

## **WSROC Opening Statement to the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority**

**Resilience NSW** was an executive agency within the Department of Premier and Cabinet, focused on disaster management and was responsible for disaster recovery and building community resilience to future disasters. It was established for all of the right reasons on 1 May 2020.

An inquiry into the response to the 2022 New South Wales floods that was co-chaired by Mick Fuller a former Police Commissioner concluded that Resilience NSW to be bureaucratic and ineffective and subsequently the agency was dissolved. The inquiry got it wrong, Resilience NSW came to an end for all of the wrong reasons, and one of them was much confusion as to how Resilience NSW was to “integrate” or work alongside the existing emergency arrangements.

Interestingly, the NSW Police Force acting in their emergency management role, that had statutory obligations far superior to those of Resilience NSW during the response phase of that emergency, escaped all criticism.

*Today, according to the NSW Government’s website, “The NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA) is the lead disaster management agency for NSW, responsible for all aspects of disaster recovery and building community resilience to future disasters”.*

*It oversees and coordinates emergency management policy and service delivery with a focus on social, economic, infrastructure and natural environment outcomes.* This is important as we now have an entity that has statutory and effective accountability for the entire emergency spectrum that encompasses prevention, preparation, response and recovery (PPRR).

It’s obvious that the RA is better resourced, has a clearer mandate and has attracted greater support and attention than its predecessor and yet those factors that contributed to the demise of Resilience NSW are still hanging about, albeit to a lesser extent, causing confusion, frustration and distraction.

The comments that follow have their justification from having participated as a commonwealth representative in many disasters and from observations coming from the excellent work being done by the Greater Sydney Heat Taskforce that will report to Government later this year.

The em arrangements in NSW have remained substantially unchanged for at least three decades. Recent policy and structural changes in the community resilience space have not been accommodated nor have they led to a systemic review of the em arrangements to optimise em and broader resilience outcomes.

There is a pressing need to review what we now specifically mean by terms such as planning, preparedness, prevention and recovery in the state's em arrangements and associated em plans especially within the context of such things as the State Mitigation Plan and Disaster Adaptation Plans.

There is also a pressing need to re-assess the role of the emergency management committees at all levels (State, Regional and Local) given that these are non-operational and multi-agency based committees that are perfectly suited to addressing broader resilience goals rather than focusing on narrow em objectives that seems to be the case today.

I would argue that there are very good reasons that these em committees be retasked with a resilience building role at local, regional and state levels and report to RA.

Up to this point, any objective assessment of em plans, subplans and functional area plans, all of which have been theoretically predicated on the PPRR approach, and outside of any specialist and accountable agency such as RA, can only conclude that little has been achieved in the strategic community resilience space that is fundamentally underpinned by the concepts of "prevention" and "preparedness".

It is pleasing to note that the RA and other public sector agencies are in the process of making the transition from a "response" and "recovery" focused em agenda to one that is substantially moving towards "prevention" and "preparedness".

However prevention and preparedness requires a shift towards place-based capabilities and strategies, and this will require far more engagement with place-based government (Councils) than ever before, it will also require;

- far more clarity in the role of Local Government across the whole of emergency management continuum,
- reorganising how Local Government contributes to emergency management and resilience, and
- identifying the optimum capabilities for local government to contribute to the whole of government efforts and resourcing appropriately.

There are many areas affecting Local Government that merit critical attention, I will briefly present a few;

Not all local government areas have the same exposure to hazards, in terms of scope, scale or intensity. Grouping Councils into prevention and preparation forums with artificial jurisdictional boundaries that do not reflect common hazards and exposure serves no purpose and contributes to the lack of engagement between the state government and local government.

REMC and Regional Emergency Operations Centres are based on the boundaries of Police “administrative” areas rather than planning and operational considerations in response to place-based hazards<sup>1</sup>. What do Burwood and Strathfield Councils have in common with Wollondilly and Campbelltown Councils when it comes to natural hazards is beyond explanation and yet this is the basis for how Local Government is organised in the em sense throughout greater Sydney.

During emergencies there are only two types of Councils, those that are directly impacted by emergencies and those that are not. This simple conclusion was the basis for the infomal re-organising Councils, during recent flooding events, into a group of non-directly impacted Councils that provided

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<sup>1</sup> For example the South West Sydney Metro Region Emergency Management Committee has the following Councils, Burwood, Camden, Campbelltown, City of Canada Bay, Canterbury Bankstown, Cumberland, Fairfield City Liverpool City, Strathfield Municipal, Wollondilly Shire

operational and logistical support to those Councils that were directly impacted.

Surely this is a simple and far more constructive way of re-organising Local Government in a more formal sense, grouping Councils on the basis of exposure to a common hazard. I would argue that this should also be the basis for LEMC and REMC boundaries, and should extend to LEOC and REOC.


Local Government's role in the em arrangements of NSW is still unclear, even though it has representation at the SEMC it is not clear whether it is a functional area, a supporting agency, a participating organisation, or whatever?

More importantly, is it appropriate that Local Government through its OLG and LGNSW representatives only has "observer" status at the SEMC given the broader role and increased expectations of Councils from Federal and State governments, and the RA?

Para 460 of the State Emergency Management Plan states ***"Recognising that local councils have many other tasks to perform, state agencies support councils with resources, personnel and advice"***.

We are not aware of any substantive discussions between the NSW Government and Local Government to specifically identify what that support actually entails and then agree to what level and how that support is provided, and under what circumstances.

We have much to do, we must make the most of the RA mandate to challenge all those elements that contribute to the States resilience including the em arrangements.



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