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1. Executive summary

Australia is facing a growing challenge caused by extreme weather, and other events, that create local, regional, or National crises. These events have out-stretched capacity of emergency services and required regular use of the Australian Defence Force (ADF) for relief and recovery support. Concurrently, the increasingly volatile and uncertain geostrategic environment demands that non-Defence related activities of the ADF are minimised. This uncertain environment may generate further crises that place “all hazards’ pressures on emergency services.

Since its creation in 2016, and receipt of the Volunteer Uplift Program (VUP 1.0) Grant, Disaster Relief Australia (DRA) has demonstrated its value in enabling veterans and other volunteers to provide a range of relief and recovery support capabilities. DRA has proven its ability to assume several roles that have been undertaken by the ADF in disaster relief and garnered strong support from communities, government agencies and corporations. DRA has established a nascent disaster preparedness capability via its Big Map initiative and proven its ability to partner with corporate, community and spontaneous volunteers to increase the impact of its veteran-led disaster relief operations.

DRA is well-placed to become a more integral part of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework by continuing to deliver its core disaster relief and recovery services and take on increased responsibilities across the preparedness phases of disaster management.

The DRA 2030 Strategic Plan provides the blueprint for the next step in DRA’s development and reinforces the value of veterans as a much-needed asset in disaster preparedness and recovery. By drawing on the extensive skill set of DRA’s veterans and other volunteers, from all walks of life, communities will benefit from reduced recovery times and the restoration of confidence and hope. The addition of an expanded preparedness capability will help disaster prone communities better understand how they can prepare for disasters, growing confidence and agency in their ability to respond should crisis come.

DRA uses the unique skills, knowledge and experience of its majority military and first responder veteran workforce to generate a disproportionate disaster relief and early recovery effect. This is achieved by providing task coordination and small team leadership for the potentially hundreds of thousands of corporate, community and spontaneous volunteers. These volunteers are driven by a desire to help others but lack the means to realise their aims.

The addition of a new First Nations community collaboration capability will foster partnerships with First Nations communities, drawing on their cultural knowledge to strengthen disaster preparedness, relief and recovery planning. Finally, the development of a range of niche equipment-based and task planning capabilities offers potential to relieve pressure on some ADF assets.

Consistent with the Royal Commission into Defence and Veteran Suicide, veterans and their families will benefit from the primary value proposition of DRA’s 2030 strategy: improved health and wellbeing achieved by meaningful connection to community; the continuation of purpose through service to others; and strengthened identity and self-worth. The increased interaction of DRA’s veterans with corporate, community and spontaneous volunteers under DRA 2030 will also assist them with the transition to civilian life and open potential employment avenues.

This strategy establishes a pathway to ensure that, by 2030, governments at all levels as well as most Australians recognise DRA as a national asset and are committed to continued investment in it as the best way to support our communities in preparing for and recovering from disasters, making for a more resilient Australia and contributing to the ongoing wellbeing of our veterans, other volunteers and their families.



1.1 Benefits delivered through DRA 2030

DRA 2030 delivers significant direct and indirect benefits for Australia, our regional neighbours, the ADF and our workforce.

Benefits delivered	Method of achieving outcomes
1 Increase capability and efficiency and save costs to Australia’s Emergency Response Management system.	<p>The increasing frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, along with other crises, are driving greater demand for recovery services like those provided by DRA.</p> <p>Unlike emergency services, which conclude their efforts after the immediate response phase, DRA focuses on long-term recovery.</p> <p>Currently, most recovery efforts are carried out by ad hoc task forces or outsourced to private contractors—a model that is both unsustainable and overlooks the potential of engaging the volunteer sector.</p> <p>DRA provides these capabilities and enables government to save costs through more efficient use of resources and the engagement of volunteers.</p>
2 Increase Australian national capabilities and confidence and reduce recovery times by enabling communities to be prepare for and manage disasters.	<p>Enable communities to better prepare for and respond to disasters and accelerate recovery for disaster-affected communities through stakeholder engagement, community planning and training events, and veteran-led task coordination and volunteer management, leading to increased community agency and confidence.</p> <p>Strengthen disaster preparedness and recovery outcomes through collaboration with First Nations communities, leveraging their cultural knowledge and insights.</p>
3 Increase global regional stability through offshore capacity building.	<p>Support regional neighbours with disaster preparedness and recovery efforts, contributing to broader regional stability.</p>
4 Reduce pressure on the ADF through increased disaster preparedness, and enhanced relief and recovery capabilities.	<p>Strengthen DRA’s ability to deploy rapid, targeted, and sustained disaster relief and recovery operations.</p> <p>Grow DRA from 5,000 (Dec 2024) to up to a total of 10,000 people by 2030.</p> <p>Relieve pressure on ADF resources through the addition of niche, equipment-based, and advanced planning capabilities.</p> <p>Improve community resilience through proactive disaster preparedness initiatives, including the Big Map capability and First Nations community engagement.</p> <p>Increase involvement of corporate, community, and spontaneous volunteers through structured programs and leadership, fostering a culture of service.</p>
5 Increase Veteran employment pathways and enhance Veteran wellbeing.	<p>Open new civilian employment opportunities for veterans through increased collaboration with corporate and community partners.</p> <p>Improve mental health, identity, and sense of purpose for veterans through meaningful service opportunities and integration into civilian life and their communities.</p>
6 Improve organisational sustainability, culture and workforce diversity.	<p>Foster a values-based, inclusive culture that promotes leadership and teamwork, innovation, and resilience across a diverse workforce.</p> <p>Expand recruitment efforts to reflect the communities served, including active inclusion of First Nations veterans.</p> <p>Achieved diversified revenue streams and reduced dependency on government funding, ensuring long-term operational stability.</p>
7 Promote innovation, enable opportunities and mitigate risks.	<p>Encourage adaptive and innovative solutions to disaster management challenges, leveraging the diverse expertise of DRA’s workforce.</p> <p>Incorporate emerging technologies to increased operational safety and efficiency through the adoption of robotic and autonomous systems (RAS) in austere and extreme conditions.</p> <p>Improve safety, health, and well-being systems to protect volunteers and staff during operations.</p>

3. Organisational overview

3.1 Vision

Australia's partner of choice in disaster preparedness, relief and recovery.

3.2 Mission

To unite the skills and experience of veterans with those of other volunteers to help communities prepare for and recover from disasters.

3.3 Purpose

We help build preparedness in communities and deliver assistance and restore hope to those affected by disasters and, through this, enrich the lives of our veterans and other volunteers through continued, meaningful service.

3.4 2030 end state

By 2030, DRA will stand as an independent, financially sustainable and trusted national partner in disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery. With a skilled workforce of up to 10,000 — predominantly military veterans and former first responders — we will harness the unique expertise and skills of our people to lead a large network of corporate, community and spontaneous volunteers nationwide. We will also be a recognised leader in disaster relief and early recovery, trusted by communities across the Nation to help them better prepare for and more quickly recover from disasters. Through flexible deployment approaches and advanced technology, we'll deliver rapid, targeted and sustained assistance to communities in need. Recognised as a trusted national capability that reduces reliance on the ADF in disaster relief and early recovery operations, we will be making an unmatched contribution to building a more resilient Australia, while also contributing to the ongoing wellbeing of our veterans, other volunteers and their families.



4. Culture and values

Organisational culture is the heartbeat of DRA, defining how we operate, engage, and deliver on our mission to support communities in times of need. Our culture transcends tasks and structure, becoming the invisible force that shapes our behaviours, decisions, and interactions within our organisation. For DRA to succeed in its vision of being Australia’s partner of choice in disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery, the fostering of a strong, positive, and values-driven culture is paramount.

At the core of DRA’s culture are our values: courage, respect, service, and tenacity. These values are not just ideals but serve as guiding principles that every member—paid or volunteer—must exemplify and champion. They form the foundation of our work and interactions, helping us to build trust with communities, inspire teamwork, and maintain a resilient mindset even in the face of adversity. Embracing these values ensures that every decision we make, every interaction we have, and every effort we put forth aligns with the greater purpose of service and relief, transcending individual roles and responsibilities.

DRA seeks to cultivate a values-based leadership model where every leader and member demonstrates these core values in their daily work. This leadership model does more than influence decisions; it reinforces a culture where integrity, compassion, and excellence are non-negotiable. The strength of our culture directly impacts the success of our disaster relief efforts and the well-being of our members. When our culture is one of inclusivity, support, and purpose, it unites our corporate, community and spontaneous partners and volunteers under a shared mission, driving higher morale and making a lasting impact on those we serve.

In an organisation like DRA, where the work often takes place in high-stakes, unpredictable environments, culture serves as a stabilising force. It ensures consistency, drives accountability, and fosters a spirit of innovation and service. For this reason, each member must take ownership of their role in nurturing and maintaining DRA’s culture, understanding that our values are not just ideals to be spoken but standards to be lived. Embracing this culture will allow us to continue being a force for good in the most challenging times, helping DRA remain an indispensable National asset while enriching the lives of our members and the communities we serve.

Our values

Courage

We embody courage by taking bold, principled, and thoughtful action, grounded in our purpose, knowing that every step forward, no matter how daunting, brings us closer to the change we seek to make in our world.

Respect

We show respect through cooperation, empathy and shared purpose, building teams where every voice is heard, every role is valued, and together we accomplish what no one could achieve alone.

Service

We serve with selflessness, purpose, and compassion, knowing that our actions create lasting change for the most vulnerable, while strengthening our bonds with the communities we support, in their time of need.

Tenacity

We practice tenacity through determination, innovation, and adaptability, seeking collaborative and practical solutions, as we push forward, even when success feels distant or difficult, in relentless pursuit of our mission.



5. Strategic objectives and initiatives

DRA has identified five strategic objectives and a range of supporting initiatives, to be delivered by June 2030.

5.1 Deliver enhanced disaster relief and recovery capabilities

DRA will develop and expand its service offering to include additional equipment-based capabilities as well as planning capabilities to support local government authorities and undertake contingency planning to understand how DRA can support activities beyond disaster preparedness, relief and recovery. DRA will actively seek to leverage the opportunities afforded by emerging technologies such as robotic and autonomous systems, where these enhance the delivery of support or contribute to the safety of our corporate, community and spontaneous volunteers.

Core initiatives:

- 5.1.1 Grow the number of DRA volunteers up to a total of 10,000 by June 2030.
- 5.1.2 Preserve our majority veteran and former first responder workforce.
- 5.1.3 Maximise our workforce capability.
 - ◆ Expand our volunteer workforce model to incorporate:
 - ◆ Standby volunteers
 - ◆ Active volunteers:
 - Short term
 - Traditional wave based, and
 - Non deployable/back of house
 - ◆ Optimise paid workforce effect (including deployable capability).
 - ◆ Pursue robotic and autonomous systems (RAS) field capabilities to reduce risk to and enhance productivity of staff operating in austere, remote and extreme weather environments.
- 5.1.4 Create a leveraged operational effect model by capitalising on the unique skills, knowledge and experience of our workforce.
 - ◆ Retain traditional (wave and all DRA strike team) deployment model.
 - ◆ Significantly expand our corporate volunteer (CorpVol) program.
 - ◆ Become the partner of choice in community volunteer (CommVol) and spontaneous volunteer (SponVol) leadership and coordination.
 - ◆ Train select members to employ RAS.
 - ◆ Develop select volunteers to lead CorpVol, CommVol and SponVol strike teams.

- 5.1.5 Refocus, restructure and appropriately resource Disaster Recovery Teams (DRT) to deliver on two key outcomes – volunteer management and local stakeholder engagement.
 - ◆ Provide dedicated facilities.
 - ◆ Tailor structures to geographic and local stakeholder engagement requirements.
 - ◆ Re-title DRT as Disaster Relief and Recovery Teams (DRRTs) to delineate from our preparedness function.
- 5.1.6 Seek greater workforce diversity to maximise innovation and better reflect the communities we serve.
 - ◆ Actively recruit First Nations Australians veterans and establish a First Nations community engagement function to ensure that DRA is better equipped to support First Nations communities and to seek their advice on disaster preparedness.
- 5.1.7 Develop our health and wellbeing capability.
 - ◆ Develop options to provide limited pharmaceutical or first aid support until mainstream support can be accessed.
 - ◆ Enhanced health governance model.
 - ◆ Deployed teams support.
- 5.1.8 Develop enhanced deployable capabilities to further reduce the burden on the Australian Defence Force (ADF).
 - ◆ Expand our existing rapid deployment team concept to create a tailored, equipment enhanced, capability that can relieve the ADF Emergency Support Force elements from its relief functions at the earliest opportunity following the end of disaster relief and recovery.
 - ◆ Provide planning to task capability to support local government authorities.
 - ◆ Develop contingency plans for and manage expectations around our ability to respond to other types of operations (all hazards and regional offshore deployment).

5.2 Grow our disaster preparedness development capabilities

DRA will develop a disaster preparedness function to further enhance our support to communities across the Nation. DRA preparedness teams will conduct proactive pre-disaster capacity building activities in preparedness planning and preparation. This will initially focus on expanding the existing domestic “Big Map” preparedness planning activity, the establishment of a dedicated First Nations community engagement function, and the creation of improved databases to manage local corporate, community and spontaneous volunteers.

DRA will examine options to include domestic all hazards planning, offshore capacity building and other select professional services such as crisis management and critical infrastructure analysis. Capacity building initiatives will be tested in consultation with other Government agencies with the intent that this offering be expanded to support offshore regional neighbours. All-hazards planning, support and other future professional services will be developed as needs and opportunities evolve.

Core initiatives:

- 5.2.1 Establish a dedicated preparedness function comprising:
 - ◆ Community preparedness (including a dedicated First Nations community engagement function and CommVol support arrangements).
 - ◆ Professionalised Big Map capability.
- 5.2.2 Expand DRA’s capability options, including:
 - ◆ Domestic All Hazards planning.
 - ◆ Offshore capacity building.
 - ◆ Critical infrastructure analysis.
- 5.2.3 Develop broader options for DRA to support offshore indigenous disaster relief capacity building, subject to government agreement.



5.3 Achieve financial sustainability and independence

DRA will pursue a diversified revenue model to allow it to maintain financial sustainability and independence of action. Central to this will be the establishment of a DRA Foundation to manage income and investments in a way which will, over time, provide an enduring income stream to support its core activities. Concurrently, DRA will seek to reduce its reliance on federal government funding from FY 30/31. DRA will also seek to minimise overhead costs, consistent with continuing to meet its governance and volunteer support requirements. The aim of this is to engender trust amongst donors and all tiers of Government that maximum use is being made of their funds to support disaster preparedness, relief and recovery.

Core initiatives:

- 5.3.1 Cap overhead costs at 25% of revenue.
- 5.3.2 Establish a balanced revenue model based on:
 - ◆ DRA Foundation
 - ◆ Social enterprise
 - ◆ Long term Commonwealth Government funding
 - ◆ Donations (Corporate and personal)
 - ◆ At Cost revenue
- 5.3.3 Establish nationally controlled partnership arrangements (de-linked from DRA Foundation investment) with a strategic framework based on:
 - ◆ Direct funding
 - ◆ In-kind
 - ◆ Brand association/recruitment effect
 - ◆ CorpVol (all)

5.4 Enhance organisational culture

DRA recognises that further growth will require a continued emphasis on establishing and maintaining the right organisational culture and investing in its people. DRA is rightly proud of its veteran focus but gains great benefit from the diverse experience it draws from the combination of its veteran volunteers, current and former emergency services personnel, and broader community volunteers. DRA is committed to fostering a positive, values based organisational culture that is strong, unified, and resilient—one that sets an exemplary benchmark and showcases how a volunteer-based organisation can thrive through a unique combination of camaraderie, professionalism, and purpose.

DRA recognises the unique challenges of remote and First Nations Australians communities and will partner with First Nations organisations to expand its understanding of how best to engage with and leverage the knowledge of First Nations communities in providing improved disaster preparedness and recovery outcomes. We also seek to encourage as many First Nations veterans as possible to serve with DRA, reinforcing our commitment to inclusivity and mutual learning.

DRA will continue to pursue supportive health, safety and well-being elements of culture, mindful of its workforce, their life experience, and the nature of the work for which they volunteer. We will focus heavily on the wellbeing of veterans and their families, ensuring better physical and mental health outcomes through a reinforced sense of service and identity and professional growth. Our aim is for everyone within DRA to experience personal progress, fulfilment, and a genuine sense of contribution to meaningful purpose. This culture will not only define how we operate internally but will also be a model that other organisations seek to learn from and emulate.

Through these commitments, DRA will continue to build a legacy of leadership, purpose, and a powerful sense of community.

Core initiatives:

- 5.4.1 Establish a dedicated leadership development and organisational culture function.
- 5.4.2 Develop a fully integrated (volunteer and paid) workforce model
- 5.4.3 Embed DRA value alignment in the recruitment and performance processes for paid staff.
- 5.4.4 Establish leadership development programs for paid staff and select volunteers.
- 5.4.5 Cyclically measure, review and adapt culture improvement initiatives.
- 5.4.6 Strengthen recognition and well-being programs.

5.5 Mature organisational governance

DRA has made significant strides in enhancing its governance arrangements during VUP 1.0. Organisational growth, an expanded service offering and a diversified income model demand continued focus on further maturing DRA's governance model. DRA will use the period up to June 2026 to invest in developing core policy needs, particularly in relation to the DRA Foundation, related financial management, safety, health and wellbeing, and in improving its human resource management processes. These are foundational efforts to progress the planned objectives for the 2026 -2030 period.

Core initiatives:

- 5.5.1 Continuous improvement of DRA strategic and operational planning, and marketing and communications.
- 5.5.2 Integrate and further develop DRA Safety, Wellbeing and Health Management System.
- 5.5.3 Implement a comprehensive business continuity plan.
- 5.5.4 Implement a Quality Management System (QMS).
- 5.5.5 Establish a dedicated integrated support function including an Integrated Management Office (IMO).
- 5.5.6 Maximise the capacity of existing Human Resource systems.

Note: these core initiatives will expand as the strategy and initiatives roll out and will be updated as part of the annual strategy review.

6. Conclusion

The DRA 2030 strategic plan outlines a bold and transformative pathway to enhance DRA's role as a critical national asset in disaster preparedness, relief, and recovery.

By leveraging the unique skills and experience of our volunteers, DRA is positioned to provide a vital service to communities affected by disasters. Furthermore, DRA's expanded focus on preparedness will empower communities to respond more effectively to future crises, reducing recovery times and building greater disaster readiness.

As DRA evolves, it will strengthen its operational capabilities, diversify its funding base, and broaden its partnerships to ensure long-term sustainability. The organisation's commitment to veteran welfare, community engagement, and innovative solutions positions it as a trusted partner in Australia's National Crisis Management Framework. By 2030, DRA will have cemented its reputation as an indispensable part of Australia's disaster management ecosystem, contributing to a more resilient and united Australia.





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