Regional Development Australia
NORTHERN TERRITORY

All postal correspondence:
GPO Box 4725
Darwin NT 0801

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Committee Secretary
Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Telephone: +61 2 6277 3535
Email: disasterresilience.sen@aph.gov.au

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Call for submissions, Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

In response to the invitation from Senator McDonald's Office to make a submission to this Inquiry, we would like to take this opportunity to advise the Committee of a project currently underway in the Northern Territory, that is directly relevant to Inquiry's Terms of Reference, specifically (a)(iv), (b)(i), (b)(ii), and (c).

The project is a partnership between Regional Development Australia NT (RDA NT), Charles Darwin University and East Arnhem Regional Council, and funded by the NT Government under the NT Risk Reduction Program, as well as contributions (cash, in-kind) from the project partners.

The time and cost of recovery from natural disasters represents a significant setback to regional development, and this is exacerbated in very remote areas, that do not have access to the same levels of support in terms of infrastructure, resilience, and capacity to respond, as is found in regional and urban settings. The project is focused on managing disaster waste in remote and very remote areas, with an emphasis on exploring culturally appropriate

models for locally owned pre-disaster preparation and mitigation. Further details regarding the project are attached. The project is currently scheduled for completion by the end of June 2023, and we look forward to sharing the outcomes of this research with the Committee at that time.

If you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact either Dr Robin Gregory (RDA NT) or Dr Deepika Mathur (Charles Darwin University) at

Yours sincerely

Kate Peake
Chief Executive Officer

Project title: Scoping Requirements for NT Remote and Very Remote Disaster Waste Management

Summary:
This project will identify critical path decisions, key workplan requirements and priority areas for inclusion in disaster waste management policy and plans for remote and very remote NT communities and create a checklist/handbook for disaster waste management preparation.

The project will provide an impetus to efforts to consider and work on disaster waste management, an area that has received little attention in the past.

Background and aims:

Cyclone Marcus in Darwin and recent flooding in QLD and NSW demonstrate that recovery from natural disasters is becoming more frequent, longer, and costly, and waste from disasters can be 5 to 15 times more than waste during business-as-usual times. A significant portion of the recovery cost is for clean-up operations that commence immediately following the disaster and continue during long-term reconstruction and are difficult to manage with traditional approaches. These challenges are exacerbated in remote and very remote areas that do not have access to the same levels of support in terms of infrastructure, resilience, and capacity to respond. Such events are expensive and a significant setback to regional development as they divert costs from other much-needed infrastructure.

While the Territory Emergency Plan has extensive detail on the four programmatic phases of disaster management (mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery), there is little discussion regarding disaster waste management during mitigation, preparation, and recovery stages. Moreover, existing arrangements for disaster management generally is very much a 'top down' approach developed for urban contexts which does not translate well to remote and very remote settings. This project aims to develop a model to support and enable locally owned disaster risk reduction. It will provide clear steps for the establishment of effective waste management plans (including protocols and practices) for remote and very remote NT communities in the aftermath of disasters.

Specific objectives of the project are:

i. Identify critical disaster waste management issues (short and long term) for remote and very remote communities for a range of natural hazard scenarios (Floods, Cyclones, Storms, Earthquakes and Tsunamis) experienced in NT.
ii. Provide a summary of current limitations for disaster waste management in selected communities (> 500 population)
iii. Generate an evidence base for effective and safe disaster waste management for remote and very remote communities.
iv. Highlight short, medium, and long-term interventions (that take into consideration a range of cultural factors) to be included in remote and very remote disaster waste management plans, as well as relevant legislative requirements pertaining to waste management.
v. Integration of key outputs into the emergency recovery policy framework when complete.

Outputs will include:

1. List of key authorities, stakeholders and influencers relating to pre- and post-disaster waste management. This will include emergency management arrangements and NT Government roles and agency responsibilities in this sphere as well as the Functional Group responsibilities outlined in the Territory Emergency Plan and all subordinate plans.
2. A disaster risk profile from the perspective of managing large volumes of disaster waste for the selected communities.
3. A description of the state of planning and preparedness for managing waste streams emerging from a range of natural hazard induced disaster risk.

4. Policy recommendations including specifications for processes and practices necessary to adequately prepare the communities for managing large volumes of waste in the case of a disaster (including extreme events).
5.Checklists for communities for disaster waste preparedness and recovery (while optimizing 3R and environmentally safe disposal of unusable remains).

Relationship to National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework

The project aims to reduce the risk from natural disasters by addressing four key *National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework* priorities:

Understanding the disaster risk

It will integrate existing waste and disaster management planning by providing evidence-based policy and practice advice. The development of a checklist/handbook for individuals and communities represents an important step in raising awareness and self-efficacy around disaster waste management.

Accountable decisions

The vertical integration of decision making for effective disaster waste management will be critical for risk minimisation in remote communities when hazards strike. Given that 'all disasters are local' it is essential that key stakeholders are identified at the local level. This project will create a resource to aid the identification of key stakeholders, their roles and responsibilities towards waste management and generate information and tools for community members to make effective contributions to disaster waste management.

Enhanced Investment

The project will identify critical areas of need for improved disaster waste management in remote and very remote communities taking into consideration a range of cultural factors. This will provide a focus for effective decision-making regarding investment by authorities. Potential funding mechanisms and programs will also be identified, including co-investment opportunities from government and the private sector, non-government grant programs, as well as any opportunities to offset some costs (e.g. through recycling) that may arise in the post-recovery phase.

Governance, Ownership and Responsibility

Conducting in-depth study of selected communities will allow the development of policy and practice settings that respond to the cultural, geographic, and economic context, enhance community self-efficacy and identify investment priorities and potential sources. This will support and enable locally owned disaster risk reduction. The project will provide an impetus to efforts to consider and work on disaster waste management, an area that has received little attention in the past. The emergence of clear governance pathways, and roles and responsibilities for community members will be one consequence of this new focus on an important area of disaster risk reduction.

Project partners: Charles Darwin University (lead), East Arnhem Regional Council, Local Government Association of the NT, and RDA NT.

Completion: 30th June 2023

Funding: Cash funding provided by the Northern Territory Government, CDU and RDA NT.