

IMPLEMENTING DISASTER RESILIENCE POLICY: MAKING IT HAPPEN IN A FEDERAL SYSTEM



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DISASTER RESILIENCE POLICY IS BEING IMPLEMENTED VIA A RANGE OF PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES ACROSS AUSTRALIA - effective implementation is critical for ensuring successful outcomes

THE ISSUE

Australia, like many other nations has embraced resilience as an approach to preventing, preparing and facilitating adaptive responses to natural disasters.

Australia's National Strategy for Disaster Resilience aims shift the emphasis away from "picking up the pieces" in the aftermath of a disaster toward self-reliance and shared responsibility between all levels of government and the community to understand disaster risks and to take action to mitigate those risks.

While there appears to be a high level of agreement in Australia about what constitutes appropriate disaster resilience policy, there is a shortage of evidence about how to operationalise it across the system to achieve a more disaster resilient nation.

THE RESEARCH

My research is examining how disaster resilience policy is being implemented in Australia with reference to the four domains of social capital, community competence, economic development and information and communication¹ and their corresponding policy objectives in TABLE 1.

My proposition is that achieving national disaster resilience also hinges on working effectively in the context of the multi-level governance system which is the Australian Federation. This includes a consideration of federal power-sharing and financing arrangements, co-ordination, sectoral roles, responsibilities and capability, and the opportunities and constraints they present for strategic and systemic disaster resilience policy implementation.

THE METHODOLOGY

The project uses qualitative methodology to investigate disaster resilience policy implementation pathways, mechanisms and limitations in terms of four domains and their related policy objectives. This is complemented by information from documents and interviews with experts from five good practice disaster resilience activities being implemented in Australia at federal, state, and local government levels and in the business and not-for-profit sectors. These are the National Flood Risk Information Project, the NSW National Partnership Agreement – Natural Disaster Resilience, the Lake Macquarie City Council Local Adaptation Plan for Flooding, the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities, & the Rivers and Ranges Community Leadership Program.

THE BENEFITS

Knowing that implementation is informed by evidence can encourage decision makers and practitioners to apply disaster resilience policy principles. In the longer term this has the potential to reduce loss and damage from disasters by shifting the focus of disaster management toward prevention, preparedness and mitigation.

¹ Norris, F.H., Stevens, S.P., Pfefferbaum, B., Wyche, K.F. and Pfefferbaum, R.L., 2008. Community resilience as a metaphor, theory, set of capacities, and strategy for disaster readiness. *American journal of community psychology*, 41(1-2), pp.127-150.

THE QUESTIONS

- How can national, sub-national and local policy implementation arrangements enable community disaster resilience?
- How does the Australian federal system of government impact on the implementation of national disaster resilience policy?
- What changes, if any, to disaster resilience implementation arrangements are needed to optimise its effectiveness in terms of supporting sustainable long term community disaster resilience?

*DISASTER RESILIENCE POLICY IMPLEMENTATION – DOMAINS & POLICY OBJECTIVES				
Domain	Social Capital (Trust)	Community Competence (Self-efficacy)	Economic Development (Sustainable)	Information & communication (Behaviour change)
Policy Objective	1.Networks	1.Political partnerships	1.Security	1.Narratives
	2.Non- adverse geography place-based	2.Stakeholder engagement	2.Economic diversity	2.Responsible media/access to trusted information
	3.Community engagement	3.Leadership (externally focused) & empowerment	3.Equity of resource distribution	3.Skills and infrastructure
	4.Leadership (internally focused)	4.Community participation	4.Sustainability	4.Information flow between sectors
			5.Shared (equitable) risk allocation	

*Adapted from Norris et al (2008); Australian Red Cross (2009); Handmer, J, Dovers, S (2013); Porteus, P(2013); Australian Productivity Commission (2003)

THE ANSWERS

- Develop multi-directional information and communication channels in disaster resilience, policy development and implementation to create a more cohesive disaster resilience system.
- Clarify the various roles and responsibilities for implementing disaster resilience within the Australian disaster management system.
- Promote trust between levels of government, and between government and non-government and business to ensure better connectivity and free flow of ideas and information.
- Support cross-training between government and community service organisations to build reciprocal knowledge and skills in community development and government administration.
- Ensure approaches to implementation are informed by evidence on good practice.
- Plan and design how to implement disaster resilience activities, including identifying the desired policy objectives and viable mechanisms for achieving these.
- Apply behaviour change theory and practice to risk communication.
- Explore new opportunities to enhance business participation in disaster resilience.
- Encourage disaster risk mitigation by reducing perceived and legal barriers that restrict the open access and use of hazard information.
- Foster a commitment to authentic community and stakeholder engagement to implement all disaster resilience activities, including a willingness to learn together and anticipate and engage with conflict.

