

Research Director
Legal Affairs and Community Safety Committee
Parliament House
George Street
Brisbane Qld 4000

Dear Sir / Madam

The Australian Red Cross is concerned at the intent of the Disaster Management Amendment Bill 2014 before the Committee as outlined:

The primary objective of the Bill is to create a new Cabinet committee called the Queensland Disaster Management Committee to replace the State Disaster Management Group and the Disaster Management Cabinet Committee

The disaster management advisory group found that improvements to disaster management governance would be achieved by creating a new Cabinet committee called the Queensland Disaster Management Committee (QDMC). The QDMC will replace the DMCC and SDMG and formally allow direct Ministerial participation in the strategic management of disaster events.

Formation of the QDMC will simplify Queensland's disaster management structure by reducing one layer of governance and allow a direct line of communication between the QDMC and the State Disaster Coordinator and State Recovery Coordinator. This would result in faster and better-informed decision-making during a disaster event.

1. Role of Red Cross in Emergency Management

Red Cross aims to improve the lives of vulnerable people by mobilising the power of humanity and for nearly 100 years has worked across Australia delivering a variety of services. One core service is assisting people affected by disasters.

Red Cross has the ability to draw together our international expertise, our collective national disaster management experience, as well as our expertise in delivering a broad range of community services including mental health, transitional housing, homelessness and social isolation services with diverse client groups. Added to this, the ability to draw upon our widespread membership base across Queensland enhances our capability to be a leader in the provision of evacuation planning and management.

Red Cross is understood by all in the community as having a specific role to play during times of disaster. This unique role directly relates to the organisational status of Red Cross. All Red Cross Red Crescent National Societies are viewed as auxiliaries to their respective governments in the humanitarian field. In Australia, this recognition is enabled through the Royal Charter of 1941. This

100
years

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means that Red Cross National Societies are recognised by their country's government as a voluntary aid society, supporting public authorities in humanitarian tasks, according to the needs of the people.

Red Cross has been providing emergency services across Australia for a century now, and has been recognised as being the first disaster response organisation in Australia, providing relief and recovery support during the 1918 influenza pandemic²⁰.

Red Cross, in our own right, and as an auxiliary to public authorities in the humanitarian field, already contribute to a wide spectrum of emergency management planning and activity, investing significant organisational internal funds to support our activities. This contribution to promoting disaster resilience has expanded over recent years from basic relief activities, to significant contributions to assist householders to prepare for the true impacts of disasters, supporting people in the response period, and assisting individuals and communities to recover in the long term.

The aim of the program is to assist individuals, households, and communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies across Australia. This is achieved through mobilising up to 7,700 volunteers, supported by a staff of 70, drawing upon our experience of previous emergencies both nationally and internationally and through strategic partnerships, such as with the Australian Psychology Society and Save the Children. Red Cross also draws upon substantial organisational resources to support the emergency services activities.

Red Cross Emergency Services has four strategic outcomes, relating to:

1. Emergency preparedness
2. Emergency response
3. Emergency recovery
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

In Queensland, the primary responsibilities of Red Cross under the current State Disaster Management arrangements are:

- to manage the registration of evacuees and associated inquiries in conjunction with the Queensland Police Service
- to manage evacuation centres as requested by and formally agreed with local councils
- provision of personal support services
- support to Department of Communities to provide community development activities within a disaster recovery setting
- provision of information and referrals to impacted individuals and communities.

In recent years, Red Cross has also entered into a number of Memoranda of Understanding with local councils in areas of high risk, where Red Cross has personnel capacity or capability to mobilise resources quickly to manage evacuation centres on their behalf.

To operationalise these commitments, Red Cross currently has more than 1500 emergency services personnel directly involved in emergency preparedness, response and recovery in Queensland alone, as part of a national Emergency Services workforce of approximately 75 staff and 10,000 volunteers.

Red Cross is currently represented on eleven Local Disaster Management Groups, six Welfare Sub Committees and eight District Disaster Management Groups, mostly in areas where we have local arrangements to provide evacuation centre management, personal support and/or emergency registration and inquiry services during emergencies.

The representation of the Red Cross on the current State Disaster Management Group (SDMG) enables the resources of the organization to be deployed effectively and gives Government authorities an opportunity to hear the voice of the community and the voluntary sector. While appreciative of the potential for the Chair of the proposed QDRMC under s 19A to invite Red Cross and other organizations as required, a standing ex-officio representative role would recognize the role and contribution of Red Cross in disasters in recent years in Queensland.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience's recognises that emergency management and disaster resilience is a partnership between communities, agencies, the private sector and governments. Accordingly the membership of these committees should reflect this "shared responsibility". Governments will end up with a much richer policy and practice environment if they include a broader membership base at all levels of governance. We would extend this approach to the inclusion of the local government sector, and would advocate for the inclusion of the Local Government Association in senior bodies.

Recommendation

Red Cross recommends:

- **That the current engagement of the Red Cross in senior levels of decision-making in response to disasters be maintained, including as ex-officio delegates on a standing invitation to the proposed Queensland Disaster Management Committee (QDMC).**

2. The Auxiliary role of Red Cross in Emergency Management

In disaster situations it needs to be recognized that the Red Cross is not an NGO, but a formal and legally authorized auxiliary to Government.

Australian Red Cross, as part of the global International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, has a specific mandate to support the public authorities in their humanitarian work, including in the area of disaster management.

Through this independent and auxiliary role, National Societies and states negotiate clearly defined roles and responsibilities in providing risk reduction and disaster management activities; health and social programs; the promotion of international humanitarian law and International Disaster Response Law; and humanitarian values. During wartime, National Societies assist the affected civilian population and support the armed forces' medical services where appropriate.

This auxiliary relationship is recognised in international law and is found in legally binding documents domestically, such as the 1941 Australian Red Cross Royal Charter. It is one of the distinguishing features which sets the Movement apart from the UN, NGOs and other organisations who provide humanitarian services.

The practical implications of the auxiliary role differ from country to country, however the common thread is that National Societies are reliable partners for national and local public authorities, and have a strong capacity to mobilise human and material resources at the community level.

An illustration of Australian Red Cross fulfilling this auxiliary role is the integral part it plays in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters in Queensland. This involves a range of activities from recruiting and training emergency service volunteers; managing evacuation centres; undertaking outreach visits to affected communities; actively contributing to government emergency management planning and policy; and running the National Registration and Inquiry

System, now Register-Find-Reunite, for evacuees and people enquiring about family and friends.

There are also a number of examples in recent years when joint appeals between all levels of government and Australian Red Cross resulted in overwhelming public response to emergencies such as bush fires and floods. At times when there is the greatest need, Australian Red Cross is able to provide its extensive network of volunteers, its long standing reputation as well as its domestic and international experience of dealing with disasters.

The 'auxiliary role' is a term used to express the specific and distinctive partnership a National Society should have with its government in providing humanitarian services. Historically, these were services provided largely in times of war under the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols. However in the contemporary world, National Societies, such as Australian Red Cross, take on a range of broad tasks involved in addressing the needs of the most vulnerable within their communities and world-wide.

Auxiliary status is a balanced relationship with reciprocal responsibilities and mutual benefits, and there is a need for strong dialogue between a National Society, governments and its public authorities at all levels to ensure that each other's needs and limitations are understood.

Recommendation

Red Cross recommends:

- **That the Qld Government legislation acknowledges and affirms the auxiliary status of the Red Cross in disaster management through inclusion in senior decision-making bodies for disaster management.**

3. The role of the Voluntary sector

Preparation for disasters in Australia is managed within a framework that covers a comprehensive approach to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. Emergency management arrangements at all levels of government deal with all types of hazards in their scope, encompassing natural hazards, technological failures and events, and human-caused emergencies.

Red Cross plays a major role in supporting individuals and communities through these arrangements. Recognised internationally as auxiliary to public authorities in the humanitarian field, Red Cross has a significant role in supporting governments to respond to humanitarian crises.

A key priority of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience is for decision makers to "adopt policies and practices that support and recognise emergency services and the importance of volunteering in our communities". One of the challenges of the 21st Century is the changing nature of volunteering. Volunteering has moved from a static commitment to an organisation to one that is more cause-focussed and often time limited. This shift makes it challenging for organisations to recruit, train, engage and retain volunteers on a long term basis. Expectations of volunteers have also changed, with a shift to a more educated and skilled workforce.

The provision of services to support people to prepare for, assist with meeting their basic relief needs and recover from disaster is increasingly being understood as a complex and dynamic issue that requires sensitive and skilled management. These issues include dealing with people under a great deal of stress, marginalised people with issues relating to homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, and mental illness. This recognition signals a need to shift the view of emergency relief from a "welfare" approach of managing on the fly, to recognising that the situations people are dealing with

are volatile, that they deserve to be treated with dignity and that their needs are complex and require skilled personnel during disasters.

The development of capacity for emergency relief and recovery activities, most often through the not for profit and health sector, should be treated no differently to the development of capacity for the emergency response activities, e.g. fire fighting, flood rescue etc. However, while state fire services and emergency services are funded by state/territory Governments to provide a range of services, similar funding is generally not available for the development of the not for profit sector's relief or recovery capacity. As a result, there is a strong reliance on the goodwill of not for profit agencies and their supporters to provide relief and recovery services and activities.

It has become increasingly obvious to volunteer organisations that they not only need to manage their volunteers better and with more skill, but that they and their volunteers are vital to the continuing development of healthy, flourishing, democratic communities and societies. They need to effectively recruit and retain volunteers and for those volunteers in turn to be able to contribute positively and meaningfully to the sustainability of their volunteering organisation. ABS General Social Survey (2010) also indicates that more Australians are volunteering, but for less time. This means rising costs for volunteer engagement and support activities as well as infrastructure improvements due to rapidly changing technology, rise of social media, and communication channels.

There is also a call from the peak body, Volunteering Australia, as well as the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent, to invest in building the capacity of volunteer trainers, leaders and coordinators. If organisations seek to build capacity and community resilience, then focusing on training and development of these roles (quality) can be more effective than increasing the number of volunteers (quantity). Professional volunteer management competencies are recognised and the accreditation of these roles is a pressing need.

Given the increase in the number and impact of extreme weather events, to maintain and grow this level of support for the Australian community without additional government support is challenging.

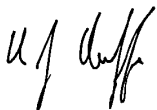
Recommendation

Red Cross recommends:

- **That the Qld Government legislation acknowledges and affirms the roles of volunteers in disaster management and response.**

I would be pleased to discuss these issues with the Committee at any time.

Yours sincerely



Kevin Keeffe
Executive Director

22 September 2014