



FRRR

Foundation for Rural
Regional Renewal

The know and the how.

Connecting good will, with good purpose,
for the vitality of rural and remote
Australia.





FRRR
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Regional Renewal

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20 December 2024

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for the opportunity for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal to submit a response to the **Australian Government's Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding (also known as the Colvin Review) to improve disaster funding arrangements**, released 25 October 2024. FRRR applauds the report's recommendations, which are clearly informed by listening to a broad range of voices and perspectives.

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's unique model connects common purposes and investment of government, philanthropy and businesses with locally prioritised needs, to create communities that are vital and resilient. Since FRRR's formation in 2000 as a limited company, with the Australian Government and Sidney Myer Fund as members, it has delivered over \$200 million to more than 15,000 projects.

FRRR has had a focus on disaster resilience and recovery for over 20 years, with a strategic emphasis on medium to long-term recovery and locally led resilience. For example, FRRR is continuing to make grants to support [2019-20 Black Summer affected communities](#) (\$19.3 million distributed to date via 12 programs and 929 projects in 240 communities) and is also nearing completion of support to communities impacted by the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Victoria. This is a deliberate approach, as we have found that this stage of support is typically under-funded. It is often when the immediate emergency response has finished, government-led assistance wanes, and the media has moved on – despite significant community need remaining. Specific FRRR programs supporting recovery and preparedness over recent years have included examples such as Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (\$5 million since the 2009 event), Strengthening Rural Communities Prepare and Recover (approx. \$800,000 per quarter), Volunteer Emergency Services Grants (\$1 million), Suncorp Rebuilding Futures (\$1 million), Visy Bushfire Recovery (\$1 million), and the [Disaster Resilient Future Ready](#) Initiative (\$3.5 million). You can find all FRRR's current disaster related grants [here](#), or read our recent Annual report [here](#).



Through these programs, FRRR provides funding, enabling each community to invest in what they identify is important for their recovery and preparedness efforts through a wide range of organisations that enable broad community benefit. Our due diligence includes consideration of the role of Local and State Governments and optimising coordination and aligning formal and informal systems at a community level.

Having reviewed the report, FRRR is pleased to provide the following response and recommendations:

- 1. Whilst FRRR is very encouraged by the recognition of rural and regional needs, we believe that remote communities require specific and dedicated support, particularly those that are disproportionately impacted by disaster.**

Earlier this year, the Australian Red Cross commissioned Deakin University to undertake research into the role, and monetary value, of social capital in disasters. The project was supported by members of the Community Resilience Alliance including the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Natural Hazards Research Australia and the The University of Melbourne.

The recently released report, [*The hidden power of community: Unveiling social capital's role in Australia's disaster resilience*](#), provides robust evidence relating to the impact and potential cost saving relating to investment in social capital building for a variety of demographics, the most prominent of which is remoteness. According to the report:

The monetary value of social capital varies across groups and communities and can be substantial. For example, for people living in remote areas, higher social capital is equivalent to receiving \$3808 in windfall income annually per person. For a remote community of around 6,770 people this equates to around \$25 million.

Investment in social capital in remote areas lead to significant returns that considerably outpace the return to income alone.

The research report makes the following recommendations:

1. Prioritise investments that enhance social capital, particularly in regional and remote areas, and with groups who experience heightened risk to the adverse mental health and wellbeing consequences of disaster
2. Incorporate social capital in disaster planning and response frameworks
3. Target interventions for groups that face heightened risk

FRRR urge the Australian Government to include remote geographic areas for priority funding, and more broadly, rural and regional communities with lower social capital in the stated scope of the Outcomes Policy 'that directly references disadvantaged or



disproportionately impacted groups to ensure their needs are appropriately considered by disaster funding programs as 'disproportionately affected communities'.

Additionally, FRRR note that 88% of the current Commonwealth disaster funding has gone to Built and Economic outcomes since 2018-19, with only 12% for Social and Natural domains. A greater balance across all outcome areas would be welcomed and arguably achieve a greater range of sustainable outcomes at a community level.

2. The report's recognition of the role of communities and local non-profits is very positive however the proposed funding settings still fall short of these organisations being able to access right-sized and right-timed support.

Whilst we agree with the report's observations about the unintended consequences of competitive grant processes, in FRRR's experience, there are ways of delivering grant funding that supports local coordination and collaboration and that minimises competition. Local communities needing to compete with Local Council and large NGO's, and the minimum size of grants and co-contribution requirements act to lock out most community-led initiatives. The typically rigid timing and duration of grant rounds and acquittals is also an impediment for accessibility and good outcomes.

We encourage consideration of smaller grant streams targeted toward local non-profits and community groups (c. up to \$50k), grant rounds being available more frequently, and grant durations being more aligned to the realities of the time it takes to achieve outcomes – up to 18 or 24 months at least. FRRR's [Prepare & Recover](#) funding stream of its long-standing small grants program is an example of this in action.

Further, FRRR has long and deep experience in supporting place-based and co-designed processes which support collaborative planning, decision-making and funding allocations. Our award-winning [Investing in Rural Community Futures](#) initiative (in partnership with the Bega Valley Shire Council plus seven other locations) is leading practice and achieving significant social resilience outcomes via investment in place-based non-profits. This program is expanding into Victoria in 2025. This kind of work requires at least three-years, and ideally five years of flexible support. We would be happy to share the model and its outcomes with NEMA.

3. FRRR is encouraged by the concept of the Disaster Management Advisory Council and the objectives to enhance involvement of the non-government sector. We believe this concept could be strengthened with an action-orientation.



In support of the report's comments on page 120-121, we invite NEMA to consider opportunities to bridge coordination and leverage the efforts of philanthropy, Government, and the corporate sectors toward shared objectives and outcomes (the Outcomes Framework). Examples of philanthropy and Government collaborations toward achieving shared objectives (such as the proposed Outcomes Framework) exist through initiatives such as IDAC, suggesting an openness and capacity within Government and philanthropy for working differently to leverage different forms of funding and resources. FRRR is eager to work with Governments on this, as an intermediary which is well placed to leverage and mobilise its role as a philanthropic convenor, and to ensure an equitable distribution of funds that provides the wrap around support smaller organisations need to build capacity and be effective and competitive for grants. FRRR's recent [report on the response to the Black Summer Bushfires](#) is an example of this in action.

Concluding comments

There are many important recommendations in the Colvin Report which we trust that our colleagues will provide feedback on with the appropriate expertise. We have sought to provide feedback and suggestions on areas that may attract less commentary and on which we hold expertise.

FRRR commends the Australian government on the commissioning of this report to better meet the needs of Australian communities in the context of the complex, busy and evolving context of disasters in Australia.

Should you require additional detail regarding our submission we would welcome the opportunity for further discussion. Please contact me on (03) 5430 2399 or ceo@frrr.org.au.

Yours sincerely,

Natalie Egleton
Chief Executive Officer