

Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority



PARLIAMENT OF
NEW SOUTH WALES

Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025



Report 2/58 – May 2026

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The motto of the coat of arms for the state of New South Wales is "Orta recens quam pura nites". It is written in Latin and means "newly risen, how brightly you shine".

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Chair's foreword

I am pleased to note at the very outset that the work of the NSW Reconstruction Authority continues to get better and better. Is it perfect – no. But does it continue to learn and grow – absolutely yes.

The NSW Reconstruction Authority is still a relatively new government agency that was only established in late 2022. Since that time, NSW has experienced a wide variety and never-ending series of events that has ultimately called on the Authority to bend and stretch and flex and adapt.

In taking note of the relentlessness of the work falling to the NSW Reconstruction Authority, it is also essential to remind ourselves that their work is not just to be a recovery agency but also an agent of preparation, prevention and resilience.

This inquiry had a focus on the severe weather event that struck the broader NSW East Coast in May 2025, particularly on the Mid-North Coast region including Taree and surrounds. The inquiry took this opportunity to also reflect on the flooding that affecting the Central West of NSW in 2022, and to turn an eye to the power outage that struck the Far West of NSW in late 2024 and the severe weather caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred in March 2025.

The work of the NSW Reconstruction Authority is exposed to the highest of expectations. This single agency is expected to be so many things to so many people under a wide range of circumstances. Often, the NSW Reconstruction Authority is meeting people at a time when they are in the midst of crisis.

Whether it is a power outage in the Far West, a flood in the Central West, a landslip on the North or South Coast, fires raging through the Hunter Valley, or a terrorist attack on the beaches of Sydney, we are increasingly turning to the NSW Reconstruction Authority for action. I have a personal concern that there must come a limit to the capacity of this one agency and that future government should be mindful of such a limitation.

This report provides a number of findings and recommendations based on what we as the Committee heard from participants along the way.

One of the more important themes was the critical nature of funding streams and the speed with which the necessary funding could be provided. I acknowledge that disaster recovery funding is a complex beast stretching across federal, state and local government, not to mention private citizens and insurance companies. It was clear during the inquiry that taking fast and decisive action is important in the recovery process, while funding questions and answers were often slow to be developed and resolved.

I also want to highlight in this foreword the incredible generosity of spirit across every community when they were called on to respond to a disaster event. Spontaneous volunteers is the term used to describe people that simply want to step up and help others. This wonderful human quality is well intended but does need to be more carefully managed going forward, so that those in need have a clear understanding of who exactly is stepping in to help them and what specifically their role is.

It has been an absolute pleasure to work with my Committee colleagues and the committee staff, who do so much of the underlying work that make these inquiries a reality. I thank everyone involved, including the Hansard team that record our spoken words and the audio-visual teams that make public access and transparency a reality, including when we are undertaking regional public hearings.

Most of all, I thank the general public who, invited to participate in this process, rose to the occasion and gave us their frank and fearless advice. In so many instances they gave generously to their neighbours and communities during a time of critical need.

Clayton Barr MP

Chair

Findings and recommendations

Finding 1	3
The May 2025 East Coast severe weather event was a historically significant natural disaster that caused widespread damage and impacts for local communities, particularly in the Mid North Coast region.	
Recommendation 1	10
That the NSW Government, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, commence work to standardise data collection and data sharing protocols relating to disaster impacts and recovery, in order to improve interagency coordination and decision-making for future disasters.	
Finding 2	13
Throughout the events within the scope of this inquiry, challenges were regularly encountered in the transition from response to recovery suggesting more work is needed to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government agencies and community stakeholders during this transition.	
Recommendation 2	13
That the NSW Government, led by NSW Reconstruction Authority and including all other relevant agencies and stakeholders, develop guiding principles to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government agencies and community stakeholders during the transition from response to recovery.	
Recommendation 3	14
That the NSW Reconstruction Authority publish the report on the After-Action Review of the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event within one month of the tabling of the Committee's report.	
Recommendation 4	14
That the NSW Reconstruction Authority implement a mechanism to revisit, track and measure insights arising from past After-Action Reviews to demonstrate improvements implemented over time, and that information from this process be published in the NSW Reconstruction Authority's annual report.	
Recommendation 5	17
That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consult with local communities to ensure that Recovery Centres and Recovery Assistance Points set up in the immediate aftermath of disasters are trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and accessible to meet the diverse needs of disaster-affected communities.	
Finding 3	20
Strong community networks, including local community groups and organisations, were essential to supporting local residents during recovery from the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.	

Recommendation 6 _____ **21**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority establish further formal partnership agreements and/or Memorandums of Understanding with local community organisations to ensure their role in disaster preparedness and recovery is formally recognised and properly resourced.

Recommendation 7 _____ **23**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consult with local communities and organisations to develop a strategic framework and/or practical guidance around the management and support of spontaneous volunteers.

Recommendation 8 _____ **24**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consider opportunities to strengthen community-led recovery by co-designing recovery strategies and frameworks with local councils, Joint Organisations, and community representatives.

Recommendation 9 _____ **25**

That the NSW Government fund permanent Community Recovery and Preparedness Officers within councils or at a regional level to coordinate outreach efforts and ensure continuity in disaster recovery and preparedness. Consideration should be given to the financial health and disaster risk profile of councils and eligibility criteria that ensures support is provided to councils on a needs basis.

Recommendation 10 _____ **28**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority continue to consult and actively engage with disaster-impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. This should include formally collaborating to co-design and deliver services, including Recovery Assistance Points, and outreach programs targeted to the needs of these communities.

Finding 4 _____ **31**

While communities have demonstrated significant resilience and adaptability, the cumulative impact of successive and compounding natural disasters has adverse mental health impacts for community members, volunteers and emergency responders.

Finding 5 _____ **31**

Requiring people to repeatedly recount their experiences across different agencies adds to the burden of already distressed community members and undermines the effectiveness of recovery assistance.

Recommendation 11 _____ **31**

That the NSW Government, led by Service NSW, urgently expand the 'Tell Your Story Once' project across government agencies to support person-centred recovery assistance processes and reduce duplication.

Finding 6 _____ **35**

The NSW Reconstruction Authority did not exercise its planning powers in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.

Recommendation 12 _____ **35**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority develop and publish clear guidelines and criteria for invoking statutory planning powers and for buy-back interventions to ensure these are applied transparently and consistently and communicated to communities effectively.

Finding 7 _____ **38**

The Resilient Homes Program is performing significantly below community expectations and needs, with stakeholders observing funding issues, restrictive eligibility criteria, and complex and lengthy application and approval processes along with limited or no rationale in relation to unfavourable decisions, adding to community frustration and uncertainty during recovery.

Recommendation 13 _____ **38**

That, in consultation with relevant councils, the NSW Government, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, should make improvements to the Resilient Homes Program, specifically including improvements to the timeliness, eligibility criteria and the application and approval process.

Finding 8 _____ **40**

Stakeholders consistently identified the importance of investment in disaster mitigation and adaptation to reduce the cost and impact of natural hazards, both in advance of disasters where risks are identified and during recovery.

Finding 9 _____ **41**

The current funding framework for betterment represents a missed opportunity to reduce the long-term costs of successive disasters as rebuilding to pre-disaster standards in communities that have experienced repeated disaster events is neither efficient nor sustainable.

Recommendation 14 _____ **42**

That the NSW Government implement ways in which betterment can be incorporated into future funding frameworks and through the Authority should give consideration to opportunities to work with local stakeholders to determine which betterment initiatives are likely to deliver the greatest savings, in the event of future reconstruction costs following a disaster.

Recommendation 15 _____ **43**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority invest further in preparedness initiatives to strengthen community capacity and capability through a dedicated fund. These programs should be informed by co-design with relevant stakeholders including insurers, local councils and community organisations.

Recommendation 16 _____ **46**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority continue to improve grant processes to better support impacted communities following a disaster, including clear and consistent eligibility criteria. These processes should retain flexibility to consider individual circumstances.

Finding 10 _____ **49**

Recent changes to Emergency Grant Reliefs have seen an increase in complexity and decrease in the upfront payment for farmers which was impactful after the May 2025 flooding events in particular.

Recommendation 17 _____ **49**

That the NSW Government, in consultation NSW Farmers and other agricultural stakeholders, streamline the Primary Industry Grants and other assistance, with particular attention being paid to streamlining the application and approval process.

Recommendation 18 _____ **49**

That the NSW Government raise the upfront primary producer grants from \$5,000 to provide more fit-for-purpose immediate support for farmers to aid the recovery process.

Finding 11 _____ **52**

Local councils highlighted significant financial pressures, delays in reimbursement, and administrative burdens associated with the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Finding 12 _____ **52**

The current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements application process has proven overly bureaucratic, complex and time consuming, all at a time when council efforts should be directed to recovery.

Recommendation 19 _____ **52**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consider opportunities to improve and increase the consistency of guidance and resources provided to local councils about eligibility criteria under the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, particularly regarding evidence required in support of Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements applications.

Finding 13 _____ **56**

The Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements category system is too complicated and there is a lack of clarity on what can be claimed under each category.

Recommendation 20 _____ **56**

That the NSW Government continue to advocate to the Australian Government through relevant intergovernmental forums for reforms of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to:

- expand eligibility criteria to include water and sewer infrastructure as essential public infrastructure
- streamline application and assessment processes, and
- incorporate betterment.

Finding 14 _____ **59**

Financial pressures under the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements are further compounded by the cumulative impact of successive natural disasters, particularly for smaller local councils and more geographically isolated councils.

Recommendation 21 _____ **60**

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority continue to prioritise improvements to streamline payment of Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement funds to local councils as a matter of urgency. The NSW Reconstruction Authority should have funds readily available so that councils do not incur the extra financial burden at a time when council assets are adversely impacted.

Finding 15 _____ **60**

Many councils remain out of pocket for significant amounts of money, owed to them through unpaid Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and other recovery payments.

Recommendation 22 _____ **60**

That the NSW Government work with the Australian Government to ensure all monies still owed to councils for approved and completed Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements-funded works be paid immediately, so as to aid those local government areas in their recovery and future resilience.

Recommendation 23 _____ **68**

That the NSW Government continue to advocate to the Australian Government through relevant intergovernmental forums for the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding (Colvin Review).

Chapter One – NSW Reconstruction Authority and the 2025 East Coast severe weather event

Summary

This chapter summarises the role of the NSW Reconstruction Authority (the Authority), including the statutory role of the Committee to review the operations of the Authority following a disaster. It also provides an overview of the May 2025 severe weather event, as the focus of the inquiry, and other relevant disasters in which the Authority has exercised its functions.

Role of the NSW Reconstruction Authority and purpose of inquiry

- 1.1 The NSW Reconstruction Authority (the Authority) is the state government agency responsible for disaster recovery and resilience.¹ The main objective of the Authority is to 'promote community resilience' by:
 - helping communities recover and rebuild after disasters
 - reducing the impact of future disasters through prevention, preparedness and adaptation work.²
- 1.2 The Authority was established in November 2022 following a recommendation of the NSW Independent Flood Inquiry.³ The functions of the Authority are set out in the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* (the Act).⁴
- 1.3 During disasters, the Authority works with emergency services to understand what impacted local communities will need to recover.⁵ The NSW Government identified that recovery commences during response.⁶ Once the immediate threat of a disaster has passed, a formal transition from response by emergency services to recovery led by the Authority takes place. The Authority then coordinates recovery efforts in collaboration with community leaders and recovery partners.⁷
- 1.4 The Authority also coordinates NSW's disaster risk management through longer term strategic work, including the development and implementation of the State Disaster Mitigation Plan and local Disaster Adaptation Plans.⁸ The Act also gives

¹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), November 2025, p 8; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Reconstruction Authority – about us](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

² *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [s 3](#).

³ [Submission 70](#), Review of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022, Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority, NSW Reconstruction Authority, p 7; *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [pt 2, div 1](#).

⁴ [NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022](#).

⁵ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Reconstruction Authority – Recovery](#), accessed 23 March 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), ch 4.

⁶ [Submission 50](#), NSW Government, p 6.

⁷ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Reconstruction Authority – About us](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Reconstruction Authority – reducing the risk](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

the Authority powers to direct resilience action statewide, and planning powers to compulsory acquire land, and manage or carry out work on this land.⁹

- 1.5 The Authority is not responsible for emergency response or management of disasters, which is led by the State Emergency Operations Controller and emergency service agencies such as State Emergency Service (SES).

Reviewing the operations of the Authority

- 1.6 Under section 93(3)(b) of the Act, the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority (the Committee) is required to review 'the operations of the Authority regarding any disaster in relation to which the Authority exercises functions'.¹⁰
- 1.7 This is the Committee's first report as part of this ongoing statutory function. It focuses on the Authority's response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. It also considers the operations of the Authority in relation to a number of other disasters that have taken place since 2022, as well as key functions of the Authority such as:
- communication and engagement with local communities, including building community capacity and resilience to disasters
 - preparedness and adaptation activities, and any use of its planning powers under the Act
 - the implementation of funding schemes, such as joint Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).
- 1.8 The Committee's previous inquiry reviewed the Act and made recommendations to amend section 93 of the Act, specifically in relation to the Committee.¹¹ Recommendation Three included:
- clarifying the timing of the Committee's review function
 - expanding the scope of the Committee's review function to include disaster prevention, preparedness and adaptation
 - amending references to the Committee to reflect the ongoing statutory role of the Committee.
- 1.9 The Committee notes that on 25 March 2026, the Hon Jihad Dib, Minister for Emergency Services, introduced the Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2026.¹² The Bill proposes to amend the Act to implement recommendations from the Committee's statutory review report, including changes to the Committee's review function and its expanded scope.

⁹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), p 8.

¹⁰ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [s 93\(3\)\(b\)](#).

¹¹ Joint Select Committee on NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Review of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022](#), report 1/58, Parliament of New South Wales, 28 November 2024.

¹² [Emergency Services Legislation Amendment Bill 2026](#).

- 1.10 The Committee welcomes these amendments to the Act to inform future operational reviews and will continue to monitor the Bill as it is considered by Parliament.

May 2025 East Coast severe weather event

Finding 1

The May 2025 East Coast severe weather event was a historically significant natural disaster that caused widespread damage and impacts for local communities, particularly in the Mid North Coast region.

- 1.11 From 18 May 2025, a slow-moving weather system caused prolonged heavy rain and severe flooding across the Mid North Coast, Hunter and Central Coast regions. The severe weather event impacted 25 local government areas (LGAs).¹³
- 1.12 Evacuation orders were issued across the region. During the response to the disaster, the State Emergency Service (SES) led an extensive emergency response with volunteers and partner agencies, completing over 800 flood rescues between 14 May and 3 June.¹⁴
- 1.13 The disaster caused significant damage and impacts for local communities. Over 2,400 buildings were inundated, and floodwaters caused telecommunications outages and infrastructure damage.¹⁵ Essential Energy reported that 46,000 customers were affected by power outages.¹⁶ Supply chains were interrupted and around 50,000 residents were isolated as a result of submerged roads.¹⁷ Five people died during the flooding.¹⁸
- 1.14 Flooding was particularly severe in the Mid North Coast region, where the Manning River flooded at record levels in what was described as a 1 in a 500-year flood event.¹⁹ The severity of the flooding was in part caused by higher-than-average rainfall in the region earlier in 2025.²⁰

¹³ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), p 70; L Cox and agencies, ['Floods isolate almost 50,000 people in NSW as BoM warns of more rain'](#), *The Guardian*, 22 May 2025, accessed 23 March 2026.

¹⁴ Minister for Recovery, Minister for Emergency Services, [Recovery continues for Mid North Coast communities as NSW SES hand over to NSW Reconstruction Authority](#), media release, 3 June 2025, accessed 23 March 2026.

¹⁵ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), p 70.

¹⁶ Essential Energy, [Updates on outages caused by storms and floods](#), 2 June 2025, accessed 13 August 2025, archived 16 July 2025 at <https://web.archive.org/web/20250716044910/https://www.essentialenergy.com.au/outages-and-faults/Outage-Information-22052025>.

¹⁷ NSW SES, [Resupplies, flood rescues to continue as 50,000 isolated by record floods](#), media release, 23 May 2025, accessed 23 March 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), p 70.

¹⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), p 70.

¹⁹ Floodwaters on the Manning River at Taree exceeded the 500-year Annual Recurrence Interval. S George, F Lord, S Montoya, V Chen, [New South Wales Mid North Coast flood impact and resilience research](#), Natural Hazards Research Australia, report number 56.2025, August 2025, p 3; MidCoast Council, [Impact Assessment – May 2025 1:500 Year Flood Event](#), version 3, January 2026, p 4.

²⁰ T Hemmings, [Rainfall records smashed during Mid North Coast severe weather](#), ABC News, 4 June 2025, accessed 23 March 2026; MidCoast Council, [Impact Assessment – May 2025](#), p 4.

- 1.15 Heavy rain in the Newcastle area also caused a landslip in the suburb of New Lambton, which impacted 16 homes and displaced 44 people (discussed further in Chapter Two).²¹
- 1.16 On 21 May 2025, the NSW Governments declared the severe weather event a natural disaster and it was assigned the Australian Government Reference Number (AGRN) 1212.²² This declaration meant that impacted communities could access special assistance measures to aid them in recovery.²³

What is a Natural Disaster Declaration and Australian Government Reference Number (AGRN)?

When severe disasters occur, the NSW Government may make a Natural Disaster Declaration across a list of impacted Local Government Areas (LGAs). A Natural Disaster Declaration activates support measures under the joint Commonwealth-state Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements for individuals, community groups or businesses covered by the declaration. These assistance measures can include things like one-off payments, grants, or concessional loans.²⁴

Natural Disaster Declarations are also assigned an AGRN. An AGRN is an identifier for each natural disaster in Australia.²⁵ In NSW, the Authority manages the list of declared disasters, which includes the list of impacted LGAs and the assistance available.²⁶ The list of impacted LGAs may be updated as the disaster continues to unfold.²⁷

Other relevant disasters

- 1.17 To understand how the Authority's operations have changed or improved, the Committee also heard evidence related to other recent disasters in line with the inquiry's terms of reference. The Authority's response to these disasters is discussed in more detail throughout the report.

Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred

- 1.18 Ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred was a long-lived weather event that took place in March 2025 that brought severe storms to South East Queensland and the North Coast of NSW.²⁸ The strength of the cyclone varied as it built and moved over the

²¹ [Submission 36](#), City of Newcastle, pp 1-2.

²² Minister for Recovery, [Disaster support for sixteen Hunter and Mid North Coast LGAs following severe flooding](#), media release, 21 May 2025, accessed 23 March 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2025-26](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²³ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²⁴ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations](#), accessed 23 March 2026; National Emergency Management Agency, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²⁵ Australian National Audit Office, [Administration of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), report no 23 of 2022-23, 18 May 2023, p 29, para 2.15.

²⁶ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²⁷ Minister for Recovery, [Disaster support for sixteen Hunter and Mid North Coast LGAs following severe flooding](#), accessed 23 March 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2025-26](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²⁸ Bureau of Meteorology, [Severe Tropical Cyclone Alfred \(22U\)](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

Coral Sea but weakened before making landfall. It was downgraded from a cyclone to a tropical low on 8 March 2025.²⁹

- 1.19 Despite being less severe than initially predicted, the weather event caused widespread disruption and damage across northern NSW. A natural disaster was declared across 19 LGAs in NSW across the Northern Rivers and Mid North Coast regions (AGRN 1198).³⁰

Major electricity outages affecting Far West NSW

- 1.20 On 17 October 2024, severe weather damaged infrastructure that was critical to the power supply for the Broken Hill area. This caused a power outage affecting 12,700 properties in the region. A Natural Disaster Declaration was made on 20 October (AGRN 1149), and the NSW Premier declared an Electricity Supply Emergency on 23 October 2024.³¹
- 1.21 This disaster was the subject of a separate inquiry by the Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning. It is explored in further detail in the inquiry's report, tabled June 2025.³²

Catastrophic floods in the Central West region in 2022

- 1.22 In 2022, the Central West of NSW experienced a series of flooding events caused by above average rainfall over three consecutive years.³³ This included AGRN 1030 from 4 August 2022 and AGRN 1034 from 14 September 2022.³⁴
- 1.23 In relation to AGRN 1032, the Committee heard evidence about the impact of flash flooding in November 2025, and the damage this caused in the Cabonne, Forbes, Lachlan, Parkes and Lithgow LGAs. These floods caused significant damage to homes, businesses, and essential services.³⁵

Other disasters

- 1.24 In line with its terms of reference, the Committee also heard evidence about other disasters that were subject to a Natural Disaster Declaration and in which the Authority exercised its functions. This included the Authority's response to the major rain and flood event on 6 April 2024 in the NSW East Coast and

²⁹ Bureau of Meteorology, [Severe Tropical Cyclone Alfred \(22U\)](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

³⁰ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Annual report 2024-2025](#), p 68; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2024-25](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

³¹ [Submission 35](#), The electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024, Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning, NSW Government, pp 4, 6-7; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2024-25](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

³² Legislative Assembly Committee on Environment and Planning, [The electricity outages affecting Far West NSW in October 2024](#), report 2/58, Parliament of New South Wales, 5 June 2025.

³³ X Gregory, 'Floodwaters cut off western NSW farmers and towns, with more rain expected', *ABC News*, 23 September 2022, accessed 23 March 2026; Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub, [Murray-Darling Basin flooding](#), New South Wales, accessed 23 March 2026.

³⁴ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2022-23](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

³⁵ [Submission 39](#), Central NSW Joint Organisation, p 2; [Submission 18](#), Cabonne Council, p 1.

Illawarra areas (AGRN 1119).³⁶ In particular, the Committee heard about the extensive damage to Council infrastructure in the Wollongong LGA.³⁷

³⁶ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2023-24](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

³⁷ [Submission 38](#), Wollongong City Council, p 1.

Chapter Two – Operations and coordination of the NSW Reconstruction Authority

Summary

This chapter outlines the NSW Reconstruction Authority's operational response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. It also notes operational improvements made by the Authority, as well as opportunities to improve strategic coordination and operations in response to future disasters.

Operational response to May 2025 East Coast severe weather event

- 2.1 During the inquiry, the Committee heard from the Authority, government agencies, local councils, community organisations and affected community members about the operational response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.
- 2.2 This section provides an overview of the key aspects of the Authority's response to the disaster event. Further stakeholder feedback about these matters, such as the communication and implementation of Recovery Centres and grant programs, is discussed throughout this report.

What is the NSW Recovery Plan?

The NSW Recovery Plan is prepared and maintained by the NSW Reconstruction Authority and broadly classifies recovery operations based on severity. It is a supporting plan to the NSW State Emergency and Rescue Management Plan (EMPLAN).³⁸

Under the NSW Recovery Plan:

- for low severity events, the affected local council leads the recovery, supported by the Authority
- for more severe events, the Authority will activate recovery coordination arrangements and lead the recovery operation while recognising local councils play a key role in leading, managing and supporting their community's local recovery
- during more complex medium or high severity events, the Authority will scale up coordination arrangements at the local and regional levels to reflect the size, scale and complexity of the recovery operation.³⁹

- 2.3 Following the declaration of the natural disaster, the Authority developed a service delivery plan to identify the recovery needs for impacted communities

³⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), p ii.

³⁹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), p 30; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 1.

and inform the roles and requirements of relevant service providers.⁴⁰ This also involved the Authority coordinating with government agencies on a 'coordinated, multi-channel' communications approach to recovery messaging, in order to ensure that affected communities were informed and supported.⁴¹

- 2.4 The Authority established Recovery Centres (RCs) at several impacted locations, including Taree, Port Macquarie, Kempsey, Macksville and Maitland.⁴² These RCs included representation from essential government services, and charitable and other community organisations to enable community members to access in-person recovery support.⁴³ These services included assistance with grants, replacing identification and personal documents, legal assistance, insurance support and guidance, and mental health support.⁴⁴
- 2.5 The Authority also established Recovery Assistance Points (RAPs) which were co-designed and delivered locally to provide tailored and culturally sensitive support to affected First Nations communities.⁴⁵ This included eight targeted RAPs at Tilligerry, Dunghutti, Purfleet, Kinchela Boys Mob Hub, Biripi Aboriginal community, Bowraville Aboriginal community, Biripi Bushland Clinic, and Kinchela Boys Home.⁴⁶
- 2.6 Service NSW operated a Mobile Service Centre to provide disaster recovery information and outreach support throughout the impacted region. This included providing services to the Clarence Valley, Coffs Harbour, Kempsey, Mid Coast, Nambucca, Port Macquarie-Hastings, Port Stephens and Upper Hunter local government areas (LGAs).⁴⁷
- 2.7 On 29 May 2025, the NSW Government announced the appointment of former NSW Police Deputy Commissioner Dave Owens as the Recovery Coordinator for the Hunter and Mid-North Coast.⁴⁸
- 2.8 The Recovery Coordinator established regular communication to support recovery efforts, including a Regional Recovery Committee and relevant sub-committees for the Hunter and Mid-Coast. This included engaging with representatives from local councils, government agencies, business groups and

⁴⁰ Ashlee Abbott, Executive Director, Recovery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 29.

⁴¹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 7; Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 2.

⁴² Minister for Recovery, [Recovery Centres opening from tomorrow as flood response continues](#), media release, 26 May 2026, accessed 2 April 2026.

⁴³ [Submission 49](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 7.

⁴⁴ Minister for Recovery, [Recovery Centres opening from tomorrow as flood response continues](#), media release, 26 May 2025, accessed 20 April 2026.

⁴⁵ [Submission 50](#), NSW Government, pp 9-10; Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2026, p 9; Joy Kyriacou, Director of Programs, Members and Volunteers, St Vincent de Paul Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 10.

⁴⁶ Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 2.

⁴⁷ Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 2.

⁴⁸ [Submission 50](#), pp 5-6; NSW Reconstruction Authority, 'Recovery Coordinator announced', [Flood Recovery Updates](#), 29 May 2025, accessed 3 April 2026.

community organisations.⁴⁹ A Recovery Action Plan was also developed 'to guide recovery efforts'.⁵⁰

2.9 On 3 June 2026, NSW State Emergency Services (SES) concluded their operational response. The Authority then assumed responsibility for managing the recovery.⁵¹

2.10 The Authority coordinated a range of grants, payments and other assistance to support recovery following the disaster event, in partnership with relevant agencies.⁵² This included:

- a \$50 million Housing Support Package developed in collaboration with Homes NSW for individuals experiencing financial hardship,⁵³ which incorporated:
 - support for renters through the Renters Bond and Advanced Rent Grant⁵⁴
 - support for low-income households and landlords, including the Home Repair Grant⁵⁵
 - an At-Home Caravans Program to provide temporary caravan accommodation for residents whose homes were made uninhabitable, as well as a specific Primary Producer Self Contained Pods Program for use in rural environments⁵⁶
 - other housing support services, including a dedicated concierge-model Housing Recovery Service to provide tailored support and assistance⁵⁷
- support for individuals to pay for essential needs through a Personal Hardship Assistance payment,⁵⁸ as well as financial support available under the Disaster Relief Grant Program⁵⁹

⁴⁹ [Submission 50](#), p 6; [Submission 10](#), Kempsey Shire Council, p 1.

⁵⁰ [Submission 50](#), p 10.

⁵¹ Minister for Recovery and Minister for Emergency Services, [Recovery continues for Mid North Coast communities as NSW SES hand over to NSW Reconstruction Authority](#), media release, 3 June 2025, accessed 1 April 2026.

⁵² [Submission 50](#), p 15; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Natural disaster declarations from financial year 2024-25](#), accessed 30 March 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 30 March 2026, pp 2-5.

⁵³ Minister for Recovery, [\\$50 million housing support package for residents impacted by East Coast Floods](#), media release, 21 August 2025, accessed 2 April 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Housing Support Package for NSW Mid North Coast and Hunter floods](#), accessed 30 March 2026.

⁵⁴ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [AGRN 1212 Renters Bond and Advanced Rent Grant](#), accessed 13 April 2026.

⁵⁵ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [AGRN 1212 Home Repair Grant](#), accessed 13 April 2026.

⁵⁶ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [AGRN 1212 At-Home Caravans Program](#), accessed 14 April 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Primary Producer Self-Contained Pod Program](#), accessed 14 April 2026.

⁵⁷ [Housing Support Package for NSW Mid North Coast and Hunter floods](#), accessed 30 March 2026.

⁵⁸ Service NSW, [East Coast Severe Weather Personal Hardship Assistance](#), last updated 7 October 2025, accessed 15 April 2026.

⁵⁹ Service NSW, [Apply for the Disaster Relief Grant](#), last updated 23 December 2025, accessed 15 April 2026.

- support for rural landholders, primary producers and aquaculture producers, including the Rural Landholders Grant⁶⁰ and Special Disaster Relief Grant (Primary Producer Grant)⁶¹
- support for small businesses and non-profit organisations through the Small Business and Non-Profit Recovery Grant.⁶²

2.11 The NSW Government announced concessional loans for eligible small business and primary producers, non-profit organisations, and sporting and recreational clubs.⁶³ These concessional loans were jointly funded by the Australian Government and NSW Government under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).⁶⁴

2.12 The NSW Government also worked with the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and the Australian Government to establish a \$19 million Community Recovery Support Fund (CRSF). This funding allowed for allocations of up to \$1 million for local councils heavily impacted by the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event to assist with immediate clean up and restoration works.⁶⁵

Strategic coordination and operational challenges

Recommendation 1

That the NSW Government, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, commence work to standardise data collection and data sharing protocols relating to disaster impacts and recovery, in order to improve interagency coordination and decision-making for future disasters.

2.13 The Committee heard that the Authority's recovery response has improved over time, which has allowed it to become 'far more organised and proactive when disasters strike'.⁶⁶ For example, Mr Dylan Reeves from Kempsey Shire Council reflected:

Most certainly in my time at Kempsey ... we've had flooding in 2021, significant flooding in 2022 and now in 2025. I think the 2025 flood event, by quite a reasonable margin, was the most well-prepared and the fastest recovery effort that I've seen.⁶⁷

2.14 The Committee is pleased to hear that some improvements in the Authority's response have been noted in the community. In the context of the May 2025 East

⁶⁰ Rural Assistance Authority, [Rural Landholder Grant](#), accessed 15 April 2026.

⁶¹ Rural Assistance Authority, [Special Disaster Relief Grant](#), accessed 15 April 2026.

⁶² Service NSW, [Apply for the Recovery Grant for Small Businesses and Non-Profit Organisations](#), last updated 13 March 2026, accessed 15 April 2026.

⁶³ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW East Coast Severe Weather grants, payments and financial support](#), accessed 12 April 2026.

⁶⁴ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW East Coast Severe Weather grants, payments and financial support](#), accessed 12 April 2026.

⁶⁵ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 30 March 2026, pp 3-4; Prime Minister of Australia, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Emergency Management, [Supporting recovery efforts in flood affected New South Wales](#), media release, 26 May 2025, accessed 2 April 2026.

⁶⁶ [Submission 43](#), Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT, p 2.

⁶⁷ Dylan Reeves, A/Director Operations and Planning, Kempsey Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 5.

Coast severe weather event, this included observing general improvements in the system of local communication and coordination led by the Authority in the immediate recovery period.⁶⁸

- 2.15 However, stakeholders also noted that strategic improvements need to be made to support the Authority's operations. In particular, the collection and use of data requires further attention, in addition to the Authority's transition from response to recovery and broader leadership role.
- 2.16 Matters relating to the Authority's specific communication and engagement with affected communities, preparedness work, and funding are further discussed in later chapters of this report.

Further work is needed to improve consistent data coordination and collection

- 2.17 Effective disaster recovery relies on accurate, timely, and accessible data. The May 2025 East Coast severe weather event highlighted opportunities for the Authority to improve its current approach to data collection and sharing to enable more efficient and effective recovery outcomes.
- 2.18 During the inquiry, stakeholders emphasised the need for central coordination in the collection and sharing of data on disaster damage and impacts, including the need for uniform data collection methods and formats. Such changes would improve coordination between agencies and other relevant stakeholders.⁶⁹
- 2.19 For example, the Insurance Council of Australia noted that during the May 2025 severe weather event, data received from local councils and some agencies were 'delivered in varied formats and with inconsistent geospatial referencing'. Inconsistencies such as these can result in tangible delays when supporting affected communities.⁷⁰
- 2.20 Stakeholders also identified that a more structured and collaborative approach to data-sharing between government agencies, local councils and community organisations would help to reduce duplication, and ensure that community services are appropriately targeted and resourced.⁷¹
- 2.21 The Committee recognises that the collection and use of personal data should be informed by strong data governance principles, including clear consent protocols, to ensure information sharing respects confidentiality and complies with legal and ethical standards. This should be balanced with the need for information sharing protocols to be practical and flexible to address the needs of impacted communities.

⁶⁸ [Submission 32](#), Mid North Coast Legal Centre, p 2; [Submission 39](#), Central NSW Joint Organisation, p 4; [Submission 48](#), Insurance Council of Australia, p 3; [Submission 49](#), p 12; James Prosser, Senior Project Manager, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 5; Charlie Chubb, Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW.ACT, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20.

⁶⁹ [Submission 17](#), NSW Small Business Commission, p 2; [Submission 48](#), p 3.

⁷⁰ [Submission 48](#), p 3.

⁷¹ [Submission 27](#), Australian Red Cross, p 8; NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 9 December 2025, p 1.

- 2.22 The NSW Government submitted that work has been completed to improve strategic oversight and governance. This included the establishment of a Recovery Planning Data and Insights Taskforce, which was set-up in preparation for ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred in 2025. The Taskforce involved the Authority working closely with the Department of Customer Service to leverage existing data platforms which provided 'a whole-of-government coordination point for gathering, accessing and analysing data to inform recovery operations and program delivery'.⁷²
- 2.23 Additionally, the Committee recognises that the Authority is currently leading a range of system and data enhancement projects to support further integration and alignment between NSW Government agencies. This work will also support more efficient and timely reporting regarding DRFA delivery and Impact Assessment.⁷³
- 2.24 However, the NSW Government also acknowledged in its submission that:
- ...central coordination in collection and sharing of damage and impact data would bring significant benefits for NSW in future disaster events. Standardisation of software platforms and data formats would allow agencies to integrate systems more easily, creating a clearer picture of recovery needs.⁷⁴
- 2.25 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, should commence work to standardise software platforms, data formats, and data collection processes and protocols. Improving data collection and standardisation will lead to greater efficiency in how the Authority coordinates with other agencies and organisations, which will likely contribute to supporting better recovery outcomes for future disaster events.

There is a significant need for clear leadership during recovery efforts

- 2.26 The Committee acknowledges that the Authority has improved its visibility as recovery leaders during its relatively short time as an agency. However, many stakeholders emphasised throughout the inquiry that clear leadership during recovery is essential for effective governance following a disaster event. The operational response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event demonstrated that further opportunities exist for the Authority to provide clearer and more consistent leadership during recovery.
- 2.27 It is important that the Authority's formal role in leading disaster recovery is appropriately recognised across government agencies to enable effective coordination during recovery. The NSW Government identified improvements in the Authority's collaboration with government agencies, such as Homes NSW and Services NSW.⁷⁵
- 2.28 However, some stakeholders argued that the Authority's ability to compel other government agencies to act during the response to the catastrophic floods in the

⁷² [Submission 50](#), p 5.

⁷³ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 2.

⁷⁴ [Submission 50](#), p 7.

⁷⁵ [Submission 50](#), pp 7, 10; Homes NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 7 April 2026, p 1.

Central West region in 2022 was limited, which constrained progress on critical recovery timeframes.⁷⁶ The Committee notes that the Authority was established in 2022 and has matured in its operations over this time.

- 2.29 It is also crucial that the formal leadership role of the Authority is clearly communicated and understood by impacted communities to provide clarity and certainty. This is particularly significant during recovery. Reflecting on the recovery from ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, Mr Sam Henderson, CEO, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance, told the Committee:

Once people start to feel uncertain or start to feel a little bit fearful ... if the theoretical leadership is there, that's one thing, but not feeling that that's being applied on the ground ... there's a difference between those two things.⁷⁷

- 2.30 During the inquiry, some stakeholders argued that the Authority's recovery governance framework was not consistently applied across the full May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.⁷⁸ For example, the Committee heard that the Authority's response to the New Lambton landslip created confusion, stress and frustration for impacted community members and local council.⁷⁹ This led to delays in supporting affected residents and undertaking relevant reconstruction work.⁸⁰

- 2.31 The Committee will continue to monitor the Authority's leadership role during recovery as part of future operational reviews. The Authority's specific approach to communication and engagement with impacted communities following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event is further discussed in Chapter Three.

Challenges continue to be experienced during transition from response to recovery

Finding 2

Throughout the events within the scope of this inquiry, challenges were regularly encountered in the transition from response to recovery suggesting more work is needed to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government agencies and community stakeholders during this transition.

Recommendation 2

That the NSW Government, led by NSW Reconstruction Authority and including all other relevant agencies and stakeholders, develop guiding principles to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government

⁷⁶ [Submission 18](#), Cabonne Council, p 4; [Submission 39](#), p 3.

⁷⁷ Sam Henderson, CEO, Northern Rivers Community Foundation, and Steering Committee Member, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2026, p 28.

⁷⁸ Robert Dudgeon, Executive Manager Assets & Facilities, City of Newcastle Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 3.

⁷⁹ [Submission 1](#), Sylvian Lersch, p 1; [Submission 4](#), Mr Warren and Mrs Sally Hedley, p 2; [Submission 5](#), Ms Jing Ren, p 1; [Submission 33](#), Hunter Joint Organisation, p 8; [Submission 36](#), City of Newcastle, p 6; [Submission 42](#), Ashleigh Avery, p 1.

⁸⁰ Jeremy Bath, CEO, City of Newcastle, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 6; Robert Dudgeon, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 3; [Submission 2](#), Dr Julian Jackel, p 1; [Submission 28](#), Peta Winney-Bartz, p 2.

agencies and community stakeholders during the transition from response to recovery.

- 2.32 As noted in Chapter One, the Authority works closely with combat agencies during the transition from response to recovery operations. However, the Committee heard throughout the inquiry that more work is needed to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government agencies and community stakeholders during this transition.⁸¹
- 2.33 The Authority has made several improvements, such as embedding its personnel within Incident Management Teams and at Emergency Operations Centres to improve early identification of recovery needs during the response phase.⁸² However, several challenges were identified in the transition from response to the early recovery phase of the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.⁸³ This included a lack of clarity for supporting agencies and issues with the coordination of clean-up activities between the SES and the Authority.⁸⁴
- 2.34 The Committee notes that the NSW Recovery Plan sets out clear roles and responsibilities for the transition from response to recovery.⁸⁵ Further work is being done between the Authority, NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) and SES to create a more structured approach to this transition.⁸⁶ Proactive communication of this information during the transition period would provide greater certainty for all stakeholders and a more consistent approach across future disaster events.⁸⁷
- 2.35 Noting that the Authority is doing further work to improve this transition, the Committee will continue to monitor this issue in future operational reviews.

After-Action Review

Recommendation 3

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority publish the report on the After-Action Review of the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event within one month of the tabling of the Committee's report.

Recommendation 4

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority implement a mechanism to revisit, track and measure insights arising from past After-Action Reviews to demonstrate improvements implemented over time, and that information from this process be published in the NSW Reconstruction Authority's annual report.

⁸¹ [Submission 22](#), NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network, p 1; Chris Favaloro, Group Manager, Project Delivery, Kempsey Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 5.

⁸² [Submission 50](#), p 5; Feargus O'Connor, Executive Director, Disaster Welfare and Business Continuity, Homes NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 25.

⁸³ [Submission 50](#), p 6.

⁸⁴ [Submission 50](#), p 7.

⁸⁵ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), p 28.

⁸⁶ [Submission 50](#), p 6.

⁸⁷ [Submission 26](#), Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, p 4.

- 2.36 The Committee acknowledges that the Authority has demonstrated a commitment to continuous improvement, including by embedding lessons learnt and improving capability following disaster events.⁸⁸ This includes the use of After-Action Reviews (AARs), which are led by the Authority and bring together stakeholders following disaster events to identify what worked well and what the Authority could do to improve its response.⁸⁹
- 2.37 Legal Aid NSW described the Authority's implementation of AARs as a positive improvement following previous disasters:
- Having participated in eight after-action reviews, our experience is that they have represented genuine, meaningful attempts to listen and respond to feedback from partner organisations ... They also provide an opportunity to identify and address ongoing recovery needs.⁹⁰
- 2.38 The Committee recognises the important role of AARs as a complementary process to the Committee's operational review function, as outlined in Chapter One.
- 2.39 The Authority undertook an AAR of the May 2025 NSW East Coast severe weather event in late-2025.⁹¹ Stakeholders provided varying feedback about their level of engagement with the Authority as part of this process. While several stakeholders noted that they were given the opportunity to provide feedback, MidCoast Council advised it was not aware of an AAR conducted by the Authority.⁹²
- 2.40 The Authority told the Committee that the report on the AAR was expected to be tabled 'in the next month or two' and would be made publicly available.⁹³ At the time of writing, the report has not been published on the Authority's website.
- 2.41 The Committee recommends that the Authority publish the report on the AAR. This will support greater transparency and accountability of post-response review and process improvement. Any recommendations arising from the AAR should be implemented with clear timeframes for implementation communicated in the published report.
- 2.42 Several stakeholders also highlighted the importance of revisiting and tracking insights from past AARs to ensure that lessons learnt are not only implemented but also measured for their effectiveness over time.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross, 3 November 2025, [Transcript of evidence](#), p 4; Susie George, Executive Director, Regional Delivery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 37.

⁸⁹ [Submission 49](#), p 13.

⁹⁰ [Submission 49](#), p 13.

⁹¹ [Submission 50](#), p 6.

⁹² Homes NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 7 April 2026, p 3; Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 6; Kempsey Shire Council, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 2; [Submission 49](#), p 13; MidCoast Council, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 27 March 2026, p 1.

⁹³ Ashlee Abbott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, pp 31-32.

⁹⁴ [Submission 27](#), p 9; Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 6.

- 2.43 The Committee recommends that the Authority implement a mechanism to track and measure insights arising from AARs to demonstrate improvements made over time. This information should be published in the Authority's annual report to provide greater transparency regarding the progress made and any barriers encountered when implementing these recommendations, in order to support the work of other government agencies and stakeholders involved in disaster recovery.

Chapter Three – Communication and community engagement

Summary

The Committee heard generally positive feedback about the recovery hubs set up by the Authority in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. Closer collaboration with communities and formalised partnerships with local organisations will help ensure that the Authority can better meet the needs of disaster-affected communities in the future.

Communication and engagement with community during recovery

- 3.1 This section begins by discussing stakeholder feedback on how the Authority engaged with community through Recovery Centres and Recovery Assistance Points. Partnerships between the Authority and local community organisations are also examined, including the importance of community engagement and the management of spontaneous volunteers during recovery.

Recovery Centres and Recovery Assistance Points were generally well received

Recommendation 5

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consult with local communities to ensure that Recovery Centres and Recovery Assistance Points set up in the immediate aftermath of disasters are trauma-informed, culturally appropriate, and accessible to meet the diverse needs of disaster-affected communities.

- 3.2 Stakeholders noted that Recovery Centres (RCs) and Recovery Assistance Points (RAPs) – referred to collectively as 'recovery hubs' – were generally well managed by the Authority following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.⁹⁵
- 3.3 Mr Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, MidCoast Council described the establishment of the RC in Taree as 'brilliant'.⁹⁶ Mr Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross, described the Kempsey RC as 'a strong example of effective local leadership and agencies working together with clear purpose and coordination'.⁹⁷
- 3.4 The Committee heard that the Authority has used a similar model for recovery hubs as part of its response to other disasters considered as part of the inquiry,

⁹⁵ [Submission 26](#), Port Macquarie Hastings Council, p 3; [Submission 10](#), Kempsey Shire Council, p 1; Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, MidCoast Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 4; Chris Favaloro, Group Manager, Project Delivery, Port Macquarie Hastings Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 5; [Submission 45](#), MidCoast Council, p 1; [Submission 33](#), Hunter Joint Organisation, p 6; [Submission 49](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 13; Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3; [Submission 24](#), Mid North Coast Joint Organisation, pp 2, 4.

⁹⁶ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 4.

⁹⁷ Jacob Walsh, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3.

including ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, the electricity outages in Far West NSW, and the flooding in the South Coast in 2024.⁹⁸

- 3.5 Some stakeholders reflected that the Authority has improved the establishment and operation of recovery hubs in response to these disasters.⁹⁹ However, the Committee also heard further feedback relating to the timing and location of these recovery hubs. Some stakeholders also told the Committee there was limited collaboration and engagement with local organisations by the Authority, regarding the service delivery plan for recovery hubs.

Feedback on recovery hub timing

- 3.6 The Committee heard mixed feedback on the length of time that recovery hubs were kept open by the Authority in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. Kempsey Shire Council said that the recovery hubs were open for an appropriate length of time.¹⁰⁰ However, other stakeholders commented that most recovery centres were closed before certain grant packages were announced, which limited necessary in-person support.¹⁰¹
- 3.7 Clarence Valley Council provided feedback about the timing of recovery hubs for other disasters, such as ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred. The Council argued that the two RAPs established following the disaster were not attended by community 'due to the short notice and limited communication' on the part of the Authority.¹⁰²
- 3.8 The NSW Government acknowledged mixed feedback on the timing of recovery hubs following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, including that RAPs could have been activated earlier during the response phase. The NSW Government identified that this feedback indicates closer coordination is needed between when RAPs open and when evacuation centres close to ensure continuity of support for communities.¹⁰³

Feedback on recovery hub locations

- 3.9 Mixed stakeholder feedback was provided about the locations chosen for recovery hubs.¹⁰⁴ While place-based recovery hubs were praised,¹⁰⁵ the Committee also heard that the venues chosen by the Authority for some hubs were unsuitable to the needs of the local community.¹⁰⁶
- 3.10 For example, in Port Macquarie Hastings Local Government Area (LGA), a large stadium foyer was chosen for a RC which arguably did not allow for private

⁹⁸ Sally Bryant, Manager, Legal Aid NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 17.

⁹⁹ [Submission 22](#), Uniting Church NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network, p 2; [Submission 14](#), Uniting NSW.ACT p 3.

¹⁰⁰ [Submission 10](#), p 1.

¹⁰¹ Chris Favaloro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6; [Submission 26](#), p 2; [Submission 49](#), p 16.

¹⁰² [Submission 6](#), Clarence Valley Council, p 2.

¹⁰³ [Submission 50](#), NSW Government, p 14.

¹⁰⁴ Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 9; Chris Favaloro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 10.

¹⁰⁵ Clare Van Doorn, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 9.

¹⁰⁶ Chris Favaloro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 10; [Submission 24](#), p 5.

discussions between recovery partners and impacted residents.¹⁰⁷ Mid North Coast Joint Organisation said that there was inconsistent or limited communication from the Authority with councils before establishing recovery hubs, which undermined local coordination efforts.¹⁰⁸

- 3.11 There was not widespread support from stakeholders for establishing pre-assigned or permanent evacuation centres. This included concerns that it is not possible to predict whether a venue that is suitable for one type of disaster will be suitable for another.¹⁰⁹ It is also difficult for a single facility to meet all necessary criteria for a suitable evacuation centre.¹¹⁰
- 3.12 The NSW Government noted that it received feedback from stakeholders that supporting agencies could help with decisions about where recovery hubs are established.¹¹¹ The Authority's specific approach to outreach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and geographically isolated residents is also explored later in this chapter.
- 3.13 There may be opportunities for the Authority to collaborate with local councils to invest in community centres as potential recovery hubs. Mr Chris Favaloro, Group Manager, Project Delivery, Port Macquarie Hastings Council said that Kempsey Shire Council is exploring a concept design for a community centre built with recovery in mind.¹¹² The Committee also heard that community facilities should be built to be emergency-ready and prepared for disasters.¹¹³
- 3.14 Further opportunities for the Authority to strengthen collaboration with local councils are discussed later in this chapter.

Community consultation as part of the service delivery plan

- 3.15 The Authority establishes recovery hubs in line with a service delivery plan. This plan is based on the needs of communities and identifies recovery partners that will be involved in the response.¹¹⁴ The Committee heard there was limited community consultation from the Authority in deciding which organisations should be present at recovery hubs.¹¹⁵
- 3.16 For example, Financial Counselling Australia noted that financial counsellors were not offered a presence at hubs following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather, event which meant that community members missed out on financial support.¹¹⁶ Additionally, Legal Aid NSW identified that insurers were only present

¹⁰⁷ [Submission 24](#), p 5.

¹⁰⁸ [Submission 24](#), p 5.

¹⁰⁹ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 9 March 2026, p 8; Anna Flack, Senior Project Coordinator, Hunter Joint Organisation, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 16.

¹¹⁰ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 9 March 2026, p 8.

¹¹¹ [Submission 50](#), p 13.

¹¹² Chris Favaloro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 11.

¹¹³ Elly Bird, Executive Director, Resilient Lismore, and Steering Committee Member, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance (NRCRA), [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 32.

¹¹⁴ Ashlee Abbott, Executive Director, Recovery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 29.

¹¹⁵ [Submission 31](#), Financial Counselling Australia, p 1.

¹¹⁶ [Submission 31](#), p 1.

at some recovery hubs, and in other instances were set up in an offsite 'insurance hub'.¹¹⁷ This made it difficult for Legal Aid staff to directly engage with insurers to support clients with insurance disputes.¹¹⁸

- 3.17 The Committee recommends that the Authority should consult with local communities, including as part of developing the service delivery plan, to ensure that recovery hubs meet the diverse needs of disaster-affected communities. Further work should also be done to explore formal partnerships with local organisations to ensure these roles at recovery hubs are clearly communicated to the community, as explored later in this chapter.

Mixed feedback was received about community forums and collaboration

Finding 3

Strong community networks, including local community groups and organisations, were essential to supporting local residents during recovery from the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.

- 3.18 It is important to communities that Authority staff are visible 'on-the-ground' following natural disasters.¹¹⁹ Face-to-face engagement strengthens accountability and leads to more effective communication with communities.¹²⁰
- 3.19 Some stakeholders said that the Authority is improving its communication and visible presence throughout the recovery process.¹²¹ Cabonne Council praised the Authority's on-ground communication and openness during recovery from the 2022 floods in the Central West.¹²² However, the Committee also heard criticism about the Authority's limited engagement with the communities in the Far West following the electricity outages in October 2024.¹²³
- 3.20 The Authority said that it prioritised transparent communication and decision-making with local organisations during its response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. This included partnering with grassroots organisations to deliver services in familiar and trusted settings, like sporting events or outreach through existing community networks.¹²⁴
- 3.21 The Committee received mixed feedback about the Authority's communication and engagement with local community members following the disaster.
- 3.22 Several stakeholders reported positive feedback about communication from the Authority, including through Disaster Recovery Briefings, town halls and

¹¹⁷ [Submission 49](#), p 15.

¹¹⁸ [Submission 49](#), p 15.

¹¹⁹ [Submission 39](#), Central NSW Joint Organisation, p 3; [Submission 18](#), Cabonne Council, p 5; Darcy Byrne, President, Local Government NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 15.

¹²⁰ Darcy Byrne, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 15.

¹²¹ [Submission 39](#), p 3; [Submission 18](#), pp 3-4.

¹²² [Submission 18](#), pp 3-4.

¹²³ Graeme McCrabb, RFS Member, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 35.

¹²⁴ [Submission 50](#), p 9.

community forum discussions.¹²⁵ However, MidCoast Council said the Authority's involvement in community-led recovery was limited, with recovery instead led by community organisations and their members.¹²⁶ Member councils within Mid North Coast Joint Organisation identified that, in some areas, 'recovery was led almost entirely by council staff and combat agencies' and that this disparity of engagement with the Authority 'reinforced perceptions of inconsistency across the region'.¹²⁷

- 3.23 More broadly, some stakeholders identified that the Authority has moved away from the language of 'community-led recovery' towards a more centralised 'community-centred' or 'community-focused' recovery,¹²⁸ as reflected in the NSW Recovery Plan and the Authority's strategic framework.¹²⁹
- 3.24 The Committee emphasises the importance of the Authority continuing to consult with local communities across NSW to inform its tailored communication and engagement approach for future disaster events.

There are opportunities to strengthen formal partnerships with local organisations

Recommendation 6

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority establish further formal partnership agreements and/or Memorandums of Understanding with local community organisations to ensure their role in disaster preparedness and recovery is formally recognised and properly resourced.

- 3.25 Strong stakeholder relationships with local community organisations are key to delivering effective services. However, building community engagement requires time and trust.¹³⁰ As Mid North Coast Legal Centre described, 'regional communities are reliant on the networks of relationships built over years'.¹³¹
- 3.26 Although the Authority reported strong rates of staff retention, stakeholders told the Committee that staff turnover disrupts relationship-building and presents challenges to effective engagement and collaboration in regional areas.¹³² Staff turnover means that new connections need to be formed and institutional knowledge is lost each time.¹³³

¹²⁵ [Submission 32](#), Mid North Coast Legal Centre, p 2; Charlie Chubb, Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW.ACT, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20; [Submission 49](#), p 23.

¹²⁶ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 5.

¹²⁷ [Submission 24](#), pp 4-5.

¹²⁸ [Submission 6](#), pp 2-3; [Submission 24](#), p 5.

¹²⁹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [NSW Recovery Plan](#), p 4; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Our Strategic Framework](#), accessed 24 April 2026.

¹³⁰ [Submission 32](#), p 5.

¹³¹ [Submission 32](#), p 5.

¹³² Deborah Stafford, Manager, Social and Cultural Planning, Byron Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9; [Submission 19](#), Byron Shire Council, pp 2-3; Andrew Graham, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 39.

¹³³ [Answers to supplementary questions](#), Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance, 16 January 2026, p 1; [Submission 35](#), Local Government NSW, p 19.

- 3.27 The Committee heard that formalising partnerships with local organisations through Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) is an effective mechanism to help strengthen local relationships while reducing key person risks.¹³⁴
- 3.28 As part of its service delivery plan, the Authority has existing MoUs with a number of community organisations.¹³⁵ The Authority noted that MoUs help to ensure that non-government partners in recovery are adequately trained and have the right qualifications to keep communities safe.¹³⁶ MoUs also allow the Authority to collaborate quickly and flexibly with non-government partners without the risks associated with a legally binding contract.¹³⁷
- 3.29 Uniting NSW.ACT representatives noted the importance of having clear roles and responsibilities during recovery to coordinate recovery services.¹³⁸ Without formal agreements, the experience for social service organisations taking part in Authority-led disaster recovery can feel 'haphazard' and disorganised.¹³⁹ A formalised plan allows organisations to be more structured in the kinds of service offered.¹⁴⁰
- 3.30 Stakeholders told the Committee that the Authority should continue to enter into further MoUs with both community organisations and social service organisations.¹⁴¹ The Committee heard that the Authority does not currently have MoUs with several social service organisations that have previously been key recovery partners, such as Legal Aid NSW. These organisations told the Committee that a MoU would be positive development and expressed interest in, or are working towards, entering into one with the Authority.¹⁴²
- 3.31 The Committee recommends that the Authority continue to establish further formal partnership agreements and MoUs with local community organisations. This will ensure their vital role in disaster preparedness and recovery is formally recognised and properly resourced.

¹³⁴ Sally Bryant, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 18; [Submission 49](#), p 12.

¹³⁵ Ashlee Abbott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 29.

¹³⁶ Ashlee Abbott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 29.

¹³⁷ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 3.

¹³⁸ Niki Gill, Operations Manager North Coast, Uniting NSW.ACT, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20; Charlie Chubb, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20.

¹³⁹ Niki Gill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20; Charlie Chubb, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20.

¹⁴⁰ Niki Gill, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 20.

¹⁴¹ Elly Bird, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 29; [Submission 49](#), p 12; Joy Kyriacou, Director of Programs, Members and Volunteers, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3; Catherine Vaara, Chief Executive Officer, Lifeline Mid Coast, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 23.

¹⁴² [Submission 49](#), p 12; Joy Kyriacou, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3; Catherine Vaara, 17 February 2026, p 23.

Spontaneous volunteers are important during recovery but require further consideration

Recommendation 7

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consult with local communities and organisations to develop a strategic framework and/or practical guidance around the management and support of spontaneous volunteers.

- 3.32 Spontaneous volunteers are community members who volunteer in one-off events to support their local community during disasters.¹⁴³ The Committee heard that volunteers play a vital role in disaster response and recovery.¹⁴⁴ However, there are emerging challenges in managing spontaneous volunteers and other 'pop up' organisations during recovery from disasters.¹⁴⁵
- 3.33 Stakeholders raised concerns around insurance and liability for spontaneous volunteers and organisations.¹⁴⁶ Mr Panuccio noted that it is necessary for councils to manage community expectations around spontaneous volunteering, including sensitivities around accepting this type of assistance and not dismissing help from well-meaning individuals.¹⁴⁷
- 3.34 The Committee heard that the Authority has previously provided support to councils and social service organisations to manage spontaneous volunteers in the form of short-term programs and grants.¹⁴⁸ However, there is no consistent or strategic approach to support this coordination.¹⁴⁹
- 3.35 The Committee is concerned that the support provided by 'pop up' organisations following disasters may risk creating community confusion about which recovery services are provided by the Authority, such as those provided at Recovery Centres and Recovery Assistance Points. Management of spontaneous volunteering should aim to reduce any confusion for local residents, such as through effective communication that clarifies which organisations are available to support them.
- 3.36 The Authority should continue to monitor feedback and issues around spontaneous volunteers and consult with local communities and organisations to develop a strategic framework or practical guidance for future recovery operations. This would help optimise the use of community-led participation while balancing associated risks.

¹⁴³ NSW SES, [Spontaneous volunteer](#), accessed 20 April 2026.

¹⁴⁴ [Submission 19](#), p 4.

¹⁴⁵ Anna Flack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 15; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 15.

¹⁴⁶ Anna Flack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 15; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 15.

¹⁴⁷ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 15.

¹⁴⁸ [Submission 19](#), p 4; Carers NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 23 November 2025, p 3.

¹⁴⁹ [Submission 19](#), p 4; [Submission 22](#), p 6; Anna Flack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 15.

Collaborating with local councils to improve community-led recovery

Recommendation 8

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consider opportunities to strengthen community-led recovery by co-designing recovery strategies and frameworks with local councils, Joint Organisations, and community representatives.

- 3.37 Successful cooperation between local councils, the Authority and community organisations is crucial to recovery from disaster events. The Committee heard throughout the inquiry that local councils are committed to working constructively with the Authority and other government agencies to improve disaster preparedness and recovery for their communities.¹⁵⁰ However, further work is required to strengthen the Authority's engagement with local councils.
- 3.38 Stakeholders emphasised the importance of the Authority working alongside councils as partners for recovery efforts to be effective.¹⁵¹
- 3.39 The Committee heard that the Authority has made positive developments to ensure ongoing liaison with each individual council following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.¹⁵² For example, the Authority has recently centralised administration of Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) to enable more direct contact with local councils. This is discussed further in Chapter Five.
- 3.40 However, the Committee heard that this liaison between the Authority and councils has not been consistent across regions. In its submission, Hunter Joint Organisation surveyed its ten member councils following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event and reported issues with the Authority's support and communication.¹⁵³ MidCoast Council said that the Authority's engagement fell short of expectations.¹⁵⁴
- 3.41 LGNSW reported that engagement from the Authority has at times been 'tokenistic or reactive, and that the transition from response to recovery was not consistently well-communicated'. This left councils confused and uncertain about roles and responsibilities.¹⁵⁵ City of Newcastle also expressed frustration about the Authority's lack of engagement with council staff following the New Lambton landslide in May 2025.¹⁵⁶

¹⁵⁰ [Submission 18](#), p 2; Dylan Reeves, A/Director Operations and Planning, Kempsey Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, pp 7, 11; Steve Wilson, Executive Officer, Hunter Joint Organisation, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 13; Elly Bird, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 28; [Submission 33](#), p 5; [Submission 39](#), p 4.

¹⁵¹ [Submission 35](#), p 11; [Submission 33](#), p 5; Steve Wilson, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 13.

¹⁵² [Submission 24](#), p 2; Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 32.

¹⁵³ [Submission 33](#), pp 6, 10.

¹⁵⁴ [Submission 45](#), p 2.

¹⁵⁵ [Submission 35](#), p 10.

¹⁵⁶ Jeremy Bath, City of Newcastle, [Written opening statement](#), 20 February 2026, p 2; Jeremy Bath, Chief Executive Officer, City of Newcastle, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, pp 3,6.

- 3.42 The Authority told the Committee that it acknowledges the need for a reliable point of contact during recovery and that it is considering ways to enhance and streamline communication with councils and communities.¹⁵⁷
- 3.43 Stakeholders called on the Authority to strengthen community-led recovery through genuine co-design at the strategic level with councils, Joint Organisations and community representatives.¹⁵⁸ MidCoast Council recommended that the Authority adopt a formal community-led recovery framework, including place-based decision forums co-chaired with councils and community leaders.¹⁵⁹
- 3.44 The Committee recommends that the Authority consider opportunities to strengthen community-led recovery by co-designing recovery strategies and frameworks with local councils, Joint Organisations, and community representatives. This would ensure that recovery is driven by meaningful, community-led partnerships that utilise and build upon existing local relationships with councils and community organisations.

Community Recovery Officers (CROs) play an important role in community-led recovery

Recommendation 9

That the NSW Government fund permanent Community Recovery and Preparedness Officers within councils or at a regional level to coordinate outreach efforts and ensure continuity in disaster recovery and preparedness. Consideration should be given to the financial health and disaster risk profile of councils and eligibility criteria that ensures support is provided to councils on a needs basis.

- 3.45 The Committee received substantial evidence throughout the inquiry about the importance of Community Recovery Officers (CRO) in enabling community-led recovery.¹⁶⁰
- 3.46 CRO roles were first established following the 2019 NSW bushfires and have been found by local councils and other stakeholders to be highly effective in engaging with local communities during recovery. However, funding for many positions has since ceased, despite the ongoing need for recovery support in many communities.¹⁶¹ LGNSW described this 'stop-start' model as both ineffective and inefficient in building long-term community resilience.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁷ Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 32.

¹⁵⁸ [Submission 24](#), pp 3, 5, 7; [Submission 33](#), p 5; [Submission 45](#), p 5; [Submission 38](#); Wollongong City Council, p 2

¹⁵⁹ [Submission 45](#), p 2.

¹⁶⁰ [Submission 35](#), pp 8, 12; [Submission 50](#), pp 12, 15-16; [Submission 33](#), pp 11- 12, 14; Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 16 January 2026, p 2; Elly Bird, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30; Jill Samuels, RSS Team Manager, Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30; David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 15.

¹⁶¹ [Submission 35](#), p 12; [Submission 50](#), pp 12, 15-16; Port Macquarie Hastings Council, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 26 March 2026, p 4; Elly Bird, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30; Jill Samuels, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30; [Submission 33](#), p 14.

¹⁶² [Submission 35](#), pp 12- 13.

- 3.47 Hunter Joint Organisation provided a case study of the experience of the MidCoast Council during the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. The Council's CRO was funded under a short-term grant, and this funding ceased in the months immediately before the disaster. This resulted in a staff member with well-established community connections being unable to assist with recovery when most needed.¹⁶³ This demonstrates how the current dependence on temporary, short-term competitive grants for community-focused roles can adversely impact the capacity and timeliness of community recovery.
- 3.48 The Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance (NRCRA) further illustrated the importance of an ongoing CRO-like role by making the comparison between Byron Shire Council – which has maintained a self-funded Resilience Officer since 2019 – and Lismore City Council, whose Community Resilience Network had not been maintained and required significant work to make functional again. The Alliance strongly recommended the Authority provide permanent funding to councils to engage specific Resilience Officers, particularly in LGAs with high disaster risk.¹⁶⁴
- 3.49 Ms Jill Samuels, RSS Team Manager, Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre similarly argued that CRO roles must be permanent, rather than event-based, due to the cyclical nature of disasters.¹⁶⁵ Several stakeholders provided similar suggestions and called for CRO roles to be permanently embedded within individual councils, in order to support recovery coordination and provide continuous expertise at the local level.¹⁶⁶
- 3.50 The Committee heard that CROs were best placed within individual local councils, rather than at the Joint Organisation (JO) level where a single officer serves multiple LGAs across a broader geographic region.¹⁶⁷
- 3.51 Following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, the Authority proposed splitting funding for a 12-month regional CRO position into two six-month roles at the JO level. Both the Hunter and Mid North Coast Joint Organisations declined this proposal. The Hunter Joint Organisation cited practical issues relating to the short timeframe, lack of meaningful engagement at the regional scale, and funding limitations as reasons for declining this offer.¹⁶⁸ After both JOs declined, the Authority offered the single available CRO role to the MidCoast Council, as the LGA with the highest identified level of impact.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶³ [Submission 33](#), p 14.

¹⁶⁴ Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 16 January 2026, p 2; Elly Bird, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30.

¹⁶⁵ Jill Samuels, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30.

¹⁶⁶ [Submission 31](#), p 2; Deborah Stafford, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9; Elly Bird, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 30; [Submission 33](#), p 15; [Submission 35](#), pp 8, 12; Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 3 December 2025, p 2.

¹⁶⁷ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 26 March 2026, p 4; [Submission 33](#), p 11; [Submission 35](#), pp 8, 12; David Reynolds, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 15; [Submission 24](#), p 5.

¹⁶⁸ [Submission 33](#), p 12; [Submission 24](#), p 5; Anna Flack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 14; [Submission 45](#), p 2; [Submission 26](#), p 4; Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 26 March 2026, pp 4-5.

¹⁶⁹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 4-5.

- 3.52 Port Macquarie-Hastings Council and MidCoast Council both advocated for embedding CROs at the local council level, with MidCoast Council identifying a need for two dedicated positions over two years within its LGA alone.¹⁷⁰ Stakeholders identified impracticalities with a JO-level model, noting challenges for a single CRO to achieve meaningful community outcomes across a broader geographical region that has experienced multiple disasters.¹⁷¹
- 3.53 Enhancing the visibility of Authority personnel and their improving collaboration with local stakeholders would strengthen accountability, shared learning and local recovery capacity, particularly in smaller councils. These improvements may also help address challenges in transitioning from response to recovery and mitigate concerns raised about Authority staff turnover.
- 3.54 The NSW Government acknowledged that Community Resilience Networks, underpinned by previously funded and deployed CROs, played a critical role in disseminating recovery messaging and mobilising local support following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.¹⁷²
- 3.55 The Authority advised that there are limitations on CROs undertaking preparedness work under current DRFA funding guidelines. For example, combining disaster preparedness and recovery functions within a single role would present challenges given the different technical expertise each function requires.¹⁷³
- 3.56 However, Byron Shire Council raised concerns about the CRO program's guidelines under the DRFA, which 'prohibit work streams that may be perceived as disaster prevention, preparedness or adaptation'.¹⁷⁴ It argued that separation of these activities is problematic and undermines effective recovery.¹⁷⁵ Issues relating to the DRFA are further explored in Chapter Five.
- 3.57 The Committee acknowledges the complexities of the current funding arrangements for CROs under the DRFA. However, it also recognise the importance of an ongoing, embedded recovery role within local councils to improve coordination between the Authority and local communities to effectively build long-term community resilience.
- 3.58 The Committee therefore recommends that the NSW Government fund Community Recovery and Preparedness Officers within councils or at a regional level to coordinate outreach efforts and ensure continuity in disaster recovery and preparedness. Consideration should be given to the financial health and disaster risk profile of local councils and relevant eligibility criteria, such as prioritising local councils most heavily impacted by disasters.

¹⁷⁰ [Submission 26](#), p 4; [Submission 45](#), p 2.

¹⁷¹ [Submission 26](#), p 4; [Submission 24](#), p 5; [Submission 45](#), p 2; Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 26 March 2026, p 4; [Submission 33](#), pp 11-12.

¹⁷² [Submission 50](#), p 12.

¹⁷³ Susie George, Executive Director, Regional Delivery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 31; Ashlee Abbott, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 32.

¹⁷⁴ [Submission 19](#), p 4.

¹⁷⁵ [Submission 19](#), p 4; Deborah Stafford, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 11.

Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

Recommendation 10

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority continue to consult and actively engage with disaster-impacted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations. This should include formally collaborating to co-design and deliver services, including Recovery Assistance Points, and outreach programs targeted to the needs of these communities.

- 3.59 The Committee was pleased to hear that the Authority has taken meaningful steps to improve engagement and outreach with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.¹⁷⁶ The Committee recommends that this work continues for future disaster events, ensuring meaningful collaboration with local communities.
- 3.60 As outlined in Chapter Two, the Authority established eight dedicated Aboriginal-specific Recovery Assistance Points (RAPs) that were co-designed with local Aboriginal Elders and communities to provide a more informal and accessible environment for local Aboriginal people in need of recovery assistance. These hubs were established following early recognition that some Aboriginal community members were hesitant to visit and engage with established Recovery Centres (RCs).¹⁷⁷ Aboriginal Liaison Officers and Aboriginal staff played a central role in facilitating respectful communication and building trust with community members.¹⁷⁸
- 3.61 Many stakeholders provided positive feedback that these hubs were well received and worked effectively to address the specific needs of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, which improved access to services in a way that previous recovery efforts had not achieved.¹⁷⁹ For example, Uniting NSW.ACT identified cultural safety gaps at previous RAPs that were established following ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred, which included insufficient numbers of staff who identify as Aboriginal which 'limited cultural safety and trust'.¹⁸⁰
- 3.62 Legal Aid NSW commended the Authority's approach to consultation and engagement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community during the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. In addition to the establishment of targeted RAPs, they noted that the Authority partnered with NSW Aboriginal Land Council and Aboriginal Affairs NSW to hold regular online 'Community Check

¹⁷⁶ Clare Van Doorne, Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, pp 2-3; Cassandra Gibbens, Executive Director, Customer Care & Business Bureau, Service NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 24; Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 26.

¹⁷⁷ Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, pp 2-3, 4.

¹⁷⁸ [Submission 50](#), p 10.

¹⁷⁹ Clare Van Doorne, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, pp 2-3; Elizabeth Lehmann, Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 18; Cassandra Gibbens, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 24.

¹⁸⁰ [Submission 14](#), p 2.

In' meetings to 'better understand current and available needs and supports in local Aboriginal communities'.¹⁸¹

- 3.63 However, Mid North Coast Joint Organisation expressed concern that the Authority's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities was 'minimal'.¹⁸² LGNSW reflected that some councils reported the Authority's engagement with Aboriginal communities as 'limited, inconsistent, or overly centralised'.¹⁸³
- 3.64 Service NSW identified opportunities for further improving engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities during future disasters, including 'preparing for dedicated Aboriginal support to roll out at the same time as general community support, using Aboriginal staff where possible'.¹⁸⁴ The Committee also heard that Authority is taking additional steps to improve targeted recovery efforts at the strategic level, including incorporating culturally sensitive initiatives as part of their State Disaster Mitigation Plan.¹⁸⁵
- 3.65 The Committee was pleased to hear about the improvements the Authority has made to better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, the Committee is of the view that this engagement should be formalised and sustained beyond individual disasters. This approach would better embed existing knowledge and relationships between and within the Authority and local communities.
- 3.66 The Committee also acknowledges that the capacity of local organisations, including Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations, to deliver outreach programs and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities depends on reliable and sustained resourcing and funding. These issues are further explored in Chapter Five.
- 3.67 The Committee recommends that the Authority continue to collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as active partners in the co-design and delivery of services to ensure recovery efforts are embedded and tailored to local community needs. The Authority should evaluate its implementation strategy for its consultation work, in order to better understand the different recovery and engagement needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across NSW.

Engagement with vulnerable individuals and residents living in isolated or remote locations

- 3.68 The Committee heard that natural disasters can deepen existing disadvantage for socially vulnerable groups in the community, as well as 'greatly expand the number of people experiencing disadvantage, many for the first time'.¹⁸⁶ It is

¹⁸¹ [Submission 49](#), p 21.

¹⁸² [Submission 24](#), p 5.

¹⁸³ Local Government NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 2.

¹⁸⁴ Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), p 3.

¹⁸⁵ Susie George, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 30.

¹⁸⁶ Clare Van Doorn, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 2.

therefore crucial that the Authority ensures that recovery efforts are specifically tailored for, and with, members of the community who may be more vulnerable to disaster impacts. This includes residents living in isolated or remote locations.

- 3.69 NSW Council of Social Services (NCOSS) highlighted that people experiencing poverty are the most impacted by a disaster and have fewer resources to recover, including low income renters, people experiencing homelessness, and those with complex needs such as people with disability.¹⁸⁷ Carers NSW similarly submitted that disaster preparedness and recovery planning must be inclusive of vulnerable groups. Vulnerable people face higher risks given their complex needs, limited mobility and dependence on essential supports during emergencies.¹⁸⁸
- 3.70 The Committee heard that the Authority used targeted mobile community outreach, use of local networks, and revised approaches to identification at recovery centres.¹⁸⁹ NCOSS observed that after the May 2025 floods, the Authority's community-facing teams took a proactive approach in engaging directly with social service organisations and community groups. This enabled timely identification of issues, particularly for residents who may struggle to engage with recovery support, such as older residents living in caravan parks.¹⁹⁰
- 3.71 However, the Committee heard that barriers still remain for some of the most vulnerable members of the community to access appropriate recovery support. Homelessness NSW submitted that, at the time of the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, there were no clear plans in place for people without secure housing, including safe shelters, evacuation procedures and defined service roles. Communication strategies largely targeted homeowners, renters and businesses, with little tailored communication directed at people without a fixed residence. Recovery information was primarily digital, excluding those without phone or internet access.¹⁹¹
- 3.72 Stakeholders generally noted that centralised recovery hubs create issues for residents spread across large geographical areas.¹⁹² Community members must either travel significant distances to attend these centralised hubs in person, or rely on government agencies coordinating transport services for them.¹⁹³ This creates barriers that exclude or discourage certain members of the community from accessing recovery support, in particular those with disabilities or the elderly.¹⁹⁴ Homelessness NSW cautioned that transporting persons experiencing homelessness to recovery hubs is not a trauma-informed response and does not support dignity in accessing services.¹⁹⁵

¹⁸⁷ [Submission 37](#), NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), p 4.

¹⁸⁸ [Submission 40](#), Carers NSW, p 2.

¹⁸⁹ Clare Van Doorne, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, pp 2-3; Cassandra Gibbens, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 24; Greg Wells, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 26.

¹⁹⁰ [Submission 37](#), p 4.

¹⁹¹ [Submission 34](#), Homelessness NSW, p 3.

¹⁹² [Submission 27](#), Australian Red Cross, p 7; Chris Favaloro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 5.

¹⁹³ [Submission 34](#), p 5; [Submission 27](#), p 7.

¹⁹⁴ [Submission 27](#), p 7.

¹⁹⁵ [Submission 34](#), p 5.

- 3.73 The Committee heard that the NSW Government had made some improvements to proof of identity and proof of address requirements for vulnerable customers presenting at Recovery Centres.¹⁹⁶ Mr Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, explained that Service NSW has streamlined and simplified their processes for staff and customers in response to lessons learnt from prior disaster recovery efforts.¹⁹⁷ Broader issues relating to grants are further outlined in Chapter Five.
- 3.74 Legal Aid NSW provided positive feedback about the services provided by Revenue NSW at several targeted RAPs. This included 'on-the-spot assistance to clients with fine debt, including the immediate write-off of fines'.¹⁹⁸ The Committee is of the view that the Authority should expand this initiative during future disaster recovery efforts to address financial hardship for impacted communities.
- 3.75 The Committee welcomes these improvements to engaging with vulnerable and geographically isolated communities and will continue to monitor the Authority's approach as part of future operational reviews.

Psychosocial wellbeing and trauma-informed responses

Finding 4

While communities have demonstrated significant resilience and adaptability, the cumulative impact of successive and compounding natural disasters has adverse mental health impacts for community members, volunteers and emergency responders.

Finding 5

Requiring people to repeatedly recount their experiences across different agencies adds to the burden of already distressed community members and undermines the effectiveness of recovery assistance.

Recommendation 11

That the NSW Government, led by Service NSW, urgently expand the 'Tell Your Story Once' project across government agencies to support person-centred recovery assistance processes and reduce duplication.

- 3.76 The Committee found that communities impacted by disasters have demonstrated significant resilience and adaptability. However, it also recognises that the cumulative impact of successive and compounding natural disasters has adverse mental health impacts for community members, volunteers and emergency responders. There are opportunities to build upon existing initiatives to better support the psychosocial wellbeing of impacted communities, such as embedding mental health support services within Recovery Centres and the expansion of the 'Tell Your Story Once' project.

¹⁹⁶ Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, [Written opening statement](#), 20 February 2026, p 2.

¹⁹⁷ Greg Wells, [Transcript of evidence](#), February 2026, p 24.

¹⁹⁸ [Submission 49](#), p 21.

- 3.77 Natural disasters have profound and enduring mental health impacts on affected communities.¹⁹⁹ The Committee acknowledges that for some community members the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event was particularly significant due to the compounding and retraumatising nature of successive disasters in recent years.²⁰⁰ Stakeholders emphasised that mental health and psychosocial support services are desperately needed to support both immediate and long-term recovery outcomes.²⁰¹
- 3.78 Stakeholders noted the importance of mental health or psychosocial supports being available immediately following a disaster event, particularly in rural and regional areas.²⁰² For example, Lifeline Australia reported that their centres experienced 'a significant increase in individuals presenting with acute distress, anxiety and hopelessness' following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.²⁰³
- 3.79 It is crucial that mental health support services are readily available at recovery hubs to ensure that community members are appropriately supported at the time of seeking assistance. Lifeline Mid Coast reported that many flood-affected residents were not able to process instructions or engage with recovery services due to trauma-induced cognitive disruption.²⁰⁴ Ms Catherine Vaara, Chief Executive Officer, Lifeline Mid Coast, explained that:
- ...people have a cognitive difference during a trauma that needs to have space before they get into the other, practical side of things. The practical side is where they want to get to. They want answers, they want help. But before they get that emotional stuff settled, they can't take instruction.²⁰⁵
- 3.80 The Committee heard that requiring people to repeatedly recount their experiences across different agencies adds to the burden of already distressed community members and undermines the effectiveness of recovery assistance.²⁰⁶ Mr Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross, advocated for a whole-of-government approach for community members presenting at Recovery Centres having to retell their story to multiple times.²⁰⁷
- 3.81 Service NSW described the 'Tell Your Story Once' initiative operating within Recovery Centres. This platform allows individuals to provide their personal information once and have it shared with some agencies to help case manage grants and other supports. Mr Wells noted that the platform is 'mostly used within Service NSW' at Recovery Centres, but that 'there is an opportunity to

¹⁹⁹ [Submission 21](#), Lifeline Australia, p 2; Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), p 9.

²⁰⁰ [Submission 21](#), pp 2-3.

²⁰¹ Jacob Walsh, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2026, p 3; [Submission 22](#), p 5.

²⁰² [Submission 35](#), p 13; [Submission 21](#), pp 2-3.

²⁰³ [Submission 21](#), p 3.

²⁰⁴ [Submission 13](#), Lifeline Mid Coast, p 1.

²⁰⁵ Catherine Vaara, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 23.

²⁰⁶ [Submission 27](#), p 8; Jacob Walsh, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 8; [Submission 16](#), St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, p 2; [Submission 49](#), p 17; Omar Bensaidi, Senior Policy Officer, Homelessness NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 12.

²⁰⁷ Jacob Walsh, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2026, p 4.

broaden the implementation [of Tell Your Story Once] across government and across agencies.²⁰⁸

- 3.82 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government should expand the 'Tell Your Story Once' initiative to include all government agencies involved in disaster recovery. This whole-of-government approach to disaster recovery would reduce duplication of information collection, minimise trauma, and ensure that a person's circumstances, once disclosed, follow them through the full continuum of recovery support.

Further mental health considerations during recovery

- 3.83 The Committee was also told that, in addition to the residents directly affected by the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, emergency responders, volunteers and service providers also experienced emotional fatigue and burnout.²⁰⁹ The high volume of work, exposure to traumatic events and lack of recognition can all contribute to adverse mental health outcomes.²¹⁰ The NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network submitted that there is an urgent need to fast-track psychosocial risk mitigation strategies for community partner volunteers and Authority staff.²¹¹
- 3.84 The Committee heard that the Authority has made improvements to psychosocial supports following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.
- 3.85 The Authority mentioned improvements such as incorporating professional mental health clinicians at Recovery Centres, making efforts to ensure privacy within Recovery Centre settings, and establishing processes for the wellbeing and psychological support of Authority staff involved in disaster recovery. These supports include:
- training
 - debriefing, and
 - access to Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services for staff.²¹²
- 3.86 However, there remain gaps in the formal integration and communication of psychosocial services within disaster recovery operations.
- 3.87 The Committee heard from Lifeline Mid Coast about a specific instance in which its crisis workers were not welcomed when they introduced themselves to recovery centre personnel from the Authority during the May 2025 Severe weather event, despite providing essential emotional triage to distressed residents.²¹³ The Authority later advised that this decision was due to venue capacity constraints to ensure privacy, and that the Authority had already

²⁰⁸ Greg Wells, [Transcript of evidence](#), February 2026, p 22.

²⁰⁹ [Submission 21](#), p 3.

²¹⁰ [Submission 22](#), p 6.

²¹¹ [Submission 22](#), p 2.

²¹² Mrs Susie George, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 38.

²¹³ [Submission 13](#), p 1; Catherine Vaara, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 20.

engaged mental health clinicians in the centres in line with its service delivery plan.²¹⁴ The Committee was pleased to hear that the Authority is now 'talking to Lifeline about progressing a partnership agreement'.²¹⁵

3.88 The NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network argued that 'there is an endemic lack of recognition and underfunding' to address psychosocial impacts in disaster recovery and planning, and that funding is 'heavily favoured towards infrastructure and economic outcomes' instead.²¹⁶ Lifeline Australia reflected similar concerns and recommended the incorporation of emotional wellbeing services as an integral part of disaster planning and recovery to ensure adequate and sustained funding of trauma-informed support.²¹⁷ This broader funding issue is further considered in Chapter Five.

3.89 The Committee also considers that psychosocial wellbeing must be treated as a core component of disaster recovery. The evidence received during this inquiry demonstrates that the mental health consequences of successive disasters are serious, endemic and long-lasting, and that relevant services should be adequately resourced to support impacted communities during the 'long-tail' of disaster recovery.

²¹⁴ Ms Ashlee Abbott, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 29.

²¹⁵ Mrs Susie George, [Transcript of Evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 30.

²¹⁶ [Submission 22](#), pp 2, 5.

²¹⁷ [Submission 21](#), p 4.

Chapter Four – Planning powers, preparedness and adaptation

Summary

The Authority did not exercise its planning powers under the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. Stakeholders identified some operational issues with the Authority's broader responsibilities in relation to disaster preparedness and adaptation, including Disaster Adaptation Plans (DAPs), betterment and community preparedness initiatives.

Planning powers and buy-back interventions

- 4.1 The Committee received feedback from stakeholders throughout the inquiry about the Authority's planning powers and their application in previous disasters, particularly the 2022 Northern Rivers and Central West floods.²¹⁸ Stakeholders expressed views about how these powers have been exercised to date, the conditions under which they should be triggered, and the importance of clear communication to communities about what interventions may be available following a disaster, including through the Resilient Homes Program (RHP).

There is community uncertainty surrounding the Authority's planning powers

Finding 6

The NSW Reconstruction Authority did not exercise its planning powers in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.

Recommendation 12

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority develop and publish clear guidelines and criteria for invoking statutory planning powers and for buy-back interventions to ensure these are applied transparently and consistently and communicated to communities effectively.

- 4.2 The Committee heard about need for greater clarity regarding the use of the Authority's statutory planning powers and related buy-back programs.
- 4.3 The *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* provides the Authority with significant planning and recovery powers following a Ministerial declaration.²¹⁹ The Authority's powers are set out in Parts 6 and 7 of the Act and function as an important regulatory tool designed to enable the Authority to respond decisively where community safety and recovery require intervention.²²⁰ For example:
- section 45 of the Act allows the Authority to acquire land, including through voluntary purchase schemes commonly referred to as 'buybacks',

²¹⁸ [Submission 50](#), NSW Government, p. 8; [Submission 49](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 19; [Submission 19](#), Byron Shire Council, p 2; [Submission 18](#), Cabonne Council, pp 2-3; [Submission 35](#), Local Government NSW, pp 17-18.

²¹⁹ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [pt 5](#).

²²⁰ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [pts 6-7](#); [Submission 50](#), p 8.

to reduce disaster risk and retire high-risk properties from residential use²²¹

- section 68 of the Act allows the Minister to issue an authorisation order permitting development to be carried out without standard planning approvals where community safety or recovery timeframes require it.²²² This power has been previously used in circumstances where urgent action was necessary, including for school rebuilds following disasters.²²³

What is a 'buyback'?

A buyback involves the government purchasing a flood-affected or high-risk property from a homeowner who wishes to sell, with the Authority having the ability to dispose of land and property.²²⁴ Actions such as these can reduce future disaster risk and costs.

The home buyback process has been most extensively applied in the Northern Rivers region following the catastrophic 2022 floods, where some properties identified as being in high-risk flood zones have been purchased.²²⁵ Once purchased, some properties are demolished, while salvageable properties can be auctioned with the requirement that new owners relocate the house to a flood safe area.²²⁶

- 4.4 The Authority did not exercise its planning powers in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.²²⁷ There were no land or housing buybacks, disposals or ministerial authorisation orders under section 68 of the Act.²²⁸
- 4.5 The Government noted that since the Authority's establishment, section 68 powers have been exercised in circumstances where community safety and timeframes were critical, such as for school rebuilds.²²⁹
- 4.6 The Committee heard that the absence of home buyback programs in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event caused confusion and frustration in affected communities. Stakeholders described a lack of clear eligibility criteria to access the programs and expressed a strong desire for clarity about why particular properties are considered for buyback, the timelines for offers, and the approaches taken to compensation.²³⁰

²²¹ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [s 45](#).

²²² *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [s 68](#).

²²³ [Submission 50](#), p 8.

²²⁴ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [div 2](#); NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Home Buyback process – Resilient Homes Program](#), accessed 8 May 2026.

²²⁵ [Submission 49](#), pp 19-20; [Submission 19](#), p 2; [Submission 43](#), Institute of Public Works and Engineering Australasia (NSW and ACT), p 3.

²²⁶ [Submission 43](#), p 3; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Home removal, reuse and recycling – Resilient Homes Program](#), accessed 8 May 2026.

²²⁷ [Submission 50](#), p 8.

²²⁸ [Submission 45](#), MidCoast Council, p 2; [Submission 24](#), Mid North Coast Joint Organisation, p 3; [Submission 33](#), Hunter Joint Organisation, p 9; [Submission 50](#), p 8.

²²⁹ [Submission 50](#), p 8.

²³⁰ [Submission 45](#), p 2; [Submission 24](#), p 3; [Submission 48](#), Insurance Council of Australia, p 5.

- 4.7 Councils were unable to provide information to residents asking about the availability of buyback and retrofitting programs because the Authority did not communicate any guidance on critical timelines or eligibility.²³¹ The Mid North Coast Joint Organisation (MNCJO) found this to be of particular concern given community expectations and the significant bearing it has on their recovery decisions.²³²
- 4.8 The NSW Government acknowledged in its submission the need to enhance collaboration between agencies and to improve councils' understanding of the Authority's planning powers. It acknowledged the importance of communicating clear protocols around the exercise of the Authority's powers under the *NSW Reconstruction Act 2022*, particularly section 68, to support local government's understanding and engagement with these processes.²³³
- 4.9 The NSW Government also observed that some confusion exists at the local level about the respective powers of the Local Emergency Operations Controller under section 61 of the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (SERM Act) and the Authority under the Act. The Committee notes that further clarity on these powers would assist in managing community expectations.

***State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* and powers of the Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON)**

The *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (SERM Act) establishes the emergency management framework for NSW, including the roles and responsibilities of emergency controllers at the state, regional and local levels.²³⁴

At the local level, a Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON) – typically a senior NSW Police officer – has broad powers to manage the emergency response within a declared emergency area.²³⁵

These powers are separate and distinct from those exercised by the Authority under the Act. LEOCON powers operate during the emergency response phase and are focused on immediate safety measures.²³⁶

The Authority's powers under Parts 6 and 7 of the Act are activated following a Ministerial declaration and are directed at longer-term recovery and reconstruction, including land acquisition, housing resilience programs and planning interventions.²³⁷

²³¹ [Submission 24](#), pp 3-4.

²³² [Submission 24](#), pp 3-4.

²³³ [Submission 50](#), p 8.

²³⁴ *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*, Subdivisions [4](#) and [5](#).

²³⁵ [Local Emergency Management Committee Handbook](#), October 2024, p 11.

²³⁶ [Local Emergency Management Committee Handbook](#), October 2024, pp 31-32; [Submission 50](#), p 8

²³⁷ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [pts 6-7](#).

Resilient Homes Program

Finding 7

The Resilient Homes Program is performing significantly below community expectations and needs, with stakeholders observing funding issues, restrictive eligibility criteria, and complex and lengthy application and approval processes along with limited or no rationale in relation to unfavourable decisions, adding to community frustration and uncertainty during recovery.

Recommendation 13

That, in consultation with relevant councils, the NSW Government, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, should make improvements to the Resilient Homes Program, specifically including improvements to the timeliness, eligibility criteria and the application and approval process.

- 4.10 The Committee also heard specific feedback from stakeholders about the Resilient Homes Program (RHP). The RHP was established following the 2022 Northern Rivers floods and is designed to reduce the vulnerability of homes in high-risk areas to future flood events.²³⁸ The RHP is administered by the Authority and offers eligible homeowners in flood-affected areas one of several forms of assistance:
- a voluntary buyback of their property
 - financial assistance towards resilient measures, such as:
 - Home Raising (elevating the home above flood levels)
 - Home Rebuild (rebuilding a more resilient home where the property was destroyed or uninhabitable)
 - Home Relocation (relocating a current home to a safer location on the homeowners property, or to another property in the region)
 - Home Retrofit (modifying the home to make it more flood-resilient).²³⁹
- 4.11 The Committee heard that programs that enable retrofitting, elevation and flood remediation demonstrably reduce the severity of disaster impacts and future insurance claims. The Insurance Council of Australia submitted that cost-benefit evidence shows retrofit programs can be highly cost-effective in reducing future public and private losses, and that expanding these programs should be a funding priority.²⁴⁰
- 4.12 The Committee heard that the RHP is performing significantly below community expectations and needs.²⁴¹ Stakeholders observed funding issues, restrictive

²³⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [About the Resilient Homes Program](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²³⁹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [About the Resilient Homes Program](#), accessed 23 March 2026.

²⁴⁰ [Submission 48](#), p 5.

²⁴¹ [Submission 19](#), p 2; [Submission 49](#), p 19; [Submission 18](#), p 3.

eligibility criteria, and complex and lengthy application and approval processes.²⁴² In cases where residents have appealed unfavourable decisions, they were provided with limited or no rationale for decisions made. This added to community frustration and uncertainty during recovery.²⁴³

- 4.13 Byron Shire Council noted that, as at August 2025, only eight buybacks and 15 house raises or retrofits had been completed in the Shire since the flooding and landslip disasters.²⁴⁴ Legal Aid NSW submitted, in relation to the RHP operating in the Northern Rivers following the 2022 floods, that a significant number of vulnerable individuals have been declined buybacks despite compelling individual and exceptional circumstances.²⁴⁵
- 4.14 Cabonne Council noted that the lengthy time between the catastrophic Central West floods of November 2022, the announcement of RHP funding and the commencement of the application phase meant that some residents have had to use their own funds for repairs. Further, other residents have had to significantly delay their recovery.²⁴⁶
- 4.15 Local Government NSW (LGNSW) identified that the long-term outcomes of the RHP in the Northern Rivers, including future use of the land that results from it, 'are yet to be seen'.²⁴⁷
- 4.16 The Committee is concerned to hear feedback from stakeholders about the lack of clarity regarding the Authority's use of its planning powers under the Act, as well as matters relating to the RHP. The Committee acknowledges that planning powers under the Act are subject to Ministerial and administrative decision-making. However, it however considers that further guidance could be provided to better support communities who have experienced significant trauma, uncertainty and loss following a disaster.
- 4.17 We recommend that the NSW Reconstruction Authority develop and publish clear guidelines and criteria for invoking statutory planning powers and for buy-back interventions. These guidelines will improve transparency around the Authority's decision making, in order to ensure statutory powers and interventions are applied transparently and consistently. For programs such as the RHP, it is vital that the criteria for the Authority's decisions is communicated to communities effectively.

²⁴² [Submission 19](#), p 2; [Submission 49](#), pp 19-20; [Submission 18](#), p 3.

²⁴³ [Submission 49](#), pp 19-20; [Submission 19](#), p 2.

²⁴⁴ [Submission 19](#), p 2.

²⁴⁵ [Submission 49](#), p 19.

²⁴⁶ [Submission 18](#), p 3.

²⁴⁷ [Submission 35](#), p 15.

Disaster mitigation and adaptation

Finding 8

Stakeholders consistently identified the importance of investment in disaster mitigation and adaptation to reduce the cost and impact of natural hazards, both in advance of disasters where risks are identified and during recovery.

- 4.18 The Committee heard throughout the inquiry about the importance of greater investment in disaster mitigation and adaptation to address the increasing and compounding costs and impacts of disaster events. While the Authority has taken several actions to support disaster mitigation and adaptation, there are areas where enhancements could be made to improve the DAP process.

Disaster Adaptation Plans (DAPs) are a strategic improvement but require significant investment

- 4.19 The Committee heard that the Authority is making efforts to invest in preparedness, adaptation and mitigation. The development of Disaster Adaptation Plans (DAPs) has been generally welcomed by councils and stakeholders as a positive development since previous disasters, such as the catastrophic Central West floods in 2022.²⁴⁸ DAPs provide an opportunity to guide investment in adaptation planning at the regional level.²⁴⁹

What are Disaster Adaptation Plans (DAPs)?

Disaster Adaptation Plans (DAPs) are place-based regional plans developed collaboratively between the Authority, NSW Government agencies, local councils and the community.²⁵⁰

DAPs are a legislative responsibility of the Authority and are a key instrument of the NSW State Disaster Mitigation Plan 2024–2026.²⁵¹ DAPs are designed to identify where natural hazard risk can be reduced through mitigation measures such as evacuation infrastructure or land use planning controls. DAPs also identify where communities may need to adapt to risk that cannot be mitigated, for example through home modification or community awareness programs.²⁵²

DAPs draw on existing council-based hazard management work, including floodplain and coastal management programs. They are intended to guide investment in adaptation and mitigation at the regional level, identify priority areas for action, and provide a strategic basis for funding applications.²⁵³

²⁴⁸ [Submission 18](#), pp 2-3; [Submission 35](#), p 18; Local Government NSW, [Answers to Supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 2.

²⁴⁹ [Submission 35](#), pp 18- 19; [Submission 50](#), pp 13-14.

²⁵⁰ NSW Government, [Disaster Adaptation Plans](#), accessed 28 April 2026.

²⁵¹ Minister for Recovery, [New guidelines launched to streamline disaster adaptation planning across the state](#), media release, 13 August 2025, accessed 28 April 2026.

²⁵² [Submission 50](#), p 13; [Submission 35](#), pp 15, 17-18; [Submission 33](#), p 13.

²⁵³ [Submission 50](#), p 13; [Submission 35](#), pp 17-18; [Submission 33](#), p 13.

- 4.20 The Authority is currently developing two DAPs in the Hawkesbury-Nepean and the Northern Rivers regions.²⁵⁴ The Authority is also working with five Joint Organisations to guide early disaster adaptation planning work that will progress to formal DAPs.²⁵⁵
- 4.21 However, councils raised concerns about the significant resourcing required to develop DAPs. LGNSW argued that the DAP process assumes councils have dedicated resources which is often not the case, particularly for smaller rural and regional councils. Feedback from councils involved in the first two DAPs indicated that the process is highly resource intensive, requiring attendance and input from staff across multiple functions including asset management, emergency management, community development, strategic planning, sustainability and adaptation planning.²⁵⁶
- 4.22 The Hunter Joint Organisation similarly noted that competitive grants programs and short-term funding cycles impede the long-term resilience of councils. In particular, short-term funding can create challenges in sustaining community engagement and retaining staff with the corporate knowledge needed to implement DAPs effectively, as discussed above.²⁵⁷
- 4.23 Councils also noted concerns about changes in Authority personnel that requires them to repeat information and rebuild relationships across DAP workstreams. Authority staff turnover such as this places further resourcing pressure on councils and limits meaningful co-design.²⁵⁸
- 4.24 The Committee acknowledges that some councils are more advanced than others in developing technical studies and options analyses relevant to DAP development. The Authority should consider opportunities to leverage the work already done by more advanced councils while also investing in building capacity in smaller and less developed councils to ensure equitable outcomes across all regions.

The important role of betterment when rebuilding infrastructure

Finding 9

The current funding framework for betterment represents a missed opportunity to reduce the long-term costs of successive disasters as rebuilding to pre-disaster standards in communities that have experienced repeated disaster events is neither efficient nor sustainable.

²⁵⁴ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Hawkesbury-Nepean Valley Disaster Adaptation Plan](#), accessed 15 April 2026; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Northern Rivers Disaster Adaptation Plan](#), accessed 15 April 2026.

²⁵⁵ [Submission 50](#), pp 13-14.

²⁵⁶ [Submission 35](#), pp 18-19.

²⁵⁷ [Submission 33](#), p 13.

²⁵⁸ [Submission 35](#), p 19; [Submission 33](#), p 13; Deborah Stafford, Manager, Social and Cultural Planning, Byron Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9; Local Government NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), p 7.

Recommendation 14

That the NSW Government implement ways in which betterment can be incorporated into future funding frameworks and through the Authority should give consideration to opportunities to work with local stakeholders to determine which betterment initiatives are likely to deliver the greatest savings, in the event of future reconstruction costs following a disaster.

- 4.25 The Committee heard consistent evidence about the importance of rebuilding infrastructure to a more resilient standard following a disaster. In particular, the Committee was told of the importance of betterment in reducing the long-term costs of successive disaster events.²⁵⁹ Rebuilding infrastructure to higher standards saves significantly more in future reconstruction costs than the initial additional investment.²⁶⁰

What is 'betterment'?

Betterment refers to the practice of repairing or rebuilding disaster-damaged assets to a higher standard than their pre-disaster condition, so that they are better able to withstand future disaster events.²⁶¹

The Act recognises betterment as part of the Authority's role,²⁶² defining 'betterment of the community' in Schedule 4 of the Act to include 'improving the community's infrastructure so that the infrastructure is less likely to be damaged or otherwise affected by the impact of a disaster.'²⁶³

- 4.26 LGNSW submitted that rebuilding infrastructure to its original specifications is not sufficient to provide communities with the level of resilience they need in the face of more frequent and increasingly severe disaster events.²⁶⁴
- 4.27 Councils have long called for greater and more accessible betterment funding.²⁶⁵ The Hunter Joint Organisation noted that NSW Government figures indicate that 97 per cent of disaster grant funding goes to response and recovery, rather than risk reduction, leaving betterment frequently underfunded.²⁶⁶
- 4.28 Councils noted significant concerns about the limits of current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) in supporting betterment. The current framework requires councils to rebuild to pre-disaster standards, leaving assets vulnerable to the next event. The Authority's ability to implement betterment improvements is further constrained by short-term, competitive grant processes that do not align

²⁵⁹ [Submission 35](#), p 22.

²⁶⁰ [Submission 35](#), p 22.

²⁶¹ NSW Government, [Infrastructure Betterment Fund](#), accessed 23 April 2026.

²⁶² *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [s 4\(b\)\(iii\)](#).

²⁶³ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [sch 4](#).

²⁶⁴ [Submission 35](#), p 22.

²⁶⁵ [Submission 35](#), p 22.

²⁶⁶ [Submission 33](#), p 13.

with councils' four-year Integrated Planning and Reporting cycles.²⁶⁷ Issues relating to the DRFA are further outlined in Chapter Five.

- 4.29 The Committee considers that the current funding framework for betterment represents a missed opportunity to reduce the long-term costs of successive disasters. Rebuilding to pre-disaster standards in communities that have experienced repeated disaster events is neither efficient nor sustainable. The Authority should give consideration to opportunities to work with local stakeholders to determine which betterment initiatives are likely to deliver the greatest savings, in the event of future reconstruction costs following a disaster.

Preparedness activities

Recommendation 15

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority invest further in preparedness initiatives to strengthen community capacity and capability through a dedicated fund. These programs should be informed by co-design with relevant stakeholders including insurers, local councils and community organisations.

- 4.30 Preparedness is a key lever for reducing future reconstruction costs and strengthening community resilience before disasters occur. The Committee heard about the Authority's work relating to preparedness. However, there is currently a disproportionate focus on response and recovery in the current disaster management framework compared with preparedness initiatives.²⁶⁸
- 4.31 Stakeholders identified a need for greater awareness of, and investment in, disaster preparedness initiatives to strengthen community capacity and capability. MidCoast Council reported that it was not aware of any specific preparedness or adaptation initiatives undertaken in the region before the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, and that pre-event readiness was dependent on the council's former Community Recovery Officer (CRO) and local capability.²⁶⁹ The Hunter Joint Organisation said that surveyed council representatives were unaware of any prior preparedness work in their region beyond social media communications.²⁷⁰
- 4.32 The Committee heard the Authority has implemented preparedness initiatives including:
- the 'Get Ready NSW' program, an all-hazards community preparedness initiative that delivered emergency warning education to Mid-Coast communities in mid-2025, and

²⁶⁷ [Submission 35](#), p 22; [Submission 33](#), p 13.

²⁶⁸ [Submission 22](#), Uniting Church NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network, p 5; Deborah Stafford, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9.

²⁶⁹ [Submission 45](#), p 3.

²⁷⁰ [Submission 33](#), p 13.

- the 'Get Ready NSW Survey', which is designed to provide specific insights into household preparedness across LGAs.²⁷¹

4.33 Some stakeholders also highlighted the Recovery Services Capacity Grant as an opportunity to strengthen connections between social services and the Authority in terms of preparedness.²⁷² Further work is needed to integrate these findings and initiatives into the local context to ensure that communities are aware of, and understand how to prepare for, disasters. This is particularly important for more vulnerable members of the community, as outlined in Chapter Three.

4.34 The Committee also notes the potential for greater investment in person-centred emergency preparedness approaches, such as the Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) framework.²⁷³ The Authority should consider how such frameworks can be integrated into its broader preparedness programs and delivered at scale through trusted local organisations.

Preparedness can be strengthened with greater use of insurance information

4.35 The Committee heard that many households in the Mid-North Coast and Hunter regions cannot afford insurance, leaving many properties underinsured or uninsured, therefore vulnerable after a disaster.²⁷⁴ As insurance becomes increasingly unaffordable in those high-risk areas, more households become dependent on government aid to recover. Without investment in adaptation and social support, recovery may reinforce existing vulnerabilities rather than addressing them.²⁷⁵

4.36 The work of the insurance sector provides valuable insights into disaster impacts, community vulnerabilities and risk patterns that can inform recovery prioritisation and resilience investment. The Insurance Council of Australia noted opportunities to strengthen data-sharing arrangements between the Authority, insurers and local councils to improve preparedness and adaptation work.²⁷⁶

4.37 The Committee is of the view that decision-making on preparedness can be supported and strengthened with greater use of information from the insurance sector. In preparing for future disasters, the Authority should engage with the Insurance Council of Australia to share insights from insurer claims data and risk modelling, alongside consultation with communities and local councils, to ensure that preparedness and adaptation investment is targeted where it is most needed.

²⁷¹ [Submission 50](#), p 12; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, pp 5, 12-13.

²⁷² Joy Kyriacou, St Vincent de Paul Society, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2026, p 7; St Vincent de Paul Society, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 19 December 2025, p 3; Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 2; Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3.

²⁷³ [Submission 7](#), Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre, p 7; Cara Varian, CEO, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, pp 14-15; Carers NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 23 November 2025, p 1.

²⁷⁴ [Submission 31](#), Financial Counselling Australia, p 1.

²⁷⁵ [Submission 14](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, p 5.

²⁷⁶ [Submission 48](#), p 5.

- 4.38 The Committee recommends that the Authority should invest further in preparedness initiatives to strengthen community capacity and capability. These programs should be informed by co-design with relevant stakeholders including insurers, local councils and community organisations to ensure that preparedness programs are targeted and effective to meet local needs.

Chapter Five – Grants and funding arrangements

Summary

This chapter outlines stakeholder feedback received throughout the inquiry about the grants process and broader issues relating to the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA), including complexity of applications, timing delays and issues with reimbursement.

Opportunities to standardise and streamline grants processes

Recommendation 16

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority continue to improve grant processes to better support impacted communities following a disaster, including clear and consistent eligibility criteria. These processes should retain flexibility to consider individual circumstances.

- 5.1 As outlined in Chapter Two, the Authority administered a range of disaster relief funding, including Disaster Relief Grants, following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. Timely grants are vital to helping disaster affected communities during recovery.²⁷⁷ However, the Committee heard mixed feedback on the Authority's administration of these grants.²⁷⁸
- 5.2 Stakeholders highlighted community concerns and frustration about inconsistent eligibility criteria and short application timeframes during the recovery period.²⁷⁹ The Committee recognises that Service NSW is currently working to enhance its efficiency in delivering grants.²⁸⁰ However, there are further opportunities for the Authority to standardise and streamline grants processes.²⁸¹
- 5.3 The Committee recommends that the Authority improve grant processes, particularly in relation to the clarity and consistency of eligibility criteria. Consistency in grant criteria will provide greater support and certainty for impacted communities. However, grant processes also need to have flexibility, in light of the diverse and often unique circumstances experienced by people recovering from a disaster event.

²⁷⁷ [Submission 31](#), Financial Counselling Australia, pp 1-2; [Submission 32](#), Mid North Coast Legal Centre, pp 2-3; [Submission 26](#), Port Macquarie Hastings Council, p 2.

²⁷⁸ [Submission 31](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 32](#), pp 2-3; [Submission 18](#), Cabonne Council, p4; [Submission 37](#), NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), p 4; [Submission 9](#), Mid Coast Outreach Incorporated, p 1; [Submission 16](#), St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, p 2; [Submission 49](#), Legal Aid NSW, p 14.

²⁷⁹ [Submission 31](#), pp 1-2; [Submission 32](#), pp 2-3; [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 37](#), p 4; [Submission 9](#), p 1; [Submission 16](#), p 2.

²⁸⁰ Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 5.

²⁸¹ [Submission 19](#), Byron Shire Council, p 1.

Issues with grant criteria

- 5.4 The Committee heard that grant criteria need to be simplified.²⁸² Grant applications are a source of stress, frustration and uncertainty for communities already coping with the effects of disasters.²⁸³ Current grant criteria were described as being too complex and application processes too onerous for disaster impacted residents.²⁸⁴
- 5.5 In particular, Legal Aid NSW recommended that the Disaster Relief Grant guidelines be reviewed to simplify eligibility criteria, reduce evidentiary requirements, and reflect a trauma-informed approach.²⁸⁵ For example, applicants must provide a list of all their lost possessions, even in cases of total loss, which can be impractical and further the applicant's distress.²⁸⁶
- 5.6 Financial Counselling Australia highlighted grant criteria that requires applicants to have no assets that could support them post-disaster, and argued that this will create further hardship if used for the basis for grant ineligibility. If applicants need to deplete their savings, sell assets, or use up superannuation before qualifying for financial support, this will leave them with no financial buffer or means to rebuild once the immediate impacts of the flood have passed.²⁸⁷
- 5.7 Inconsistent eligibility criteria was also highlighted by stakeholders. Mid North Coast Legal Centre said that this inconsistency caused confusion throughout the recovery period and that many clients they spoke to had concerns about the grants process.²⁸⁸ NCOSS also told the Committee that complex grant requirements 'significantly increase the workload of community members and social service organisations who provide support to disaster-impacted residents'.²⁸⁹
- 5.8 City of Newcastle highlighted community concerns and frustration regarding grant eligibility for those impacted by the New Lambton landslip.²⁹⁰ Ms Melissa Gore, Local Recovery Coordinator, City of Newcastle, said that the Authority communicated with the Council about specific grants that residents of New Lambton should apply for. However, residents were ultimately not eligible for these specific grants as they had insurance or income that disqualified them as part of means testing.²⁹¹ The Authority noted that they did administer hardship allowance and rental grants to New Lambton residents in person.²⁹²

²⁸² [Submission 31](#), p 2; [Submission 37](#), p 5.

²⁸³ [Submission 18](#), p 4, [Submission 9](#), p 1; [Submission 16](#), p 2; [Submission 37](#), p 4.

²⁸⁴ [Submission 49](#), p 15; [Submission 16](#), p 2; [Submission 14](#), Uniting NSW.ACT, p 3.

²⁸⁵ [Submission 49](#), pp 14-15.

²⁸⁶ [Submission 49](#), p 14.

²⁸⁷ [Submission 31](#), pp 1-2.

²⁸⁸ [Submission 32](#), p 2.

²⁸⁹ [Submission 37](#), p 4.

²⁹⁰ Melissa Gore, Local Recovery Coordinator, City of Newcastle, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 3; Jeremy Bath, Chief Executive Officer, City of Newcastle, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 7.

²⁹¹ Melissa Gore, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 3.

²⁹² Susie George, Executive Director, Regional Delivery, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 28.

- 5.9 Disaster preparedness and recovery planning must be built with vulnerable cohorts in mind. The current level of assistance provided does not appear sufficient for those that face higher financial risks, combined with other complex needs such as homelessness and or a disability. Eligibility process for such grants should be revised in consultation with stakeholders familiar with the specific needs of vulnerable communities, which would ultimately benefit all persons seeking disaster assistance.

Grants do not meet the needs of those with disability and carers

- 5.10 Stakeholders highlighted that grants do not meet the needs of those with disability and those that depend on carers.²⁹³
- 5.11 Carers and the people they care for may need special allowances in order to meet the specific needs of individuals following disasters, such as securing equipment or medication. Current grants do not provide sufficient support to meet these needs.²⁹⁴ Co-design of grants with peak organisations and the communities they represent will ensure grants provide adequate assistance to these vulnerable populations during disasters.²⁹⁵

Issues around the timing of grants

- 5.12 The Committee heard issues with the timing of grants were a cause of frustration and uncertainty in the community.²⁹⁶ Stakeholders also told the Committee about applicants experiencing delays in receiving payment.²⁹⁷
- 5.13 As noted in Chapter Three, stakeholders identified that certain funding packages were announced after the closure of Recovery Centres following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. This meant that residents could not easily access in-person support for making applications.²⁹⁸
- 5.14 Residents from impacted areas were initially deemed ineligible for financial support due to the geographic boundaries set by the Authority. These residents only became eligible for grants weeks after the event.²⁹⁹ The Committee notes that improved consultation with local stakeholders on locality names and geographical boundaries would help avoid similar issues for future disaster events.³⁰⁰

²⁹³ Bastien Wallace, Senior Policy Officer, People with Disability Australia (PWDA), [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 26; Sharon Gudu, Chief Executive Officer, Carers NSW Australia, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, pp 22, 25.

²⁹⁴ Sharon Gudu, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 25.

²⁹⁵ Sharon Gudu, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 25; Bastien Wallace, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 25.

²⁹⁶ [Submission 32](#), p 2; [Submission 26](#), pp 2-3; [Submission 18](#), p 4.

²⁹⁷ [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 26](#), p 2; [Submission 32](#), p 2; [Submission 15](#), Mathew Fawcett, p 1.

²⁹⁸ [Submission 26](#), p 2; [Submission 49](#), p 16.

²⁹⁹ [Submission 32](#), p 2; [Submission 26](#), p 2; [Submission 15](#), p 1.

³⁰⁰ [Submission 32](#), pp 2-3.

- 5.15 Stakeholders noted that short application deadlines for grants are a barrier for potential applicants in disaster impacted communities.³⁰¹ Extending application periods would improve the accessibility and uptake of grants.³⁰²

Grant issues for the agricultural industry

Finding 10

Recent changes to Emergency Grant Reliefs have seen an increase in complexity and decrease in the upfront payment for farmers which was impactful after the May 2025 flooding events in particular.

Recommendation 17

That the NSW Government, in consultation NSW Farmers and other agricultural stakeholders, streamline the Primary Industry Grants and other assistance, with particular attention being paid to streamlining the application and approval process.

Recommendation 18

That the NSW Government raise the upfront primary producer grants from \$5,000 to provide more fit-for-purpose immediate support for farmers to aid the recovery process.

- 5.16 Grants are a critical lifeline for primary producers and the agriculture industry following disasters.³⁰³ The Authority offers grants to agricultural businesses to assist with cleanup and recovery so they can continue to produce primary goods.³⁰⁴ NSW Farmers noted there are a variety of challenges agricultural businesses face in applying for recovery grants.³⁰⁵
- 5.17 Agricultural businesses have been experiencing significant challenges due to the cumulative impact of frequent natural disasters.³⁰⁶ However, due to the close timing of ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred and the May 2025 East Coast severe weather events, farmers that were impacted by both disasters were only able to access one Natural Disaster Relief Grant up to \$25,000 to cover both events.³⁰⁷
- 5.18 NSW Farmers argued that current grant application processes 'resembled audits rather than supportive measures designed to facilitate [farmers'] recovery'. They noted that providing evidence was challenging, including technical issues with the application process and concerns with the complexity and detailed requests for evidence required. This included requests that were sometimes considered insensitive, such as asking oyster farmers to send images of dead stock.³⁰⁸

³⁰¹ [Submission 32](#), p 3; [Submission 31](#), p 2.

³⁰² [Submission 32](#), p 3; [Submission 31](#), p 2.

³⁰³ [Submission 47](#), NSW Farmers, p 1.

³⁰⁴ [Submission 47](#), p 1.

³⁰⁵ [Submission 47](#), pp 6-10.

³⁰⁶ [Submission 47](#), p 6.

³⁰⁷ [Submission 47](#), p 6.

³⁰⁸ [Submission 47](#), p 8.

- 5.19 Much of this complexity has been added to the process post a recent audit of the 2022 Emergency Relief Grants that saw additional requirements introduced for primary producers to apply for grants available. Significant changes were also made to the upfront payment available without proof of payment, reducing these from \$25 000 to \$5 000 which proved extremely challenging for farmers during this event.³⁰⁹

The Authority should streamline grant processes

- 5.20 The Authority should consider opportunities to improve grant processes to better support impacted communities as there are risks to community recovery if money is not passed on quickly.³¹⁰

- 5.21 Ms Cara Varian, Chief Executive Office, NCOSS, argued that it costs the NSW Government more money to try and repair things after they have been damaged or people have been struggling without funds for longer.³¹¹ Ms Varian added that:

Getting money out, there will be some breakage, or sometimes people will get money that they may not be entitled to. But, largely, in these situations we see that people are doing their best, and I think that there are even bigger risks that we don't get the money out than making sure that there's a couple of people who got money that they shouldn't have.³¹²

- 5.22 The Committee notes that the Authority should be guided by the NSW Grants Administration Guide as part of a 'risk-based' approach to recovery grants. The Guide advises that 'officials should determine the volume, detail and frequency of reporting requirements proportional to the risks involved and the intended policy outcomes'.³¹³ It also provides guidance about achieving value with relevant money, including 'using processes and procedures proportional to the grant's value and risk'.³¹⁴

- 5.23 Service NSW noted it has a strong collaborative relationship with the Authority. They also advise that Service NSW are working on standardising grants processes to speed up delivery more broadly.³¹⁵ This will involve establishing a set of agreed criteria, processes and technologies.³¹⁶ Service NSW also noted that work on enhancing efficiency in delivering grants has reduced delivery times from 8 weeks in 2022 to around 7-9 days in 2025. This has been a result of establishing standardised and repeatable digital and administrative processes.³¹⁷

³⁰⁹ [Submission 47](#), pp 9-10.

³¹⁰ Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 14.

³¹¹ Cara Varian, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 14.

³¹² Cara Varian, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 14.

³¹³ NSW Government, [Grants Administration Guide](#), March 2024, p 22.

³¹⁴ NSW Government, [Grants Administration Guide](#), March 2024, p 23.

³¹⁵ Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 25; Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 5.

³¹⁶ Greg Wells, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 25.

³¹⁷ Service NSW, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 25 March 2026, p 5.

- 5.24 The Committee welcomes these improvements to grant administration and recommends the Authority make further changes to improve grant processes to better support impacted communities for future disasters.
- 5.25 The Committee recommends that these grant processes should include clear and consistent eligibility criteria, and should be flexible enough to account for a wider range of individual circumstances. These processes should also involve a 'risk-based' approach to grants. This should balance the need to get support to affected communities quickly, with the need to responsibly manage public money and to ensure public value.

Issues with Joint Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)

- 5.26 The Authority is responsible for coordinating Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) in NSW to help councils and communities recover and rebuild after natural disasters. This disaster relief is delivered to individuals, community groups and businesses by a variety of NSW Government agencies, such as Service NSW and the NSW Rural Assistance Authority.³¹⁸
- 5.27 DRFA were activated as part of the response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event following the Natural Disaster Declaration on 21 May 2025.³¹⁹
- 5.28 Throughout the inquiry, the Committee heard that there are significant issues with DRFA, particularly for local councils.³²⁰ The NSW Government and the Authority also acknowledged that there are challenges under the current DRFA framework.³²¹ These issues are explored in further detail below.
- 5.29 The Committee has made several recommendations to the Authority and the NSW Government to improve the consistency of guidance and support provided to local councils, including prioritising improvements to streamline payment of DRFA funds, as well as advocate to the Australian Government for reforms to the DRFA.

What are Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)?

Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) are the model in which the Australian Government provides states and territories with funding to assist disaster affected communities.³²² Funding can be provided as a financial

³¹⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Coordination](#), last updated 22 December 2025, accessed 30 March 2026.

³¹⁹ Minister for Recovery, [Disaster support for sixteen Hunter and Mid North Coast LGAs following severe flooding](#), media release, 21 May 2025, accessed 30 March 2026.

³²⁰ For example: [Submission 19](#), p 1; [Submission 45](#), MidCoast Council, p 3; [Submission 33](#), Hunter Joint Organisation, p 15; [Submission 39](#), Central NSW Joint Organisation, p 3; [Submission 6](#), Clarence Valley Council, p 5; [Submission 26](#), p 5; [Submission 36](#), City of Newcastle, p 6; [Submission 24](#), Mid North Coast Joint Organisation, p 7; [Submission 43](#), Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT, p 5; [Submission 35](#), Local Government NSW, p 20; [Submission 47](#), pp 6-10; [Submission 14](#), p 4-5; [Submission 27](#), Australian Red Cross, p 9.

³²¹ [Submission 50](#), NSW Government, p 13; Graham Kennett, Executive Director, Reconstruction, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35.

³²² National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), last updated 2 January 2026, accessed 30 March 2026.

reimbursement or as an advance payment in response to extremely damaging disasters.

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is the Australian Government agency responsible for administering DRFA. NEMA works with states and territories who deliver the funding and determine the type and level of assistance to make available.³²³

Once DRFA are activated in relation to a disaster, the Australian Government may reimburse states and territories up to 75 per cent of the financial assistance provided. This Commonwealth-state cost sharing is sometimes referred to as 'joint' arrangements.³²⁴

Advance payments are made in exceptional circumstances, specifically when a disaster causes significant and extreme damage and the costs are likely to exceed what the state or territory can manage in the immediate to short-term.³²⁵

Applying for DRFA is complex and time-consuming

Finding 11

Local councils highlighted significant financial pressures, delays in reimbursement, and administrative burdens associated with the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Finding 12

The current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements application process has proven overly bureaucratic, complex and time consuming, all at a time when council efforts should be directed to recovery.

Recommendation 19

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority consider opportunities to improve and increase the consistency of guidance and resources provided to local councils about eligibility criteria under the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, particularly regarding evidence required in support of Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements applications.

- 5.30 Many councils told the Committee that applying for DRFA is a complex process that places a significant administrative burden on them and their staff.³²⁶ Councils described applying for funding, making claims and proving eligibility as

³²³ [Submission 17](#), NSW Small Business Commission, p 2.

³²⁴ National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), last updated 2 January 2026, accessed 30 March 2026.

³²⁵ National Emergency Management Agency, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), last updated 2 January 2026, accessed 30 March 2026.

³²⁶ [Submission 19](#), p 1; [Submission 45](#), p 3; [Submission 33](#), p 15; [Submission 35](#), p 23; Nathan McBriarty, Manager Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, Wollongong City Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9; Dylan Reeves, A/Director Operations and Planning, Kempsey Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, pp 6-7; [Submission 36](#), p 6.

cumbersome, convoluted, and time-consuming.³²⁷ LGNSW said that councils find funding applications overly bureaucratic and complex.³²⁸

- 5.31 This complexity adds to the burden of councils that are recovering from disasters, and impacts their ability to apply for funding.³²⁹ Diverting staff to work through this application process can also place financial pressures on councils.³³⁰ Mr Nathan McBriarty, Manger, Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, Wollongong City Council said that Wollongong City Council has 'tireless amounts of staff' working to find information as part of DRFA submissions and to prove eligibility.³³¹
- 5.32 Mr Dylan Reeves, Acting Director, Operations and Planning, Kempsey Shire Council, said that Kempsey Shire Council struggles to get DRFA funding due to the significant amount of processes, time and effort involved in submitting claims and reviewing finances.³³² Mr Reeves also said that Kempsey Shire Council requires engineering support to substantiate submissions and provide accurate cost estimates.³³³ Even with this technical assistance, Mr Reeves said the Council still lacks confidence on whether funding will be provided and if assessors will have sufficient evidence.³³⁴ The costs of hiring engineering support to make claims are only claimable if the projects are deemed eligible.³³⁵
- 5.33 Mr James Prosser, Senior Project Manager, Port Macquarie Hastings Council also noted that the Council was not confident that their administrative work would result in successfully receiving funds.³³⁶
- 5.34 City of Newcastle said they found the process of applying for DRFA following the New Lambton landslip complex and unclear, and that the Council needed to engage experienced third parties to navigate the funding categories. The costs of contracting these third parties were not budgeted for in the Council's operational plan.³³⁷
- 5.35 Councils told the Committee that there is a need for clear guidance on what evidence is required for impact assessment and eligibility as part of DRFA applications.³³⁸ MidCoast Council and Hunter Joint Organisation suggested that placing a dedicated Authority officer within disaster-impacted councils would assist with the DRFA application process.³³⁹ Central West Joint Organisation said

³²⁷ [Submission 45](#), p 3; [Submission 33](#), p 15.

³²⁸ [Submission 35](#), p 23.

³²⁹ James Prosser, Senior Project Manager, Port Macquarie Hastings Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 8.

³³⁰ [Submission 45](#), p 3.

³³¹ Nathan McBriarty, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9.

³³² Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, pp 6-7.

³³³ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 8.

³³⁴ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 8.

³³⁵ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 9.

³³⁶ James Prosser, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 8.

³³⁷ [Submission 36](#), p 6.

³³⁸ [Submission 33](#), p 16; [Submission 45](#), p 5; Nathan McBriarty, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 9; David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 13.

³³⁹ [Submission 33](#), p 16; [Submission 45](#), p 5.

that councils should be supported in applying for DRFA through adequate resourcing of the Authority and clear guidance across all levels of government.³⁴⁰

DRFA categories are complex

- 5.36 The Committee heard that the DRFA category system is too complicated and there is a lack of clarity on what can be claimed under each category.³⁴¹

What are the DRFA categories?

There are four categories of DRFA assistance that provide different kinds of financial assistance to either individuals, states or local government. The DRFA Guidelines specify how DRFA funding may be used under each category.³⁴²

Category A funding generally provides assistance to individuals and Category B to states and local government for the restoration of essential public assets. Category A and B funding does not require prior approval from the Australian Government.³⁴³

Category C funding generally provides assistance for communities includes grants for small businesses and primary producers. Category D is used to address specific gaps in recovery. Category C and D funding requires agreement from the Prime Minister, and is granted in specific and exceptional circumstances in response to particularly severe disasters.³⁴⁴ Categories C and D are generally only used after the impacts of the disaster have been assessed.³⁴⁵

- 5.37 MidCoast Council said that claiming funding under Category C and D and the 'exceptional circumstances' pathway was particularly complex. It also reported challenges on agreeing on categories as part of the application process.³⁴⁶ Clarence Valley Shire Council also noted that there is a lack of clarity around Category D funding and defining 'exceptional circumstances'.³⁴⁷
- 5.38 Clarity and flexibility around how funds are utilised would be beneficial for councils during recovery.³⁴⁸ The Committee also heard that simplifying the DRFA

³⁴⁰ [Submission 39](#), p 3.

³⁴¹ [Submission 33](#), p 15; [Submission 45](#), p 3; [Submission 6](#), p 5.

³⁴² Department of Home Affairs, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018](#), 5 June 2018, pp 15-23.

³⁴³ National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), last updated 2 January 2026, accessed 30 March 2026.

³⁴⁴ National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), last updated 2 January 2026, accessed 30 March 2026.

³⁴⁵ National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements](#), last updated 2 January 2026, accessed 30 March 2026.

³⁴⁶ [Submission 45](#), p 3.

³⁴⁷ [Submission 6](#), p 5.

³⁴⁸ Deborah Stafford, Manager, Social and Cultural Planning, Byron Shire Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 11.

process and streamlining eligibility criteria would reduce the administrative burden on councils.³⁴⁹

Greater transparency and clarity are needed

- 5.39 The Committee heard that there has been inconsistent decision-making about when DRFA are granted and what kind of works are funded.³⁵⁰ Mr Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, MidCoast Council, reflected that following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, the Council was told that DRFA could not be used to repair damage to water and sewerage infrastructure.³⁵¹ However, other LGAs have had this damage covered in the past.³⁵² Additionally, following previous disasters, some communities were eligible for grant programs that MidCoast Council was not.³⁵³
- 5.40 Mr Panuccio called for greater transparency about what assistance has been available to other councils in the past.³⁵⁴ Mr David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW (LGNSW), said that making the DRFA claims assessment process more transparent would make it easier for councils to lodge claims.³⁵⁵
- 5.41 Clarence Valley Council stated that approved DRFA funding has, at times, not been provided to the Council as described in signed agreements. This delayed the commencement of significant flood mitigation projects.³⁵⁶ It also identified that there have been changes made to the evidence needed to make DRFA claims from time to time and these changes have not been clearly communicated.³⁵⁷
- 5.42 The lack of clarity around DRFA processes can negatively impact council's confidence in their ability to respond to disasters and recover effectively. Councils want to support their communities with recovery; however, this work requires funding and confidence that funding will be received or that money spent will be reimbursed.³⁵⁸ Stakeholders noted that this confidence is also important for the community during the recovery period.³⁵⁹ Communities can be better supported by councils if they can provide clear and timely information.³⁶⁰

³⁴⁹ David Reynolds, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 13; [Submission 39](#), p 3; [Submission 35](#), p 23.

³⁵⁰ [Submission 6](#), p 5; Steve Wilson, Executive Officer, Hunter Joint Organisation, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 14.

³⁵¹ Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, MidCoast Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3.

³⁵² Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3; Steve Wilson, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 14.

³⁵³ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 4.

³⁵⁴ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 4.

³⁵⁵ David Reynolds, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 13.

³⁵⁶ [Submission 6](#), p 5.

³⁵⁷ [Submission 6](#), p 5.

³⁵⁸ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6; Steve Wilson, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 14.

³⁵⁹ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6; Chris Favaloro, Group Manager, Project Delivery, Port Macquarie Hastings Council, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6; [Submission 24](#), p 7.

³⁶⁰ Chris Favaloro, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6.

- 5.43 The Authority reported it is taking steps to work closer with individuals councils on navigating DRFA funding, which is discussed later in this chapter.³⁶¹
- 5.44 The Committee is concerned that the DRFA application process is adding an additional burden onto councils that already need help with recovery following disasters. The Authority should actively assist councils with the application process as part of its role in administering these funds. The Committee recommends that the Authority improve the guidance provided to local councils about eligibility criteria of DRFA. This guidance should be consistent and more robust in clarifying evidence requirements to support DRFA applications.

Further administrative issues with applications

- 5.45 The Committee heard that there is an expectation that DRFA assessments should be submitted before the full extent of disaster impacts are known.³⁶² MidCoast Council and Hunter Joint Organisation said that this creates additional administrative work for councils, who are required to provide the same data multiple times throughout the application process as a result.³⁶³
- 5.46 Ms Deborah Stafford, Manager, Social and Cultural Planning, Byron Shire Council, said that there can be retrospective administrative requirements as part of the DRFA application process, even for claims that are assessed quickly.³⁶⁴

There are key gaps in the current DRFA eligibility criteria for critical assets and betterment

Finding 13

The Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements category system is too complicated and there is a lack of clarity on what can be claimed under each category.

Recommendation 20

That the NSW Government continue to advocate to the Australian Government through relevant intergovernmental forums for reforms of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements to:

- **expand eligibility criteria to include water and sewer infrastructure as essential public infrastructure**
- **streamline application and assessment processes, and**
- **incorporate betterment.**

³⁶¹ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35.

³⁶² [Submission 33](#), p 16; [Submission 45](#), p 3.

³⁶³ [Submission 33](#), p 16; [Submission 45](#), p 3.

³⁶⁴ Deborah Stafford, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 11.

Water and sewerage infrastructure

- 5.47 The Committee heard that DRFA guidelines exclude certain critical assets to communities, in particular water and sewerage infrastructure.³⁶⁵ Water and sewer services are fundamental to public health, safety and liveability.³⁶⁶ As natural disaster become more frequent and severe, excluding this infrastructure from recovery funding will undermine councils' ability to maintain these services.³⁶⁷
- 5.48 Mr Darcy Byrne, Chief Executive, LGNSW, told the Committee that regional councils are already operating at a deficit regarding water infrastructure and that the lack of funding for water infrastructure is an existential problem for rural and regional councils.³⁶⁸
- 5.49 The Authority advised that water and sewer infrastructure are excluded because of their classification as commercial activities.³⁶⁹ Mr Graham Kennett, Executive Director, NSW Reconstruction Authority, told the Committee that this is because customers of water utilities are charged a fee that is greater than 50% of the operating costs of the business.³⁷⁰
- 5.50 Mr Kennett recognised that water and sewer are essential public assets, and that there are broader affordability issues for local water utilities, especially across regional NSW.³⁷¹ However, Mr Kennett said that he did not think DRFA would be the mechanism to solve these broader affordability issues. Mr Kennett also said that it was unlikely that DRFA would be reformed to include water and sewer infrastructure as this would open the door for 'electricity, telecommunications and other essential public assets' that are also funded by customers to be covered.³⁷²
- 5.51 Mr Kennett said that other areas of the NSW Government, including the Minister for Water, are working on reforms regarding water and sewer infrastructure.³⁷³ Mr Andrew Graham, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, said that the Authority is 'involved with and constantly talking to the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) about issues that should be addressed in policy'. In the meantime, the Authority's focus has been on utilising the existing provisions of the DRFA as best as it can.³⁷⁴

³⁶⁵ [Submission 33](#), pp 16-17; [Submission 35](#), p 21; Anna Flack, Senior Project Coordinator, Hunter Joint Organisation, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 13.

³⁶⁶ [Submission 33](#), p 17; [Submission 35](#), pp 21-22; Anna Flack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 13; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3.

³⁶⁷ Darcy Byrne, President, Local Government NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 14.

³⁶⁸ Darcy Byrne, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 14.

³⁶⁹ [Submission 33](#), p 17; David Reynolds, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 14.

³⁷⁰ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 33.

³⁷¹ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 33.

³⁷² Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, pp 34-35.

³⁷³ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 33.

³⁷⁴ Andrew Graham, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 33.

Betterment

- 5.52 The Committee heard that DRFA do not adequately support betterment work. Betterment funding is needed to ensure communities are more resilient to increasingly frequent and severe disasters.³⁷⁵ However, stakeholders said that restrictions around betterment work under DRFA meant that councils experience challenges in repairing infrastructure to a better and more resilient standard following disasters.³⁷⁶
- 5.53 Port Macquarie Hastings Council told the Committee that there was no clear indication if betterment funding would be available in response to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.³⁷⁷ The Authority should set out clear and well-defined evidence requirements for making betterment claims.³⁷⁸
- 5.54 LGNSW said that betterment investment will save money in the future, but costs more than DRFA covers.³⁷⁹ Mr Reeves said Kempsey Shire Council currently has infrastructure compromised from previous disasters, but current DRFA guidelines meant that the council cannot 'build back better'.³⁸⁰ Stakeholders reported that DRFA often only allows for the restoration of assets to pre-disaster standards, which leaves them vulnerable to future disasters.³⁸¹
- 5.55 Mr Tim Mackney, Board Director, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia NSW and ACT, noted that there is room for the Authority to significantly invest in betterment. Mr Mackney noted that, prior to the establishment of the Authority, Tweed Council experienced significant delays in receiving funding for betterment under DRFA. This was due to difficulties in rolling out betterment funding in a way that complements and supplements DRFA.³⁸²
- 5.56 Mr Kennett told the Committee that the Authority is working to 'unlock some of the opportunities the DRFA presents around betterment'.³⁸³ The NSW Government acknowledged that there is a desire among stakeholders to see a strategic shift towards investment in disaster reduction and resilience. It also acknowledged that investment in risk reduction and resilience via DRFA is in need of review. However, it claimed that progress will require coordinated efforts across all levels of government.³⁸⁴

³⁷⁵ [Submission 35](#), p 22; Tim Mackney, Board Director, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 49.

³⁷⁶ [Submission 33](#), p 16; Anna Flack, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 13; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3; [Submission 45](#), p 3; [Submission 24](#), p 8; [Submission 26](#), p 2; James Prosser, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6.

³⁷⁷ [Submission 26](#), p 2.

³⁷⁸ [Submission 26](#), p 2.

³⁷⁹ [Submission 35](#), pp 22-23.

³⁸⁰ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6.

³⁸¹ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6; [Submission 35](#), pp 22-23.

³⁸² Tim Mackney, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 49.

³⁸³ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35.

³⁸⁴ [Submission 50](#), p 13.

Other gaps in funding

- 5.57 The Committee also heard evidence from stakeholders about other gaps in DRFA funding related to volunteers and staffing costs.
- 5.58 Some stakeholders said that DRFA should cover costs associated with managing and coordinating spontaneous volunteers.³⁸⁵ The Committee heard there is no consistent framework or funding mechanism to support this coordination, despite the vital role volunteers play in supporting affected communities during recovery as discussed in Chapter Three.³⁸⁶
- 5.59 Port Macquarie Hastings Council noted that it incurs on-cost expenses and employee related costs that are higher than the 33 per cent allowed under DRFA reimbursement. These costs must be absorbed into the Council's budget.³⁸⁷
- 5.60 LGNSW said that it advocates for the expansion of DRFA, so that funds can be used on a broader range of assets and cover the true costs of disaster recovery for councils.³⁸⁸ These include:
- open spaces, sporting fields and community infrastructure³⁸⁹
 - cleanup of damaged buildings and hazardous materials, such as asbestos³⁹⁰
 - landslips and erosion, and navigational dredging.³⁹¹
- 5.61 The Committee is concerned about the impact that ongoing natural disasters will have on the financial health of councils and recognises that councils need funding relief for repairing essential public infrastructure. It also believes the application and assessment process should be made simpler, and that funding ought to be granted so that councils can 'build back better'.
- 5.62 The Committee recommends that the NSW Government continue to advocate to the Australian Government for reforms of DRFA to expand eligibility criteria to include critical water and sewer infrastructure. It should also advocate to streamline the application and assessment process, and ensure that funding incorporates betterment of infrastructure.

Retrospective reimbursement forces councils to carry financial risk and delays recovery efforts**Finding 14****Financial pressures under the current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements are further compounded by the cumulative impact of successive natural**

³⁸⁵ [Submission 45](#), p 3; [Submission 33](#), p 16; [Submission 19](#), p 4.

³⁸⁶ [Submission 19](#), p 4.

³⁸⁷ [Submission 26](#), p 4.

³⁸⁸ [Submission 35](#), pp 7, 20.

³⁸⁹ [Submission 35](#), p 7.

³⁹⁰ [Submission 35](#), p 21.

³⁹¹ [Submission 35](#), p 21.

disasters, particularly for smaller local councils and more geographically isolated councils.

Recommendation 21

That the NSW Reconstruction Authority continue to prioritise improvements to streamline payment of Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement funds to local councils as a matter of urgency. The NSW Reconstruction Authority should have funds readily available so that councils do not incur the extra financial burden at a time when council assets are adversely impacted.

Finding 15

Many councils remain out of pocket for significant amounts of money, owed to them through unpaid Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and other recovery payments.

Recommendation 22

That the NSW Government work with the Australian Government to ensure all monies still owed to councils for approved and completed Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements-funded works be paid immediately, so as to aid those local government areas in their recovery and future resilience.

- 5.63 Under the current DRFA, local councils are required to pay for recovery upfront and seek reimbursement for these costs afterwards.³⁹² The Committee consistently heard that this approach leaves councils exposed to significant unfunded expenses.³⁹³
- 5.64 Local councils impacted by the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event and other recent natural disasters still have significant outstanding reimbursement claims.³⁹⁴ For example, as of 15 February 2026, Kempsey Shire Council still have \$14 million in expected payments due from the Authority.³⁹⁵ Port Macquarie Hastings Council has \$6 million in costs that are pending payment.³⁹⁶ A case study MidCoast Council's outstanding claims is included below.

Case Study: MidCoast Council

MidCoast Council estimated that recovery following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event would cost **\$226 million**.³⁹⁷

As of 1 February 2026, the council had spent \$43 million on emergency, immediate rectification and restoration works. The Council estimated that 106

³⁹² [Submission 24](#), p 7.

³⁹³ [Submission 24](#), p 7; [Submission 26](#), p 1; [Submission 19](#), pp 1, 4; [Submission 35](#), p 23; [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 39](#), p 2; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, pp 3, 7.

³⁹⁴ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 9 March 2026, pp 2-7; Local Government NSW, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 12 March 2026, pp 1-3; [Submission 26](#), p 1; Kempsey Shire Council, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 18 March 2026, pp 1-2; Port Macquarie Hastings Council, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 26 March 2026, p 1.

³⁹⁵ Kempsey Shire Council, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 18 March 2026, pp 1-2.

³⁹⁶ Port Macquarie Hastings Council, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 26 March 2026, p 1.

³⁹⁷ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3.

public space assets were damaged and that reconstruction and betterment work would cost \$65 million. It also estimated that the cost of resilience and betterment work to prevent future disaster-related damage would cost \$265 million.³⁹⁸

MidCoast Council told the Committee it has approximately \$76,856,850 in outstanding DRFA claims.³⁹⁹

As of 15 February 2026, only \$6.1 million had been reimbursed to the council under DRFA. As of 1 March 2026, this figure increased to \$15,320,853. This includes the full amounts claimed for waste cleanup and waived feeds during clean up and water, and part of the full claim amounts for work on roads and public buildings and spaces.⁴⁰⁰ However, this still leaves the Council significantly out of pocket roughly nine months following the event.

The cost of water and sewer infrastructure restoration, totalling approximately \$7.5 million, is not eligible for reimbursement under DRFA and is ultimately passed on to the community.⁴⁰¹

- 5.65 The current retrospective reimbursement approach creates cash-flow challenges and financial risks, especially for smaller councils.⁴⁰² This makes the current model a threat to the financial viability of many regional and rural councils.⁴⁰³ Councils with limited rate bases are forced to divert funding away from essential services and future resilience work to pay for recovery.⁴⁰⁴ Recovery costs that are not reimbursed to councils through DRFA are ultimately passed on to the community through higher rates or cuts to services.⁴⁰⁵
- 5.66 Port Macquarie Hastings Council noted a lack of clarity about how funding spent on recovery would be reimbursed to the Council following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. In addition to budget impacts, this has caused issues with managing community expectations regarding recovery.⁴⁰⁶ Councils also commented that the strict deadlines to complete eligible works for reimbursement were unrealistic given the scale of damage from the May 2025 East Coast weather event.⁴⁰⁷
- 5.67 The financial pressures of the reimbursement model are further compounded by the cumulative impact of previous natural disasters and more frequent and

³⁹⁸ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3.

³⁹⁹ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 9 March 2026, p 2.

⁴⁰⁰ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 9 March 2026, p 5.

⁴⁰¹ Hunter Joint Organisation, [Answers to questions on notice](#), 9 March 2026, p 5; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3.

⁴⁰² [Submission 24](#), p 7; [Submission 26](#), p 1; [Submission 19](#), pp 1, 4; [Submission 35](#), p 23; [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 39](#), p 2; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, pp 3, 7.

⁴⁰³ Darcy Byrne, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 13; [Submission 39](#), p 3; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7.

⁴⁰⁴ [Submission 39](#), p 3.

⁴⁰⁵ [Submission 26](#), p 4; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 3.

⁴⁰⁶ [Submission 26](#), p 1.

⁴⁰⁷ [Submission 24](#), p 7.

severe disasters in the future. Unfunded recovery work or outstanding payments mean that councils must rely on their financial reserves instead. This leaves them vulnerable and makes responding to future disasters more challenging.⁴⁰⁸ The Committee notes these issues may also be faced by more geographically isolated councils, who may have limited resources or experience other challenges due to their rural and remote location.

- 5.68 The Committee heard that challenges with DRFA reimbursement can influence a council's decision to fund certain recovery work. Fears of not being reimbursed or finding out that work might not be eligible under the DRFA guidelines mean that councils may not undertake certain recovery work or choose not to rebuild assets.⁴⁰⁹ Smaller councils with less funding reserves are particularly vulnerable to this issue.⁴¹⁰ The Committee is concerned that the reimbursement model will further entrench disaster risk and undermine preparedness work done by the Authority.

There is a need for faster interim payments and cashflow support for local councils

- 5.69 Stakeholders told the Committee that there is a need for quicker funding decisions and approvals following disasters to support recovery and reconstruction work. Recovery is inherently urgent and timely access to recovery funding is essential. However, councils experience significant delays in receiving reimbursement.⁴¹¹
- 5.70 The Committee heard that delays in providing DRFA are caused by:
- bureaucratic processes and/or poor administration of funds⁴¹²
 - redundancy in processes, such as needing to provide the same data multiple times⁴¹³
 - the complexity of application processes.⁴¹⁴
- 5.71 These delays force councils to find other ways to cover these costs, which then has significant impacts on their budget.⁴¹⁵ For example, Cabonne Council experienced a 12-month delay waiting for funding claims to be assessed following

⁴⁰⁸ Nathan McBriarty, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, pp 8, 11; Darcy Byrne, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 14.

⁴⁰⁹ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, pp 6-7, 9; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7.

⁴¹⁰ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7.

⁴¹¹ James Prosser, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 4; Deborah Stafford, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 11; [Submission 19](#), p 4; [Submission 39](#), p 3.

⁴¹² [Submission 24](#), p 6; [Submission 43](#), p 5; [Submission 25](#), Community Disaster Action Group (CDAG), p 5; [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 35](#), p 20.

⁴¹³ [Submission 33](#), p 16; [Submission 45](#), p 3.

⁴¹⁴ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 4.

⁴¹⁵ [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 26](#), p 2.

the floods in the Central West region in 2022. The Council had to borrow from its reserves to fund recovery work during this time.⁴¹⁶

- 5.72 Mr James Prosser, Senior Project Manager, Port Macquarie Hastings Council, told the Committee that the Council cannot begin certain recovery work until it has all necessary processes in place and funding approved, which can take years.⁴¹⁷ Mid North Coast Joint Organisation also noted that most member councils still had not received confirmation of eligibility for DRFA funding four months after the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event. This left them uncertain about the scope or timing of restoration funding and unable to commit to essential recovery works.⁴¹⁸
- 5.73 The Institute of Public Works Engineers Australia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT described the Authority's DRFA systems as 'woefully inadequate'. They contrasted the agency's processes and the delays councils experience with the work of the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA), and said that the QRA processes claims in as little as three weeks in certain instances.⁴¹⁹ However, Tim Mackney, Board Director, IPWEA NSW & ACT also acknowledged that the Authority is in a 'teething period' and the QRA has more experience with these processes.⁴²⁰ The Authority also advised they are working with the QRA to learn from them (discussed further below).⁴²¹
- 5.74 IPWEA noted the Authority could reduce delays by increasing staffing in DRFA administration, as it was currently under-resourced in this area.⁴²²
- 5.75 The Committee is of the view that the Authority should have funds readily available so that councils do not incur this extra financial burden at a time when council assets are adversely impacted. Consideration should be given to whether the NSW Reconstruction Authority Fund, established under section 22 of the Act, is adequately supporting the prompt distribution of funding to councils and other organisations assisting with recovery.⁴²³

The Authority is making changes to DRFA administration

- 5.76 The Committee heard that the Authority is taking steps to address issues causing delays in administering DRFA. It has announced new funding packages, centralised DRFA administration, and investing in new software.

New funding packages

- 5.77 Following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, the NSW Government worked with NEMA and the Australian Government to set up a \$19 million

⁴¹⁶ [Submission 18](#), pp 4, 6.

⁴¹⁷ James Prosser, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 6.

⁴¹⁸ [Submission 24](#), pp 6-7.

⁴¹⁹ [Submission 43](#), p 5.

⁴²⁰ Tim Mackney, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 48.

⁴²¹ Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 37.

⁴²² Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 3 December 2025, p 3.

⁴²³ *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022*, [s 22](#).

Community Recovery Support Fund.⁴²⁴ The package enabled funding to be quickly provided to impacted councils and communities for immediate recovery and risk-mitigation activities. The Authority said that councils found the fund to be valuable and responsive, and it addressed eligibility gaps in standard recovery measures.⁴²⁵

DRFA administration has been centralised

- 5.78 The Authority has recently changed the way it handles certain types of DRFA funding. At the time of the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event, the Authority coordinated and administered Essential Public Asset Restoration (EPAR), Emergency Works (EW) and Immediate Reconstruction Works (IRW) in collaboration with Transport for NSW and NSW Public Works.⁴²⁶
- 5.79 As of October 2025, the Authority has taken over administration of this funding.⁴²⁷ This new centralised responsibility is intended to improve governance, speed up approvals, and provide consistent support for councils.⁴²⁸
- 5.80 Mr Panuccio had concerns about the timing of the transfer taking place so close to the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.⁴²⁹ IPWEA NSW & ACT said there was little proactive communication from the Authority about the transition which left councils without information.⁴³⁰
- 5.81 As part of this change, the Authority has established a new claim system for EPAR, EW and IRW works. This involves paying councils an initial amount of 20% of the estimated total project cost, and then quarterly payments based on actual and forecast expenses over reporting periods. The Authority advised that this should ensure councils remain cash flow positive.⁴³¹
- 5.82 The Authority had previously created a special agreement for advance and quicker payments following flooding across the Northern Rivers in 2022.⁴³² However, the Authority described this old 'tripartite' system as 'clunky' and advised that the new claims model replaces the need to make separate agreements with each individual council.⁴³³
- 5.83 Mr Kennett acknowledged that DRFA reimbursement timelines and administrative requirements are a 'pinch point' for councils. He said that the Authority was working closely with individual councils and had made over \$29

⁴²⁴ [Submission 50](#), p 15.

⁴²⁵ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, pp 8-9.

⁴²⁶ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 8; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Coordination](#), last updated 22 December 2025, accessed 30 March 2026.

⁴²⁷ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 8.

⁴²⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Coordination](#), last updated 22 December 2025, accessed 30 March 2026.

⁴²⁹ Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7.

⁴³⁰ [Submission 43](#), p 5.

⁴³¹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 8.

⁴³² Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35.

⁴³³ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 8.

million worth of advanced payments in recognition of the cash-flow urgency and the backlog of claims, especially following ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred.⁴³⁴

- 5.84 The Committee received mixed feedback about the centralisation of responsibilities to the Authority. Some stakeholders welcomed the transition.⁴³⁵ Central NSW Joint Organisation said that the success of the transition would depend on how effectively the Authority can accelerate the funding process.⁴³⁶
- 5.85 Some stakeholders noted there is a risk that the administrative burden will increase for councils if the transition is not smooth and experienced government staff were not retained.⁴³⁷

Software changes

- 5.86 As part of the centralisation of DRFA administration, the NSW Government noted it has invested in the development of the OneGMS platform (also known as 'SmartyGrants').⁴³⁸ This online portal is used for grants administration and has been developed to include functions for councils to submit DRFA claims.
- 5.87 IPWEA NSW & ACT expressed concerns about the platform and said that is not fit for purpose for something as complex as the DRFA.⁴³⁹ They described the software as difficult to use for 'even the simplest of grant arrangements' and noted it requires significant manual data uploads and work arounds. It also has data limitations and cannot interface with standard disaster recovery software.⁴⁴⁰
- 5.88 The Authority recognised that SmartyGrants has issues, but said it is the 'best system we have available at the moment' and that improvements are being made.⁴⁴¹
- 5.89 The Committee is pleased to note the Authority is working on systems and structural changes to reduce delays in processing DRFA funding. However, it remains concerned about the significant financial impact on councils caused by these delays. The Committee recommends that the Authority prioritise improvements to streamline payment of DRFA funds to councils as a matter of urgency. Funds should be readily available so that councils do not incur an extra financial burden at a time when council assets are already adversely impacted.

⁴³⁴ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35.

⁴³⁵ [Submission 39](#), p 3; James Prosser, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 8; [Submission 43](#), p 5; [Submission 18](#), p 4; [Submission 35](#), p 9.

⁴³⁶ [Submission 39](#), p 3.

⁴³⁷ [Submission 10](#), Kempsey Shire Council, p 2; [Submission 24](#), p 6.

⁴³⁸ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 2.

⁴³⁹ [Submission 43](#), p 5; Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 3 December 2025, p 3.

⁴⁴⁰ Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 3 December 2025, p 3.

⁴⁴¹ Graham Kennett, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 35; Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 3 December 2025, p 4.

Stronger partnerships with local councils and other jurisdictions will improve collaboration on DRFA processes and outcomes

- 5.90 As identified in Chapter Three, stakeholders noted the importance of collaborative working relationships between local councils and Authority staff throughout recovery.⁴⁴² Collaboration will ensure better outcomes for the community and keep costs reasonable.⁴⁴³ Mid North Coast Joint Organisation said that future funding reforms need to be co-designed with councils and joint organisations to ensure they are fit for purpose.⁴⁴⁴
- 5.91 The Committee heard that a more collaborative approach between the Authority and councils will also help balance the need for faster recovery while still maintaining transparency and accountability around the distribution of funding.⁴⁴⁵ Councils said that there are substantial audit requirements associated with DRFA that cause delays.⁴⁴⁶ Early collaboration can support the quick release of funding while still meeting necessary auditing requirements.⁴⁴⁷
- 5.92 The Committee notes that changes to the administration of funds (discussed above) present an opportunity for more direct involvement between the Authority and councils. The NSW Government said it developed guidance materials for impacted councils on different DRFA funding categories following the May 2025 East Coast severe weather event.⁴⁴⁸
- 5.93 The Authority said it has good relationships with the QRA and that teams from the two agencies have regular meetings about the design of future funding arrangements and reform.⁴⁴⁹ The Committee notes that the QRA was established in 2011 and is a more mature organisation. The Committee will monitor this ongoing working relationship and consider what changes the Authority has implemented as part of future operational reviews.⁴⁵⁰
- 5.94 The Authority is also working with NEMA and the NSW Government, and has MoUs with the South Australian and Queensland Governments to explore best practice in cross-state disaster related collaboration, coordination and preparation.⁴⁵¹ The Committee recognises the importance of these ongoing working relationships across jurisdictions to support better funding and recovery outcomes in NSW.

⁴⁴² Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7; Adrian Panuccio, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7.

⁴⁴³ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 7.

⁴⁴⁴ [Submission 24](#), p 7.

⁴⁴⁵ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 11.

⁴⁴⁶ David Reynolds, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 13; Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 11.

⁴⁴⁷ Dylan Reeves, [Transcript of evidence](#), 17 February 2026, p 11.

⁴⁴⁸ [Submission 50](#), p 10.

⁴⁴⁹ Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 37.

⁴⁵⁰ Queensland Reconstruction Authority, [Governance](#), accessed 13 April 2026; David Reynolds, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 14.

⁴⁵¹ Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 37; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 15.

The DRFA creates challenges for recovery partners and social service organisations

- 5.95 In addition to issues experienced by local councils, the Committee also heard the DRFA creates issues for recovery partners and support agencies that work with the Authority. DRFA restrictions limit the ability of organisations, including those with MoUs with the Authority, to recover all costs involved with their work.⁴⁵²
- 5.96 Australian Red Cross said these limitations include the work of incident management teams that support and mentor volunteers in the field, and overtime work. This places a financial burden on organisations and threatens the sustainability of the services they provide.⁴⁵³
- 5.97 Australian Red Cross noted that the Authority has made recent improvements to address this and provided additional funding to support costs of a surge workforce.⁴⁵⁴ The Authority also funded community partners under Recovery Services Capacity Grants that will allow community partners to recruit and train volunteers ahead of disasters.⁴⁵⁵
- 5.98 Stakeholders also observed that more sustainable funding is needed for social services in the long term.⁴⁵⁶ DRFA is event-based and this funding model creates service gaps that result in social services being unable to assist communities with the long-term impacts of disasters.⁴⁵⁷ As disasters become more frequent, the effects begin to blend into each other creating a 'poly-crisis' environment.⁴⁵⁸ Disasters have a 'long-tail' that cause long term impacts that can take years to recover.⁴⁵⁹
- 5.99 Uniting NSW.ACT observed that communities now cycle continuously through response, recovery and preparation.⁴⁶⁰ The event-based nature of DRFA limits the assistance that organisations can provide to impacted communities. This is because funding can only be used by organisations in relation to the specific disaster they received the funding for.⁴⁶¹
- 5.100 Short-term contracts, which can last between three and 12 months, mean that social service organisations need to be continually re-contracted. This creates an administrative burden and uncertainty for staff.⁴⁶² Legal Aid NSW and Mid North Coast Legal Centre noted that the event-based nature of DRFA means it is not a

⁴⁵² [Submission 27](#), p 9; Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3; [Submission 22](#), Uniting Church NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network, p 5; Cara Varian, CEO, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 11; [Submission 14](#), pp 2-3.

⁴⁵³ [Submission 27](#), p 9; Jacob Walsh, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3.

⁴⁵⁴ [Submission 27](#), p 9.

⁴⁵⁵ Jacob Walsh, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 3; Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 2.

⁴⁵⁶ [Submission 22](#), p 5; Cara Varian, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 11.

⁴⁵⁷ Uniting NSW.ACT, [Written opening statement](#), 20 February 2026, p 1; [Submission 14](#), pp 2-3.

⁴⁵⁸ [Submission 22](#), p 5.

⁴⁵⁹ [Submission 49](#), p 7; [Submission 32](#), p 6; Sally Bryant, Manager, Legal Aid NSW, [Transcript of evidence](#), 3 November 2025, p 17.

⁴⁶⁰ Uniting NSW.ACT, [Written opening statement](#), 20 February 2026, p 1.

⁴⁶¹ [Submission 49](#), p 25; [Submission 37](#), p 5.

⁴⁶² [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Submission 49](#), pp 24, 25.

suitable funding source for the sustainable, long-term legal services they seek to provide.⁴⁶³

- 5.101 NCOSS said that grants to social service organisations should be simplified and that the current reimbursement model places a significant financial burden on them.⁴⁶⁴ The model also creates an administrative burden and redundant operations if organisations have existing agreements with the Authority.⁴⁶⁵ In practice, funding arrangements mean that social service organisations must make significant organisational adjustments to adapt to the strict government disaster support system. Aligning social service support and disaster support systems would better serve communities.⁴⁶⁶
- 5.102 The Committee heard that the Authority often does not consult with recovery partners before applying for DRFA. This means that the designs of recovery packages are not community-led and may not fully reflect the needs or outcomes sought by communities or recovery partners. Australian Red Cross said there is no clear or consistent mechanism for recovery partner proposals to be considered in the initial design phase. Further, there are not always opportunities to seek funding through later applications. A more consultative and structured approach to recovery funding would enhance the work of recovery partners and help to meet community needs.⁴⁶⁷
- 5.103 Stakeholders told the Committee that there is a need for more disaster recovery funding for social and community support. The majority of funding presently goes towards infrastructure.⁴⁶⁸
- 5.104 The Committee notes the concerns raised by social service organisations and recognises the important role they play in recovery. The Committee encourages the Authority to consider these issues as part of broader interjurisdictional discussions about DRFA reforms.

Colvin Review

Recommendation 23

That the NSW Government continue to advocate to the Australian Government through relevant intergovernmental forums for the implementation of the recommendations of the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding (Colvin Review).

⁴⁶³ [Submission 49](#), p 25; [Submission 32](#), pp 4-5.

⁴⁶⁴ [Submission 37](#), pp 5-6.

⁴⁶⁵ [Submission 37](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 49](#), p 25.

⁴⁶⁶ [Submission 37](#), pp 6-7.

⁴⁶⁷ [Submission 27](#), p 10.

⁴⁶⁸ [Submission 22](#), p 5; [Submission 37](#), p 6; [Submission 25](#), p 5.

- 5.105 The Committee consistently heard from stakeholders throughout the inquiry who supported the recommendations of the Colvin Review or called for similar reforms of the DRFA.⁴⁶⁹
- 5.106 The NSW Government noted that the Authority's approach reflects key recommendations from the Colvin Review, particularly in enhancing governance and program delivery, coordination, transparency, and community engagement. It also acknowledged areas for further development, such as the potential for further streamlined funding mechanisms and clearer eligibility guidelines for disaster recovery support.⁴⁷⁰

What is the Colvin Review?

The Australian Government commissioned an Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding, known as 'the Colvin Review', to improve disaster funding arrangements. The review was led by Andrew Colvin AO APM and delivered to the Government in April 2024. The review made 47 recommendations and found that DRFA are in need of review and reform.⁴⁷¹

The report recommends that the Australian Government develop a new National Natural Disasters Outcomes Policy that clarifies the purpose of disaster funding and takes an evidence-informed and risk-based approach.⁴⁷² This new policy should also guide changes to disaster funding.⁴⁷³ The policy and associated changes and frameworks should also clarify the role that DRFA plays in disaster funding.⁴⁷⁴

The report also found that DRFA has become the default mechanism to deliver a range of disaster recovery and resilience work, but this has distorted its original intent and purpose of assisting state governments with the financial burden of disaster relief and reconstruction costs.⁴⁷⁵ To address this, application of DRFA should be simplified to ensure that they can be used consistently and are easier to administer.⁴⁷⁶

- 5.107 At the time of writing, the Australian Government has not responded to the recommendations of the Colvin Review. The NSW Government says this 'restricts the States' ability to implement them.'⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁶⁹ [Submission 48](#), Insurance Council of Australia, p 7; [Submission 49](#), p 24; [Submission 47](#), p 12; [Submission 45](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 37](#), pp 5-6; [Submission 36](#), p 7; [Submission 35](#), p 25; [Submission 24](#), p 7; [Submission 19](#), p 1.

⁴⁷⁰ [Submission 50](#), p 16.

⁴⁷¹ National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding \(also known as the Colvin Review\)](#), last updated 4 June 2025, accessed 23 March 2026; Andrew Colvin AO APM, [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#), final report, 30 April 2024, pp 3, 12, 24-37.

⁴⁷² Andrew Colvin AO APM, [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#), p 16.

⁴⁷³ Andrew Colvin AO APM, [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#), p 16.

⁴⁷⁴ Andrew Colvin AO APM, [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#), p 16.

⁴⁷⁵ Andrew Colvin AO APM, [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#), p 19; Department of Home Affairs, [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements 2018](#), 5 June 2018, p 14.

⁴⁷⁶ Andrew Colvin AO APM, [Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding](#), p 19.

⁴⁷⁷ [Submission 50](#), p 16.

- 5.108 Mr Graham said the Authority is not privy to the timing of when decisions will be made to reform the DRFA.⁴⁷⁸ However, the Authority said that it advocates for reform to DRFA and is involved in regular policy discussions with NEMA.⁴⁷⁹
- 5.109 The Authority also said that it undertakes regular policy reviews and is considering the extent to which the disaster recovery framework in NSW remains fit for purpose and where improvements can be made. The Colvin Review has been considered as part of these reviews.⁴⁸⁰
- 5.110 In line with the findings of the Colvin Review, the Authority notes that it experiences challenges with ensuring that disaster support to cross-border communities under the DRFA is consistent. The Authority said this reinforces the need for place-based approaches to recovery.⁴⁸¹
- 5.111 The Authority also said that it is committed to ensuring its policies reflect and guide best practice approaches to disaster response, such as the Disaster Assistance Guidelines, the NSW State Disaster Mitigation Plan, and Disaster Adaptation Plans.⁴⁸² The agency said the delivery of the Resilient Homes Program is a practical example of its investment in disaster risk reduction and long-term resilience, consistent with principle 2 of the Colvin Review.⁴⁸³
- 5.112 The Committee strongly believes reform of DRFA is urgently needed. We recognise the challenge facing the Authority in implementing recommendations of the Colvin Review in the absence of a formal Australian Government response to the Review.
- 5.113 The Committee is pleased to hear that the Authority is working to improve disaster funding in NSW and making improvements to its implementation where possible. The Committee recommends that the NSW Government continue to advocate to the Australian Government through relevant intergovernmental forums for the implementation of the recommendations of the Colvin Review. This advocacy needs to be treated with the utmost of urgency, so that local stakeholders responsible for undertaking recovery, mitigation and betterment work are financially supported in improving outcomes for their communities.

⁴⁷⁸ Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 33.

⁴⁷⁹ Andrew Graham, [Transcript of evidence](#), 20 February 2026, p 33; NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 15.

⁴⁸⁰ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 16.

⁴⁸¹ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, pp 13-14.

⁴⁸² NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, pp 16-17.

⁴⁸³ NSW Reconstruction Authority, [Answers to supplementary questions](#), 30 March 2026, p 16.

Appendix One – Terms of reference

That, pursuant to section 93(3)(b) of the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* (the 'Act'), the Committee review the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority (the 'Authority') regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025, with particular reference to:

- (a) the Authority's response to, and any changes or improvements to the operations of the Authority, the following recent disasters:
 - i) the severe weather caused by ex-Tropical Cyclone Alfred from 3 March 2025,
 - ii) the major electricity outages affecting Far West NSW from 17 October 2024,
 - iii) the catastrophic floods affecting the Central West region in 2022, and
 - iv) any other disasters that were subject to a Natural Disaster Declaration and in which the Authority exercised its functions.
- (b) the exercise of any planning powers under the Act in the affected region, including:
 - i) powers under Parts 6 to 7 of the Act following a Ministerial declaration under Part 5, particularly the power to compulsorily acquire land,
 - ii) land and housing buybacks and disposals,
 - iii) the effectiveness of housing resilience programs, and
 - iv) developments subject to a ministerial authorisation order under section 68 of the Act.
- (c) how the Authority and relevant agencies communicated to and engaged with affected communities in the delivery and design of reconstruction and preparedness efforts, including whether principles of community-led recovery and culturally appropriate emergency management were considered.
- (d) the effectiveness of any relevant preparedness and adaptation work by the Authority for the affected region before the disaster.
- (e) the application of any relevant funding under the Joint Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, including the implementation of any recommendations arising from the Colvin Review published in October 2024.

The Committee is required to report on the outcome of the review by May 2026.

Appendix Two – Conduct of inquiry

This report fulfils one of the Committee’s statutory functions under the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* (the Act). Under section 93(3)(b) of the Act, the Committee is required to review the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding any disaster in relation to which the Authority exercises functions.

On 18 August 2025, the Committee self-referred a review of the Authority’s response to the May 2025 NSW East Coast severe weather event and other related matters.

The Committee invited submissions from the public, with an initial deadline of 3 October 2025, which was extended until submissions closed on 15 October 2025.

The Committee received 50 submissions from a broad range of stakeholders. This included local councils, community and social service organisations, insurers and other professional bodies, legal organisations, mental health advocacy groups, impacted individuals, and government agencies. A list of submission makers is provided in Appendix Five, and the submissions are available on the inquiry [webpage](#).

As part of the inquiry, a public online survey was conducted to gather additional information. Details about the survey are provided at Appendix Four.

The Committee held three public hearings:

- NSW Parliament House on 3 November 2025 and 20 February 2026
- Club Taree, Taree on 17 February 2026.

Evidence was received from a range of witnesses, including community and non-government organisations, local government, insurance bodies, professional bodies, and government agencies. A list of witnesses who appeared at the hearings is included at Appendix Six. The transcripts from the hearings are available on the inquiry [webpage](#).

Appendix Three – Site visit report

On 16 February 2026, the Committee visited areas of Taree that experienced heavy flooding in May 2025. The purpose of the visit was to better understand the impacts of the 2025 flood event and to hear directly from impacted community about their recovery experiences and interactions with the NSW Reconstruction Authority.

The Committee first visited affected homes on the south side of the Manning River. Members spoke with a local resident whose home was impacted during the flood and heard firsthand accounts of the damage sustained and the cumulative impacts of repeated flood events. Discussions focused on the effects of flooding on residential properties, experiences of warnings and emergency responses, and challenges associated with recovery, including insurance and repair processes.

The Committee then travelled to Pulteney Arcade, a commercial area that previously hosted several businesses which are no longer operating as a result of flood damage. Members spoke with a local business owner and heard about the impacts of flooding on commercial premises, including repeated inundation, disruption to trade, and concerns about the long term viability of businesses in the area.

As part of the visit, a roundtable discussion was held at Club Taree. Several community organisations were invited to attend including: Mid Coast Outreach Incorporated, Manning Valley Neighbourhood Services Inc, Taree Lions Club, Harrington Resilience Association, Country Women's Association – Wingham Branch, Wingham Flood Hub, and Rotary Club of Taree on Manning. The discussion focused on local organisations' engagement with the Authority, their role in supporting affected communities, and challenges encountered in delivering recovery assistance.

The Committee thanks Mrs Tanya Thompson MP, Member for Myall Lakes, local residents, business representatives, and community organisations for their time and for sharing their experiences and insights.

Appendix Four – Online survey

As part of this inquiry, the Committee conducted a public online survey to gather stakeholder views on the NSW Reconstruction Authority's response to the severe weather event that affected the NSW East Coast in May 2025.

The survey sought feedback on a range of matters relevant to the inquiry, including:

- the Authority's response to the May 2025 floods, and how this compared with its response to recent past disasters
- the use of the Reconstruction Authority's powers and its communication with impacted communities
- the effectiveness of disaster preparedness and planning prior to the event
- the application of disaster recovery funding.

In total, the survey received nine responses from stakeholders. While the survey had relatively low engagement, the views expressed provided some insight into the experiences of a subset of stakeholders.

Several issues were identified in the survey responses, including concerns about the visibility of the Authority's activities at the local level, delays in accessing recovery support, and challenges with communication and engagement.

Some respondents also raised issues relating to information accessibility, the adequacy of recovery resourcing, and the duration of recovery support, while a small number noted improvements compared with previous disaster responses.

These themes were considered by the Committee during the inquiry.

The Committee thanks those stakeholders who completed the survey and shared their experiences.

Appendix Five – List of Submissions

No.	Author
1	Mr Sylvain Lersch
2	Dr Julian Jackel
3	Mrs Caroline Garred
4	Mr Warren and Mrs Sally Hedley
5	Ms Jing Ren
6	Clarence Valley Council
7	Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre
8	Mr Yan Naing Soe
9	Mid Coast Outreach Incorporated
10	Kempsey Shire Council
11	Name suppressed
12	People with Disability Australia (PWDA)
13	Lifeline Mid Coast
14	Uniting NSW.ACT
15	Mr Matthew Fawcett
16	St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
17	NSW Small Business Commission
18	Cabonne Council
19	Byron Shire Council
20	Foodbank NSW & ACT
21	Lifeline Australia
22	Uniting Church NSW Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network
23	Mrs Meryl Dillon
24	Mid North Coast Joint Organisation
25	Community Disaster Action Group (CDAG)
26	Port Macquarie Hastings Council
27	Australian Red Cross
28	Ms Peta Winney-Baartz
29	Mr James Smyth
30	Name suppressed
31	Financial Counselling Australia
32	Mid North Coast Legal Centre

No.	Author
33	Hunter Joint Organisation
34	Homelessness NSW
35	Local Government NSW
36	City of Newcastle
37	NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
38	Wollongong City Council
39	Central NSW Joint Organisation
40	Carers NSW Australia
41	Confidential
42	Mrs Ashleigh Avery
43	Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT
44	Confidential
45	MidCoast Council
46	Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance (NRCRA)
47	NSW Farmers
48	Insurance Council of Australia
49	Legal Aid NSW
50	NSW Government
51	Ms Lauren Davies

Appendix Six – List of Witnesses

03 November 2025

Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney, NSW

Witness	Position and Organisation
Ms Joy Kyriacou	Director of Programs, Members and Volunteers, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
Ms Clare Van Doorn	Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
Mr Jacob Walsh	NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross
Mr Brendan Pearce	Senior Adviser – Engagement, Australian Red Cross
Ms Cara Varian	CEO, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
Ms Eleanor Harris	Senior Project Officer, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
Mr Omar Bensaidi	Senior Policy Officer, Homelessness NSW
Ms Sally Bryant	Manager, Legal Aid NSW
Ms Elizabeth Lehmann	Senior Outreach Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW
Ms Sharon Gudu	CEO, Carers NSW Australia
Ms Bastien Wallace	Senior Policy Officer, People with Disability Australia (PWDA)
Mrs Jill Samuels	RSS Team Manager, Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre
Mr Sam Henderson	CEO, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance (NRCRA)
Ms Elly Bird	Executive Director, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance (NRCRA)
Mr Graeme McCrabb	RFS Member, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS
Ms Kylie Macfarlane	Deputy CEO and Chief Operating Officer, Insurance Council of Australia
The Hon. David Elliott	CEO, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT
Mr Tim Mackney	Board Director, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT

17 February 2026**Club Taree, Auditorium, Taree, NSW**

Witness	Position and Organisation
Mr Adrian Panuccio	General Manager, MidCoast Council
Mr Dylan Reeves	A/Director Operations and Planning, Kempsey Shire Council
Mr Steve Wilson	Executive Officer, Hunter Joint Organisation
Ms Anna Flack	Senior Project Coordinator, Hunter Joint Organisation
Ms Catherine Vaara	Chief Executive Officer, Lifeline Mid Coast
Mr James Prosser	Senior Project Manager, Port Macquarie- Hastings Council
Mr Chris Favalaro Click or tap here to enter text.	Group Manager, Organisational Project Delivery, Port Macquarie Hastings Council

20 February 2026**Parliament House, Macquarie Room, Sydney, NSW**

Witness	Position and Organisation
Mr Nathan McBriarty	Manager Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, Wollongong City Council
Ms Deborah Stafford	Manager, Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, Byron Shire Council
Mr Darcy Byrne	President, Local Government NSW
Mr David Reynolds	Chief Executive, Local Government NSW
Mr Charlie Chubb	Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW.ACT
Ms Niki Gill	Operations Manager North Coast, Uniting NSW.ACT
Mr Feargus O'Connor	Executive Director, Disaster Welfare and Business Continuity, Homes NSW, Department of Communities and Justice
Mr Greg Wells	Managing Director, Service NSW
Ms Cassandra Gibbens	Executive Director, Customer Care & Business Bureau, Service NSW
Ms Ashlee Abbott	Executive Director, Recovery, NSW Reconstruction Authority
Mrs Susie George	Executive Director, Regional Delivery, NSW Reconstruction Authority
Mr Graham Kennett	Executive Director, Reconstruction, NSW Reconstruction Authority

Mr Andrew Graham	Chief Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority
Mr Jeremy Bath	CEO, City of Newcastle
Mr Robert Dudgeon	Executive Manager Assets & Facilities, City of Newcastle
Ms Melissa Gore	Local Recovery Coordinator, City of Newcastle

Appendix Seven – Extracts from minutes

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 10

10.01am, 18 August 2025

Room 1254 and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler, Ms Higginson, Mr Murphy and Mr Williamson

Via videoconference: Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Kirby, Mr Lawrence and Adj. Prof. Smith.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Anna Tran, Yann Pearson, Elizabeth Hawken and Jordan Schembri.

1. Membership change

The Committee noted the following extracts from the Votes and Proceedings and the Minutes:

Legislative Council Minutes No. 100, 8 May 2025, entry no. 2:

JOINT COMMITTEES—MEMBERSHIP (Formal Business)

Ms Sharpe moved, as formal business, government business notice of motion no. 2:

(1) That:

...

- (c) Mr Barrett be appointed as a member of the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr Faraway, and
- (d) Mr Murphy be appointed as a member of the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority in place of Ms Suvaal, discharged.

(2) That a message be forwarded to the Legislative Assembly conveying the terms of the resolution agreed to by the House.

Question put and passed.

Legislative Assembly Votes and Proceedings no. 106, 8 May 2025, entry no. 17:

The Temporary Speaker (Ms Stephanie Di Pasqua) reported the following message from the Legislative Council:

The Legislative Council desires to inform the Legislative Assembly that it has this day agreed to the following resolution:

(1) That:

...

- (c) Mr Barrett be appointed as a member of the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority to fill the vacancy created by the resignation of Mr Farraway, and
- (d) Mr Murphy be appointed as a member of the Joint Select Committee on the NSW Reconstruction Authority in place of Ms Suvaal, discharged.

(2) That a message be forwarded to the Legislative Assembly conveying the terms of the resolution agreed to by the House.

2. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Higginson: That the minutes of the meeting of 21 March 2025 be confirmed.

3. ***

4. Proposed Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

4.1 Terms of reference and conduct of inquiry

The Committee considered the draft inquiry timeline. Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Butler: That the Committee seeks the Speaker's approval for travel up to three days to the North Coast, including Taree, for the purpose of conducting a public hearing and undertaking visits of inspection.

The Committee agreed that the secretariat will canvas possible dates for this travel.

The Committee considered the attached draft terms of reference. Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Butler:

- That the words 'Northern Rivers,' and 'and Hawkesbury-Nepean' be omitted from paragraph (a)(iii) of the attached draft terms of reference.
- That, pursuant to section 93(3)(b) of the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022, the Committee conduct an inquiry to review the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025, in accordance with the amended draft terms of reference.

The Committee agreed in-principle that there should be an inquiry to review the NSW Reconstruction Authority's operations regarding the catastrophic flooding affecting the Northern Rivers region from 2022.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Barrett: That the Committee call for submissions to be received by 3 October 2025.

4.2 Submissions

The Committee noted the draft suggested stakeholder list. Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy:

- That the Committee invite the amended draft list of stakeholders and any additional stakeholders as agreed by email to make a written submission.
- That members email any proposed additional stakeholders before COB on 21 August 2025, to be circulated by the secretariat the next day; and that any proposed stakeholders be invited unless an objection is received by email to the secretariat before COB on 25 August 2025.

The Committee agreed to consider conducting a public online survey alongside written submissions at a later meeting, and that the secretariat will prepare draft survey questions for consideration.

5. Private briefing with the NSW Reconstruction Authority

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy: That the Committee admit the following representatives from the NSW Reconstruction Authority to conduct a private briefing:

- Ashlee Abbott, Acting Head of Preparedness and Recovery
- Guy Mitford, Director, Ministerial & Executive Services
- Susie George, Executive Director, Regional Delivery, by videoconference.

Ms Abbott, Mr Mitford and Ms George were admitted to the meeting at 11.24 am and briefed the Committee.

Ms Abbott, Mr Mitford and Ms George left the meeting at 12.13 pm.

6. General business

Mr Barrett advised the Committee that he previously worked for GIVIT.

7. Next meeting

The Committee adjourned at 12.14 pm until a date and time to be confirmed.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 11

2.30pm, 11 September 2025

Room 1136 and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair), Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler, Mr Kirby, Adj. Prof. Smith and Mr Williamson.

Apologies

Ms Higginson, Mr Lawrence and Mr Murphy.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Anna Tran, Yann Pearson and Nicolle Gill.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Williamson, seconded by Mr Kirby: That the minutes of the meeting of 18 August 2025 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

3.1 Online survey

The Committee considered the draft survey questions.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Adj. Prof. Smith, seconded by Mr Barrett:

- That the Committee uses an online survey based on the amended draft introductory text and questions to give the broader community an opportunity to provide their views to the inquiry.
- That the closing date for the survey be 3 October 2025.

Ms Butler joined the meeting at 2.34 pm.

3.2 Inquiry work program

The Committee considered the updated suggested inquiry timeline.

Discussion ensued.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Butler, seconded by Mr Butler:

- That the Committee hold a public hearing on 3 November 2025 in Parliament House.
- That, pursuant to the Committee's previous resolution to travel to the Mid North Coast, that the Committee undertake this travel for the purpose of holding a regional public hearing and conducting private roundtables with stakeholders.

4. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 2.37 pm until a date and time to be confirmed.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 12

11.00am, 24 October 2025

Room 1043 and via videoconference

Members present

Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Butler, Ms Higginson and Mr Lawrence.

Via videoconference: Mr Barr (Chair), Mr Murphy and Mr Williamson.

Apologies

Mr Barrett, Mr Kirby, and Adj. Prof. Smith.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson and Jordan Schembri.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy, seconded by Ms Butler: That the minutes of the meeting of 11 September 2025 be confirmed.

2. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

2.1 Submissions

Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Ms Higginson:

- That the Committee notes its agreement via email on 30 September – 1 October to extend the deadline for submissions until Wednesday, 15 October and write to any stakeholders previously invited to advise them of the extension; and
- That the relevant details be updated on the Committee's webpage.
- Resolved on the motion of Ms Higginson, seconded by Mr Lawrence: That the Committee accepts the submissions from Insurance Council of Australia, NSW Farmers, and Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance as late submissions.
- The Committee considered the publication of submission received.
- Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Mr Murphy:
- That the Committee accepts and publishes submissions 2-8, 12-29, 31-35, 37-40, 42-43, and 45-48 in full.
- That the Committee accepts and publishes submissions 11 and 30 with the author's name suppressed.
- That the Committee accepts and publishes submissions 1 and 36 with redaction of attached correspondence.
- That the Committee accepts and publishes submission 9 with redactions of paragraphs 2 and 4 on page 2.
- That the Committee accepts and publishes submission 10 with redaction of paragraph 4 on page 1.
- That submission 41 and 44 remain confidential to the Committee and not be published.

2.2 Forthcoming submissions

The Committee noted extension requests from the NSW Reconstruction Authority and Legal Aid NSW to provide a written submission by 24 October 2025.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Butler, seconded by Ms Higginson: That the Committee adopts the following process in relation to submissions from the NSW Reconstruction Authority and Legal Aid NSW:

- Secretariat to review submissions for potential redactions and circulate to the Committee.
- Members to lodge any objections to publication of the submissions within one business day of being sent the submissions.
- Should no objections be raised by members within the specified timeframe, the Committee accepts and publishes submissions from the NSW Reconstruction Authority and Legal Aid NSW.
- Should objections be raised by members within the specified timeframe, the Committee to discuss the submission(s) at a subsequent meeting.

2.3 Survey

The Committee noted that the survey closed on 15 October 2025 and received 9 responses.

Discussion ensued.

2.4 Public hearing arrangements

The Committee noted the public hearing scheduled on 3 November 2025.

The Committee considered future public hearing arrangements and additional witnesses to be invited to give evidence.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Mr Lawrence: That the Committee hold a public hearing at Parliament House in early 2026.

2.5 Site visit

The Committee considered potential revised dates for a site visit to the North Coast in late February 2026, due to the recently adopted 2026 sitting calendar.

Discussion ensued.

3. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 11.13 am until 3 November 2025.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 13

9.18am, 3 November 2025

Jubilee Room, Parliament House and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler, Ms Higginson, Mr Murphy and Mr Williamson.

Via videoconference: Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Lawrence and Adj. Prof Smith.

Apologies

Mr Kirby.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson and Art Bae.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Murphy, seconded by Mr Barrett: That the minutes of the meeting of 24 October 2025 be confirmed.

2. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

2.1 Submissions

The Committee noted submissions received from Legal Aid NSW and NSW Government.

2.2 Survey

The Committee considered the 9 survey responses received and its approach to using survey responses as part of the inquiry.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Ms Higginson: That the Committee authorises a deidentified summary of the free text responses provided by survey respondents to be included as an appendix to the final report of the inquiry.

3. Pre-hearing procedural resolutions

The Committee considered the notice of public hearing for Monday 3 November 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Williamson, seconded by Adj. Prof Smith:

- That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of public hearing for Monday 3 November 2025 to give evidence in relation to the review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025.
- That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 3 November 2025, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.
- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by Monday 10 November 2025 at 4pm;
 - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections the questions within one day of receiving the questions.

- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 14 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 9.25 am.

4. Public hearing - Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

Witnesses and the public were admitted. The Chair opening the public hearing at 9.30 am and made a short opening statement.

Mr Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Mr Brendan Pearce, Senior Adviser, Engagement, Australian Red Cross was sworn and examined by videoconference.

Ms Joy Kyriacou, Director of Programs, Members and Volunteers, St Vincent de Paul Society was sworn and examined.

Ms Clare Van Doorn, Regional Director, Operations North East, St Vincent de Paul Society was affirmed and examined.

Mr Walsh and Ms Van Doorn each made opening statements. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

Ms Cara Varian, Chief Executive Officer, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) was affirmed and examined.

Ms Eleanor Harris, Senior Project Officer, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS) was sworn and examined.

Mr Omar Bensaidi, Senior Policy Officer, Homelessness NSW was affirmed and examined.

Ms Varian and Mr Bensaidi each made opening statements. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 11.10 am and recommenced at 11.31 am.

Ms Sally Bryant, Manager, Disaster Response Legal Service and Ms Elizabeth Lehmann, Senior Solicitor, Disaster Response Legal Service, Legal Aid NSW were affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Mr Lawrence declared that an existing social relationship with Ms Elizabeth Lehmann.

Ms Bryant made an opening statement. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

Ms Sharon Gudu, Chief Executive Officer, Carers NSW Australia was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Ms Bastien Wallace, Senior Policy Officer, People with Disability Australia was sworn and examined.

Ms Gudu and Ms Wallace each made opening statements. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 12.32 pm and recommenced at 1.15 pm.

Mrs Jill Samuels, Richmond Valley RSS Team Manager, Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Mr Sam Henderson, Steering Committee Member, and Ms Elly Bird, Steering Committee Member, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance were affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Mrs Samuels and Ms Bird each made opening statements. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

Mr Graeme McCrabb, Menindee RFS Member, Menindee Headquarters Brigade, NSW RFS was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

The Committee questioned the witness.

Evidence concluded, the witness withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 2.31 pm and recommenced at 3.15 pm.

Ms Kylie Macfarlane Deputy Chief Executive Officer and Chief Operating Officer, Insurance Council of Australia was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Ms Macfarlane made an opening statement. The Committee questioned the witness.

Evidence concluded, the witness withdrew.

The Hon. David Elliott, Chief Executive Officer, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT was sworn and examined by videoconference.

Mr Tim Mackney, Board Director, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia (IPWEA) NSW & ACT was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Mr Elliot and Mr Mackney each made opening statements. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 4.23 pm.

5. Post-hearing deliberative meeting

The Chair resumed the meeting at 4.23 pm

5.1 Publication orders

Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Mr Barrett: That the Committee authorises the publication of the corrected transcript of public evidence given today, and that the transcript be published on the Committee's webpage.

6. General business

7. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 4.28 pm until a date and time to be confirmed.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 14

11.33am, 2 February 2026

Room 1043 and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair), Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler and Mr Williamson.

Via videoconference: Ms Higginson, Mr Lawrence and Mr Murphy.

Apologies

Adj. Prof. Smith.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson, Joan Douce and Riley Duncombe.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Ms Butler: That the minutes of the meeting of 3 November 2025 be confirmed.

2. ***

3. **Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025**

3.1 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The Committee noted receipt of answers to questions on notice from:

- Ms Sharon Gudu, Carers NSW, received 23 November 2025
- The Hon. David Elliott, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia NSW & ACT, received 10 December 2025.
- Ms Kylie Macfarlane, Insurance Council of Australia, received 11 December 2025.

The Committee noted receipt of answers to supplementary questions from:

- Ms Bastien Wallace, People with Disability Australia, received 1 December 2025
- Mr Tim Mackney, Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia NSW & ACT, received 3 December 2025
- Ms Eleanor Harris, NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS), received 9 December 2025
- Mr Brendan Pearce, Australian Red Cross, received 10 December 2025
- Ms Sharon Gudu, Carers NSW, received 10 December 2025
- Ms Kylie Macfarlane, Insurance Council of Australia, received 11 December 2025.
- Mrs Jill Samuels, Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre, received 12 December 2025
- Mr Findley Hipkin, Legal Aid NSW, received 18 December 2025
- Ms Clare Van Doorn, St Vincent de Paul Society NSW, received 24 December 2025
- Ms Elly Bird, Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance, received 16 January 2026.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Butler: That answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions received from the following organisations be published on the Committee's webpage:

- Carers NSW
- Institute of Public Works Engineering Australasia NSW & ACT
- Insurance Council of Australia
- People with Disabilities Australia
- NSW Council of Social Service (NCOSS)
- Australian Red Cross
- Mid Richmond Neighbourhood Centre
- Legal Aid NSW
- St Vincent de Paul Society NSW
- Northern Rivers Community Resilience Alliance.

3.2 Clarification of evidence

The Committee noted correspondence from Mr Jacob Walsh, NSW State Director, Australian Red Cross on 14 November 2025, clarifying evidence given at the public hearing on 3 November 2025.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Mr Williamson: That the Committee:

- accept and publish Mr Walsh's correspondence clarifying evidence given at the public hearing on 3 November 2025 on the Committee's webpage
- insert a footnote providing a link to the published correspondence at the relevant section of the transcript.

3.3 Proposed site visit to Taree

The Committee noted the proposed itinerary for the site visit to Taree on 16 – 17 February 2026, including conducting a site visit, stakeholder roundtable and public hearing.

Discussion ensued.

3.4 Public hearing

The Committee noted the public hearing scheduled for 20 February 2026 at Parliament House and the proposed witness list.

4. General business

5. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 11.44 am until 17 February 2026.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 15

9.21am, 17 February 2026

Auditorium, Club Taree

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair), Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler, Ms Higginson, Mr Lawrence, Adj. Prof. Smith and Mr Williamson.

Apologies

Mr Kirby and Mr Murphy.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson and Riley Duncombe.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Butler, seconded by Adj. Prof. Smith: That the minutes of the meeting of 2 February 2026 be confirmed.

2. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

2.1 Pre-hearing procedural resolutions

The Committee considered the notice of public hearing for Tuesday 17 February 2026.

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Higginson, seconded by Mr Lawrence:

- That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of public hearing for Tuesday, 17 February 2026 to give evidence in relation to the review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025.
- That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 17 February 2026 by committee staff and media organisations, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023; and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.
- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by Friday, 27 February 2026 at 4pm;
 - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections the questions within one day of receiving the questions.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 14 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 9.24 am.

3. Public hearing - Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

Witnesses and the public were admitted. The Chair opened the hearing at 9.35 am and made a short opening statement.

Mr Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, MidCoast Council was sworn and examined.

Mr Dylan Reeves, A/Director Operation and Planning, Kempsey Shire Council was affirmed and examined.

Mr James Prosser, Senior Project Manager, and Mr Chris Favaloro, Group Manager, Project Delivery, Port Macquarie-Hastings Council, were affirmed and examined.

Mr Adrian Panuccio made an opening statement. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, Mr Dylan Reeves, Mr James Prosser and Mr Chris Favaloro withdrew.

Mr Steve Wilson, Executive Officer, and Mr Anna Flack, Senior Project Coordinator, Hunter Joint Organisation were affirmed and examined.

Mr Steve Wilson and Ms Anna Flack each made opening statements. The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 11.12 am and recommenced at 11.31 am.

Ms Catherine Vaara, Chief Executive Officer, Lifeline Mid Coast was affirmed and examined.

Ms Vaara made an opening statement. The committee questioned the witness.

Evidence concluded, the witness withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 12.00 pm.

4. Post-hearing deliberative meeting

The Chair resumed the meeting at 12.07 pm.

4.1 Publication orders

Resolved on the motion of Mr Williamson, seconded by Mr Barrett: That the Committee authorises the publication of the corrected transcript of public evidence given today, and that the transcript be published on the Committee's webpage.

4.2 Documents tendered

Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Ms Butler: That the Committee accept and publish the following document tendered during the public hearing:

- Impact Assessment – May 2025 1:500 Year Flood Event Version 3, presented by Mr Adrian Panuccio, General Manager, MidCoast Council.

5. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 12.09 pm until Friday 20 February 2026.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 16

9.15am, 20 February 2026

Macquarie Room and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler, Ms Higginson, Mr Lawrence, Mr Kirby, Adj. Prof. Smith and Mr Williamson.

Via videoconference: Ms Butler (Deputy Chair)

Apologies

Mr Lawrence and Mr Murphy.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson, Joan Douce and Riley Duncombe.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Higginson, seconded by Mr Williamson: That the minutes of the meeting of 17 February 2026 be confirmed.

2. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

2.1 ***

2.2 Pre-hearing procedural resolutions

The Committee considered the notice of public hearing for Friday 20 February 2026.

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Williamson, seconded by Mr Barrett:

- That the Committee invites the witnesses listed in the notice of public hearing for Friday, 20 February 2026 to give evidence in relation to the review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025.
- That the Committee authorises the audio-visual recording, photography and broadcasting of the public hearing on 20 February 2026 by committee staff and media organisations, in accordance with the Legislative Assembly's resolution of 9 May 2023 and the Assembly's guidelines for coverage of proceedings for parliamentary committees administered by the Legislative Assembly.
- That the Committee authorises requests from organisations appearing on 20 February 2025 to access hearing footage from Parliament on Demand
- That the Committee adopt the following process in relation to supplementary questions:
 - Members to email any proposed supplementary questions for witnesses to the secretariat by Friday, 27 February 2026 at 4pm;
 - Secretariat to then circulate all proposed supplementary questions to Committee, with members to lodge any objections the questions within one day of receiving the questions.
- That witnesses be requested to return answers to questions taken on notice and any supplementary questions within 14 days of the date on which the questions are forwarded to witnesses.

The Chair adjourned the meeting at 9.27 am

3. Public hearing - Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

Witnesses and the public were admitted. The Chair opened the hearing at 9.30 am and made a short opening statement.

Mr Jeremy Bath, CEO, City of Newcastle was affirmed and examined.

Mr Robert Dudgeon, Executive Manager Assets & Facilities, City of Newcastle was affirmed and examined.

Ms Melissa Gore, Local Recovery Coordinator, City of Newcastle, was affirmed and examined.

The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

Mr Nathan McBriarty, Manager Infrastructure Strategy and Planning, Wollongong City Council was sworn and examined.

Ms Deborah Stafford, Manager, Social and Cultural Planning, Byron Shire Council, was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

Mr Darcy Byrne, President, Local Government NSW was sworn and examined by videoconference.

Mr David Reynolds, Chief Executive, Local Government NSW was sworn and examined by videoconference.

The Committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

The hearing adjourned at 11:08 am and recommenced at 11.15 am.

Mr Charlie Chubb, Head of Northern & Western NSW, Uniting NSW.ACT was sworn and examined by videoconference.

Ms Niki Gill, Operations Manager North Coast, Uniting NSW.ACT was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

The committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witness withdrew.

Mr Feargus O'Connor, Executive Director, Disaster Welfare and Business Continuity, Homes NSW, Department of Communities and Justice was affirmed and examined.

Mr Greg Wells, Managing Director, Service NSW was sworn and examined.

Ms Cassandra Gibbens, Executive Director, Customer Care & Business Bureau, Service NSW was affirmed and examined.

The committee questioned the witnesses.

Evidence concluded, the witnesses withdrew.

Ms Ashlee Abbott, Executive Director, Recovery, NSW Reconstruction Authority was affirmed and examined.

Mrs Susie George, Executive Director, Regional Delivery, NSW Reconstruction Authority was affirmed and examined.

Mr Graham Kennett, Executive Director, Reconstruction, NSW Reconstruction Authority was affirmed and examined by videoconference.

Mr Andrew Graham, Chief Operating Officer, NSW Reconstruction Authority was affirmed and examined.

The committee questioned the witness.

Evidence concluded, the witness withdrew.

The public hearing concluded at 1.36pm.

4. Post-hearing deliberative meeting

The Chair resumed the meeting at 1.49pm.

4.1 Publication orders

Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Mr Kirby: That the Committee authorises the publication of the corrected transcript of public evidence given today, and that the transcript be published on the Committee's webpage.

4.2 Documents tendered

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Mr Kirby:

- That the Committee publishes the written opening statements provided by the following witnesses on the Committee's webpage:
 - Wollongong City Council
 - Local Government NSW
 - Uniting NSW.ACT

- Service NSW
- City of Newcastle.

5. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 1.50pm until a date and time to be confirmed.

MINUTES OF MEETING no. 17

10.00am, 21 April 2026

Room 1254 and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair) and Ms Higginson

Via videoconference: Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Barrett, Mr Butler, Mr Kirby, Adj. Prof. Smith and Mr Williamson.

Apologies

Mr Lawrence and Mr Murphy.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson, Joan Douce and Riley Duncombe.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Ms Higginson, seconded by Mr Barrett: That the minutes of the meeting of 20 February 2026 be confirmed.

2. Correspondence

The Committee considered the following items of correspondence received:

- Email dated 24 February 2026 from Ms Lauren Davies, Wingham Flood Hub, regarding a letter provided to the Chair following the Committee roundtable discussion on 16 February 2026
- Email dated 17 March 2026 from Ms Danielle Johnston, on behalf of Mr Adrian Pannucio, General Manager, MidCoast Council, clarifying MidCoast Council's response to a question on notice from the 17 February 2026 hearing.

Resolved on the motion of Adj. Prof Smith, seconded by Mr Butler: That the Committee note email correspondence received from Ms Davies on 24 February 2026, accept Ms Davies' letter as a late submission and publish it in full on the Committee's webpage.

3. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

3.1 Answers to questions on notice and supplementary questions

The Committee noted receipt of answers to questions on notice from:

- Hunter Joint Organisation, received 9 March 2026
- Local Government NSW, received 12 March 2026
- Kempsey Shire Council, received 18 March 2026
- Port Macquarie Hastings Council, received 26 March 2026
- NSW Reconstruction Authority, received 30 March 2026
- Homes NSW, received 7 April 2026.

The Committee noted receipt of answers to supplementary questions from:

- Local Government NSW, received 25 March 2026
- Service NSW, received 25 March 2026
- Hunter Joint Organisation, received 26 March 2026
- Port Macquarie Hastings Council, received 26 March 2026
- MidCoast Council, received 27 March 2026
- Kempsey Shire Council, received 30 March 2026
- NSW Reconstruction Authority, received 30 March 2026
- Homes NSW, received 7 April 2026.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Bulter, seconded by Mr Williamson: That answers to questions taken on notice and supplementary questions received from the following organisations be published on the Committee's webpage:

- MidCoast Council
- Kempsey Shire Council
- Port Macquarie-Hastings Shire Council
- Hunter Joint Organisation
- Local Government NSW
- Service NSW
- Homes NSW
- NSW Reconstruction Authority.

4. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 10.02 AM until Friday 15 May 2026.

UNCONFIRMED MINUTES OF MEETING no. 18

1.32pm, 15 May 2026

Room 1254 and via videoconference

Members present

Mr Barr (Chair, by videoconference), Mr Butler

Via videoconference: Ms Butler (Deputy Chair), Mr Barrett, Ms Higginson, Mr Murphy, Adj. Prof. Smith. and Mr Williamson.

Apologies

Mr Kirby and Mr Lawrence.

Officers in attendance

Matt Johnson, Belinda Ramsay, Yann Pearson, Joan Douce and Riley Duncombe.

1. Confirmation of minutes

Resolved, on the motion of Mr Williamson, seconded by Ms Butler: That the minutes of the meeting of 21 April 2026 be confirmed.

2. Review of the operations of the NSW Reconstruction Authority regarding the NSW East Coast severe weather from May 2025

2.1. Consideration of Chair's draft report

Resolved on the motion of Ms Higginson, seconded by Mr Barrett: That the Committee agrees to record the meeting for the purposes of committee staff preparing the minutes and report amendments, and that the recording be deleted once the report is tabled.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Higginson, seconded by Mr Barrett: That the Committee considers the Chair's draft report chapter by chapter.

The Committee considered Chapter One of the report.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Butler, seconded by Ms Butler: That Chapter One stands as part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Two of the report.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Mr Williamson: That a new finding be inserted before paragraph 2.32 to read:

Throughout the events within the scope of this inquiry, challenges were regularly encountered in the transition from response to recovery suggesting more work is needed to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government agencies and community stakeholders during this transition.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Higginson: That a new recommendation be inserted before paragraph 2.32 to read:

That the NSW Government, led by NSW Reconstruction Authority and including all other relevant agencies and stakeholders, develop guiding principles to ensure that roles and expectations are clear and consistent for government agencies and community stakeholders during the transition from response to recovery.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Mr Butler: That Chapter Two as amended stands as part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Three of the report.

Mr Butler left the meeting.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Butler, seconded by Mr Barrett:

- That recommendation 8 be amended as follows:
 - omitting the words 'consider co-funding with local councils' and inserting instead 'fund'
 - inserting the words 'and Preparedness' following the words 'permanent Community Recovery'
 - inserting the words 'or at a regional level' following the words 'Officers within councils'
 - inserting the words 'and preparedness' following the words 'in disaster recovery'
 - inserting the words 'and disaster risk profile' following the words 'the financial health'
 - omitting the words 'that need it most' and inserting instead 'on a needs basis'.
- That committee staff make consequential amendments to paragraph 3.58 to reflect the amended recommendation 8.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Mr Williamson: That a new finding be inserted after Finding 3 to read:

Requiring people to repeatedly recount their experiences across different agencies adds to the burden of already distressed community members and undermines the effectiveness of recovery assistance.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Butler: That recommendation 10 be amended by inserting the word 'urgently' after the words 'led by Service NSW,'.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Williamson, seconded by Ms Higginson: That Chapter Three as amended stands as part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Four of the report.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Butler:

- That a new finding be inserted before paragraph 4.10 to read:

The Resilient Homes Program is performing significantly below community expectations and needs, with stakeholders observing funding issues, restrictive eligibility criteria, and complex and length application and approval processes along with limited or no rationale in relation to unfavourable decisions, adding to community frustration and uncertainty during recovery.
- That a new recommendation be inserted before paragraph 4.10 to read:

That, in consultation with relevant councils, the NSW Government, led by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, should make improvements to the Resilient Homes Program, specifically including improvements to the timeliness, eligibility criteria and the application and approval process.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett:

- That a new finding be inserted before paragraph 4.25 to read:
The current funding framework for betterment represents a missed opportunity to reduce the long-term costs of successive disasters as rebuilding to pre-disaster standards in communities that have experienced repeated disaster events is neither efficient nor sustainable.
- That a new recommendation be inserted before paragraph 4.25 to read:
That the NSW Government implement ways in which betterment can be incorporated into future funding frameworks and through the Authority should give consideration to opportunities to work with local stakeholders to determine which betterment initiatives are likely to deliver the greatest savings, in the event of future reconstruction costs following a disaster.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Butler, seconded by Ms Higginson: That recommendation 12 be amended by inserting the words 'through a dedicated fund' following the words 'to strengthen community capacity and capability'.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Higginson: That Chapter Four as amended stands as part of the report.

The Committee considered Chapter Five of the report.

Mr Barrett moved:

- That a new finding be inserted before paragraph 5.16 to read:
Recent changes to Emergency Grant Reliefs have seen an increase in complexity and decrease in the upfront payment for farmers which was impactful after the May 2025 flooding events in particular.
- That a new recommendation be inserted before paragraph 5.16 to read:
That the NSW Government, in consultation NSW Farmers and other agricultural stakeholders, streamline the Primary Industry Grants and other assistance, with particular attention being paid to streamlining the application and approval process.
- That a new recommendation be inserted before paragraph 5.16 to read:
That the NSW Government raise the upfront primary producer grants from \$5,000 to provide more fit-for-purpose immediate support for farmers to aid the recovery process.
- That a new paragraph be inserted after paragraph 5.18 to read:
Much of this complexity has been added to the process post a recent audit of the 2022 Emergency Relief Grants that saw additional requirements introduced for primary producers to apply for grants

available. Significant changes were also made to the upfront payment available without proof of payment, reducing these from \$25 000 to \$5 000 which proved extremely challenging for farmers during this event. [Insert footnote: Submission 47, pp. 9-10.]

Question put.

The Committee divided.

Ayes 4: Mr Barrett, Ms Higginson, Adj. Prof Smith and Mr Williamson.

Noes 2: Mr Barr and Ms Butler.

Question passed.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Butler: That a new finding be inserted after Finding 6 to read:

The current Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements application process has proven overly bureaucratic, complex and time consuming, all at a time when council efforts should be directed to recovery.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Butler: That recommendation 14 be amended by:

- inserting the words 'and increase' following the words 'consider opportunities to improve'
- inserting the words 'and resources' following the words 'consistency of guidance'.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Ms Higginson: That a new finding be inserted before recommendation 15 to read:

The Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements category system is too complicated and there is a lack of clarity on what can be claimed under each category.

Resolved on the motion of Mr Barrett, seconded by Mr Williamson:

- That a new finding be inserted after recommendation 16 to read:
Many councils remain out of pocket for significant amounts of money, owed to them through unpaid Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and other recovery payments.
- That a new recommendation be inserted after recommendation 16 to read:
That the NSW Government work with the Australian Government to ensure all monies still owed to councils for approved and completed Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements-funded works be paid immediately, so as to aid those local government areas in their recovery and future resilience.

Resolved on the motion of Ms Butler, seconded by Ms Higginson: That Chapter Five as amended stands as part of the report.

Resolved on the motion of Adj. Prof Smith, seconded by Ms Butler:

- That the draft report as amended be the report of the Committee and that it be signed by the Chair and presented to the House.

- That the Chair and committee staff be permitted to correct stylistic, typographical and grammatical errors.
- That, once tabled, the report be posted on the Committee's webpage.

2.2. Proposed report cover

The Committee considered proposed options for the report cover.

Discussion ensued.

3. General business

4. Next Meeting

The meeting adjourned at 3.21pm until a date and time to be confirmed.