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BUILDING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT CAPACITY IN REMOTE NORTH AUSTRALIAN COMMUNITIES

Status report, November 2019

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CURRENT RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

1 DEVELOPING EFFECTIVE EM PARTNERSHIPS

The essential premise of this project is that effective EM in remote community settings needs to be delivered as an engaged partnership between responsible EM (and related agencies and organisations such as Red Cross) and empowering of self-reliant and resilient communities with robust community governance arrangements. Substantial research findings, including those undertaken as part of present research activities (Morley et al. 2016; Sangha et al. 2017; Sithole et al. 2019), have observed that, despite being well-meaning, relationships typically involve EM agencies planning and delivering *for*, rather than *with*, remote communities. A key challenge facing EM agencies is to know *how* and with *whom* to engage in respective communities—noting that individual community situations will likely present different complex community governance circumstances. At the same time a key challenge for building remote community-based governance more than likely requires not just the re-instituting of former traditional governance structures, but addressing the additional complexities of urbanised living arrangements where various clans representing different language groups and societies are now congregated together on lands/estates under the prime custodianship of recognised traditional owners.

The two community case studies explored in this research project, at Galiwin'ku and Ramingining, illustrate the complexities of the challenges involved.

1.1 Galiwin'ku

The following edited text draws heavily from (i) an essay "Galiwin'ku Burrmalala – strong winds of change" by Elaine Lawurrpa, Alan Marratja, Danny Burton, Glenn James, which was included as Box 6.6 in James et al. (2019); with (ii) updated notes supplied by Glenn James (NAILSMA)

In 2015 tropical cyclones (TC) Lam (Feb 19th) and Nathan (March 22nd) struck the north coastal communities of Galiwin'ku, Milingimbi, Ramingining and Gapuwiyak, with devastating effect, thankfully with no loss of life. The category 4 TC Lam did the most damage with wind gusts estimated at 230km/hr. At Galiwin'ku (population ~2500), infrastructure damage was significant with several hundred houses damaged and over 50 needing reconstruction or replacement. Power services to many houses were damaged, as were communications infrastructure, roads water supply and other municipal services. Hundreds of people were displaced and housed in temporary accommodation until rebuilding could occur. Understandably, the social fabric of the community was also put under enormous stress, adding to individual post-traumatic stress.

In this case, as with others nationally, EM agencies are particularly interested in building resilience through their response and recovery efforts; and increasingly interested in local factors that impact and may be drawn on to maximise community resilience, preparation and response capability, and adaptability in natural hazard management. Ongoing cost-benefit assessment is also key to EM strategic investment. To this end community resilience research has been

supported by State and Territory EM agencies and particularly through the Bushfires and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC).

Several months after Lam and Nathan, when infrastructure repairs and rebuilds were done, a group of senior *Yolngu* (a regional term for Aboriginal person) saw an opportunity to help fellow community members talk through the post-event trauma, uncertainty and disempowerment evident at Galiwin'ku. Two senior Yolngu researchers with years of experience in participatory research techniques and three junior researchers worked under the auspices of *Yalu Marnggithinyaraw* Indigenous Corporation (Yalu) – the local *Yolngu* research organisation – to develop a locally appropriate project, following local principles including local ethics approval:

lundu-nhina: (establish a good environment for the right people to sit together)

rom-lakaranhamirr: (reminding each other of the lawful ways of doing things)

ral-mirriyanhamirr: (sharing the tasks to be done)

ral-gama: (bringing back what we must share)

rulangdhuna: (putting what we have produced in place)

This was supported at arm's length by NAILSMA and Australian Red Cross (ARC). The research project was aptly named the *Burrmalala* (strong wind) project. It began in part to help residents express their emotional and other distress, and secondly to collect local information and views about vulnerabilities and strengths in community governance, including how agencies performed in preparing for and responding to the cyclones. This was carried out by familiar *Yolngu*, speaking the local lingua-franca (*Yolngu-matha*), following local social and cultural protocols, with understanding, respect and sensitivity to the circumstances of others in the process. The research team gathered nuanced and related messages through by dint of shared kin relationships/protocols, *Yolngu* cultural knowledge, embedded local and historical experience – meaning that would likely be obscured for non-Yolngu researchers.

Comments and concerns around the resilience of built-capital such as old and structurally weak housing and overcrowding problems were common, and although infrastructure provision was seen as the responsibility of 'outside' or non-*Yolngu* agents, effective planning, building and managing were seen as requiring proper engagement with *Yolngu* to be most effective. The marriage of top down with bottom up solutions was a key message from research respondents and on many accounts EM agencies and local organisations worked well under very difficult circumstances to include Yolngu in their on-groundwork, and achieved good results.

The Northern Territory Emergency Services (NTES) in effect helped create a momentary relationship with *Yolngu* leaders and others where mutual interests (basic quality of life needs) aligned. Respondents emphasised that other processes in their history, associated with the 'mission days', the Northern Territory Emergency Response ('The Intervention') and the introduction of the East Arnhem Shire for example, created relationships around community governance tending to lack effective engagement or continuity with *Yolngu*, weakening social and cultural capital:

1. *Balanda* [predominantly Anglo Australians] *who have lived at Galiwin'ku and learnt a few things, develop relationships and understandings, leave and take with them the knowledge; about agencies, systems, processes, policies and programs; about Matha (language), Gurrutu (relationships) and understandings about Yolngu values including developed and trusted connections to Yolngu at Galiwin'ku*

2. *Two-way knowledge is supposed to be transferred at places like the local authority, DELAC, Yolngu Wanganamirri Mittji, Makarr dhuni, but it's more like a one-way cultural transfer – The Yolngu story and Yolngu agenda is missing [in the decision making]. . .*

3. *Yolngu need a system that Yolngu control. Too many Balanda come to Galiwin'ku and think they already understand Yolngu and Galiwin'ku and want to tell Yolngu what's wrong with them and how to fix it but they don't know anything. . .Yolngu must sort out a system. Yolngu should choose Balanda staff.*

4. *Balanda who work at Galiwin'ku should demonstrate respect for Yolngu rights, interests and land.*

Although the cyclones were tragic and frightening, they were not seen as a dominant influence on community resilience and capability. The research inspired more detailed discussion around (re)creating a 'community interface' . . . a place where *Yolngu* leaders can meet outside agencies to assist them in delivering their services better, direct them to follow appropriate protocols, collaborate with them, ensure *Yolngu* pick up capability and responsibilities through their interaction, ensure economic benefits accrue and ensure *Yolngu* values are invested in:

1. *The community interface should be the place information is exchanged and everyone (Yolngu clans as well as the agencies) get to have their say. The [current] community interface is mixed-up, all over the place, controlled by the Balanda [non-Yolngu].*

2. *Yolngu don't have control, don't set the agenda. All agencies and Yolngu clans need Yolngu and Balanda staff to help them with their own governance so they can all meet at the community interface to share knowledge and information.*

3. *The interface needs some resources plus good Balanda and Yolngu to fix it up and make it work – based on Yolngu ways – Language, Law, Histories.*

Reinstating traditional governance authority

The diagram below, presented by Yolngu researchers at a BNHCRC-sponsored workshop held in Darwin in April 2019, illustrates the challenge facing the re-institutionalisation of traditional governance at Galiwin'ku. On the right hand side are all the agencies and organisations that the Galiwin'ku community need to deal with on an ongoing basis, mediated through 'western' governance structures and frameworks. On the left is the Dalkarra and Djirrikay Authority (DDA) representing a contemporary approach to asserting traditional *Yolgnu* governance. In the middle is the Community Interface which the local *Yolgnu* leadership is in the process of constructing as an effective arrangement,

including the development of specific Community Reference Groups, for mediating and negotiating with all the agencies and organisations that seek to do business in Galiwin'ku.
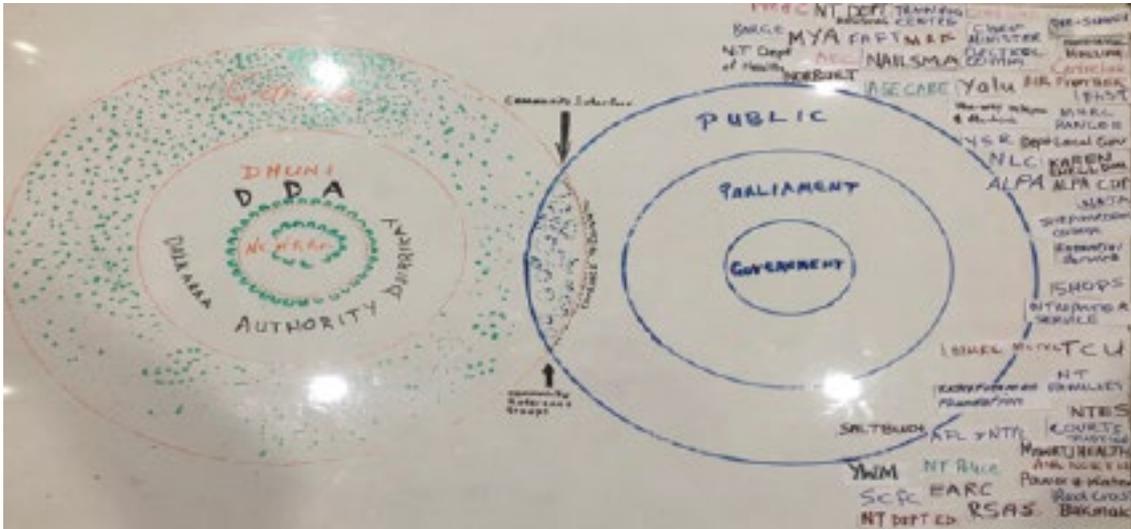
Recent progress at Galiwin'ku

The Dalkarra and Djirrikay Authority (DDA) has successfully engaged all the clan groups at Galiwin'ku in discussions and planning for empowering *Yolngu* leadership. Over the last 6 months in particular, the DDA and its appointed secretariat have defined and sought to address a large range of practical issues confronting their local authority initiative, such as:

1. Does the DDA hold and local credibility?

2. How will the DDA (as the 'go to' authority) effectively manage the huge workload and responsibility of engagement with EM and (all) other agencies doing 'business' in Galiwin'ku?

3. What is the best mechanism for more effective external relationship building with the DDA?

4. How is the DDA to be financially supported to be effective?

5. Should the DDA itself, or an arms-length entity, be incorporated to be able to receive funds etc?

6. How does the DDA avoid unwanted influence from organisations that may support it and or provide financial support (e.g. being bound to external grant prescriptions)…how does it remain focused on local leadership driven agendas?

This practical work will be reflected in the framework and discussions with EM and other agencies when the DDA feels sufficient collective clarity is achieved and options have been worked through. In time, the DDA aims to establish a Community Reference Group addressing EM needs specifically.

Lessons learned from this adaptive community-based research experience include:

1. Community governance and related politics are incredibly complex and should not be left to inexperienced agency representatives to navigate. This usually leads to frustration, diminution of local cultural and community authority and loss of effectiveness. Clan Leaders recognize this and want to provide authoritative direction

2. Change against prevailing modus-operandi is slow and difficult. It requires support and patience from existing partners/collaborators/service providers

3. Enabling the DDA will require dedicated resources and the DDA is concerned that 'funding' their work will come with 'strings attached' that may seriously compromise what they set out to do. There are options for a shift in the way agencies spend their budgets to engage with communities (e.g. financially supporting the DDA/reference groups to provide information and local services back to the EM agency that could enable better agency and community outcomes; providing direct support to relevant reference groups to improve equity and joint goal seeking).

4. Community governance and ability to improve relationships in any or all sectors requires significant Traditional Owner and clan leader empowerment that must be driven from within because governance over the entire history of contemporary community life has developed from disjointed externally driven prerogatives into disempowering chaos. Agencies and organisations assisting, such as NAILSMA, have to know when and how to withdraw so that they are not seen as owning the initiative or controlling the agenda but can continue to offer support if requested

5. Unique but complementary experiences and project approaches are exemplified at Galiwin'ku and Ramingining.

1.2 Ramingining

ARPNet has been working with the Ramingining community in sub-coastal north-east Arnhem Land over the past five addressing very similar community governance and leadership issues to those being undertaken by NAILSMA and partners at Galiwin'ku. Ramingining, a community of ~800 persons, is situated on the western edge of the Arafura Swamp and, like Galiwin'ku, suffered the impacts of Cyclones Lam and Nathan. Also, like Galiwin'ku, and characteristic of remote Indigenous communities generally, housing is in short supply and unemployment is rife.

Notably, in the context of Indigenous community capacity, Ramingining boasts seven well organised local Indigenous Ranger Groups under the umbrella of the independent Arafura Swamp Rangers Aboriginal Corporation (ASRAC)—see https://asrac.org.au and, particularly, links to their 2017-2027 Healthy Country Plan).

Recent progress at Ramingining

Recent collaborative research with local community members focusing on emergency management issues has involved the development of a draft post-

cyclone response planning framework, leadership training, and contribution to the development of a Leadership Emergency booklet for emergency response which has been distributed to the community and the ranger group. The draft emergency response planning framework has been discussed with the *Mala* (Indigenous reference group of community elders set up by the Australian Federal Government), but still requires further community consideration which is due to occur later this year.

The community recognise that development of the emergency management framework is important because it presents their vision of what an emergency management plan should address, and that it can be used as a basis to more effectively engage with the NTES. Currently the community feels that NTES has very low expectations of the interest and willingness of the community to be involved. It is anticipated that this community plan will do the following:

1. Make NTES aware of their interest and intent

2. Present the principles or terms of engagement that would strengthen Community involvement

3. Present clear information on what the community is willing to do and how. It would go further to identify the roles and responsibilities of individuals to be involved and identify where necessary needs for skills development.

4. Identify clearly those areas where government needs to take charge

5. Identify clearly when and where the outside volunteers should fit in.

Lessons learnt

In summing up lessons learnt from the extensive research collaboration between ARPNet and local community members concerning traditional approaches to hazards risk management, as part of BNHCRC project reporting Dr Bev Sithole (ARPNet research coordinator) recently made the following observations:

1. It is important to start by recognising the many levels of relationships and obligations Aboriginal people have towards different kinds of hazards. There is a need to further understand the Indigenous and cultural dimension of emergencies and associated leadership arrangements over them. With this recognition comes an appreciation of the complex knowledge that exists and the requisite ceremonies associated with them. An emergency is a sign, a signal from country for need for a change of behaviour, practices or ways of living. It is transformational beyond the immediate impacts.

2. Although there is strong evidence of local community interest in developing partnerships with emergency management authorities, the Northern Territory Emergency Service (NTES) and other agencies remain sceptical of community participation and interest. Our work shows very emphatically that there is local interest and willingness to be involved in emergency management, although not in the current "volunteer' role. Communities see engagement in post-cyclone activity as a service that could be paid for, and more importantly that they can become of service to other communities which may not be as organized.

3. Leaders of community organisations are not always interested or available to engage or discuss community interests in post-emergency response. It is their attitude and views which tend to be reflected by partner organisations rather than those of the community itself. In Ramingining the community has underlined the importance of the 'middleman' to advance or constrain community interests. Building trust is key to strengthening relationships.

4. Existing NTES institutions act in relation to set procedures and government protocols. They do not have to respond to calls by communities to do things differently. So far, the response to possibilities of discussions with communities to explore different ways of strengthening the relationship have not been successful. At our last meeting we agreed that it is key to find champions within NTES or at least windows of opportunity to initiate dialogue rather than create an alternative post emergency response plan.

5. The draft post-response emergency planning framework is exciting because while it shows where community can do things for themselves, it also identifies areas of possible collaboration with government.

2 SCENARIO PLANNING FOR COMMUNITY RISK MANAGEMENT

As noted in introductory remarks providing background to this report, in the absence of available resourcing to adequately provide mainstream EM services to all but a few major remote communities, this research activity has focused on exploring and assessing the extent to which publicly-funded Indigenous Ranger Groups (IRGs) can assist with provision of EM services—for example, through contracted service provision arrangements. Following initial consultation with EM agencies both in the Northern Territory and Western Australia, the project has engaged with a number of communities as identified by those agencies as being of interest: NT—Hermannsburg and Yuendumu in central Australia; Borroloola and surrounding Gulf region; eastern Arnhem Land; WA—preliminary activities with Bidyadanga and Nyul Nyul communities in the West Kimberley.

While details of project activities are summarised below, for broader context we include here edited discussion from a recent paper addressing delivery of effective fire management issues and associated challenges in Australia's extensive rangelands, with a particular focus on the Northern Territory (see Russell-Smith et al. 2019, including referenced citations):

"Engaging remote communities

In addition to Bushfires NT, NTFRS, NTES staff and volunteers, and National Park rangers, the diffuse network of remote communities, pastoral stations, and especially Indigenous Ranger Groups (IRGs), currently provides a largely untapped, uncoordinated resource for assisting with prescribed burning activities outside of urban centres. A core challenge is to better engage with remote Indigenous communities to develop and implement effective, preventative, and responsive fire management.

Currently there are 35 IRGs in the Northern Territory funded through Commonwealth Government 'Working on Country' and 'Indigenous Protected

Area' programs. Although the contracted focus of IRGs is to meet a variety of biodiversity and cultural resource management targets (see Kerins 2012), such groups could deliver, if roles were formally expanded and appropriate training and resourcing provided, fire and broader emergency management services to an extended number of remote communities and wider landscape settings (Sangha et al. 2017). For long-term sustainability, such investment should essentially include support for building integrated bottom-up community, and top-down corporate, governance and effective administration capacity (Cooke 2019; Kerins and Green 2019). Already most IRGs have significant regional fire management responsibilities. The effectiveness of IRGs as front-line fire managers would be significantly enhanced if coordinated through, trained, resourced, and supported by, an appropriate centralised agency structure…

An apparent drawback of this community-based delivery model is that domestic emergency management agencies are heavily reliant on the engagement of volunteers to deliver effective disaster risk reduction and management; in 2014-2015 over 250,000 volunteers were recorded as supporting Australian emergency management organisations (CoA 2016). However, as noted by McLennan et al. (2016), emergency management volunteer models are in a process of transition, with community expectations demanding greater decentralised authority and shared community responsibility. Such evolving models include the retention of trained, part-time ('on-call'), remunerated auxiliaries (or 'retained volunteers'), including in the Northern Territory, to augment professional fire management and firefighting services (e.g. FRNSW 2018; NTFRS 2018; QFES 2018). The engagement of paid auxiliaries affords an example which, by extension as a fee-for-service model, could serve usefully in remote rangelands locales.

To date, however, there has been little formal recognition that volunteer-based services in remote Indigenous communities providing for fuel hazard reduction (and emergency management services generally), could be more sustainably supported by an extended contractual model (Blythe McLennan—RMIT University, pers. comm.). We recognise that such a model involves both additional initial establishment and training costs, but likely also affords substantial ongoing community, employment, and enterprise-development benefits. With respect to IRGs, core funding is already provided through Commonwealth programs and the case can additionally be made to materially support the Council of Australian Government's currently unfunded commitment to A National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous Communities (COAG 2007). It is well recognized that employment opportunities in most Indigenous remote communities are almost non-existent and that developing culturally appropriate enterprise opportunities is essential (COAG 2009; Altman and Kerins 2012; Smyth and Whitehead 2012; Sangha et al. 2017; Gerritsen et al. 2019)."

2.1 Project activities

The following activities have been undertaken to date or are in progress—refer extended details in the 2019 project Annual Report:

1. **NT** – ongoing consultations have been undertaken with Indigenous ranger Groups (IRGs) at Hermannsberg (and to a lesser extent Yuendumu) in central Australia, especially Borroloola in the NT Gulf region, and

Galiwin'ku in north-east Arnhem Land, and. NTES have a limited presence in all these remote communities; EM activities are generally coordinated by the Police and undertaken through volunteer Fire and Emergency Response Groups (FERGs). To date, the main opportunities for IRG members is to train to become volunteers with the FERGs. Research activities have involved: (1) interviews with IRG members to determine their interest and willingness to engage in EM activities, skill levels, training needs and resource requirements, and their potential interest in contracted EM services; (2) preliminary planning exercises addressing business-as-usual with future directions scenarios. Significant barriers to IRG members volunteering in FERG units include lack of drivers licences, criminal checks, aversion to dealing with serious road accidents, training and resourcing needs, and associated lack of confidence—this latter issue highlights an identified need for leadership training (see below). At the organisational level IRGs also face very considerable governance challenges. Evidently, substantial investment is required if these IRGs are to develop as effective, semi-autonomous EM providers.

2. **WA** – building on many years of experience by DFES (WA Dept of Fire & Emergency Services) personnel with attempts to establish effective volunteer brigades in remote West Kimberley communities, preliminary assessments of factors contributing to successful establishment have been undertaken to date at Bidyadanga and Nyul Nyul (Beagle Bay). Interviews with community and IRG members, and EM personnel have established that those key factors have involved:

   a. ongoing persistence with community volunteer engagement by committed DFES staff, often on a weekly basis, over 9 years;

   b. effective training and resourcing;

   c. the complementary development of local IRGs which has facilitated implementation of fire management operations and related EM activities in surrounding regions. Follow-up community-based research will be undertaken over the next few months under a WA-funded component of Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP) in partnership with DFES. It is anticipated that the lessons learnt from this research will contribute to the undertaking of the proposed BNHCRC Utilisation project described in Section 3.

3. **_Indigenous EM volunteer training_** – a major accredited training exercise, initiated and funded generously by the Commonwealths' Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience (AIDR), was held recently in August 2019. The trial program, involving over 30 Indigenous participants from east Arnhem and NT Gulf communities and NT EM staff, was held at rural accommodation and meeting facilities on the outskirts of Darwin. Although participants were not strictly 'EM volunteers', most were involved with IRGs or other community-based initiatives broadly addressing EM issues. The first three days focused on leadership training, excellently (and culturally appropriately) delivered by Australian Forensic Services in partnership with Ramingining Indigenous elder and IRG coordinator Otto Campion. Day 4 focused on first aid training delivered by St Johns. Day 5,

held at CDU's Casuarina campus, was undertaken as Scenario Planning exercise, focusing on a Business as usual model vs. a Collaborative model for managing emergency situations in remote communities. A clear outcome of the week was recognition that effective EM delivery communities needs to be undertaken as an informed partnership between supportive EM agencies and well-organised community governance structures. It is hoped that the success of this trial training program will encourage similar regionally-focused exercises in the future.
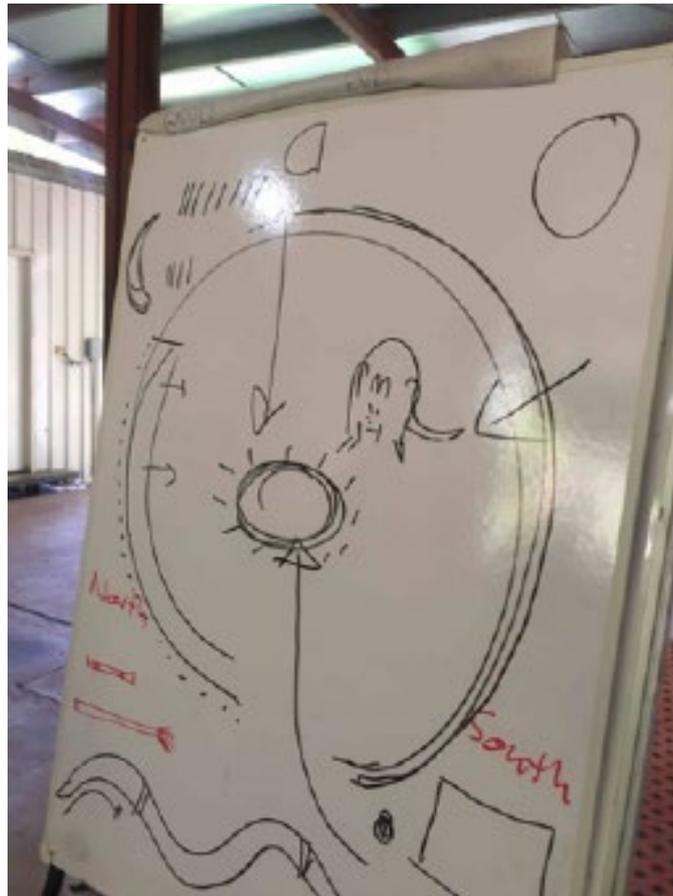
Kangaroo Fire Drive drawn by Otto Campion to demonstrate resources and planning required for managing fire.

DEVELOPING A BNHCRC UTILISATION PROJECT FOCUSED ON BUILDING EFFECTIVE EM PARTNERSHIPS WITH REMOTE COMMUNITIES

BACKGROUND

Since its inception the BNHCRC has supported a suite of projects undertaken through the CRC's 'northern hub' under the theme of *Building community resilience in northern Australia*, including two current projects: *Developing effective emergency management partnerships in remote north Australian communities*, and *Scenario planning for remote community risk management in northern Australia*. Broad contextual issues relating to these projects were presented and discussed at the Northern RAF held on 2nd April in Darwin, including:

1. How do EM agencies engage effectively and build long-term relationships with remote communities—especially in absence of adequate knowledge concerning the importance of engaging with Indigenous 'informal' community governance arrangements?

2. Conversely, how do local communities develop and build effective long-term partnerships with EM agencies?

3. How can EM arrangements better utilise remote community resources, skills and capabilities (e.g. Indigenous Ranger Groups)—especially given that EM agencies typically do not have the resources to effectively service the PPRR needs of many dispersed remote communities?

4. How appropriate and effective are standard Volunteer models for engaging and retaining remote community members—what are the experiences of EM agencies operating across the North?

5. What are the associated costs and benefits (including financial) of different volunteer or alternative (e.g. fee-for-service) engagement models—what is the evidence?

6. How do above matters relate to, might inform and be informed by, ongoing national discussions addressing evolving EM community engagement and Volunteer models?

UTILISATION PROPOSAL

Based on preliminary discussions with EM agency endusers, Red Cross, community stakeholders, and research partners, we would like to assess potential BNHCRC interest in supporting a Utilisation project addressing the above matters in a phased approach as follows:

Phase 1

1. An initial workshop (later in 2019, or early 2020) involving representative enduser agencies and Indigenous remote community stakeholders from the three northern jurisdictions, Red Cross and national research and

implementation partners addressing Volunteerism issues (e.g. relevant BNHCRC projects, AIDR)

2. To consider what form(s) of utilisation product(s) workshop participants would consider useful for addressing their specific and collective needs. On the basis of discussions from the Darwin RAF it is anticipated that such product(s) might include: (a) a short document addressing above matters utilizing a narrative format—e.g. through case study storytelling; (b) a short video addressing key issues for wider community distribution; (c) a short formal report summarizing main findings for dissemination to regional endusers, and regional and national institutional stakeholders

Phase 2

1. On basis of above, development and delivery of afreed products in later 2020

PARTICIPANTS

EM agencies – BFNT, NTES (NT); DFES (WA); QFRS, QRFS (QLD)…? Remote Indigenous community—NT, WA, QLD

National—BNHCRC, EMA, AIDR, Red Cross…?

Research—CDU, NAILSMA, ARPNet, RMIT…?

EXPECTED OUTCOMES AND BENEFITS

1. Shared northern Australia EM agency experiences, practical solutions, challenges, opportunities, associated with delivering EM in remote community settings

2. Opportunity for remote Indigenous communities to share their experiences, practical solutions, challenges, opportunities, associated with delivering EM in remote community settings

3. Opportunity for developing an agreed 'protocol' concerning developing effective EM partnerships between responsible agencies and remote community governance interests

4. Opportunity for discussing, developing an agreed partnership roadmap involving both north Australian EM agencies and remote communities

5. Opportunity to present findings to and discuss with national EM institutions concerning north Australian regional remote community EM challenges, and provide direct contribution to national EM policy development.

Participants at the leadership workshop, held near Darwin in August 2019.

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