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Shire of Yalgoo Press Release

The Disaster that is Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements in Western Australia.

The system in place to help communities recover after natural disasters has failed our community.

Could yours be next?

The Shire of Yalgoo covers over 30,000 square kilometres and is a conduit and producer of millions in royalties and billions in primary producer GDP. Our road network supports iconic pastoral country, state conservation parks and numerous mining enterprises and is an integral part in maintaining safe transport both within and throughout the region. While funding for routine maintenance and repair of these road networks is the responsibility of local government, Commonwealth funding exists to repair this type of essential infrastructure following a natural disaster. While Cyclone Seroja did not affect the Shire of Yalgoo in 2021 as much as some of our neighbours, the shire did experience substantial road damage from declared storm events AGRN962 (March 2021) and AGRN1021 (March 2022). Both storms generated similar rainfall levels to those recently experienced in the Kimberly as a result of Cyclone Sean. These storms caused the extended closure of Great Northern Highway and kept the local government unsealed road network unusable due to significant flooding. Road repairs and assessments were made by the Shire of Yalgoo based on the understanding that funding would be made available via Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Western Australia (DRFAWA).

The Shire of Yalgoo submitted an application to the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) as the assessment agency responsible for administering disaster recovery funding. After numerous assessment delays coupled with inconsistent advice from the department, DFES rejected the shire's \$6 million application to fund the recovery work, required to make roads in the area safe and usable again. DFES bureaucrats appear to have made this decision arbitrarily with very little transparency regarding the process, essentially overriding the actions of an elected Council who believed natural disaster funds would be paid in good faith, existed for all Australian communities and would be administered fairly.

While this decision has severely impacted the Shire of Yalgoo's ability to maintain established services and continue with ordinary operations what is also concerning is that the costs involved in submitting an unsuccessful application are also not being funded. The cost of providing the evidence for this process, which is required at both State and Commonwealth level, is onerous and expensive, particularly in a remote area, and equates to roughly a quarter of the cost of the total application. This is ratepayer and taxpayer money that would never have been required if the shire had the capacity to respond to these natural disasters themselves or were extended any level of trust or confidence by the state and commonwealth government in the provision of evidence required as part of the assessment process. It is an unfair expectation that the entire cost of repairs to a local government road network caused by documented storm events should be met by a small local government while the benefits of a safe road network are shared amongst the much wider community of road users.



We know we are not alone - The recently released Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding (Colvin Review) summarises the following:

“At present, disaster funding decisions are mostly reactive and are not understood in terms of consistency, certainty, nor transparency. The Review heard from many stakeholders about how difficult it was to understand how decisions were made, or how to approach making an application for funding.”

Decisions under DRFAWA at a state government level do not exist in legislation. This means that their bureaucrats “captains call” cannot be considered by an independent body such as the State Administrative Tribunal.

The Shire of Yalgoo has called on the Minister for Emergency Services and the DFES Commissioner to look into this situation. Akin to repeated calls for the expansion of Rescue and Emergency Helicopters into the Midwest this plight of a regional area has fallen on deaf ears.

