



DUNGOG SHIRE COUNCIL

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CFD
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Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements
Productivity Commission
LB2 Collins Street East
MELBOURNE VIC 8003

Email: disaster.funding@pc.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam

Submission to the Australian Government Productivity Commission Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements. In brief Dungog Shire Council is situated within the Hunter region of NSW and is situated in the foothills of the Barrington Tops the Shire comprises an area of 2248Km² and has three main river systems that all start within the Barrington Tops.

From an infrastructure perspective the Shire services a population of 8,600 residents, through a regional road network of 123 Km, a local road network of 591 Km the Shire also has 129 bridges of which 46 are timber plus a further 42 causeways /low level crossings.

It is fair to say that in the last seven years this Shire has unfortunately had more than it's share of natural disaster declarations the majority of which have related to flooding, the last event in March 2014 was a storm event that left a trail of destruction across the Shire.

Generally speaking the community has coped with the flooding events as the waters quickly move downstream towards the Hunter river. However if bridges or causeways have been impacted by the floods that result in the closure of roads for periods of time whilst the resilience of the community is relatively strong it does get tested when such damage impacts on their lives as regards travelling to their place of work or gaining access to their property. We have witnessed the risks that some foolish members of our community have undertaken.

As a member of the Hunter Councils group the Council has been involved in climate change strategies and reviewed our risk profile in relation to the impact of natural disasters. However with the three river systems that can rapidly rise due to the vast catchment areas that they cover the Council is very conscious of the damage that can be caused as a consequence of a major flood.


DungogShire
Life as it should be.

COUNCIL'S VISION:

A vibrant, united community, with a sustainable economy. An area where rural character, community safety and lifestyle are preserved.

Council would highlight that there should be greater consideration as regards funding resilience/ betterment programs. The nature of flood events within our Shire consistently results in certain areas being damaged time and again whilst we have been funded to make the repairs the financial position of this Council does not enable us to redesign and relocate road infrastructure to prevent the problem from re-occurring. If funds were provided to enable solutions to be put in place then the impacts of major flood events would not result in a major drain on the public purse in the longer term.

Council would also raise the issue on Page 27 of the paper concerning land use planning and infrastructure policies, one of Councils underlying issues is adequate recording and monitoring of flood levels Councils ability to fund flood management strategies is severely hampered by our lack of financial resources (rates base \$5Mil), work on studies within our Shire has been piece-meal over a number of years.

There is this constant issue as regards funding the studies, Council needs the studies undertaken to assist with improved land use planning in the development of Councils Local Environmental Plan (LEP) yet Council cannot afford to fund the magnitude of flood studies still required within our LGA.

With key State agencies responsible for the river systems within our LGA Council would argue that it should be the responsibility of the State to fully fund flood studies, in view of technological advancement they should have the access to far more advanced spatial systems that could have been monitoring the flood events of recent years. Dungog Shire Council with a staff of 68 FTE's does not have the staff resources or expertise to drive this process. Yet we are held accountable for the flood related mapping data that is linked to our LEP and decisions surrounding developable land are based on mapping that in some cases will not be as accurate as it should be and at times economic development opportunities have been lost as a consequence.

Council would argue that the Commonwealth needs to maintain the current funding regime for Category B infrastructure funding. We don't believe that decisions to transfer cost to local communities should be done behind the veil of inquiries and issues papers. If the Government proposes to make any amendments to the current arrangements that will impact upon communities either directly or indirectly then they should engage with communities not leave it up to local government to explain the situation after an event has taken place.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input into this inquiry.

Yours faithfully

Craig Deasey PSM
General Manager