

**Submission
No 22**

REVIEW OF THE NSW RECONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY ACT 2022

Organisation: Bega Valley Shire Council

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Clayton Barr MP
Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority
Parliament of New South Wales
Via email: nswreconstructionauthority@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Dear Mr Barr,

Submission for the review of the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*

Council welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Committee in reviewing the legislation that supports and guides the work of the NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA). Our community has endured numerous disasters in recent years and have been reliant on the support of both the state and federal government to recover and rebuild. Our submission will not attempt to delve into the legal provisions within the Act and assess their validity or appropriateness. We believe the legislation provides a clear remit for the RA and we are most eager to see effort and resources focussed on assisting the Agency to continue to be a trusted partner in community resilience through planning and preparedness and importantly providing tactical and operational support in rebuilding and recovery challenges we face when experiencing natural disasters.

Firstly, I wanted to acknowledge the great work of the NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA) team in the most recent bushfire our community experienced at Coolagolite. The RA team were very responsive and able to provide support to our community and Council in an impactful and efficient manner. This was an excellent example where state agencies worked closely to respond to the emergency and RA staff were instrumental in planning for the recovery tasks that were to follow. RA staff were able to take the lead in coordinating recovery, setting up locality-based recovery centres, coordinating key service agencies, hosting community events and coordinating the local recovery committee to ensure our services were coordinated and focussed on supporting bushfire effected properties. By having local staff available and decision-makers with delegation enabled us to provide localised and responsive services. The support received is appreciated and acknowledged.

It was found during the response and recovery of the Coolagolite fire that data management and data sharing between agencies and council continues to be an issue. This hinders the efficiency of government agencies and service providers working with affected individuals and businesses. We recommend that the committee consider how information management and intergovernmental agreements can support data collection and sharing can be achieved. We advocate that this inquiry consider investment in technology both at state and local government level to support data management and improve customer experience for individuals during emergency response and recovery.

The state government recently released the State Disaster Mitigation Plan (SDMP). This document calls for responsibility of developing localised Disaster Adaption Plans (DAPs) to support communities being borne by local council. Whilst supportive of this localised approach, Council is concerned with how this

body of work will be resourced if we are expected to compile the plan and then implement it. Bega Valley Shire Council is facing significant financial challenges in delivering the services we currently provide and adding additional obligations without funding to deliver that work places further financial and scarce resource pressures on Council.

I understand that NSW Reconstruction Authority are developing guidelines for DAPs and will soon be sharing information on how they will support Councils to develop and deliver these plans. We urge the state government to consider how they can use the legislation to take responsibility for coordinating and leading this as important function of community resilience. With RA now having legislative responsibilities for *“prevention, preparedness and adaptation”* we believe there is an opportunity for RA to achieve consistency and standardisation in the approach and achieve some efficiencies utilising knowledge, skills and experience that can be shared across the local government sector. Council is also eager to understand the future land use planning implications of the SDMP being implemented and how the state will support Councils to meet obligations that may be allocated to local government in the plan.

As the committee will appreciate, funding of disaster mitigation and recovery works is a key challenge for all disaster impacted Councils and the funding provisions under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) need to change urgently. These arrangements don't take a wholistic look at the impact of cumulative disasters and they include very limited betterment provisions. At present the guidelines only permit the disaster impacted asset to be rebuilt to its pre-disaster condition or with very limited changes to a modern equivalent (i.e. a timber bridge to concrete but not at a higher deck level or wider travel lanes). This approach is limiting and removes the opportunity for Councils to take a resilience focussed approach to asset repair in the design and rebuilding process. Like-for-like repair is not optimising DRFA funding to consider and reduce the impact of future disasters. Council wrote to the Minister for Emergency Services earlier this year requesting this issue be addressed. We have had community halls, public toilets and water and sewer assets impacted by disasters that are not classified as 'essential public assets' and therefore are not supported under the DRFA funding arrangements. Council urges the state government to prioritise these changes and ensure that funding arrangements are fit for purpose, financially responsible and future proof investment in communities to achieve community resilience.

I note that the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act came into effect in 2022 and it has taken until mid-2024 for the RA to pull the State Disaster Mitigation Plan together. The RA are required to report on implementation progress within 5 years of the Act coming into effect. Council is optimistic that the implementation of the SDMP and the localised DAPs are not rushed to meet that reporting requirement and that appropriate funding programs are developed allowing adequate time for Councils to deliver projects and programs that build community resilience.

We are grateful for the opportunity to work in partnership with RA to deliver our project “Embedding the Enabling Resilience Investment Approach in Bega Valley supporting regional scaling” with financial support through the Disaster Risk Reduction Fund. This project is due to be completed by 30 June 2024 and we believe the outcomes will support a valuable way to measure the success in the Act in achieving the purpose and objectives. Further benefits will be realised by using this project to inform future strategic planning and priorities of the Authority and how it interacts and supports local councils across NSW.

Much of the effort in delivering the State Disaster Mitigation Plans calls for a shift in how whole-of-government support disaster mitigation, response and recovery. Council works with numerous state government agencies and there is often misalignment, or worse, duplication, of service provision across agencies. Council strongly supports a whole-of-government shift and acknowledgement of the urgency of the work outlined in the SDMP. The government's cultural shift towards a mitigation focus

cannot come soon enough as our communities are fatigued and the need for clear direction, aligned with community needs, is evident.

I welcome your call should you wish to discuss any matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely



Iliada Bolton
Director / Business & Governance