



St Vincent de Paul Society
NATIONAL COUNCIL of AUSTRALIA Inc. *good works*

National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy Taskforce
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment

3 September 2021

National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy

Dear National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy Taskforce,

The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society thank the Commonwealth Government for the opportunity to provide input on the development of a new National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy and a roadmap towards a climate resilient Australia.

Our two organisations combined provide a significant proportion of social services and programs in Australia. We also play a key role in supporting first responders and affected communities respond to natural and manmade disasters. Recently we have walked alongside communities through floods, storms and cyclones, the 2019-20 Black Summer Bushfires, and ongoing drought. The Commonwealth has called on our volunteers and resources to provide assistance when national disasters have occurred. We are pleased to be able to work in a partnership to deliver to local communities immediate and longer term financial and social support and assistance in response to these times of distress and need.

Prevention and early intervention have been shown to have a much higher return on investment when compared to crisis intervention. In our work, we have witnessed a trend of more severe and frequent natural disasters for some time now.

We continually work to improve our training, equipment, resources and processes but it is vital that action is taken at the national level to address the mounting risks posed by climate change and to support communities to respond.

Climate change does not discriminate but some in our society will feel its impacts more.

We welcome the acknowledgement in the '*Climate change adaptation roles and responsibilities in Australia*' fact sheet that people affected by structural and other disadvantages will need further assistance. It is imperative that the government response to climate change provides for people within our community who have the least means to build resilience and adapt.

Just as governments have a role to play in assisting workers affected by industry transitions and providing information and modelling on the potential impacts for various groups within our society, we must ensure people living in increasingly risky areas who cannot afford to protect their homes or to retreat to a safer area, as well as people living in energy poverty or unsuitable housing who cannot meet increasing costs to maintain a healthy home environment.

The new National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy must represent a commitment by all levels of government to work together, if we are to build our resilience as a nation and successfully adapt to a changing climate.

Public goods, services and assets

Governments are uniquely positioned to invest in community-level resilience and adaptation strategies that have the potential to benefit the whole community. This includes structural protections, such as flood levees. It also includes legislative, policy and regulatory protections against known future climate risks, such as through land use planning and the National Construction Code. The joint Commonwealth and state-funded Queensland Resilience and Risk Reduction Fund is one example of how all levels of government can work together in this space.

The recent establishment of the National Resilience and Recovery Agency demonstrates a strong commitment from the Commonwealth to take a lead role during times of national natural disasters and is another example of investing in community-based support systems to better equip local communities to respond to disasters which are highly correlated to climate change patterns.

Research shows that climate change impacts go beyond the environmental. The increased risk of natural disasters and extreme weather conditions is associated with an increased risk of domestic and family violence, and mortality.¹ Our experience is that the aftermath of a natural disaster can also lead to severe financial hardship, mental ill-health and homelessness. An evaluation of the St. Vincent de Paul Society's implementation of the government-funded Drought Community Support Initiative (DCSI) found high rates of significant mental health problems, with respondents identifying the length of the drought as a major contributor to stress.² A follow up study of DCSI recipients supported by The Salvation Army also found that financial and economic pressures exacerbated social isolation, all of which were contributing factors to poor physical and mental ill-health.³

The government response to climate change must therefore include provision for additional programs and services. This should include prevention and early intervention activities, for example, by improving home energy efficiency rating for people vulnerable to heat stress, assisting vulnerable communities to move out of disaster-prone areas, or training more mental health professionals. It should also provide for post-disaster response, for example, providing access to financial counselling services and specialised mental health support.

A well-targeted social security net

The *National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy 2015* identified policy design and the social welfare system as ways in which governments support people who may be vulnerable to climate-related impacts, or who have limited capacity to respond. Based on our experience

¹ Campo, M. & Tayton, S. (2015). *Domestic and family violence in regional, rural and remote communities: An overview of key issues*. <https://aifs.gov.au/cfca/sites/default/files/publication-documents/cfca-resource-dv-regional.pdf>

Vicedo-Cabrera, A.M., Scovronick, N., Sera, F. *et al.* (2021). The burden of heat-related mortality attributable to recent human-induced climate change. *Nat. Clim. Chang.* 11, 492–500). <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41558-021-01058-x>

² Esler, M., Boyer, C. & Gray, M. (2021). *Evaluation of the St Vincent de Paul Society's Implementation of the Drought Community Support Initiative. CSRM Working Paper No. 1/2021*. ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods. https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/324799_Evaluation_of_the_St_Vincent_de_Paul_Society%E2%80%99s_implementation_of_the_Drought_Community_Support_Initiative_DCSI_ANU_Centre_for_Social_Research_Methods.pdf

³ Bracken, S., Hendrickson, B., & Lensun, L. (2020). *Outcome Measurement: Drought Community Support Initiative Round 2*. The Salvation Army Australia.



delivering support for people experiencing hardship and disadvantage, The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society submit that the government's social security response to climate change needs to encompass more than income support payments.

The one-off Disaster Recovery Payment and the short-term Disaster Recovery Allowance are insufficient to allow people already experiencing financial hardship or multiple forms of disadvantage to recover following a natural disaster. Neither are they adequate for situations where entire livelihoods are disrupted.

Our combined DCSI service delivery experience was that recipients continued to experience significant levels of hardship, even after receiving the payment of up to \$3000.⁴ This leads to increased and sometimes ongoing demand for costly crisis response services, such as emergency relief, homelessness and family violence support. Proactive and early action by governments to help every individual and household in our society build resilience and adapt to a changing climate will go some way to ensuring the effects of a disaster are not disproportionately felt.

As climate change reduces the number of properties as well as the areas that are safe and affordable to live in, housing demand is likely to increase significantly.⁵ This disproportionately affects First Nations people, who have a strong and continuing connection to country, as well as people who do not have the resources to simply relocate. Our experience after the Black Summer fires is that, faced with impossible decisions, many of these people will remain in disaster prone areas but forgo prohibitively expensive home insurance. This leaves them with little to no buffer when hit by extreme weather and natural disasters.

There is room for all levels of governments to work together proactively. Responses could include increasing the stock of social and affordable housing, establishing a 'buy-back fund' for at-risk properties, increasing access to Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) assessments for homeowners and landlords, and ensuring that new housing developments are not built in areas of high risk.⁶

The role of private parties

While The Salvation Army and the St. Vincent de Paul Society agree that reducing personal risk is 'a strong incentive to act', it is important that the new National Climate Resilience and Adaptation Strategy specifically provides for individuals, families and communities who do not have the capacity to do so. A low-income family forced to live in a less expensive but flood-prone area cannot manage their risk by moving away because there are no other affordable options. Someone renting their home with an energy efficiency rating of 0.5 cannot simply install better

⁴ Esler, M., Boyer, C. & Gray, M. (2021). *Evaluation of the St Vincent de Paul Society's Implementation of the Drought Community Support Initiative*. CSRM Working Paper No. 1/2021. ANU Centre for Social Research & Methods. https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/324799_Evaluation_of_the_St_Vincent_de_Paul_Society%E2%80%99s_implementation_of_the_Drought_Community_Support_Initiative_DCSI_ANU_Centre_for_Social_Research_Methods.pdf

Bracken, S., Hendrickson, B., & Lensun, L. (2020). *Outcome Measurement: Drought Community Support Initiative Round 2*. The Salvation Army Australia.

⁵ Mallon, K., McKinlay, M., Houghton, N., Hamden, R., Tedder, R. and Lamb, J. (2019). *Climate Change Risk to Australia's Built Environment: A Second Pass National Assessment*.

⁶ Bajracharya, B., Childs, I., & Hastings, P. (2011). Climate change adaptation through land use planning and disaster management: Local government perspectives from Queensland. In *Proceedings from the PRRES Conference 2011: 17th Annual Pacific Rim Real Estate Society Conference*. Pacific Rim Real Estate Society. http://www.prrres.net/papers/Bajracharya_Childs_Hastings_Climate_change_disaster_management_and_land_use_planning.pdf



insulation or solar panels to reduce their energy consumption. A person experiencing homelessness has limited means to protect themselves during a heatwave.

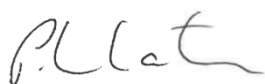
This must include ensuring access to the information and resources they need to adapt to a changing climate. As a start, the Commonwealth Government can work with state, territory and local governments to ensure people on lower incomes, especially people experiencing high levels and multiple forms of disadvantage, are not left behind.

This should include access to distributed energy resources, such as solar PV, and higher energy efficiency. Our experience through delivering programs like the Actsmart Household Energy Efficiency Program and providing emergency bill relief is that rising energy prices and energy inefficient homes results in people living in conditions that lead to poor physical and mental health.

Research by the St. Vincent de Paul Society also shows that people experiencing significant disadvantage are at greater risk of electricity disconnection.⁷ This includes people on low incomes, older people and single parent families, as well as people living in areas with high unemployment or housing affordability issues.

We commend to the Taskforce the work of countries like the United Kingdom in setting energy efficiency targets for 'fuel-poor' households, which has seen initial positive progress.⁸

Yours sincerely,



Paul Hateley, Major
Head of Government Relations
The Salvation Army Australia



Mr Toby o'Connor
Chief Executive Officer
St Vincent de Paul Society National Council of
Australia Inc.



We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters throughout Australia.

We pay our respect to Elders and acknowledge their continuing relationship to this land and the ongoing living cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia.

We also acknowledge future aspirations of all First Nations peoples. Through respectful relationships we will work for the mutual flourishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians.

We commit ourselves in prayer and practice to this land of Australia and its people, seeking reconciliation, unity and equity.

⁷ St Vincent de Paul Society & Alvis Consulting. (2019). *Households in the Dark II: Mapping electricity disconnections in South Australia, Victoria, New South Wales and South East Queensland*.
https://www.vinnies.org.au/icms_docs/310289_Households_in_the_Dark_II_2019.pdf

⁸ UK Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. (2020, April 20). *Annual Fuel Poverty Statistics in England, 2020 (2018 data)*. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/882404/annual-fuel-poverty-statistics-report-2020-2018-data.pdf

