



Australian Government
**Department of Industry,
Science and Resources**

Inquiry into the Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022

Submission of the Department of Industry, Science and
Resources to the Senate Finance and Public
Administration Legislation Committee

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Introduction

The Department of Industry, Science and Resources (the department) recognises the importance of, and contributes across, the full spectrum of natural disaster response, relief, recovery, preparedness and resilience.

Natural disaster events have cross-sectoral impacts in a range of industry contexts. The department provides support to affected industries after significant natural disaster events and supports better emergency response through world leading science and research, supporting the successful development and deployment of new technologies and building capability with critical infrastructure operators. The department also has a role in supporting long term resilience, risk reduction and preparedness for natural disasters.

The department supports the Department of Home Affairs (DHA) as the lead agency responsible for the Australian Government's disaster resilience and emergency response policies across the emergency management continuum. Agencies with sector specific responsibilities, such as the department, play an important role to support DHA to implement critical infrastructure policy and respond to challenges emerging from natural disasters, including in relation to effective functioning of supply chains, through both regulatory and non-regulatory responsibilities.

In support of the Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022, this submission provides an overview of the range of activities the department undertakes across disaster resilience and emergency response, and shares learnings and advice for the implementation and delivery of the Disaster Ready Fund (DRF). The department would like to see the DRF prioritise disaster prevention as well as disaster response – in particular, funding projects that enable industry to increase preparedness and resilience as well as respond to recover from natural disasters. Several such initiatives are detailed in this submission.

Natural Hazards Research

The department and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) hold joint policy responsibility for the \$85 million National Hazards and Disaster Resilience Research Centre grant program that funds Natural Hazards Research Australia (NHRA).

NHRA is an independent research centre delivering a comprehensive, multi-disciplinary research program focused on building resilience and reducing risks associated with natural hazard events. NHRA's research strategy and program are informed by a broad range of stakeholders, including Commonwealth, state and territory agencies, emergency service agencies, industry, researchers and not-for-profit organisations. NHRA connects researchers with communities, businesses and emergency service providers, ensuring its research outcomes meet contemporary needs.

Strengthening Business

The department provides immediate on-the-ground assistance to businesses after a disaster, connecting them with support through the Strengthening Business initiative under AusIndustry's Entrepreneurs' Programme. The initiative is designed for businesses wanting to use their recovery as a catalyst to re-imagine their business offering, and strengthen their digital, operational and strategic foundations. Strengthening Business pairs these businesses with an independent facilitator who acts as a broker to their region, helping them navigate the recovery and business landscapes.

Strengthening Business – Bushfire Recovery and Resilience was established in March 2020 to provide on-the-ground, meaningful information and advice to small businesses directly impacted by the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires. The initiative was part of the Small Business Recovery package and the National Bushfire Recovery Fund, delivered across 32 local government areas (LGAs) in NSW, Victoria and South Australia.

Through the 2021-2022 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, an additional \$6.9 million was provided to continue recovery and resilience advice services for regional business impacted by bushfires, with eligibility criteria expanded to include COVID-19 and flood emergencies until 30 June 2023.

In March 2022, the Strengthening Business initiative was expanded into at least 31 of the most flood-affected regions of Northern NSW and South Eastern Queensland.

With a footprint of 45 facilitators (including six digital solutions specialists) covering 63 LGAs across South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, the service has worked with almost 900 businesses to date.

The Strengthening Business initiative is currently funded until 30 June 2023.

Learnings from Strengthening Business for the implementation of the Disaster Ready Fund

The department has significant experience supporting businesses and industry through AusIndustry. Strengthening Business is distinct from other service offerings as a place-based, recovery and rebuild response. It helps businesses anticipate and plan for change, take advantage of new opportunities, and feel confident to shift and diversify in response to changing markets. It ensures affected businesses receive critical services – for example, grant referrals, digital upskilling, financial advice – to assist in their rebuild, growth and continued sustainability. The following learnings from Strengthening Business may be relevant in the implementation and delivery of the Disaster Ready Fund:

- Recovery efforts in identified local government areas (LGAs) hampered by successive economic shocks (associated with bushfire, floods and COVID-19) takes time. Assisting businesses in these regions to rebuild their business support systems, plan and implement improvements and build resilience and viability takes between 12 and 18 months.
- Locally-based facilitators can work with businesses to help them define their value proposition, and map pathways to realise that value over the short, medium and longer term. A place-based model enables facilitators to treat the business as a whole, supporting it to build digital capability, identify and access sustainable sources of revenue and support, and expand connections to local and regional networks.
- Embedding flexibility enabled facilitators to deliver a one-to-many service working with clusters of businesses and communities to ensure they recover and become more resilient against future instability and/or natural disasters.
- Closely connecting facilitators to other local representatives (of existing recovery, regional development and small business services) across all tiers of government, mitigated the risk of overlap and duplication of services.

Supply Chain Resilience

The department is responsible for leading whole-of-government coordination to identify and manage vulnerabilities in Australia's critical supply chains.

Activities funded by the DRF will contribute to minimising domestic supply chain disruptions as a result of natural disasters. The department, through the Office of Supply Chain Resilience (OSCR), can support NEMA by sharing information on emerging critical supply chain risks that are brought to our attention. The impacts of natural hazards on supply chains can impact logistics such as infrastructure/roads, and agriculture – OSCR can work with NEMA and other relevant agencies to provide advice on identified initiatives under the fund to build supply chain resilience.

CSIRO

As Australia's national science agency, CSIRO works with industry, government and the research community to turn science into solutions addressing Australia's greatest challenges, including food security and quality; clean energy and resources; health and wellbeing; resilient and valuable environments; innovative industries; and a secure Australia and region. As part of this work, CSIRO contributes to major scientific initiatives aimed at increasing Australia's disaster resilience.

CSIRO is delivering an \$11.2 million project in the Northern Rivers region of NSW. NEMA has engaged CSIRO to undertake a project to understand the climate, catchment, and hydrological drivers within the Northern Rivers region of New South Wales and how this impacts flooding. The Northern Rivers Resilience Initiative will provide science to inform the investment, through a rapid design process to understand the drivers behind the unprecedented flood event and develop community-supported solutions for resilient investment.

Geoscience Australia

As Australia's pre-eminent public sector geoscience organisation, Geoscience Australia (GA) is the nation's trusted advisor on the geology and geography of Australia. GA applies science and technology to describe and understand the Earth for the benefit of Australia. GA supports Australia's ability to manage the impact of natural hazards and helps inform decisions about risk.

GA contributes to each stage of the emergency management cycle to improve Australia's preparedness, response and recovery, with a focus on contributing to safer communities. For example, GA's National Earthquake Alert Centre operates around the clock to provide rapid alerts of significant earthquakes with the potential to cause damage, injury, widespread alarm or tsunami in Australia and overseas. GA's hazard scientists have developed nation-wide assessments for earthquake, tsunami and severe wind hazard that define the magnitude, for earthquake the amount of ground-shaking, and likelihood of that magnitude being exceeded across a given time period. This information is used in building standards development and by decision makers to develop mitigation and adaptation strategies to build community resilience.

GA is the custodian of the National Exposure Information System (NEXIS), a capability designed to provide comprehensive and nationally consistent information on 'what', i.e. people and the buildings they occupy, is 'where' in the landscape. This system enables emergency responders and decision makers to better understand what elements of the community are at risk. GA's engineers use this detailed information about our buildings, i.e. age, construction type, roof type, to quantify the vulnerability of our built environment to a particular hazard. Bringing all this together, GA is able

to provide the emergency management community key information on the likely impacts of natural hazard, in advance of the event for a tropical cyclone and during and after for other hazards.

Australian Climate Service

CSIRO and GA are two of four partners in the Australian Climate Service (ACS) that provides advice to client agencies to improve understanding of the threats posed by a changing climate and natural hazards, and to limit the impacts of these threats now and in the future.

Formally established on 1 July 2021, \$210 million over four years is committed to strengthening Australia's position as a world leader in anticipating and adapting to the impacts of changing climate. The ACS brings together Australia's extensive climate and natural hazard information into a new single national view. It draws on world-leading expertise from the four partner agencies: the Bureau of Meteorology (the Bureau), GA, CSIRO, and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

Australian Space Agency

The Australian Space Agency (ASA) works with GA, the Bureau and CSIRO to explore how space-based earth observation platforms can better support preparedness, response and recovery from bushfires. This work includes the commercialisation of Australian scientific discoveries and IP through Australian industry.

Under the Australian Government's Crisis Management Framework, ASA has a role as a regulator in relation to space object, or space debris, re-entry as set out in the Australian Contingency Plan for Space Re-entry Debris (AUSSPREDPLAN). The aim of AUSSPREDPLAN is to manage the risk posed by re-entering space debris which may impact Australia, and how Australian Government support to any space debris impact can be provided and managed.

ASA is also supporting DHA and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet in relation to the establishment of the new National Space Weather Action Plan under the Australian Government's Crisis Management Framework. Space events are global, with significant national impacts for Australia. Space weather can disrupt many of Australia's critical services, such as the electricity grid, Global Position System (GPS) and satellite and radio communications. It can also damage satellites and affect aviation and air passenger safety. Many industries and government sectors may be impacted if there is a loss of power, GPS or communications following a space weather event.