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The NFF recognises the immense and vital role played by regional and rural volunteer services (e.g. State Emergency Services, NSW Rural Fire Service, SA Country Fire Service) and primary producer focused charitable organisations, such as BlazeAid, the Country Women's Association (CWA), and Rural Aid, in providing immediate response and timely recovery action in farming regions.

The NFF encourages the Committee to consider opportunities to ensure and better support the ongoing capacity and capability of these organisations, in the context of more frequent and intense natural disasters. Ensuring sufficient and sustainable resourcing of regional volunteer and charity organisations will increase the resilience of Australia's regional communities to respond to and recover from disasters.

Additionally, the Committee should recommend the Government continue and better support regional investment, in infrastructure and programs, to build resilience to natural disasters. For example, the NFF supports that the Australian Government should provide funding for the repair and reconstruction of roads affected by recent flooding and ensure this is done to a high standard to withstand future climate change-induced stresses on road and freight networks. We refer the committee to the [NFF's 2023-24 Pre-Budget Submission](#) for further information.

### Connectivity

Rural communities continue to face connectivity challenges that can directly impact their safety. Not only have recent natural disasters, including floods and bushfires, put peoples' lives at risk, but they have had significant impacts on the ability of regional Australians to operate businesses and access health and education services.

This impact is felt not just during the events, but in many cases for an extended period following. The NFF has previously welcomed network resilience initiatives such as the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters program rolled out following the 2019-20 bushfire season. Given the ever-increasing reliance on connectivity services and the ongoing prevalence and impact of natural disasters, funding should be allocated for continued investment in network resilience initiatives. This should include funding for the extension of similar programs previously delivered as well as investigation of innovative means to improve the resilience of connectivity during times of natural disaster, such as satellite-delivered mobile connectivity.

Further, the NFF welcomed recommendation 9 from the 2021 Regional Telecommunications Review, which encouraged the Government to undertake a feasibility study to consider the capability of mobile roaming to be deployed in emergency circumstances. Similarly, we welcomed the previous Government's instruction for the ACCC to commence such a review last year.

The NFF believes roaming in emergency situations is a common sense initiative, and supports the principle that no one in an emergency situation should have potentially lifesaving communications not available simply due to not being a customer of a particular network.

While triple zero emergency calls are permitted on all networks, many instances arise during emergency situations that do not require these emergency calls but are of no less importance to individuals. The geographical spread of households in regional areas can make responses by emergency services often difficult, if not impossible. Key information is often relayed via mobile communications between family members, neighbours and the broader community. An example of this being those in transit being caught in a situation, such as fire or flood, and requiring assistance.

The NFF thanks the Committee for the opportunity to comment on Australia's disaster resilience. The policy contact for this matter is Charlotte Wundersitz, Policy Officer (Trade & Economics)

Regards,

**TONY MAHAR**

Chief Executive Officer