



**FRRR**  
Foundation for Rural  
Regional Renewal



## Submission To The Victorian Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee - Inquiry into Climate Resilience

28 June 2024

### About FRRR

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal - FRRR - (phonetically: F-triple-R) - is the only national foundation specifically focused on ensuring the social and economic strength of remote, rural and regional communities.

FRRR's unique model connects common purposes and investment with locally prioritised needs, to help realise an Australia where remote, rural and regional communities are vibrant, resilient, empowered and sustainable. Since FRRR's start in 2000, it has delivered over \$177 million to more than 14,000 projects. In FY22/23, FRRR made 339 grants to Victorian not-for-profit organisations, totalling over \$5.4M.

We are independent, trusted and experienced in grant program design and funds distribution, holding partnerships with Federal and State governments, significant philanthropic foundations and corporates across Australia. FRRR's work focuses on four key strategic areas: 1 – People, 2 – Place, 3 – Disaster Resilience, and 4 – Climate Solutions. Further information on FRRR's background is included as an Appendix.

FRRR has responded to the Inquiry's Terms of Reference, as detailed below, however we would also welcome a further discussion about any of the points raised. Questions about FRRR, our work, or the detail contained within this submission can be directed to:



**FRRR considers that a broader whole-of-government response to questions of climate resilience is urgently needed, beyond the infrastructure focus of the questions set out in the Climate Resilience Terms of Reference, but in seeking to respond to the purview of the Inquiry, has confined our responses to the questions raised with an introductory statement and then more specific statements to (a), (c), (d), (e), and (f) as follows:**

Over the 25-year history of FRRR, we have supported communities to activate, and sustain initiatives across the charitable spectrum – supporting infrastructure, health and wellbeing, community cohesion, arts & culture, environment, economic development, and much more. This includes initiatives to both strengthen existing and establish new community-based infrastructure that is beyond the remit of, or adds value to, local and state government investment.



On an average annual basis, approximately 40% of the total FRRR granting is directed towards built infrastructure that enables and facilitates local people and communities to gather, connect and undertake a very wide range of community activity that is a central component of building social/human capital; highlighting the critical interconnectedness of built and social capital when building healthy and thriving regional communities.

In simple terms; our experience in funding investment in a community hall kitchen, water tank or toilet should not be measured in simple dollar terms of the infrastructure, when it yields return many times over in social capital outcomes of health, wellness, cohesiveness, community identity and social connection.

Our [research](#), in partnership with the University of Sydney relating to building community level disaster resilience speaks directly to the importance of investing in social capital efforts such as highlighting inclusion, strengthening local networks, building communication, increasing local information, establishing self-organisation systems, supporting local decision making, and creating local resources, tools and supports; all of which would be very challenging if not impossible to create without the strong underpinning of locally available and accessible built infrastructure where this activity occurs.

This community level infrastructure is particularly critical in the immediate period during and a disaster. The need is further amplified where communities are geographically isolated and options for community gathering places are few, small and often under resourced to meet community need. As our climate variability increases, we must also invest in the resilience of our infrastructure in the face of such increasing variability.

Looking to the future; a significant need exists to:

- a) Provide financial support for community organisations to maintain and improve climate resilient community owned and/or managed infrastructure; and
- b) Invest in social resilience of communities to improve resilience across the system, including climate resilience.

- (a) the main risks facing Victoria's built environment and infrastructure from climate change and the impact these will have on the people of Victoria; AND**
- (c) the barriers facing Victoria in upgrading infrastructure to become more resilient to the impacts of climate change, including barriers in rebuilding or retrofitting infrastructure, including but not limited to, issues relating to insurance and barriers faced by local government;**

FRRR recognises the physical risks to the built environment and infrastructure brought about by climate change and increasing numbers of climate-events and disasters. However, FRRR confines our comments in this submission to questions of social risk and how it relates to infrastructure -

As our climate becomes increasingly variable, and climate events and disasters more common, this is already, and will continue to impact the people of Victoria.



Communities experiencing climate transition often experience multiple challenges relating to their public physical infrastructure. There are many small rural and remote communities that have a single community meeting place and a high proportion of those buildings were constructed many decades ago when climate resilience was not a consideration in construction.

We need to maintain appropriate spaces for communities to gather, connect, and take refuge – these must be comfortable, with appropriate temperature controls, have energy and telecommunications security, be inclusive, and be trusted as a safe and appropriate gathering place by community members.

Many of the funding requests that FRRR receives are related to communities seeking to upgrade their community infrastructure to resist extreme weather events, better regulate interior temperatures, store water, or to serve as a shelter for communities during extreme weather and emergencies.

It is difficult for community committees or Section 86 Committees who manage these community assets to secure the funding the funding to ensure they are fit for purpose and usable all year round. There are limited opportunities to access government or philanthropic funding to upgrade infrastructure, particularly in the \$25,000 to \$250,000 project value range which is required in many cases to make effective improvements.

FRRR is observing a trend where Local and State Governments are increasingly handing responsibility for maintenance and management of these community halls and other buildings over to community committees; many of which have a highly constrained ability to raise funds, and support the basic annual costs of the infrastructure many of which are increasing with the frequency of climate impacts.

This trend concerns FRRR, as it occurs in combination with declining volunteering rates, with many not-for-profit organisations concerned about governance succession and their future viability. The consequences of losing these committees, or of this kind of community infrastructure continuing to fall into disrepair are potentially catastrophic.

Climate change is increasing the burden we are placing on volunteers to manage and maintain community infrastructure that can support communities in an increasingly disaster and climate event prone context.

If government is to be an effective enabler of healthy community life; it is critical they work alongside philanthropy to reduce obstacles to ensure volunteering, and participating in such governance roles, easier, not harder – or risk further decline to the not-for-profit sector and further damage to the social fabric of our communities. To that end, we need greater government support of social resilience. In order to invest in social resilience, FRRR and the University of Sydney's research, elucidated seven critical dimensions of disaster resilience, being:

1. Inclusion



2. Networks
3. Communication
4. Information
5. Self-organising systems
6. Decision-making
7. Resources, tools and support.<sup>1</sup>

This also includes not-for-profit leadership, such as continued investment in Victoria's Community Leadership programs which recently lost their Victorian Government funding.<sup>2</sup> and greater investment in the maintenance and upgrade of vital community infrastructure.

FRRR recommends that the Victorian Government make continued and concerted investments in the social resilience of communities. When communities lead and drive resilience initiatives, FRRR's work and research indicates that "these efforts are sustained for longer, have ongoing positive impacts across the community and build local strengths which can adapt to a range of challenges."<sup>3</sup> FRRR would be ready and willing to partner with the Victorian Government to deliver such investment.

**(d) the adequacy of the current Victorian planning system as it relates to its adaptation to, preparation for, and mitigation of climate change impacts;**

At a planning level, FRRR is concerned by and suggests there is an urgent need to revise planning regulations to:

- a. limit use of practices that increase climate stress such as black roofs on concentrated developments,
- b. require shade and shelter belts throughout land use planning,
- c. ensure buildings are built to appropriate comfort and energy levels (eg adequate insulation) and passive design and positioning, and
- d. remove the ability for developments to occur on known flood sites and/or high risk fire areas and accelerate the adoption of such regulatory and planning law changes.

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<sup>1</sup> Howard, A., Rawsthorne, M. and Joseph, P. (2022) Critical Dimensions in Community Disaster Resilience [Fact Sheet], University of Sydney for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal. Available at: [https://frrr.org.au/wp-content/uploads/FRRR\\_Critical-dimensions-for-community-led-resilience-building.pdf](https://frrr.org.au/wp-content/uploads/FRRR_Critical-dimensions-for-community-led-resilience-building.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ioemccracken.com.au/media-releases/2023-06-08-walsh-leadership-programs-cut-in-regional-victorias-time-of-need>

<sup>3</sup> Howard, A., Rawsthorne, M. and Joseph, P. (2022) Critical Dimensions in Community Disaster Resilience [Fact Sheet], University of Sydney for the Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal. Available at: [https://frrr.org.au/wp-content/uploads/FRRR\\_Critical-dimensions-for-community-led-resilience-building.pdf](https://frrr.org.au/wp-content/uploads/FRRR_Critical-dimensions-for-community-led-resilience-building.pdf)



**(e) what more could be done to better prepare Victoria's built environment and infrastructure, and therefore the community, for future climate disaster events; and**

In addition to recommendations mentioned above, FRRR recommends the Victorian Government invest in:

- mapping the uses of local community infrastructure at a regional level to assess climate resilience, community uses and opportunities for climate resilient infrastructure plans to be embedded in local government and other critical infrastructure planning. Embedding local co-design processes in this mapping would engage community in conversations about use and planning of local community infrastructure while enabling ground-truthing of information.
- upgrading emergency evacuation centres / Neighbourhood Safer Places so that they each have: a) independent energy security; and b) are able to act as extreme heat havens, in addition to acting as a bushfire, or flood place of last resort.
  - a) After the Black Summer bushfires, FRRR received a large number of requests for philanthropic grants to support the installation of solar panels with behind the meter battery units that could be isolated from the grid, or mobile generators that could be of use to the community – many reported that there was no reliable place for community members to charge mobile phones, or prepare food and drink for long periods of time – as a result, they sought additional independent energy solutions.
  - b) FRRR are now receiving grant applications from some rural and remote locations where their evacuation centre is responding to a growing number of disruptions – whether bushfire, flood, cyclone, or extreme heat. With increasing climate variability, it will be increasingly important to provide safe, comfortable, and appropriate Neighbourhood Safer Places – which requires investment ahead of time.
- ensuring any funding tied to disaster remediation or recovery works includes a requirement to build back better and more climate resilient, rather than incorporating a return to status quo – which further entrenches infrastructure (whether roads, buildings, or other) that is no longer appropriate;

**(f) whether further inquiries or investigation may be needed into other aspects of climate change adaptation and climate disaster preparedness in Victoria, noting that climate change will have far-reaching impacts on all aspects of Victorian life, including but not limited to biodiversity, human health, primary production, industry, emergency services and more, and that while these areas may overlap with the matters covered in this inquiry, they may also warrant further investigation in their own inquiries.**



As acknowledged in the question, there is overlap and interrelationship of these elements of our system. FRRR also encourages the Victorian Government to consider where investments in elements such as stronger social resilience will result in benefits across many areas of the system.

FRRR directs investment into the capacity and capability of not-for-profit organisations across Victoria because it recognises that a stronger not-for-profit sector will be support their communities to act on opportunities, or be more resilient to shocks and disruptions – whether they are brought on as a result of a changing climate, disaster industry transition (energy, forestry, closure of primary employer), or otherwise.

We hear from communities of the frustration in being required to act on government funding that limits spending and impact to one climate risk, eg bushfire resilience, or drought resilience, or energy resilience, or natural capital resilience, or climate resilience, but not combinations of these elements – despite their interdependence. By asking communities to silo their activities in this way, we are inadvertently limiting outcomes, reducing opportunities for efficiency, adding to the burden and consultation fatigue being experienced by communities who are experiencing each of these as single pieces of investigation, and ultimately depleting resilience.

Sophisticated wellbeing indicators, such as those developed by Dr Jacki Schirmer at the University of Canberra<sup>4</sup>, can assist in measuring resilience of populations over time, so that we can improve our understanding of the interdependence of interventions across the system in order to move to an approach that does not silo investment in particular areas and instead allows for investment that can have broad and systemic impact.

In particular, FRRR suggests that the Victorian Government considers in more depth:

- the inter-relationship between nature-based solutions and nature-based mitigation with social and built infrastructure resilience; and
- how the needs of remote, rural and regional Victorian communities differ from their urban counterparts, and require flexible boundaries through which to adopt changes to policy or investment.

We would welcome an opportunity for further conversations – please contact FRRR with the details listed on page one. We thank the Victorian Government for the opportunity to make a submission to the Inquiry into Climate Resilience.

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.regionalwellbeing.org.au/about/>



## Appendix: Background Information on FRRR

The Foundation for Rural & Regional Renewal (FRRR) is a national charitable foundation with a vision for a vibrant, resilient and sustainable remote, rural and regional Australia. FRRR's work is categorised in three main areas: Grant & Develop, Leverage & Broker, and Insights & Learning. Across this work, FRRR focuses on four key [strategic](#) focus areas: People, Place, Disaster Resilience and Climate Solutions.

Since FRRR's establishment in 2000, it has delivered over \$177M million to more than 14,000 projects. In the last year, FRRR granted out \$22.5M across 1,158 projects to 552 postcodes across Australia.

FRRR is structured as a company limited by guarantee, with two members, The Australian Government and The Sidney Myer Fund. FRRR holds DGR-1 endorsement and is [ACNC registered](#). FRRR is governed by a highly respected [Board](#) of 11, Chaired by Tim Fairfax AC and Deputy Chair Anne Grindrod. Chief Executive Officer, Natalie Egleton, leads the team of 30 experienced staff who are based across Australia, with an office headquartered in Bendigo, Victoria.

### Partnerships

FRRR takes a leadership role in assisting remote, rural and regional communities to respond to social, cultural and economic change. We do this in partnership with others who are interested in supporting remote, rural and regional Australia, acting as a collaborator and conduit in the pursuit of systems change.

FRRR has 650 donor partners across Government, Trusts, Foundations, Corporations and Individuals.

- **Government** partners include: The Australian Government, NSW Reconstruction Authority, and the Victorian Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (administering the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Funds).
- FRRR is trusted by a number of **prominent Australian businesses** to deliver grant programs benefiting remote, rural and regional Australia, including: [Suncorp](#), [Telstra](#), [ANZ](#), [Nutrien](#), [Raine & Horne](#), [AMP Foundation](#), [Kellogg Australia](#), and many more.
- Our **Trust and Foundation partners** include: the Sidney Myer Fund, Paul Ramsay Foundation, Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, Minderoo Foundation, and more.

*"FRRR sits alongside communities and within community, it doesn't dictate to communities how things should happen. They are very much there as a trusted partner and enabler. I knew FRRR would deliver and would do it in a way that respected the agency that communities need to have..." Michelle Gortan, Macdoch Foundation*

Read more about what our Partners say about us [here](#).



## Capabilities

- FRRR is an experienced **funds manager**, with \$20M of funds under management including \$5M in its [Disaster Resilience & Recovery Fund](#), with FRRR's Board approving the allocation of annual earnings to support of disaster preparedness and recovery projects across Australia;
- FRRR partnered with the **Victorian Government** in the design and distribution of funds from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund across 2012-2023. [FRRR managed and delivered a series of grant programs](#) focused on the long-term recovery of Black Saturday affected communities, which evolved as needs changed in the ensuing years, and distributed nearly \$3M.
- FRRR is a delivery partner of the Australian Government's Future Drought Fund's [Helping Regional Communities Prepare for Drought Initiative](#), involving the delivery of **almost \$30M across 35 regions** at risk of drought over three years, of which \$2,575,999 investment has been directed into Victoria.
- FRRR is an experienced **leader in place-based initiatives**, with its [Investing In Rural Community Futures program](#) developing the capability of the not-for-profit sector in eight NSW communities to support and improve the community's future vitality. The program was supported by partner, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation, who invested \$5M over 5 years. This program is now being expanded across a number of NSW and Victorian communities.
- FRRR walks alongside **Aboriginal collectives** such as [South Australia's First Nations Philanthropic Funders Working Group](#), which sees six Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations overseeing the creation of a community informed and led model to direct philanthropic funding for First Nations communities across South Australia.