RAPAD
REMOTE AREA PLANNING & DEVELOPMENT BOARD

14 August 2026

The Hon Kristy McBain MP
Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Territories
Minister for Emergency Management
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600
Email minister.mcbain@mo.regional.gov.au

Dear Minister McBain

RE: Proposed Changes Disaster Recovery Funding Framework - clarification sought on consequences for Central Western Queensland

The Central Western Queensland Remote Area Planning and Development (RAPAD) Board welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the National Emergency Management Agency's consultation into Disaster Management Reforms.

On behalf of the Board, I write to seek further clarification about the practical consequences of the proposed Disaster Recovery Funding Framework (DRFF) for Central Western Queensland and RAPAD's seven member councils. RAPAD brings local government from across the Central West Region together to drive regional focused opportunities. We take a regional approach while recognising the individuality of governments and non-governemnt groups to bridge the gaps between opportunity, action and growth.

In principle, RAPAD supports the proposed reform's objective of a simpler, faster and nationally consistent framework. With significant experience of disasters and managing projects under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements for over a decade, RAPAD has advocated for arrangements and systems which reduce the administrative burden and deliver appropriate support and investment to impacted communities. It is vital, however, national policy and the arrangements reflect the needs on the ground across Australia's unique and complex communities.

In central western Queensland, there are complexities in recovery created by the compounding events which occur regularly. While remote and isolated communities experience increased costs to rebuild, they face recruitment and retention challenges of staff and contractors thus prolonging rebuilding, and social and health impacts from reduced access to essential services. Reducing support to central western councils will create challenges for councils to be able to both restore and maintain essential assets and drive communities forward.

It is understood the details of Disaster Recovery Funding Framework are still being developed, including the eligible activities and the determination of exceptional assistance is yet to be confirmed. We therefore raise these matters in a spirit of constructive inquiry rather than as conclusions about the final policy and seek further information and consultation from the Commonwealth.

Nationally consistent assistance packages

Queensland's experience of disasters is unique. The state experiences the most disasters, with communities experiencing one or more events activated under the funding arrangements each year. Almost 150 DRFA activations have been made in response to disasters since the Queensland Reconstruction Authority's inception.

The impact of cumulative and concurrent disasters must be recognised. Communities who are continually in states of recovery have less capacity to return to a sense of normal when another event is then upon them. Queensland is also the most decentralised state. Isolation limits access to employment, education, medical, and social services. Distance from major centres increases costs for services and material, and limits the availability of contractors and service providers.

It is important new policy does not consider the nature of the events experienced in central western Queensland as business as usual, but instead is shaped on hazard profiles, risk and mitigation most needed to protect those communities.

RAPAD is seeking to understand from the Commonwealth Government:

- How it will understand the nation's risks and prioritise resilience funding?
- If there will be consideration for Queensland communities who experience the hardship of cumulative events? and
- How geography, isolated and remoteness and small communities, who support the nation through economies such as agriculture, mining and tourism, will be considered in the funding arrangements?

A 50:50 funding partnership between the Australian Government and states and territories for eligible events

In Queensland disaster management under the Disaster Management Act is locally led. As the closest level of government to the community, councils are best placed to recognise communities' needs and develop strategies most appropriate to support them.

Councils with small populations have limited rate bases, and drawing further on ratepayers impacted by disaster cannot be the solution as they cannot afford these additional costs. Central west communities contribute significantly to the national economy and reductions of funding from the Commonwealth will risk the sustainability and production of these industries.

The direct consequence for RAPAD councils

Based on the information currently available and the Queensland Reconstruction Authority's (QRA) retrospective modelling, the proposed arrangements appear likely to leave the RAPAD region materially worse off.

$590.2M DIRECT DRFA PROGRAMS	**$82.6M** LESS COMMONWEALTH FUNDING	**$16.5M** BETTERMENT SHORTFALL	**75** DISASTER EVENTS SINCE 2018

Since 2018, the seven RAPAD councils have managed approximately $590.2 million in direct DRFA-supported works and assistance across 75 disaster events. QRA has modelled what a uniform 50 per cent Commonwealth share would have meant for these past programs. Compared with Queensland's historical average Commonwealth contribution of 64 per cent, the modelled reduction is approximately $82.6 million.

If the final arrangements produced an outcome of this kind, it would not be an accounting adjustment. The shortfall would have to be met by the Queensland Government and/or councils, or recovery works would be reduced, deferred or delivered more slowly. RAPAD councils have very small rate bases, extensive road networks, high remote-area delivery costs, and limited capacity to absorb losses of this scale without consequences for road access, essential services and other council responsibilities.

Council	Events	Direct DRFA	Cth reduction	Betterment gap	Other C/D
Barcaldine	10	$94.9m	$13.3m	$1.27m	$0.47m
Barcoo	14	$86.3m	$12.1m	$1.28m	$1.32m
Blackall-Tambo	8	$86.1m	$12.1m	$1.69m	$0.34m
Boulia	10	$68.7m	$9.6m	$1.30m	$2.05m
Diamantina	10	$46.7m	$6.5m	$5.57m	$0.61m
Longreach	12	$96.8m	$13.6m	$0.25m	$0.72m
Winton	11	$110.8m	$15.5m	$5.13m	$1.27m
RAPAD total	**75**	**$590.2m**	**$82.6m**	**$16.50m**	**$6.78m**

Source: QRA council impact assessments, program data as at 23 June 2026. Figures are rounded. The impact columns are different measures and must not be added together.

The proposed betterment model also appears likely to weaken resilience unless further flexibility is built into the policy. Across 44 past RAPAD council betterment projects with approximately $17.0 million in approved funding, Queensland Reconstruction Authority's modelling indicates only one project would have been fully eligible under the proposed 15 per cent Resilient Infrastructure Scheme. The modelled shortfall is approximately $16.5 million. RAPAD is seeking clarification on how the final framework would avoid damaged assets being restored to their previous vulnerability, with the resulting risk of repeated damage and repeated recovery costs.

The council assessments also identify $6.78 million in other past Category C and D assistance and $1.55 million in Counter Disaster Operations costs whose future treatment remains unclear and requires clarification. These figures exclude assistance paid through the State to residents, primary producers, small businesses and not-for-profit organisations. The $82.6 million reduction should therefore be read as a minimum measure of the modelled direct council effect, not the full regional consequence.

Queensland Reconstruction Authority has also identified a proposed increase in the small-disaster activation point from $240,000 to $2.7 million. This is significant for geographically isolated events: damage can be locally severe and disruptive in a remote shire without reaching a large statewide threshold. RAPAD seeks confirmation of how the final framework would ensure such events are not excluded from Commonwealth support solely because their impacts are concentrated in a small and sparsely populated area.

Simpler activation thresholds

RAPAD strongly support disaster recovery funding arrangements based on clear, practical and easily understood activation thresholds, enabling recovery and restoration activities to commence as soon as possible following a disaster event. In regional and remote areas, timely access to recovery funding is critical to restoring essential community infrastructure, re-establishing community services and supporting local economies and reducing long term impacts on affected communities.

Post disaster councils quickly undertake damage assessments to understand impacts. The Queensland Reconstruction Authority, through a clear and direct reporting line, provides certainty on eligibility of activities to allow councils to confidently conduct emergent work and emergency repairs. This confidence prevents any delays, and under new arrangements RAPAD asks how and if the role of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority will support this.

Delays in funding approvals can have significant consequences. To minimise disruption and maintain recovery momentum, any future disaster recovery funding framework should preserve the principles which have underpinned the success of the current Queensland model. This includes maintaining straightforward activation arrangements, providing certainty around funding eligibility, minimising administrative complexity and ensuring funding is available when it is needed most. The primary focus of any new framework should be on enabling the rapid restoration of community functionality, infrastructure and economic activity, rather than introducing additional procedural steps which hinder timely recovery efforts.

RAPAD therefore encourages governments to ensure future funding arrangements remain practical, efficient and outcome-focused, supporting local governments to respond quickly and effectively to the needs of their communities following disaster events.

More streamlined reporting, claiming and assurance processes

As outlined above RAPAD strongly support disaster recovery funding arrangements based on clear, practical and easily understood activation thresholds, enabling recovery and restoration activities to commence as soon as possible following a disaster event with councils calling for decreased administrative burden and working with the Queensland Reconstruction Authority to continuously improve asset management systems to report damage, progress and completion.

It is unclear what the administration changes will entail under the new framework. If changes are made to systems and administrative processes, RAPAD asks how will these be implemented, will there be additional systems required, will training and awareness be supported through workshops and guides?

A new Resilience Infrastructure Scheme [to support communities to build back better]

RAPAD is seeking to understand what will be the effects on asset betterment and resilient investment and why is investment being reduced when the Colvin Report recommends greater investment from the Commonwealth for local government capacity and communities?

The proposed reduction in Commonwealth disaster funding raises questions for local governments regarding the potential transfer of financial responsibility to councils or the state that are already managing increasing demands on limited resources. If Commonwealth contributions are reduced, there is a risk councils will be required to absorb a greater share of recovery, resilience and preparedness costs, potentially impacting their ability to deliver essential services and invest in community development.

There is also concern a reduction in disaster funding could result in fewer resources being available for future mitigation and resilience initiatives, despite the growing frequency and severity of natural disasters. Continued and increased investment in local disaster resilience is critical to strengthening community capacity, reducing long-term recovery costs, and enabling communities to adapt to, withstand and recover from disruptions.

Greater clarity is also required regarding how disaster and resilience risks will be assessed and prioritised under any new arrangements. Queensland currently benefits from the use of Local Resilience and Adaptation Plans (LRAPs), which provide a locally informed evidence base for identifying risks and investment priorities. It is unclear how the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) will assess local risk profiles, determine funding priorities, and allocate resources across jurisdictions. RAPAD would welcome further information on the criteria to be used to identify priority risks, the types of resilience and mitigation initiatives that will be eligible for support, and how local knowledge and planning frameworks will inform future investment decisions.

Flexibility for severe or catastrophic events.

Local communities experience disasters in different ways, and their capacity to prepare for, respond to, and recover from these events is influenced by a range of social, economic, environmental, and geographic factors. As a result, disaster recovery packages should retain sufficient flexibility to ensure assistance can be tailored to the specific circumstances of each event and the unique needs of the affected community.

Local governments play a critical role in identifying and coordinating recovery priorities because of their close connection to residents, businesses, and local stakeholders. Their detailed understanding of local conditions, vulnerabilities, and community expectations places them in the best position to determine the types of support and resources required following a disaster. Maintaining local decision-making authority is essential to ensuring recovery efforts are targeted, effective, and aligned with community needs.

While through consultation the National Emergency Management Agency has asked for information from stakeholders, however has not released details on packages and eligible activities. RAPAD seeks further details of activities which are proposed to continue and what may in the future be considered ineligible. While in principle there is agreement packages require simplification to allow faster delivery, and while equity is required, questions exist around whether creating consistency will create equity when communities across Australia do not experience disasters equally.

Cluster fencing illustrates the need for clarification

Cluster fencing is the clearest practical example of why RAPAD is seeking clarity on the future treatment of place-based exceptional recovery. Following the 2025 Western Queensland floods, the Australian and Queensland Governments established the $105 million Exclusion Fence Restitution Fund under the DRFA exceptional-circumstances arrangements. The program provides grants of up to $500,000 to rebuild flood-damaged or destroyed exclusion and cluster fencing and applies across all seven RAPAD council areas.

RAPAD understands the final DRFF settings are still to be confirmed. The material currently available appears to remove the existing Category D exceptional-package structure, while indicating additional assistance may be considered in 'genuinely extraordinary circumstances'. It does not yet explain the criteria, process, timing or funding scale. RAPAD is therefore not asserting a comparable fencing program could not occur under the final framework, rather, on the information available, it is not clear how such a program would occur, who would initiate it, or whether it could be approved at the scale and speed required?

$21.28 MILLION A YEAR IN INCREASED REGIONAL GROSS MARGIN	**$56.30 MILLION A YEAR IN TOTAL REGIONAL ECONOMIC BENEFIT**	**APPROXIMATELY 139 ADDITIONAL AGRICULTURAL EMPLOYMENT EQUIVALENTS**	**$4.57 IN MODELLED ANNUAL REGIONAL BENEFIT FOR EVERY $1 OF GOVERNMENT FUNDING**

The RAPAD cost-benefit analysis of the recently delivered Queensland Feral Pest Initiative cluster-fencing rounds models the scale of the benefits which depend on this infrastructure remaining functional. The project involved 40 clusters of 165 Landholders fencing 4017km and protecting 2.25m ha delivered:

- approximately 139 additional agricultural employment equivalents;
- $21.28 million a year in increased regional gross margin;
- $56.30 million a year in total regional economic benefit;
- $29.73 million in landholder co-investment alongside $12.32 million in one-off government funding; and
- $4.57 in modelled annual regional benefit for every $1 of government funding.

The social consequences are equally important. Program monitoring records reduced stress from wild-dog attacks, less time spent trapping and controlling dogs, greater flexibility in enterprise choice, improved business viability and greater confidence in the future. At community level, fencing construction and the return of sheep and wool enterprises support jobs, local purchasing, families, school enrolments, sporting clubs and services.

If the final framework does not retain a clear and timely mechanism to restore damaged cluster fencing at the scale required after a major flood, these gains would be at risk. The consequence would not simply be unrepaired wire and posts. It could include reduced livestock protection, weaker farm viability, lost private investment, fewer jobs and further pressure on already small communities across the region.

The Disaster Ready Fund does not appear to be an equivalent substitute. It is a competitive pre-disaster risk-reduction program and does not, at face value, provide an assured, rapid and event-specific pathway to restore privately owned but regionally significant productive infrastructure after /a disaster. RAPAD is seeking confirmation of whether the Australian Government considers another mechanism under the proposed DRFF capable of performing this role.

Clarification sought and request for meeting

RAPAD is not opposing reform. The QRA modelling and the cluster-fencing example raise material questions for our seven councils and the communities we represent. RAPAD would appreciate the Minister's advice on the following matters:

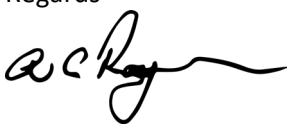
- Under the final DRFF, what mechanism would allow governments to establish and fund a package comparable to the current $105 million Exclusion Fence Restitution Fund following a future major flood?
- Would flood-damaged exclusion and cluster fencing remain eligible for exceptional assistance, including where the infrastructure is privately owned but delivers substantial regional economic and community benefits?
- How would 'genuinely extraordinary circumstances' be defined, initiated, assessed and approved, and what assurance could remote communities have about the timing and scale of support?
- How will the final cost-sharing, activation, Counter Disaster Operations and betterment settings account for the limited fiscal capacity, repeated disaster exposure, extensive road networks and high delivery costs of remote councils?

RAPAD requests the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) further develop the details of the proposed funding arrangements, following the information gathered during this consultation period (06 June - 19 August 2026) and hold further consultation with local governments, States and Territories so valuable feedback about the programs potential implementation can be better understood and appropriate changes made.

Given RAPAD's role representing the seven Central Western Queensland councils and delivering the current Exclusion Fencing Recovery Grants, the board would welcome a meeting with you and relevant National Emergency Management Authority officials at a time convenient to you. A meeting would allow RAPAD to walk through the QRA modelling, explain the practical regional consequences and better understand how the unresolved elements of the framework are intended to operate.

RAPAD's concern is not that we know comparable support will be unavailable. It is that the material currently available does not yet show how it would be available. We would value the opportunity to resolve this uncertainty before the framework is finalised.

Regards



Tony Rayner
Chair

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CC: Hon Ann Leahy, Minister for Local Government and Water and Minister for Fire, Disaster Recovery and Volunteers lgwv@ministerial.qld.gov.au
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