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12 December 2022

Committee Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on
Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
E: rdit.reps@aph.gov.au

Dear Committee Secretary,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport inquiry into the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural, and remote road network.

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia’s response to the Terms of Reference is confined to the related issues category.

Drowning Risk

After a severe weather event there will unavoidably be damage to roads, bridges and other infrastructure. Royal Life Saving Society – Australia notes that after the bushfires and floods, reconstruction of critical infrastructure has taken time, with competing priorities, high demand, and significant structural issues delaying completion of repairs.

In the interim many people have relied on small watercraft, such as tinnies and kayaks, in situations where they would not ordinarily need to do so.

The time to repair and reinstate infrastructure varies from days to years. In some cases, when floodwaters recede repairs to roads can be completed relatively quickly. In other cases, such as Murphy's Bridge near Bodalla, children kayaked to the school bus for more than two years while the bridge was rebuilt following bushfires.

This poses a significant safety risk. We note in the Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report that the 2021/22 year recorded the highest drowning death toll for the past 25 years, and that a significant proportion of those deaths were attributable to flood-related drowning.

There is currently no coordinated advice available. We note that the NSW Flood Inquiry Report reinforced the need for consistent advice and communications to help build resilience and to reduce the risk to life.

Recommendation

A nationally coordinated and consistent safety toolkit for people using watercraft as a form of transport during emergencies and in the recovery period needs to be developed.

A process is required whereby relevant water safety stakeholders and emergency response groups are convened to develop a single consistent set of safety advice. This would address the variety of different waterways, watercraft, and experience levels of individuals in a format that is readily disseminated to communities across Australia.

The resulting advice would cover all phases of an emergency, including preparedness, response during a severe weather event, and the short-, mid- and long-term recovery phases.

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia stands ready to lead the development of this water safety advice through a collaborative process.



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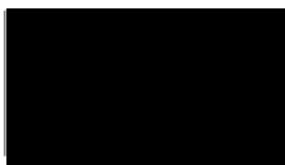
About Royal Life Saving Society - Australia

Royal Life Saving Society – Australia is a public benevolent institution that has a proud history of working within our region and beyond on drowning prevention. For more than 125 years, Royal Life Saving has served the Australian community providing water safety and swimming skills.

We're here to help all Australians enjoy the water safely through drowning prevention leadership, education and action.

Should you require further background information, please contact Justin Scarr, Chief Executive Officer, Royal Life Saving Society – Australia at [REDACTED]

Yours sincerely,



Justin Scarr
Chief Executive Officer
Royal Life Saving Society - Australia