



Evaluation Report

Flexible Funding Grants Program Community Recovery Package

Queensland Bushfires
September – December 2019

December 2022

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Contents

Introduction	iv
Program Implementation.....	1
Summary	1
Governance activity	3
Progress monitoring.....	4
Evaluation findings.....	11
Governance	11
Community engagement.....	12
Effectiveness	14
Efficiency	23
Equity	26
Implementation	28
Conclusion	30
Governance	30
Community engagement.....	30
Effectiveness	30
Efficiency	31
Equity	31
Implementation	31
Recommendations.....	32
Appendices	33
Appendix A – Background.....	33
Appendix B – Evaluation plan	44

Introduction

The 2019 bushfire season in Queensland was catastrophic. At the height of the season, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) was dealing with more than 90 bushfires at one time.

The Southern Queensland Bushfires and the Stradbroke Bushfires both occurred in September, and the Eastern Queensland Bushfires burnt throughout November and December. Additionally, fires in other parts of the state resulted in the merging of the bushfire events into one disaster event - Queensland Bushfires, September - December 2019. More than seven and a half million hectares burnt state-wide, resulting in the activation of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) for 23 of the 77 Local Government Areas (LGAs).

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 accelerate recovery and build resilience of those communities impacted by the Queensland bushfires in September – December 2019.

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.

This evaluation requires conduct in accordance with [A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework for Disaster Recovery Programs \(2018: 2\)](#). The framework allows for examination of 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.

Developed for the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA), the Deloitte Overarching Disaster Recovery Evaluation Framework has also been reviewed and incorporated within this evaluation.

In conclusion, the evaluation of the Flexible Funding Grants Program was shown to contribute to the recovery of the communities and local economies impacted by the Queensland Bushfires. 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 the evaluation of 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 released in 2020. The objective of the program is to provide funding to non-government organisations, research bodies, industry groups and peak bodies, community groups, and Local Governments to deliver projects that:

- drive disaster recovery and build awareness and resilience within communities impacted by the bushfires
- support community-led engagement activities, development of local recovery initiatives and encourage partnerships and collaboration
- proactively reduce future risks in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework and minimise community dependence on government assistance.

Funding was released in two rounds, with all approved projects to be completed by no later than 30 June 2022.

Round 1 – released in the first quarter of 2020.

Round 2 – released in the fourth quarter of 2020.

Eligible applicants could apply for more than one grant, with each project required to meet the following grant caps, Program objectives, eligibility criteria and requirements of:

Small grants (minimum \$2,500 up to a maximum of \$50,000)

- a) demonstrate how 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) include evidence of community support and participation in the project.

Large grants (minimum \$50,001 up to a maximum of \$100,000)

- c) demonstrate how 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.
- d) include demonstrated evidence (additional to support letters) of significant community support for the project.
- e) include 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) include demonstrated evidence (additional to support letters) of community participation in the development and implementation of the project.
- g) include confirmation of alternative funding source of any ongoing costs (e.g. maintenance of facilities).

h) include a lite project plan noting significant milestones supporting the objectives of the proposal.

A detailed project plan, detailing the deliverables, milestones and timelines etc. was to be delivered within the first quarterly funded period to support all approved large grant projects.

From a total of 206 applications, 110 were approved with 109 projects completed as last reported on 30 June 2022.

Round	Applied	Approved	Completed
Round 1	99	37	36
Round 2	107	73	73
Total	206	110	109

Cost

There were 110 grants administered for a total of \$5.99 million.

Round	Budget	Actual Cost
Round 1	N/A	\$1.80M
Round 2	N/A	\$4.19M
Total	\$6.00M	\$5.99M

Time

Round 1 was released in May 2020, later than originally planned due to the COVID-19 global pandemic. Most of the projects were reported as complete by the June 2022 deadline.

Milestone	Target Date	Actual Date
Round 1 released	Mar-20	May-20
Round 2 released	Dec-20	Dec-20
Completion	Jun-22	Jun-22

Governance activity

Advisory group

As the funding programs were delivered, DCDSS in conjunction with the funding recipients identified announcement, progress and finalisation of program media opportunities. DCDSS communicated these opportunities to QRA, who advised Emergency Management Australia.

To ensure collaboration and integration of recovery initiatives, there was a requirement for the submitted FFG quarterly updates to be provided at the CDO reference group meetings, as well as Local Disaster Management Groups and/or District Disaster Management Group and District Human and Social Recovery Groups.

As the lead agency responsible for overarching administration of the DRFA, QRA worked closely with state and local governments to deliver value for money and best practice expenditure and acquittal of DRFA funds within disaster-affected communities.

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 DCDSS 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

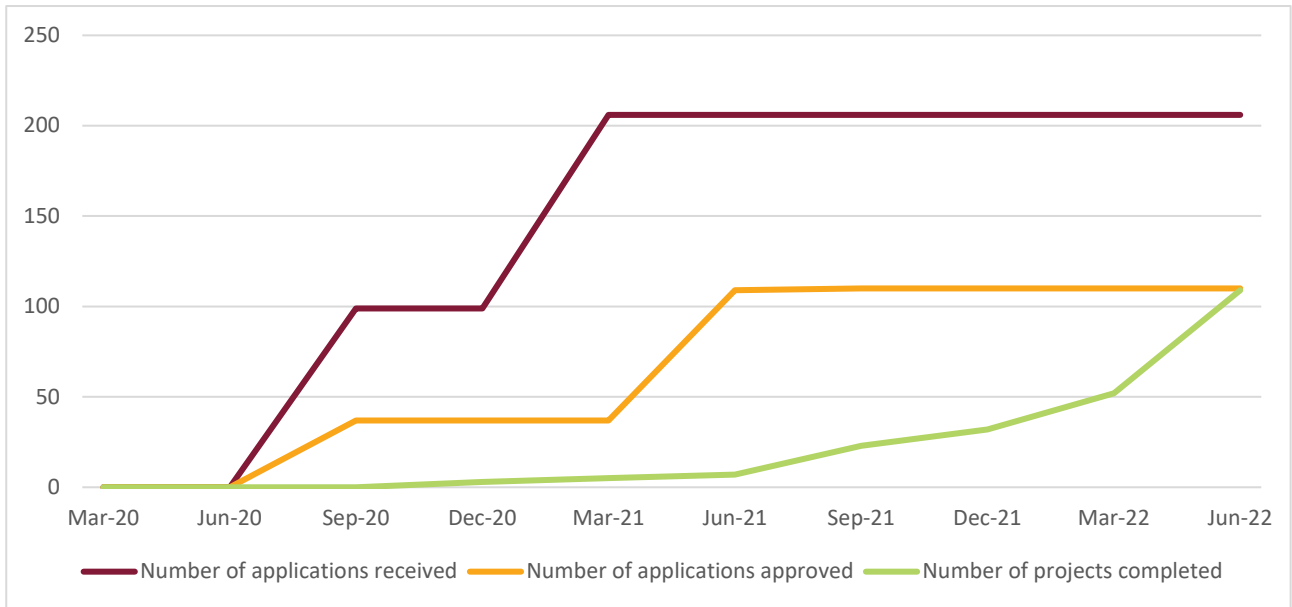
The Queensland Audit Office reviews samples of all programs during delivery and acquittal as part of their audit of Queensland's annual DRFA claim. The Australian National Audit Office also conducts an audit of the claim on behalf of the Australian Government.

Progress monitoring

Quantitative

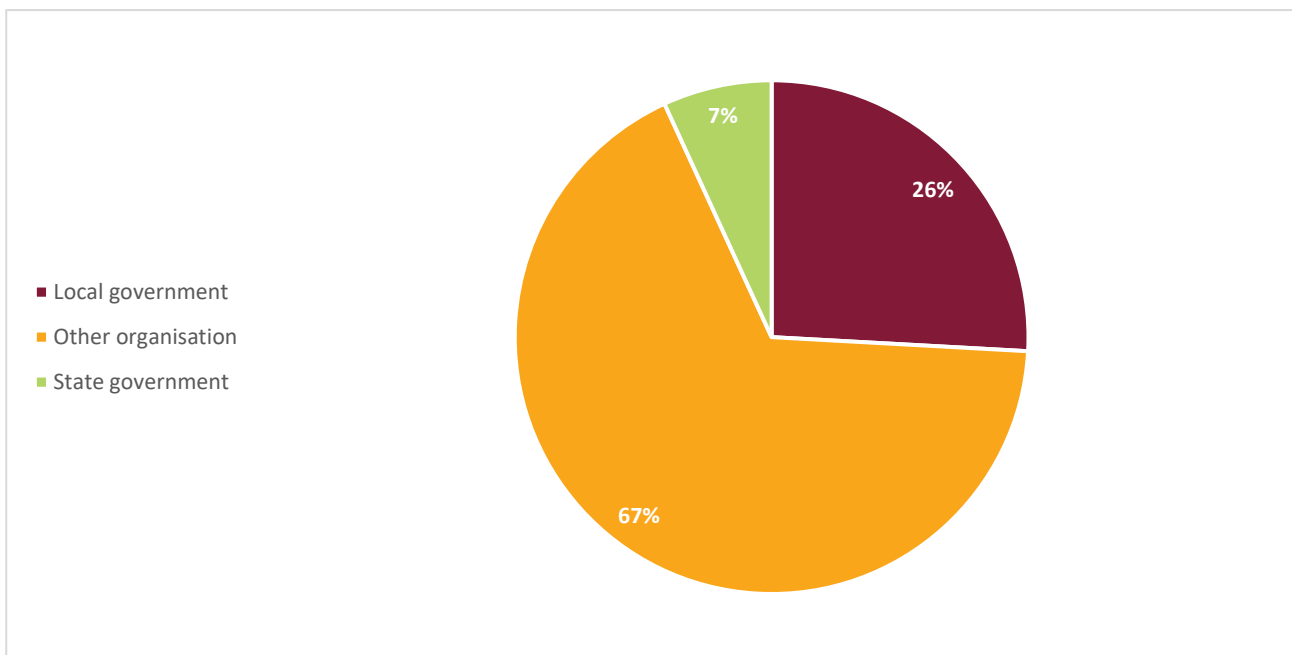
Grant applications over time

Grants were released in two rounds. 110 grant applications were approved from a total of 206 applications received.



Projects funded by organisation

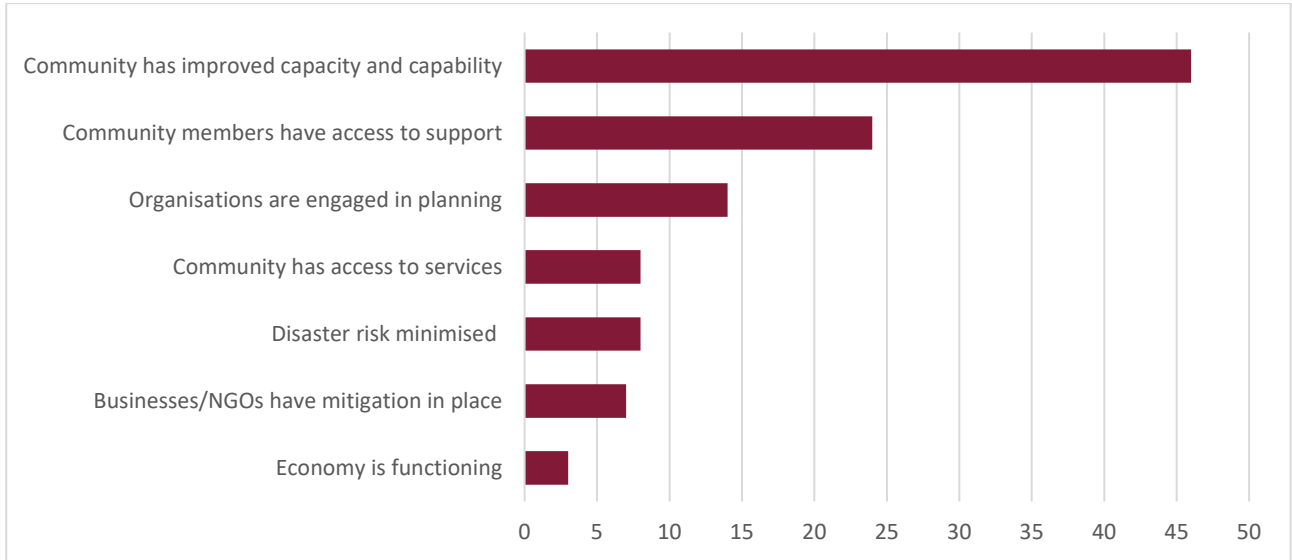
110 projects were funded across 84 unique organisations. Projects were funded for local government (28) and state government (9) organisations, with most projects awarded to other entities (73), such as community groups, non-government agencies, industry groups and non-government organisations.



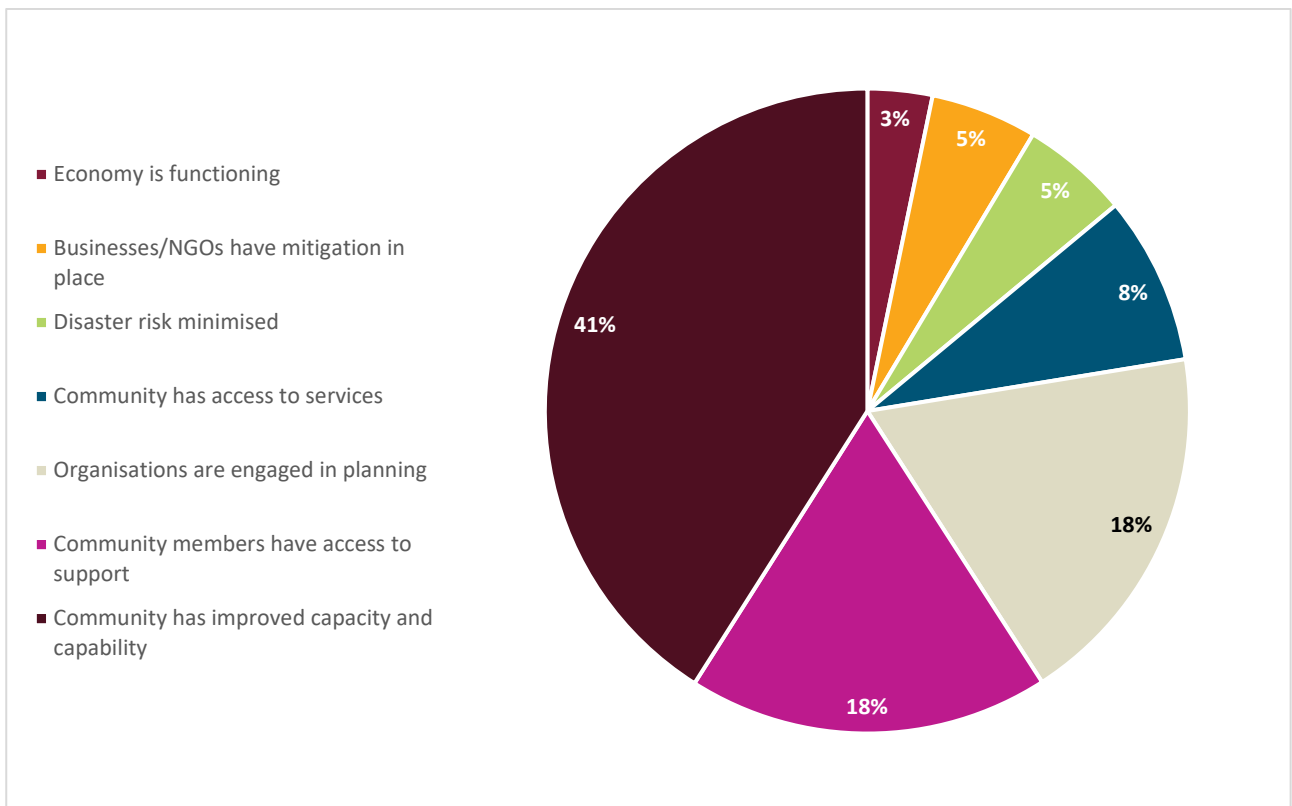
Projects funded by recovery objective

The grants funded 110 projects aligned to the recovery objectives in the program logic. Most approved projects (46) and funding (41%) related to the community having improved capacity and capability to respond to future disasters.

Number of approved grants by recovery objective



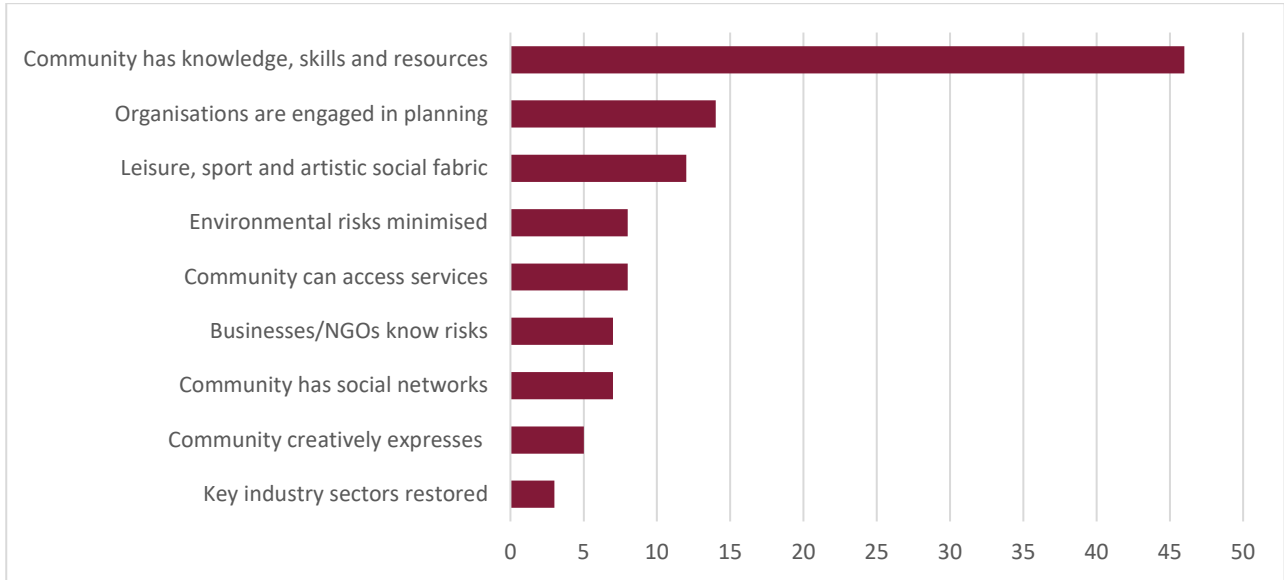
Percentage of approved funding by recovery objective



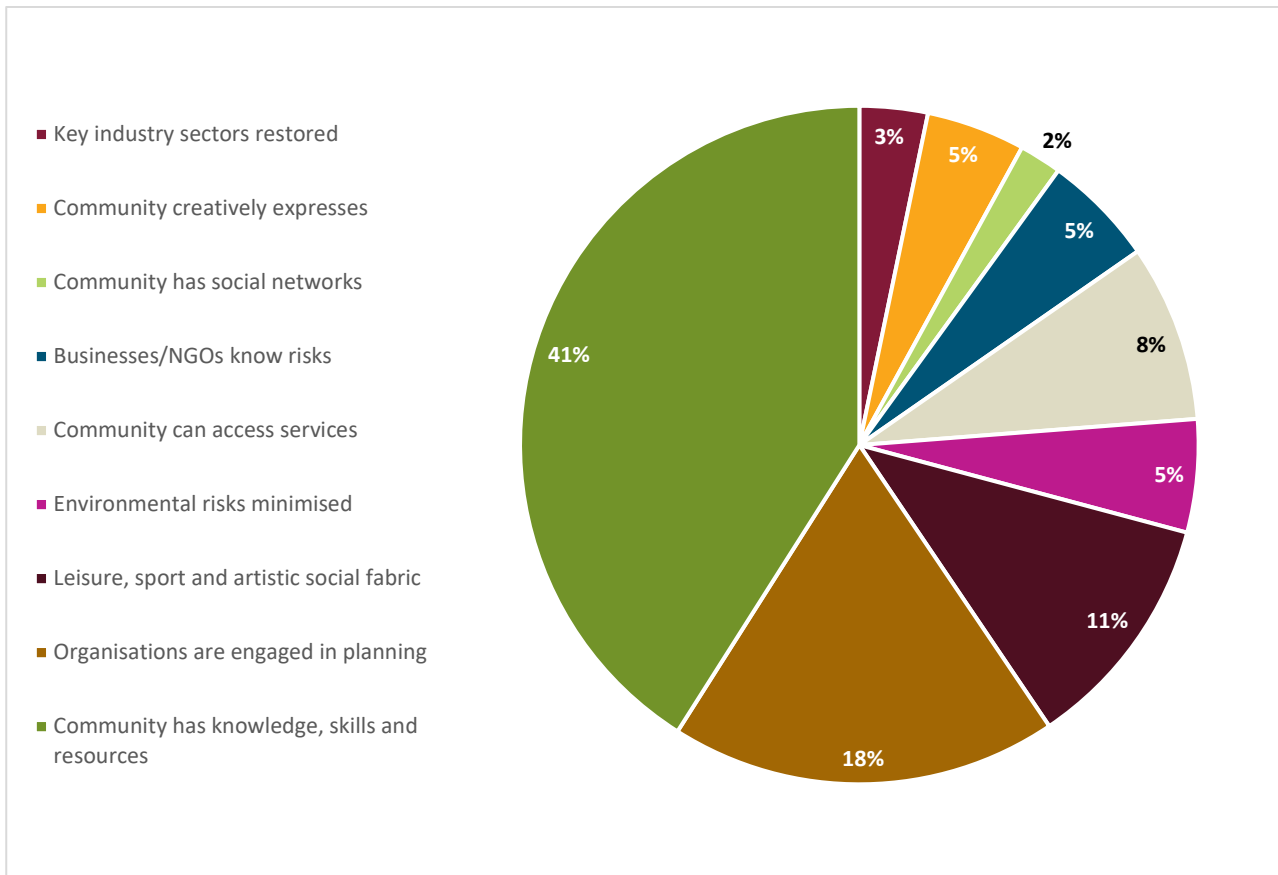
Projects funded by recovery outcome

The grants funded 110 projects aligned to the recovery outcomes in the program logic. Most approved projects (46) and funding (41%) related to the community having the knowledge, skills and resources for dealing with disaster related health risks.

Number of approved grants by recovery outcome



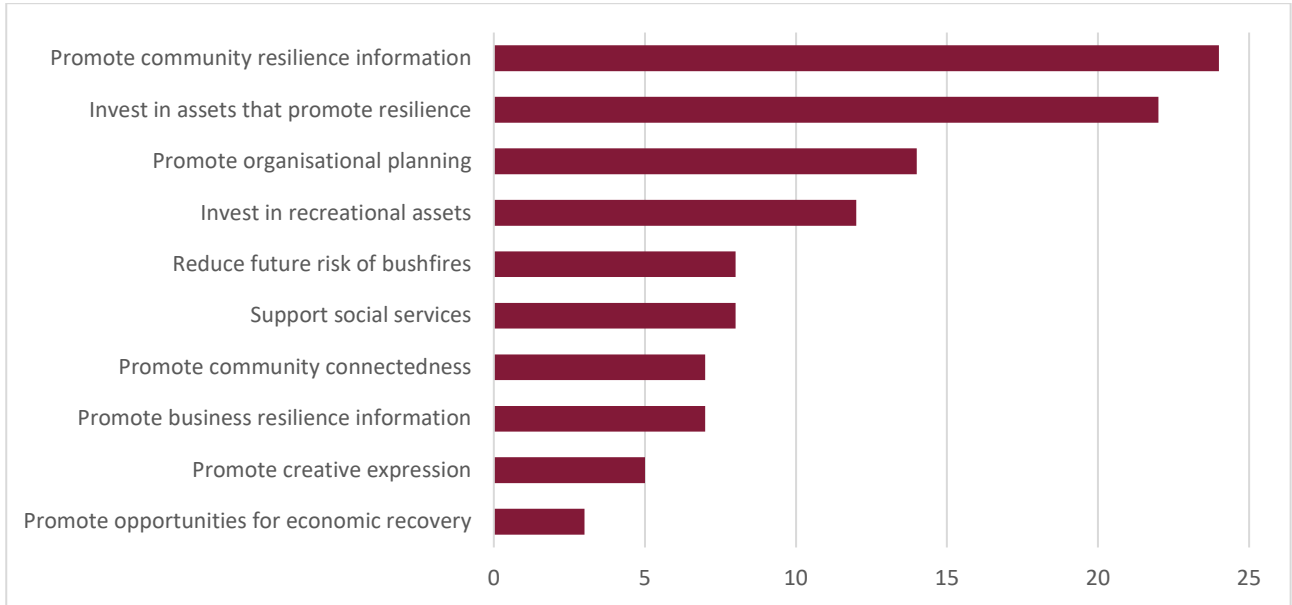
Percentage of approved funding by recovery outcome



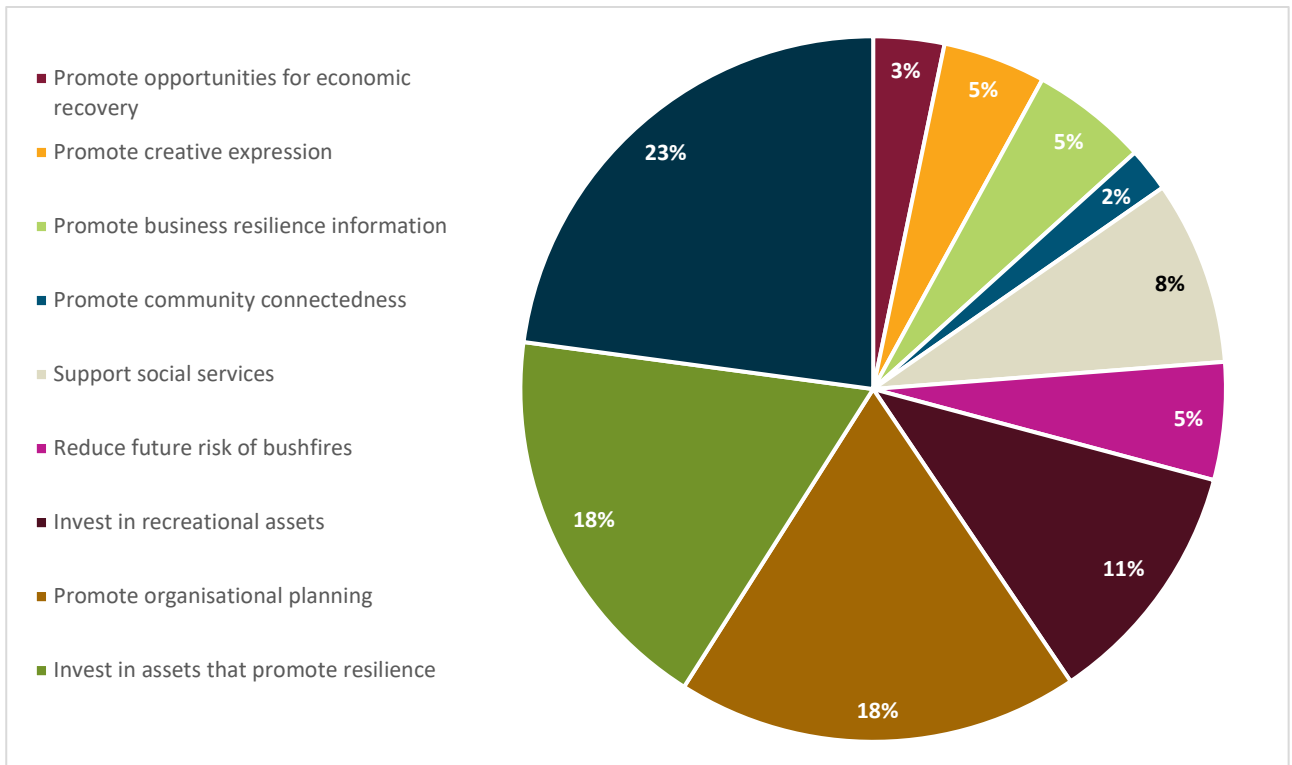
Projects funded by program strategy

The grants funded 110 projects aligned to the strategies of the Flexible Funding Grant Program. Most approved projects (24) and approved funding (23%) were allocated to promoting community resilience information.

Number of approved grants by recovery outcome



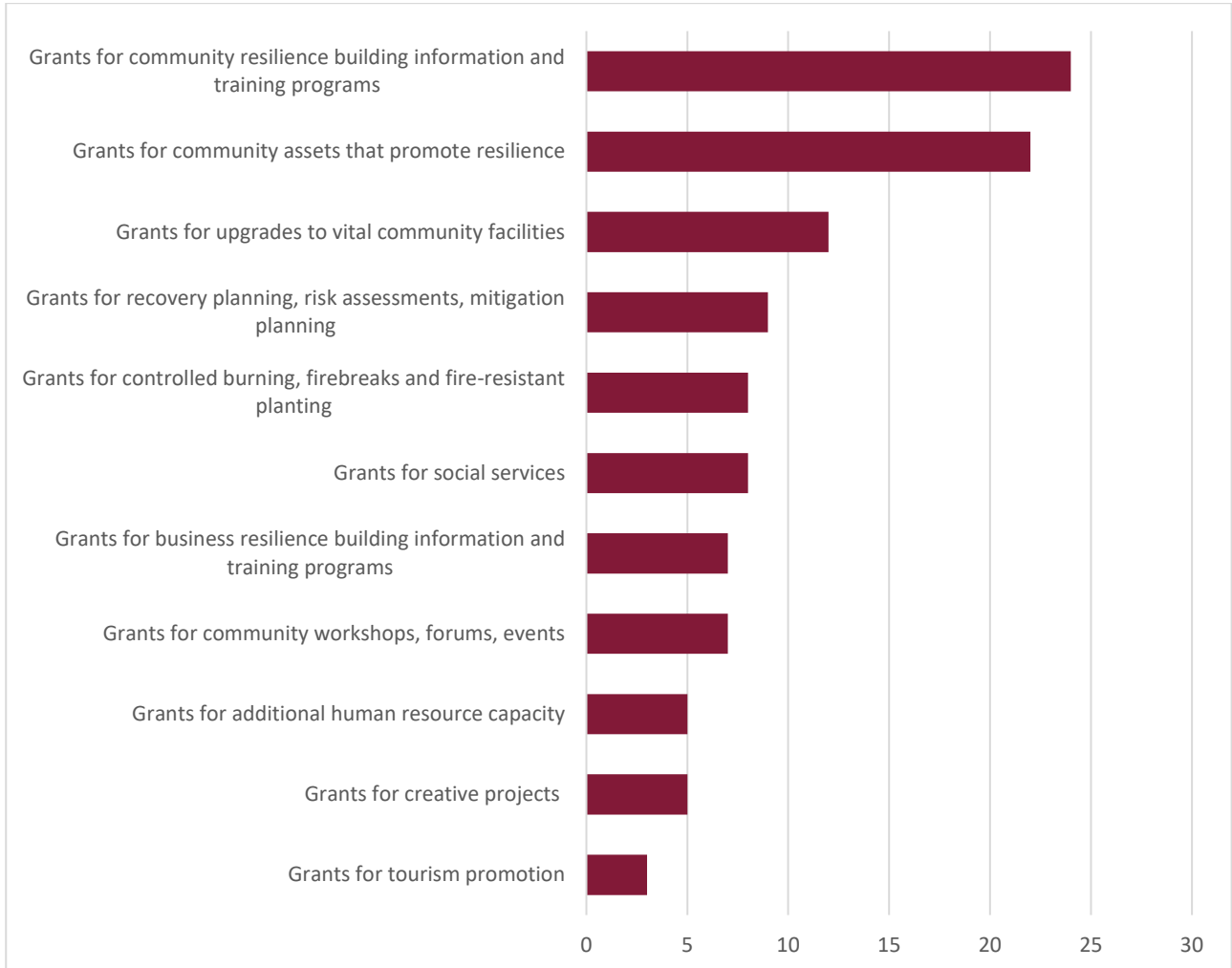
Percentage of approved funding by recovery outcome



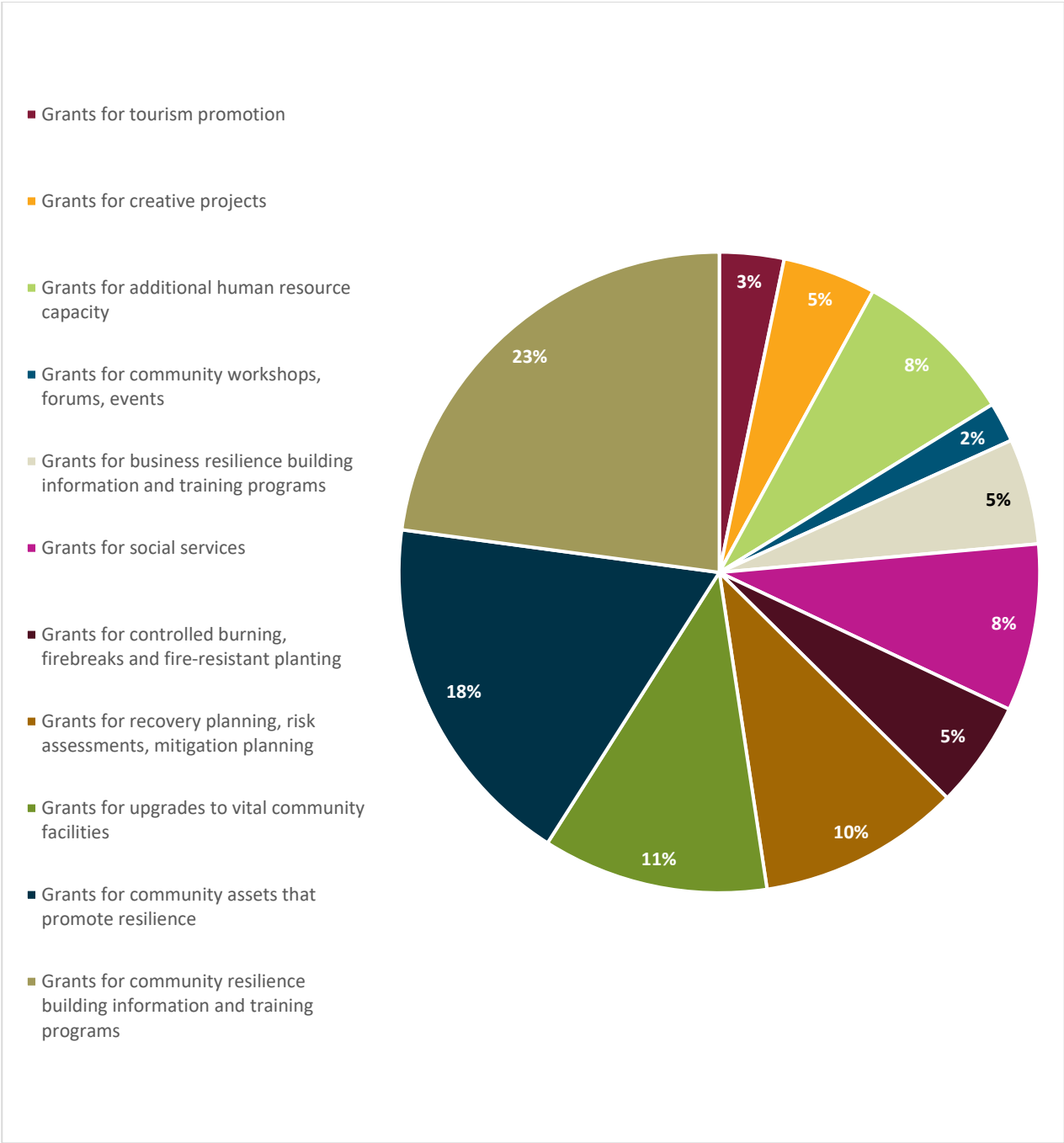
Projects funded by indicator

The grants funded 110 projects aligned to indicators that support the program strategies and recovery outcomes. Most approved projects (23) and funding (21%) were allocated to grants for community resilience building information and training programs.

Number of approved grants by indicator



Percentage of approved funding by indicator



Qualitative

Case studies

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

Index	Case study	Aligned Recovery Outcomes
CS01	Seeing Past the Smoke 2020 and Beyond	Community has knowledge, skills and resources
CS02	Fire Memories	Community creatively expresses
CS03	Vision Impairment and Technology	Community has knowledge, skills and resources
CS04	Scarecrow Festival Lantern Parade	Community has social networks
CS05	Improving wellbeing and resilience	Community can access services
CS06	A Woman’s Journey to Resilience	Community has knowledge, skills and resources)
CS07	Bushfires in the Biosphere Recovery and Resilience	Community has knowledge, skills and resources
CS08	Community Disaster Management Education Officer	Organisations are engaged in planning
CS09	Festival of Small Halls	Community has social networks
CS10	School Chaplain Program	Community can access services

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.

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

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.

10 case studies were made available for evaluation at program completion, 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.

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

Community engagement

Evolving needs

C12 – Are evolving community needs assessed and prioritised during the recovery process to inform recovery activities?

The design of the Flexible Funding Grants program enabled community organisations – with support from community members – to identify community needs and determine their own recovery activities.

Case Study	Recovery need identified	Informed recovery activity
CS01	<i>The Capricorn region will continue to experience disastrous events.</i>	<i>Capricornia Catchment coordinated and facilitated a program of workshops and meetings covering three different disaster-related needs in each of the LGA areas of Livingstone, Gladstone, Rockhampton Regional Council areas.</i>
CS03	<i>Throughout periods of significant upheaval individuals experiencing vision impairment become extremely isolated and had limited access to essential resources.</i>	<i>Guide Dogs for the Blind Assoc. of Queensland delivered workshops for vision impaired Queenslanders to build a sound capability in the use of smartphones, tablets, smart speakers, etc.</i>
CS05	<i>Community Gro identified a need in their community for individuals to be provided support and education due to the significant negative impact the multiple disasters has had on community.</i>	<i>The Community Support Worker engaged well with several individuals and smaller groups. Through their direct involvement, they made a total number of 78 referrals for further mental health support.</i>
CS08	<i>...the significant need for locally specific education to be developed and delivered with emergency services, community organisations, volunteers, individuals with disability, first nation people and schools.</i>	<p><i>Creation of additional resources to support community activities and events</i></p> <p><i>Redesign of the Council Disaster Management webpages, improving public access to preparedness resources.</i></p> <p><i>A CALD disaster awareness and education program delivered via community information sessions, run by or supported by the Council disaster management unit in conjunction with emergency services and CQMA.</i></p>

The implementation of the Flexible Funding Grants program enabled community organisations to assess evolving community needs and alter recovery activities to meet those needs.

Case Study	Evolving need identified	Informed recovery activity
CS05	<i>The program identified there were some Indigenous people in the community who did not feel comfortable going to the Community Tent/Hubs where the Emergency Response group was set up.</i>	<i>This information was fed back to Townsville City Council who undertook to make these response areas more culturally appropriate for gathering. Further to this, the IWR program focused on education and support surrounding disaster resilience for individual community members who identified as First Nation Peoples.</i>

Finding 2: The Flexible Funding Grant program demonstrated evidence of prioritising recovery activities to align with initial and evolving community needs.

Effectiveness

Sustainable community

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

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

- Community members can meet health needs
- Community members have access to psychosocial support
- Economy is functioning
- Organisations are engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery.

The success of each objective will be explored individually.

Community members can meet health needs

This objective is linked to the recovery outcome of *community members can access appropriate services to address health needs*. The key strategy of the program was to support community organisations to deliver social services.

Support social services

Nine grants (10% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations for new or enhanced social services targeting impacted communities. Examples of funded social services projects included:

- safety for women, youth and children in disasters
- psychosocial first aid and mental health services
- counselling and community support services
- suicide prevention services
- services for culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- services for persons with disabilities.

Two case studies showcased social services:

- CS05 – Improving wellbeing and Resilience
- CS10 – School Chaplain Program.

The Improving Wellbeing and Resilience case study (CS05) highlights a new support service resource – Community Support Worker – that was funded to provide education and support group sessions for different audiences on the topics of:

- Self-care strategies
- Programs for children who have experienced a natural disaster
- Building wellbeing and resilience.

The Community Support Worker coordinated 78 referrals for further mental health support. The project also identified a gap in existing services for Indigenous people in the community. Proactive steps were taken to encourage changes to those services to be more inclusive. Overall, the project concluded that:

“...the participants gained better knowledge through the sessions that were delivered, and where they can get help during disaster events.”

The School Chaplain Program case study (CS09) highlights a school in one of the most impacted communities extending a successful chaplaincy service to provide additional support to disaster impacted students.

“The service has provided a listening ear and a caring presence for children in crisis, and those who just need a friend. They have also provided support for staff and parents.”

The service expanded to introduce a 10 week program targeted at primary school girls. The case study reflected that:

“...providing additional support to the wellbeing of students which in turn has contributed to a happy and healthy broader school community.”

Finding 3: Flexible Funding Grants supported social service organisations to deliver new or enhanced targeted services, helping the community meet their health needs.

Community members have access to psychosocial support

This objective was linked to the following recovery outcomes:

- Community members have social networks to support each other
- Community members have opportunities for creative expression to help recover from disaster
- Leisure, sport and artistic activities are part of the community.

As outlined in the program logic, the strategies aligned to these recovery outcomes respectively are:

- Promote connectedness, support networks and social inclusion
- Promote opportunities for creative expression to help community recovery
- Invest in places for community recreational activities.

Each of these strategies can be explored individually.

Promote connectedness

Eight grants (2% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote connectedness, support networks and social inclusion. Examples of funded social inclusion projects included:

- community workshops, forums and programs
- community events – such as festivals and recreational competitions.

Two case studies showcased community connectedness projects:

- CS04 – Scarecrow Festival Lantern Parade
- CS09 – Festival of Small Halls.

The Scarecrow Festival Lantern Parade case study (CS04) highlights the community coming together to make lanterns for display in the festival.

“The lantern parade and the Festival at large brought the community together which assisted in social engagement and interaction. The lantern making workshop brought together the young with their adult supervisors.”

The Festival of Small Halls case study (CS09) highlights leveraging a touring music show to bring communities together – participating in the arts and celebrating resilience in local community halls.

“The project delivered ten concerts to bushfire-affected communities, accompanied by workshops, bushfire education and facilitation of recovery services such as counsellors.”

Finding 4: Flexible Funding Grants promoted community connectedness and social networks.

Promote opportunities for creative expression

Five grants (5% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote opportunities for creative expression, to help community recovery. Examples of funded creative projects included:

- public art displays, trails and murals
- storytelling, language retention and messages.

One case study showcased creative projects:

- CS02 – Fire Memories.

This case study highlights a project that gathered and shared first-hand experiences of the community’s response to the bushfires.

“A storytelling pavilion was built and permanently stationed at Binna Burra Lodge, to collect and share memories, increasing awareness, fostering discussion and building collective learning following the heavily impacted are by Queensland bushfires.”

The pavilion toured the region and was nominated for a design award. The project collected stories through video

“More than 50 hours of interviews were undertaken, all to be archived at the State Library of Queensland.”

The project also organised four community workshops to promote discussion on strengthening resilience. Exhibitions were also presented offering an interpretation of the tragedy, which:

“helped educate the public about fire disasters and their impacts but also capture their own stories.”

This project likely contributed to other recovery outcomes, such as *community members have access to psychosocial support* through promoted connectedness and investment in community facilities.

The case study shares photos of an award winning structure and news article. Participant statistics, feedback or the video content have not been made available for evaluation.

Finding 5: Flexible Funding Grants promoted opportunities for creative expression.

Invest in recreational assets

12 grants (11% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to invest in places supporting community recreational activities. Examples of funded recreational assets included men's sheds, showgrounds, libraries, shade structures and community kitchens.

No case studies were available for these projects.

Finding 6: Flexible Funding Grants were invested in places supporting recreational activities, although examples of their impact and reach are not clear.

Economy is functioning

A key strategy of the program was to promote opportunities for economic recovery, ensuring that key industry sectors for the community are restored.

Promote opportunities for economic recovery

Three grants (3% in total value) were provided to non-government organisations to promote organisational mitigation and recovery planning. All three projects related to promotion of the tourism sector in Sunshine Coast, Scenic Rim and Australia's Country Way (inland highway from Rockhampton south to the Queensland border).

Case studies, participant numbers or tourism statistics were not available for these projects.

Finding 7: Flexible Funding Grants promoted tourism-related projects in several impacted regions, although their impact and reach are not clear.

Organisations are engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery

A key strategy of the program was to promote organisational mitigation and recovery planning.

Promote organisational planning

14 grants (18% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote organisational mitigation and recovery planning. Examples of funded recovery planning projects included:

- community recovery plans
- bushfire management plans
- guidelines and frameworks
- resilience and education officers (human resources)
- bushfire hazard assessments.

One case study showcased creative projects:

- CS08 – Community Disaster Management Education Officer.

This case study highlights the engagement of a human resource to develop and deliver locally specific education content throughout various social groups in the impacted communities. The officer coordinated:

- the creation of additional resources to support community activities
- a redesign of existing online content to improve preparedness resources and access to diverse communities
- a partnership between local government and two non-government organisations to create a disaster awareness and education program (CQMA Community Connectors) for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.

The case study estimates the project:

“...engaged a minimum of 250 individuals either directly or indirectly, with the subsequent number reached by CQMA community connectors far exceeding this.”

All 10 case studies available for evaluation provide examples of different organisations involved in community recovery more broadly. Overall, the program provided grants to 84 unique community organisations to deliver projects related to community recovery and resilience.

Finding 8: Flexible Funding Grants ensured organisations were actively engaged in recovery planning activities.

Summary of findings

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

Finding 9: The Flexible Funding Grants program was generally effective in contributing to a sustainable community.

There are opportunities to further substantiate this finding by:

- capturing additional case studies, particularly in relation to grants promoting opportunities for economic recovery
- expanding the evaluation planning to incorporate a mechanism for independently capturing views direct from participants – through interviews, surveys or other anonymous feedback services.

This finding could be evidenced through direct feedback from participants, with sourcing managed by either QRA, DCDSS, CDOs, community organisations delivering projects or an independent evaluator.

Recommendation 2: Evaluation of the program’s effectiveness may be enhanced by capturing additional case studies and sourcing feedback directly from participants.

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
- Disaster risks are minimised.

The success of these objectives will be explored individually.

Community has improved capacity and capability to respond to future disasters

Key strategies to achieve this objective were to:

- promote community resilience to future disasters
- invest in community resilience assets.

Promote community resilience

24 grants (23% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to promote community resilience through funding of resilience building information and training programs.

Four case studies showcased community resilience projects:

- CS01 – Seeing Past the Smoke 2020 and Beyond
- CS03 – Vision Impairment and Technology
- CS06 – A Woman’s Journey to Resilience
- CS07 – Bushfires in the Biosphere Recovery and Resilience.

Seeing Past the Smoke 2020 and Beyond case study (CS01) highlights a regional organisation able to develop several initiatives to help the region prepare for future disaster vents. Building on a successful program from a previous event (2018 Central Queensland Bushfires), the project implemented a program of workshops and meetings across three local government areas to address community needs that included:

- Infrastructure and vegetation support for landholders
- Individual support for women through Lady’s Luncheons
- Mental resilience training through yoga therapy and relaxation techniques
- Activities that supported youth engagement.

The project achieved a longer-term capacity in relation to mental resilience strategies, developing:

“easy to reproduce community activities that proved to strengthen mental resilience without the need for facilitators.”

This project also likely contributed to other recovery outcomes, such as *community members have social networks to support each other, and organisations are engaged in recovery planning and community members.*

While participant numbers or feedback have not been made available for evaluation, the case study shares many photographs showing a variety of event types and dozens of participants engaging in workshops, luncheons and group activities, including a beach clean-up event with adults and children.

The Vision Impairment and Technology case study (CS03) highlights an example of a new support service for vision impaired Queenslanders, building capability in the use of technology through workshops. Participants from disaster impacted communities were trained in skills that improve information communication, searching and dissemination. The project acknowledges access to technology for all individuals is critical in times of disaster.

“...members of the community who were once vulnerable or at risk are now empowered with a set of tools to be informed, to be ready, and to act on advice with support networks and resources available via digital channels.”

This project also likely contributed to other recovery outcomes, such as *organisations are engaged in recovery planning* and *community members can access appropriate services*. Participant numbers or feedback was unavailable for evaluation.

A Woman’s Journey to Resilience case study (CS06) highlights a support service established to build the resilience of women within fire-affected areas and prepare women who relocated to the region. The project also established a Circle of Security, educating parents on new skills and tools for dealing with challenging behaviour in children arising from exposure to disaster events. As a result of the program:

“...four of the participants have gone onto further education and another two signed up for volunteering initiatives.”

The case study shares photographic evidence of the events, content and participants.

The Bushfires in the Biosphere Recovery and Resilience case study (CS07) highlights a project the delivered bushfire education programs to five schools in the Noosa shire. The project drew upon the expertise of Kabi Kabi educators to ensure that:

“students were given comprehensive education in types of ecosystems effected, the way these systems respond to fire as well deep exploration of Aboriginal Perspectives and traditional use of fire by Aboriginal people to manage land”.

Following community interest, the program was expanded to local government and the broader community through, which continued through subsequent disaster event via videoconference. The case study claims that a key outcome for the community was:

“a better understanding of fire in relation to Noosa Shire ecosystems, emergency planning and what this means for households, disaster management dashboard and its use as well as a more integrated approach between school and public education and the Noosa Council LDMG.”

Finding 10: Flexible Funding Grants supported community organisations to effectively promote community resilience.

Invest in community resilience assets

22 grants (18% in total value) were provided to local government and non-government organisations to invest in assets that promote community resilience.

Examples included:

- equipment to support preparation activities (e.g. freeze dryers, water fill stations)
- animal refuse shelters
- disaster recovery hubs
- evacuation centres
- filtration systems
- power backup systems and generators
- telecommunications backup systems
- firefighting infrastructure upgrades (e.g. sheds, stations, appliance parking)
- fire warning signage
- mobile trailer-based equipment, such as sandbagging, cooking, evacuation supplies
- fire protection infrastructure.

Case studies for these projects were not made available for evaluation.

Finding 11: Flexible Funding Grants invested in assets promoting community resilience to future bushfire events, although examples of their impact and effectiveness are not clear.

Business and not for profits have in place adequate mitigation practices for risk and threats

A key strategy to achieving this objective was to promote business resilience to future disasters.

Promote business resilience

Seven grants (5% in total value) were provided to community organisations to promote business resilience. Examples of funded projects included:

- information and training sessions
- leadership programs
- disaster preparedness and business continuity planning.

Targeted business industries and sectors included:

- Horticulture
- Tourism
- Landholders
- Small to Medium Enterprises.

Case studies for these projects were not made available for evaluation.

Finding 12: Flexible Funding Grants supported community organisations to promote business resilience to future disasters through information, training and planning, although examples of their impact and reach are not clear.

Disaster risks are minimised

A key strategy to achieving this objective was to reduce future risks of bushfires.

Reduce bushfire risk

Eight grants (5% in total value) were provided to community organisations to reduce the environmental risks of bushfires. Examples of funded projects included:

- Indigenous burning techniques through traditional practices
- Backburning
- Fire trails
- Fire breaks.

Case studies for these projects were not made available for evaluation.

Finding 13: Flexible Funding Grants supported several community organisations to reduce the risk of bushfires in the environment, although examples of their effectiveness are unclear.

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.

Finding 14: The Flexible Funding Grants program was generally effective in contributing to a resilient community.

Opportunities to further substantiate this finding include 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 2.

It is likely that some community members benefitted directly (e.g. resilience education) or indirectly (e.g. experienced a new resilience resource) from their participation in funded projects of the Flexible Funding Grants program. There are opportunities to continue to monitor a sample of these program beneficiaries to further evaluate how the program contributed to a resilient community in the long term.

Recommendation 3: Evaluation of the program's effectiveness in contributing to resilient communities may be enhanced by continuing to monitor the stories of program beneficiaries into the future, especially when faced with future disaster events.

Efficiency

Cost effectiveness

H1 – How cost effective was the program?

The program was allocated \$6 million for Flexible Funding Grants up to a maximum of \$100,000 to be made available for community-led initiatives across the 23 local government areas activated for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA).

All \$6 million was allocated under this program for 110 projects, led by 84 community organisations across at least 14 of the impacted local government areas. The approved allocation can be estimated across sustainable and resilient community objectives aligned to the program logic.

Overarching Recovery Objective	Expenditure	Proportion
Sustainable communities	\$3.0M	50%
Resilient communities	\$3.0M	50%

The program and community organisations appropriately prioritised a balance of both sustainable and resilient initiatives.

Across the two funding rounds, \$5.99 million of the \$6 million was spent, resulting in a negligible underspend of approximately \$10,000. The governance of the program was effective in maximising the available funding for community-led initiatives.

10 case studies were made available from the 110 approved projects (9%) and these project examples demonstrated successful strategies that contributed to sustainable and resilient communities.

Finding 15: The Flexible Funding Grants program utilised available funding to contribute to the overarching recovery objective of sustainable and resilient communities.

DCDSS delivered the program with internal human resources and grant systems as an in-kind contribution. These were unclaimed program costs due to DRFA eligibility criteria. As a result, the program management and administration costs for the program are reflected as nil.

Finding 16: The State maximised available funding for the community through in-kind contributions of program management and administration costs.

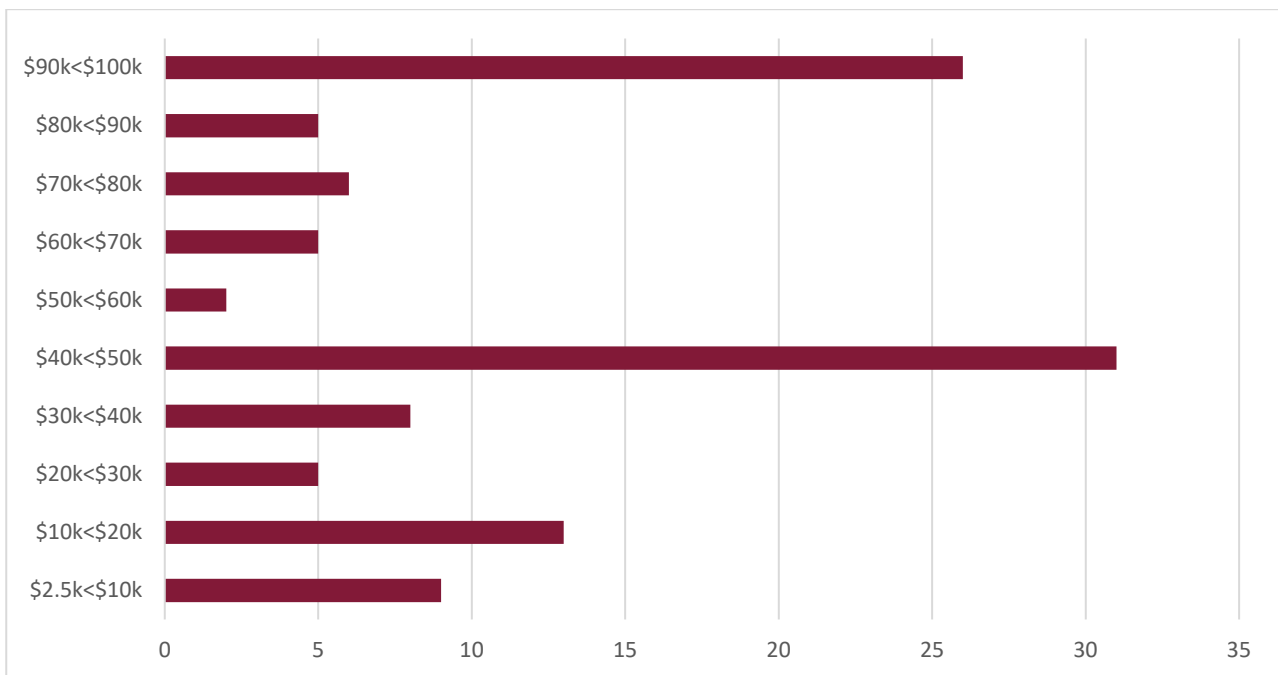
Community organisations delivered projects with a range of existing and new resources. The breakdown of costs at the project level for program management and administration is unknown.

Finding 17: The proportion of costs allocated by community organisations toward program management and administration, versus delivery, is not clear.

Recommendation 4: Merits of seeking the cost breakdown between indirect and direct costs should be investigated, to maximise direct funding to the community.

Recommendation 5: Consider the benefits of establishing a benchmark for appropriate indirect costs, to guide community organisations with allocation for program management and administration costs.

Grants were provided to community organisations for a wide range of grant values within the grant caps, as highlighted in the graph below.



The Scarecrow Festival Lantern Parade project (CS04) made use of \$5,000 small grant to enhance a one-off event to further promote community connectedness. The Community Disaster Management Education Officer (CS08) accessed the maximum \$100,000 large grant to enable a dedicated human resource to contribute to long term recovery and ensure that the local government organisation was actively engaged.

Finding 18: The adaptable nature of the Flexible Funding Grants program enabled community organisations to only access the funding amount required to achieve the desired recovery outcome (up to a \$100,000 maximum).

Finding 19: Community organisations could effectively contribute to recovery outcomes with access to grants from \$2,500 to \$10,000.

There was a tendency for organisations to access the maximum grant amounts available for both the small (\$50,000) and large grants (\$100,000). This could indicate a community need for additional funding over the grant caps, although further survey and analysis of community organisations and participants would be required to substantiate this finding.

Finding 20: Uptake for the maximum grant value could possibly indicate a community need for additional funding over the grant caps.

Recommendation 6: Expanding scope of the evaluation to survey community organisations and program participants should be considered, to determine whether grant funding amounts were appropriate to meet community needs.

An estimate of the social and economic cost of the Queensland Bushfires impacts was not available for evaluation. An estimate was undertaken for the Monsoon Trough event that occurred earlier, possible due to the comparatively much larger scale of the impacts. A social and economic cost estimate is useful in determining value for money, cost effectiveness and the context for recovery spend.

Finding 21: An estimate of social and economic costs of the event impacts would help to define the recovery problem and provide context for considering a proportionate recovery cost allocation.

Recommendation 7: Considering the benefits of estimating social and economic costs of each significant disaster event, may help define the recovery problem and provide valuable context to allocating recovery costs.

Equity

Fairness and access to recovery support

Q1 – To what extent was the program delivered across different stakeholder, regions and social groups?

The Flexible Funding Grants program was delivered across a wide geographical footprint – involving different stakeholders, regions and social groups.

Organisations

A total of 110 different initiatives were funded across 84 unique community organisations.

Projects were funded for local government (28) and state government (9) organisations, with most projects awarded to other entities (73) – such as community groups, non-government agencies, industry groups and non-government organisations.

Livingstone Shire Council received the second most at six projects (6% in value). This allocation appears to align with the State Recovery Plan, highlighting the Livingstone region as one of the most impacted areas, with 24 residential properties either damaged or destroyed. All other organisations received four projects or less.

Regions

The projects were distributed among approximately 14 different local government areas across Far North, North, Central and South Eastern Queensland.

Projects were delivered across differing geographies, including:

- community projects (e.g. showground upgrade, memorial project)
- local projects (e.g. events, recovery plans, training programs)
- regional projects (e.g. tourism and leadership programs).

Social groups

There was evidence of multiple social groups participating in the funded projects, including:

- Community service organisations
- Local government
- Natural resource management groups
- Industry groups
- Not-for-profit and charities
- Tourism sector
- Agricultural sector
- Families, youth and children
- Schools and education sector
- Sports and recreational clubs
- Arts, cultural and musical groups
- Indigenous groups
- Religious groups
- Environmental groups.

Outcomes

The program allowed community organisations to determine recovery outcomes, leading to diversity in project allocation. As concluded in the Effectiveness findings of this report, the program contributed to seven recovery objectives linked to nine recovery outcomes.

Finding 22: The Flexible Funding Grants program was widely distributed, supporting multiple social groups through an appropriate mix of community organisations.

Implementation

Interaction

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

The Flexible Funding Grants program was effective in encouraging interaction between recovery outcome domains.

The program logic demonstrates the program contributed to nine recovery outcomes aligned to seven recovery objectives across four recovery domains:

- Overarching
- Human and Social
- Economic
- Environmental.

Available case studies showed evidence of collaboration across multiple recovery domains.

Case Study	Program activity	Recovery domain
CS01	<i>Supporting infrastructure and vegetation by targeting landholders</i>	<i>Environmental</i>
	<i>Supporting the individual by targeting women through Ladies Luncheons</i>	<i>Human and Social</i>
	<i>Supporting resilience via yoga therapy and mental relaxation techniques</i>	<i>Human and Social</i>
CS07	<i>Enhanced capability for Rockhampton Regional Council through a Community Disaster Management Education Officer</i>	<i>Overarching</i>
	<i>Locally specific education to be developed and delivered with emergency services, community organisations, volunteers, individuals with disability, first nation people and schools, for recovery to continue and individuals and groups to take actions to connect and build capacity.</i>	<i>Human and Social</i>

Available case studies also showed evidence of interactions within recovery domains. For example, the Improving Wellbeing and Resilience project (in case study CS05) made 78 referrals for further mental health support through the Community Support Worker.

There is evidence of collaboration with other programs funded by the Queensland Bushfires Community Recovery Package. For example the Community Development Officers (CDOs) funded through the Community Development program recorded 1,306 hours with 2,816 participants on Flexible Funding Grant activities.

Finding 23: The Flexible Funding Grants program was effective in encouraging interaction between recovery outcome domains and other programs within the Community Recovery Package.

Conclusion

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

Governance

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

Community engagement

2. The Flexible Funding Grant program demonstrated evidence of prioritising recovery activities to align with initial and evolving community needs.

Effectiveness

3. Flexible Funding Grants supported social service organisations to deliver new or enhanced targeted services, helping the community meet their health needs.
4. Flexible Funding Grants promoted community connectedness and social networks.
5. Flexible Funding Grants promoted opportunities for creative expression.
6. Flexible Funding Grants were invested in places supporting recreational activities, although examples of their impact and reach are not clear.
7. Flexible Funding Grants promoted tourism-related projects in several impacted regions, although their impact and reach are not clear.
8. Flexible Funding Grants ensured organisations were actively engaged in recovery planning activities.
9. The Flexible Funding Grants program was generally effective in contributing to a sustainable community.
10. Flexible Funding Grants supported community organisations to effectively promote community resilience.
11. Flexible Funding Grants invested in assets promoting community resilience to future bushfire events, although examples of their impact and effectiveness are not clear.
12. Flexible Funding Grants supported community organisations to promote business resilience to future disasters through information, training and planning, although examples of their impact and reach are not clear.
13. Flexible Funding Grants supported several community organisations to reduce the risk of bushfires in the environment, although examples of their effectiveness are unclear.
14. The Flexible Funding Grants program was generally effective in contributing to a resilient community.

Efficiency

15. The Flexible Funding Grants program utilised available funding to contribute to the overarching recovery objective of sustainable and resilient communities.
16. The State maximised available funding for the community through in-kind contributions of program management and administration costs.
17. The proportion of costs allocated by community organisations toward program management and administration, versus delivery, is not clear.
18. The adaptable nature of the Flexible Funding Grants program enabled community organisations to only access the funding amount required to achieve the desired recovery outcome (up to a \$100,000 maximum).
19. Community organisations could effectively contribute to recovery outcomes with access to grants from \$2,500 to \$10,000.
20. Uptake for the maximum grant value could possibly indicate a community need for additional funding over the grant caps.
21. An estimate of social and economic costs of the event impacts would help to define the recovery problem and provide context to considering a proportionate recovery cost allocation.

Equity

22. The Flexible Funding Grants program was widely distributed, supporting multiple social groups through an appropriate mix of community organisations.

Implementation

23. The Flexible Funding Grants program was effective in encouraging interaction between recovery outcome domains and other programs within the Community Recovery Package.

Recommendations

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

RECOMMENDATION 1

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

RECOMMENDATION 2

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

RECOMMENDATION 3

Evaluation of the program's effectiveness in contributing to resilient communities may be enhanced by continuing to monitor the stories of program beneficiaries into the future, especially when faced with future disaster events.

RECOMMENDATION 4

Merits of seeking the cost breakdown between indirect and direct costs should be investigated, to maximise direct funding to the community.

RECOMMENDATION 5

Consider the benefits of establishing a benchmark for appropriate indirect costs, to guide community organisations with allocation for program management and administration costs.

RECOMMENDATION 6

Expanding scope of the evaluation to survey community organisations and program participants should be considered, to determine whether grant funding amounts were appropriate to meet community needs.

RECOMMENDATION 7

Considering the benefits of estimating social and economic costs of each significant disaster event, may help define the recovery problem and provide valuable context to allocating recovery costs.

RECOMMENDATION 8

Clarify whether funding State Government departments and agencies aligns with the Flexible Funding Grants Program intent and revise program guidelines accordingly.

Appendices

Appendix A – Background

2019 Queensland Bushfires

Impacts

The 2019 bushfire events impacted 23 of the 77 local government areas.

The 2019 bushfire season in Queensland was catastrophic. At the height of the season, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES) was dealing with more than 90 bushfires at one time. More than seven and a half million hectares burnt state-wide, resulting in the activation of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) for 23 Local Government Areas (LGAs).

The Southern Queensland Bushfires and the Stradbroke Bushfires both occurred in September, and the Eastern Queensland Bushfires burnt throughout November and December. The fires impacted the 14 LGAs of Bundaberg, Gladstone, Gold Coast, Gympie, Ipswich, Livingstone, Lockyer Valley, Noosa, Redland, Scenic Rim, Somerset, Southern Downs, Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba.

The fires resulted in impacts across the five lines of recovery (Human and Social, Economic, Built, Environment and Roads and Transport) and have exacerbated existing drought related challenges in a number of communities.

Additionally, fires in other parts of the state saw another nine LGAs activated under the DRFA resulting in the merging of the bushfire events into one disaster event - Queensland Bushfires, September - December 2019. The nine LGAs are Brisbane, Cook, Fraser Coast, Mareeba, North Burnett, Rockhampton, South Burnett, Townsville and Whitsunday.

Response

Human and Social

During the bushfire events there were 11,938 instances of psychological first aid provided to residents within these communities, whilst there were over 12,000 residents financially assisted with EHA grants. A number of key community supports, health and wellbeing recovery impacts and issues have been identified across locations and interest groups.

Building

The Queensland Building and Construction Commission (QBCC) and the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA), either directly or via member organisations, deployed staff to provide advice and assistance at recovery hubs in the immediate aftermath of the fires. The insurance industry prioritised claims from these events, providing confidence and reassurance to the community. Support continues to be provided to impacted local governments and disaster management groups including provision of information and factsheets to assist with the appropriate clean up and repair of sites.

QBCC also opened the Bushfire Rebuild Register to ensure that impacted residents had access to the details of suitably qualified and certified tradespeople in their local area. 291 licensed tradespeople made themselves available to support the repair and recovery of impacted areas.

Roads and Transport

TMR is undertaking slope stabilisation works and geotechnical inspections for further treatment to bushfire-damaged state roads in South East Queensland.

Critical reconstruction work undertaken included:

- Slope stabilisation works
- Facilitation of limited access traffic control
- Emergency works to temporary road closures

- Tree clearing, installing temporary barriers and replacing damaged signage
- Preliminary geotechnical and structural assessments which identified some long-term slope stability issues, which will require complex design solutions and permanent batter slope protection works.

Economic

The 2019 Queensland Bushfires have had a considerable on-the-ground effect on local businesses and economies with detailed, quantified assessments of capital damage and economic loss underway.

In response to the September bushfires, the Tourism Industry Development Division of the former Department of Innovation and Tourism Industry Development (DITID) drafted a Southern Queensland Tourism Recovery Package which focuses primarily on supporting tourism recovery in the Southern Downs and Scenic Rim regions.

For the November bushfires, the central Queensland office of the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training (DESBT) communicated with Livingstone Shire Council and the former DSDMIP's Rockhampton regional office to determine the impact of the fires on small businesses.

Environment

Fire scar mapping was undertaken across the state with a mosaic of the data forming a state-wide perspective. Fire scar mapping and historical fire information is important for improving our understanding and management of fire, and its interactions with climate variability, vegetation and land use. Further fine scale analysis of fire extent, severity and field surveys are needed to confirm distribution and level of impact for priority species and locations, including on Minjerriba (Nth Stradbroke Island). Appropriate recovery actions will then be determined.

Consequences

Queensland's 2019-20 bushfire season in numbers



* Data based on situational reports from the fire ground at a point in time, and reliant upon the accuracy of individual updates.

ECONOMIC



more than **7.7Mha** burnt state wide

300,000 emergency alerts issued



First deployment nationally of **Australian Defence Force Reservists** to assist

OVER **230ha** high value horticulture crops impacted

29 properties in the horticulture industry impacted



est. **\$17.9M** impact on agriculture industry in the Shire of Livingstone

8500ha grazing land impacted

56 Binna Burra Lodge staff directly affected through loss of employment
 56 workers from Binna Burra sourced alternative employment

est. **\$1,133,700** Total direct and indirect impact on small business

100-150 interstate and international personnel assisting the Queensland firefighting effort at any one time

Almost 70 small local businesses surveyed nominated a direct or indirect business impact

est. **\$732,500** Direct impacts to small business

est. **\$9.9M** Tourism disruption in the **Scenic Rim**

more than **3000** bushfires have occurred in Queensland this season

23 activated LGAs covering an area of **7.7M ha** = **4%** Queensland's land mass APPROX

9,362 Contents Claims **89%** closed average value **\$11,364**

est. **\$5.2M** Impact to **Southern Downs** agriculture industry

13,252 Residential Building Claims **84%** closed average value **\$59,077**

4,577 Domestic Motor Claims **98%** closed average value **\$11,810**

37 beef producers experienced impacts to their stock

ROADS + TRANSPORT



APPROX. **340 km** state road network impacted

State recovery planning

2019 Queensland Bushfires – State Recovery Plan

Former Police Commissioner Ian Stewart was appointed to the role of State Recovery Coordinator (SRC) on 18 September 2019 to lead event recovery. The role involved development of the 2019 Queensland Bushfires – State Recovery Plan 2019-2022 (the Recovery Plan).

This Recovery Plan acknowledged the existing challenges and inherent resilience of impacted communities and provided a framework for communities to recover, rebuild and reconnect. Recovery was delivered across the five lines of disaster recovery – Human and Social, Building, Roads and Transport, Economic and Environment. The Recovery Plan focuses on phase two of the recovery phases – Recovery and Reconstruction.

The aim of the Recovery Plan was to outline support for local governments and communities impacted by the 2019 Queensland Bushfires to enable them to reach a state of ‘recovered.’ The Recovery Plan identified impacts and developed strategies and outcomes required to restore functionality of community. It aligned capacity and capability to deliver those outcomes.

The Recovery Plan supported communities affected by the impacts of the 2019 Queensland Bushfires, providing them with the framework to access support, recover from its devastation, restore essential infrastructure and functionality, capture lessons and acknowledge the impacts of drought on current circumstances and through their recovery journey.

Roles and responsibilities

Local government

Local government is responsible for ensuring recovery occurs in affected community. This responsibility stems from the Disaster Management Act 2003. In this plan, this responsibility is demonstrated through the inclusion of local recovery plans.

Queensland Reconstruction Authority

QRA is the lead agency for coordination and development of disaster recovery, resilience and mitigation policy in Queensland. QRA supports the delivery of recovery and reconstruction projects for communities impacted by the 2019 Queensland Bushfires from a state perspective by providing coordination and facilitation of communication across the five FRGs to achieve whole-of-community outcomes. QRA also administers funding assistance on behalf of the Commonwealth and Queensland governments under the DRFA. QRA will provide regular reports outlining recovery progress across local governments, informed by the FRGs at a state level.

State Recovery Policy and Planning Coordinator

The Chief Executive Officer of the QRA also fulfils the role of the SRPPC. The SRPPC works with the SRC to ensure a smooth transition between response and recovery, as well as overseeing recovery operations including state-level preparedness and recovery policy, planning and capability development.

State Recovery Coordinator

The SRC works in partnership with the SRPPC to coordinate recovery activities for the 2019 Queensland Bushfires, reports regularly to the QDMC, and provides strategic advice to government agencies undertaking disaster recovery work.

Deputy State Recovery Coordinator

The Deputy SRC provides local support to the SRC or acts as the SRC in the SRC's absence. The Deputy SRC also provides Queensland Government with critical insights on how to best assist communities on their road to recovery.

Recovery support and collaboration

Effective recovery requires collaboration between local, state and federal governments, community and non-government agencies in consultation with impacted communities. Other agencies that play a part in assisting with the recovery of impacted communities are listed in Annex A, including their purpose and contact details.

Functional recovery groups

FRGs coordinate and support the planning and implementation of Queensland's whole-of-community recovery activities across the five lines of recovery – Human and Social, Building, Roads and Transport, Economic, and Environment – supporting local government to fulfil its recovery objectives. The FRGs leverage existing strong partnerships between local and state government to ensure close collaboration and coordination during the management of recovery activities. Activities are in accordance with the needs and priorities identified by communities and the state and includes those outlined in local recovery plans. The Recovery Plan is delivered locally with support from FRGs and QRA, with oversight from the Queensland Disaster Management Committee.

National Bushfire Recovery Agency

The Agency is responsible for administering a National Bushfire Recovery Fund which is supporting recovery efforts across Australia over the next two years. An initial \$2 billion has been allocated to this fund, which is in addition to other services and support available under existing natural disaster support mechanisms. The Agency works shoulder to shoulder with and for communities and collaborates with all levels of government, industry experts, business and charity sectors.

Department of Home Affairs – Emergency Management Australia (EMA)

EMA plans and coordinates Australian Government disaster recovery assistance to Queensland and contributes a significant portion of funding to Queensland to help individuals and communities recover from disasters with financial support.

Human and social recovery plan

Impact summary

The human and social impacts from the 2019 Queensland Bushfires have been evident, with community disruption, infrastructure damage, psycho-social impacts and financial hardship affecting the local government areas of Bundaberg, Gladstone, Livingstone, Lockyer Valley, Noosa, Scenic Rim, Somerset, Southern Downs, Sunshine Coast and Toowoomba. Several areas have been evacuated or impacted by bushfires more than once, and this has had significant psychological impact upon the community members in the impacted areas. During the bushfire events there were 11,938 instances of psychological first aid provided to residents within these communities, whilst there were over 12,000 residents financially assisted with EHA grants.

This highlights some of the compounding psychological impacts that the fires have had on the affected communities. Concerns regarding air quality were also raised, with air toxicity levels being some of the highest recorded since 2009 in certain areas. It should also be noted that many of these communities have also been subject to ongoing drought conditions and in recent years, some have been impacted multiple times by cyclones, floods or bushfires.

- Over 3700 claims for Australian Government Disaster Recovery Payments (AGDRP) and Disaster Recovery Allowances were lodged by bushfire affected people in Queensland and New South Wales (across all bushfire events) resulting in \$4,593,400 being paid.
- Over 12,796 donated goods for the 2019 Queensland Bushfires have been provided through GIVIT.

- Significant financial hardship support is also being provided by emergency relief service providers and charities such as Uniting Care QLD, GIVIT and Salvation Army, who have held public appeals for Queensland and New South Wales bushfire relief. This has been particularly targeted to people who fall outside the grant eligibility criteria and/or who have significant damage/losses.

The 2019 Queensland Bushfires were originally two separate events, known as the:

- Southern Queensland Bushfires
- Eastern Queensland Bushfires.

Southern Queensland Bushfires

A number of key community supports, health and wellbeing recovery impacts and issues have been identified across locations and interest groups.

Financial hardship:

- 3538 EHA grants paid with a total of \$1,443,600 paid to assist 8095 residents.
- 22 Essential Household Contents grants paid with a total value of \$29,035.
- Four Structural Assistance Grants paid with a total value of \$25,400.
- Three ESSR scheme grants paid with a total value of \$13,290.
- In total, \$1,511,325 has been distributed under the jointly funded state and Commonwealth PHA and ESSR schemes to impacted communities throughout the event to date.

Housing and accommodation:

- 87 properties were assessed as damaged with 21 having severe or total destruction.
- DHPW received 49 applications for emergency housing assistance, all 49 applications have been finalised and closed.

Provision of a range of social, emotional and psychological support services:

- Partner agencies (Uniting Care QLD – Lifeline and Red Cross) have provided 5738 instances of psychological first aid.
- 1398 phone calls were made to the community recovery hotline.
- 3484 visitors attended the four community recovery hubs.
- 271 outreach visits were conducted to provide support to impacted communities.

Partner agency referrals:

- Many of these communities were already impacted by drought further compounding the impacts of the bushfires. This was particularly noticeable with the unusually high numbers of farmers seeking financial, emotional and practical support. Referrals to a range of existing community and welfare services, and to the extraordinary disaster-specific partner agencies were crucial in providing the level of additional support that was required by these communities.
- During outreach and hub operations, over 475 referrals were issued to partner agencies working in conjunction with Community Recovery.

Community disruption:

- A total of 18 state schools were closed during this event.
- There was disruption of community social events, volunteering and community services activities (due to impacts upon volunteers and staff), impacts on sporting or service facilities, road closures, and impact on financial capacity of business to support events and/or community members to attend.

Community concerns:

- The ongoing drought continued to be a concern for residents, not only for water preservation but potential of further bushfire danger from the extreme hot and dry weather.

- Air toxicity was also a concern raised by community members based on the smoke-filled haze affecting much of the state during this event. Residents with asthma or respiratory problems were most adversely affected, with children and the elderly also being of concern.

Eastern Queensland Bushfires

A number of key community supports, health and wellbeing recovery impacts and issues have been identified across locations and interest groups.

Financial hardship:

- 1799 EHA grants paid with a total of \$721,620 paid to assist 4080 residents.
- 37 Essential Household Contents grants paid with a total value of \$66,340.
- 11 Structural Assistance Grants paid with a total value of \$133,640.
- 13 ESSR scheme grants paid with a total value of \$64,489.
- In total, \$988,939 has been distributed under the jointly funded state and Commonwealth PHA and ESSR schemes to impacted communities throughout the event to date.

Housing and accommodation:

- 48 properties were assessed as damaged with 29 having severe or total destruction.
- DHPW received 33 applications for emergency housing assistance. 31 applications have now been finalised and closed. DHPW continues to manage the remaining two applications.

Provision of a range of social, emotional and psychological support services:

- Partner agencies (Uniting Care QLD – Lifeline, Queensland Health and Red Cross) have provided 6200 instances of psychological first aid.
- 1129 phone calls were made to the community recovery hotline.
- 1843 visitors attended the three community recovery hubs and five pop-up hubs.
- 836 outreach visits were conducted to provide support to impacted communities.

Partner agency referrals:

- Many of these communities had recently been impacted by the Southern Queensland Bushfires, which has added another layer of complexity with the compounding and cumulative impacts evidenced by the level of personal support required. Referrals to a range of existing community and welfare services and to the extraordinary disaster specific partner agencies were crucial in providing the level of additional support that was required by these communities.
- During outreach and hub operations, over 475 referrals were issued to partner agencies working in conjunction with Community Recovery.

Community disruption:

- A total of three state schools were closed during this event.
- During this event many people were evacuated on more than one occasion, leaving residents in a constant state of heightened vigilance, resulting in individual and community fatigue.
- Disruption of community social events, volunteering and community services activities (due to impacts upon volunteers and staff), impacts upon sporting or service facilities, road closures, and impact on financial capacity of business to support events and/or community members to attend.

Stradbroke Bushfires

- An evacuation centre housed up to 25 residents over the four day peak of the fires.
- Evacuated residents were provided with psychological first aid and counselling through community champions who are trained Red Cross Volunteers.

Community concerns

- The cumulative impacts of multiple events over the last couple of years has begun to deteriorate communities' wellbeing with many communities stating they are 'worn down'.

These complications have caused anger, frustration and a genuine level of concern in communities.

- Extremely high referral rates were recorded by partner agencies during this event which further supports the conclusion that the cumulative impact is taxing resilience
- and exceeding community resources.
- Air toxicity was a concern raised by community members based on the smoke-filled haze affecting much of the state during this event. Residents with asthma or respiratory problems, children and the elderly were most adversely affected.
- Concern for wildlife and loss of habitat as well as farming/livestock was also an additional reported stressor.

Recovery outcomes

Sustainability

- Adequate housing is available to community members at appropriate times in the recovery process.
- Community members have access and are able to meet health needs (including mental health) arising from the disaster.
- Community members have access to psychosocial support.
- Households, families and individuals can act autonomously to contribute to the recovery process.
- Community members have access to education services.
- Community members have access to appropriate and coordinated social services.
- Community members feel sufficiently safe and secure following a disaster to engage in social activities and interactions with other members of the community.

Resilience

- The community has improved capacity and capability to respond to future disasters.
- The Community Recovery Package delivered targeted support to individuals and families to recover from the 2019 Queensland Bushfires, as well as building community capacity to more effectively respond to future events.

Program

Program guidelines

Eligibility criteria

Eligible applicants

- Local governments activated for DRFA for the Bushfires.
- Non-government organisations, research bodies, industry groups and peak bodies, community groups, and Local Governments with eligible project proposals within the DRFA-activated local government areas for the Queensland bushfires September to December 2019. Queensland-based applicants will be prioritised.

Eligible projects

- projects must support communities located within local government areas activated for DRFA for the bushfire events (refer to the activations summary <https://www.qra.qld.gov.au/activations>)
- projects must contribute to the recovery of the community from the impact of the disaster and to the future disaster preparedness of the community
- projects must support community-led engagement activities, partnerships and collaboration and the development of local recovery initiatives:

- reducing future risks in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework and minimise community dependence on government assistance
- enhancing self-efficacy and community-efficacy
- minimising negative impacts and embrace opportunities
- promoting connectedness, encourage support networks and social inclusion
- supporting and promote opportunities for sustainable economic recovery
- supporting business and service provider continuity
- promoting preparedness and resilience to future disasters.

Ineligible projects

Ineligible project examples include:

- a. Clean-up activities
- b. Replacing losses covered by insurance or claimable through other funding sources
- c. Privately owned cultural assets, including collections, buildings and spaces
- d. Capital works/places/objects owned by a State or Commonwealth Government department, agency or authority
- e. Restoration of infrastructure such as buildings, roads or bridges
- f. Environmental restoration
- g. Covering existing debts or budget deficits
- h. Projects that are not related to disaster recovery or future disaster resilience
- i. Projects that have a political or religious outcomes focus
- j. Projects that may have a negative impact on existing businesses/services
- k. Projects benefiting individuals or individual businesses or primary producers
- l. Facilities that are not open to the whole community

Eligible costs

Costs directly associated with delivering the approved project, and excluding ineligible costs. DCDSS extraordinary administrative costs associated with delivery of the program (e.g. extraordinary wages).

Ineligible costs

Ineligible costs may include, but not limited to:

- a. costs associated with ineligible project activities
- b. costs of preparing applications, reports or associated supporting material
- c. legal costs
- d. in-kind contributions
- e. purchase of land or property
- f. salaries or general operating costs not directly associated with delivering an approved project
- g. cash prizes or commercial gifts
- h. work already commenced or completed prior to grant approval

- i. core business for an organisation
- j. purchase of core business capital equipment such as motor vehicles and office equipment
- k. remuneration of permanent or executive officers
- l. existing staff positions
- m. land acquisition costs
- n. duplication of existing initiatives
- o. furnishings and supplies
- p. temporary works, other than those required to enable completion of the proposed project
- q. ongoing costs for administration, operation or maintenance
- r. remuneration of employees for work not directly related to the proposed project
- s. unsupported on-cost charges and non-specific indirect and overhead costs
- t. vehicle leasing, unless directly related to the delivery of the project

These lists identify the most common examples and are not intended to be prescriptive or comprehensive. Contact DCDSS with eligibility enquiries.

Appendix B – Evaluation plan

Program outcomes

Queensland Bushfires – State Recovery Plan 2019–2022 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 have access and can meet health needs arising from the disaster
- Community members have access to psychosocial support
- 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
- Reduced environmental issues following disaster events, due to more effective planning and preparedness by government, industry and community.

The Flexible Funding Grants Program Guidelines also referenced recovery outcomes including:

- Organisations are engaged in plans for mitigation and management of the recovery
- Key industry sectors for the community are restored.

Program logic

A program logic diagram has been developed and 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
- recovery objectives align to the overall recovery objective of sustainable and resilient communities.

Program monitoring data

Quantitative

The quantitative data planned for regular and ongoing monitoring is the:

- number of grant applications received
- number of grant applications approved
- total value of grant applications 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 the:

- 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 Queensland Bushfires – State Recovery Plan 2019–2022.

Community Recovery Package 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
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 To what extent did the community have access to and were engaged in the program?	
C2 Has community engagement occurred in a timely and on-going way that provides adequate representation of community views?	
C3 Is there shared vision of a sustainable and resilient community that is understood by the community?	
C4 Has there been joint planning between community actors and emergency teams and structures?	
C5 Do organisations have capacity to develop and manage community volunteers for disaster recovery?	
C6 Are recovery plans developed through participatory processes?	
C7 Does the community have the capacity and formal avenues to lobby and challenge external agencies on disaster recovery plans, priorities, and actions?	
C8 Is there inclusion/representation of vulnerable groups in community decision-making and management of disaster recovery?	
C9 Are agreed plans and management arrangements well understood by the community and all disaster management agencies?	
C10 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?	
C11 Do community members have information they need to continue recovering from the disaster?	
C12 Are evolving community needs assessed and prioritised during the recovery process to inform recovery activities?	✓
C13 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	How cost effective was the program?	✓
H2	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?	
H3	Did the program prevent price escalation stemming from the level of demand and competition between organisations?	
H4	How well did the program balance the need to optimise between cost of restoring essential public assets and the cost of delaying such projects?	
H5	How appropriate were the price benchmarks used to evaluate service providers?	
H6	Did the program achieve value for money relative to the disaster recovery context?	

Equity

To evaluate the equity of disaster recovery programs, the following KEQ has been sampled to assess whether the program was equitable in its implementation.

Equity key evaluation questions	Sampled
Q1 To what extent was program delivered across different stakeholder, regions and social groups?	✓

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 To what extent was the program delivered as intended?	
I2 Was the program consistent with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery?	
I3 To what extent has the program been implemented according to the recovery plan?	
I4 Did the speed of the recovery process compromise quality of services?	
I5 Did the recovery program meet community needs as they changed over time and in response to changes in disaster impact?	
I6 To what extent did program activities and resources effectively encourage interaction between outcome domains?	✓
I7 Where disaster recovery involved several separate components or projects, how well coordinated were these with each other?	
I8 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 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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