments can then determine what assistance will be required under the joint Commonwealth-State Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), which is coordinated by NEMA.

And just this morning I agreed to extend Disaster Recovery Allowance for individuals in 12 additional local government areas in New South Wales, as well as activating the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payments for Gunnedah, Moree Plains and Narrabri.

The Government is also taking action right now to make sure Australian communities like those impacted by the flooding, are less likely to go through this ordeal again.

This morning, the Prime Minister joined the Premier of New South Wales to announce \$800 million in joint funding, to buyback, repair or raise homes in the Northern Rivers region,

following repeated relentless floods there over the past few years.

I note that Premier Perrotet stated this morning that this funding wouldn't have happened without the cooperative relationship between the Federal and NSW Govts.

This program of works follows the rollout of a similar buyback scheme in South-East Queensland which has already seen more than 40 homes be purchased.

Because we want to do better when it comes to disasters in this country.

Not only in our immediate response, which should be swift and compassionate, but also in our longer-term response which should provide hope and safety to communities.

As a new government, we want to change how we deal with natural disasters, from reaction to prevention.

With climate change delivering more frequent and intense disasters, we need to be much better prepared than we saw from the previous government.

The Federal Budget, handed down on Tuesday, outlined several very important initiatives centred on risk mitigation and disaster resilience.

First, we have introduced *The Disaster Ready Fund*, our flagship disaster resilience initiative.

Up to \$1 billion has been set aside over five years to mitigate potential disaster loss and damage and help reduce the physical, economic and psychological impacts. Where possible this funding will be matched by state, territory and local governments meaning up to \$2 billion will be invested over 5 years.

This will replace the former Government's failed \$4.8 billion Emergency Response Fund, which in three years failed to complete a single mitigation project, failed to release a cent in recovery and earned the Government over \$800 million in interest.

We have also committed \$38.3 million to the veteran-led *Disaster Relief Australia* to enhance their operations, by funding them to increase their capacity and capability to put more volunteers on the ground, so Australian communities have more readily deployable capacity for recovery.

The Budget also allocated \$22.6 million to the *Hazards Insurance Partnership (HIP) and Strategic Insurance Projects* measures, which will establish partnerships between government and the insurance sector to improve consumer understanding of insurance products and leverage private-public initiatives to inform mitigation projects that reduce premiums for Australian households.

This government remains committed to ensuring there is sufficient funding for disaster preparedness and mitigation across the country, and I remain 100% committed to working with NEMA to support Australian communities affected by disaster, and to assist in building resilient communities.

This will take inclusive and collective disaster risk reduction efforts and actions, but together we can reduce the impact of the next flood or any other natural hazard that threatens our families, friends, businesses and communities.

As the Treasurer said on Tuesday night, in times like this, our government will always step up and do the right thing – standing with communities through the crisis, and through the recovery.

I'd now like to hand over to Australia's first Coordinator-General of the National Emergency Management Agency, Mr Brendan Moon.