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Dear Air Chief Binskin

**National Natural Disaster Arrangements Royal Commission  
Issues Paper into the role of Local Government**

Thank you for providing the opportunity to make a submission to the issues paper into the role of Local Governments in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters.

Due to the timelines for comment, the Local Government Association Tasmania (LGAT) has not been able to consult with its members on developing this submission. LGAT has promoted the issues paper to its member councils and has encouraged them to respond directly. Were a Council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of specific comments made by that Council in LGAT's submission should not be viewed as lack of support on that matter.

LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* and is the representative body and advocate of Local Government in Tasmania. LGAT works to:

- Protect the interests and rights of councils;
- Promote the efficient operation of Local Government; and
- Foster strategic and beneficial relationships.

Local Government in Tasmania makes a significant contribution to preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters. The contribution of Local Government to emergency management differs from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and this should be recognised in the Royal Commissions considerations. The role of councils in

Emergency Management in Tasmania is enshrined within the [Emergency Management Act 2006](#) and further explained in the [Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements](#).

This submission focuses on a few key issues relevant to the Local Government Issues Paper released on 5 June 2020. In particular; risk assessment, mitigation funding, betterment, recovery arrangements and evacuation centres.

### **Risk Assessment**

Local councils are key stakeholders in municipal emergency management committees, who are responsible for developing municipal emergency management plans. Key agencies such as the Tasmania Fire Service, Tasmania Police and the State Emergency Service also have representation on municipal emergency management committees. It is legislated that these plans must be updated every two years.

A key component of the emergency management plans is a risk assessment which supports the committee to understand and maintain awareness of local hazards, the risk they pose to their community and to prioritise treatment strategies. The Tasmanian Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines and toolbox has been developed to support undertaking the risk assessment.

Risk assessments utilising these guidelines, consistent with the National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines (NERAG), are complex assessments and are only as good as the data that has been input. Officers who sit on the municipal emergency management committees are not experts in risk and therefore the task is often thought of as too complex. Additional funding for base line data, especially in the flood space, as well as support for capacity building at the state level to support municipal emergency risk assessments would be welcomed.

Furthermore, incentivizing risk assessments by linking them to an increased pool of funding for projects to mitigate the risks is recommended. Mitigation funding is addressed in more detail below.

### **Mitigation Funding**

LGAT has consistently advocated for additional funding to be directed to mitigation as the total economic cost of disasters continues to grow. In 2014 the Productivity Commission recommended that the Australian Government increase its mitigation funding to the states and territories to \$200 million per year. The Productivity

Commission noted that governments overinvest in post-disaster reconstruction and underinvest in mitigation, resulting in an increased impact and cost of natural disasters to the community. In Tasmania, a study was undertaken into the cost and benefits of the flood levy in Launceston, demonstrating that the benefits of the levee outweighed the cost four fold from just one event.

A significant amount of work has been undertaken to demonstrate the economic case for investing in mitigation. This evidence has not yet translated into a shift in the funding model at the Federal level with the recent National Partnership for Disaster Risk Reduction decreasing the funding available to jurisdictions for mitigation. The Federal Government needs to prioritise the review of its mitigation funding as a matter of urgency.

### **Betterment**

LGAT, the Australian Local Government Association and other Local Government Associations around Australia have long advocated for betterment funding as part of the broader relief and recovery funding arrangements. Rebuilding infrastructure to original specifications and condition is not sufficient to provide communities with the level of resilience they need in an environment of more frequent and increasingly severe natural disasters. Betterment funding, to rebuild more resilient infrastructure, will save millions of dollars in years to come by ensuring that infrastructure is rebuilt to withstand the new climate reality.

Under the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), essential public assets may be reconstructed to their pre-disaster function. The Commonwealth only provides funding equivalent to the reconstruction of an essential public asset to its pre-disaster function. This clause makes it difficult for the Commonwealth to fund Local or State Governments to 'build back better'.

The DRFA does provide for betterment within the guidelines but the administrative burden of developing a business case is significant. There is also a need for better guidance on what would constitute an acceptable standard for betterment which could then justify the additional investment. Currently, in the absence of an agreed standard for betterment, it can be difficult to construct business cases for investment and Local Government lacks the resources to fulfil the administrative requirements of an application to the Australian Government for betterment. It is understood that only one project nationally has received betterment funding. This demonstrates the difficulty of the current arrangements in supporting this essential element of reconstruction.

The provision for building back better must be reviewed and the process improved to encourage betterment. This will ultimately save the Government and the community a significant amount in the long term.

### **Recovery Funding Arrangements**

In 2018, the Federal Government implemented new Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements. The objective of the new arrangements was to reduce the administrative burden involved in making claims and to increase the speed at which states and councils received recovery funding. In practice this has not transpired. Councils have reported a significant increase in the administrative burden, particularly in relation to restoring essential public assets, which has impacted on council cash flows. The review and change to the arrangements have not met the key objectives of the reform.

### **Evacuation Centres**

In Tasmania, councils are responsible for managing evacuations centres. As part of this role, registration is an important component. A reliable and real time registration process is necessary to manage an evacuation centre in a safe and effective manner.

To date, registration processes in Tasmania have been delivered by Red Cross through its Register:Find:Reunite registration process. The process used in Tasmania has been paper based and the sharing of information for evacuation centre management has at times been difficult. As such, a new approach was established through the development of an app, which has enabled real time data for efficient and effective management of people in evacuation centres.

This data supports resourcing and identifying the organisations needed to support a communities relief and recovery needs. Data about who attends evacuation centres and for how long will also assist councils and municipal committees in planning for future events.

The cost to councils of running evacuation centres, as disasters become more prolonged, is increasing. Councils are able to be reimbursed for a portion of the costs to deliver services by third parties, however councils are unable to claim the cost of staff time allocated to managing the evacuation centre. This is in contrast to being able to claim day labour for rebuilding essential assets. This is a significant cost to Tasmanian councils, which is likely to increase into the future. The Federal Government should amend the DFRA to allow councils to claim their staff time in evacuation centres as they do in rebuilding essential assets.

I hope the information provided in this submission supports the Commission in its deliberations on this important topic and I look forward to seeing the recommendations and final report.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Katrena Stephenson', with a stylized, cursive script.

Dr Katrena Stephenson  
**CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER**