

Friday, 30 October 2020

Law Council President, Pauline Wright, response to the release of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disasters Arrangements Report

All comments are to be attributed to Law Council President, Pauline Wright.

It is not surprising that the importance of legal assistance in times of emergency features prominently in the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements report, handed to the government today.

As noted in the report, the delivery of legal assistance is a key example of non-government recovery support playing a fundamental role in helping individuals who are adversely affected by natural disasters.

The legal profession has consistently stood up to the challenges of natural disasters through the provision of emergency support, led by the community legal sector, legal aid commissions and the pro bono contribution of private practitioners.

That is why the Law Council believes that the mobilisation of outreach centres providing on-the-ground advice, telephone advice services and dedicated online and physical resources are vital to communities following disaster events and must be linked to long term support and recovery from disasters.

However, the report also highlights a need for improved planning and coordination in the delivery of these services, including a recommendation for pre-agreed recovery programs that includes the provision of legal assistance. Importantly, the report notes that non-government organisations should be included in this recovery planning process.

The Law Council supports these recommendations, and calls on the Australian Government to consider additional resourcing for the legal assistance sector, which continues to perform a vital role in supporting our society regardless of whether or not we are in a period of national disaster.

The Law Council also welcomes the report's focus on the need to improve the regulatory framework for charitable fundraising in Australia.

A nationally consistent scheme for the regulation of fundraising is long overdue, and the report's finding that such a scheme could provide greater community confidence in the management of financial donations following a natural disaster is welcomed.

The legal sector has consistently demonstrated its ability to adapt in the face of crises and leverage minimal resources to provide significant sections of the community with much-needed advice and assistance to manage the myriad of challenges that arise in times of emergency.

With 80 recommendations aimed at improving Australia's national natural disaster arrangements, the report provides an opportunity to learn and adapt from the extremely challenging circumstances in the past year.

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