



**Australian
Human Rights
Commission**

everyone, everywhere, everyday

**Disability Discrimination Commissioner
and Race Discrimination Commissioner**

Graeme Innes AM

14 March 2011

Mr John Hawkins
Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Economics
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Mr Hawkins

Thank you for the opportunity to express my views to the Senate Inquiry on the flood reconstruction levy bill.

The purpose of writing is to draw your attention to the opportunities that reconstruction funding would provide in improving community accessibility – including for those Australians with disability - in the course of programs for reconstruction.

A commitment towards building more inclusive community is an appropriate reflection of the solidarity of the Australian people in response to the tragedy and losses which have occurred. It would also be consistent with the commitments made by the Prime Minister during the election campaign in releasing the draft National Disability Strategy, which will be officially launched on 18 March 2011.

Work has already been undertaken by the Government, in partnership with other levels of government and with industry and disability community representatives, to build more accessible communities.

In particular, so far as public buildings are concerned, the commencement of the *Disability (Access to Premises – Buildings) Standards 2010* (Premises Standards) on 1st May 2011 will bring far-reaching improvements to access and provide much needed clarification on how building professionals and approval authorities can meet their responsibilities under discrimination law to ensure buildings are accessible to people with disability.

The Government decided to apply key features of these Standards, even ahead of their commencement, to the Building the Education Revolution program. Their application in the course of forthcoming reconstruction efforts would clearly be even more appropriate.

To the extent that reconstruction plans involve housing, the work of the National Dialogue on Universal Housing Design, originally convened by The Hon Bill Shorten and Ms Therese Rein, provides an important basis for moving forward in developing housing which meets human needs in the course of a lifetime, including as we age or when we have a disability for other reasons.

The Livable Housing Design Guidelines, now available online from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, provide clear design principles for accessible and adaptable housing, as well as noting a particular commitment where housing receives Government assistance or funding, in line with the Government's approach to social and affordable housing initiatives. Many other areas of community infrastructure, such as play and recreation facilities and footpaths and walkways, will of course also require reconstruction.

I have welcomed the valuable program of \$5 million funding under the Accessible Communities Program announced by Senator McLucas and made available nationally for matching grants to local government bodies to improve accessibility of community infrastructure. The scale of funding contemplated for reconstruction of flood affected communities is, by dire necessity, very much larger and more long-term.

Planning for reconstruction must draw on the expertise of people in the community and in all areas and levels of government including local government. The people of Queensland are well served in this respect, having strong disability and accessibility expertise for example within the Brisbane City Council, and within the disability community. In particular, Mr Kevin Cocks AM who has recently been appointed Queensland Anti-Discrimination Commissioner has been a leader for many years on issues of accessibility and community inclusion.

I hope that the Committee considers the value of reconstruction funding in facilitating a more inclusive future for people with a disability.

Yours sincerely

Graeme Innes AM
**Disability Discrimination Commissioner
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