



MEDIA RELEASE

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Office of Emergency Management (OEM) releases ground-breaking reports

- First of their kind reports on how emergencies could possibly affect communities.
- The culmination of extensive work involving 119 agencies and 406 participants.
- Each report outlines the credible worst case risks posed to each district around Western Australia.
- The reports can be used to inform mitigation options and expenditure priorities to build a more resilient state.

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) has launched a series of risk assessment reports for each of Western Australia's Emergency Management districts.

These reports detail the risks posed to each district from a range of priority hazards and highlight what is likely to be impacted by these events.

Fire, flood and storm were common hazards broadly assessed. Beyond these, the regional differences came to the fore: from cyclones in the north, animal and plant diseases in the south, marine emergencies along the coastline, and road, rail or air crashes in our most remote areas.

These reports represent the culmination of extensive collaboration that has included input from over 406 participants coming from 119 separate agencies. Over 70 different scenarios were assessed with a particular focus upon how these hazards may impact upon the Western Australian people, economy, public administration, the environment and the social setting.

Leveraging off a national scheme to build Natural Disaster Resilience the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) initiated the State Risk Project in 2013. This project was joint-funded under the Commonwealth's National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience and was designed to gain a comprehensive and consistent understanding of the risks faced by West Australians. In May 2017, the Commonwealth confirmed a 12 month extension with new funding available for 2017-18 to support state and territory resilience programs.

In 2013 the Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience & Safer Communities suggested that a fresh approach to pre-disaster resilience is required. Highlighting that for every dollar spent on mitigation between three and eight dollars is saved in terms of damages avoided (depending on the event).

In 2015 the Australian Government Productivity Commission reported that between 2009–10 and 2012–13, \$11.0 billion was spent on disaster recovery, while only \$225 million was spent on mitigation.

The OEM has identified that the district level is the best avenue for practically assessing risk, developing treatments and measuring capability. While state-level assessments are useful to gain a broad understanding of what the highest risks are, they do not easily lend themselves to identifying tangible options to treat the risks and lessen the impacts.

Comments attributed to State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) Chair Frank Edwards CSC:

“Major disasters cause significant disruptions to the people of WA. Along with the personal distress of living through these events they also incur significant costs to individuals, businesses, industries and the state itself.

“These district risk reports provide a body of evidence that spell out just how these emergencies could affect us. While we cannot stop the natural hazards themselves, we can work towards minimising the impact that they will cause to our people, economy, public administration, the environment and the social setting.

“The work of the OEM, in conjunction with experts from the 119 agencies that have contributed, means that we can learn the lessons without having to go through a disaster that might cost us a 100 million dollars.

“We can use these future casting reports to inform mitigation options and are another tool governments can use to prioritise and direct the funds where they will do the most good.

“Emergencies will continue to affect us. The more we can do to minimise their effect, the less profound their impact will be.”

Comments attributed to OEM Executive Director Mal Cronstedt:

“These district-wide reports are first of their kind in Western Australia. They are a comprehensive and consistent assessment of priority hazards based on credible worst case scenarios. This has not been done before by agencies with this scale of event, constructed by experts, focussing on multi-agency interdependencies and analysed in a consistent manner across our state’s six core objectives (our people, economy, environment, infrastructure, governance and social setting) pertinent to the State’s wellbeing. Thus this is a true holistic, integrated approach which takes a whole of district perspective which goes far beyond any individual agency role and focus.

“Recovery costs are growing exponentially and this is unsustainable for an economy. Thus the focus now is how to better invest in mitigation to endeavour to lessen or prevent the impacts.

“The forecast annual cost of natural disasters in Australia is set to rise from \$6.3 billion currently to around \$23 billion a year in 2050 as population density increases and the severity and frequency of storms, floods, heatwaves, cyclones and bushfires grow. The recent events on the east coast with Cyclone Debbie have damage estimates into the billions of dollars.

“This year in Western Australia extensive flooding has already caused extensive damage to road infrastructure incurring significant recovery and restoration costs.”

Comments attributed to OEM Project Leader – State Strategic Risk, Dr Heather Taylor:

“We have produced a risk assessment report for each Emergency Management district around the state. These reports detail the results of the district risk assessments that were done as part of the State Risk Project.

“Each report explains the risks posed to the district from a range of priority hazards. A credible worst-case scenario for each hazard was assessed in a workshop setting to determine the risks. Participants assessed how the hazards may impact upon the Western Australian people, economy, public administration, the environment and the social setting.

“The collective district data represents the culmination of extensive collaboration that has included input from 406 participants from 119 separate agencies. The State Risk Project has identified the district level as the best avenue for practically assessing risk, developing treatments and measuring capability. These reports provide a body of evidence that shows how emergencies will likely affect us. This will then inform mitigation options and expenditure priorities to build a more resilient state.”

Comments attributed to Director-General of Emergency Management Australia, Mark Crossweller:

"Western Australia continues to lead the country with its comprehensive and rigorous approach to its state-wide risk assessment. The benefits that flow will hold the government and community in great stead as they navigate through the onset of possible future disasters outlined comprehensively in this process."

Download the reports: www.oem.wa.gov.au/publications.

Fact file:

ABOUT THE OFFICE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

The Office of Emergency Management (OEM) was established on 1 December 2016. The OEM was formerly the SEMC Secretariat, which was created in July 2013 as a sub-department of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES).

The OEM was established as a result of the recommendations of the Special Inquiry into the January 2016 Waroona Fire by Euan Ferguson AFSM. The establishment of the OEM included the transfer of the function of the State Recovery Coordinator to the OEM (from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet).

The OEM's key role is in providing support to the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) in delivering on its strategic goals across Risk, Capability, Impact, Engagement and Governance and Support.

Further information about the OEM: www.oem.wa.gov.au.

Media Contact: Loredana Manfredi
(08) 6551 4029