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Submission to the Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding

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Q1. What experience have you had with Commonwealth disaster funding support?

This submission is presented in 5 parts relating to the Review's questions to be answered. It tends to flow as continuous argument artificially divided into the 5 questions. It argues that there is a national need to better understand both the emergency management agencies and the communities perspectives of risk and concludes with a proposal for consideration by the NEMA.

The submission addresses the following aims of the Review:

assess how Commonwealth disaster funding measures can be redefined and enhanced to complement and support state and territory arrangements and programs, proactively improve resilience and promote disaster risk reduction to constrain growing recovery costs, and deliver a system that is effective, responsive, equitable, and accessible; whilst harnessing opportunities for increased investment and participation from all sectors to reduce risk, build resilience and make our communities safer.

And, primarily addresses the following question:

How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

Specifically, this submission asks: what knowledge, understanding and behaviours do the emergency management agencies and the communities demonstrate regarding addressing risk in the contemporary disaster resilience setting.

This is in the context of the Review's aim to, proactively improve resilience and promote disaster risk reduction to constrain growing recovery costs, and deliver a system that is effective, responsive, equitable, and accessible; whilst harnessing opportunities for increased investment and participation from all sectors to reduce risk, build resilience and make our communities safer, in all phases of the disaster cycle.

A subtext is: do emergency management agencies and the community demonstrate a contemporary understanding of assessing and managing disaster risk reduction and mitigation in their communities?

Disclaimer

This submission represents the views of the undersigned who make this submission as Australian citizens and not on behalf of any organisation or agency. The undersigned (Frank Archer and Caroline Spencer) were co-signatories of a similar proposal submitted to the Review of the National Action Plan for DRR





Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

known as the NAP2 review in 2021 by the Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative (MUDRI), which is replicated here as an updated version and forms the basis of this submission. NEMA has not yet released the outcome of the NAP2 review.

Q2. How could Commonwealth funding support communities to reduce their disaster risk?

From Risk to Resilience continuum.

Risk is poorly understood in the emergency management sector, and is in a process of change.

Resilience is often defined using peak organisations definitions and in reference to glossaries. The academic literature portrays the view that there is no generally accepted definition of resilience.

To have an aspirational by-line with both ends of the spectrum mired in contested definitions and concepts can only lead to further confusion.

Reforms are underway: These reforms are crystallising and still evolving, but are led by different actors. They are not yet consolidated. These reforms include, but are not limited to:

1. Linking Risk & Resilience from Hyogo to Sendai to NDRRF a companion to NSDR.
2. Risk assessment moving from a two dimensional Probability Vs Consequences approach derived from the ISO model, to a three, or four, dimensional approach involving: Hazard, Exposure, Vulnerability and Capacity approach led by the CSIRO, the NDRRF and endorsed by the Royal Commission. However, this transition has not yet permeated the sector nor the community.
3. The concepts of Compound, Complex, Cascading, and, Catastrophic disasters, are often used synonymously, but we suggest these are not synonymous, although mentioned in the Royal Commission Report (2020).
4. Confusion over the use of the terms: hazard, risk, event, and disaster/emergency.
5. That risk assessment & management is not just a before the events activity, but is an activity that should run through all phases of an event.
6. The transition to a revitalised, proactive risk mitigation approach from a traditional, reactive response approach to emergency management in Australia, led by the NDRRF and endorsed by the Royal Commission, but, we suggest, not yet embraced by the response actors in the sector.
7. The emergence of non-traditional disasters and of climate change adaptation, neither of which are fully appreciated in the sector - Disasters are social events and referred to as Shock Doctrine by Naomi Klein.
8. The emerging trend to community-led initiatives, when the community has not traditionally had access to education, resources and other support to contribute to their risk reduction aspirations, or, able to influence the system. Commonly used terms in this sector of community-led, community-centric, community-based and community at the centre are not actually synonymous, but are used synonymously. The Monash University-led Fire to Flourish program is a national leader in this approach. The Queensland government in its 2022 Queensland Strategy for Disaster Resilience portrays an approach through a locally-led, regionally coordinated and government supported approach to understand local and regional disaster resilience needs in Queensland.





Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

9. Systemic Disaster Risk, led by the CSIRO, the NDRRF and the subject of a AIDR National Handbook (2021). This new concept is still relatively unknown in the national EM sector and totally unknown in the community sector.

Progress in clarifying and advancing the From Risk to Resilience agenda lies in adding another to the alliteration on , ie Risk Reform Resilience We see this lack of clarity as impeding a successful Risk to Resilience.

Q3. Please describe your understanding of Commonwealth disaster funding processes.

Systemic Disaster Risk

The Global Assessment Report (GAR) on Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR, 2022), promotes "The keys to building resilience and accelerating sustainable development are:

- measuring what we value,
- designing systems around the way people make decisions on risk, and
- reconfiguring governance and financial systems to work collaboratively and across silos".

GAR2022 outlines 'how immediate action around these three areas can help governments, local communities and individuals better position themselves to cope with a volatile, uncertain future'.
<https://www.undrr.org/gar2022-our-world-risk#container-downloads>

The Report integrates with the Sustainable Development Goals, the Sendai Framework, and the Paris Climate Change Agreement highlighting the need to:

- understand people's perception of risk and how human minds make decisions about risk;
- reconfigure from top-down approaches to embrace transdisciplinary approaches in consultation with affected people;
- embrace a new 'risk language' that cuts across multiple disciplines; and,
- step up participation, transparency and citizen dialogue in risk decision making to accelerate learning and necessary adjustments.

These are all consistent with the Australian National Strategy for Disaster Resilience and the NDRRF, but provides a how to on moving towards these objectives.

The Report places addressing 'systemic disaster risk' firmly on the map, underpinning a new way of thinking. This theme is also evolving in the Australian context.

The Australian Governments National Resilience Task Force (2019) contributed 5 major deliverables dramatically changing the lexicon of emergency management in Australia:

Deconstructing Disaster The strategic case for developing an Australian Vulnerability Profile to enhance national preparedness (2017);

Profiling Australia's Vulnerability Exploring new ways of thinking about our vulnerabilities to disaster - the interconnected causes and cascading effects of systemic disaster risk (2018). The paper presents 'the reality that hazards lead to disaster where there is exposure of a vulnerable society and where the consequences exceed people's capacity to cope;





Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

- The first release of Guidance for Strategic Decisions on Climate and Disaster Risk (2019);
- The sentinel report, the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (NDRRF) (2018).
- The Framework includes: Drivers; Vision; Goals; Priorities; Guiding principles; Strategies and 5-year Outcome Targets;
- The, little known, First National Action Plan to Implement the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (2018).

The AIDR National Handbook on Systemic Disaster Risk (2021) reveals the following:

- It does not define risk, nor disaster risk, nor asystemic disaster risk;
- The section on build disaster risk literacy is limited to 12 lines, and is grossly inadequate to support and inform the reader of the changing lexicon;
- There is no synthesis of the extensive CSIRO-led papers and reports; and

The Handbook largely omits a gender lens, a diversity lens and a disability lens. It fails to portray a whole of community approach. As noted by Craig Fugate, former Administrator of the USA FEMA, if we fail to include all sectors of the community in our EM plans, we immediately increase their vulnerability.

We believe that the AIDR National Handbook Systemic Disaster Risk (2021) impedes a successful Risk to Resilience and needs to be reviewed.

Q4. Are the funding roles of the Commonwealth, states and territories, and local government, during disaster events clear?

The understanding of risk.

The NDRRF outlines the 2030 Vision for Disaster Risk Reduction in Australia:

In Australia, we are enabled and supported to actively reduce disaster risk and limit the impacts of disasters on communities and economies. All sectors of society understand and respond to social, environmental, technological and demographic changes which have the potential to prevent, create or exacerbate disaster risks.

- All sectors of society:
- make disaster risk-informed decisions, are accountable for reducing risks within their control, and
- invest in reducing disaster risk in order to limit the cost of disasters when they occur.

This vision assumes that the community and agencies within the sector have: a common understanding of risk; and, equal capacity and opportunity to make disaster risk informed decisions. Based on our experience gained from engaging with both the community and the sector agencies we assert that this is not the case. We are concerned that the success of NEMA will be impeded if it bases its action plan on this flawed assumption.

A key first step would be to test our assumption.



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Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

In our former role at Monash University, we previously contributed to the national rollout of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR) in a similar manner to this proposal. We were funded by the Attorney Generals Department to review the understanding of resilience by key stakeholders.

Following acceptance of our Report to Funder, our first paper, Natassia Goode, Caroline Spencer, Dudley McArdle, Paul M. Salmon, Frank Archer, Characteristics of a disaster resilient Victoria: consensus from those involved in emergency management activities was published in AJEM in 2015. See link

The Abstract provides an insight into the basis of our current proposal: The aim of this study was to reach a consensus among stakeholders on the characteristics that they consider relevant for developing a disaster-resilient Victoria. Key stakeholders were defined as members of organisations involved in emergency management activities in Victoria (i.e. federal, state and local government, emergency services organisations, businesses, non-government organisations, community groups and researchers). A literature review was conducted to identify an initial set of characteristics. Using the Delphi technique, three surveys were conducted to identify any additional characteristics stakeholders considered relevant. This was used to achieve consensus on which of the characteristics from the literature and additional characteristics are relevant for the Victorian context. The findings indicate that stakeholders perceive that a systemic approach, which encompasses both formal structures and grass roots efforts, is required to develop a disaster resilient Victoria. This paper reports those findings to reach a consensus among key stakeholders on the characteristics they consider relevant for developing disaster resilience in Victoria. (Highlighting added)

This theme is continued in the next section.

Q5. Is there any further information you would like to provide?

The understanding of risk (ctd) and a proposal

Our second paper (from the previous section) , Natassia Goode, Paul M. Salmon, Caroline Spencer, Dudley McArdle, Frank Archer, Defining disaster resilience: comparisons from key stakeholders involved in emergency management in Victoria, Australia was published in Disasters in March 2016. See link

The Abstract provides further insight into the basis of our current proposal: Three years after the introduction of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience there remains no unanimously adopted definition of disaster resilience within Australia's emergency management sector. The aim of this study is to determine what the concept means to key stakeholders in the emergency management sector in the Australian State of Victoria, and how these conceptualisations overlap and diverge. Via an online survey, 113 people were asked how they define disaster resilience in their work in the emergency management sector.

A data mining software tool, Leximancer, was employed to uncover the relationships between the definitions provided. The findings show that stakeholders see resilience as an ability that encompasses emergency management activities and personal responsibility. However, the findings also highlight some possible points of conflict between stakeholders. In addition, the paper outlines and discusses a number of potential consequences for the implementation and the success of the resilience-based approach in Australia. (Highlighting added)





Australian Government

National Emergency
Management Agency

Proposal

Our proposal is to basically replace resilience with risk and repeat the above studies. We believe that the same limitations exist with the communities and key stakeholders understanding of risk, including the current reforms, and that this limitation is impeding a successful Risk to Resilience.

Understanding risk and acting on those risks are keystone principles of the NSDR, and of the NDRRF. We believe that at an early state of the NAP2, that the NRRRA test our assertion that neither the community nor the agencies within the sector have: a common understanding of a risk; nor a contemporary understanding a risk reform; nor an equal capacity and opportunity to make a disaster risk informed decisions, nor the capacity to influence system policies and strategies.

An initial step would be to prepare a Discussion Paper on the Reform elements of a Risk , Reform Resilience with recommendations on how this reform can best be shared with the community and the sector agencies. The second step would be to further investigate the sector's and communities knowledge, understanding a behaviour around contemporary Disaster Risk Management.

We are happy to responding to any questions, if so requested, and hope that NEMA can provide a positive response to this innovative proposal.

