

NATIONAL FOOD RELIEF SECTOR FUNDING AND POLICY PRIORITIES

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Australia's food relief sector

Australia's food relief sector is working hard to achieve zero hunger and halve food waste by 2030. Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite have a proud history of shining a spotlight on food insecurity and food waste in Australia. We redirect food waste to food relief, delivering safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food to those who need it most. We also play a critically important role in reducing Australia's greenhouse gas emissions by stopping good food from going to landfill.

Urgent need for action

The *Foodbank Hunger Report 2021* found that 1 in 6 adults in Australia haven't had enough to eat in the last year and 1.2 million children went hungry. Whilst food insecurity in Australia is not a new phenomenon, the global pandemic has brought the problem into sharp focus, revealing just how many people are going hungry and requiring the services of the food relief sector for support.

The **food relief sector has dramatically increased its effort and output** in recent years to respond to the rapid increase in demand for food relief. Together, Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite are providing food relief to more than a million people per month across Australia, distributing more than 85 million kilograms of food and groceries in FY2021. Despite these record volumes, the current need in the community is not being met, and Federal Government funding for the food relief sector is not confirmed beyond next financial year.

The **sector is responsible for ensuring people have access to food relief** during times of crisis, whether that crisis is triggered by everyday household food insecurity, natural disasters or the socio-economic impacts of the global pandemic. Given the rapid escalation and the frequency and intensity of natural disasters, the sector anticipates a new baseline of food insecurity coupled with regular spikes arising from natural disasters, and the supply chain impacts that are often experienced as a consequence, making it more difficult to source the food and groceries essential to the crisis and recovery phase.

There is enough food produced in Australia to feed everyone and eradicate food insecurity. However, **Australia currently wastes more than 7.6 million tonnes of food each year**, costing the Australian economy over \$36.6 billion per annum. Not just a waste of resources and money, food waste also feeds climate change. Over 17.5 million tonnes of CO2 come from the food wasted in Australia and 8-10% of global greenhouse gas emissions come from food that is produced but wasted. Only 0.2% of wasted food is rescued – a huge, untapped opportunity for people and planet.



PRIORITIES

We are seeking commitments from all Australian political parties to:



1.

Provide for Australians doing it tough via **sustained, adequate funding for food relief.**



2.

Better prepare for future disasters by establishing dedicated **disaster preparedness and rapid emergency food relief** programs.



3.

Act against climate change by making it easier to **reduce and redirect food waste**



Sustained funding to provide food relief to Australians doing it tough

Investing in a strong food relief sector is smart social, environmental and economic policy. Ready access to food relief can prevent people from drifting into a deeper level of vulnerability and is a crucial aspect of recovery pathways. Early intervention reduces the burden on Australia's social security, education, healthcare and justice systems, and food relief providers are a vital link in the broader emergency relief and civil society ecosystem.

The food relief sector was well-supported by the Federal Government in response to COVID-19 to ensure an immediate uplift in food relief volumes, reach and impact to meet the needs of local communities. Almost \$20m of the \$200m Community Support Package was shared between Foodbank, OzHarvest and secondbite to support Commonwealth-funded Emergency Relief organisations through increased food and grocery supplies and alternate distribution methods.

Similarly, the sector received emergency funding from the Federal Government in 2020 to assist in the response to the devastating Black Summer Bushfires.

Unfortunately, funding for everyday food relief – outside of times of natural disaster and the global pandemic – has not been as adequate or responsive. With more than a million people per month now in need of food relief, it is important that the sector be adequately resourced, with multi-year funding agreements in place to ensure the maximum efficiency of taxpayer funds by supporting programs and activities capable of delivering food relief year-round.

A return to 'business as usual' funding via Department of Social Services grants – a combined total of \$1.5 million per annum across all three organisations– would not be enough to meet the current demand, leaving many vulnerable Australians without access to food relief when they need it the most.

As Australia finds a new normal in an environment of ongoing natural disasters, escalating cost of living pressures and the lengthy and complex pandemic response and recovery, it is clear that 'business as usual' has changed. The need for food relief remains persistently high (as evidenced in the monthly AskIzzy search reports published by InfoXChange), and Federal for the sector should reflect the depth of food insecurity across Australia.

Action needed

An annual commitment of \$45 million is required to ensure food relief is available to those experiencing food insecurity year-round. Multi-year funding agreements commensurate with the depth of the food insecurity in Australia will enhance the ability of Foodbank, OzHarvest and SecondBite to deliver diverse food rescue, procurement and distribution models; enable locally-led needs-assessments; facilitate access to wraparound support services and deliver food relief with dignity and impact.



Better prepare for future disasters: dedicated preparedness and rapid emergency food relief programs

In addition to everyday food relief activities, the food relief sector acts as an enabler to the emergency relief sector and is an important part of the disaster response framework. In the days and weeks after a disaster, government and emergency relief providers need rapid access to a reliable, cost-effective supply of highly sought-after food and grocery items. In the months and years after a disaster, the sector needs the ability to continue that locally-delivered support to help communities rebuild.

At present, there is no standing arrangement or program to allow the food relief sector to promptly 'draw down' on a dedicated emergency food relief fund to facilitate rapid response locally or at scale.

The Australian Government already has such a mechanism for disasters overseas. The Australian Humanitarian Partnership is a \$10 million a year pre-approved funding envelope that can be rapidly deployed to a pre-selected agencies with Ministerial approval. Australia also donates \$11 million a year to the United Nations Central Emergency Response Fund, which has the same function.

In Australia, natural disasters are a regular occurrence. We need to expect, prepare and plan for these times at home, as we do overseas. It is important that this program or fund consider not only the emergency response and recovery phase, but also the important preparedness phase, noting the recent Productivity Commission finding that 97% of all disaster funding is spent on recovery and clean-up, with only 3% spent on mitigation, preparedness and resilience.

Action needed

The establishment of rapidly disbursable stand-by funding of \$10m per annum for emergency food relief following a crisis or natural disaster as well as for mitigation, preparedness and resilience. This funding will allow food relief providers to quickly amplify on times of heightened need without adverse impacts on everyday food relief activities. By providing funding to maintain a rapidly scalable emergency food relief capability with a keen focus on preparedness as well, the food relief sector will be able to draw on product reserves and then activate promptly, providing essential relief in real time and at scale through existing trusted networks.



Make it easier to reduce food waste – action against climate change

Australia has committed to halve food waste by 2030. Food rescue is the proven solution to reduce food waste and boost food relief. It is a solution to both food insecurity and unnecessary CO2 emissions, yet only 0.2% of Australia's surplus food is donated – the bulk goes to landfill. The financial benefits to Government and the economy of avoiding or redirecting food waste are significant. In fact, every dollar invested in food waste prevention delivers \$7 back to the economy.

There are huge opportunities to rescue greater volumes of food across the supply chain, and closer to the source across all regions of Australia. A 10-fold increase in rescued food would meet 10% of Australia's target to halve food waste. This requires investment in sector capacity and incentives for participating businesses. A national food waste tax incentive would act as a meaningful catalyst in incentivising the donation and transportation of food that may otherwise end up in landfill, helping achieve Australia's food waste targets and provide more food for food relief.

Action needed:

Introduce a National Food Waste Tax Incentive. Farmers do not want surplus or out of spec produce going to waste, but the cost of harvesting and transporting produce can make it uneconomic to donate it. A National Food Waste Tax Incentive would provide a tax offset for donations of food, transport, logistics and warehousing made by companies to registered food relief charities. This would provide vital support to SMEs, particularly farmers, whilst encouraging them to direct surplus production to vital food relief. There is a net economic gain, noting the large social return on every kilogram of food relief provided to people in need. This initiative has the strong backing of a range of stakeholders across the food industry, agribusiness sector, peak bodies and charity sector, as well as the Fight Food Waste Cooperative Research Centre.



About Foodbank

At Foodbank we believe everyone should have access to good quality food. We're here for the everyday Australians who are going without. We work with 2,950 frontline charities and 2,890 schools to get more than 87 million meals per year out to those who could use a hand. More than 40% of all food and groceries distributed by Foodbank nationally goes to regional and rural communities. Foodbank accepts donations of ambient, chilled, fresh food, private label products and personal and household care items. Products may be out of specification, close to expiry, deleted product, surplus to requirements or have damaged or incorrect packaging. We supplement our 'surprise chain' by collaborating with farmers and manufacturers to purchase and manufacture in-demand food items that are not readily available via rescue channels to ensure frontline charities have access to these for their clients year-round.

Contact: Foodbank Australia CEO, Brianna Casey (E: brianna@foodbank.org.au, www.foodbank.org.au)

About OzHarvest

OzHarvest is a for impact organisation with a driving purpose to 'Nourish our Country' by stopping good food going to waste and delivering it to people in need. Our food rescue operations collect 250 tonnes of fresh and nutritious food from more than 3,000 businesses every week, which is redistributed free of charge to over 1,600 charities across Australia. During periods of crisis or elevated need, we activate our scalable emergency food relief response, packing and distributing emergency food hampers, cooked meals, and holding pop up markets in regional communities. In addition to immediate food support solution, we are committed to finding solutions to help end food waste and insecurity. Our educational programs and change campaigns are designed as interventions to help people lead fully sustainable lives.

Contact: OzHarvest CEO and Founder, Ronni Kahn AO (E: ronni.kahn@ozharvest.org, www.ozharvest.org)

About SecondBite

SecondBite is helping to end food waste and end hunger in Australia. SecondBite collaborates with growers, manufacturers and retailers to divert edible food (fruits and vegetables, meat, eggs, dairy products, breads and packaged pantry foods) from landfill. In areas where it is efficient to do so, SecondBite collects and delivers food directly and also runs a Community Connect model that connects charities to collect donated food from supermarkets in other areas and regions. In Financial Year 2020/21, SecondBite rescued and redistributed 48.7 million meals and is on target to deliver 50 million meals in 2021/22. SecondBite provides the rescued food completely free of charge to over 1300 charities around Australia that run food programs helping to feed hungry Aussies. Every \$1 donated enables us to deliver enough food for approximately five meals.

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