NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RESILIENCE: IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW

Priority areas for action
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Introduction

In July 2014, the Law, Crime and Community Safety Council (LCCSC) tasked the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) to review the implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (the Strategy) with the aim of identifying national priority areas for action for consideration by Ministers.\(^1\) It was noted at ANZEMC that this review would not be a ‘root and branch’ review but would focus instead on a critical evaluation of progress.\(^2\)

This report acknowledges that state and territory governments have primary responsibility for emergency management within their jurisdiction. Each jurisdiction represents a different working environment, has different experiences and is at a different stage of advancement across the disaster resilience spectrum.

The fact that many jurisdictions have developed and implemented resilience strategies and programs, tailored to their specific risks and needs, reflects commitment to the disaster resilience agenda. A separate report describes the significant progress that has been made over recent years, drawing on case studies from jurisdictions. This report highlights the key gaps and challenges faced in implementing the Strategy, and provides high-level guidance for ANZEMC and its subcommittees to consider in their work programs over the next three years.

Many of the issues identified in this report relate to recommendations from the Productivity Commission’s Inquiry into Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements (the PC Inquiry). However, recommendations that specifically relate to national recovery and mitigation funding models are being considered by a separate multi-jurisdictional working group and this review has not duplicated that activity.

Methodology

Several activities were undertaken as part of the Strategy implementation review process:

- jurisdictions completed a stocktake of key resilience initiatives undertaken since release of the Strategy in 2011
- a range of government and non-government stakeholders participated in qualitative research undertaken by research consultants, TNS Australia, to assist in identifying and understanding the Strategy’s key successes, barriers and challenges, and
- jurisdictions responded to a discussion paper, which explored the high-level findings from the above processes and posed questions about future actions.

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\(^1\) LCCSC 4 July 2014 Meeting - Communique and Decisions.
\(^2\) ANZEMC 25 August 2015 Teleconference—Summary of Outcomes.
ANZEMC is progressing the long term journey to build Australia’s resilience to disasters. A significant body of work has occurred that delivers against the Strategy’s priority outcomes, including the development of national initiatives overseen directly by ANZEMC, a range of activities progressed by state, territory, and local governments specific to their jurisdictions’ needs and work undertaken by non-government bodies, communities and individuals. While a great deal of progress has been made, several key themes for future effort have emerged:

- Measurement, Evaluation and Strategic Priority Setting
- Improving Cross-Sectoral Partnerships
- Improved Community Engagement
- Enhanced Resilience in the Built Environment
- Better Risk Awareness and Risk Mitigation, and
- Improved Capabilities for Disaster Resilience.

Under each of these themes, this report highlights key gaps and challenges faced in implementing the Strategy and recommends a number of areas that would benefit from additional focus, and can be used as a high-level guide for consideration by ANZEMC and its subcommittees in their future work programs.

It is important to note that these recommendations are not intended to replace current work programs or create an additional burden or resource impost on ANZEMC and its sub-committees. They are meant to complement existing work programs already underway.

**RECOMMENDATION**

1. ANZEMC use the findings of this report to assist sub-committees in determining their work programs over the next three years.
Measurement, evaluation and strategic priority setting

Measuring and evaluating the impact of disaster resilience projects, programs and policies is key to better understanding their utility and impact, identifying impediments to implementation and establishing future priorities. The process of measurement and evaluation also underpins a culture of awareness, continuous learning and improvement.

To date, there has been limited work undertaken to assess the extent to which individual bodies of work or the program as a whole are contributing to improved disaster resilience. Where evaluation has occurred, it has been on an ad-hoc basis and the outcomes of these evaluations have not been shared or applied nationally.

Measuring ‘resilience’ is challenging. As the Strategy acknowledges, resilience is often the product of a long-term evolving process, and is not something that can be easily measured in short timeframes. Measurement and evaluation of the Strategy has been made even more difficult by the high-level, principles-based nature of the Strategy’s objectives.

Since the Strategy was developed, significant advances have occurred in national security, critical infrastructure and community resilience policy. Many jurisdictions implement disaster resilience-building activities within this broader context. While the high-level principles of the Strategy remain sound, it is timely to further develop the Strategy’s objectives to take account of broader resilience thinking, and to establish more measurable objectives and a sustainable evaluation framework.

Such a framework would allow the consideration of strategic priorities on an ongoing basis—both for specific projects, relevant programs (such as NEMP and BNHCRC research) and the ANZEMC sub-committees.

The Risk Measurement and Mitigation Sub-Committee (RAMMS) of ANZEMC have agreed that the establishment of a measurement and evaluation framework is within its remit and further work should be done to determine practical options within existing resources.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

2. ANZEMC explore further developing the Strategy to consider measurable objectives and incorporate contemporary, broader resilience policy.

3. ANZEMC (RAMMS, in collaboration with the Community Engagement Sub-Committee (CESC), the Capability Development Sub-Committee (CDSC) and the Recovery Sub-Committee (RSC)) consider developing options for a measurement and evaluation framework for the Strategy, including options for the establishment of baseline data.
Improving cross-sectoral partnerships

Sustained and effective partnerships are essential to realising the principle of shared responsibility—that all sectors of society, including individuals, all levels of government, business and the non-government sector take collective responsibility for understanding and managing disaster risks. The ANZEMC governance structure has been successful in driving national work and enabling cross-jurisdictional engagement. However, meaningful partnerships between governments and stakeholders outside the ANZEMC structure, particularly the private sector, are limited.

Further work is required to develop mutually beneficial partnerships beyond the emergency management sector, to share information, and more effectively coordinate and leverage resources through industry-led initiatives and joint-ventures. The PC Inquiry noted a specific need for state and territory governments, local governments and insurers to further explore opportunities for collaboration and partnerships.

A range of networks currently exist, such as the Critical Infrastructure Advisory Council (CIAC), the Trusted Information Sharing Network (TISN), the Resilience Expert Advisory Group (REAG), the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) and the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA). Some sectors, for example the electricity and communications sectors, have broad reach into communities and could be distributing messages and price signals to the community to promote resilient behaviour.

CESC has identified scoping engagement with the private sector to improve community resilience as a strategic priority. A scoping exercise would help to identify sectors outside of government that can contribute to disaster resilience; what current engagement mechanisms exist (or could be developed); and how to best integrate disaster resilience objectives into existing agendas.

**RECOMMENDATION**

4. ANZEMC [CESC, in consultation with CDSC, RAMMS and RSC] to scope relevant non-traditional emergency management stakeholders and, where there is benefit at the national level, explore mechanisms to partner with them.
Improved community engagement

Empowering individuals and communities to take responsibility for the risks they live with is central to the concept of disaster resilience.

Localised, grass roots initiatives that are targeted and tailored for specific communities have proven to be highly effective. They foster a greater understanding of risk within the community, encourage the community to take ownership of their risks and help to ensure that emergency service organisations target their resources to protect the community’s most valued assets.

Research also shows that disaster risk reduction and resilience education in schools has been a force-multiplier—extending awareness across families and motivating households and communities to engage in prevention and preparedness activities.

The high level of volunteering in Australia is an important building-block for community engagement. More than 500,000 Australians are formally involved in a range of emergency services, including firefighting, flood and storm response, and search and rescue. These personnel are critical to the effective delivery of emergency services, and maintaining participation rates is becoming increasingly challenging. In addition hundreds and even thousands of spontaneous volunteers have emerged in response to disaster events, reflecting a high level of community goodwill that could be harnessed.

Over the last three years, ANZEMC has sponsored the development of a wide range of resources to assist in community engagement, such as the Community Engagement Framework and the School Education Program. The Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum was established, and a National Action plan for the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers was developed, along with a Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit.

While these resources have been developed in close consultation with stakeholders and represent best-practice, the extent of implementation is unclear, and likely to be patchy at best. Further work is required to understand barriers to implementation of these tools, and to better understand examples of successful community engagement initiatives and promote their uptake.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

5. ANZEMC (CESC) to analyse the barriers to broader implementation of community engagement initiatives and continue to promote their uptake.

6. ANZEMC (CESC) to improve sharing of successful local initiatives to drive better community awareness.
Enhanced resilience in the built environment

Enhancing resilience in the built environment can reduce the impact of hazards on communities by decreasing exposure and vulnerability. While some extreme weather events are unexpected and their impact is devastating, many are recurrent and their impact could be mitigated. As noted by the PC Inquiry:

*Land use planning is perhaps the most potent policy lever for influencing the level of future natural disaster risk. But it is a challenging policy area that must balance a range of (sometimes competing) priorities, including the management of natural disaster risk.*

*There is growing awareness of the need to integrate natural disaster risk management into all aspects of the land use planning process, but this is not always achieved in practice. Inquiry participants expressed concern that development continues to be approved in high risk areas, or that good local government decisions are being overturned.*

The need to integrate natural disaster risk management into all aspects of the land use planning process is acknowledged in the *Enhancing Disaster Resilience in the Built Environment Roadmap (Roadmap).* The Roadmap sets out a range of immediate and medium term activities to enhance disaster resilience in the built environment, including:

- ensuring that legislation integrates the functions of land use planning, building and emergency management
- developing and refining processes associated with land use planning and building
- implementing a comprehensive framework for the development of nationally consistent ‘fit for purpose’ hazard research, data, modelling and mapping
- developing and implementing a nationally consistent vendor disclosure framework
- arranging partnerships between stakeholders with a focus on all tiers of government
- developing lifelong learning opportunities for stakeholders with a focus on the ongoing training, mentoring and certification of industry professionals, and
- achieving inter-jurisdictional collaboration.

Jurisdictions are developing ‘capability and investment plans’ to assist in implementing the activities in the Roadmap. However, progress has been slow, as jurisdictions manage broader deregulation and reform agendas. There is a need to facilitate regular and constructive engagement between emergency management, planning, building and infrastructure agencies to ensure that the Roadmap objectives are progressed.

**RECOMMENDATION**

7. ANZEMC (Land Use Planning and Building Codes Taskforce) continue to promote enhanced disaster resilience in the built environment, and progress the objectives of the Roadmap through the facilitation of regular and constructive engagement between relevant agencies.
Better risk awareness and risk mitigation

Access to transparent, accurate and trusted sources of information about disaster risk is essential to inform robust risk assessments for use at the prevent, prepare, respond and recover phases of disaster management. Making sure that those risk assessments are easily accessible and understood, in particular by decision makers, is also crucial to ensure that stakeholders make informed judgements and act in the face of all natural disaster events, including those at the extreme end of the spectrum.

Significant progress has been made in building our understanding of natural disaster risk. States and territories have assessed and prioritised disaster risks and hazards through state-wide risk assessments. Over the last year, RAMMS has begun to analyse the information, tools and processes necessary to support mitigation investment decisions. There would be benefit in identifying the information needs of relevant stakeholders and making a stronger case for mitigation investment with key decision makers. This includes those within governments, communities and the private sector.

As highlighted by the PC Inquiry, there is also a need for governments at all levels to make new and currently held natural hazard data publicly available in accordance with open public sector information principles. However, there will be a need to consider issues relating to legal liability, intellectual property rights, and the lack of clear mandates for agencies to provide data required.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. ANZEMC (RAMMS) to continue to engage mitigation decision makers on the required information, tools and processes to support disaster mitigation investment, and share examples of successful jurisdictional approaches.

9. ANZEMC (RAMMS, CESC and RSC) to investigate how risk information and associated management techniques can be better delivered to communities, particularly through sharing of jurisdictions’ experiences.
Improved capabilities for disaster resilience

Disaster resilience is achieved through learning, innovating, and developing skills and resources at the individual, community and operational level that can be applied to manage disasters.

All states and territories have benefitted from cost-effective capabilities built at the national level, as well as lessons learned from exercises and formal inquiries. Responses to disaster events have also assisted in evaluating capability levels. Each state and territory is responsible for emergency management capability development within its jurisdiction and has recently described and shared an overview of their jurisdiction’s operational capability through the National Capability Statement. Exercise Apollo, an element of ANZEMC’s rolling three year exercise program, has also been undertaken to examine the role of senior decision makers involved in a mass casualty event with significant health consequences.

There are benefits in an understanding of capabilities that can be drawn-upon across jurisdictions and from other countries. There are also cases where it is more effective and efficient to develop capability on a national scale, although to date national capabilities have been developed on an ad-hoc basis in response to particular events. It is also important to consider capability needs for those less likely events that have catastrophic consequences, and stretch our normal systems, processes and capacity.

There is an opportunity to better link jurisdictional risk assessments to capability development to ensure that we have the capabilities to adequately address the disaster risks identified. This would help to understand, prioritise and support capability development to manage the increasing regularity and impact of ‘high-likelihood’ extreme events.

RECOMMENDATIONS

10. ANZEMC (CDSC) to review the need and current approach to a national capability framework.

11. ANZEMC (CDSC/RAMMS) to explore linking capability strategies to risk assessments, particularly in relation to developing capability for extreme and catastrophic events.