

Numerous challenges face the emergency management sector over the coming years, including more frequent and extreme natural disasters, increasing urbanisation of the landscape, greater community expectations and increasingly politicised emergency events. Each is difficult to respond to in its own right; together they pose a complex problem for the community and government.

Australia is a large country with a diverse landscape and each state or territory has a different risk profile and exposure. In the last decade, each jurisdiction has evolved its own capability in accordance with the specific risks each state faces. Capability discussions between the jurisdictions have predominantly focused on cross-border learning rather than developing a national capability framework for interoperability and sharing resources.

Concepts around capability can now include a number of activities under the broad themes of risk and resilience, readiness, response, relief and recovery service delivery. Specialist fields include warnings and communication, workforce planning and coordination, interoperability, predictive services and modelling, relief coordination, community partnerships, and education and research.

Capability as a concept in emergency management will continue to evolve to the environment around it. Notably, the breadth of the capability concept has evolved in every jurisdiction beyond supplying the resources and training to respond to an emergency. As disasters have grown in frequency and intensity, the sector's understanding of effects and consequence has evolved and the capability concept continues to widen to include consequence and the spectrum of emergency management, before, during and after emergencies.

**Throughout 2015-2017, emergency service agencies around Australia participated in workshops hosted by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC to consider the major issues in natural hazards emergency management.**

**This publication on capability summarises the outcomes of one of these workshops and poses questions as a guide for a national research agenda in natural hazard emergency management.**

## CAPABILITY BUILDING FOR CATASTROPHIC EVENTS

Changes in demographics (growing and ageing populations living on the urban fringe), climate change, ageing infrastructure and an increased fiscal austerity are significantly increasing the likelihood and consequence of a catastrophic event, particularly an event on a scale yet to be experienced.

It is important that government and the wider emergency management sector continue to explore the challenges and complexities that accompany these events. Across the spectrum of emergency management, everyone should work collaboratively to explore the economic, policy and operational implications of catastrophic events. A collective imagination will help the sector to understand and build capability for catastrophic events.

Key issues that need to be addressed are:

- **What are the likely policy, resourcing and operational impacts of catastrophic events?**
- **How can the nation work collaboratively to understand the consequences catastrophic events?**



Communities experience the consequences of emergencies, and as such, a proactive approach is needed to invest in the capability development of communities. The emergency management sector understands that there is a wealth of emergency management skills and resources in Australian communities and is seeking to more effectively understand, harness and build on communities' capability.

Embracing community capabilities has a triple benefit for the emergency management sector: it harnesses community capability and builds on traditional views of capability; it supports the contemporary notion of shared responsibility; and it supports communities to build resilience for emergencies. This raises questions for government and agencies as to the best method to support community resilience-building. Embracing community will involve a range of activities that will help build community capability for those inevitable emergency events. It is more than just community engagement; it is about community's active participation in a range of emergency management activities before, during and after emergencies.

- **How can communities better harness their strengths to increase capability at both a local and national level?**
- **How should government balance building community resilience and extending emergency management sector capability?**
- **How can the emergency management sector better involve communities in capability discussions?**
- **How can the government sector learn from other sectors to manage risk and be more agile in supporting the needs of community?**

There is currently no national agenda for interoperability and sharing resources in an emergency. Each state has their own reciprocal arrangements with other states, but there is no overarching strategy around interoperability. However, climate change foreseeably brings significant change in the frequency and intensity of emergencies and catastrophic events and it is likely that all jurisdictions will need a wider pool of resources to draw from.

Developing a national capability framework is in the national interest and will be to the mutual benefit of all the states and will enable a national coordination resource. It will involve the exploration of legislation, research, policy and operations and will require states to come together with a collective imagination to understand how the states can work together to meet the current and future needs of the community.

- **How should capability be defined and how does this shape the discussion on interoperability within and between agencies and jurisdictions?**
- **What are the financial benefits that come with national interoperability and the ability to provide both surge and specialist capabilities between jurisdictions?**
- **Understanding that not all elements can be national, what are the funding, political and resourcing priorities at a national level that will contribute to a national interoperability and resource sharing agenda?**
- **How can collaboration and maturity be encouraged across the sector to work together to build relationships and trust?**
- **What would a joined up communications strategy with consistent messaging look like?**



## National research priorities for natural hazards emergency management

*What are the most significant natural hazard emergency management issues Australia faces over the next 10 years?*

This was the question posed to emergency service agencies around Australia in a series of workshops hosted by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC from 2015-2017.

This publication is an outcome of one of these workshops and part of a broader national research agenda in natural hazards emergency management being developed by the CRC.

The workshops provided an exploration of major issues that would benefit from the support of research at a national level. There was no attempt to solve any of the issues or problems raised nor was there any discussion on the details of specific research projects. The participants discussed the issues they believed were relevant to the specific topic under discussion, the relative importance of the issues and the reasons underpinning their relative importance.

This series of publications summarises the outcomes of the workshops conducted so far – more will take place in 2017. They provide a guide for future research activities by identifying national priorities across major themes. The workshop outcomes have also influenced the evolving research agenda of the CRC.

This statement has been developed with the assistance of the Australia and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) Capability Development Sub-committee (CDSC). The CDSC hosted a workshop with key natural hazard stakeholders in Canberra and by video conference in all other Australian states on 1 March 2016.



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