



**ALGA**

Australian Local  
Government Association

# National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)

ALGA Submission to the Senate  
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade  
References Committee

May 2025

## National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)

### Introduction

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade References Committee on the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army).

ALGA is the national voice of local government in Australia, representing 537 councils across the country. In structure, ALGA is a federation of state and territory local government associations. This submission should be read in conjunction with any separate submissions received from state and territory associations as well as individual councils.

### Discussion

Local governments play a critical role in emergency management, including preparedness and prevention, and are at the forefront of supporting communities during and after adverse events. Councils have a long-established role in coordinating the provision of recovery services - including volunteers and liaising with charities and aid organisations - and with strong ties to the community and knowledge of local resources, they are best placed to know how to respond to local needs and priorities.

Additionally, councils often step up to support other areas in times of need, including through aid, deploying personnel, or establishing relief centres in their own townships. For example, in Queensland councils will facilitate sharing of response and recovery resources, including sending council employees to different communities to assist in recovery efforts. Another example is the Municipal Association of Victoria which is the custodian of the Inter-Council Emergency Management Resource Sharing Protocol (the Protocol). The Protocol sets out an agreed position between Victorian councils on the facilitation of timely mustering and sharing of resources between municipalities during and after an emergency; identification of roles and responsibilities; and clear protocols and processes for initiating requests for assistance, transitions post-recovery, and reimbursement between councils. These examples highlight the critical role councils play, not only in supporting their own communities, but in providing support to others during times of crisis – often at a financial cost to themselves.

Councillors and their staff often wear multiple 'hats' during and after emergencies, doing their full-time job for council and also volunteering in the community. Quite often this is at a time when their own home and safety is at risk from emergency conditions.

Between 2019 and 2023, 434 of Australia's 537 councils were impacted by natural disasters – a number expected to increase as adverse weather events grow in intensity and frequency as a result of climate change. However, under the current funding arrangements, local governments lack the capacity and resources to respond to disasters or are forced to divert funds from their core services. ALGA has subsequently called on the Australian Government to provide \$900 million per annum for emergency management capacity and capability in local governments, distributed via a formula basis.

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ALGA notes that on 18 September 2024, the Senate referred the National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army) to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report by 22 September 2025. This was in response to the *Final Report of the Senate Select Committee Inquiry into Australia's Disaster Resilience* (the Report), which found Australia is facing a decline of volunteers, particularly in government emergency services organisations. The Report also noted increased demand on existing volunteer services to respond to increasing numbers of, and duration of, events, and the critical role volunteers play in Australia's disaster resilience. ALGA notes the *Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding* undertaken by Andrew Colvin in 2024 (the Colvin Review) also highlighted these concerns.

The issue of waning volunteer numbers does put increased pressure on councils – who are already stretched. ALGA welcomes a nation-wide response to increasing emergency management capacity. It is worth noting that regional and rural areas experience significant demographic challenges (e.g. aging population and employment constraints), which can contribute to volunteer attrition.

While ALGA cannot speak to specificities in the Terms of Reference for the Climate Army, ALGA reiterates the need for a sustainable, dedicated, non-competitive funding model for local governments that build and uplift their capacity and capability to respond to disasters in their community. We would caution on significant expenditure on volunteers until this core capacity and funding is increased. Our concerns are drawn directly from recommendations from the Colvin Review, in particular:

- **Recommendation 5** - addresses the need to uplift local government capability and capacity, with appropriate support and funding. It aligns with recommendation 11.1 of the *Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements*. In order for councils to continue to play a critical role in emergency management, they urgently need an uplift in capability and capacity, combined with dedicated and sustainable funding streams.
- **Recommendation 6** - calls for the Commonwealth to implement an enhanced national training and exercise regime to test and build local government capacity. Access for local government staff to nationally accredited training has been very limited over recent years, which has led to a significant gap in opportunities to building capacity and capability in the sector. National training pathways can build operational capacity and also develop the planning and risk assessment capacity of council staff. This will also be an on-going requirement to counter skills loss due to staff turnover in councils.
- **Recommendation 42** - recommends the Commonwealth reconsidering, with a view to increasing, the current funding allocated to the DRF or other similar future programs. Success of the proposed recommendations in the Colvin Review requires a significant increase in funding and resources for all who share responsibility for emergency management.

Broadly speaking, ALGA supports initiatives that reduce the pressure on councils and supports post-disaster outcomes for their communities. We remain concerned about the inaction on the above Colvin recommendations to assist with local government response and capacity.

We caution that any new arrangements would need to be embedded into the volunteer eco-system with clear governance arrangements to avoid duplication and confusion on roles. Should the program advance, we would need to see significant consultation with ALGA and our members to ensure the needs of communities are met.

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Thank you again for the opportunity to provide comment on this important issue. We look forward to further engagement.

Sincerely,

Amy Crawford

CEO