

### COULD THIS FEDERAL SENATE REPORT MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Last month the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience published its report *Boots on the ground: Raising resilience* ([https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/Senate/Disaster\\_Resilience](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Disaster_Resilience)).

The Select Committee reported on the current preparedness, response and recovery workforce models, including the role of the Australian Defence Force and, among others, the civil and volunteer groups and state-based services in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters. It also considered other models for repurposing or adapting Australian civil and volunteer groups.

#### Recommendations of note were:

Funding be provided direct to local government to facilitate disaster recovery and resilience (Recommendation 3).

- Legislate to provide leave from employment for volunteers (Recommendation 4).
- Allow volunteers tax deductions for training and courses that are part of their emergency volunteering (Recommendation 5).
- Australian Government provide a comprehensive resource centre for mental health resources, training and support for first responders (Recommendation 6)
- Incentivise young Australians to participate in disaster response and recovery volunteer organisations (Recommendation 10).

The Select Committee acknowledged that State Emergency Service agencies must be supported to ensure their levels of resourcing and training are maintained and sustainable in the face of increased demand for their services. It went on to say what we all know: the role of volunteers cannot be understated.

What the report also highlighted were the opportunities for collaboration between local and Federal agencies and direct funding to provide resources for response and recovery after disaster events. Whilst State Emergency Service units provide local and immediate response, there is a need for additional capacity to sustain the response and recovery over longer periods of time. This requires community engagement and a level of interoperability between State and Federal agencies.

#### There is something in this Report for everyone

- State Government and local Governments can leverage off Federal funding and other resources.
- Local Government can better influence recovery that meets local needs.
- Emergency service volunteer brigades, groups and units can access multiple resources and benefit from nationally recognised training, alternative maintenance of competency pathways and interoperability with a wider range of organisations.

The SES Volunteers Association supports SES volunteers and their selfless contributions to Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR) in its local community, and welcomes collaboration with DFES and local government in the interests of safer communities.

*Submitted by A Hawke, SESVA Vice President South*