

**Key Policy in discussion**

**CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT**

**Portfolio and or agency**

**Gender and Disaster Australia**

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## **Overview**

In our [pre-budget briefing on climate change and disaster management](#) we showed how climate change has a gender dimension. Women are more likely than men to suffer the adverse health consequences of extreme climate events, and women are disproportionately affected by climate change disasters. In Australia, disasters increase women's economic insecurity: women lose or forgo employment opportunities on taking up additional community and care responsibilities, as shown after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires and the 2011 floods in Queensland and Victoria. Disasters also increase rates of gender-based violence, including from the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires, a pattern replicated after the 2020 fires. Failure to take action on climate change and emissions abatement can exacerbate gender inequality and reduce women's ability to adapt. Women are also more likely to express their concern about global warming, and to support climate change mitigation policies.

Against this background we raised a number of questions around priority policies for women that need to be addressed in disaster management. Some of these are not budget matters. Of those that are, how effective was the budget response? Is there a corresponding Opposition measure?

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## **Budget Measures**

The budget response to disaster management needs to be set against the background of underpinning measures to address Energy Policy and Environmental Protection. The challenge that this Government has not addressed is that energy policy is the driver of climate change that results in loss of biodiversity and increased severity of fire, flood and drought.

- *Energy Policy*

The Federal Budget continues to support energy initiatives that rely on fossil fuels. The Australian Petroleum Production & Exploration Association (APPEA), which represents the oil and gas sector, [has congratulated the Government](#) on the budget that has "reaffirmed the long-term role of the oil and gas industry in Australia's

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The National Foundation for Australian Women is dedicated to promoting and protecting the interests of Australian women, including intellectual, cultural, political, social, economic, legal, industrial and domestic spheres, and ensuring that the aims and ideals of the women's movement and its collective wisdom are handed on to new generations of women. NFAW is a feminist organisation, independent of party politics and working in partnership with other women's organisations.

Authorised by the National Foundation for Australian Women, Canberra: President Ms Jane Madden.

economy and lower emissions future.” The funding will largely support low emissions LNG, hydrogen production and associated carbon capture and storage infrastructure.

There is some funding for clean energy through the Clean Energy Finance Corporation (CEFC), which invests in renewable energy and technologies, the Australian Renewable Energy Agency (ARENA), which supports research and development in this area and the Clean Energy Regulator, but that funding will decline over the forward estimates. The Clean Energy Council has highlighted that apart from some investment in microgrids, primarily in remote communities, there is a [lack of investment in transmission](#) to support the shift to renewable energy provision.

It is notable that the cost of living measures include a halving in the fuel tariff, with no incentives to assist the transition to electric vehicles. Incentives for electric vehicles in some states have seen a tripling of the number of EVs registered in Australia in 2022, admittedly off a low base, but there has been no additional support for these drivers in the budget.

While we acknowledge that the fuel excise reduction is a short term measure, it is not good climate policy.

Note that in the Address in Reply the Opposition Leader referenced the ALP policy: Powering Australia, which sets out Labor’s renewable energy plan.

- *Environmental Protection*

There is some funding in this area, but the specified projects have been cherry-picked. There is an additional \$1 billion for the Great Barrier Reef, compared to \$200.1 million to expand the Environment Restoration Fund, the recovery and conservation of the koala and koala habitats, community-led tree planting projects, and investment in Commonwealth National Parks.

The Government has committed \$192.0 million to respond to the Independent Review of the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999 with an additional \$192.0 million to improve environmental resilience, protect Indigenous heritage and support economic growth.

Recycling initiatives include a boost of \$60.4 million over 4 years to leverage investment into new advanced plastic recycling technologies and will work in partnership with states, territories and industry.

Although this funding is essential to redress damage that has already happened, the fundamental causes of climate change are not being adequately addressed.

- *Disaster Recovery and Resilience*

Against the background of these less than barely adequate measures to mitigate climate change and environmental degradation, the 2022-23 Budget includes a substantial bandaid to deal with the effects of policy inertia. There is a package to support recovery from the 2022 floods in NSW and Queensland, much of which has already been announced. \$3.6 billion has been allocated, and another \$3 billion has been allocated over the forward estimates partly funded by the Emergency Response Fund.

The package includes:

- Mental health funding: \$31.2 million over 2 years from 2021-22 to meet the increased demand and support for the mental health of residents in flood affected areas through the recovery process.

- Financial Wellbeing and Capability Activities: \$25.0 million to provide additional funding for Financial Wellbeing and Capability activities including emergency relief, food relief and financial counselling for communities affected by the floods in NSW and Queensland.
- Legal Assistance: \$5.4 million over 2 years from 2021-22 to existing legal assistance services operating within Queensland and NSW to support flood affected individuals, small businesses and primary producers to access timely legal assistance as required
- Health Care: \$4.7 million over 2 years from 2021-22 to support primary health care services for flood impacted regions, including emergency response teams and additional workforce capacity and establishing a shared temporary business premises in or near Lismore for displaced local primary health care providers to ensure continuity of access to healthcare for the community.

As noted in our pre-election briefing, it is essential that the specific needs of women as first responders are met. The response of women to disasters is different to men, and they need dedicated counselling and medical services. In distributing the funding to services working on the ground, it is critical that the specific needs of women, including the urgent restoration of child care services, are recognised. This is the priority specifically addressed by our questions.

#### **Key Questions of concern that need to be addressed**

**1. Will your government analyse federal funding in disasters over the past term of the federal government, compensate women for what is owed as a result of unfair and unequal distribution of disaster funding, and establish a system to ensure gender parity in disaster funding in the future?**

There is no commitment in the budget papers to review prior decisions and allocations of funding.

**2. Will your government provide urgent and immediate emergency response in disaster to reconnect essential services of power, internet, water and clean-up, prioritising lone women and single parents?**

Funding continues to be allocated as emergencies arise, provided through the Emergency Response Fund. The Government is providing funding to establish a panel of emergency response providers to assist with the provision of resources in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. There is also funding provided in the regional infrastructure package to improve telecommunications support.

**3. Will your government reserve a proportion of disaster recovery funds to reinstate child-care and school infrastructure following disasters as a priority to allow women more equitable access to continuing or new employment?**

The response plan for the 2022 Flood Emergency in NSW and Qld has included support for child care services. There are no additional places allocated to families dealing with the emergency. \$6.9 million has been allocated in 2021-22 to provide Business Continuity Payments of \$10,000 to Early Childhood Education and Care services in flood affected locations that close for 7 days or longer and \$22.1 million over 2 years from 2021-22 to increase the Community Child Care Fund Special Circumstances grant to assist services experiencing financial viability issues resulting from the recent floods and the COVID-19 pandemic.

**4. Will your government provide funding to embed the Gender and Emergency Management Guidelines into key emergency service organisations to allow a focus on family violence in government post-disaster support, e.g. streamline access to \$5,000 family violence payment?**

There is no comment in the budget documents on this point, although funding has been allocated to family violence disaster responses.

**5. Will your government fund the inclusion of family violence and gender specialists in disaster planning, response, recovery and reconstruction?**

Rates of family violence increase following disasters and funding to provide additional support in this area is welcome. The Women's Budget Statement reports that \$3.7 billion has been made available over 4 years to strengthen disaster responses to women and children experiencing domestic, family and sexual violence. The breakdown between the inclusion of gender specialists in disaster planning, response, recovery and reconstruction and the provision of services to women escaping violence is not clear.

**6. Will your government establish a national initiative for First Nations' women and men to lead fire management?**

It is important that all natural disaster management take an Indigenous caring for country perspective, recognising the sustainable stewardship of country by Indigenous peoples over millennia. This support should be gender sensitive, recognising the different knowledge and skills of Indigenous women and men in caring for country.

It is also important to recognise the particular distress of Indigenous women and men experiencing the increased effects of disasters, given this long stewardship. Many Indigenous people are particularly affected by natural disasters, as they often live in regional or remote areas increasingly affected by disasters. It is important that responses to natural disasters are safe for Indigenous people and culturally informed.

The Government will provide "...\$636.4 million over 6 years from 2022-23 to expand the *Indigenous Rangers Program* to increase the capacity of Indigenous people to undertake land and sea country management" (Budget paper 2, p 161). This measure will include incentives increase the proportion of women and young people in ranger positions. This is a welcome investment as it will create over 1000 new ranger positions by 2026/27.

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**Questions that still need to be raised in the run up to the election.**

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