

August, 2024

Opening Statement to the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022

To the members of the Joint Select Committee,

My name is Melissa Jones, and I represent BlazeAid, a volunteer-based organisation that has been at the forefront of rural disaster recovery efforts across rural Australia since 2009.

Over the past three years, BlazeAid has received invaluable financial support from the NSW Reconstruction Authority, which has significantly enhanced our ability to assist communities devastated by natural disasters. This partnership has helped us to establish and maintain base camps in some of the hardest-hit areas, providing crucial resources in the form of grants and support to those in need. It costs BlazeAid up to \$5000 per week to run a basecamp. The grants from NSWRA cover the cost of food supplied to volunteers while they are working in camp.

One notable example of this collaboration is our work in Wauchope, where BlazeAid operated for nearly three years following the Black Summer bushfires and floods. We were grateful to have NSWRA contribute \$72,267 towards our basecamp running costs. With this support, we were able to mobilise over 890 volunteers, who gave 15933 volunteer days. During that time, BlazeAid volunteers cleared 158kms of damaged farm fencing and rebuilt a further 332km of fencing on 449 properties. This effort not only helped restore physical farm boundaries, allowing properties to become income producing again, but also provided much-needed emotional support to the affected property owners. The estimated value of this work in the region equates to just over \$4,000,000.

Additionally, the NSW Reconstruction Authority has helped with facilitation of our operations by providing logistical support and connections with local councils and other agencies. This comprehensive support has allowed BlazeAid to respond swiftly and effectively to multiple disasters across NSW, ensuring that we can continue to serve those in need. In total, NSW Reconstruction Authority has contributed over \$200,000 towards the running of our basecamps since 2022.

In conclusion, the support from the NSW Reconstruction Authority has been instrumental in enabling BlazeAid to fulfill its mission of helping rural communities recover from natural disasters. We look forward to continuing this vital partnership and working together to build a more resilient and prepared New South Wales.

BlazeAid

**Helping Communities Rebuild
After Natural Disasters**

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Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Kind regards,



Melissa Jones

Chief Executive Officer

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