

Opening Statement – Dr Alice Howe, Central Coast Council

Thank you for the opportunity to address this Inquiry on behalf of Central Coast Council.

As noted in our submission, the Central Coast is one of the largest urban local government areas in Australia, by population. It is also subject to significant natural disaster hazards, primarily floods, fires and coastal erosion. Over the last 50 years, we have experienced 29 major weather events, with 10 of these occurring in the last five years.

Over this last five period, we have also worked with three iterations of the NSW department responsible for coordinating emergency management in NSW, now the NSW Reconstruction Authority, as well as the myriad other organisations involved in emergency planning, preparation, response and recovery.

In response to this complex disaster hazard and policy environment, Central Coast Council has invested substantially in understanding the local natural disaster hazard envelope and developing risk mitigation strategies to keep our communities and environment safe, and build local disaster resilience.

Our submission focused on the interactions of the Reconstruction Authority Act with the functions of local government in emergency management and land use planning.

While we broadly support the primary object and terms of the Act, particularly in relation to adoption of an all-hazards approach, we are concerned that the Act does not adequately address the interaction of the NSW Reconstruction Authority's functions with those of other agencies, including local government.

For example, for coastal councils, much of the work required to prepare disaster adaptation plans, required under Part 4, Division 2 of the Reconstruction Authority Act, is also required to prepare coastal management programs under the Coastal Management Act and flood risk management plans required under the Local Government Act and the NSW Flood Prone Land Policy. This lack of integration across the NSW legislative framework is likely to result in significant duplication of effort for local councils asked or directed by the NSW Reconstruction Authority to participate in disaster management processes that may not adequately accommodate local circumstances.

We suggest that, given the complexity of the disaster resilience space and the large number of agencies involved in it, a higher standard of alignment among agencies involved in disaster management, including local government, is essential and should be reflected in an amended Reconstruction Authority Act.

Thank you