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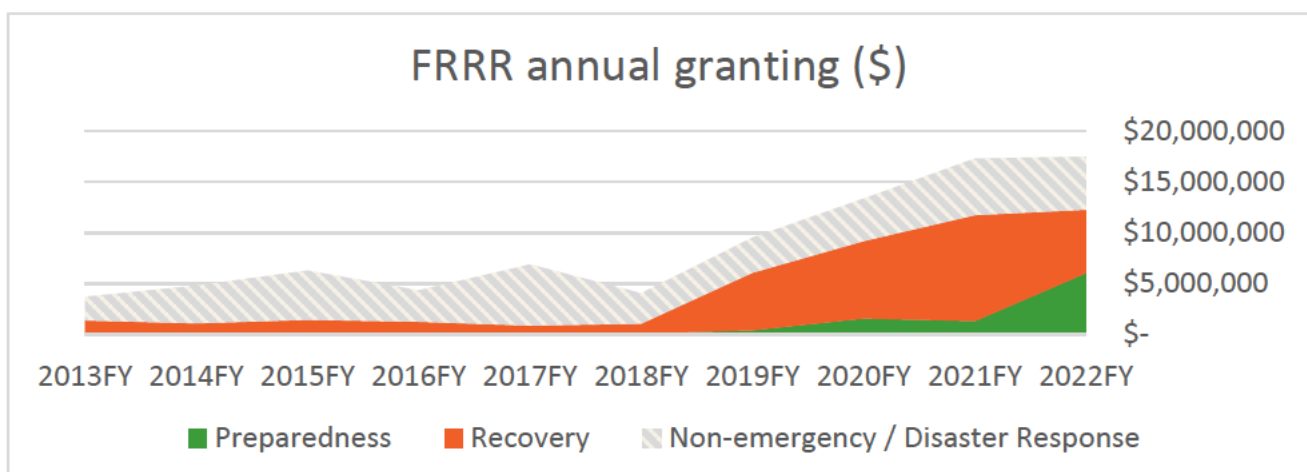
Mr Tim Fairfax AC

Senator Louise Pratt, Chair
Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
fpa.sen@aph.gov.au

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission regarding the *Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022 [Provisions]*.

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal - FRRR - (phonetically: F-triple-R) - is the only national foundation specifically focused on ensuring the social and economic strength of remote, rural and regional communities. FRRR focusses on supporting community organisations and not-for-profits; these groups provide the programs, activities, services and opportunities that help create and sustain vibrant communities, and build the resilience of their local areas. Since FRRR's establishment in 2000, FRRR has delivered over \$155 million to more than 13,000 local projects.

Remote, rural, and regional areas are at the frontline of natural disasters and the impacts of climate change. Because of this FRRR has a long track record of working with disaster-impacted communities and more than half of our grants annually now go toward disaster-related projects. Over the last 10 years we have distributed \$46.4 million to community groups supporting preparedness and recovery from the 2009 Victorian bushfires, the 2019-20 Black Summer fires, drought, and other disasters.



This submission primarily expresses support for *Emergency Response Fund Amendment (Disaster Ready Fund) Bill 2022*. Our understanding of the Bill is that many of the changes are administrative in nature, but there are two elements we particularly would like to note.



Firstly, we welcome the increase of allowed annual expenditure up to \$200 million. FRRR has seen a significant increase in grant requests over the last three years, with 2021-2022 Financial Year request levels being 44% higher than the 5-year average 2016-2020. Unfortunately, in the last three years 15% of grant requests (918 grants) to FRRR have had to be declined due to a lack of available funds. We know that many community groups are also struggling with cash flow and local fundraising due to the impacts of COVID-19 over the last three years. In this context, additional support is even more vital. **FRRR welcomes the fact that this measure would make more funding available to support rural, regional and remote communities.**

Secondly, we would like to draw attention to the modification of the purpose of the Emergency Response Fund so that it is solely focussed on “natural disaster resilience and risk reduction” (preparedness) rather than recovery. In 2015 FRRR adopted a strategy to invest more strategically, and to influence those seeking to fund in the emergency management field, to focus more on resilience and preparedness. This included the design and launch of the Disaster Resilient:Future Ready program which was an early mover in developing a structured approach to place-based and community-led preparedness.

In the last three years we have seen a notable shift in applications from community groups we work with toward preparedness-based projects. In 2021-22FY the proportion of disaster related funding we provide that went to preparedness related projects reached 49% (\$6,049,835) compared to an average of 21% across the last 10 years. To that end **FRRR welcomes and supports the shift in emphasis for the Fund toward preparedness reflected in the Bill. FRRR also emphasises that support for preparedness should not be limited to risk mitigation through infrastructure, but should also include support for community resilience and environmental resilience.**

While we support this shift in principle, it must not come at a cost to communities trying to recover from the effects of disasters. FRRR has a long track record of working with disaster-impacted communities. We focus on medium to long-term recovery, typically providing funds from 12-18 months to ten years after a disaster event. This is a deliberate approach, as we have found that this stage of support is typically an under-funded area of support for communities.

Overall FRRR is supportive of this Bill, and we look forward to continuing to work closely with the Government toward achieving the outcomes gained through additional investments in resilience and risk reduction. Should you require additional detail regarding our submission we would welcome the opportunity for further discussion, please contact us on _____ or email _____

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Egleton
Chief Executive Officer

Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal

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