



# CENTRAL DARLING SHIRE COUNCIL

May 23, 2024

## Calling for a review of Natural Disaster Declaration criteria

Central Darling Shire Council Administrator, Bob Stewart, has written to the National Emergency Management Agency Coordinator-General asking for an urgent review of the Natural Disaster Declaration guidelines. Mr Stewart said it was vital that the criteria requiring rural remote councils to *demonstrate a coordinated multi-agency response* be removed to allow for Natural Disaster Assistance to be fairly available to all councils.

It comes after a storm event on 5-6 February 2024 impacted the northern areas of Central Darling Shire, including White Cliffs. Despite causing \$1.3 million in damages the storm was deemed not eligible for Natural Disaster assistance. This is because, as Council understands, there was no coordinated multi-agency response to the natural disaster.

The situation highlights the fact that Central Darling and other rural and remote Councils are at an unfair disadvantage when applying for Natural Disaster Assistance.

Not only does Central Darling have low emergency services volunteer participation rates but calling out emergency services for storm events where nothing can be done is a waste of volunteers' time and potential loss of income to them. On the occasion in February remote station property owners, dealt with storm damage themselves because emergency services access was not practical until unsealed roads and creek crossings were made accessible and ground conditions dried out. There was also very little private property damage because most houses in White Cliffs are underground (dug outs) and on high ground.

To date because of the storm Council has spent \$861,113 on remedial works, exceeding the \$250,000 Natural Disaster Assessment threshold. Most of the damage is to unsealed roads and White Cliffs Golf Course has sustained significant soil erosion.

Central Darling is a low socio economic and disadvantaged Shire. It covers an area about the size of Tasmania and has 1725 residents. Rate income is not enough to cover the operational functions of Council. The Council is solely reliant on funding support from Federal and State governments. Any severe impact on Council infrastructure, such as the February storm, requires funding assistance for repairs.

Last week the Council General Manager, Greg Hill, attended a ministerial meeting in Sydney to lobby for the Natural Disaster Declaration funding support to be made available for the vital storm repairs and reimbursement of costs already incurred. Mr Hill met with the NSW Emergency Services Minister Jihad Dib and NSW Reconstruction Authority CEO Mal Lanyon on May 16. The next step is to seek support from the National Emergency Management agency. Ends

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