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Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
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Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

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Dear Members of the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

INVITATION TO SUBMIT

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Australia's preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, as well as alternative models for disaster recovery. I am pleased to provide a Queensland local government perspective informed by our direct experience of preparing for and responding to numerous natural disasters in our region.

As you know, large parts of the nation are now exposed to persistent and ongoing risks from natural hazards. Increasingly, the State and Federal Governments are relying on local government support to manage and respond to disasters that impact our populations - the level of government with the least amount of resources to allocate to these activities.

There is currently no accepted baseline or standard for funding Local Government response, relief and recovery disaster operations across Australia. To support climate adaptation, a baseline level of funding must be established to support permanent local government staff positions to deliver specific resilience, response and recovery actions.

This need was reinforced through the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report (28 October 2020), which stated that State and Territory governments should take responsibility for the capability and capacity of local governments to which they have delegated their responsibilities in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, to ensure local governments are able to effectively discharge the responsibilities devolved to them.

Despite these recommendations, Moreton Bay Regional Council (Council) has yet to see these measures implemented. Council has historically been a strong advocate for preparedness and resilience and has subsequently funded an Emergency Management and Public Safety department, growing from four full-time positions to 24 full-time positions, only three of which are supported by Federal and State grant funding. This significant investment is a recognition of our assessed risk exposure.

This is a crucial opportunity to advocate for the implementation of a sustainable and ongoing line of funding to support local governments in delivering preparedness and response activities, particularly for less well-resourced local governments in Queensland, where vulnerable demographics are often over-exposed to risk, or impacts from natural hazards are spread over vast geographic areas.

In addition, I believe standardising and expanding the training and development of emergency management practitioners would greatly benefit the industry and the community.

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The cessation of the national training facility at Mt Macedon and the Regional College of Disaster Management in Queensland are examples of our failure to enable ongoing Federal and State support to bring mixed agency personnel together to collaborate and learn about disaster management and resilience.

Establishing a well-resourced and sustainable national network of training colleges for delivering nationally accredited vocational and tertiary training for the Emergency Management sector should be the first step for any government wishing to build national resilience and improve community outcomes. This supports the Standard for Disaster Management in Queensland and the recommendations in the review of the National Natural Disaster Arrangements Report. This review highlighted the need for continuous improvement in disaster management activities, including a lessons management process and an aligned training methodology. The report also recommends developing and implementing a national accreditation scheme for specialist and incident management team roles, providing a national picture of personnel capacity and capability and supporting resource sharing.

After every disaster, there are reviews and a long list of recommendations. However, there is a failure to execute and finish these reviews and this is due to a lack of ultimate ownership and delegation of responsibilities to under-resourced local governments. It is crucial that the outcomes of this review are endorsed by all levels of government through the National Cabinet mechanisms now in place and that the responsibility for execution is funded and owned at the highest level to ensure that outcomes are realised to better prepare and protect our communities from an increasingly dynamic natural hazard environment.

You may be aware, for example, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute published the paper 'Australia is struggling under the cumulative effects of continuous and concurrent crises' by Andrew Henderson on 18 November 2022. This paper comments that *'Climate volatility and geopolitical instability contribute to the risk of concurrent crises happening with more frequency and severity. The cumulative nature of these events contributes to their impact by eroding our ability to respond and fatiguing our emergency management response systems. This extinguishes recovery time, let alone time to reset'*.

I urge the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience to take these concerns seriously and to make the necessary decisions to implement the recommendations for adequate funding, staffing and training in disaster management and resilience to give local governments of all sizes and regions the tools to do the job. Local government is and will remain the level of government that will allow the most accurate resilience and response actions and achieve the best resilience outcomes for our communities. But it can only do this with the proper support from our State and Federal colleagues to provide us with a strategic landscape on which we can operate effectively. This is a seminal moment to address this issue and support our communities safety and wellbeing.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours sincerely

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Mayor

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