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MEDIA RELEASE

Black Summer Bush Fires one year on

A year on from the Black Summer bushfires that ravaged Qld, NSW, Vic and SA, Claire Victory, National Council President of the St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia, said there are lessons to be learned to ensure a more streamlined approach to respond to future disasters.

Speaking shortly after the Society lodged its submission with the Senate Finance and Public Administration Committee, Ms Victory said when the response was well coordinated and communication channels were well established, things went very well.

But, she said, reducing red tape and streamlining administrative processes will make life a lot easier for local communities and for the agencies assisting them in the future.

Improvements could have been made with respect to:

- giving more notice on when Recovery Centres were being established;
- including Vinnies on the Recovery Centres' state website;
- reducing the paperwork required of small businesses;
- reducing the time taken to complete and finalise insurance claims;
- providing information that would help people decide whether to rebuild;
- increasing the amount of and access to emergency accommodation;
- accessing telecommunications systems in isolated communities.

The submission reflects the views of members, volunteers and staff who provided direct relief to those affected by the 2019-20 bushfires through Vinnies' centres and shops, helplines, visits and attendance at community events and Recovery Centres. It is rich with examples of practical assistance provided during each phase of the Society's three-tier bushfire response – the emergency stage (1-2 months), recovery stage (2-3 months) and rebuilding stage (6+ months).

'The Society is now largely engaged in the rebuilding stage, but up to six months after the disaster, we were still providing initial emergency assistance to some, while others were being helped with recovery. Each journey is different, and recovery does not occur quickly or simultaneously.

'Around 60 per cent of donated funds are distributed during the emergency stage, with the remaining 40 per cent distributed during recovery and rebuilding stages.

'At 30 November 2020, the Society raised \$25.6 million in donations, distributed or committed \$21.5 million and assisted around 9,400 households. The remaining \$4.1 million will be committed to recovery projects up to December 2021,' Ms Victory said.

A copy of the St Vincent de Paul submission is available [here](#).

The St Vincent de Paul Society in Australia consists of 60,000 members and volunteers who operate on the ground through over 1,000 groups located in local communities across the country.

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