

21 October 2014

Productivity Commission
Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements
By email: disaster.funding@pc.gov.au

Dear Sir/Madam,

Response to Draft Report - Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements

Save the Children Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comments on the Draft Report of the Productivity Commission's Public Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements (the Report).

Save the Children strongly supports the focus of the Report on the need for more efficient planning and mitigation of risks. However, we are disappointed that there is a lack of focus on funding for mitigation activities that engage with children to build resilience and preparedness. Children are only mentioned four times across the two volumes of the Report, and only in relation to the allocation of payments for those adversely affected by major disasters.

As a result of our work in humanitarian emergencies and disaster risk reduction, both in Australia and internationally, we have observed the importance of building disaster resilience and preparedness amongst children. Disaster education is a key avenue for building this capacity, which in turn builds capacity in families and communities. Given the potential for long term negative effects of disasters on children it is also essential that resilience and mitigation strategies are tailored to their unique needs.

Placing children at the centre of disaster risk reduction, emergency management planning and mitigation activities will have positive, flow on effects for families and broader communities. It will also build long-term societal resilience.

Unfortunately, these matters are not explored in sufficient detail by the Report. This is a significant gap, however, it can be easily addressed. In this regard, we reiterate the need for an increased effort in developing strategies that are directed towards better equipping children, families and communities to prepare for, respond to and cope with the impacts of natural disasters.

Save the Children proposes that increased funding should be directed towards mitigation efforts to assist children and families, in order to build community resilience to disasters. We make the following key recommendations for inclusion in the Report:

1. The national curriculum should maintain its existing focus on disaster education and increase opportunities where possible in the early years;
2. With an increase in funding for mitigation activities some of these funds should be directed to the development of a national day of disaster preparedness: a dedicated annual day in the education curriculum where schools work with emergency service organisations and local governments to run education activities on planning, preparing and building community capacity to respond to natural disasters and emergencies; and
3. Direct national mitigation funding to Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction activities.

Supporting school education and providing a coordinated focus on Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction activities will ensure that children are engaged in building community preparedness and resilience. There are many examples of young people taking the lead in the aftermath of disasters. Ensuring that children have the knowledge to prepare and respond to disasters is vital to achieve the best outcomes for entire communities.

Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction also provides new opportunities in the Australian context. Funding activities that allow children to engage with the emergency management arrangements in their local area will build disaster resilience now and for future generations. Research that is currently funded through the Bushfire and Natural Hazard Collaborative Research Centre will deliver new knowledge with regard to Child-Centred Disaster Risk Reduction, which may lead to programs that could be funded for national implementation. Looking to these emerging areas of research for innovative and creative solutions to build disaster resilience may lead to more targeted mitigation spending.

Save the Children will be attending the Commission's public hearing on Tuesday, 28 October in Melbourne. We can provide further detail in support of this submission at that hearing. In the meantime, if you have any questions or would like to discuss please do not hesitate to contact me

Yours sincerely,

Mat Tinkler
Director, Policy & Public Affairs