



RA Submission  
to the House of  
Representatives  
Standing  
Committee  
on Regional  
Development,  
Infrastructure  
and Transport

**Road Resilience  
Inquiry**



28 FEBRUARY 2023

# Submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport – Inquiry into the Implications of Severe Weather Events on the National Regional, Rural and Remote Road Network 2023

## BACKGROUND

Roads Australia (RA) is the peak body for roads within an integrated transport system, representing an industry that contributes \$236 billion annually to the economy and supports 1.4 million jobs. RA has over 150 members and brings industry, government, and communities together to lead the evolution of Australia's roads, integrated transport and mobility.

RA prides itself on being a leader in the industry. The organisation strives to be at the forefront of setting the industry up for success and pioneering new ways to be able to attract and retain highly skilled people now and into the future. This is iterated in the [RA Strategic Plan 2022-2024](#) which outlines our four strategic values as being:

### The leader

#### To be a leading voice of influence.

RA is recognised by government, industry and the community as driving value and connectedness for the Australian roads and integrated transport sector.

### The facilitator

#### To facilitate contributions to the industry and public policy.

Develop and communicate sound, evidence-based policy solutions encompassing safety, capacity, transport reform, customer experience and sustainability.

### The collaborator

To collaborate on the efficiency, development and national priority of Australia's roads and integrated transport systems which underpin the social, economic and cultural fabric of the nation.

Promote recognition by government, industry and the community of the critical importance of Australia's roads and integrated transport in infrastructure assets and networks.

### The champion

#### To champion a diverse, inclusive, sustainable and values-led organisation and industry.

Support our people to be high performing through our culture and systems.

Our main priority in embodying these characteristics is to make positive changes to the integrated transport system and our member organisations – both of which sit within the context of the construction industry.

RA welcomes the opportunity to make this submission to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Regional Development, Infrastructure and Transport's inquiry into the Implications of Severe Weather Events on the National Regional, Rural and Remote Road Network 2023.

The [RA Strategic Plan 2022-2024](#) outlines RA's four policy themes:

**Place Making** – Capitalising on neighbourhood spaces to optimise their use and to promote people's health, happiness and well-being.

**People** - A focus on the people of transport, the workers and customers.

**Data and Technology** – Using information and emerging technology to deliver improvements to customers and the development of infrastructure.

**Resilience** – To be able to rapidly and successfully respond to change.

Our strategic plan also includes three policy goals:

- Optimise the use of our roads for environmental, social, economic and cultural outcomes.
- Improve the stewardship of our roads for the workers on them and the people who use them.
- Decarbonise the economy through integrated transport and the efficient use of resources and energy.

## CONTEXT AND IMPERATIVES

Australia has a road network that is under stress from changing climatic conditions, increasing vehicle loading and an imperfect maintenance regime. A road network under stress is a less resilient road network.

Regional, rural and remote roads networks are critically important for their local and regional economies and the well-being of communities.

Disruption to these networks, particularly due to severe weather events, has a disproportional effect on regional and remote businesses and communities, as unlike their metropolitan and city counterparts, there are often few, if any, transport alternatives.

Historically, the design and construction of roads in regional, rural and remote communities has served Australia well over the last 100+ years with the rise of motorised transport. The technology of light weight pavements built of local materials, together with the use of spray sealing for waterproofing higher priority sections of the network, has enabled the provision of good access to communities, industries and businesses across the nation.

This technology has meant that Australia has been able to seal a vast proportion of its important national regional, rural, and remote road network at low cost. The large, unsealed network has also been historically an appropriate road standard in terms of the role and function of those parts of the network.

The change in the number and severity of weather events over recent years, which is only expected to worsen, and other issues requires the Australian road community to rethink the previous views on the road networks' exposure, vulnerability and acceptable condition.

A strategic focus on the management of these important assets as they contribute to the wellbeing of communities in regional, rural and remote Australia is an imperative.

While it is not possible to build (or rebuild in the majority of cases) a road network that will be completely immune to these impacts – a strategic approach to the design, construction, maintenance and operation of the network is critical for the future.

This submission includes recommendations related to items in the Terms of Reference of the Inquiry, together with a broader consideration of the resilience of the regional, rural and remote networks – from planning, design, construction through to maintenance, response to severe weather events, recovery and engagement with communities.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Regional, rural and remote road networks

1. **RA recommends that the Federal Government, in partnership with road authorities, leads the assessment of the social and economic value of regional, rural and remote roads and road networks. This can create an improved understanding of the value of the role of road networks for community and economic resilience. The value assessment should be reviewed regularly to inform investment cases for maintenance funding and adaptive upgrades.**

### Network planning, design and maintenance

2. **RA recommends that Infrastructure Australia continue its consideration of resilience in network planning and management and that further work be done in partnership with state and territory governments in improving the resilience of regional, rural and remote road networks.**
3. **RA recommends that the Federal Government strengthen resilience considerations in the planning of new and upgraded road projects in regional, rural and remote areas, included roads that will need to be restored or adapted to future conditions following the most recent floods.**
4. **RA recommends that the Federal Government invest in the development of fit-for-purpose design standards to lift the level of resilience on the strategically important sections of the road network, including the parts of the road network critical for emergency response and initial recovery.**

5. RA recommends that the Federal Government increase its investment in research and development into adaptation measures such as local and recycled materials, nature, early warning systems and maintenance and this be supported by a program of knowledge transfer and education for local road authorities. The outcomes include improve pavement and network resilience.
6. RA recommends that the Federal Government work with regional, rural and remote road authorities on a shared cost drainage system upgrade and maintenance scheme, commencing with strategically important and vulnerable roads.
7. RA recommends that the Federal Government work with regional, remote and rural road managers to progress the National Road Maintenance Backlog priority project including the issue of network resilience and that real solutions to the current situation be developed and implemented.

#### **Informing and educating communities**

8. RA recommends that the Federal Government work with state, territory and local governments on a comprehensive approach to the provision of up-to-date road functionality and hazard information for the travelling public across regional, rural and remote areas through appropriate on-ground intelligence and technology-based solutions.

#### **National Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangement**

9. RA recommends that the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) be modernised and updated to allow for roads to be 'built back better' so they are more resilient to future severe weather events and disasters.

10. RA recommends that the administrative arrangements of the DRFA be streamlined and simplified to provide a fit-for-purpose approach that meets the needs of all levels of government and ensures that road remediation is undertaken in a timely manner.

#### **Federal Government leadership**

11. RA recommends that the Federal Government expand the scope and the size of the Disaster Ready Fund and other funding programs to respond to the recent natural disasters impacting regional, rural and remote road networks and build their resilience for the future.

## THE REGIONAL, RURAL AND REMOTE ROAD NETWORK

There are approximately 877,000 kilometres of road in Australia<sup>1</sup> with 695,000 kilometres of this network being in rural, regional and remote areas. The National Highway of 18,620 kilometres is an important connection for communities and freight linking regional and remote communities to regional centres and capital cities<sup>2</sup>.

In regional and remote areas 85 per cent of the road network is the responsibility of local governments with the rural arterial network of approximately 95,000 kilometres being managed by state and territory governments.

More than half a million kilometres (540,000km) of the network is unsealed, as formed only, or formed and paved with gravel, and includes other local access roads such as forestry and mining access. While the length of the sealed network has grown significantly over the last 60 years the vast majority remains unsealed.<sup>3</sup>

While different portions of the road network are managed by different jurisdictions, it needs to be considered in an integrated approach. Road users will use local roads, arterial roads and the national network without regard to ownership or management responsibilities.

Each component of the road network is designed and managed to meet the transport demands on that portion of the network. This includes the role and function of the road, traffic volumes, freight vehicle movements and other local requirements.

Funding for maintenance is dependent on the road owner. Many local governments in rural and remote areas are responsible for extensive networks but have limited rates revenue to manage and maintain them. The Federal government contributes to local roads through the Roads-to-Recovery<sup>4</sup> program, a local road component of the Financial Assistance Grants,

and the Roads of Strategic Importance program<sup>5</sup> among other programs.

State and territory governments manage the arterial road networks with some support from the Federal Government on specific projects.

The National Highway network is managed by state and territory governments with assistance by the Federal Government.

In addition to the networks managed by the governments, there are a range of other roads managed by private and commercial entities. These include forestry, mining and private roads which also form an important part of rural and remote networks.

The economies and liveability of many rural and remote communities depend on these connections helping to cheaply and efficiently move goods into and out of communities, as well connecting local residents to important social and commercial services.

The efficient movement of goods can in particular have a higher level of importance to regional communities because of lower population densities and longer distances. With the reduction in intrastate freight rail connections, the introduction of longer and heavier freight vehicles has made a major contribution to freight efficiency for local communities as they compete on a national and global basis.

The resilience of rural and remote road networks is also being challenged by the expanded use of these vehicles, both in terms of wear and tear on road pavements and surfaces and the constraint of bridge structures designed for lower mass and smaller freight vehicles.

The true value of these roads, and therefore the cost should their use be restricted or closed as a result of severe weather events, is often underrepresented in government assessments.

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<sup>1</sup> [Australian Infrastructure Statistics Yearbook 2020, BITRE](#)

<sup>2</sup> [2021 Update: The Value of Australian Roads, BIS Economics Roads Australia](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Information Sheet 92, Growth in the Australian Road System, BITRE, August 2017](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Roads to Recovery Program, Commonwealth of Australia](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Roads of Strategic Importance Program, Commonwealth of Australia](#)

Depending on the surrounding network, the consequences for any given road of being closed or restricted can vary greatly.

While the CSIRO together with the Federal and state/territory Governments and industry have developed the Transport Network Strategic Investment Tool (TraNSIT)<sup>6</sup> to map and understand the movement and routes across the agricultural and forestry supply chain more should be done to understand the direct economic importance of road networks in regional, rural and remote locations.

Additionally, the community consequences (including access to education and services as well as personal and family connections) as a result of closed and restricted transport networks is poorly understood and valued.

Infrastructure bodies and agencies across Australia have begun work on looking at the consequences from climate change. RA has been participating in the Climate Consequences project being led by Infrastructure Victoria and is aware of other work occurring in jurisdictions.

There is an opportunity now to improve the value assessment for maintaining these connections which will then assist governments to make more informed decisions about strategic improvement and network resilience.

### **Recommendation 1.**

**RA recommends that the Federal Government, in partnership with road authorities, leads the assessment of the social and economic value of regional, rural and remote roads and road networks. This can create an improved understanding of the value of the role of road networks for community and economic resilience. The value assessment should be reviewed regularly to inform investment cases for maintenance funding and adaptive upgrades.**

## **IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND INCREASING SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS**

Climate change is having a significant impact on infrastructure across the nation and particularly in rural and remote areas where there is little redundancy in the infrastructure system.

As the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change have reported there has been “observed increases in the frequency and intensity of climate and weather extremes, including hot extremes on land and in the ocean, heavy precipitation events, drought and fire weather.”<sup>7</sup>

The same report also stated, “Key infrastructure systems including sanitation, water, health, transport, communications and energy will be increasingly vulnerable if design standards do not account for changing climate conditions.”<sup>8</sup>

Regional, rural and remote communities across Australia have over the last few years experienced increased numbers of storms and flooding.

These events follow the Black Summer bushfires, a number of damaging hailstorms, category 3 cyclones impacting Western Australia and Queensland and other extreme weather events.

Roads previously designed with 100-year life spans, based on historical weather patterns, are not prepared for the impacts from the changing climate.

Deterioration of the nation’s road network particularly in regional, rural and remote areas is already clearly evident, much of this being accelerated by climate change and severe weather events.

One RA member reported a doubling of potholes between July and October 2022 in a Victorian region due to the October 2022 flood event. Another member has reported a 92% increase in potholes in Queensland in 2021/22 compared to the period prior to 2020/21.

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<sup>6</sup> [Transport Network Strategic Investment Tool \(TraNSIT\) CSIRO, Oct 2022](#)

<sup>7</sup> Summary for Policymakers, IPCC, 2022: page 9

<sup>8</sup> Summary for Policymakers, IPCC, 2022: page 13

RA members are seeing evidence of the interplay between network condition, maintenance and resilience, including the following:

- cracking in pavements quickly turning into potholes in a storm as the water is able to easily penetrate and erode the pavement surface;
- poorly maintained drains (or drainage systems that are under-designed) resulting in excess water on and under the pavement contributing to accelerated pavement failure; and
- poorly maintained vegetation (such as a failure to remove dead trees and prune limbs) resulting in debris on the road following severe weather events.

One RA member also reported the compounding impact of multiple severe weather events impacting the road network in a rolling manner together with a level of complexity in responding and delivering the required repairs. This member has discussed the long-term effects on the road network of saturated roads and soils long after the peak of the flooding event has passed. Water continues to sit on roadsides long after the flood, undermining the integrity of the road structure.

## NETWORK PLANNING, DESIGN AND MAINTENANCE

### - PLANNING AND DESIGN

Roads form only a small part of the land impacted by severe weather events which is why wholesale land-use planning (integrated with transport planning) plays an important role in preparing for severe weather.

Infrastructure Australia and Infrastructure New South Wales in August 2021 jointly developed an advisory paper<sup>9</sup> to improve infrastructure resilience. This paper provides guidance on the planning and management of infrastructure with ten directions for systemic change in

infrastructure planning to improve its resilience the outcome for communities.

### Recommendation 2.

**RA recommends that Infrastructure Australia continue its consideration of resilience in network planning and management and that further work be done in partnership with state and territory Governments in improving the resilience of regional, rural and remote road networks.**

The planning and development of new and upgraded roads in rural and remote communities needs to build in resilience requirements at the beginning of the project.

As mentioned earlier, understanding and adequately valuing the consequences of the severe weather on regional, remote and rural communities can lead to improved planning for projects and programs of work.

Building for the future should also be included in the recovery efforts from the most recent floods.

Investing into planning now could save millions of dollars in the future.

The planning should be based on the role and function of the network and factor in the risk of severe weather and flooding events that may be faced by the local communities. There needs to be an understanding of the risk, exposure and vulnerability of the network and the communities they serve.

### Recommendation 3.

**RA recommends that the Federal Government strengthen resilience considerations in the planning of new and upgraded road projects in regional, rural and remote areas, included roads that will need to be restored or adapted to future conditions following the most recent floods.**

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<sup>9</sup> [A Pathway to Infrastructure Resilience, Advisory Paper 1: Opportunities for systemic change, IA & INSW August 2021](#)

## - CONSTRUCTION STANDARDS

As mentioned earlier, the cost of closing and restricting access to roads will vary greatly from road to road.

It will not be possible to build a network that will be completely immune to the impacts of all disasters. Taking a strategic approach so that the most critical and at-risk portions of the network (and which have connections that are also protected or not forecast to be impacted under changing conditions) are designed and constructed to standards that will improve resiliency would be a positive measure.

### Recommendation 4.

**RA recommends that the Federal Government invest in the development of fit-for-purpose design standards to lift the level of resilience on the strategically important sections of the road network, including the parts of the road network critical for emergency response and initial recovery.**

The design and construction standards for bridges and drainage requirements needs to be reconsidered for high-risk, significant sections of the network.

The design needs to take into account the risk, exposure and vulnerability of the assets, and the impact on transport and community outcomes of those road assets being compromised in the short, medium and longer term. The design and construction also needs to take into account the appropriate protection of drainage infrastructure should it be threatened with flooding, for example, through proper scour protection.

It is also essential that road authorities have the funding capacity to ensure that the right design is constructed. An RA member advised that one local road authority took the decision to reduce the number of spans for a bridge construction project to save costs. This was a false economy, as the bridge failed due to a flood that occurred shortly after completion of the project.

The selection and use of the most appropriate materials is critical to the performance of roads in regional, rural and remote areas. In many areas the only viable option is the use of local materials with the importation of higher quality materials being completely uneconomical. It is essential that the supply of these local materials is maintained to allow for construction and maintenance of the road network.

In many locations environmental and other restrictions are causing real issues with the ready supply of road building materials.

There are several technologies that can be used to improve the quality and performance of local pavement materials particularly through the appropriate use of additives such as foamed bitumen, lime, cement and a number of proprietary products. These technologies can significantly improve the waterproofing of road pavements.

These add to the cost of construction but will result, when properly designed and used, a more resilient road pavement with the impact of increased rain and water ingress and larger freight vehicles. In addition, on sealed roads, the construction of wider sealed shoulders can reduce the impact of flooding by reducing the amount of water ingress into the road pavement and improving its ongoing load carrying capacity in the face of increasing rain and flooding.

There is an ongoing need for continued research into pavement technologies and particularly those that can improve the performance of local materials. In addition, there needs to be support for local and regional road authorities in assisting them in being able to appropriately use local materials and supporting technology through ongoing knowledge transfer and education. The use of recycled materials is also an important element of this research, to build on the success of the current use of waste materials in roads, such as fly ash and slag.



### Recommendation 5.

**RA recommends that the Federal Government increase its investment in research and development into adaptation measures such as local and recycled materials, nature, early warning systems and maintenance and this be supported by a program of knowledge transfer and education for local road authorities. The outcomes include improve pavement and network resilience.**

#### **- NETWORK MAINTENANCE AND MANAGEMENT**

The regional, rural and remote road networks are under substantial pressure and exhibiting long-term deterioration across the nation. There has been under investment in critical maintenance activities with that stress being evident in the following areas, among others:

- wetter subgrades leading to more potholes and pavement failures;
- inadequate maintenance specifically road pavements, surfaces and drainage;
- impact of larger freight vehicles that are important for productivity and economy;
- increasing temperatures and UV contributing to road surface deterioration; and
- inadequate vegetation management leading to increased fire risk, fallen trees and blockage of drainage elements.

If state and territory governments have issues adequately funding and managing their roads, the problem is worse for local governments.

Lack of maintenance of road shoulders, table drains, culverts and other drains is one of the big issues faced by regional, remote and rural road networks. When maintenance funds are short these are the first maintenance works that are deferred. However, if this maintenance were able to be delivered regularly with secured funding they can ensure that roads suffer less damage and are able to be re-opened sooner.

With changes to rainfall patterns, investigating then upgrading and maintaining drainage systems, especially for roads on slopes and in other vulnerable locations could save millions of dollars in recovery costs in the future.

### Recommendation 6.

**RA recommends that the Federal Government work with regional, rural and remote road authorities on a shared cost drainage system upgrade and maintenance scheme, commencing with strategically important and vulnerable roads.**

It is essential that the bitumen sealing on sealed roads retains its integrity so as to provide an impervious surface to protect the road pavement underneath.

Typically sprayed seal road surfaces remain serviceable for 12 to 15 years depending on a range of factors. The current resealing rates mean that road surfaces are not being sealed for many years.

One RA member advised that, in one jurisdiction where they operate, over 40 per cent of the seal age is greater than 20 years old and severely lacks the ability to withstand the ongoing wet weather. Cracking in the sealed surface allows water penetration into the pavement layers below.

Resealing - particularly in some of the northern wetter climates - is absolutely critical before the onset of the monsoon to prevent the ingress of water and the failure of the underlying layers of pavement.

Appropriate vegetation management including roadside mowing and tree trimming is also often a casualty of inadequate maintenance funds. This increases the fire risk and the build-up of material in the road corridor which can compromise the movement of water away from the pavement and road surface.

Road maintenance funding is a challenge across Australia, with Infrastructure Australia identifying the issue and including the National Road Maintenance Backlog<sup>10</sup> as priority project in its 2022 Infrastructure Priority List.

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<sup>10</sup> [National Road Maintenance Backlog Priority Project, Infrastructure Australia 2022](#)

This early-stage IA proposal would address the road maintenance backlog across local, state and national roads. Key steps include:

- a comprehensive review of road condition across Australia using standardised data and criteria;
- prioritising and fixing roads in poor condition using a structured and evidence-based process; and
- considering reform options, including road regulatory reform and more structural reforms such as road-user charging.

The priority project also states there is also an opportunity to implement more pre-emptive maintenance. Early maintenance on assets such as pavement can significantly reduce future costs, if timed correctly.

There is no real ownership of this priority project – even though there appears to be a clear understanding from governments at all levels that urgent action is required.

#### **Recommendation 7.**

**RA recommends that the Federal Government work with regional, remote and rural road managers to progress the National Road Maintenance Backlog priority project including the issue of network resilience and that real solutions to the current situation be developed and implemented.**

#### **RESPONDING TO SEVERE WEATHER EVENTS**

Like other agencies when responding to severe weather events, road agencies and their contractors require strong communications and open collaboration.

Additionally, the personnel needed to respond are often locals who can be personally affected by the event themselves and are unable to assist.

Several RA members have highlighted the critical importance of collaboration across levels of government and with on-ground road maintenance contractors both in the response and recovery phase.

Some of the funding that would have been used for routine maintenance is now being used to respond and recover assets. This furthers the maintenance backlog previously mentioned.

#### **NETWORK RECOVERY**

While it is critical to get networks open as soon as possible, this needs to include consideration for the safety of all road users and the impact on the already damaged road. In some cases, roads may require speed and load restrictions to reduce ongoing damage while saturated pavements dry out sufficiently to allow them to be restored.

In some case, roads may need to be sacrificed by not including restrictions, but only where there is clear understanding that there will be an expanded scope of works and additional costs through such action.

Of greatest criticality, however, is ensuring that recovery expenditure does not take away from future maintenance budgets.

Also important is that in future years the maintenance expenditure matches the need of the road system. This will be especially important during long dry periods / droughts when there is low/no visually obvious damage. At these times it can be tempting to reduce funding to pay for other budget priorities but this can leave the asset exposed when a high intensity rain event occurs.

#### **INFORMING AND EDUCATING COMMUNITIES**

Local communities and road users need good information on the status of the road network during severe weather events impacting the network and through the response and recovery phases. This is essential to ensure the safe use of the roads and the protection of infrastructure through the recovery and rebuilding phases.

The information needs to be timely and reflect the on-ground situation noting that this can be highly changeable and a challenge in rural and remote areas where access to determine the impacts and the damage can be very difficult.

In the outback and remote areas of South Australia there are a network of signs providing information on the status of major outback roads. Recently, QR codes have been added to these signs that allows road users (where there is mobile phone access) to access the SA Government's Outback Road Warnings<sup>11</sup> website.

Often it is important to manage the movement of traffic in the days and weeks after a severe weather event including reducing the loading on saturated pavements before they have an opportunity to dry out.

This is necessary to reduce the damage to the road structure in the short term.

There is an opportunity for the more extensive use of this approach to provide the most up-to-date information to communities and road users.

#### **Recommendation 8.**

**RA recommends that the Federal Government work with state, territory and local governments on a comprehensive approach to the provision of up-to-date road functionality and hazard information for the travelling public across regional, rural and remote areas through appropriate on-ground intelligence and technology-based solutions.**

#### **NATIONAL DISASTER RECOVERY FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS**

The resilience of communities and particularly rural communities is integrally linked with the resilience of its infrastructure including power, water, communications and transport. Governments across Australia have recognised the importance of a coordinated response and have had national disaster response and recovery agreements in place for a number of years.

The Federal Government Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA)<sup>12</sup> allows for up to 75 per cent of the assistance provided to individuals and communities to be provided by the Federal Government.

The DRFA includes counter disaster operations and the reconstruction of essential public assets, including roads.

A key principle of the current DRFA is that public assets are funded to repair, remediate or reconstruct the asset to the level it was prior to the disaster. The current DRFA requires that jurisdictions document the standard and condition of the asset prior to the disaster and ensure that claims for support under the DRFA will only replace the asset to the state it was prior to the disaster. This means that a real opportunity is lost to reinstate the infrastructure including the road network to a standard and level that would be more resilient to likely future disasters in the same location.

This deficiency has been recognised in the agreement between the Federal and Queensland Governments in the 2019 Betterment Program. This program was developed to build back better, more resilient essential infrastructure damaged by the North and Far North Queensland Monsoon Trough of January/February 2019. The program has funding of \$100 million jointly provided by the Federal and Queensland Governments

"The key objectives of the Betterment Program are to provide Category D DRFA funding to enable state agencies and local governments to:

- access funding that is in addition to DRFA Category B, Reconstruction of Essential Public Assets (REPA) funding available to restore event damaged assets to pre-disaster function
- use the total funding to build back better, more resilient essential public infrastructure."<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> [Outback Road Warnings Department of Infrastructure and Transport, South Australia](#)

<sup>12</sup> [Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements, Australian Government](#)

<sup>13</sup> [2019 Betterment Fund 2019, Queensland Reconstruction Authority](#)

It is important the DRFA be modernised and updated to reflect the challenges for infrastructure, including roads with the increasing number and severity of extreme weather events. It is no longer appropriate to restrict the DRFA to replacing assets on a like-for-like basis. It is critical that an assessment be undertaken to determine the need to increase the resilience of sections of the road network in the remediation and reconstruction phase following a disaster. This should be a “whole of life” value assessment for economic and social conditions similar to that described in

#### **Recommendation 1.**

Any assessment to decide if a road should be ‘built back better’ should not be administratively overbearing or delay the restoration of a transport link for the community.

It is noted that the Federal Government has commissioned an independent review of disaster funding with a final report due in April 2024.

“The review will consider how Commonwealth arrangements for disaster funding can be optimised to support a system that is fit-for-purpose to support wellbeing, national productivity, prosperity and economic security and maintains state, territory and local government roles and responsibilities in the context of the projected increase in natural disasters over the coming decades.”<sup>14</sup>

The Terms of Reference of the review include consideration of options to embed resilience and risk reduction into response and recovery funding. RA supports the review and specifically the inclusion of the issue of resilience and risk reduction in the terms of reference.

#### **Recommendation 9.**

**RA recommends that the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) be modernised and updated to allow for roads to be ‘built back better’ so they are more resilient to future severe weather events and disasters.**

The DRFA requires significant administrative effort in preparing applications for funding and there are often long delays in the receipt of funding. This is a particular issue for smaller rural and remote local governments with limited resources and funds. This can leave roads in a poor and unsafe condition for longer periods than necessary. While it is important that the funding process is rigorous and justifiable, the processes for application, project approval, verification and acquittal need to be streamlined and simplified.

#### **Recommendation 10.**

**RA recommends that the administrative arrangements of the DRFA be streamlined and simplified to provide a fit-for-purpose approach that meets the needs of all levels of government and ensures that road remediation is undertaken in a timely manner.**

#### **FEDERAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP**

The Federal Government has established the Disaster Ready Fund (DRF) of one billion dollars over 5 years to improve resilience to natural events across Australia. The first round of \$200 million is currently seeking applications for funding, closing on 6 March 2023<sup>15</sup>.

The Federal Government established the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) on 1 September 2022. NEMA has responsibility for a number of programs, including managing the DRF.

While this investment is welcome and will assist in improving resilience to natural events in communities in Australia, the level of funding needs to be reviewed and increased.

The recently formed Rural Roads Alliance, representing local councils, farmers and transport companies has identified a need for a significant investment in rural and remote roads in response to the recent severe weather events and to build a network that will be more resilient to future events.

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<sup>14</sup> [Independent Review of Disaster Funding, Australian Government](#)

<sup>15</sup> [Disaster Ready Fund, Australian Government](#)

It is seeking an injection of \$5.5b over four years through a range of Federal Government funding programs.

**Recommendation 11.**

**RA recommends that the Federal Government expand the scope and the size of the Disaster Ready Fund and other funding programs to respond to the recent natural disasters impacting regional, rural and remote road networks and build their resilience for the future.**

**CONCLUSION:**

RA appreciates the opportunity to make this submission on the implications of severe weather events on the national regional, rural and remote road network. Good stewardship of the road network and improving its resilience in the face of increasing severe weather is critical for the economy and well-being of communities across Australia.

RA's membership is involved in the planning, design, construction, maintenance and operation of road networks across regional, rural and remote Australia. Many are currently dealing with the impacts on road networks from recent events. These organisations have a presence in local communities and understand the importance of improving the resilience of road network.

RA would be pleased to provide further and more detailed information to this important inquiry should the Committee consider that to be helpful.



Roads Australia  
Submission to The House  
of Representatives  
Standing Committee on  
Regional Development,  
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