

25 May 2023

Re: Submission on the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

To the Minister for Emergency Management, Senator the Hon. Murray Watt,

Defence Families of Australia (DFA) write in response to the request for submissions for an Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding.

Since 1986, DFA has been the Ministerially-appointed group representing the equities of the families of current serving ADF members. As the official advisors to Government and Defence, DFA advocates for ongoing improvement in policy and practice. Our aim is to reduce the negative impacts of military service on ADF families, and to support the positive aspects of this unique Defence lifestyle.

Right now, the Defence community faces the biggest set of stressors in a generation. Consequently, DFA's work is more important than ever. A full list of DFA's current advocacy goals can be found in the DFA Advocacy Map. This tool is published biannually to encourage collaboration and input from the community to achieve these goals. The map is available at: dfa.org.au/advocacy-map

Resourcing our emergency services to reduce dependence on ADF

As noted in the Briefing Paper on the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding led by Andrew Colvin AO APM, Australia has experienced a series of severe weather events, including bushfires and major flooding, which have necessitated significant response and recovery operations. These incidents highlighted the severity, intensity, and frequency of natural disasters in our country, and globally. Moreover, experts predict the frequency and intensity of such events are likely to escalate in the future, posing additional strain on Australia's relief, response, and recovery capabilities.

DFA requests that emergency services should be appropriately resourced to reduce what has become an unsustainable dependence on Australian Defence Force (ADF) members to regularly fill current gaps. We recognise and appreciate the dedication and bravery exhibited by ADF members when deployed in times of crisis. However, ADF personnel should not be used as a permanent solution or substitute for the appropriate staffing and resources within the emergency services sector.

While it is understandable that in exceptional circumstances, the ADF may need to provide temporary assistance, it is essential to maintain a clear distinction between the roles and responsibilities of the Defence Force and emergency services. ADF members are primarily trained and equipped to defend the nation, protect our interests, and contribute to global security efforts. Their core functions include operational readiness, maintaining national security, and supporting overseas missions. These functions are of paramount and increasing importance in our current geopolitical context. Drawing resources away

from these areas is risking Australia's security and the safety and readiness of our loved ones in the ADF to respond to military threats.

It is essential to adequately resource and invest in our emergency services, who should remain the primary responders during natural disasters. These services, including fire, police, paramedics, and other relevant agencies, possess specialised training and experience that is tailored to handle emergencies effectively. By ensuring that emergency services have sufficient funding, staffing, and resources, their capacity to respond swiftly can be enhanced, safeguarding the lives and properties of our population.

Moreover, it is crucial to consider the impact prolonged and frequent deployments of ADF members in emergency services roles may have on Defence families. Consistent deployment rotations disrupt family life, affecting stability, and creating significant challenges for spouses, children, and support systems within the Defence community. Maintaining a balance between military duties and family commitments is vital for the overall wellbeing of Defence personnel and their loved ones. Calling on ADF members to fill gaps in emergency services during natural disasters adds to what is already a significant commitment.

Our recommendation is to prioritise Commonwealth and state or territory investment to enhance the capacity of emergency services, ensuring they are adequately equipped to effectively respond to the rising frequency and severity of natural disasters. By optimising funding and resources, emergency services can scale up operations and enhance adaptability in the face of these challenging circumstances. This will in turn reduce the burden placed on the ADF.

In conclusion, DFA acknowledges the valuable contribution made by the ADF in assisting emergency services during natural disasters. We advocate for a collaborative approach that recognises the distinct roles of the ADF and emergency services, and ensures the provision of adequate resources and staffing to the latter. This approach will ensure the safety and security of our nation and reduce what has become an unsustainable dependence on the ADF to fill gaps.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to engaging in further dialogue to foster a shared understanding and promote the best interests of Defence families, our ADF, and the broader Australian community.

Yours sincerely,



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