



# Evaluation Report

## *Rural Residential Recovery Program* Community Recovery Package

**Central Queensland Bushfires**  
**22 November – 6 December 2018**

**November 2022**

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## Introduction

The Central Queensland Bushfires 2018 was an unprecedented disaster event for Queensland.

The fires impacted local economies, including the agricultural sector, which suffered temporary losses of pasture and animal feed, disruption due to debris clean-up, and the destruction of on-farm infrastructure, such as fencing and water reticulation. Nine dwellings were destroyed and a further 17 houses sustained moderate or minor damage from the fires. Recovery assistance loans were activated for primary producers, while impact assessment continued to determine whether access to grants was required.

Recovery operations found the impacted areas had many small acreage blocks that operated as lifestyle properties and small lot farms but did not meet eligibility criteria for access to assistance (available or proposed) for primary producers.

A Community Recovery Package was announced as a joint Commonwealth and State funded program through the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements under Category C. The package included a Rural Residential Recovery Program to support the extraordinary clean up and reinstatement of rural residential properties or lifestyle blocks impacted by the fires.

The Australian Red Cross (ARC) led the implementation of the program with administrative support from the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA). The program concluded in January 2020.

A requirement of the Community Recovery Package is to evaluate the program in accordance with [A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs \(2018: 2\)](#). The evaluation examines the program's effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness and implementation. It also considers if the program supported disaster affected communities to become more sustainable and resilient.

The evaluation concluded the Rural Residential Recovery Program generally contributed to the recovery of the communities and local economies impacted by the Central Queensland Bushfires 2018. Several detailed findings were documented in response to key evaluation questions.

Recommendations have been provided to improve the effectiveness of disaster recovery programs in future. Some are specific to a Rural Residential Recovery Program or similar, with others relevant to community recovery programs generally.

The evaluation of the Rural Residential Recovery Program is an important contribution to improve subsequent disaster programs in government and will be published on National Disaster Recovery Monitoring and Evaluation Database hosted by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.

# Program implementation

## Summary

### Scope

The program design is aligned to DRFA Category C assistance. This is made available to primary producers or small businesses through the Queensland Rural and Industry Development Authority (QRIDA), for an initial amount of up to \$10,000. QRIDA was considered to implement this program, however significant subsequent disaster events (e.g. North and Far North Queensland Monsoon Trough 25 January – 14 February 2019) severely impacted the capacity of QRIDA to deliver.

Australian Red Cross (ARC) was appointed to lead the implementation of the Rural Residential Recovery Program with administrative support from the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA). ARC mobilised a project team, established a new grant management system, with program implementation starting in July 2019 (when grant applications opened to the public).

Grants were available to eligible applicants for a value between \$250 and \$10,000, with a cap of \$10,000 per applicant. Applications were assessed on the program guidelines and criteria relating to applicants, properties, geographical areas, activities, and costs. Applications closed in January 2020.

The following outputs were recorded:

- 188 applications received
- 166 applications approved
- \$1,484,256 in grants paid to eligible applicants.

The grants funded needs that have been categorised and listed below in order of occurrence:

- Fencing
- Debris
- Contractor and hire costs
- Water infrastructure
- Purchase of materials / goods
- Shed
- Fodder / animal foodstuff.

The grants were fully allocated when the program finished. Several applications were unable to be funded as the budget was exhausted.

### Cost

The program was implemented for \$1.5M, as the original budget was fully utilised.

Location	Budget	Actual cost
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>	<b>\$1,441,995</b>

## Time

The program started approximately eight months after the disaster event and was delivered by January 2020, following a one month extension of the application period.

Milestone	Target date	Actual date
Applications open	Jul-19	Jul-19
Applications close	Dec-19	Jan-20
Applicant works completed within 12 months	Dec-20	Jan-21

## Governance activity

### Governance structure

ARC allocated a project team to establish a new grant administration system and coordinate the delivery of grants to the community.

QRA were led by their Regional Liaison Officer (RLO) who was responsible for liaising with and managing programs delivered by non-government organisations such as the ARC. The QRA RLO was supported by other governance functions such as compliance, value for money and assurance – through existing assessment processes to administer DRFA funding.

There was no additional advisory group or specific multi-agency governance body established for this program.

### Program reviews

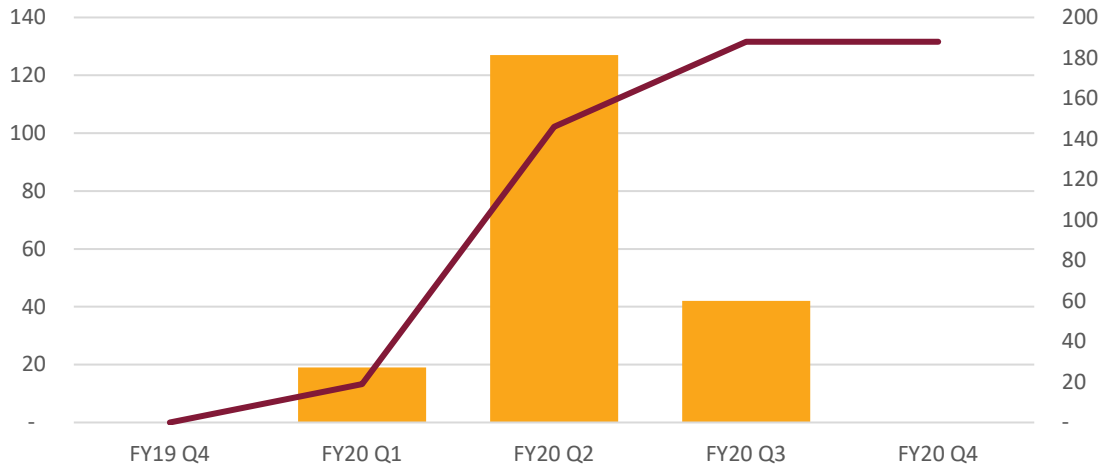
QRA conducted regular program reviews which incorporated a financial and progress assessment of the Rural Residential Recovery Program. The DRFA program is reviewed in detail three times each year for a total of four reviews throughout this program design, implementation and close out.

## Progress monitoring

### Quantitative

#### Grant applications received

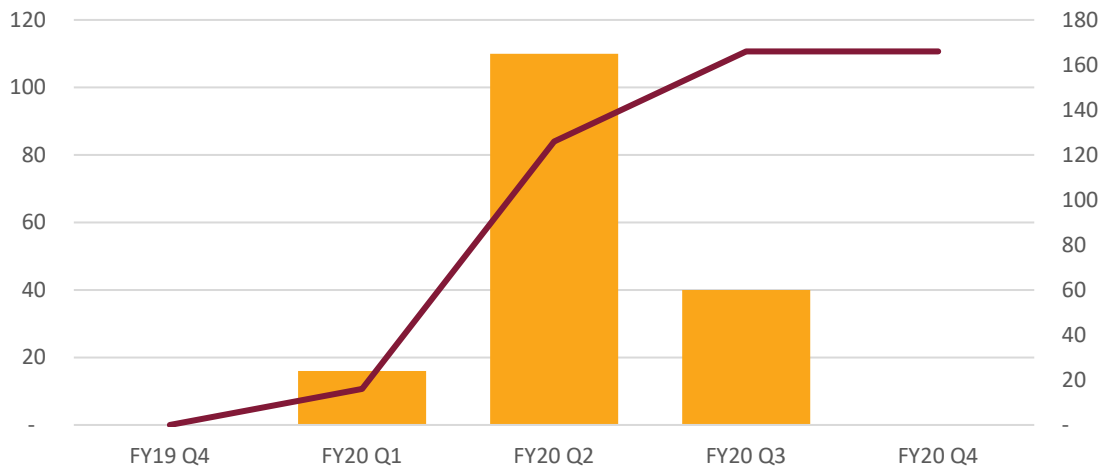
A total of 188 grant applications were received within the application period for the program.



### Grant applications approved

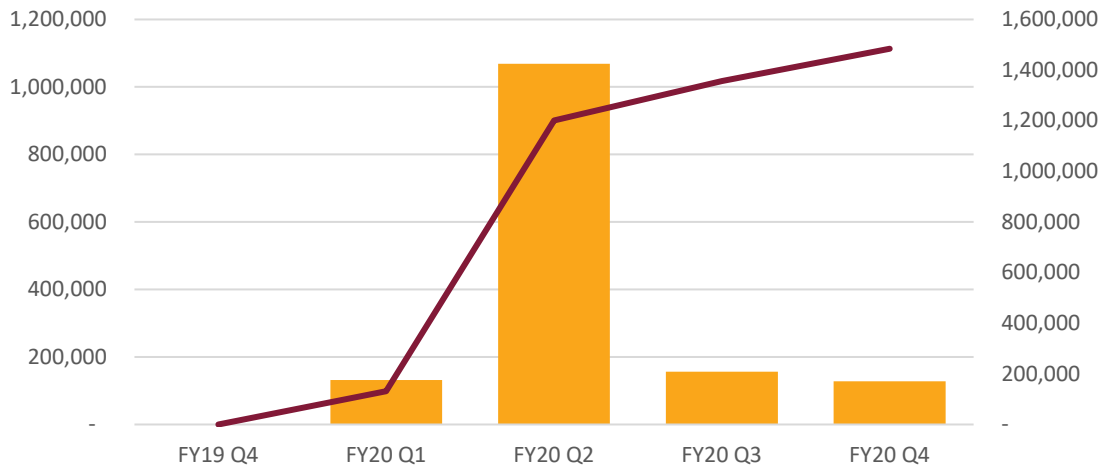
A total of 166 grant applications were approved following an eligibility assessment. The 12 grant applications received but not approved were assessed as ineligible with the following justification:

- Applicant not within eligible area
- Activities not eligible for reimbursement
- Damage not related to the CQ Bushfires
- Program funds being exhausted.



### Value of grants paid

A total value of \$1,484,256 was paid to eligible applicants across 166 grant applications. The average grant value paid was approximately \$9,000.



## Qualitative

### Community sentiments

ARC coordinated the collection of feedback from grant recipients via email or phone. The feedback was collated by ARC and presented as community sentiments in a close out report.

76 grant recipients provided feedback to ARC. All were positive feedback ranging from brief notes of thanks to detailed heartfelt messages of gratitude. Some examples of the community sentiment are provided below for context.

*“The funding for this work will be very much appreciated as it has been rather depressing looking at all the damage.”*

*“Thank you for your really fast action and turnaround with this, I’ve already talked to the fencer and he has booked him so hopefully I might have a new fence by Christmas.”*

*“Thank you for the grant. So nice to receive help, particularly as my insurance company cancelled my insurance without warning a few weeks before the fire. The Red Cross grant has been a great help. Thank you.”*

All feedback has been deidentified and included for reference as *Appendix C*.

### ARC staff interviews

QRA officers interviewed ARC staff involved in program administration during March 2021. The questions related to program implementation to capture key achievements and opportunities for improvement. The session notes were recorded and made available for evaluation.



# Evaluation findings

## Governance

### Regular monitoring

*G2 – Has the governance structure ensured recovery programs are monitored on a regular basis?*

The governance structure enabled the Rural Residential Recovery Program to be monitored in accordance with the program guidelines and existing DRFA reporting arrangements.

ARC provided monthly progress reports to QRA (throughout implementation) detailing the number of grant applications received, grant applications approved and the total grant funding paid to approved applicants. The progress reporting enabled ARC and QRA to jointly monitor the:

- rate of grant uptake in the community
- evolving recovery needs for grant assistance
- balance of total funding remaining.

An example of monitoring data analysed regularly was the total funding remaining. The data informed ARC and QRA in their decision to extend the program by one month to provide additional time for the community to access the total grant funding available under the program.

Each financial quarter, the monitoring data was consolidated by QRA and shared with EMA as part of the DRFA reporting requirements to the Commonwealth. Given the short duration of the program implementation, the quarterly data was updated five times (refer to graphs in the progress monitoring section of this evaluation). The reported outputs and metrics followed program guidelines and the evaluation plan to support evaluation of the recovery outcomes.

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*Finding 1: The governance structure ensured regular monitoring of the rural residential recovery program.*

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In addition to monthly monitoring and reporting, ARC completed a project close out review to identify key achievements and areas for improvement. This review captured community feedback from grant recipients and engagement with project staff to document lessons learned. The project close out activities provided valuable insight into the program and further supported the evaluation of recovery outcomes.

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*Finding 2: The governance structure ensured a close out review was undertaken with program delivery staff and community members, to capture feedback and document lessons learned.*

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*Recommendation 1: Delivery organisations that implement community recovery programs should incorporate a close out review with program delivery staff and community members, to capture feedback and document lessons learned.*

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## Adaptive

*G3 – Has the governance structure ensured programs are adaptive to changing needs and impact?*

As the program rolled out, recovery needs and support requirements of impacted community members evolved. These changing needs showed in the types of eligibility enquiries raised by impacted residents during the grant application process. Refer to key evaluation question C11 for further details.

The governance structure ensured all enquiries were responded to and closed out, however concerns were raised on the timeliness of some responses. For example, a general query by multiple applicants in relation to the eligibility of mobile equipment took over one month to resolve.

Complex queries that couldn't be addressed by ARC within the program guidelines required clarification from QRA and EMA. Initially unclear to ARC, the process was not fully communicated in the program guidelines.

Additionally, these agencies were impacted by other concurrent disaster events – especially the North and Far North Monsoon Trough – which may have affected available resources and timely responses.

The clarification process meant responding to evolving community needs, temporarily delayed some grant assessments. Grant recipients appeared to understand this challenge as shown through positive community sentiments.

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*Finding 3: There are opportunities to improve the governance structure to enhance adaptiveness and responsiveness to the community's changing needs.*

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The grant assessment process workflow was changed to include the clarification process and was documented by ARC and QRA officers during project close out. Incorporating a documented workflow process will benefit future recovery program guidelines. Target timelines could be included to manage expectations of all parties.

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*Recommendation 2: Program guidelines should include a process for complex queries to improve adaptiveness and response to the potential for evolving community needs.*

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A dedicated governance group was not stood up for this program.

The Evaluation of the Community Mental Health Program implemented under the same Central Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package reference conclusions and recommendations that apply to this program. The program featured an advisory group incorporating representatives from the Human and Social Functional Recovery Group (HSFRG), QRA and the delivery organisation (both centralised and regional officers).

The Rural Residential Recovery Program may have benefitted from establishing a similar body with defined governance and oversight responsibilities; to regularly consider program challenges and respond to changing community recovery needs. The membership could consist of the following functions to ensure representation from interested and influential parties:

- Economic Functional Recovery Group (EFRG) leadership
- QRA program management and eligibility assessment
- ARC program implementation
- Local representation (e.g. local government or community recovery officer).

Responsibilities of a dedicated governance group could include:

- reviewing complex issues and changing community needs
- a shortcut or avoidance of linear assessment processes for critical queries
- expediting urgent queries to EMA for clarification
- updating program guidelines and other documentation where required for communication.

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*Recommendation 3: Establish an advisory group with all representative functions to ensure future programs are adaptive and responsive to the changing needs of impacted communities.*

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## Compliance

*G5 – Has the governance structure ensured governance procedures conform to legislation, policies, and other plans?*

The governance structure has ensured a high level of compliance with relevant plans and funding arrangements.

This is best demonstrated in the program logic, which links high-level recovery outcomes in the [Central Queensland Bushfires Recovery Plan 2018-2021](#) (the State Recovery Plan); to the outcomes, objectives and strategies in the program guidelines; to the outputs and metrics captured in the monitoring data.

The State Recovery Plan communicates the EFRG action of delivering Targeted Community Funding to achieve community recovery outcomes. More detailed objectives are documented in the program guidelines for rural residential recovery. These two documents complement each other without conflict.

The evaluation findings detailed in relation to key evaluation question G3 include the recommendation to incorporate the EFRG as part of a specific governance group, stood up for future programs.

During implementation, the assessment processes reviewed compliance with eligibility rules detailed in the program guidelines. The ARC assessments records identified 15 applications as ineligible due to the:

- applicant not within eligible area
- activities not eligible for reimbursement
- damage not related to the CQ Bushfires
- program funds being exhausted.

A fraudulent claim was also identified through internal auditing processes and actioned with the applicant.

The program financial close out documents were assessed by compliance and assurance teams within QRA in accordance with the DRFA administration requirements. All DRFA claims made to the Commonwealth are subject to external audit at state and federal levels.

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*Finding 4: The governance structure has contributed to compliance with legislation, policies, and other relevant plans.*

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## Community engagement

### Accessible and appropriate information

*C10 – Do community members have information they need to continue recovering from the disaster?*

The eligibility criteria for this program were complex, with strict definitions and detailed rules applied to determine eligible applicants, properties, geographical areas, activities, and costs. These criteria aligned to similar recovery grant funding programs implemented for primary producers and small businesses administered through DRFA assistance measures.

While primary production and small business sectors have experience with such eligibility requirements, the program requirements were likely unfamiliar to those in newly defined 'rural residential' community groups.

Complex eligibility, particularly the geographical boundaries and definition of a rural residential property, meant a public media release or community wide program launch would be inappropriate and may have negative consequences for community recovery.

This decision impacted ARCs ability to communicate program information to the community. It is unknown if this impacted community participation, however, was reported as a key challenge by ARC in accessing impacting community members.

ARC developed program information material to assist the community with accessing recovery grants, including:

- a flyer
- a frequently asked questions (FAQs) document
- a grant application form
- a postcard
- various social media posts.

ARC sought to distribute program information through various sources, including via:

- ARC social media accounts
- a targeted Australia Post mail out
- local government sources, such as:
  - community recovery officers
  - disaster management officers
  - various social media accounts
  - displayed at regional council branch offices
- Queensland Health mental health clinicians
- the QRA website
- various community leaders, such as local real estate agents.

It should be noted that both the community recovery officers and mental health clinicians were funded as part of the same Central Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package.

The targeted Australia Post mail out was very effective, distributing 55,000 post cards to residents. While state and federal government approvals of the postcard content took considerable time (approx. 6 weeks), ARC officers reported the mail out was very successful in reaching the community.

ARC sought support from QRA with their challenges to host program information online. QRA quickly developed functionality on the existing recovery web landing page to publish all program information, including application forms. All material incorporated links to this website and functioned well for applicants in their grant application process to ARC.

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*Finding 5: Information was designed and distributed to the community to support the recovery, although a media release could have improved community reach and accessibility.*

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*Recommendation 4: Ensure recovery programs receive the necessary communications support by government to broaden program awareness and improve accessibility to recovery support.*

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## Evolving needs

*C11 – Are evolving community needs assessed and prioritised during the recovery process to inform recovery activities?*

The recovery operations were led by the State Recovery Coordinator (SRC), who visited impacted areas to discuss recovery needs with local communities and plan the

State's recovery objectives. Community members advised the SRC that a key recovery priority for the impacted areas was the repair of property; this priority was stated in the State Recovery Plan.

The SRC was supported by QRA officers and representatives from the Functional Recovery Groups (FRGs) that worked with local, regional and state level representatives to develop recovery activities to support the repair of property. It was identified that impacted areas included many small acreage blocks that were operated as lifestyle properties and small lot farms that sustained damage and debris from the bushfire event. These 'rural residential' properties did not meet eligibility criteria required to access the DRFA assistance measures – available or proposed – for primary producers.

A discrete program was designed to provide grant funding to support the clean-up and reinstatement of rural residential properties impacted by the fires. The needs formed a shortlist of eligible recovery activities aligned to the reported community impacts, such as the clean-up of debris and reinstatement of damaged fencing. These recovery activities were aligned to relevant existing policy, such as similar DRFA assistance measures for Counter Disaster Operations and recovery grants for primary producers.

As recovery progressed and the program was implemented, additional recovery needs were highlighted by the community. As an example, through consultation with applicants, it was identified that several rural residential property owners suffered losses to mobile equipment; such as tractors and farm equipment. This was not originally contained within the program guidelines as eligible costs.

ARC worked with QRA and EMA to determine appropriate eligibility guidance, aligned to program intent. As a result, additional individuals were subsequently considered eligible for grant funding to support their evolving recovery needs.

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*Finding 6: The evolving community needs were considered in the initial design and ongoing implementation of the rural residential recovery program.*

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Refer to key evaluation question G3 for findings and recommendations of governance response to evolving community needs.

## Effectiveness

### Sustainable community

*E1 – To what extent did the disaster recovery program produce a sustainable community?*

Quantitative and qualitative evidence demonstrates the Rural Residential Recovery Program contributed to a sustainable community.

As per the program logic, the rural residential recovery outcome links to the economic recovery objectives and outcomes, which relate to the recovery objective of sustainable communities.

The key rural residential recovery outcome targeted by the program was to “**Support extraordinary clean-up and reinstatement of rural residential properties**”.

The two rural residential recovery objectives specified in the program guidelines were to:

1. Assist with the extraordinary expenditure for clean-up and reinstatement of eligible rural residential properties.
2. Help alleviate the distress to residents and animals, repair damage and reduce hazards/risks to eligible properties not covered by insurance or other funding.

### **Assist with extraordinary expenditure**

The key strategy to assist with extraordinary expenditure was to provide grants for eligible applicants.

#### *Provide grants for eligible applicants*

166 households received financial support from recovery grants averaging approximately \$9,000. Grant recipients allocated funding to the costs of various recovery needs, either existing or future works. The most common recovery needs addressed were the repair of fencing and the removal of debris.

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*Finding 7: Providing grants assisted eligible applicants to cover some of the extraordinary expenditure resulting from the bushfires.*

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### **Alleviate distress, repair damage and reduce risks**

Two strategies were implemented to alleviate distress, repair damage and reduce risks for those impacted by the disaster.

#### *Distribute funds in a timely manner*

To determine if funds were distributed in a timely manner, two indicators were measured:

- a) program establishment time
- b) application turnaround time.

The program was established in July 2019, within approximately seven to eight months following the disaster event. While the establishment period follows recovery planning and program guidelines, it represents a significant amount of time that the community was unable to access recovery funding.

Time was required to gain necessary government approvals, develop guidelines for a new program and identify a suitable delivery partner. While QRIDA was a logical delivery partner, the agency’s capacity was challenged due to mobilising significant state and federal recovery funding in response to multiple disaster events – including the North and Far North Monsoon Trough in February 2019. Once ARC was appointed, time was needed to stand up a grant management capacity, including the establishment of a new grants management system.

Delayed program establishment impacted the ability to distribute funds immediately, which may have impacted program effectiveness.

For example, an eligible activity listed in the program guidelines was the removal and disposal of dead livestock from the property. This could be considered an urgent response activity to be addressed in the immediate days and weeks following the event. Other eligible recovery activities, such as removal of debris and dangerous trees, could also be considered response or emergent recovery activities.

By program launch, the grants were effectively offered as a retrospective reimbursement of eligible expenditure for these specific examples, provided the applicant retained evidence.

ARC reported anecdotal examples of community members unable to claim for activities where invoices or receipts had not been kept. The program's effectiveness did rely on the individual's ability to retain evidence of expenditure, despite being unaware of a possible grant funding program.

This challenge was mostly offset by the ability to fund other key recovery activities that were less emergent in nature, such as the repair and reinstatement of damaged fencing, sheds or water infrastructure not covered by insurance.

Impacted community members may have benefitted from establishment of the rural residential recovery program in a timelier manner, with earlier access to financial support and knowledge relating to recording evidence of expenditure.

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*Finding 8: The program was established within the planned timeframe, although there are opportunities to accelerate mobilisation and establish contingent delivery arrangements in advance.*

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*Recommendation 5: Negotiate delivery partnerships for an agreed list of likely community recovery programs to build contingent capacity for deployable program rollout.*

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*Recommendation 6: Consider a means to communicate early messaging to the community in relation to evidencing expenditure where a cost reimbursement is component is proposed.*

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Once the program was established, applications were made directly to ARC for processing in the grants management system and eligibility assessment. ARC would then make payment to approved applicants within 48 – 72 hours of approval.

ARC was effective in assessing applications in a reasonable timeframe. Community sentiment generally reflected upon a quick turnaround timeframe and positive experience with the process:



*“Thank you so much, the process was so quick, money arrived and we are now commencing the purchase of fencing materials, we are most grateful.”*

*“This whole process was thorough and quick, money is in the bank and suppliers have been contacted. You do so much good, thank you seems inadequate.”*

*“I really appreciate it, thanks for making the process painless and efficient and quick.”*

There were some delays with several applications containing complex eligibility queries requiring referral to QRA and EMA. Complex eligibility queries can be reduced in future programs by documenting the eligibility decisions made during implementation and recording compliance lessons learned.

Refer to the findings captured under key evaluation question G3 relating to recommendations for improving governance and documenting eligibility referral processes.

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*Finding 9: Grant applications were generally processed in a timely manner, although opportunities exist to streamline and document complex eligibility queries and referrals.*

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*Recommendation 7: Document updated eligibility criteria for a future Rural Residential Recovery Program.*

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It is likely that the community had little expectation of available grant funding to support rural residential recovery, which may explain why grant recipients were generally accepting of receiving funding between eight and 14 months after the bushfire event.

There is room for improvement in both program establishment time and application turnaround time to ensure that recovery funds are distributed in the timeliest manner.

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*Finding 10: Funds were distributed in a relatively timely manner, although the mobilisation of future programs must be expedited.*

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#### *Coordinate grant delivery compassionately*

It is evident ARC strived to deliver more than grant administration and financial payments. ARC provided additional social services aligned to their core business in parallel with the implementation of this program.

ARC demonstrated compassionate grant delivery throughout program implementation, including:

- providing applicants with a contact name and details for any queries at any time

- supporting individuals with grant applications
- supporting individuals with organising recovery work, including helping to coordinate contractors
- talking to applicants about their experience and life during the application process
- administering psychological first aid treatment to traumatised individuals
- providing referrals of traumatised or depressed applicants to mental health clinicians for screening or treatment
- providing referrals of ineligible applicants to community development officers
- providing referrals of ineligible applicants to charity organisations, such as GIVIT
- contacting individuals after grant payment to follow up on their experience.

Community sentiments reflect positively on ARCs compassionate and personalised approach. This went over and above the objective of the program but contributed immensely to alleviating stress for those already impacted by the bushfires.

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*Finding 11: The rural residential recovery grants were delivered compassionately and ARCs approach was appreciated by grant recipients.*

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### Summary of findings

Through evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data, it is likely that the Rural Residential Recovery Program has effectively contributed to producing a more sustainable community.

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*Finding 12: The rural residential recovery program was generally effective in contributing to a sustainable community.*

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## Resilience vs sustainability

*E4 – Was there any trade-off between achieving resilient outcomes and sustainable outcomes?*

It is difficult to assess the trade-off between achieving resilient and sustainable outcomes through distributing grant recovery funding to cover losses.

This evaluation has found that the program was generally effective in achieving sustainable outcomes, however there were no explicit resilient outcomes targeted in the program design or implementation.

Potential consequences are associated with providing support for individuals, in disincentivising personal resilience. For example, a requirement for accessing a rural residential recovery grant was demonstrating that the loss was uninsured. There is a

risk that the grant support is perceived to reward a lack of insurance and incentivise future apathy toward insurance in general.

It is also understood that not all assets and activities on personal property are insurable. In certain circumstances, insurance may not be a viable or sustainable option. It is therefore challenging to quantify a trade-off on this issue.

Reviewing the emotional community sentiments recorded from ARC engagement, it shows that a financial boost encourages some individuals to become more personally resilient, but it is not quantifiable.

There is one explicit example of an individual demonstrating personal resilience outcomes due to grant funding:

*“...we really appreciate your prompt action and assistance. We are looking forward to putting the grant to good use, safeguarding our property against further disasters.”*

There were also anecdotal stories of individuals querying their eligibility to replace their timber fence with a more resilient material.

These approaches should be promoted. Future programs could incorporate mitigation, preparedness or safeguarding incentives to further encourage personal resilience, in addition to sustainable outcomes.

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*Finding 13: There is some inevitable trade-off between achieving resilient and sustainable outcomes through grant recovery funding, however future programs could consider incorporating mitigation incentives to encourage and promote resilient outcomes.*

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*Recommendation 8: Consider opportunities to incorporate mitigation incentives into future programs to encourage and promote resilient outcomes.*

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## Efficiency

### Value for money

*H5 – Did the program achieve value for money relative to the disaster recovery context?*

The Commonwealth and state governments approved funding for \$1.5M to deliver the rural residential recovery program based on early estimates of indicative numbers of impacted residents.

The program was implemented for a total cost of \$1,500,000, which fully exhausted the original budget allocation. Most of the cost was for grants to 166 recipients, with an average grant value of approximately \$9,000, which was close the cap on grants to individual recipients of \$10,000.

ARC claimed \$15,744, or approximately 1 per cent of the total budget for program administration and indirect costs. ARC used this funding to invest in a new grant

system that was established specifically for this program. The in-kind contribution from ARC in the form of staff wages for program management and other administrative costs is not known. An administrative cost to government of 1 per cent is considered efficient and achieves value for taxpayer dollars invested.

While the program achieved a value for money outcome, there were opportunities to increase its efficiencies by drawing upon budget underspends realised within other programs delivered under the Community Recovery Package. For example, refer to the underspend reported in the Community Mental Health Program Evaluation Report.

There were at least six rural residential applicants that were eligible for funding, yet denied due to fund exhaustion, as recorded by ARC during their project close out report. ARC advised they continued to field community queries in relation to the availability of the grants well after the program closing date and project close out report; indicating there could have been additional eligible applicants if funding was available.

It is likely that additional applicants may have been funded through this program if extra funds were available, with limited or no impact to administration cost. Budget redirection may have been impacted by timing, noting that the rural residential recovery program concluded earlier.

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*Finding 14: The program achieved value for money, although there may have been opportunities to redirect underspend funds from other programs toward supporting more impacted individuals.*

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*Recommendation 9: Ensure that funding across the entire Community Recovery Package is managed to maximise the opportunity to redirect any underspends to address recovery needs.*

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## Implementation

### Plan implementation

*I1 – Was the program consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery?*

A high level assessment of the program’s consistency with the [National Principals for Disaster Recovery](#) has been undertaken. A consistency rating of low, medium and high has been applied subjectively. Low and medium ratings identify opportunities for improvement.

Principle	Consistency	Comments
Understanding the context	High	Implementation was sensitive to the context of impacted residents, including recognition of the links to human impacts and social recovery outcomes.

		ARCs compassionate program delivery was appreciated by the community.
Recognising complexity	Moderate	<p>Implementation of a new program with a new delivery organisation partner was ambitious.</p> <p>Refer to findings in response to key evaluation question G3 for recommendations to improve governance of complex programs.</p> <p>The program achieved successful outcomes despite external impacts, such as subsequent natural disasters.</p>
Using community-led approaches	High	<p>The program design was community-led through recovery operations and the program sought to address community recovery needs.</p> <p>ARC built strong relationships with the community through program implementation, with both impacted residents they supported and their community recovery colleagues in the regions (e.g. community development officers).</p> <p>Although community representatives were not an active part of the program's governance structure, their participation in sharing disaster impacts, recovery needs, and grant effectiveness (via community sentiments) contributed to positive community outcome.</p>
Ensuring coordination of all activities	High	<p>ARC demonstrated community leadership and sound program implementation capability in the rollout of recovery grants.</p> <p>ARC facilitated a smooth transition from disaster response activities (e.g. administering psychological first aid treatment) to recovery activities in impacted communities.</p>
Employing effective communication	Moderate	<p>Communication of information throughout implementation was sound, although there are opportunities for improvement as discussed in the findings for the key evaluation question C10.</p>
Acknowledging and building capacity	Moderate	<p>Implementation had limited capacity building at a local level as the program was focussed on financial relief for impacted individuals, as opposed to enhancing resilience. There was at least one grant recipient who invested their grant funding into reconstructing more resilient infrastructure. Other grant recipients commented</p>

		<p>that the financial assistance had helped them to retain a level of personal capacity.</p> <p>ARC provided referrals to other social services, including community development and mental health treatment, that had a capacity building focus.</p> <p>Implementation built capacity of the ARC to deliver grant programs aligned to their social services.</p> <p>Implementation also built capacity among all levels of government generally, which are now better equipped to rollout a similar program in future.</p>
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*Finding 15: The program was generally consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.*

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## Interaction

### *15 – To what extent did program activities and resources effectively encourage interaction between outcome domains?*

While the rural residential recovery program was designed primarily to achieve an economic recovery outcome, there is clear overlap with social recovery outcomes. The effectiveness of the program is likely to have contributed positively to the following social recovery outcomes:

- The community is not experiencing excessive stress and hardship arising from the disaster
- Households, families, and individuals are enabled to affect their own recovery through appropriate income sources.

Community sentiments reflected that rural residential recovery grants reduced their personal stress and financially supported their own recovery.

ARC was well placed to provide this link to social recovery, given their membership on the HSFRG and experience in supporting impacted individuals with psychological first aid treatment in response to disasters.

There is evidence to suggest that ARC facilitated a high level of interaction between the rural residential recovery program and other programs within the Community Recovery Package, especially the:

- Community Development Program, and
- Community Mental Health Program.

ARC leveraged relationships with both community development officers (particularly within Gladstone Regional Council) and the mental health clinicians to help communicate and roll out the program in the affected areas.

There are also examples of ARC referring to other services where appropriate. One applicant that was ineligible for funding was referred to the community development officer, as well as to the GIVIT charity, to help them find alternative recovery support. Other examples of grant applicants that presented with severe psychological trauma to ARC officers trained in psychological first aid, were referred to the relevant mental health clinician for treatment.

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*Finding 16: The program implementation encouraged effective interaction between the lines of functional recovery, outcome domains and concurrent recovery programs.*

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While the ARC was well placed to encourage interaction between recovery domains and programs due to their existing role in response, other delivery organisations may benefit from formalised inductions and coordinated briefings between all programs within the Community Recovery Package.

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*Finding 17: There are likely to be benefits associated with implementing the Community Recovery Package as a coordinated program of services.*

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*Recommendation 10: Consider implementing the Community Recovery Package as a coordinated program of services with formalised inductions and progress briefings with all program participants and expanded governance structures.*

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## Conclusion

The evaluation has concluded that the Rural Residential Recovery Program has contributed to the recovery and resilience of the communities impacted by the Central Queensland Bushfires 2018.

The key findings of the evaluation are provided below.

### Governance

1. The governance structure ensured regular monitoring of the rural residential recovery program.
2. The governance structure ensured a close out review was undertaken with program delivery staff and community members, to capture feedback and document lessons learned.
3. There are opportunities to improve the governance structure to enhance adaptiveness and responsiveness to the community's changing needs.
4. The governance structure has contributed to compliance with legislation, policies, and other relevant plans.

### Community engagement

5. Information was designed and distributed to the community to support the recovery, although a media release could have improved community reach and accessibility.
6. The evolving community needs were considered in the initial design and ongoing implementation of the rural residential recovery program.

### Effectiveness

7. Providing grants assisted eligible applicants to cover some of the extraordinary expenditure resulting from the bushfires.
8. The program was established within the planned timeframe, although there are opportunities to accelerate mobilisation and establish contingent delivery arrangements in advance.
9. Grant applications were generally processed in a timely manner, although opportunities exist to streamline and document complex eligibility queries and referrals.
10. Funds were distributed in a relatively timely manner, although the mobilisation of future programs must be expedited.
11. The rural residential recovery grants were delivered compassionately and ARCs approach was appreciated by grant recipients.
12. The rural residential recovery program was generally effective in contributing to a sustainable community.



13. There is some inevitable trade-off between achieving resilient and sustainable outcomes through grant recovery funding, however future programs could consider incorporating mitigation incentives to promote resilient outcomes.

## Efficiency

14. The program achieved value for money, although there may have been opportunities to redirect underspend funds from other programs toward supporting more impacted individuals.

## Implementation

15. The program was generally consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.
16. The program implementation encouraged effective interaction between the lines of functional recovery, outcome domains and concurrent recovery programs.
17. There are likely to be benefits associated with implementing the Community Recovery Package as a coordinated program of services.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations are provided to improve the effectiveness of future disaster recovery programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

Delivery organisations that implement community recovery programs should incorporate a close out review with program delivery staff and community members, to capture feedback and document lessons learned.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

Program guidelines should include a process for complex queries to improve adaptiveness and response to the potential for evolving community needs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

Establish an advisory group with all representative functions to ensure future programs are adaptive and responsive to the changing needs of impacted communities.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Ensure recovery programs receive the necessary communications support by government to broaden program awareness and improve accessibility to recovery support.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Negotiate delivery partnerships for an agreed list of likely community recovery programs to build contingent capacity for deployable program rollout.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

Consider a means to communicate early messaging to the community in relation to evidencing expenditure where a cost reimbursement is component is proposed.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

Document updated eligibility criteria for a future Rural Residential Recovery Program.

### **RECOMMENDATION 8**

Consider opportunities to incorporate mitigation incentives into future programs to promote resilient outcomes.

### **RECOMMENDATION 9**

Ensure that funding across the entire Community Recovery Package is managed to maximise the opportunity to redirect any underspends to address recovery needs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 10**

Consider implementing the Community Recovery Package as a coordinated program of services with formalised inductions and progress briefings with all program participants and expanded governance structures.

# Appendices

## Appendix A – Background

### Central Queensland Bushfires 2018

#### Impacts

The Central Queensland Bushfires in 2018 was an unprecedented disaster event for Queensland.

135 fires were attended at the peak of the event on 28 November 2018. These occurred in 35 localities across eight Queensland Local Government Areas (LGAs) and approximately 1.4 million hectares of land was burned. Homes, property, pets and livestock were lost with extensive destruction of the natural environment and an enormous clean-up operation required.

The fires caused significant social disruption within impacted communities – including 14,462 residents notified for evacuation, 71 early childhood centres and schools closed, and impacts to the operation of local businesses and transport routes.

A human life was tragically lost in the event, in addition to losses of homes, property, pets and livestock. Examples of impacts to personal property and equipment include:

- 17 dwellings damaged, with 9 destroyed
- 72 sheds or other structures damaged, with 27 destroyed
- 37 properties damaged
- 28 vehicles damaged.

#### Response

In response to the event, local and state government resources were stood up to assist the community. The firefighting operation was the largest in the State's history.

Examples of government response activities include:

- 3,000 fire and emergency services personnel were deployed, including 1,202 from interstate
- 59 aircraft utilised in fire and emergency response, with 47 flying at the peak of the disaster
- 479 damage assessments undertaken of property
- More than 2500 visitors attended the 7 Community Recovery Hubs and 8 Pop-Up Hubs that were established to coordinate community recovery services in location
- 413 community recovery workers were deployed in the aftermath of the event.

Between 27 November and 5 December 2018, the Queensland Government activated the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) for Category A and B assistance measures for communities in the following local government areas:

- Banana Shire Council
- Bundaberg Regional Council
- Central Highlands Regional Council
- Gladstone Regional Council

- Isaac Regional Council
- Livingstone Shire Council
- Mackay Regional Council
- Rockhampton Regional Council

Approximately \$4.9 million of Category C funding was administered through these arrangements.

## Consequences

The impacts of the fires resulted in some economic consequences for the community, particularly disruption to the agricultural sector. The State Recovery Plan noted that regarding agricultural production:

*“there are a small number of individual producers who have lost a significant amount of crop (e.g. sugarcane, dragon fruit, manuka honey)”*

However, overall losses to crops and livestock to primary producers were considered relatively minor.

In the impacted areas there is a significant concentration of small property owners with rural residential blocks of land that operated their properties as small lot farms with some agricultural production. These small-scale producers were also impacted but were unable to access the level of funding available for larger producers.

*“These small acreage owners did not meet the criteria of being a primary producer and are not eligible for DRFA primary producer assistance.”*

## Community Recovery Package

On 30 December 2018, the state and Commonwealth Governments jointly [announced](#) a Category C exceptional circumstances funding package under the DFRA for a Community Recovery Package.

The \$12.042 million package was developed by QRA in consultation with Emergency Management Australia (EMA) and included the following programs:

- Community Development Program
- Community Mental Health Program
- Flexible Grants Program
- Community Information and Education
- Targeted Community Funding
- Evaluation of the Community Recovery Fund

The individual programs were developed in consultation with key State Government agencies to address and identify immediate needs within impacted communities. The subsequent design and implementation of the programs formed part of the State Recovery Planning operations.

## State recovery planning

### State recovery plan

On 9 December 2018, the Queensland Premier appointed a State Recovery Coordinator (SRC) to lead the disaster recovery effort. The SRC was supported by QRA as Queensland's lead agency responsible for disaster recovery and resilience policy. After meeting the people most affected by the bushfires, the SRC identified the repair of property as a priority in the recovery planning.

The [Central Queensland Bushfires Recovery Plan 2018-2021](#) was published 3 April 2019. The aim of the State Recovery Plan was to outline state government support for local governments and communities impacted by bushfires to reach a state of 'recovered'.

The plan included recovery tasks and timing to achieve high-level recovery outcomes organised by the five lines of disaster recovery. The plan stated that recovery progress of these tasks is to be monitored against key metrics through quarterly recovery status reporting.

### Economic recovery plan

The Central Queensland Bushfires Recovery Plan 2018-2021 outlines the impacts and recovery plan specific to the Economic line of recovery. The Economic line of recovery is coordinated by the Economic Functional Recovery Group (EFRG), which is led by the Department of State Development, Infrastructure, Local Government and Planning (DSDILGP).

The Economic recovery plan includes a recovery task of delivering Targeting Community Funding for:

*“... ‘lifestyle properties’ for extraordinary expenditure that is not covered by insurance and does not extend to primary producers or small businesses.”*

The recovery task refers to examples of expenditure, stating that funding would provide:

- Additional support for clean-up activities beyond what is available under Category A.
- Financial support to assist with the extraordinary clean-up and reinstatement activities on residential properties, beyond the immediate vicinity of the residential house.
- Support and access to clean water, feed and safe fenced properties.

The lead agency for this recovery task was not identified with timing indicated from the first quarter of 2019.

The detail on the specific program design and implementation for the Central Queensland Bushfires 2018 was documented separately as 'program guidelines'.

## Rural residential recovery program

### Program guidelines

Program guidelines were developed by QRA, which were then endorsed by EMA.

The Targeted Community Funding was renamed as the Rural Residential Recovery Program in the program guidelines.

The guidelines outlined the program's purpose, scope, outcomes and objectives, principles, delivery and care models, governance and reporting, schedule, budget and resourcing, stakeholders, communication, risks, and evaluation.

## Program Design

### *Purpose*

The purpose of the program was to:

*“support the extraordinary clean up and reinstatement of rural residential properties (lifestyle blocks) impacted by the CQ Bushfires.”*

### *Outcomes and objectives*

The guidelines identified two main outcomes aligned to the purpose:

1. assist with the extraordinary expenditure for the clean-up and reinstatement of eligible rural residential and lifestyle properties impacted by the Central Queensland Bushfires event
2. help alleviate the distress to residents and animals, repair damage and reduce hazards/risks to eligible properties not covered by insurance or eligible funding.

### *Scope*

Grant applications to a maximum of \$10,000 and a minimum of \$250, where the total amount claimable of \$10,000 per applicant.

The guidelines limited the scope of the funding program to strict eligibility criteria that included a defined group of applicants, within a defined geographical area, for defined activities to cover defined costs. The criteria aligned to other DRFA recovery grants that can be activated for primary producers and small businesses.

The eligible geographical area was aligned to the area activated for DRFA Personal Hardship Assistance Scheme (PHAS) under the same disaster event. For clarity, impacted persons living outside these areas were ineligible for assistance under this program.

The guidelines provided examples of eligible activities.

Applicants were required to provide evidence to demonstrate eligibility, including that:

- there was a valid relationship to an eligible property in an eligible area
- the damage was caused by the bushfire event
- the claimed costs were not insured or recoverable under other DRFA assistance
- the costs were incurred (e.g., receipts)
- property owner approval (in the case of tenancy).

### *Delivery model*

Applicants applied directly to ARC, which received and assessed all applications. Forms were located on the QRA website and at local council offices in hardcopy.

Information for applicants, including how to apply, was made available on the QRA and ARC websites.

ARC paid approved grant applications directly to the successful applicant. ARC also followed up with direct communication with the successful applicant post-payment.

*Reporting*

The guidelines outlined the reporting requirements summarised in the table below.

Reporting	Frequency
Progress reporting	Monthly
Progress payments	As required
Acquittal reporting	Annually

*Schedule*

The program milestones are listed in the table below.

Milestone	Commencement	Completion
Application period	26-Jul-19	31-Dec-19
Works period		31-Dec-20

*Budget*

The original budget is noted in the table below.

Component	Budget
Grants	\$1,485,149
Administration	\$14,851
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,500,000</b>

## Appendix B – Evaluation plan

### Program outcomes

The Central Queensland Bushfires Recovery Plan 2018-2021 identified high level recovery outcomes organised around the five functional lines of recovery. The Economic recovery outcomes that relate to the Rural Residential Recovery Program are as follows:

- Community members are able to meet their material and service needs and participate in the economy.

The program guidelines for the Rural Residential Recovery Program identified two key outcomes:

- assist with the extraordinary expenditure for the clean-up and reinstatement of eligible rural residential and lifestyle properties impacted by the CQ Bushfires event
- help alleviate the distress to residents and animals, repair damage and reduce hazards/risks to eligible properties not covered by insurance or eligible for other funding.

### Program logic

A program logic has been developed as a diagram by QRA, which is included as *Appendix C*.

The diagram shows the logical relationship for how:

- outputs can be measured against indicators
- indicators relate to the program strategies and activities
- strategies and activities achieve program objectives
- program objectives achieve to program outcomes
- program outcomes align to State Economic Recovery outcomes
- economic recovery outcomes align to economic recovery objectives
- economic recovery objectives align to the overarching recovery objective of sustainable and resilient communities.

### Program monitoring data

#### Quantitative

The quantitative data planned for one-off monitoring is:

- time required to mobilise and launch the grant program
- time required to assess and process grant applications.

The quantitative data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is:

- number of grants received



- number of grants approved
- value of grants paid.

### **Qualitative**

The qualitative data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is:

- applicant feedback (community sentiment).

### **Financial**

The financial data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is:

- actual expenditure, aligned to financial transaction reports
- estimated forecast to complete.

## **State reporting**

### **Recovery reporting**

The quantitative and qualitative monitoring data and financial progress reports were referenced by QRA to inform the progress reports prepared as part of the Central Queensland Bushfires Recovery Plan 2018 – 2021 reporting requirements.

### **Community Recovery Package reporting**

The quantitative and qualitative monitoring data and financial progress reports were reviewed, aggregated, and summarised by QRA and submitted to EMA as part of the DRFA Category C Community Recovery Package reporting arrangements.

## **Program reviews**

QRA conducted regular program reviews of all DRFA funded programs, which included a comprehensive program review three times each year. The Rural Residential Program was included in this review, with time allocated for ARC representatives or QRA liaison officers to brief the QRA Executive team on the program and progress.

## **Program evaluation**

### **Key evaluation questions**

Key evaluation questions (KEQ) give focus to different aspects of a disaster recovery program. A list of KEQs is provided in the framework, which has been considered and sampled in the evaluation of the Community Mental Health Program. Additional KEQs have been developed by QRA in some instances to support further evaluative activity specific to this program.

KEQs have been sampled based on:

- relevance to this program
- availability of monitoring data
- coverage of all five evaluation aspects of a disaster recovery program.

KEQs sampled for this evaluation are indicated with a tick (✓).

*Governance*

To evaluate the governance of disaster recovery programs, the following KEQs were sampled to assess whether the governance structure helped to achieve recovery outcomes.

Governance key evaluation questions		Sampled
G1	Has the governance structure taken a long-term perspective on outcomes and recognised the complexity of the process?	
G2	Has the governance structure ensured recovery programs are monitored on a regular basis?	✓
G3	Has the governance structure ensured programs are adaptive to changing needs and impact?	✓
G4	Has the governance structure ensured recovery plans clearly define roles and responsibilities for disaster recovery?	
G5	Has the governance structure ensured governance procedures conform to legislation, policies, and other plans?	✓
G6	Has the governance structure established community-managed funds and other resources for disaster recovery?	
G7	Is there a shared understanding among stakeholders regarding disaster recovery responsibilities, authority and decision-making?	
G8	Has the governance structure ensured that governance is transparent and accountable?	
G9	Has the governance structure managed unintended consequences that might flow from recovery activities?	
G10	Has the governance structure coordinated response and relief efforts with the recovery process so that the two 'work together'?	

*Community engagement*

To evaluate the community engagement on disaster recovery programs, the following KEQs have been sampled to assess whether the engagement process appropriately drew from the community to ensure the community was integral to the recovery process.

Community engagement key evaluation questions		Sampled
C1	Has community engagement occurred in a timely and on-going way that provides adequate representation of community views?	

C2	Is there shared vision of a sustainable and resilient community that is understood by the community?	
C3	Has there been joint planning between community actors and emergency teams and structures?	
C4	Do organisations have capacity to develop and manage community volunteers for disaster recovery?	
C5	Are recovery plans developed through participatory processes?	
C6	Does the community have the capacity and formal avenues to lobby and challenge external agencies on disaster recovery plans, priorities, and actions?	
C7	Is there inclusion/representation of vulnerable groups in community decision-making and management of disaster recovery?	
C8	Are agreed plans and management arrangements well understood by the community and all disaster management agencies?	
C9	Has information been developed and disseminated in multiple media, multi-lingual formats, alternative formats; is appropriate to a diverse audience, user-friendly; and accessible to under-served populations?	
C10	Do community members have information they need to continue recovering from the disaster?	✓
C11	Are evolving community needs assessed and prioritised during the recovery process to inform recovery activities?	✓
C12	Are governance processes appropriately inclusive and representative of the affected community?	

*Effectiveness*

To evaluate the effectiveness of disaster recovery programs, the following KEQs have been sampled to assess whether the program was effective in achieving the overarching recovery outcomes.

Effectiveness key evaluation questions		Sampled
E1	To what extent did the disaster recovery program produce a sustainable community?	✓
E2	To what extent did the disaster recovery program produce a resilient community?	

E3	Was there any trade-off between achieving resilient outcomes and sustainable outcomes?	✓
E4	To what extent did program activities and resources allow positive interaction among the recovery domains (lines of recovery / other programs)?	

*Efficiency*

To evaluate the effectiveness of disaster recovery programs, the following KEQs have been sampled to assess whether the program was efficient in its implementation.

Efficiency key evaluation questions		Sampled
H1	To what extent did the program achieve the right balance between centralisation of some activities to achieve economies of scale while at the same time being responsive to local needs and conditions?	
H2	Did the program prevent price escalation stemming from the level of demand and competition between organisations?	
H3	How well did the program balance the need to optimise between cost of restoring essential public assets and the cost of delaying such projects?	
H4	How appropriate were the price benchmarks used to evaluate service providers?	
H5	Did the program achieve value for money relative to the disaster recovery context?	✓

*Implementation*

To evaluate the effectiveness of disaster recovery programs, the following KEQs have been sampled to assess whether the implementation of the program was appropriate.

Implementation key evaluation questions		Sampled
I1	Was the program consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery?	✓
I2	To what extent has the program been implemented according to the recovery plan?	
I3	Did the speed of the recovery process compromise quality of services?	
I4	Did the recovery program meet community needs as they changed over time and in response to changes in disaster impact?	

15	To what extent did program activities and resources effectively encourage interaction between outcome domains?	✓
16	Where disaster recovery involved several separate components or projects, how well coordinated were these with each other?	
17	To what extent was the recovery process affected by external factors that may have had an impact on the community's ability to recover?	

## ARC close out report

At program completion, ARC delivered a project close out report that incorporated:

- Grant funds disbursement breakdown
- Applicants enquiry log
- Community sentiments
- Lessons learned.

This close out report was made available for evaluation.

## ARC interview

Two months after the grant funding closed, ARC officers participated in a session with QRA officers to discuss the program to capture key achievements and lessons learned. These notes were also made available for evaluation.

## Dissemination of findings

The evaluation will be shared with ARC and relevant Queensland Government departments and agencies.

A copy of the evaluation report will be uploaded to the National Disaster Recovery Monitoring and Evaluation Database hosted by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.





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