

30 January 2024

Community Support and Services Committee  
Parliament House, George St  
Brisbane 4000 QLD  
By email: [CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:CSSC@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Committee Members

## **Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill ('the Bill')**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Bill.

### **About QCOSS**

The Queensland Council of Social Service (QCOSS) is the peak body for the social service sector in Queensland. Our vision is to achieve equality, opportunity, and wellbeing for all Queenslanders.

### **QCOSS' position**

QCOSS welcomes the Bill and recognises the substantial work that has underpinned this important reforms. However, the Bill does not harness the opportunity to more effectively embed community services into key coordination and disaster response activities. Although we are pleased there is a clear commitment to increased investment in vital emergency responders and agencies, there is a relative under-investment in the community sector.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of writing, many of our members and their communities are recovering from severe weather events that occurred in December throughout North Queensland and South-East Queensland, as well as the more recent impacts of Tropical Cyclone Kirrily. The contribution of QCOSS members alongside key emergency response agencies in the immediate and long-term response and recovery is enormous. This submission is informed by QCOSS' ongoing engagement with our members, who are professionals on disaster resilience and response efforts.

### **Better disaster management coordination in partnership with the community sector**

Place-based community organisations are uniquely positioned to provide essential support during an emergency such as an extreme weather event. They have a deep knowledge of their community, they are efficient connectors to other service providers, they are highly skilled at assisting with system navigation, and they are often early on the scene providing immediate practical assistance.<sup>2</sup>

Through our consultations, many community organisations raised concern that their organisation's role in responding to disasters often comes down to individual staff going 'above and beyond.' With an increased frequency in severe weather events, our caring sector is burning out, often while also facing personal devastation to their own homes and within their own communities.

The Bill provides an opportunity to ensure community organisations are embedded into key bodies within the disaster management co-ordination framework. This would require an ongoing uplift in funding to ensure that relevant organisations have the capacity to engage with the strategic meetings of relevant bodies; sufficient and ongoing funding for specialised staff such as disaster

<sup>1</sup> Explanatory Notes. Emergency Services Reform Amendment Bill 2023 (Qld), page 16.

<https://documents.parliament.qld.gov.au/tp/2023/5723T1994-827C.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Queensland Council of Social Service. *State of the Sector 2022*.

<https://www.qcoss.org.au/publication/report-state-of-the-sector-2022/>



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resilience workers to undertake disaster response and resilience activities; and increased funding to support emergency response infrastructure, and equipment such as generators.

We encourage the Committee to engage with the Neighbourhood Centres Queensland (NCQ) [Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-2026](#),<sup>3</sup> as well as NCQ's specific recommendations in response to this Inquiry.

QCOSS also supports the submission of Community Legal Centres Queensland (CLCQ). CLCQ identified a need for ongoing monitoring and accountability measures, including an independent review, in relation to the increased role of the Queensland Police Service as the lead agency for disaster management in Queensland. They have also identified a need for greater legal protection for 'Good Samaritan' community volunteers who respond to disasters.

### **Conclusion**

QCOSS welcomes the concerted effort and considerable investment in emergency services and looks forward to working with government to ensure the unique skills of our sector can be sustainably funded and engaged in this context. Thank you again for the opportunity to provide our submission. If you have any questions, please contact Aimee McVeigh, Chief Executive Officer at [aimee@qcross.org.au](mailto:aimee@qcross.org.au) or 07 3004 6903.

Yours sincerely



Aimee McVeigh  
Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>3</sup> Neighbourhood Centres Queensland. (2023). Queensland Neighbourhood Centres Strategy for Disaster Resilience 2023-2026: A plan to strengthen the resilience of Queensland's local communities facing COVID-19, flooding and rainfall events, drought, bushfires and other disasters. <https://ncq.org.au/projects/disaster-resilience-strategy/>