



# Evaluation Report

## Community Development Program Flexible Funding Grants

Central Queensland Bushfires  
22 November – 6 December 2018

December 2022

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# Introduction

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 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 the Flexible Funding Grants Program.

The purpose of the Flexible Funding Grants Program is to fund projects that support local communities to recover from the impacts of the disasters and/or contribute to their future disaster preparedness.

The Department of Communities, Disability Services and Seniors (DCDSS) led the implementation of the program with administrative support from the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA). The program concluded in June 2022.

A requirement of the Flexible Funding Grants Program is to conduct an evaluation in accordance with [A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs \(2018: 2\)](#). The evaluation examines the effectiveness, efficiency, appropriateness and implementation of the grants. It also considers if the grants supported disaster affected communities to become more sustainable and resilient.

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

Recommendations have been provided to improve the effectiveness of a Flexible Funding Grants Program in future, with evaluation of the grants being an important contribution to improve subsequent disaster programs in government.

This report will be published on the National Disaster Recovery Monitoring and Evaluation Database hosted by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience.

# Program implementation

## Summary

### Scope

As part of the DRFA Category C assistance, a total of \$6 million was available under the Flexible Funding Grants Program across 2019/20 and 2020/21 for targeted recovery and resilience projects. Funding was split in two stages:

#### **Round 1: approximately \$1.8 million**

- Small grants (minimum \$2,500 up to \$20,000)
- Large grants (minimum \$20,000 up to \$100,000)

#### **Round 2: approximately \$4.2 million**

- Small grants (minimum \$2,500 up to \$20,000)
- Large grants (minimum \$20,000 up to \$100,000)

Following underspends in both Rounds 1 and 2, Round 3 was scheduled to distribute the remaining funds, but due to time constraints were unable to proceed.

Funding was provided through flexible grants to non-government organisations, community groups and local governments to implement projects aimed at driving recovery, building awareness and resilience within the disaster affected Local Government Areas (LGAs).

The grants intended to support the following program strategies:

- promote community connectedness
- promote organisational planning
- promote community resilience
- promote NGO preparedness and resilience
- promote business preparedness and resilience
- reduce future risks.

Applicants could apply for more than one grant, with projects under both Stage 1 and 2 required to meet the following criteria:

#### **Small grants (minimum \$2,500 up to \$20,000)**

- a) The project contributes to the recovery of the community from the impact of the disaster and/or contributes to the future disaster preparedness of the community.
- b) Evidence of community support and participation in the project.

#### **Large grants (minimum \$20,000 up to \$100,000)**

- c) The project contributes to the recovery of the community from the impact of the disaster and contributes to the future disaster preparedness of the community.
- d) Evidence of significant community support for the project.
- e) Evidence of inclusive processes used to identify and prioritise the project/s such as community engagement or community development plans; and endorsement by the Local Recovery Groups and/or Local Disaster Management Group.
- f) Evidence of community participation in the development and implementation of the project.
- g) Confirmation of alternative funding source of any ongoing costs (e.g. maintenance of facilities).

From a total of 85 applications, 82 were approved. 81 projects have been completed, with one project not commencing (funding returned).

Round	Applied	Approved	Completed
<b>Round 1</b>	22	21	21
<b>Round 2</b>	63	61	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>81</b>

## Cost

There were 85 grants administered for a total of \$4.83 million.

Round	Budget	Actual cost
<b>Round 1</b>	\$1.80M	\$1.09M
<b>Round 2</b>	\$4.20M	\$3.70M
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6.0M</b>	<b>\$4.83M</b>

## Time

Round 1 and 2 were released by their targeted dates.

All funds were to be fully expended and acquitted to DCDSS by 31 March 2021.

Milestone	Target date	Actual date
<b>Round 1 released</b>	Mar-19	Mar-19
<b>Round 2 released</b>	Sep-19	Oct-19

<b>Completion</b>	<b>Mar-21</b>	<b>Jun-22</b>
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## Governance activity

### Governance structure

The Flexible Funding Grants Program had two key governance arrangements.

#### Grant Evaluation Panel

An evaluation panel was established as per the program guidelines to assess the grant applications for all funding rounds. The membership included:

- QRA – one officer
- DCDSS – three officers
- Queensland Health – two officers
- A Non-Government Organisation – Uniting Care Community – one officer.

#### District Committee

A district committee was established as per the program guidelines to support collaboration and integration of all recovery initiatives of the Central Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package. The membership included:

- DCDSS – two officers
- Council – an officer each from Gladstone and Livingstone
- Queensland Health Hospital and Health Services – two officers
- Community Development Officers – one officer
- Disaster Management Officer – one officer (from Livingstone above)
- QRA – one officer.

### Program reviews

QRA conducted regular program reviews which incorporated financial and progress assessments of the Flexible Funding Grants Program. The DRFA program as a whole portfolio was reviewed by QRA in detail three times each year, for a total of nine reviews throughout the program. These reviews included a program briefing from the DCCDS Director of Community Recovery directly to QRA's Executive Leadership Team.

QRA provided quarterly progress reports on all Category C packages, including the Flexible Funding Grants Program, to Emergency Management Australia (EMA) – as the Commonwealth and State jointly funded the program. These reports were made available for evaluation.

## Independent audit

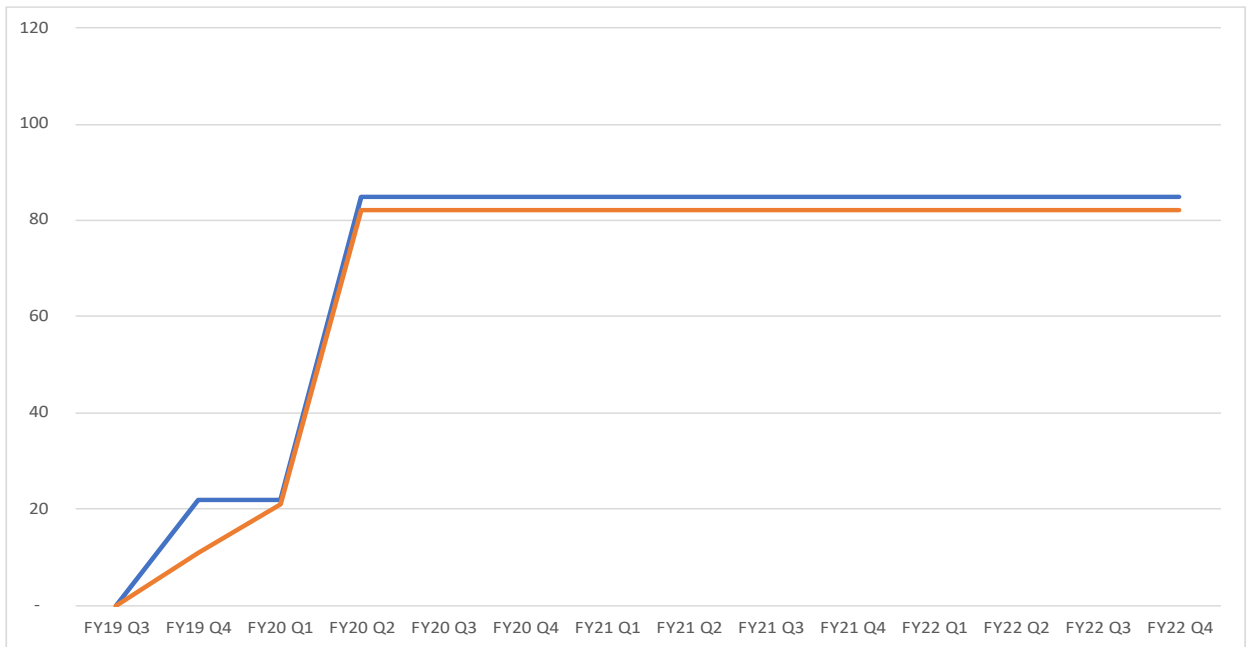
The Queensland Audit Office reviews samples of all programs during delivery and acquittal as part of their audit of Queensland's annual DRFA claim. The Australian National Audit Office also conducts an audit of the claim on behalf of the Australian Government.

## Progress monitoring

### Quantitative

#### Grant applications over time

Grants were released in two rounds in 2019. 82 grant applications were approved out of a total 85 applications received.

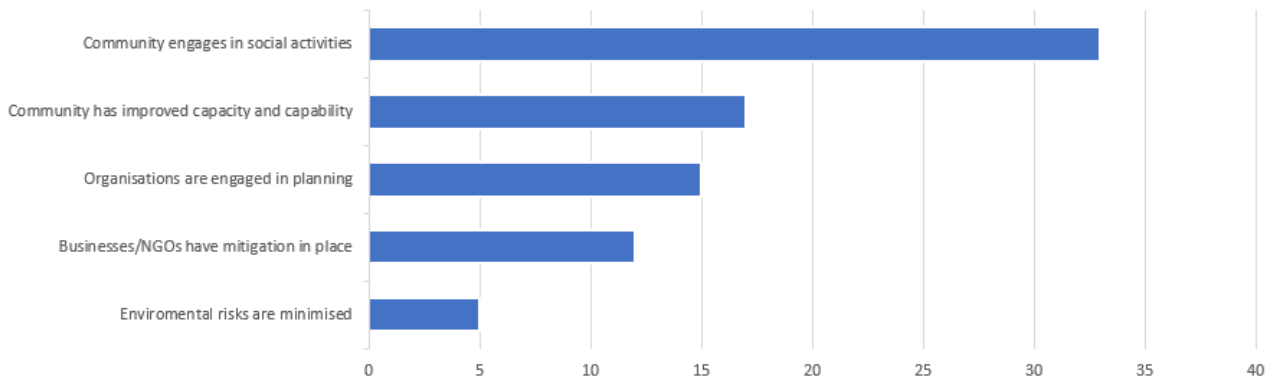


#### Grants by recovery outcome

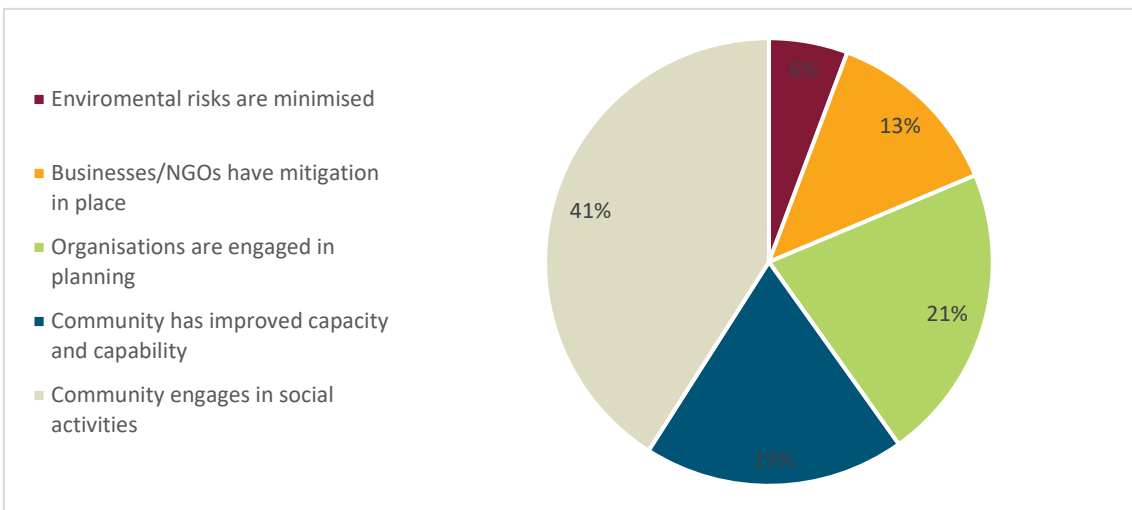
The grants funded 82 projects aligned to the recovery outcomes in the program logic. The majority of approved projects (33) and funding (41%) related to the community feeling safe and secure to engage in social activities.



*Number of approved grants by recovery outcome*



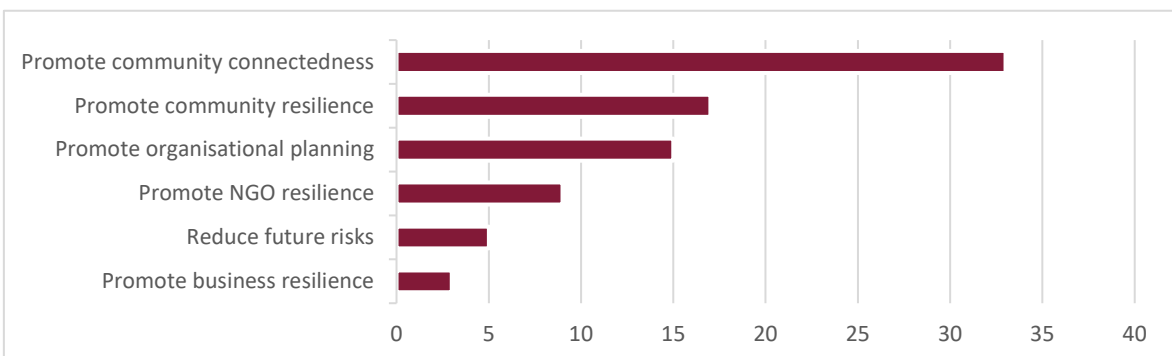
*Percentage of approved funding by recovery outcome*



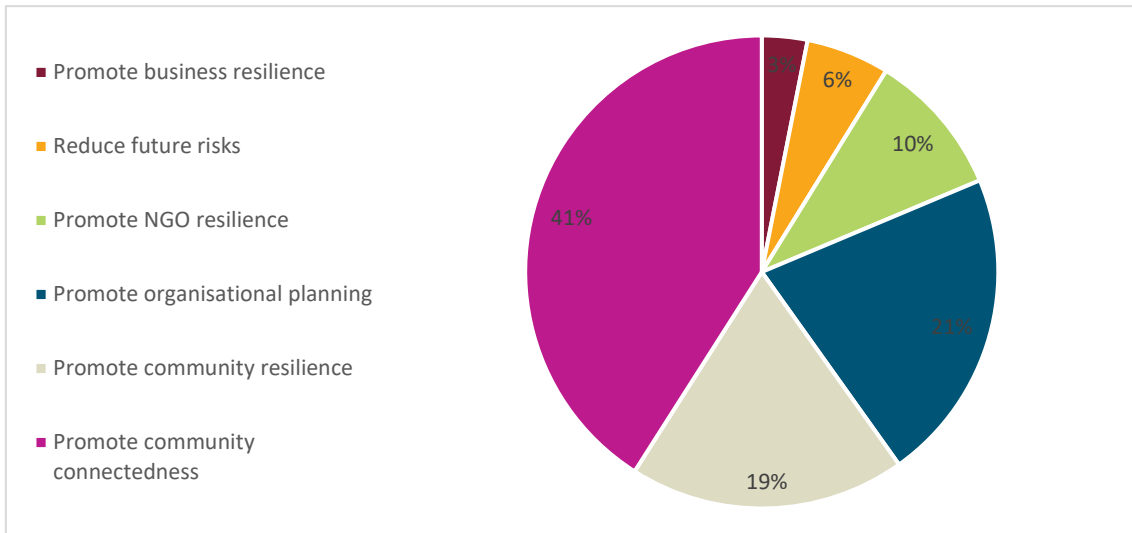
**Grants by program strategy**

The grants funded 82 projects aligned to strategies of the Flexible Funding Grant Program. The majority of projects (33) and funding (41%) related to promoting community connectedness.

*Number of approved grants by program strategy*



### Percentage of approved funding by program strategy



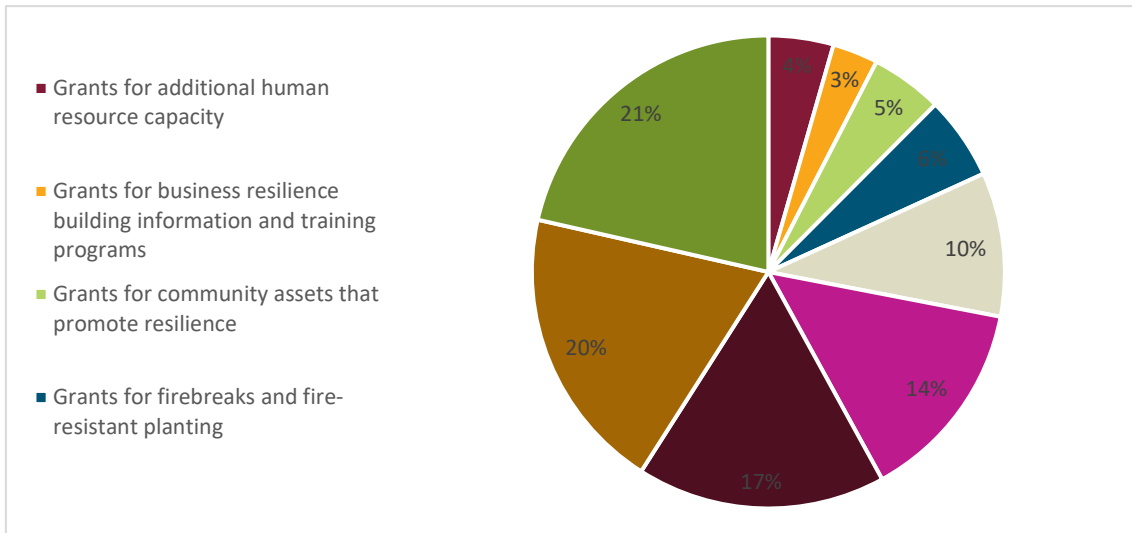
### Projects by indicator

The grants funded 82 projects aligned to indicators that support the program strategies and recovery outcomes. The majority of projects (17) and funding (21%) related to community workshops, forums and events, closely followed by upgrades to vital community facilities (16 and 20% respectively).

### Number of approved grants by indicator



### Number of approved grants by indicator



## Qualitative

### Case studies

Throughout grants implementation, case studies were used to highlight examples of qualitative outcomes. Several case studies have been selected and made available for evaluation as indexed below.

Index	Case study	Aligned Recovery Outcome
<b>CS01</b>	Finch Hatton and Eungella Firebreaks	Environmental risks are minimised
<b>CS02</b>	The Caves Community Telecommunications Upgrade	Community has improved capacity and capability
<b>CS03</b>	Rural Community Connect	Community engages in social activities
<b>CS04</b>	Community Recovery Challenge	Community engages in social activities
<b>CS05</b>	Business Continuity Planning	Businesses/NGOs have mitigation in place
<b>CS06</b>	Mt Larcom Community Disaster Management Capability Improvement	Businesses/NGOs have mitigation in place
<b>CS07</b>	Resilient Leadership Program	Businesses/NGOs have mitigation in place

<b>CS08</b>	Rockhampton Volunteer Organisations Active in Disasters (VOAD)	Organisations are engaged in planning
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# Evaluation findings

## Governance

### Regular monitoring

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

The governance arrangements ensured that the Flexible Funding Grant Program was monitored and reported on regularly.

Each quarter, the program effectively monitored and reported on key quantitative measures of the:

- number of grant applications received
- number of grant applications approved
- total value of grant applications approved
- total expenditure.

Reporting on these metrics enabled all levels of government to monitor the progressive uptake of available grants and budget.

Upon completion of Round 2, an extension of time was negotiated between the State and Commonwealth governments to enable the release of a third round of grants to use unspent funds.

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*Finding 1: The governance structure ensured that the Flexible Funding Grant Program was monitored and reported on regularly.*

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There were limited case studies reported throughout program implementation. Only three Flexible Funding Grant Program case studies were provided through progressive Recovery Reporting and Quarterly Reporting to the Commonwealth.

As Flexible Funding Grants support a wide variety of program strategies and recovery outcomes, it is difficult to monitor and evaluate program success progressively based on quantitative metrics alone. Case studies are essential to demonstrate the effectiveness of each grant aligned to desired recovery outcomes for the community.

An additional five case studies were made available at project completion for evaluation, highlighting positive community outcomes.

There are opportunities through existing structures to ensure greater access to case studies, good news stories and evidence of project success at the community level.

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*Recommendation 1: The governance structure must ensure that case studies and good news stories are made available progressively for monitoring and reporting of community outcomes.*

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## Compliance

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

The governance arrangements ensured governance procedures were compliant.

This is best demonstrated by the program logic, which links high-level recovery outcomes in 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 HSFRG action of delivering a Flexible Grants Program to achieve community recovery outcomes. More detailed objectives are documented in the program guidelines to promote sustainable and resilient communities. These two documents complement each other without conflict.

During implementation, one approved applicant identified an inability to initiate the project and returned the funds to the delivery agency accordingly. All other projects were completed within the (extended) allowable time limit.

The program financial close out documents are yet to be 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 2: The governance structure has contributed to compliance with legislation, policies and other relevant plans.*

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In the implementation of Round 2, 18 grants were approved for a value more than the \$100,000 cap for large grants. This oversight was made due to releasing the grants simultaneously with grants from different events with high cap values.

This oversight resulted in the erroneous payment of funding to applicants. It was decided not to pursue repayment retrospectively from applicants, as projects were aligned to recovery outcomes. The overpayments were considered ineligible for reimbursement under the DRFA, absorbed by the delivery agency.

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*Recommendation 2: The governance structure must ensure strict compliance with the endorsed program guidelines in the release and approval of grants.*

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## Community engagement

### Timely and ongoing engagement

*C1 – Has community engagement occurred in a timely and on-going way that provides adequate representation of community views?*

Community engagement was led primarily through the Community Development Officers (CDOs) established under the Community Development Program in March and April 2019. Prior engagement was led by existing community response and recovery organisations, for which monitoring data is unavailable.

Round 1 of the Flexible Funding Grants were released in March 2019, relying on existing organisations to provide timely and ongoing engagement. Refer to KEQ 13 in relation to speed of recovery versus quality of service.

Once appointed, CDOs invested more than 1,500 hours in supporting more than 100 regional participants with Flexible Funding Grant related activities over two years.

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*Finding 3: CDOs engaged with community organisations to provide ongoing support with Flexible Funding Grant related activities.*

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In a contract close out meeting, CDOs remarked on the importance of case studies to effectively engage with community organisations. They reported the community organisations required assistance in developing project ideas aligned to recovery objectives and a library of relevant case studies would have saved time and improved their effectiveness in communications.

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*Recommendation 3: Create a library of case studies to support all organisations improve their ability to engage with community organisations.*

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In the close out meeting, one CDO explained that it was difficult to support community organisations with Flexible Funding Grant projects where they did not have access to grant applications or project details.

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*Recommendation 4: Ensure grant applications and project details are shared with local government representatives or CDOs to improve their ability to engage with community organisations.*

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## Effectiveness

### Sustainable community

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

The Flexible Funding Grant Program targeted two recovery objectives that contribute to sustainable communities:

- Community members feel sufficiently safe and secure following a disaster to engage in social activities and interactions with other members of the community.
- Organisations are engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery.

The success of each objective will be explored individually.

#### **Community engages in social activities**

A key strategy to encouraging the community to engage in social activities was to promote connectedness, encourage support networks and social inclusion.

#### *Promote community connectedness*

33 grants (41% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote community connectedness, including:

- 17 grants for community workshops, forums and events
- 16 grants for upgrades to vital community facilities.

There were two case studies showcasing community workshops, forums and events:

- CS03 – Rural Community Connect
- CS04 – Community Recovery Challenge.

Both highlight the successes of locally based organisations being funded to create new and tarded community engagement opportunities. The Rural Community Connect story was sourced from Council’s website and features personal feedback from community members that participated in a workshop.

There were no case studies available for upgrades to vital community facilities. These projects related to new or refurbished assets that were demonstrated as being critical facilities that enable social engagement. Examples include new men’s sheds, upgrades to pony club facilities and designs for new halls. Case studies highlighting these experiences would help to support continued investment in such projects for future programs.

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*Finding 4: Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote community connectedness.*

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## Organisations are engaged in planning

A key strategy to ensure organisations are engaged in planning was to promote organisational mitigation and recovery planning.

### *Promote organisational planning*

15 grants (21% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote organisational planning, including:

- 13 grants for recovery planning, risk assessments and mitigation planning
- Two grants for additional human resource capacity.

Case study CS08 highlights an example of an effective organisational planning project. Led by Volunteering Queensland, the project mapped 70 community organisations in the Rockhampton area and invited them to participate in a local consortium of Volunteer Organisations Active in Disasters. Subsequent resources have been developed to assist with future deployment of volunteers.

There were no case studies available to demonstrate the additional human resources. However, there was evidence in the Recovery Reporting of their contribution to delivering recovery and resilience planning activities, including those funded by Flexible Funding Grants.

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*Finding 5: Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote organisational planning activities.*

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Examples of the organisational planning outputs (e.g. bushfire management plan) would be useful artefacts to reference in future programs.

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*Recommendation 5: Example of key outputs (e.g. bushfire management plans) funded by the flexible funding grants program should be catalogued for reference in future programs.*

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## Summary of findings

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

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*Finding 6: The flexible funding grant program was generally effective in contributing to a sustainable community.*

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There are opportunities to further substantiate this finding by:

- capturing additional case studies, particularly in relation to grants for:
  - upgrades to vital community facilities
  - additional human resource capacity
- expanding the evaluation planning to incorporate a mechanism for independently capturing views direct from program participants – through interviews, surveys or other anonymous feedback services.

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*Recommendation 6: Evaluation of the program’s effectiveness may be enhanced through capturing additional case studies and sourcing feedback directly from participants.*

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## Resilient community

*E2 – To what extent did the disaster recovery program produce a resilient community?*

The Flexible Funding Grant Program targeted three recovery objectives that contribute to resilient communities:

- Community has improved capacity and capability to respond to future disasters.
- Business and not for profits have in place adequate mitigation practices for risk and threats.
- Risk of adverse impacts of future disasters on the environment is minimised.

The success of each of these objectives will be explored individually.

### **Community has improved capacity and capability**

A key strategy to improving community capacity and capability was to promote community resilience to future disasters.

#### *Promote community resilience*

17 grants (19% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote community resilience, including:

- 12 grants for community resilience building information and training programs
- Five grants for community assets that promote resilience.

Case study CS02 highlights an effective community resilience promotion project. The upgrade of community telecommunications at a tourist park at The Caves helped to reduce ‘black spots’ in an area at risk of bushfire events. A project participant commented:

*“Having mobile service at Capricorn Caves has greatly improved the business’ ability to communicate on the property in the event of a natural disaster or medical emergency.*

*As a result this has reduced the time it would take first responders to reach the property... Having mobile service is essentially a lifesaving service we now have as a result of this program.”*

There were no case studies available for the community resilience building information and training programs. However, there was evidence in the Recovery Reporting of their delivery in the community as part of local government’s recovery operations.

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*Finding 7: Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote community resilience.*

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### **Businesses/NGOs have mitigation in place**

The key strategies to ensuring businesses and non-government organisations (NGOs) have mitigation in place was to promote:

- NGO resilience to future disasters
- business resilience to future disasters.

Each of these will be explored separately.

#### *Promote NGO resilience*

Nine grants (10% in total value) were provided to NGOs to promote community resilience. Case study CSo6 highlights an example of an effective NGO resilience promotion project. The upgrade of facilities designed to improve capability and capacity to respond to future bushfire events. The grant funded the:

- building of security fences for the premises to ensure the safety of brigade equipment
- installation of backup power supply (a generator) to ensure power and the centre’s reliability
- improvement to office facilities
- sealing of facilities concrete floor to improve durability
- installation of base station UHF and VHF radios to improve base communication.

The case study highlights valuable resilience outcomes, including:

*“The brigade is now well equipped to run communications during future disasters and can accommodate firecoms officers to be stationed [sic] at Mount Larcom as required.*

*The project has helped the brigade volunteers feel their efforts are appreciated and that they can operate from a more appropriate base.*

*The project has allowed continued local businesses to provide service during uncertain times.”*

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*Finding 8: Flexible funding grants supported non-government organisations to improve resilience to future disasters.*

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### *Promote business resilience*

Three grants (3% in total value) were provided to community organisations to promote business resilience through information and training programs.

Case study CS03 highlights an example of an effective business resilience promotion project. The project delivered revised and improved business continuity plans for 10 organisations. The project has also promoted discussion of business continuity planning among stakeholders in peer-to-peer networks.

Case study CS07 highlights two additional effective business resilience promotion projects. Identical resilient leadership programs were rolled out in Bundaberg and Gladstone through local community organisations. The program reportedly enhanced and empowered local leaders through training, including content related to disaster planning and disruption management. These programs also made their workshop material available for future reference.

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*Finding 9: Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote business resilience to future disasters.*

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## **Environmental risks are minimised**

A key strategy to minimising environmental risks was to reduce future risks posed by bushfires.

### *Reduce future risks*

Five grants (6% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to reduce future risks through grants for firebreaks and fire-resistant planting.

Case study CS02 highlights an effective risk reduction project, which funded a 30km firebreak in Finch Hatton and Eungella to protect private properties from bushfires spreading from State-managed forests.

*“The project requires all landholders to give permission for the break to be on their property, and provide access to the men, dozers and other equipment to cut the break.*

*While much of the budget is put towards the use of heavy machinery, the work is not possible without a part-time worker from Reef Catchments to engage with landholders and coordinate works.”*

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*Finding 10: Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote minimising environmental risks.*

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## **Summary of findings**

Through evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data, it is likely that the Flexible Funding Grant Program has effectively contributed to producing a more resilient community.

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*Finding 11: The flexible funding grant program was generally effective in contributing to a resilient community.*

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There are opportunities to further substantiate this finding by expanding evaluation planning to incorporate a mechanism for independently capturing views direct from program participants – through interviews, surveys or other anonymous feedback services.

Refer to recommendation 6.

## **Interaction**

*E4 – To what extent did program activities and resources allow positive interaction among the recovery domains (lines of recovery / other programs)?*

The Flexible Funding Grants Program has encouraged positive interaction among the recovery domains.

The program logic highlights how recovery objectives span:

- overarching recovery objectives
- human and social recovery objectives
- economic recovery objectives
- environmental recovery objectives.

Interaction between recovery domains is evident throughout implementation. Local government applied for funding on behalf of community organisations to deliver human and social connectedness activities. Local government and community organisations applied for grants to coordinate training for businesses. Environmental organisations worked collaboratively with emergency services and volunteers to cut firebreaks. Communities coordinated themselves to secure funding for upgrades to vital community assets.

The interaction of activities and resources between recovery domains is a key feature of the flexibility that this grant program enables.

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*Finding 12: The flexible funding grants program facilitated positive interaction among the functional lines of recovery.*

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# Efficiency

## Balance

*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?*

The program achieved a reasonable balance between the centralisation of program administration and the localisation of project selection and delivery.

The evaluation panel assessing grant applications included both state representatives located in Brisbane (QRA, DCDSS) and regional representatives located within the impacted region (DCDSS, Queensland Health, Uniting Care). Local representatives (e.g. Council) were excluded to avoid any perceived conflict of interest from intended applicants.

The district committee that supported collaboration and integration of all recovery initiatives of the Central Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package included state representatives located in Brisbane (DCDSS, QRA), regional representatives located within the impacted region (DCDSS, Queensland Health) and local representatives (Councils, Community Development Officers).

Program administration, reporting and financial acquittal was coordinated and delivered centrally by DCDSS.

All representatives referenced above were current operational staff within existing organisations and were not costed to the program. The entire \$6 million budget allocation was made available for grants.

The Central Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package also funded a Community Development Program to employ three Community Development Officers (CDOs) located in the region. A key responsibility of the CDOs was to support organisations with the preparation and submission of Flexible Funding Grants. Refer to the separate evaluation of the Community Development Program for findings and recommendations.

The CDOs invested more than 1,500 hours in supporting more than 100 regional participants with Flexible Funding Grant related activities. It is considered the locally based CDO approach promotes responsiveness to local needs and conditions.

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*Finding 13: The flexible funding grants program achieved a reasonable balance between centralised governance and regional representation to promote connection of local communities.*

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## Implementation

### Consistency

#### *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](#) was conducted, with a consistency rating of low, medium and high applied subjectively. Low and medium ratings identify opportunities for improvement.

Principle	Consistency	Comments
<b>Understanding the context</b>	High	Broad criteria for the Flexible Funding Grants enabled a wide variety of community-led initiatives across practical geographical boundaries where the bushfires occurred.
<b>Recognising complexity</b>	Medium	<p>The recovery from the Central Queensland Bushfires in 2018 was complex.</p> <p>Flexible Funding Grants were implemented quickly and efficiently through two rounds in 2019, although there were some anecdotal reports that the not all community organisations were ready for the first round. CDOs were mobilised by April 2019 with a role to assist with grant preparation, although the first round was released in March 2019.</p> <p>The release of a third round in 2021 following a program extension to use unspent funds provided community organisations with an additional opportunity to access the grants.</p> <p>With the benefit of hindsight, three to five smaller rounds released progressively over the (extended) three year program timeframe may have more adequately addressed the recovery complexities.</p> <p>The recovery from the Central Queensland bushfires was impacted by COVID-19 pandemic. However, only one grant out of 99 approved was returned due to the applicant being unable to initiate the project.</p>

<p><b>Using community-led approaches</b></p>	<p>High</p>	<p>The Flexible Funding Grants promoted and supported projects that were entirely community-led.</p> <p>The community-led approach was limited to local government, not for profit organisations and community groups.</p> <p>Evidence of community support and participation in the project was a pre-condition to funding.</p>
<p><b>Ensuring coordination of all activities</b></p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Establishment of the program was coordinated, benefitting from a clear design and establishment phase at the state level through the State Recovery Plan and program guidelines.</p> <p>During program implementation, there was evidence of some issues with coordination as the mobilising of CDOs coincided with the closure of the first round of flexible funding grants.</p> <p>Once mobilised, CDOs were generally effective in coordinating grant projects and activities, investing more than 1,500 hours in supporting more than 100 regional participants over two years.</p>
<p><b>Employing effective communication</b></p>	<p>Medium</p>	<p>Communication was largely reliant on existing local, district and State disaster response and recovery arrangements until CDOs were mobilised.</p> <p>For information on the effectiveness of the Community Information and Education Program also funded under the Central Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package, refer to the program evaluation.</p> <p>Communication methods were diverse and included workshops, information sessions, training programs, fridge magnets, posters, books, recovery plans and grant submissions.</p> <p>Community members should be invited to participate in formal independent feedback activities, such as interviews or surveys to further evaluate the effectiveness of communication in future programs.</p>

<p><b>Acknowledging and building capacity</b></p>	<p>High</p>	<p>The program provided 23 grants to improve community capacity through recovery planning, risk assessments, mitigation planning and additional human resource capacity.</p> <p>The program also provided 14 grants to improve NGO and business capacity through NGO assets that promote resilience, business information and training programs.</p> <p>The program also built capacity of community organisations to prepare, submit, deliver and acquit grant funding. This is a key capability of organisations that rely on external funding.</p> <p>For grants and projects that fund targeted capacity building activities, participants should be invited to provide formal feedback – such as through interviews, surveys or feedback forms made available for evaluation – to further assess the effectiveness of capacity building activities in future programs.</p>
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*Finding 14: The program was generally consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.*

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## Speed vs quality

### *13 – Did the speed of the recovery process compromise quality of services?*

The Flexible Funding Grants Program was established in line with the State Recovery Plan. Round 1 grants were released in March 2019 (approximately three months after the event) and Round 2 grants were released in October 2019 (approximately 10 months after the event).

Evidence in the Recovery Reporting from local government showed some issues in relation to the awareness of the grants and the coordination of the various projects approved. This may be partly due to the speed of the recovery processes.

The CDOs under the Community Development Program were appointed in March and April 2019 after the release of the Round 1 funding. This meant applicants from the first round did not receive assistance from the CDO.

This may have been alleviated through the planned second round of funding in October 2019.

Future programs could consider adopting a three stage roll out – spread over the available timeframe to maximise grant take up aligned to recovery objectives.

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*Recommendation 7: Consider the implementation of several, smaller funding rounds throughout the available timeframe, to maximise community engagement and program effectiveness.*

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## Conclusion

The evaluation has concluded the Flexible Funding Grants Program contributed to the recovery and resilience of the communities impacted by the Central Queensland Bushfires 2018. Key findings of the evaluation are provided below.

## Governance

1. The governance structure ensured that the Flexible Funding Grant Program was monitored and reported on regularly.
2. The governance structure has contributed to compliance with legislation, policies and other relevant plans.

## Community engagement

3. CDOs engaged with community organisations to provide ongoing support with Flexible Funding Grant related activities.

## Effectiveness

4. Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote community connectedness.
5. Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote organisational planning activities.
6. The flexible funding grant program was generally effective in contributing to a sustainable community.
7. Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote community resilience.
8. Flexible funding grants supported non-government organisations to improve resilience to future disasters.

9. Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote business resilience to future disasters.
10. Flexible funding grants supported community organisations to promote minimising environmental risks.
11. The flexible funding grant program was generally effective in contributing to a resilient community.
12. The flexible funding grants program facilitated positive interaction among the functional lines of recovery.

## Efficiency

13. The flexible funding grants program achieved a reasonable balance between centralised governance and regional representation to promote connection of local communities.

## Implementation

14. The program was generally consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.

## Recommendations

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

### **RECOMMENDATION 1**

The governance structure must ensure that case studies and good news stories are made available progressively for monitoring and reporting of community outcomes.

### **RECOMMENDATION 2**

The governance structure must ensure strict compliance with the endorsed program guidelines in the release and approval of grants.

### **RECOMMENDATION 3**

Create a library of case studies to support all organisations improve their ability to engage with community organisations.

### **RECOMMENDATION 4**

Ensure grant applications and project details are shared with local government representatives or CDOs to improve their ability to engage with community organisations.

### **RECOMMENDATION 5**

Example of key outputs (e.g. bushfire management plans) funded by the flexible funding grants program should be catalogued for reference in future programs.

### **RECOMMENDATION 6**

Evaluation of the program's effectiveness may be enhanced through capturing additional case studies and sourcing feedback directly from participants.

### **RECOMMENDATION 7**

Consider the implementation of several, smaller funding rounds throughout the available timeframe, to maximise community engagement and program effectiveness.

# Appendices

## Appendix A – Background

### Central Queensland Bushfires 2018

#### Impacts

The Central Queensland Bushfires in 2018 have been described as an unprecedented event for the state of Queensland.

135 fires were attended at the peak of the event. These occurred in 35 communities across eight local government areas in Queensland between 22 November and 6 December 2018.

The fires caused significant social disruption within impacted communities, with 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 grant and loan funding was administered through these arrangements, including approximately \$1.8 million of emergency hardship assistance grants paid to impacted residents.

## **Consequences**

More than 1.4 million hectares of land was burned, with impacts to people, private property, primary producers, agriculture, and the environment across eight LGAs.

413 community recovery workers assisted bushfire impacted communities in the aftermath of the event, undertaking over 3,500 visits and phone calls and leading to more than 1,500 referrals to community support services. In addition, 4,314 Emergency Hardship Assistance grants were distributed under the DRFA, with a total of \$1,849,045 paid to residents as at 22 January 2019. 28 Emergency Housing Accommodation Requests (EHAR) were received. On 4 December alone, 316 persons were supported with Psychological First Aid. Additional support was required for the 232 residents of the Baffle Creek area during repatriation.

As a result of the evident social and economic disruption, it was anticipated that long term effects would be evident in impacted areas, and a program to assist disaster-impacted individuals, carers, families, volunteers and communities with specialist support would be required post-disaster.

## **State recovery planning**

### **Central Queensland Bushfires 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](#) (CQ Bushfires Recovery Plan) was published 3 April 2019. The aim of the 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.

## 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 Funding 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 CQ Bushfires Recovery Planning operations.

## Flexible Funding Grants Program

### Program guidelines

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

The guidelines stated projects under the Flexible Funding Grants Program must be aligned with national disaster recovery outcomes (not limited to human and social recovery) and the National Disaster Recovery Principles as outlined in the Community Recovery Handbook and State Recovery Plan.

### Program design

#### *Purpose*

The purpose of the program was to:

*“fund projects that support local communities to recover from the impacts of the disasters and/or to contribute to their future disaster preparedness”.*

#### *Outcomes and objectives*

### Recovery outcomes

Funded projects will need to contribute to one or more of the following Disaster Recovery Outcomes:

- The needs of vulnerable groups are addressed in disaster recovery.
- The community is aware of the disaster recovery processes.
- The community can express its changing disaster recovery needs.

- Community members are aware of the risks of future disasters.
- The community has improved capacity and capability to respond to future disasters.
- Business and not for profits have in place adequate mitigation practices for risks and threats.
- Government, private sector and civil society and organisations are engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery.

### **Objectives**

The grants will support community-led engagement activities, partnerships and collaboration and the development of local recovery initiatives and grants that:

- reduce future risks and minimise community dependence on government assistance
- enhance self-efficacy and community-efficacy
- minimise negative impacts and embrace opportunities
- promote connectedness, encourage support networks and social inclusion
- support and promote opportunities for sustainable economic recovery
- support business and service provider continuity
- promote preparedness and resilience to future disasters.

### *Delivery model*

Projects must be undertaken in line with the National Disaster Recovery Principles as outlined in the Community Recovery Handbook 2:

- understanding the *context*
- recognising *complexity*
- using local, *community-led* approaches
- ensuring *coordination* of all activities
- employing effective *communication*
- acknowledging and building local *capacity*
- identifying lessons and building resilience.

### *Scope*

The scope of the program was to deliver grants for projects that contribute to recovery of the community from the impact of the disaster and/or contribute to the future disaster preparedness of the community.

Applicants were required to provide evidence of community support and participation in the project for both small and large grants.

For large grants, applicants were also required to provide:

- evidence of inclusive processes used to identify and prioritise the project/s such as community engagement or community development plans; and endorsement by the Local Recovery Groups and/or Local Disaster Management Group
- evidence of community participation in the development and implementation of the project
- confirmation of alternative funding source of any ongoing costs (e.g. maintenance of facilities).

### *Schedule*

The guidelines stipulated that funding will be available across 2019/20 and 2020/21 financial years with all funds to be fully expended and acquitted to DCDSS by 31 March 2021.

### *Budget*

A total budget of \$6 million was available under the program with funding split into two stages:

#### **Stage 1: approximately \$1.8 million**

- Small grants (minimum \$2,500 up to \$20,000)
- Large grants (minimum \$20,000 up to \$100,000)

#### **Stage 2: approximately \$4.2 million**

- Small grants (minimum \$2,500 up to \$20,000)
- Large grants (minimum \$20,000 up to \$100,000)

### *Reporting*

Applicants were required to provide a completion report outlining achievements and deliverables against what was identified in the application.

For large grants, applicants were also required to provide a copy of a general ledger specific to the funded project each quarter.

## 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 community recovery outcomes that relate to the Flexible Funding Grants Program are as follows:

- Community members feel sufficiently safe and secure following a disaster to engage in social activities and interactions with other members of the community.
- Organisations are engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery.
- Community has improved capacity and capability to respond to future disasters.
- Business and not for profits have in place adequate mitigation practices for risk and threats.
- Risk of adverse impacts of future disasters on the environment is minimised.

### 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
- program strategies achieve recovery objectives
- the recovery objectives align to the recovery objective of sustainable and resilient communities.

### Program monitoring data

#### Quantitative

The quantitative data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is:

- number of grants received
- number of grants approved
- value of grants approved.

#### Qualitative

The qualitative data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is:

- case studies.

## **Financial**

The financial data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is:

- total expenditure to date.

## **State reporting**

### **Recovery reporting**

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

### **Flexible Funding Grants reporting**

The quantitative and qualitative monitoring data and financial progress reports were reviewed, aggregated and summarised by QRA; then 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, including a comprehensive program review three times each year. The Flexible Funding Grants Program was incorporated in this review, with time allocated for DCDSS 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 Flexible Funding Grants Program. Additional KEQs have been developed by QRA 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
<b>G1</b>	Has the governance structure taken a long-term perspective on outcomes and recognised the complexity of the process?	
<b>G2</b>	Has the governance structure ensured recovery programs are monitored on a regular basis?	✓
<b>G3</b>	Has the governance structure ensured programs are adaptive to changing needs and impact?	
<b>G4</b>	Has the governance structure ensured recovery plans clearly define roles and responsibilities for disaster recovery?	
<b>G5</b>	Has the governance structure ensured governance procedures conform to legislation, policies, and other plans?	✓
<b>G6</b>	Has the governance structure established community-managed funds and other resources for disaster recovery?	
<b>G7</b>	Is there a shared understanding among stakeholders regarding disaster recovery responsibilities, authority and decision-making?	
<b>G8</b>	Has the governance structure ensured that governance is transparent and accountable?	
<b>G9</b>	Has the governance structure managed unintended consequences that might flow from recovery activities?	
<b>G10</b>	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 within 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
<b>C1</b>	Has community engagement occurred in a timely and on-going way that provides adequate representation of community views?	✓
<b>C2</b>	Is there shared vision of a sustainable and resilient community that is understood by the community?	

<b>C3</b>	Has there been joint planning between community actors and emergency teams and structures?
<b>C4</b>	Do organisations have capacity to develop and manage community volunteers for disaster recovery?
<b>C5</b>	Are recovery plans developed through participatory processes?
<b>C6</b>	Does the community have the capacity and formal avenues to lobby and challenge external agencies on disaster recovery plans, priorities, and actions?
<b>C7</b>	Is there inclusion/representation of vulnerable groups in community decision-making and management of disaster recovery?
<b>C8</b>	Are agreed plans and management arrangements well understood by the community and all disaster management agencies?
<b>C9</b>	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?
<b>C10</b>	Do community members have information they need to continue recovering from the disaster?
<b>C11</b>	Are evolving community needs assessed and prioritised during the recovery process to inform recovery activities?
<b>C12</b>	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
<b>E1</b>	To what extent did the disaster recovery program produce a sustainable community?	✓
<b>E2</b>	To what extent did the disaster recovery program produce a resilient community?	✓



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

### *Efficiency*

To evaluate the efficiency 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
<b>H1</b>	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?	ü
<b>H2</b>	Did the program prevent price escalation stemming from the level of demand and competition between organisations?	
<b>H3</b>	How well did the program balance the need to optimise between cost of restoring essential public assets and the cost of delaying such projects?	
<b>H4</b>	How appropriate were the price benchmarks used to evaluate service providers?	
<b>H5</b>	Did the program achieve value for money relative to the disaster recovery context?	

### *Implementation*

To evaluate the implementation 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
<b>I1</b>	Was the program consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery?	✓
<b>I2</b>	To what extent has the program been implemented according to the recovery plan?	

<b>I3</b>	Did the speed of the recovery process compromise quality of services?	✓
<b>I4</b>	Did the recovery program meet community needs as they changed over time and in response to changes in disaster impact?	
<b>I5</b>	To what extent did program activities and resources effectively encourage interaction between outcome domains?	
<b>I6</b>	Where disaster recovery involved several separate components or projects, how well coordinated were these with each other?	
<b>I7</b>	To what extent was the recovery process affected by external factors that may have had an impact on the community's ability to recover?	

### Dissemination of findings

The evaluation will be shared with DCDSS 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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