



PREMIER OF TASMANIA

11 OCT 2022

Senator Louise Pratt
Chair of Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
Senate
Email: fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Senator

I am writing to provide the Tasmanian Government's submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee's inquiry into the provisions of the Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022 (the Bill). I thank the Committee on behalf of all Tasmanian Government agencies that were invited to make a submission.

Overall response

The Tasmanian Government acknowledges and supports the primary intent of the Bill. We understand this to be the establishment of the Disaster Ready Fund using funds from the existing Emergency Response Fund, to be administered by the National Emergency Management Agency and operated with the purpose of providing up to \$200 million per financial year for activities that build natural disaster resilience and reduce risks.

Response and recovery from significant or catastrophic natural disasters

The Tasmanian Government recognises the importance of funding natural disaster response and recovery. We are committed to providing disaster affected Tasmanian communities with the support they need. This includes our commitment to share the cost of activities delivered by Tasmanian local governments through the *Tasmanian Relief and Recovery Arrangements*.

Under the proposed changes it will no longer be possible to disburse up to \$150 million per financial year to fund emergency response and recovery following significant or catastrophic natural disasters. Response and recovery funding should be flexible and needs based, and should support community driven recovery whenever possible.

The Tasmanian Government considers that the *Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements* (the DRFA) are the most appropriate framework for cost sharing for response and recovery, because they are flexible and demand driven. We welcome the Australian Government's continued commitment to the DRFA, including the ongoing reform process to ensure they operate equitably, efficiently and effectively.

In the event of a catastrophic natural disaster affecting Tasmanian communities, the Tasmanian Government would look to work with the Australian Government to provide an appropriate level of jointly funded support through the exceptional circumstances provisions of the DRFA.

Resilience in Tasmania

The Tasmanian Government supports the intent of the proposed Disaster Ready Fund and is committed to supporting our communities to build resilience to prepare for, better withstand and recover from future emergencies.

Under the Australian Government's \$50 million National Flood Mitigation Infrastructure Program, made possible through the Emergency Response Fund, Tasmania has secured \$3.19 million to support delivery of the following infrastructure projects to assist our communities to prepare for future flood events:

- Construction of flood levees in Latrobe.
- Flood mitigation works at South Hobart Primary School.
- Kingston Rivulet upgrade to improve draining of floodwater into existing stormwater systems.
- Construction of levee banks and widening of Port Creek in Waratah-Wynyard.

The Tasmanian Government and respective local governments have committed \$14.27 million to enable the realisation of these projects.

These examples demonstrate that Tasmanian communities can successfully identify and implement opportunities to build their resilience. The Tasmanian Government would welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Government, with Tasmanian local governments, and with our partners in the Tasmanian community, to support our communities to take advantage of these opportunities.

Ensuring all communities have an opportunity to build resilience

The Tasmanian Government recognises that Australia is a disaster prone country, with all communities facing some level of disaster risk. Whenever possible, governments should work together to ensure that all communities are appropriately supported to build their resilience. This is best achieved by a mixture of resilience building opportunities. The Disaster Ready Fund is particularly welcome, because the disaster risk profile and other characteristics of Tasmanian communities mean that it can be challenging to access resilience funding through mechanisms such as the DRFA.

Targeting investment to communities currently recovering from disasters, to regions prone to particularly severe events, or to densely populated areas with high levels of physical or other capital, may be appropriate in some circumstances but should not unduly limit access for other communities. For example, smaller regional communities that are exposed to frequent events of moderate severity could realise significant social, economic and environmental benefits from resilience investment, and they should have opportunities to pursue these outcomes.

We should ensure that all disaster-prone communities, including smaller and regional communities, are able to build their resilience. This means minimising unnecessary barriers created by eligibility criteria and reducing administrative complexity that disadvantages smaller communities. This reform presents an opportunity to ensure funding through the Disaster Ready Fund is accessible for smaller jurisdictions and local governments that might otherwise receive limited support.

Ongoing resilience funding

The Tasmanian Government understands the intent is for the Disaster Ready Fund to be an ongoing source of funding for disaster resilience and risk reduction initiatives. We are strongly supportive of this

approach as ongoing funding is important to provide applicants with the confidence to deliver long-term resilience projects, and to embed the identification and pursuit of resilience building opportunities within normal business.

The Tasmanian Government would welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Government to ensure that the administration of the Disaster Ready Fund creates a stable, supportive investment environment for resilience building.

The scope of the Disaster Ready Fund

Tasmania has a resilience-based and all-hazards approach to emergency management. An all-hazards approach leads to better overall emergency preparedness by building resilience against disasters of all kinds. As such, consideration should be given to broadening the scope of the Disaster Ready Fund to an all-hazards view to include other equally impacting hazards such as biosecurity emergencies.

I look forward to seeing the outcomes of the proposed reforms and continuing to work with the Australian Government and our local governments to build the resilience of Tasmanian communities.

Yours sincerely

Michael Ferguson MP
Acting Premier