

18 November 2016

Our Ref: GP/CA  
File No.:

Mr Mike Blake  
Review Investigator  
Government Flood Review  
Department of Premier and Cabinet  
GPO Box 308  
Hobart TAS 7001

Dear Mr Blake

### **Flood Review**

Thank you for providing the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) with an opportunity to provide a submission into the flood review. Due to the tight timelines for submissions, LGAT requested that its member Councils provide submissions directly to the review, and we are supportive of the specific issues raised on those. LGAT's submission is focused on high-level strategic issues.

We have noted the following terms of reference (ToR) for the review:

1. The effectiveness of the strategies, preparedness and plans related to managing flood risk in Tasmania that were in place prior to the June 2016 floods occurring; including existing and potential levee systems.
2. Community preparation, resilience and awareness, including awareness of insurance matters, relating to major flood events in Tasmania.
3. The causes of the floods which were active in Tasmania over the period 4–7 June 2016 including cloud-seeding, state-wide water storage management and debris management.
4. The use and efficacy of forecasting, community alerts, warnings and public information by authorities in responding to flood events.
5. The effectiveness of transition from response to recovery in the week following the June floods; including capacity and priorities for infrastructure repair, and immediate assistance payments.
6. Consideration of the detrimental environmental effects of the flooding upon the landscape, and what effective mitigation measures may be necessary to avoid similar events.
7. And any other matters relevant to the terms of reference.

Terms of Reference 1, 2, 4 and 5 are considered as part of this submission. It is understood that the council submissions have also covered Terms of Reference 3 and 6.

**1. The effectiveness of the strategies, preparedness and plans related to managing flood risk in Tasmania that were in place prior to the June 2016 flood occurring; including existing and potential levees.**

The *Tasmania State Natural Disaster Risk Assessment* identified flooding as one of the key risks to Tasmania. However, unlike fire there has been little investment at the State level to build capability in this area. The State Emergency Service (SES) is poorly resourced and relies on grant funding through the Commonwealth Partnership Agreement to deliver important state-wide foundational work to better understand risk.

Funding to support mitigation work is minimal and stakeholders, including councils, are heavily reliant on Federal Government funding in this area.

When compared to fire and the arrangements that are in place at the State level to understand, mitigate and respond to the risk the difference is significant. The recent alignment of SES with Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) should go some way to build capability within SES, however, there is significant work to be undertaken and investment and good governance structures are needed.

Some notable work was undertaken by SES as part of stage one of the Community Flood Resilience Project in 2013, including a review of historical flood studies and an audit of flood warning systems in Tasmania. The next stage of the project was to develop a business case to address some of the gaps in existing knowledge and infrastructure and to further develop an education and awareness strategy to improve the public's awareness in relation to flood and storm events. This stage of the project was put on hold due to resourcing issues within SES. There is an urgent need for this work to be reinvigorated.

Funding (or lack of) to assist stakeholders in mitigating the risk of natural disasters is a key issue. Many councils in Tasmania have been significantly financially impacted by various emergencies in Tasmania over the past five years. Studies undertaken by councils and learning's from recent events have identified high priority mitigation projects which would minimise future impacts on local communities but the resources are simply not available to implement them.

Currently in Tasmania the main form of funding available for councils to undertake flood mitigation works is the Natural Disaster Resilience Grants Program (\$2.34m). Under this program there is a requirement for match funding (50:50). For small councils, with high risk and expensive infrastructure based projects, a 50:50 split means the funding is often unattainable. Previous programs have provided for a 30:30:30 split between the federal government, state government and local council making it more accessible to smaller councils or those who have faced significant strain in recovering from disasters.

The focus of the mitigation programs provided in each state differs and it is LGATs understanding that some State Governments provide additional funding, to top up the federal government contribution, and to increase the overall pool of funds available.

It is recommended that should further funding be made available to the State for mitigation activities through a national partnership agreement that the state reconsider current grant programs to provide a more appropriate split in contributions, particularly for those stakeholders who are poorly resourced.

## **2. Community preparation, resilience and awareness, including awareness of insurance matters, relating to major flood events in Tasmania.**

As identified above, the issue of community preparedness, resilience and awareness raising in relation to flood has been identified as a current gap. Launceston City Council has exemplified the type of good work that can be undertaken when building community awareness and resilience in a municipality, through publications and community engagement (in schools, senior citizen clubs etc). Consequently, the local community is becoming more aware of their risks and how to respond in an emergency.

Evidence suggests that the community places a high value on the work the Council is doing in this area. There is however a need for more leadership at the State level to drive preparedness, resilience and awareness outcomes more broadly. LGAT believes that this is well recognised at the State level.

The TFS has done, and continues to do some excellent work in building community resilience in relation to fire through a community development approach. The TFS community protection planning and bushfire ready neighbourhood programs have received national recognition and we understand there are plans for a similar approach to be taken with flooding.

A business case is currently being prepared as part of implementing the recommendations arising from the Department of Justice review into emergency management arrangements in Tasmania. It is understood that as part of the business case funding has been allocated for staff to deliver these programs for all hazards.

## **4. The use and efficacy of forecasting, community alerts, warnings and public information by authorities in responding to flood events.**

Several councils have questioned the adequacy of the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) warnings during the June 2016 floods. Warnings were often inaccurate and were not delivered in a timely manner. It is important that an evaluation is undertaken into the warning systems, the adequacy of the river gauges; particularly in relation to the number and position of them, whether they are in working condition, and whether they can provide accurate readings during significant events such as those experienced in the June floods.

This issue also raises questions about the BOM's recent rationalization of their services in relation to riverine flooding and their legislated obligation to provide warnings.

The issue of SES resourcing during the events was also raised in council submissions. Due to the wide spread impact of the flooding across numerous municipalities, the lack of man power on the ground was perceived as detrimental and significant.

Resourcing constraints during widespread emergency events needs to be addressed in order to respond to future events in an effective way.

It is LGAT's understanding that this issue has been addressed in significant detail in several council submissions.

**5. The effectiveness of transition from response to recovery in the week following the June floods; including capacity and priorities for infrastructure repair, and immediate assistance payments.**

A number of councils raised concerns about the transition to recovery. It is perceived that the State Government activation of the Flood Recovery Taskforce was not as efficient as it could be. Building capacity at the state level in relation to recovery is a priority in enabling a quick and efficient activation of a taskforce.

If you have any further questions about this submission please contact Georgia Palmer, Senior Policy Officer, Local Government Association on 6233 5965 or [georgia.palmer@lgat.tas.gov.au](mailto:georgia.palmer@lgat.tas.gov.au)

Yours sincerely



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**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**