

21 August 2024

Opening Address – Hawkesbury City Council

Hawkesbury City Council thanks the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority for the opportunity to give evidence at the public hearing of the statutory review of the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*.

Whilst Hawkesbury City Council believes that the policy objectives of the Act remain valid, and that the terms of the Act remain appropriate for securing its objectives, it is yet to be tested locally during a disaster of significant scale.

This address has been prepared with consideration to the concurrent Disaster Adaptation Plan (DAP) and review of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) processes which are underway, and the challenges experienced in the Hawkesbury during its most recent natural disasters.

Since the catastrophic bushfires that were experienced in the Hawkesbury in late 2019 and early 2020 which impacted vast areas of the region, the Hawkesbury has experienced eight significant flood events.

The response, recovery and preparedness approach of both Hawkesbury City Council and combat agencies are well refined as a result of these extensive and frequent natural disasters, however Council has observed issues related to data collection and information sharing that have presented challenges during and following each disaster event.

It is noted that the primary object of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022 is to be achieved (in part) by:

b) providing for the functions and powers of the NSW Reconstruction Authority, including functions and powers to –

(i) facilitate the protection, recovery and reconstruction of affected communities.

Hawkesbury City Council is actively participating in the development of the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley Disaster Adaptation Plan (DAP) as led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, which is intended to facilitate the **protection** of communities through mitigation and adaptation measures (including public infrastructure, homes, land use planning and local preparedness programs) and implemented by State and Local authorities.

Hawkesbury City Council has also contributed to the review of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), where Council highlighted the need for betterment funding and pre-agreed 'off the shelf' recovery packages that would enable Council to deliver the **reconstruction** of improved infrastructure following a disaster.

An ongoing concern for Hawkesbury City Council that sits outside of the DAP and DRFA arrangements and therefore remains unaddressed, are issues related to data collection and information sharing, in particular, a lack of a standardised process for Damage Impact Assessments and an absence of protocols that enables information to be readily shared between response and recovery agencies.

Given that the level and timing of recovery supports that are made available to communities rely heavily on accurate data, Hawkesbury City Council considers Damage Impact Assessments to be critical component of recovery that the NSW Reconstruction Authority should commandeer and lead, irrespective of combat agency tenure following a disaster.



A more robust and coordinated Damage Impact Assessment process would create consistency in the data collection process and ensure that the data collected would reflect the full extent of the impact of the disaster, thereby better informing the level of funding and agency support that is deployed to communities to enable disaster recovery.

In addition to the information collected by agencies regarding residents and their properties post-disaster, residents must self-report their circumstances to multiple agencies in attempts to secure a myriad of recovery services (e.g. emergency relief, funding, accommodation services). On repeated occasions residents experience issues regarding personal and property information not being readily available to them. Further to this, information is not able to be shared between agencies at all, meaning that residents need to repeatedly substantiate and evidence that they have been impacted by the disaster.

The lack of information sharing between agencies hinders the timeliness of access to recovery support services and re-traumatises residents, often in the immediate aftermath of a disaster event.

The Act describes the coordination and governance function of the NSW Reconstruction Authority which, if exercised, could enable the Authority to facilitate critical information sharing between agencies, vastly improving and expediting the recovery process for residents.

Hawkesbury City Council thanks the Committee for its consideration of this feedback and looks forward to the outcome both of this review and the ongoing work of the NSW Reconstruction Authority, including the finalisation of the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley Disaster Adaption Plan, which will ultimately improve the disaster resilience of our community.

Yours faithfully

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