

POLICY REFORMS SHOULD EASE SHARED DISASTER ONUS



bushfire&natural
HAZARDSCRC

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BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TO NATURAL DISASTERS IS A COMPLEX CHALLENGE THAT SPANS MANY POLICY AREAS. THIS PROJECT TACKLES IT BY DELIVERING POLICY OPTIONS THAT COULD HELP GOVERNMENTS AND EMERGENCY SERVICES TO STRENGTHEN RESILIENCE IN COMMUNITIES.

This project has identified barriers to community resilience and potential policy solutions that could be factored into the preparation, response and post-event phases of emergency management. The study's three research themes revealed significant tensions in the shared responsibilities between governments exercising power and community empowerment; between the conflicting needs of insurers and their clients; and within traditional models of post-disaster inquiries. For the latter theme, the researchers have proposed the trialing of restorative practices as a powerful alternative to adversarial post-event inquiries.

Having identified these inherent tensions across the three themes, the researchers propose policies that could resolve or ease them or, in the case of disaster insurance, highlight the need to develop better models. Ultimately, the project could contribute to making community resilience a priority within all policy making, in the context of disaster management.

THEME 1 – POLICY OPTIONS TO ENCOURAGE COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience prescribes or implies shared emergency responsibilities to different sections of the 'community'.

The researchers analysed this high-level policy statement and identified a range of potential policy options that could enforce the responsibilities set out in the Strategy. The research considered

education and training, financial incentives and disincentives, and legislation, among others. The analysis revealed a significant tension in the existing policy between the role of government agencies as central coordinating authorities in disaster management and the vaguer emphasis on community and individual empowerment.

THEME 2 – USING INSURANCE PRICE TO COMMUNICATE BUSHFIRE RISK

The researchers identified and analysed two key arguments: that insurance price does and should reflect bushfire risk, and that insurance price signals might encourage those seeking insurance against bushfire losses to mitigate their bushfire risk. The research identified why pricing bushfire risk is not an attractive option for the insurance industry, even though it is the insurers that are exposed to risk of financial loss through bushfires. Individual risk assessment of properties would be prohibitively expensive for insurance companies to countenance given that house loss by bushfires, even after catastrophic events, does not represent a major cost to the industry.

THEME 3 - POST EVENT INQUIRIES

In earlier research, Eburn and Dovers have argued that alternatives to quasi-judicial inquiries after significant natural hazard events should be explored if the Australian community is to learn from catastrophic events without destroying the good will of the emergency services and, more importantly, their volunteers.

Their ongoing research has critiqued the adversarial processes used in inquiries. They have identified restorative practices as a better, alternative way of conducting them. Their discussion paper, Learning for emergency services, looking for a new approach, will be finalised in late 2017.

FURTHER READING

- Lukasiewicz A, Dovers S, Eburn M (2017) Shared responsibility: the who, what and how. Environmental Hazards, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17477891.2017.1298510>
- Eburn M, (2016) The International Law of Wildfires in Research Handbook on Disasters and International Law, Edward Elgar (eds) Susan C Breau and Katja LH Samuel.
- McDonald F, Eburn M, Smith E (2016), Legal and Ethical Aspects of Disaster Management in Disaster Health Management: A Primer for Students and Practitioners, Routledge (eds) Gerry FitzGerald, Mike Tarrant, Peter Aitken and Marie Fredriksen.

Released for Discussion:

- Eburn M, & Dovers S, (2016) Learning for emergency services, looking for a new approach. Discussion Paper, report no. 223.2016, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

FURTHER INFORMATION?

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END USER STATEMENT: *Creating sound emergency management policy in government remains an iterative process in all Australian jurisdictions. This project has demonstrated that translating public policy into readily identifiable and measurable community resilience outcomes presents a range of challenges. Among the tools that contribute to resilience are those driven by the private sector, such as insurance, and the inquisitorial processes employed post-event. The findings in relation to the restorative justice approach is indicative of a need for further innovation and research in this context.*

