



## TRUST FOR NATURE

**Address** 5/379 Collins Street  
Melbourne VIC 3000, Australia  
**Phone** +61 (0)3 8631 5888  
**Freecall** 1800 99 99 33 (Aus only)  
**Email** [trustfornature@tfn.org.au](mailto:trustfornature@tfn.org.au)  
**Web** [www.trustfornature.org.au](http://www.trustfornature.org.au)  
**ABN** 60 292 993 543

17 February 2023

Select Committee to Australia's Disaster Resilience  
Parliament of Australia  
Via online submission

Dear Select Committee

### **Inquiry into Australia's Disaster Resilience**

Trust for Nature (the Trust) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Select Committee on Australia's disaster resilience.

### **About Trust for Nature**

Trust for Nature (the Trust) is Victoria's dedicated private land conservation agency, established under statute, and responsible for ensuring the long-term management and protection of biodiversity on private land in Victoria. Among others, it works with farmers, First Nations groups, conservationists and conservation organisations. It has helped protect more than 110,000 hectares of important habitat on private land, principally by entering into voluntary permanent legal agreements on title with more than 1,600 committed landowners.

### **Summary**

Trust for Nature recognises that the focus of this inquiry may be to determine the most appropriate models for responding to natural disasters in their immediate aftermath. However, environmental health and resilience at the landscape scale is indivisible to the long-term impacts and outcomes of natural disasters. As such, our environment and its unique biodiversity values should be recognised as an essential component when considering natural disaster preparation and mitigation (Terms of Reference, (a)(iv)).

This inquiry should explicitly consider the role of existing natural infrastructure in the context of natural disaster preparation and mitigation, and opportunities for future improvements. This is because:

- Nature-based solutions, such as conserving forests, wetlands and coral reefs, can help communities prepare for, cope with, and recover from disasters, including slow-onset events such as drought.<sup>i</sup>
- Environmental degradation can be a key factor in turning extreme weather events into natural disasters. By contrast, well-managed ecosystems can reduce the impact of many natural hazards, such as flooding, storm surges and bushfires.<sup>ii</sup> In the latter case for example, cool-season burns and (where appropriate) grazing can help reduce biomass and in turn mitigate the impact of bushfires.
- There is an urgent need to invest in nature-based solutions to disaster risk reduction in order to minimise our vulnerability to future events. It is well-established that investments in preventative measures, including in maintaining healthy ecosystems, are much more economical than the costs incurred by disasters.<sup>iii</sup>

## Recommendations

1. Preparation for natural disasters must incorporate long-term, landscape scale approaches that protect, manage and restore our environment. This will increase resilience and reduce costs.
2. In its report, the Select Committee should clearly and prominently acknowledge the indivisibility of nature and disaster resilience. It should articulate clear actions and strategies that support environmental management and increase nature-based solutions.
3. Support for nature-based solutions will provide important signals that allow the conservation and other sectors to actively plan for and fund landscape scale environmental management in preparation for future natural disasters.
4. Environmental management activities help drive shared community purpose, community cohesion, and social resilience, as well as contributing to the agricultural and economic resilience of the landscape. The Trust supports further investments into the building of networks and capacity building, and, together with the Australian Land Conservation Alliance (ALCA) and its members, are well placed to be a key delivery partner to the private land sector.
5. Policies and taxes that actively disincentivise environmental management activities that would otherwise help build landscape-level resilience, should be reformed or abolished.<sup>iv</sup> Whilst the specific policies and taxes themselves may be considered outside of the remit of this inquiry, it is important to highlight their role as potential barriers to effective disaster response, preparedness, and resilience in the long term.
6. Greater priority needs to be placed on education and awareness of the economic benefits of protecting and building back our natural infrastructure as a legitimate and cost effective way of managing and mitigating natural disasters.
7. A particular focus should be placed on protecting and enhancing drought refuges, including by building back buffer areas and linking them up across the landscape.

We would be happy to elaborate on any aspects of this submission and look forward to following the outcomes of this inquiry.

Kind regards

Cecilia Riebl  
Policy Advisor

---

<sup>i</sup> Nature Based Solutions to Disasters, IUCN, <https://www.iucn.org/resources/issues-brief/nature-based-solutions-disasters>

<sup>ii</sup> Wetlands and resilience to natural hazards, DCCEEW: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/factsheet-wetlands-resilience-natural-hazards#:~:text=Well%2Dmanaged%20ecosystems%20can%20reduce,the%20intensity%20of%20the%20event>  
See also: [https://wwf.panda.org/wwf\\_news/?133901/Environmental-protection-vital-to-reducing-natural-disaster-impact-WWF](https://wwf.panda.org/wwf_news/?133901/Environmental-protection-vital-to-reducing-natural-disaster-impact-WWF)

<sup>iii</sup> For example: Valuation of disaster risk reduction ecosystem services of Australia's coastal wetlands: review and recommendations, IDEEA Group, 2020: <https://www.dcceew.gov.au/water/wetlands/publications/valuation-disaster-risk-reduction-ecosystem-services-australias-coastal-wetlands-review-recommendations>; Investment in Disaster Risk Management in Europe Makes Economic Sense: Summary Report, World Bank & European Union, 2021: <https://documents1.worldbank.org/curated/en/873811622437677342/pdf/Summary-Report.pdf>.

<sup>iv</sup> For example: State land taxes on land being protected, managed, or restored for nature; or the lack of tax relief available for most conservation and restoration expenses.