

NATIONAL EMERGENCY RESPONSE

The Official Journal of the Australasian Institute of Emergency Services

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It all started back in April 2024, when Joseph Johnson, a 26-year-old entrepreneur who grew up in Kellerberrin and now lives in Northam, had a frustrating experience trying to rent out his room on Gumtree.

"It used to be free, but suddenly I was asked to pay \$28 to list it," Joseph explains. Frustrated and determined to find out why, he sat down at his desktop and typed into Google: "Why do you have to pay to use Gumtree?"

That moment sparked an idea why not create a free platform where everyone has equal access to buy and sell without fees or worrying about scammers and spam? From that day on, Joseph was determined to build something better. Outback Marketplace was coded and built from scratch over the next eight months, officially launching in December 2024.

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Another key feature is Town Hall, which works like a Local Community Board on Facebook. It's a space where users can share thoughts, experiences, announcements, and local updates, helping Aussies connect, build community, and support local businesses and individuals across Northam and beyond.

KEY CATEGORIES THAT SUPPORT THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Outback Marketplace goes beyond just buying and selling—it's designed to empower local businesses, workers, and farmers with dedicated categories, including:

- **Services for Hire** – Supporting small businesses by giving them the free attention and advertising they deserve. Whether you're a handyman, cleaner, or personal trainer, this is the place to showcase your services without paying a cent.
- **Jobs Wanted** – A section for people seeking work, making it easier for job seekers and employers to connect locally.
- **Farming Equipment & Vehicles** – Recognising the importance of agriculture in regional Australia, this category makes it simple for farmers to buy, sell, or trade essential equipment and vehicles.

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On the cover

Rescue, resilience and gratitude: The Karijini rescue that connected Western Australian responders with a community in Alabama. Photo supplied by WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions (Parks & Wildlife).

Articles, photographs and short stories are sought for the National Emergency Response Journal. Please submit items for the next edition to editor@aies.net.au by **September 28, 2026**. There is an annual award for the best article submitted by an AIES member.

Content Deadline



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Dementia awareness on the front line

As an emergency responder, some situations can place you in the lives of people at their most vulnerable

People living with dementia are among the most vulnerable in our society, yet this is not always immediately obvious.

Dementia is often described as an invisible disability, as its cognitive, behavioural, and memory-related symptoms are not always physically apparent, often leading to stigma and misunderstanding.

In 2026, an estimated 446,500 Australians are living with dementia - a figure projected to rise to more than one million by 2065. This means emergency responders are increasingly likely to encounter people living with dementia.

People living with dementia may struggle to understand instructions,

feel disorientated, or find it difficult to communicate their needs. These challenges can affect behaviour in ways that may be misinterpreted as noncompliance or resistance.

Through consultation with emergency services, Dementia Australia consistently heard similar challenges from staff: how to recognise dementia, communicate effectively, manage agitation or confusion, and respond safely.

A helpful framework is the **ACE principles**

- **Awareness:** recognise the possible signs of dementia or cognitive decline
- **Consideration:** consider what are they experiencing
- **Engagement:** communicate with care.

To build your awareness, watch Dementia Australia's interactive video series designed specifically for emergency services:

dementia.org.au/emergency-services

If you need information or advice, the National Dementia Helpline is available anytime on **1800 100 500**, or via live chat and email at **dementia.org.au**.

Dementia awareness for emergency services



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When every second counts, understanding matters.

Our free, interactive video and resources equip emergency service workers to recognise the signs of dementia and respond with care.

Scan QR Code to watch video and learn more



New members

The Australasian Institute of Emergency Services is pleased to announce the following emergency services people joined the AIES between April 2026 - June 2026.

Name	Organisation
NSW / ACT / International Division	
Brandy Alger	New Zealand Red Cross
Douglas Allan	Charles Sturt University
Gina Eccersall	USAR
Lauren Flett	National Emergency Management Agency
Glenn Jones ESM CEM	NSW SES
Nathan Kirkwood	NSW Police
Benjamin Ryan	Evolution Mining
Aaron Vom Bruch	NSW Premier's Department
QLD / NT Division	
Anne Beckett	Powerlink
Cindel Richardson ESM	QLD Police

Name	Organisation
SA / WA Division	
Hannah Callary	City of Karratha
Scott Crossingham	Rio Tinto Iron Ore
Jonathan Marshall	ERGT
Brendon McLaughlin	Rio Tinto Iron Ore
Amanda Stoward	Rio Tinto
TAS Division	
Tol Broinowski	Tasmania Department of Justice
VIC Division	
Ashley O'Loughlin	Fire Rescue Victoria
Jamal Nobandi	Disaster Relief Australia
Aaron Worcester	Fire Rescue Victoria

Emergency Service Medal Cindel Richardson MAIES

Congratulations to AIES Queensland member Cindel Richardson who was recognised for her 20-plus year service to the SES where she has pioneered training programs for search and rescue efforts, disaster response, community preparedness, and supported recruitment and retention efforts.

Cindel also serves as the Queensland Police Multicultural Affairs Unit Acting Inspector.

In this role, she demonstrated exceptional leadership supporting community safety and resilience as incident commander during Tropical Cyclone Alfred in 2025 and Tropical Cyclone Marcia in 2015. ●



→ Cindel Richardson MAIES

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Message from our National President

David Parsons ESM FAIES CESM
AIES President



Conference season

Conference season has arrived with two annual conferences coming soon – Disaster and Emergency Management Conference on the Gold Coast and the Emergency Services Foundation Conference in Melbourne. *Turn to page 31 for more information about these events.*

AIES members attending the Emergency Services Foundation Conference should take time to introduce themselves to Victorian President and National Director Doug Caulfield OAM who will be at the AIES stand in the trade show.

AIES members attending the Disaster and Emergency Management Conference are invited to join the Whats App group for this event by contacting NSW/ACT Division President Brett Henderson who is coordinating the communications via email, president.nsw@aies.net.au

These events present a great opportunity for AIES members to connect with fellow AIES members. We also look forward to introducing our Institute to potential new members at both conferences.

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Canadian Hazard and Risk Network Conference

In May I was joined by AIES member Todd Miller at the Canadian Hazard and Risk Network Symposium in Edmonton in Alberta Canada. Todd was successful in obtaining a Professional Development Fund Scholarship last year to support his attendance. Todd presented at the symposium on his PhD research and has shared his story for members in this edition of NER.

The event was a great opportunity to hear the current and emerging issues in emergency management from a Canadian perspective. You can read more on page 22.

50th Anniversary Celebrations

Our 50th Anniversary Implementation Project Team led by John Moy are doing a great job developing proposal briefs for review by the Board. A special thanks to the team working with John on this important project.

2027 will be an important milestone for the AIES. It is impressive that the organisation has survived all the changes over this time frame. Stay tuned for more information about how we will celebrate this significant milestone for our Institute.

➤ L-R: Todd Miller,
John Moy.



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New awards launched to recognise contributors shaping sector knowledge

A new award recognising the role contributors play in strengthening professional learning and knowledge sharing across the emergency management and emergency services sectors has been launched by Countrywide Austral, publisher of the Australasian Institute of Emergency Services' *National Emergency Response Journal*.



Kristi High

Editor *National Emergency Response Journal*

countrywideaustral



**Australasian Institute of
Emergency Services**

The **Contributor Impact Awards** for best member story and front cover photo will be presented after each edition, through the newly established Countrywide Austral Contributor Impact Fund initiative.

Under the initiative, \$250 will be awarded for an outstanding feature article, story or opinion piece submitted by an AIES member, while a further \$250 will be awarded for an original front cover image that captures the work of emergency management or emergency services personnel.

Countrywide Austral Managing Director Tony Cornish said the award recognises the important role practitioners play in sharing experiences, lessons and insights that help advance professional practice across the sector.

"Emergency management has always been a profession that learns from experience. The stories shared through *National Emergency Response* capture lessons that can help others prepare for, respond to and recover from future events," Tony said.

"Some of the most valuable knowledge in our sector comes from practitioners reflecting on what they've experienced, what they've learned and what others can take away from those experiences."

The awards are also designed to encourage a broader range of voices to contribute to the journal.

"There are many people across emergency management and emergency services with valuable perspectives and lessons to share who may not traditionally see themselves as writers," Tony said.

"This award is about recognising those contributions and encouraging more people to participate in professional discussion and knowledge sharing."

The initiative also recognises the role visual storytelling plays in documenting the work of emergency management and emergency services personnel.

"A powerful image can capture the reality of response, recovery and resilience in ways words alone cannot. Photography helps preserve important moments and provides

another way for practitioners to share their experiences with the sector," Tony said.

The awards are for articles that are compelling, accessible and experience-based. Formal academic research papers published in their original form are not eligible, although articles that reference or translate research findings into practical insights for practitioners will be included in the judges' consideration of award-ready content.

Awards commence from the Summer 2026 edition of *National Emergency Response*. ●

Please read the Contributor Guidelines, which are available on the AIES website. Or contact the Editor if you have any questions. Submission are accepted all year round.

🌐 <https://aies.net.au/ner>

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Emergency Services**

Thought Leadership

from experts in emergency services and management

Jonathan Curtis MAIES

Editor AIES Thought Leadership Series



Let's be reasonable: mitigating risks associated with work overload for emergency managers

In this article Mark Layson explores the need to proactively manage the risks of overworking. The emergency management sector cannot sustain a culture that expects staff to do 'whatever it takes' for 'as long as it takes' where disasters are more frequent, severe and long lasting. An immediate driver for change is the evolving legal landscape that is much less accepting of overwork as business as usual.



Rev Dr Mark Layson MAIES CESM

Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network NSW/ACT

Background

Australian employment contracts regularly contain clauses requiring employees, particularly managers, to work 'reasonable additional hours'. Emergency organisations operate in a volatile environment, making it difficult to describe what is 'reasonable', especially during high-intensity operations. Therefore, many emergency organisations avoid detailing a vital element of the employment contract. Instead, senior leaders often presume on a tacit expectation that their workforce will meet almost any operational

demand. However, a series of changes raise the question whether a tacit and open-ended approach to work hours reaches the threshold of reasonable in 2026.

Over the past decade, disasters have grown not only in frequency but in duration and complexity. Events are increasingly followed by prolonged recovery efforts that stretch capacity for extended periods. Disaster response is becoming the BAU for many emergency managers. This shift, along with the introduction of psychosocial risk regulations and increasing workforce retention concerns in the sector, demands a reassessment of tacit expectations about reasonable work hours. The question is not whether additional hours will be required, but how and by whom reasonable work hours will be determined. Any solution must balance

staff health, operational performance, and align with psychosocial work health and safety (WHS) regulations.

Recognising this emerging challenge, the NSW/ACT Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network (DRCN) undertook a review of its operating model, culminating in a Work Hours and Fatigue Protocol designed to clarify what 'reasonable additional hours' means in a disaster context. The intention was to reduce ambiguity about work hours before periods of high operational demand eventuate, rather than reactively manage consequences.

Regulatory context

Australian workplace law habitually avoids prescribing a fixed threshold for additional hours. Instead, the Fair Work framework applies a multi-factor test that

Note that the views expressed in this article are those of the author and are not necessarily the views of the AIES.

considers health and safety risk, personal circumstances, operational requirements, compensation, and industry considerations. Senior emergency managers must now do more than simply count raw hours worked; they must consider them alongside related issues, such as fatigue management, compliance with emerging psychosocial hazard regulations, and newly expressed workers' rights to disconnect.

Legal considerations

Recent Australian cases are now reflecting this regulatory context. Courts have repeatedly found that even modest systemic overtime can constitute a breach of the Fair Work Act. Reliance on contractual reasonableness clauses, which may simply presume an industry culture of overwork, does not displace workers' statutory protections to a 38-hour week. Organisational culture is increasingly under legal scrutiny.

Court decisions convey the message that short-term operational needs are easier to justify than embedded overtime; however, what remains unanswered is how long a disaster response must last before it is effectively BAU and therefore embedded. What is certain is that deference to the clause 'reasonable additional', and industry expectation, is no longer sufficient.

The risk of leaving 'reasonable' undefined

Workforce agility is critical during crises, while ambiguity can obscure risks. In disaster environments, workers often accept extended hours as part of a service ethos. However, in the absence of defined parameters, sustained overwork gradually becomes ambiguous. Work hours expectations are rarely communicated through formal directives; instead, pressure often emerges through cultural norms, such as remarks questioning personal commitment or suggestions that career progression may be at risk.

When employees perceive that declining additional hours carries a reputational consequence, the statutory right to refuse unreasonable hours becomes psychologically inaccessible. What follows is not resilience but silent compliance (and later malicious compliance), which is associated with psychosocial harm.

A proactive approach to workplace harm

Two recent court decisions, one in the High Court that relates directly to work load, have made it clear that organisations, especially government organisations must take a proactive approach to managing foreseeable risks. Therefore, central to the DRCN's approach to work hours was the recognition that disaster work

is predictably unpredictable. Business-as-usual operations must remain anchored to standard weekly hours to reinforce that surge conditions should not become normative. Activation periods acknowledge the reality of increased workloads while introducing review thresholds that prompt leadership reassessment if extended hours persist. BAU and rest periods are treated as operational necessities that expect that workloads will return toward sustainable levels in a managed way.

A key element of this approach is the introduction of an event assessment matrix that categorises incidents according to duration, volume, and intensity. This framework supports early leadership judgment about workforce demand and provides an explicitly stated basis for determining whether BAU activities, such as training, should continue, be deferred, or be cancelled.

When expectations are proactively defined, ambiguity diminishes during high-pressure moments. Employees gain confidence that their wellbeing is considered within operational planning, and organisations strengthen their sustainability.

The framework is a relational enabler, allowing managers and staff to meaningfully communicate about how, when, and why deadlines are adjusted, non-essential projects are paused, and staffing models are recalibrated before fatigue becomes BAU. Workload, therefore, is treated as a dynamic risk requiring active management rather than as a by-product of implied coercion regarding individual worker commitment.

Work hours and fatigue as a shared responsibility

Fatigue control and work-hour management are explicitly included as tasks in operational planning and duties. Managers and staff are encouraged to communicate early and regularly about hours worked and to flag stressful events within those reasonable and extended hours. Consequently, work can be redistributed or even refused when organisational and individual capacity is nearing its limit.

Under the protocol, an operation may not require significantly longer hours for more than two weeks, because after that, the operation has effectively become

embedded. In those two weeks, rest periods and managed breaks are expected and encouraged, and psychological safety is supported under a Just Culture algorithm. The Just Culture algorithm preferences learning over blame cultures and addresses systemic conditions alongside individual accountability.

Conclusion: a leadership moment for the sector

Resilience is often discussed in relation to disaster-affected communities. Increasingly, it must also describe emergency organisations work systems. Workforce risk management models must align with the emerging complexity of polycrisis workforce management, rather than be shaped by assumptions from a previous era where work overload was normalised.

Articulating reasonable additional hours is an act of organisational resilience that better supports workers and communities during a crisis. When expectations are proactively defined, ambiguity diminishes during high-pressure moments. Employees gain confidence that their wellbeing is considered within operational planning, and organisations strengthen their sustainability.

Returning to the dilemma in the introduction: will the emergency management sector continue to accept a reliance on professional goodwill, informal expectations, and cultures that equate exhaustion with dedication? If so, what will be the legal and personal cost of this decision? Alternatively, is our industry mature enough to recognise workload as a risk to individual safety and workforce sustainability that leaders must manage? More precisely, the question is whether the sector is prepared to define reasonableness on its own terms or wait for the courts, regulators, and exhausted employees and volunteers to define it for them? ●

Author bio

Rev Dr Mark Layson MAIES CESM is a researcher, author and disaster leadership practitioner, with more than thirty years' experience across policing, fire and rescue, aeromedical chaplaincy and disaster recovery.

He currently leads the Disaster Recovery Chaplaincy Network NSW/ACT.

Do you have a contribution for the AIES leadership series?
Articles should be a maximum of 1,000 words. Send your idea to:
✉ thoughtleadership@aies.net.au

Advancing practice through research

Showcasing recently published research in emergency and disaster management



Research continues to play a critical role in shaping policy, strengthening community resilience, and enhancing the professional practice of those working on the frontline of crises. In recent years, the growth of doctoral-level research within emergency and disaster management has produced a more robust evidence base to inform decision-making, capability development, and sector-wide reform.

A key distinction within this landscape is the difference between the Professional Doctorate and the traditional Doctor of Philosophy (PhD). As outlined in the first article in this series, the Professional Doctorate is typically grounded in practice-led inquiry, enabling experienced practitioners to examine complex operational, organisational, and community challenges from within their professional context. By contrast, the PhD is more traditionally research-focused, emphasising theoretical development, methodological rigour, and the generation of new knowledge that advances a discipline more broadly. Both pathways are highly valuable, yet they differ in emphasis, one primarily practice-oriented, the other more research-intensive in its design and contribution.

This article, the second in the series, shifts focus from a Professional Doctorate to a recently completed PhD, showcasing the work of Dr Steven Schwartz, whose thesis, 'Understanding Lost Person Behaviour in Australian Wilderness Environments: Learning from the Experts', offers an important and original contribution to the field. While grounded in real-world experience, Dr Schwartz's research adopts a qualitative, theory-building approach that deepens our understanding of lost person behaviour from a human-centred perspective.

Together, the works featured across this series, spanning both Professional Doctorates and PhDs, represent contemporary contributions to the evolving discipline of emergency and disaster management. They reflect the growing maturity of the field, where practitioner insight and academic research combine to address complex challenges. Through this series, we continue to highlight the depth, diversity, and relevance of doctoral research being undertaken within our professional community, and to reinforce its importance in strengthening the capability and future direction of the sector.

Understanding lost person behaviour in wilderness environments: the work of Dr Steven Schwartz

John Moy MAIES

AIES President Queensland/Northern Territory Division

with reference to the research of



Dr Steven Schwartz

B.Bus, PgDip StratMan, M.M.S (Hons), PhD

Introduction - Why Lost Person Behaviour Matters

Across Australia and internationally, wilderness environments continue to attract increasing numbers of recreational users seeking adventure, wellbeing, and connection with nature. While the vast majority of these experiences are safe and fulfilling, a small but significant number result in individuals becoming lost—triggering complex, resource-intensive search and rescue (SAR) operations and, in some cases, tragic outcomes.

Lost person incidents are not new. However, what is changing is the scale, complexity, and human impact of these events. For emergency services, these incidents demand

rapid deployment, inter-agency coordination, and high operational costs. For those who become lost—and their families—the experience can be deeply traumatic.

Despite the operational sophistication of modern search and rescue, much of the research in this field has historically focused on the searcher perspective: probability theory, search patterns, terrain analysis, and resource deployment. Comparatively little attention has been given to the lived experience of the lost individual.

It is this critical gap that underpins the doctoral research of Dr Steven Schwartz, whose work offers a significant shift toward user-centred understanding in emergency and disaster management.



We are increasingly effective at finding lost people—but we understand far less about what it means to be lost.

A Practitioner-Scholar Grounded in Experience

Dr Steven Schwartz brings a rare combination of lived operational experience and academic rigour to his research. A lifelong outdoor enthusiast, his early experiences exploring the wilderness landscapes of New Zealand evolved into formal service through the Royal New Zealand Infantry Regiment, followed by continued engagement in Australia with the Queensland State Emergency Service (SES) in various roles, including most recently as Local Controller. Now based in Cairns, Dr Schwartz remains an active SES member, contributing to search and rescue operations across Far North Queensland. Alongside this, he serves as a lecturer in disaster and emergency management at CQ University, shaping the next generation of practitioners. This dual identity, practitioner and researcher, is central to the depth and applicability of his research.

The Research Problem: Moving Beyond the Searcher Lens

Traditional lost person behaviour (LPB) research has largely relied on quantitative, statistical models, often categorising lost individuals into demographic groups and predicting likely locations based on patterns. While highly valuable operationally, these approaches tend to overlook the human experience of becoming lost.

Dr Schwartz identified a fundamental issue: "We are increasingly effective at finding lost people—but we understand far less about what it means to be lost."

Through qualitative research involving individuals who had experienced being lost in Australian wilderness environments, his study sought to answer key questions:

- How do lost events actually unfold from the perspective of the individual?
- What factors contribute to becoming lost?
- Where are the opportunities to reduce harm and trauma?

Defining the 'Lost Wilderness Tourist'

One of Dr Schwartz's key contributions is the development of a clear and practical definition: "A lost wilderness tourist is a person who has entered a wilderness area in pursuit of leisure or pleasure and is unable to reach safety due to geographical disorientation, physical entrapment, or both." This definition is important because it distinguishes recreational users from other missing person categories, it recognises both cognitive (disorientation) and physical (being stuck) dimensions and it supports more targeted planning, prevention, and response strategies

Understanding the Lost Event: A Six-Phase Model

A central innovation in Dr Schwartz's research is the identification of six distinct phases that characterise lost person incidents.

1. Pre-Event Phase

This includes background factors such as planning, experience level, equipment, and risk awareness. Poor preparation often lays the foundation for later problems.

2. Pre-Wilderness Phase

The transition from normal life into the wilderness environment. Decisions made here—route choice, timing, communication—can significantly influence risk.

3. Trigger Phase

The point at which the individual becomes lost. This may result from navigational error, environmental conditions, injury, or unexpected events.

4. Lived Lost Experience

This is the core human experience, and it is characterised by confusion, fear, decision-making under stress, and attempts to self-rescue.

continued on page 17 →

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5. Rescue Phase

The involvement of search and rescue agencies. This phase includes detection, location, and physical recovery.

6. Recovery Phase

Post-rescue impacts, including physical recovery, psychological effects, and reintegration.

Why This Matters for Emergency Services

This phased model represents a significant advancement in understanding lost person incidents because it moves beyond static analysis and frames these events as dynamic, evolving processes involving multiple stakeholders.

1. Improving Prevention Strategies

By identifying risks in the pre-event and pre-wilderness phases, agencies can:

- Enhance public education campaigns
- Promote better trip planning and risk awareness
- Tailor messaging to specific user groups

2. Supporting Decision-Making During Incidents

Understanding how individuals behave when lost provides insights into:

- Likely movement patterns
- Decision-making under stress
- Behavioural responses such as “panic travel” or sheltering

3. Reducing Trauma

Importantly, Dr Schwartz’s research highlights opportunities to minimise psychological harm, not just achieve successful rescue outcomes.

A Shift Toward Human-Centred Emergency Management

At its core, this research reflects a broader evolution within emergency and disaster management: a shift from purely operational efficiency toward human-centred

Understanding the human experience of being lost is just as important as refining how we search.

practice. By integrating insights from Disaster management theory, Tourism studies and behavioural science, Dr Schwartz demonstrates how interdisciplinary approaches can deepen understanding and improve outcomes.

This aligns with wider trends across the profession, including recognition of lived experience as valuable data, emphasis on community-centred resilience and the growing importance of qualitative, practitioner-informed research.

Applications Beyond Wilderness Tourism

While focused on wilderness users, the implications of this research extend more broadly. Dr Schwartz’s models have potential application across a range of vulnerable groups, including children, people with cognitive impairment and importantly, individuals living with dementia.

Understanding how these groups experience disorientation and decision-making under stress opens pathways for improved search strategies, targeted prevention programs and ultimately better support for families and carers.

The Value of Practitioner-Led Research

Like the work of Dr Russell Dippy highlighted in the previous edition, this research underscores the importance of practitioner-led doctoral study in advancing the field. Professional doctorates and applied PhDs enable experienced practitioners to:

- Investigate complex and real-world problems
- Generate evidence grounded in practice
- Translate research into practical, actionable outcomes

Dr Schwartz’s work is a strong example of how operational insight and academic inquiry can combine to produce meaningful contributions to the discipline.

Reflections on the Doctoral Journey

Dr Schwartz characterises the PhD journey as both demanding and deeply rewarding—less a sprint than an endurance expedition requiring sustained effort, resilience, and commitment. Reflecting on his experience, he emphasises that success is often grounded in a genuine passion for the topic, as it is this intrinsic motivation that carries candidates through the inevitable challenges and periods of doubt.

Progress, Steve notes, is rarely linear. Instead, it is incremental, built over time through persistence and steady application rather than sudden breakthroughs. Along the way, many candidates encounter feelings of imposter syndrome; however, Dr Schwartz is clear that acceptance into a doctoral program is itself evidence of capability, and those feelings, though common, should not be allowed to undermine confidence.

He also highlights the importance of maintaining humility and curiosity, particularly in qualitative research where

openness to new perspectives and critical self-reflection are essential. Ultimately, he views the doctoral experience as transformative, not only in terms of academic achievement, but in the way it reshapes how individuals think, question, and engage with the world around them.

These reflections will resonate strongly with many in the emergency management sector, particularly those balancing demanding operational roles with academic ambitions, and underscore the value of perseverance and purpose in pursuing advanced study.

Looking Forward: Strengthening the Evidence Base

As lost person incidents continue to occur across Australia’s diverse landscapes, the need for evidence-informed approaches becomes increasingly important. Dr Schwartz’s research contributes to this by:

- Expanding theoretical understanding
- Providing practical models for application
- Highlighting opportunities for prevention and harm reduction

For agencies, policymakers, and practitioners, the message is clear. Understanding the human experience of being lost is just as important as refining how we search.

Conclusion

Dr Steven Schwartz’s doctoral research marks an important step forward in the study of lost-person behaviour. By shifting the focus from purely operational models to the lived experience of those involved, his work offers valuable insights for improving prevention, response, and recovery. In doing so, it reinforces a broader truth within emergency and disaster management. Effective practice is not only about systems and processes, it’s about people. ●

Author Bio

John Moy is the current president of the Queensland NT division of the AIES. He is a lecturer in emergency and disaster management at CQ University with professional experience across emergency management, public safety, leadership, and vocational education. With a strong interest in practitioner-led research, he is committed to supporting

professionalisation within the sector. John is currently completing his own professional doctoral studies examining the future of emergency services volunteerism in Australia. He is currently developing the VolunTier Framework which seeks to address the challenge rapidly declining emergency service volunteering in Australia.

Introducing the Rural Resilience Alignment Framework (RRAF)

Strengthening Alignment Between Communities, Systems and Decision-Making



Karen van Huizen MAIES

Emergency Management Practitioner | Rural Resilience Specialist | Farmer

Introduction

Across Australia and internationally, communities are facing increasing complexity from interconnected pressures including natural hazards, climate variability, economic disruption, infrastructure vulnerability, workforce pressures, rising insurance costs, social isolation, and changing patterns of regional development.

In rural and regional communities, these pressures are rarely experienced in isolation. Instead, they interact across agriculture, emergency management, health, planning, infrastructure, insurance, housing, local economies and community wellbeing. While individual systems often operate effectively within their own responsibilities, the interaction between systems can create challenges for coordination, timing and decision-making.

At the same time, preparedness within communities is increasing. Individuals, businesses and communities are becoming more aware of their risks, vulnerabilities and interdependencies. Through lived experience, local knowledge and preparedness activities, communities often identify emerging risks and practical solutions early.

A rural property owner may know a bridge is vulnerable before a flood occurs. They may identify practical mitigation actions, but implementing those

Rather than replacing existing frameworks, systems or governance structures, RRAF provides an alignment approach that strengthens how communities, institutions and decision-making systems connect and respond to emerging risks over time.

actions may require interaction with planning systems, insurers, infrastructure authorities, funding programs and emergency management arrangements. Each system may operate effectively within its own remit, yet collectively the pathway to action can remain unclear. RRAF was developed to better understand and address these types of alignment challenges.

However, a consistent

pattern has emerged across preparedness, response and recovery environments:

- communities are often able to identify risks and potential actions earlier than systems are able to align around them. This creates a gap between community insight and system coordination.

In many cases, communities may already understand emerging risks, vulnerabilities and practical mitigation opportunities before broader recovery, funding or governance systems are able to respond cohesively. This can create a disconnect between preparedness and the systems responsible for supporting longer-term adaptation, mitigation and recovery. As a result, opportunities for earlier action may be delayed even where risks are already visible at community level.

The Rural Resilience Alignment Framework (RRAF) was developed to better understand and address this challenge.

Rather than replacing existing frameworks, systems or governance structures,

RRAF provides an alignment approach that strengthens how communities, institutions and decision-making systems connect and respond to emerging risks over time.

The framework focuses on improving visibility, coordination, navigation and alignment across interconnected systems, supporting earlier and more locally informed action before impacts escalate.

What is the Rural Resilience Alignment Framework (RRAF)?

The Rural Resilience Alignment Framework (RRAF) is a practical framework designed to strengthen alignment between:

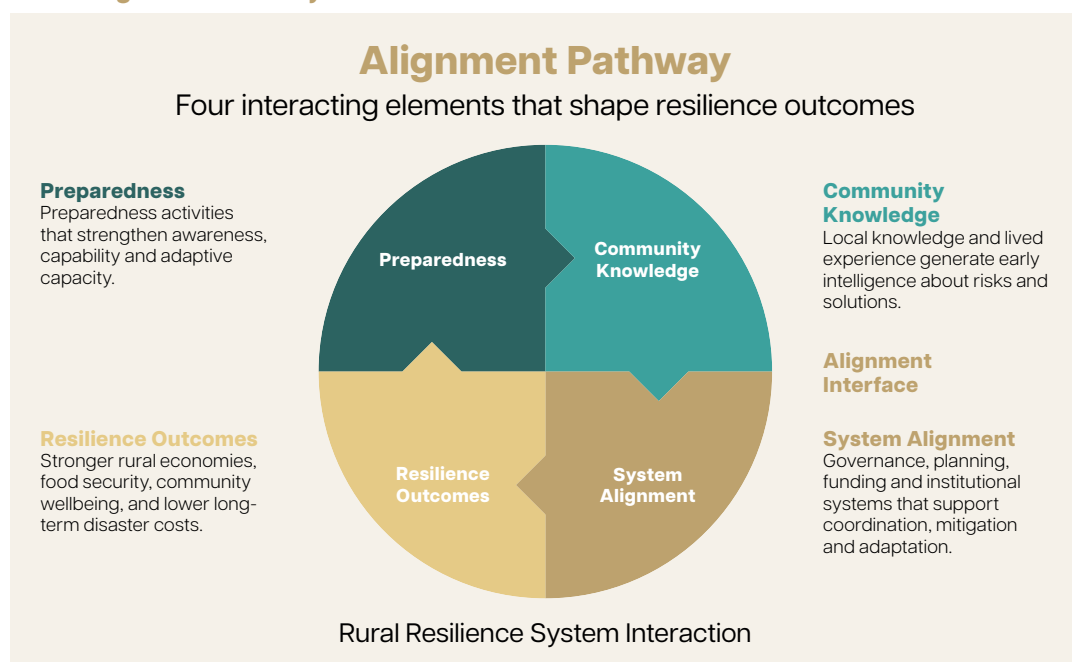
- preparedness,
- community knowledge,
- institutional systems,
- and decision-making pathways.

The framework recognises that resilience outcomes are shaped not only by individual systems, but by how systems interact.

RRAF positions community not as the end-user of resilience systems, but as an important source of early intelligence about emerging risk, vulnerability and potential solutions.

Prepared communities generate valuable local insight through lived experience, adaptation, observation and practical problem-solving. The role of systems is not simply to respond after disruption

Figure 1
RRAF Alignment Pathway



occurs, but to recognise, connect and enable action based on this insight where possible.

The framework supports stronger alignment between:

- local knowledge,
- operational systems,
- planning processes,
- governance structures,
- funding pathways,
- and decision-making environments.

This enables earlier identification of barriers, more coordinated responses across sectors, and improved visibility of how risks are experienced at community level.

Why Alignment Matters

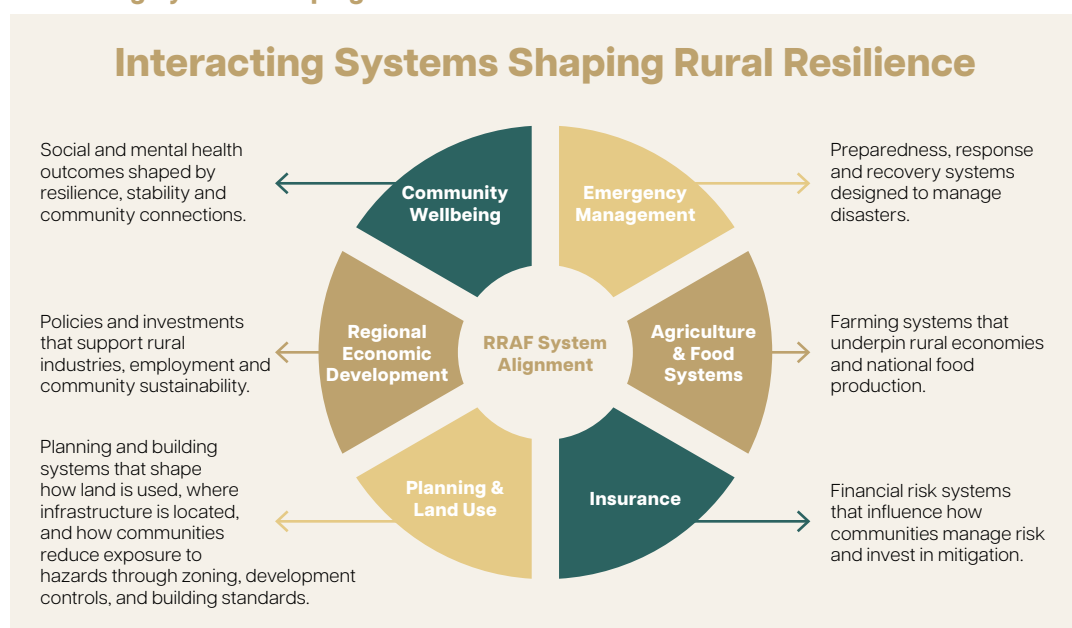
Many resilience systems are designed to operate within specific legislative, operational and funding environments. Emergency management, agriculture, planning, infrastructure, health, insurance and regional development all have legitimate responsibilities, processes and decision-making structures.

However, communities experience these systems collectively rather than individually.

During disruption, households and communities are often required to navigate multiple systems simultaneously while also managing practical realities such as:

- protecting livelihoods,
- maintaining access,
- supporting family members,

Figure 2
Interacting Systems Shaping Rural Resilience



- caring for livestock,
- managing financial pressures,
- or responding to infrastructure loss.

In these situations, the challenge is not always a lack of support within individual systems, but the difficulty of coordinating across multiple systems operating independently.

In many cases, communities may already understand emerging risks, vulnerabilities and practical mitigation

opportunities before broader recovery, funding or governance systems are able to respond cohesively. This creates what is described within the framework as the response–recovery gap, where preparedness and local awareness begin to outpace the ability of interconnected systems to align around early action.

This can create:

- delays in action,
- duplication,
- gaps in coordination,

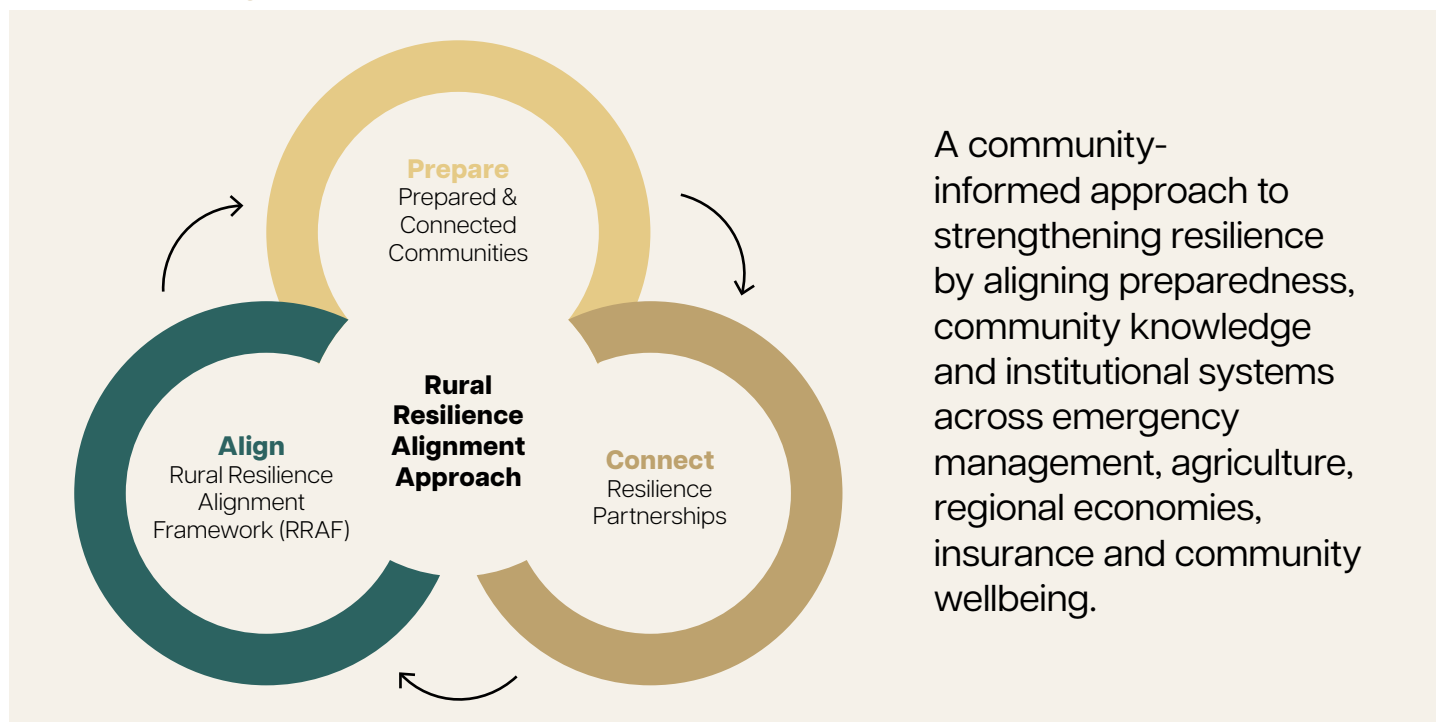
- administrative burden,
- and missed opportunities for early mitigation.

RRAF approaches resilience as an alignment and navigation challenge across interconnected systems.

The framework focuses on improving how systems connect, communicate and respond across local, regional and state environments.

continued on page 20 →

Figure 3

Rural Resilience Alignment Approach**A Framework That Builds on Existing Systems**

The Rural Resilience Alignment Framework (RRAF) is designed to complement and strengthen existing resilience, preparedness, recovery and governance frameworks.

RRAF aligns strongly with:

- the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction,
- the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework,
- State Emergency Management arrangements,
- community resilience approaches,
- adaptive governance principles,
- place-based planning approaches,
- and regional resilience initiatives.

The framework does not seek to replace existing systems or create parallel governance structures.

Instead, it functions as an alignment layer that helps improve:

- coordination,
- visibility,
- communication,
- escalation pathways,
- and system responsiveness across sectors and levels of decision-making.

This supports more connected and efficient approaches to resilience-building over time.

The Core Components of RRAF

The framework is built around several interconnected components that support ongoing alignment between communities and systems.

1. Preparedness and Community Intelligence

Preparedness activities strengthen awareness, capability and local problem-solving.

Through this process, communities generate detailed understanding of:

- local risks,
- vulnerabilities,
- dependencies,
- and practical mitigation opportunities.

This information forms an important source of early resilience intelligence.

Prepared communities often identify emerging risks earlier than systems align around them.

2. Municipal Resilience Partnerships

Municipal Resilience Partnerships provide structured spaces where:

- community members,
- local government,
- emergency services,
- planners,
- infrastructure providers,

Rather than relying solely on top-down consultation, RRAF supports continuous feedback and alignment pathways across multiple levels of governance.

- agriculture,
- health,
- insurers,
- and other relevant sectors can work together to improve alignment around identified risks and opportunities.

These partnerships support:

- cross-sector communication,
- earlier visibility of barriers,
- shared understanding,
- and coordinated problem-solving.

Importantly, they operate as standing structures that adapt over time rather than temporary post-event committees.

3. Recovery and Resilience Navigation

RRAF recognises that navigating systems during disruption can create significant cognitive, administrative and coordination burden for affected individuals and communities.

Navigation functions support communities to:

- understand pathways,
- coordinate across systems,
- identify barriers,
- connect with appropriate services,
- and escalate issues where required.

At the same time, these roles provide valuable visibility into how systems interact in practice, helping identify recurring areas of friction and opportunities for improvement.

4. Regional Alignment Pathways

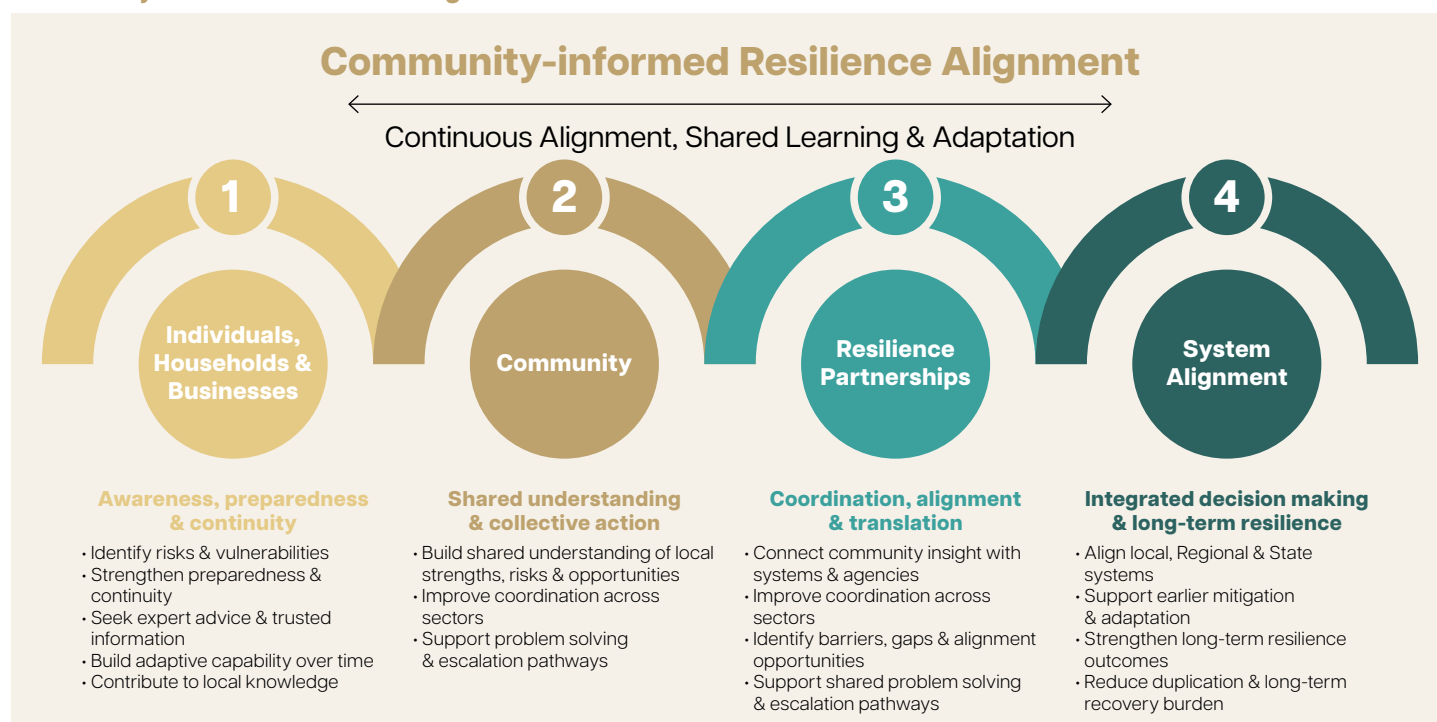
The framework supports stronger two-way connection between:

- community,
- municipal,
- regional,
- and state systems.

This enables local insight to inform regional and state-level

Figure 4

Community-Informed Resilience Alignment



decision-making while also improving the ability of broader systems to communicate clearly with communities.

Rather than relying solely on top-down consultation, RRAF supports continuous feedback and alignment pathways across multiple levels of governance.

Applying the Framework

RRAF is designed to be adaptable across different local, regional and organisational environments. Implementation may vary depending on local priorities, governance structures and available capability.

The framework may support:

- local government resilience planning,
- resilience partnerships and cross-sector coordination,
- preparedness and adaptation initiatives,
- recovery and resilience navigation functions,
- regional collaboration pathways,
- and place-based resilience approaches.

Rather than prescribing a single model, RRAF provides an alignment approach that can evolve over time through practical application, collaboration and shared learning.

Moving Beyond Emergency Management Alone

While the framework aligns strongly with emergency management systems, RRAF is not limited to disasters alone.

The framework recognises that resilience is shaped by the interaction between many systems over time, including:

- agriculture,
- housing,
- infrastructure,
- planning,
- insurance,
- economic development,
- social connection,
- climate adaptation,
- health and wellbeing,
- and emergency management.

Disasters often expose vulnerabilities that already exist within these broader systems.

By strengthening alignment earlier, communities and institutions may be better positioned to:

- reduce escalation of known risks,
- support continuity,
- strengthen local adaptability,
- and reduce long-term recovery demand.

This positions resilience not simply as disaster response capability, but as the ongoing ability of communities and systems to adapt, coordinate and function under changing conditions.

The Long-Term Vision

The long-term aim of the Rural Resilience Alignment Framework is to support:

- stronger local resilience,
- more connected governance,
- improved system coordination,
- and earlier action on emerging risks.

The framework seeks to strengthen resilience by improving how existing systems interact rather than creating additional layers of complexity.

Through practical demonstration, partnership development and ongoing refinement, RRAF aims to support scalable approaches that can operate across:

- local,
- regional,
- state,
- and potentially national environments.

At its core, the framework is based on a simple principle:

- resilience is strengthened when communities, systems and decision-making structures remain connected and aligned over time.

That alignment creates the conditions for earlier action, stronger adaptation and more sustainable long-term resilience outcomes.

RRAF is intended to evolve through practical application, collaboration and shared learning across communities, sectors and systems over time. ●

Author Bio

Karen van Huizen (MAIES) is an emergency management practitioner and community resilience specialist with experience across preparedness, response coordination, and disaster recovery. Drawing on both professional practice and lived experience as a farmer in rural Australia, her work focuses on strengthening alignment between communities and the systems designed to support them.

Karen is the developer of the Rural Resilience Alignment Framework (RRAF), a series examining how system alignment, funding structures, and workforce design influence the ability to act on known risks. She is also co-developer of the First 72 Hours Program, supporting individuals and communities to strengthen preparedness and early decision-making.

Canadian Risk and Hazards Network Symposium

In May, I attended the 2026 Canadian Risk and Hazards Network (CRHNet) Symposium in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada (Amiskwaciwâskahikan).



David Parsons ESM FAIES CESM
AIES President



This year's theme, Living the Lessons: From Impact to Insight, focused on turning disaster experience into practical improvements for communities, organisations and emergency management agencies.

Hosted by the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology Disaster and Emergency Management Faculty, the symposium was a great mix of speakers, workshops and posters. Themes that emerged included:

- What does an increasing community precarity mean for emergency managers?
- How do we create a sustainable professional workforce?
- Has the term resilience had its time?
- Politics is driving emergency management to be a centralised system, but is this destroying the decentralised capability needed in big disasters?

There was a highly engaging workshop on the future of disaster risk reduction. Some of the themes explored that will impact the future of our work included:

- Disinformation and AI
- Declining societal trust
- Societal fragmentation
- Economic constraint
- Geopolitics
- Data overload
- Contraction of insurance

It was great to see Todd Miller MAIES CESM presenting on his PhD research looking at emergency management as a complex adaptive system and the importance of relationships.

One of the most impressive presentations was delivered by Jasper Mayor Richard Ireland. Mayor Ireland gave an amazing presentation on the Jasper wildfire event. The presentation covered the response and recovery aspects of the wildfire. Mayor Ireland also spoke about the many mitigation and preparedness lessons.

→ (L-R) AIES President David Parsons and Jasper Mayor Richard Ireland.



→ (L-R) AIES President David Parsons and Alberta Emergency Management Agency Plan Manager Tim Coulter.



Key issues included the effectiveness of Unified Command that was established based on well-developed and trusted relationships. Effective planning and exercising also played a key role. There were many lessons for mitigation related to building codes and property management. Mayor Ireland and other speakers spoke

about the recovery efforts and programmes implemented.

This symposium was a great chance to hear from a number of speakers about First Nations emergency management issues in Canada.

There were good examples of increasing partnerships in emergency management but as always, there is a long way to go.



→ Alberta PECC.



→ EOC tabard worn by cultural knowledge holders.

← AIES member Todd Miller.



→ Mexican restaurant in Vancouver.



← (L-R) Rachael Oliver and David Parsons.

There was good awareness of the working being done with cultural burning practices in Australia and of the work being undertaken through the Firesticks Alliance.

The following themes came through strongly:

- The need to listen to Indigenous science
- The need to listen
- The need to share power
- The need to recognise family not hierarchy

The tabard pictured top right is worn by Indigenous women in the Emergency Operating Centre (EOC) as they hold the cultural knowledge and provide advice on critical food sources, medicinal areas and cultural sites of importance.

As in Australia and New Zealand, there is still a long way to go to build the partnership between colonial emergency management thinking and First Nations that needs to become the norm.

It was great to be able to donate a copy of my latest book – *Decision Making Under Pressure* – as a prize in the poster display. This was won by Rachael Oliver from the Canadian Red Cross.

Rachael has been supporting the recovery of Small Point–Adam's Cove in Newfoundland and Labrador following the August 2024

wildfires, which destroyed 15% of the community's housing stock.

This was the community's first disaster experience. It was geographically remote, resource-constrained, and had limited organisational capacity. Leadership rested with part time volunteer councillors already stretched from response with no dedicated recovery experience or structures.

The Canadian Red Cross is supporting the community through their recovery, but the central challenge was clear: how do you enable meaningful community leadership when capacity is limited, but responsibility is immediate?

Rachael has a full day with three flights to get from her home in British Columbia to work with her amazing community.

While in Edmonton we took the opportunity to visit the Alberta Emergency Management Agency where we found Queenslander Tim Coulter. As the Plans Manager for the Alberta Emergency Management Agency, Tim leads a team of dedicated Emergency Management planning specialists in the preparation of provincial level emergency management responses. This includes responses to wildfires, major flood events, drought management,

ice jams and other large-scale emergencies. When not activated, Tim is responsible for overseeing the preparation and implementation of the Business Continuity plans across the Government of Alberta.

Tim very kindly gave us a tour of the Provincial Emergency Coordination Centre (PECC). The PECC is a large facility with seating in the main and work rooms for more than 100 people.

On the way to Alberta, Todd and I spent a day in Vancouver adjusting to the time zone change and catching up with colleagues. Being Mother's Day, restaurants were busy for lunch, but we were lucky to find bar stools in a very genuine Mexican restaurant. So, an Aussie and a Kiwi sat with dozens of people celebrating together by enjoying food from a menu mostly written in Spanish and great live music. ●

If you would like to apply for a future overseas study tour please email
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Living the lessons: From impact to insight

A reflection on a Canadian study tour, supported by the Australasian Institute of Emergency Services



Todd Miller MAIES CESM

Associate Director – Resilience at Auckland University of Technology

When the Australasian Institute of Emergency Services (AIES) awarded me a \$500 (AUD) scholarship towards travel to Canada, I could not have known that the trip would open with a small lesson in the very thing our profession exists to manage: disruption.

The plan was simple enough – Auckland to Edmonton (via Vancouver). The reality proved less so. A lightning strike to the allocated aircraft forced a reroute via Hawaii and an unscheduled departure a day ahead of schedule. And so I found myself dialling into an incident management team meeting from the sands of Waikiki Beach, laptop balanced on my knees with beach views. It was a fitting reminder that in our line of work the office travels with you, and that adaptability is often the first competency tested.

Vancouver: partnership and place

Arriving in Vancouver, I had the privilege of meeting AIES President Dave Parsons, and Greg Solecki from the First Nations Health Authority. Our conversation turned quickly to the intersection of disaster and emergency management (DEM) and Indigenous partnerships – how authority, knowledge and care are shared, and how genuine partnership reshapes the way communities prepare for and recover from disaster. It was an early signal of a theme that would recur throughout the trip: that effective emergency management is, at its heart, relational work.

HazNet: living the lessons

Dave and I then flew on to Edmonton for the Canadian Risk and Hazard Network Symposium (HazNet), hosted over three days at the Northern Alberta Institute of Technology (NAIT). The programme blended keynotes, lightning talks, workshops, posters and roundtables, each anchored to the recurring theme – “living the lessons, from impact to insight.” It is a deceptively simple phrase, but one that captured the spirit of the gathering: a community determined to turn hard-won experience into practice.

For a sector that so often runs on goodwill and improvisation, the growing emphasis on recognised pathways and shared standards is a welcome maturation.



ome to the 2026 CRHNet Symposium!



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Among the moments that stayed with me was the keynote delivered by the Mayor of Jasper, Richard Ireland, who spoke with quiet authority about the devastating wildfires that struck his community. His reflections on the criticality of collaboration and unified command were all the more powerful for being lived rather than theorised; here was leadership shaped by consequence.

The symposium also showcased a rich variety of frameworks, both theoretical and practical. Amber Ruston of Traverse Analytics

presented the VEC Resilience Framework, an inventive approach that weaves together sports visualisation, disaster ecology and cultural intelligence. From another perspective, Ernie Louttit and Tiffany Leung delivered a systems-based approach to embedding Indigenous leadership and cultural safety in humanitarian evacuation management – a session that, once again, placed partnership and cultural safety at the centre rather than the margins of practice.

Threaded throughout were numerous academic stands sharing competency and credentialing opportunities, all pointing towards the steady professionalisation of our field. For a sector that so often runs on goodwill and improvisation, the growing emphasis on recognised pathways and shared standards is a welcome maturation.

↑ Todd Miller.

← Amber Ruston presenting at the symposium.

continued on page 26 →



↑ (L-R) AIES President David Parsons and Todd Miller at the NAIT data visualisation lab.

→ (L-R) Todd Miller and AIES President David Parsons.

← (L-R) Todd Miller and Alberta Emergency Management Agency Plan Manager Tim Coulter.



Behind the scenes

The learning did not stop when the formal programme ended. We were given the opportunity to experience the NAIT data visualisation lab – a smart, interactive coordination room blending touch-screen tables and data projections, the kind of environment that turns information into shared situational awareness. We also visited the Alberta office of the Canadian Meteorological Service, where we explored their hazard mapping and warning processes, and saw first-hand how forecasting science is translated into actionable public warnings.

The tour rounded out with a visit to the Alberta provincial coordination centre, where the Planning Function Manager – an ex-Australian, as it happened – showed us through their operation and reflected on the similarities between AIIMS and their Incident Command System. There is something quietly

reassuring about recognising your own doctrine in another jurisdiction, on the far side of the world; it speaks to a shared professional language that crosses borders.

Sharing the research

Amongst all of this were countless opportunities to connect, network and share – the informal conversations that are so often where the real value of these gatherings lies. I was also fortunate to present my own doctoral research, having secured the final presenter slot of the symposium. I spoke to Disaster and Emergency Management as a complex adaptive system, and to the need to understand the network of actors and relationships within it, and to deliberately create opportunities for inclusion and collaboration. It was heartening to see many heads nod across the room – a small but meaningful sign that the ideas resonated with practitioners grappling with the same complexity in their own systems.

With thanks

I am grateful to AIES for the scholarship that made this journey possible, and to Dave Parsons and the many colleagues, hosts and new acquaintances who made it so rewarding. I returned home with a notebook full of frameworks and a fuller appreciation of just how much we have in common with our Canadian counterparts – and how much we still have to learn from one another. If there is a single lesson I will carry forward, it is the one the symposium named so well: the work is never finished at impact; the value lies in the insight we are willing to draw from it. ●



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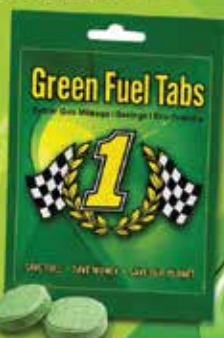
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Groundbreaking research delivers Australia's first framework for tracking trauma exposure

Australia's fire and emergency service agencies have a new framework to help them better understand and respond to the psychological impacts of trauma exposure among their workforce.

Natural Hazards Research Australia

Unveiled at the Natural Hazards Research Forum 2026 in Adelaide, the *Good Practice Principles for Tracking Potentially Traumatic Event Exposure and Organisational Responses in Emergency Services Guide* provides what researchers describe as Australia's first nationally endorsed framework for tracking workers' exposure to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) and the organisational support that follows.

Developed through the *Best Practice for Tracking and Responding to Potentially Traumatic Event Exposure* project, the initiative was led by Phoenix Australia – Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health and funded by Natural Hazards Research Australia.

The guide has been formally endorsed by the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) Mental Health and Wellbeing Working Group and approved by the AFAC Council, giving it sector-wide standing across Australian and New Zealand fire and emergency services.

The project addresses a challenge long recognised across the sector. Emergency service workers, including firefighters, State Emergency Service volunteers, paramedics and rescue personnel, are routinely exposed to potentially traumatic events as part of their work. These experiences can include attending incidents involving death, serious injury, significant destruction and life-threatening situations.

While agencies have long understood the psychological demands associated with emergency response work, the project found there has been no nationally agreed, evidence-based framework to guide how organisations track worker exposure to potentially traumatic events or assess whether their support systems are achieving their intended outcomes.

Researchers say approaches have varied considerably between agencies, creating challenges for consistency, evaluation and continuous improvement.

The newly released Good Practice Principles seek to address that gap by providing organisations with a shared foundation for decision-making while allowing flexibility for different operational environments, workforce structures and organisational needs.

Rather than establishing prescriptive standards, the framework outlines principles that agencies can use to review, develop and strengthen their own systems.

A key feature of the framework is its focus on both exposure and response.

The guide recognises that recording exposure to potentially traumatic events is only one part of supporting worker wellbeing. Equally important is understanding what organisational actions occur after an exposure is identified, including how support is offered, delivered and evaluated.

↑ The project's aim is to identify best practices for tracking fire and emergency service workers' exposure to potentially traumatic events (PTEs) and organisational responses to PTE exposure.

According to the project team, this dual focus is intended to help organisations connect information about worker exposure with meaningful and timely support measures.

Lead researcher Alexandra Howard from Phoenix Australia said the framework was developed in close consultation with emergency service organisations and reflects the realities of frontline emergency response work.

"Emergency service workers put themselves in harm's way to protect our communities, and they deserve organisations that are equally committed to protecting them," Ms Howard said.

"This research gives agencies, for the first time, an agreed, evidence-informed foundation for how to track trauma exposure, allowing them to use this information to





Orion Media Group / Shutterstock.com

Emergency service workers put themselves in harm's way to protect our communities, and they deserve organisations that are equally committed to protecting them.

make better decisions and investments that genuinely support worker wellbeing.

"It has been built with the sector, and it reflects the sector's real experience and real needs."

The endorsement by AFAC is expected to encourage agencies across the sector to review their existing approaches and consider how they align with the principles outlined in the guide.

The framework is also intended to evolve over time.

Project recommendations include monitoring implementation across agencies and undertaking future reviews to capture lessons learned and incorporate emerging evidence and practice developments.

Natural Hazards Research Australia Chief Executive Officer Andrew Gissing said the project demonstrates how research can

be translated into practical outcomes for emergency service organisations and their workforce.

"Natural Hazards Research Australia was established to produce research that makes a real difference to real people," Mr Gissing said.

"This project is exactly that.

"The mental health of our emergency service workers is not a peripheral concern – it is central to the resilience of our entire emergency management system.

"When we support our people better, we protect communities better.

"We are proud to have funded this work and to see it embedded in national practice through AFAC's endorsement."

The release of the Good Practice Principles comes amid growing attention on psychological health and wellbeing across emergency services, with agencies

increasingly focused on creating systems and processes that support workers throughout their careers.

For many organisations, the guide provides an opportunity to assess existing practices against a nationally endorsed framework and identify opportunities for improvement.

The project's Final Report and the *Good Practice Principles for Tracking Potentially Traumatic Event Exposure and Organisational Responses in Emergency Services Guide* are now available to agencies, with additional resources being developed to support self-assessment and systems improvement.

The research was presented at the Natural Hazards Research Forum 2026, held in Adelaide from 10–12 June, where researchers, practitioners and policymakers gathered to discuss how evidence-based research is informing emergency management practice across Australia. ●

Further information

The Good Practice Principles Guide and Final Report are available from Natural Hazards Research Australia
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Community-led recovery and resilience after the 2022 Lismore floods



Brody Wickham MAIES CESM

Bachelor of Emergency Management
student, Charles Sturt University
NSW Rural Fire Service

Disaster Event Overview

On 28 February 2022, Wilsons River at Lismore peaked at 14.37 metres, more than two metres above the previous record set in 1974 and well beyond the level the city's levee was built to contain (O'Kane & Fuller, 2022). The flood inundated the central business district, low-lying residential areas in South and North Lismore and surrounding towns including Murwillumbah, Coraki, Woodburn and Mullumbimby. Across the wider 2022 east coast event nine lives were lost in NSW, more than 1,600 homes were damaged in Lismore alone and approximately 30,000 residents were displaced (Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2022; O'Kane & Fuller, 2022). A second major flood three weeks later on 30th March struck a community still in clean-up and compounded the damage.

An atmospheric river system intensified by La Niña drove the hazard, combined with a saturated catchment. Climate change was a likely amplifier (Lawrence et al., 2022). Framing

the event as unprecedented obscures more than it explains. Rugendyke and Vanclay (2023) demonstrate that severe flooding has been a defining feature of the Richmond River basin since European settlement, with major events in 1861, 1887, 1893, 1954 and 1974. The 2022 flood exceeded earlier records in magnitude but was consistent with the region's hydrological history.

Lismore is increasingly seen as a warning of what climate-amplified flooding looks like in temperate Australia. The disaster tested the assumptions embedded in existing emergency management arrangements, exposed deep structural vulnerabilities and triggered the largest climate adaptation programme yet attempted in this country (NSW Reconstruction Authority [NSW RA], 2024). This article argues that the 2022 flood was not a natural disaster but the predictable collision of intensifying climate hazards with entrenched vulnerabilities.

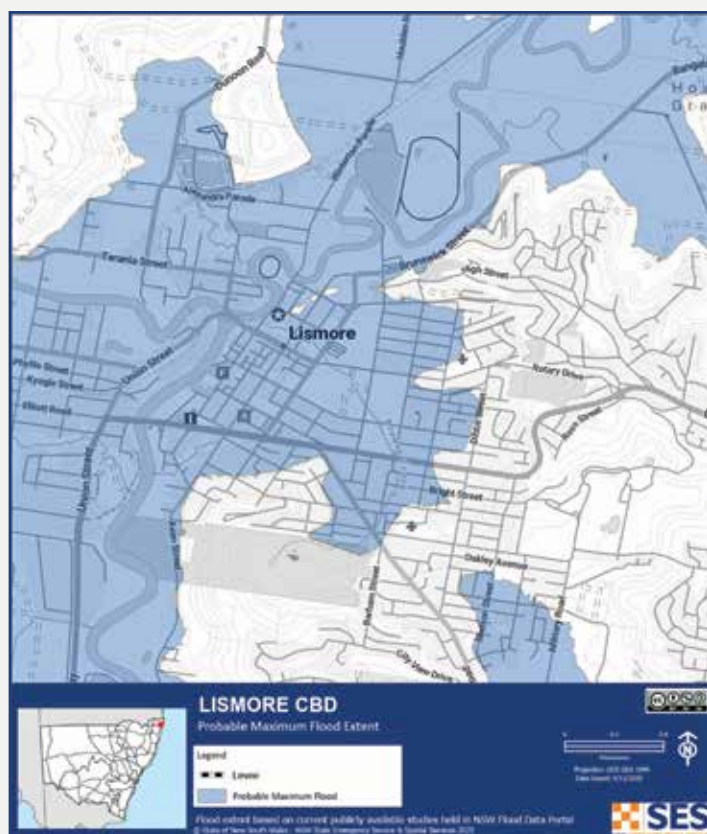


Figure 1. Probable Maximum Flood (PMF) extent for the Lismore CBD. The PMF defines the maximum extent of flood-prone land and is estimated at 16.55 m at the Wilsons River Rowing Club gauge. The 28th of February 2022 flood peaked at 14.37 m and inundated much of the area shown. Source: NSW State Emergency Service and Spatial Services (2025); flood extent based on publicly available studies in the NSW Flood Data Portal.

The recovery's most effective elements have been those led by community. Its most contested elements have been those led by formal government systems.

Social, Built, Economic and Natural Environment Analysis

Wisner et al.'s (2004) Pressure and Release model is useful here because it traces vulnerability through unsafe conditions, dynamic pressures and root causes rather than treating vulnerability as static. Applied to Lismore, the hazard interacted with a community whose vulnerabilities had been accumulating across all four environments for decades.

Pre-existing vulnerability landscape

The Northern Rivers has long been recognised as one of Australia's most flood-exposed and socioeconomically disadvantaged regions. Rolfe et al. (2020) used GIS analysis combined with the NSW

45 and Up Study to show that 82 per cent of residents within the 2017 Lismore town-centre flood footprint were in the lowest socioeconomic quintile, compared with 60 per cent across the broader Lismore flood-affected region and 47 per cent in Murwillumbah's flood-affected area, against 27 per cent regionally. Residents in flood-prone areas were also more likely to have pre-existing mental health conditions and poorer general health (Rolfe et al., 2020). The region also has higher proportions of older people, Aboriginal people and people with disability than NSW averages (Baillie et al., 2022). These were the unsafe conditions in place when the 2022 hazard arrived.

Natural environment

The flood inflicted significant ecological damage across the Wilsons River catchment. There was riverbank erosion, large landslips, sediment loads and inundation of agricultural land already stressed by

Black Summer-era impacts. Koala habitat in surrounding hills, already nationally listed as endangered, was further degraded by landslips and debris flows (Lawrence et al., 2022). Decades of catchment clearing and altered hydrology had reduced the landscape's capacity to absorb extreme rainfall. The natural environment was therefore both a victim of the flood and a contributor to the severity of damage downstream (Rugendyke & Vanclay, 2023).

Built environment

The Lismore CBD levee, designed to a 1974-era standard, was overtopped for the first time. The flood exceeded the engineering assumptions embedded in the city's land-use planning. More than 1,600 homes in Lismore alone were damaged or destroyed, with public housing and lower-cost rental stock in South Lismore disproportionately affected (O'Kane & Fuller, 2022). Critical infrastructure was severely compromised. Lismore Base Hospital's operating capacity was constrained, telecommunications and power failed when most needed and floodwaters cut off road access to the worst-affected neighbourhoods. The Inquiry found no evidence of extraordinary preparation or planning by NSW agencies in line with the identified heightened risk (HRW, 2022; O'Kane & Fuller, 2022). The deeper failure was that decades of development decisions had placed homes, businesses and a hospital in a high-consequence floodplain on the assumption that engineering would manage the risk.

Economic environment

Economic impacts cascaded from the built-environment failure. The Lismore CBD, the regional commercial centre, was largely inoperable for months. Insurance disputes emerged as a primary secondary stressor. Among flood-affected rural business owners in the Northern Rivers, those with unresolved claims had almost four times the odds of probable depression (adjusted OR 3.76; Fitzgerald et al., 2020). Across the broader flood-affected cohort, people whose lives had not returned to normal at six months reported markedly higher rates of continuing depression (Matthews et al., 2019).

Underinsurance and outright lack of insurance were widespread, reflecting affordability constraints and insurer withdrawal from high-risk postcodes. Agricultural producers across the region lost crops, livestock and access roads. The compounding effect of repeated floods in 2017 and then twice in 2022 has destabilised the long-term economic viability of parts of the floodplain (Rugendyke & Vanclay, 2023).

Social environment and differential vulnerability

The social environment is where compound vulnerability becomes most visible. O'Driscoll et al. (2025) found a 22.9 per cent increase in psychiatric inpatient admissions at Lismore Base Hospital in the twelve months after the flood, alongside an 18.2 per cent reduction in median admission length. Demand rose sharply while system capacity forced earlier discharges. Matthews et al. (2019) had already shown that, after the 2017 flood, people displaced for more than six months had double the probability of continuing PTSD, anxiety and depression symptoms. Those with three or more sites affected (home, business, community) had six times the odds of continuing PTSD.

Differential vulnerability ran through every dimension of the social impact. Baillie et al. (2022) document that people with disability and their carers were more likely to be flooded, more likely to remain displaced six months later and were systematically excluded from community-level disaster preparedness. HRW (2022) identified specific failures. Older residents in their 70s and 80s without smartphones could not access digital warnings. Auslan interpreters were absent from emergency communications. South Lismore residents who had moved their cars to higher ground earlier in the day were stranded once evacuation was finally ordered. Aboriginal communities, including the Bundjalung communities who own the Lismore-based *Koori Mail*, organised parallel response networks because formal systems did not adequately reach them. This pattern is

continued on page 36 →

documented across other recent Australian disasters (Williamson et al., 2020). Young people experienced significant mental health impacts under-recognised in earlier recovery framing (Luk & Longman, 2024). What 2022 revealed was a coupled system in which natural-environment degradation amplified built-environment failure, which produced economic collapse and deepened social and psychological harm. The heaviest weight fell on those least able to bear it.

Recovery Principles and Community Recovery Processes

Australia's National Principles for Disaster Recovery, endorsed by the Australian and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee, set six benchmarks for recovery (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience [AIDR], 2018). These are to understand the context, recognise complexity, use community-led approaches, coordinate all activities, communicate effectively and recognise and build capacity. Evaluating the Lismore recovery against these principles reveals an inverted pattern. Community-led recovery substantially outperformed formal recovery in the first weeks and months. Formal systems have come into their own only in the medium-term reconstruction phase.

The community-led dimension of the response was extraordinary. The civilian "tinny army" of Lismore residents with private boats conducted the bulk of rescues during the peak of the flood while emergency calls to the SES went unanswered for hours. The Inquiry concluded that community members' actions prevented the death toll from being significantly higher (O'Kane & Fuller, 2022; HRW, 2022). The *Koori Mail*, an Aboriginal-owned newspaper based in central Lismore, suspended publication for the first time in its 30-year history and converted its premises into the de facto recovery hub for the region, distributing food, supplies and direct cash aid for months. Resilient Lismore, a volunteer coordination platform, mobilised thousands of unpaid workers to clean out flood-damaged homes. These responses align with the principles of "community-led

→ Lismore 2022.



approaches" and "recognise and build capacity" but emerged from communities themselves rather than from formal recovery design.

The formal response failed several principles. The Inquiry described a "systemic failure" of warning and response, finding the SES unprepared for the scale of the event and Resilience NSW inadequate to coordinate recovery (O'Kane & Fuller, 2022). The agency was subsequently abolished and replaced by the NSW Reconstruction Authority, established under legislation in late 2022. Communication effectiveness, another of the six principles, broke down in critical respects. Warnings did not reach older residents without smartphones, Auslan was absent from public information and people with disability were not systematically identified or supported through the evacuation process (Baillie et al., 2022; HRW, 2022).

Sustainability integration into the recovery has been mixed. The \$880 million Resilient Homes Program, jointly funded by NSW and the Commonwealth, represents Australia's largest climate-adaptation initiative and a genuine attempt at managed retreat. By late 2025 more than 960 buyback offers had been made and over 780 homes settled, with many subsequently auctioned for relocation off the floodplain (NSW RA, 2024). This aligns with the Sendai

Framework's emphasis on reducing existing risk through adaptation rather than relying solely on response (United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction [UNDRR], 2015). The programme's reach has been uneven. Renters, who made up a significant proportion of those displaced, have been excluded from buyback compensation. Replacement land delivery through the Resilient Lands Program has lagged demand, with the first sites only progressing through 2026. Natural-environment recovery has been less prioritised than built-environment recovery.

Psychosocial dimensions of recovery have followed a pattern documented as the "funding cliff", in which short-term mental health and community support funding is withdrawn at twelve to eighteen months while need is still rising (Northern Rivers Community Foundation [NRCF], 2024). Specialist long-tail interventions, such as the Southern Cross University-led stepped care PTSD trial funded in 2024, arrived two years after the event. Equity outcomes have been similarly uneven. Williamson and Weir (2021) and the broader literature on Aboriginal-led recovery emphasise that government-delivered programmes often fail to recognise or fund Indigenous community organisations already doing the work. This pattern is visible in

the formal underfunding of the *Koori Mail*-led response despite its scale and effectiveness. The overall picture is of a recovery in which the National Principles were realised most fully by communities themselves, while formal systems exhibited the very gaps the principles were designed to address.

Resilience-Building Strategies

The four strategies below address vulnerabilities and recovery gaps identified in the preceding analysis. Each draws on evidence from the Lismore case and from comparable Australian and international scholarship. Each is intended to be feasible within the policy architecture now emerging through the State Disaster Mitigation Plan (NSW RA, 2024).

Strategy 1. Embed and resource Indigenous- and community-led recovery institutions as standing partners

The *Koori Mail* and Resilient Lismore demonstrated capability that government agencies did not, but did so on volunteer time and donated funds. A standing model with pre-disaster memoranda of understanding, predictable multi-year funding and formal seats at recovery coordination tables would convert episodic volunteer effort into reliable institutional



← North Lismore flooding.

David Lowe of SES NSW

capacity. This addresses the social-environment vulnerability documented by Williamson et al. (2020), who show that Aboriginal communities have been systematically marginalised from formal recovery governance despite consistently leading effective on-ground responses. Williamson and Weir (2021) endorse this as the central change required in Australian disaster policy. Implementation would draw on existing Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation models and would need to include cultural safety standards for evacuation centres, where racism toward Aboriginal residents has been documented in other recent disasters (Williamson et al., 2020).

Strategy 2. Person-centred preparedness and warning systems for at-risk groups

The Inquiry, HRW and Bailie et al. (2022) all identified the same pattern. People with disability, older residents and people without smartphones were systematically failed by the warning and evacuation system. The strategy here has three components. First, multi-channel and multi-format warnings, including Auslan, Easy Read, in-language and non-digital channels (radio, door-knocks, landline). Second, pre-disaster registration of mobility-restricted residents on a voluntary, locally held register.

Third, resourcing Disabled People's Organisations to lead person-centred preparedness conversations rather than designing preparedness for, rather than with, disabled people. This addresses Sendai Framework Priority 4 on enhancing preparedness (UNDRR, 2015) and the cost is modest relative to the human cost of the failures it addresses.

Strategy 3. Managed retreat with anti-displacement and ecological restoration provisions

Rugendyke and Vanclay (2023) argue that engineering solutions cannot future-proof Lismore against further catastrophic flooding and that planned withdrawal of critical services, commercial premises and vulnerable housing from the highest-risk parts of the floodplain is essential. The Resilient Homes Program is a starting point, but the strategy proposed here would extend it in three ways. First, equity provisions could include rental affordability covenants on Resilient Lands sites, replacement public housing on flood-safe land for displaced public housing tenants and structured assistance for renters who currently fall outside buyback eligibility. Second, ecological repurposing would convert vacated buyback land

to floodable greenspace, riparian restoration and engineered flood storage rather than holding it in indefinite limbo. Third, community-led design of the post-buyback landscape would let affected residents shape the future of places they have left. This strategy spans the built, economic and natural environments simultaneously and aligns with the IPCC AR6 emphasis on transformative adaptation (Lawrence et al., 2022). It is the most contested of the four because managed retreat carries genuine ethical weight. The response is not to avoid retreat but to design it so it does not deepen the inequalities the original disaster exposed.

Strategy 4. Long-tail psychosocial and economic recovery infrastructure

The mental health and economic impacts documented by O'Driscoll et al. (2025), Matthews et al. (2019) and the NRCF (2024) extend years past the event, but funding does not. The strategy is to embed multi-year (five-plus years) commitments for community-based mental health, financial counselling, insurance dispute advocacy and small-business recovery into the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements as a default, rather than requiring renewed political decisions every twelve months. Practical components include place-based recovery hubs

operating for at least five years post-event, ongoing funding for trauma-informed care via local providers including Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations and standing financial-counselling capacity that can mobilise rapidly. Success should be measured against concrete benchmarks such as sustained service uptake, time-to-resolution for insurance disputes and longitudinal mental-health outcomes, so that recovery infrastructure is wound back on evidence of community recovery rather than on exhausted political cycles. This addresses the social and economic vulnerabilities most strongly correlated with persistent psychological harm, including business income loss and unresolved insurance disputes (Matthews et al., 2019). The Reconstruction Authority's broader shift away from the historic 97-per-cent response, three-per-cent mitigation funding split provides the policy frame within which long-tail recovery can be re-budgeted (NSW RA, 2024).

Conclusion

The 2022 Lismore floods were the product of a hazard event interacting with vulnerabilities accumulated across decades of land-use, housing, infrastructure and service-system decisions. The recovery has been uneven and where it has worked it has typically been led by communities themselves rather than by formal agencies. Building genuine resilience for a future in which events like 2022 are likely to recur and intensify requires inverting the dominant model. This means placing community at the centre of recovery design, embedding equity and Indigenous leadership into preparedness institutions, treating managed retreat as an ethically serious adaptation rather than a last resort and committing long-term to the psychosocial and economic recovery work that current funding cycles cut short. The strategies proposed here are not radical. They are simply consistent with the evidence. ●

A full list of references is available by contacting
✉ editor@aies.net.au

Karijini National Park rescue

The dramatic rescue of an American tourist from a gorge in Karijini National Park has highlighted the best of inter-agency cooperation during visitor season.

Story and images courtesy of the WA Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions

Parks and Wildlife Service Rangers, St John WA paramedics and SES volunteers worked together for five hours to rescue the tourist from Joffre Gorge.

US Police Officer Antonio Fanning was hiking through the gorge last July when he fell around 8 metres and landed in the rocky pool below, suffering a fractured vertebra. Fortunately, four fellow hikers were nearby and provided first aid while raising the alarm.

The first on the scene were Parks and Wildlife Service Rangers, who were joined by St John WA and SES volunteers in what became a logistically challenging rescue.

After being placed carefully on a stretcher and winched up 60 metres to the top of the gorge, Officer Fanning was taken to hospital for treatment.

National Park Ranger Michael Bones said, "The response time from St John Ambulance and from the SES was incredible given where we are.

"Most of the people involved would be volunteers, people that have all worked a full day... they're coming out here and they're at Joffre Gorge in the middle of Karijini National Park 'til 10

Most of the people involved would be volunteers, people that have all worked a full day... they're coming out here and they're at Joffre Gorge in the middle of Karijini National Park 'til 10 at night helping someone that's got themselves in trouble.

at night helping someone that's got themselves in trouble.

"It's fantastic work and a real testament to all of the people that have come out and given up their time to help someone else."

continued on page 41 →







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Mr Fanning is a police officer assigned to a school in his home town of Auburn, Alabama. The community of Auburn raised funds to get Officer Fanning back to the United States on a flight.

Officer Fanning, who suffered a fractured vertebra, a head injury, a fractured wrist and dislocated finger, has now made a healthy recovery and has returned to work. Several months on, he's sent a special message to his WA rescuers.

"I want to thank everybody involved in my rescue," said Officer Fanning.

"I want to thank the Park Rangers, the emergency personnel, the whole volunteer crew that came out and rescued me that night. I appreciate everybody. Thank you Western Australia."

The incident is an excellent example of inter-agency collaboration to achieve a safe rescue. It was captured on camera by DBCA cameraman Miles Brotherson, who had been in Karijini National Park all day filming a conservation initiative when the emergency call came through just before dusk.

The resulting video will now be used for staff training and safety awareness and can be viewed on the @ParksAndWildlifeWA Youtube channel. ●



Northern Australia needs an elite First Nations crisis capability program

Each wet season, Northern Australia and the wider Oceania region are reminded that climate stress is no longer episodic. Cyclones, floods, extreme heat, infrastructure failure and displacement arrive with uncomfortable frequency. And they are becoming more destructive, stretching emergency response systems that were designed for a different era.

Roland Houareau and Nigel Browne

→ Flooding at Nitjpurru, Northern Territory.



As Australia looks to boost the north's defence posture, infrastructure investment, population growth and deeper regional engagement over the coming decades, it must rethink how it builds crisis-response capability. In a serious crisis, such as flooding or a pandemic, especially in remote or austere environments, the Northern Territory will often be resource constrained. Distance, limited surge capacity, workforce scarcity and complex terrain mean that help may not arrive quickly or in sufficient scale.

Australia needs to build the right capability in the right place and use all available A-grade people to deliver it. For this, it must consider Aboriginal people not just as participants in community life, but as holders of elite capability critical to national resilience.

When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy is discussed, the focus is mostly on programs that assist those most in need, such as employment pathways, social services and training initiatives designed to lift baseline outcomes. These programs matter and must continue.

But no high-functioning system, whether in sport, business, defence or emergency management, relies solely on lifting the average. Performance under pressure depends on a small number of people who are exceptionally skilled, trusted and capable of operating in ambiguity. Elite athletes win games. Elite professionals stabilise complex systems when they begin to fail. Elite responders buy time when time is running out.

This isn't about privilege or exclusion; it's about how responsibility is carried. Every successful organisation knows this intuitively. Yet Aboriginal policy lacks programs that are explicitly designed to identify, develop and deploy high-potential Aboriginal capability for mission-critical roles.

The result is a persistent mismatch. Aboriginal people, particularly in Northern Australia, possess deep strengths in environmental and terrain knowledge, climate adaptation, endurance, language, cultural navigation and remote operations. But we continue to treat these strengths as incidental

or informal, rather than as a foundation of national capability that could be built upon.

Crisis response is unpredictable, demanding different skills through phases of anticipation, response, stabilisation and recovery. It requires strengths in logistics, judgement, coordination, communication and the ability to operate without immediate reinforcement. Many responses to crises fail, as when evacuation efforts are inadequate, because the right people are not present early enough, close enough or long enough.

To address this challenge, Australia should establish an elite First Nations crisis capability program based in the north. It should be a deliberately limited, high-standard development pathway focused on crisis operations.

The program could be set up across three locations in the region, each with up to 20 participants, offering three years of training and assessment. If continued over 12 years, each location could train four cohorts. Participation would be voluntary and competitive, with the program absorbing direct costs. It would attract


 Victoria Daly Regional Council

ambitious individuals who see it as an opportunity for self investment.

This approach would complement existing social programs. It would contribute to a robust system that both supports those in need and develops those keen to carry responsibility for others.

The First Nations crisis capability program should collaborate with high-reliability organisations such as the Australian Defence Force, as well as similar programs in the ASEAN nations and the United States. The program's architects could learn how such organisations plan, decide, adapt and lead when information is incomplete and consequences are real.

Participants should also be embedded in defence-led crisis management environments, allied forces and Northern Territory essential services, so that they can learn how to command and coordinate under pressure. This could be conducted through annual immersive modules held over three to four days.

Critically, many crises occur in geographically and culturally challenging

environments. Aboriginal Territorians' deep understanding of the terrain, seasonal patterns, local communities and language offers a clear operational advantage.

As Andrew Warton, commissioner of the NT Fire and Emergency Services and former station leader in Antarctica, observed, 'Targeted, voluntary development pathways that build advanced crisis response skills designed with Aboriginal leadership and aligned to existing emergency management arrangements are worth exploring for the north'.

In the 2030s, Australia will likely need to respond to a humanitarian crisis beyond its borders, driven by climate stress, natural disasters or political instability. To be prepared, strategic planning for Northern Australia's defence, resource, energy, infrastructure and regional engagement should prioritise speed, competence and credibility.

Imagine Australia deploying into a foreign crisis an Aboriginal special crisis team based in northern Australia. The first face seen, the first voice heard, the first hand extended in

another country's hour of need would belong to an Australian of Aboriginal descent – calm, capable and caring.

When policymakers speak about resilience, regional leadership and the future of the north, this is what success looks like: carefully constructed capability, visible excellence and the ability to act when it matters most. Australia has the opportunity and arguably the obligation to establish such a team before the next crisis strikes. ●

Story courtesy of The Conversation

Author bios

Roland Houareau is executive director of consultancy Aslan Professional Services.

Nigel Browne is chief executive of Aboriginal Investment Northern Territory and a descendant of the Larrakia and Wulna peoples.

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Police step up to the challenge by taking part in the Emergency Services Lifeblood Drive

Queensland Police Service (QPS) officers across the state are rolling up their sleeves to donate blood and plasma as part of the annual Emergency Services Lifeblood Drive (1 May to 31 July).

QPS Media

QPS officers made an incredible 658 donations during last year's Lifeblood Drive, earning the title of Queensland's leading emergency service for blood donations, helping to save countless lives in the process.

This year QPS officers are determined to continue the friendly rivalry with other emergency services and together, contribute to the good cause.

Senior Constable Darin Carruthers has been in the QPS for 36 years and having attended many frontline emergencies, knows just how critical blood can be to save lives.

He has the rare blood type of AB negative, which he shares with about one percent of Queensland's population.

"Every blood donation has the potential to save up to three lives so by participating in the drive I'm helping to keep other Queenslanders safe," Senior Constable Carruthers said.

First-year constable Amber Johnson, 22, was nervous about being a first-time donor but was pleased she could contribute and

wants to encourage community members to give blood as a simple, but powerful way to help others.

"As a QPS officer, helping people is at the core of what I do every day, so taking part in the Emergency Services Drive is another way I can help outside of my frontline duties," Constable Johnson said.

"Being a first-time donor has been a positive experience, and it feels rewarding knowing that such a small act can make a real difference to someone's life, and I hope to continue to donate regularly."

To find out more about giving blood, visit the Australian Red Cross Lifeblood website at www.lifeblood.com.au to find your nearest donation centre. ●



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Our Victorian members front and centre at AWE launch

On Wednesday 29 April, Australasian Women in Emergencies (AWE) was officially launched in Gippsland, Victoria.



Tara (Gardner) Turner MAIES

Business Resilience Officer at Loy Yang B Power Station
Security Risk Management, Incident Response



AWE Gippsland

Built on connection. Powered by Gippsland.

I was proud to present this new network to the sector and the broader Gippsland community.

While attending in my dual capacity of President and Chair of the Combined Gippsland Essential Industries Group (CGEIG) and AIES representative, I was proud to be assisted in the launch by several other Victorian Division members who have worked hard over the past few months to make the day an important and memorable one. This included Narelle Hocking MAIES (Emergency Management Victoria) and Lisa Worcester MAIES (VIC SES).

It was also great to see our Victoria Division President Doug Caulfield OAM RFD FAIES and Aaron Worcester MAIES at the launch.

AWE is a free national network dedicated to promoting connection, leadership, mentoring, and professional growth for individuals working in emergency management, resilience, response, recovery, and related sectors. The response to the opening ceremony was inspiring, with nearly 70 participants registered from 28 organisations, seven local government areas, and almost 30 towns across Gippsland and beyond.

Attendees include representatives from emergency services, government, industry, essential services, volunteers, and community organisations. This diversity highlights the necessity of this network. Reflecting on my early experiences at Loy Yang B, where there were few women on site, and during the formative years of CGEIG, I often found myself as the only woman in the room, sometimes feeling lost in a sea of jargon.

These experiences taught me resilience and underscored the importance of strong mentors, advocates, and those willing to create opportunities for others. This is why AWE Gippsland is significant. It fosters connection, confidence, and leadership, ensuring the next generation has the pathways, support, and allies they need.



↑ L-R: The Australasian Women in Emergencies Network launch team Narelle Hocking MAIES, Lisa Worcester MAIES, Assistant Chief Fire Officer Aaron Worcester MAIES and Tara Turner MAIES.

Narelle and the team behind the launch are super women in my opinion, and the world needs more of these kinds of people.

The principal guest speaker at the event was Victoria's Deputy Emergency Management Commissioner Mariela Diaz who spoke of her challenges of rising through the Emergency Management ranks and passed on some valuable lessons and advice to all those in attendance.

Mariela said, "The day marks not just a launch, but the beginning of something

inspiring for the Gippsland region. I would like to especially thank Narelle Hocking for coming up with the idea – sheer brilliance – and for providing the opportunity for CGEIG and myself to play a role. Narelle and the team behind the launch are super women in my opinion, and the world needs more of these kinds of people." ●



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National Awards for Victorian members

This year's AIES Annual National Awards were announced in Launceston recently where two Victorian Division members were recognised with National Awards for Excellence.



Doug Caulfield OAM RFD FAIES

President AIES Victorian Division

Tara Turner MAIES from Loy Yang B Power Station received a National Award for Excellence in the field of Leadership.

Tara is the Business Resilience Officer at Loy Yang B Power Station in the Latrobe Valley and President and Chair of the Combined Gippsland Essential Industries Group.

→ L-R: Business Resilience Officer at Loy Yang B Power Station, and President /Chair of Combined Gippsland Essential Industries Group, Tara Turner MAIES is presented with the AIES National Award for Excellence for Leadership by Victorian Division President Doug Caulfield OAM.



Karen van Huizen MAIES received recognition in the field of innovation for her work as co-developer of the First 72 hours project. Karen is a regular contributor to this journal. Turn to page 16 to read her recent work, Introducing the Rural Resilience Alignment Framework.

→ L-R: Alpine Shire Council CEO William Jeremy, AIES Victorian Division President Doug Caulfield OAM, Karen van Huizen MAIES and Alpine Shire Mayor Cr Sarah Nicholas.





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Books for Emergency Managers and students

Recommendations from the emergency management community



Michelle Gillman MAIES CESM CEM
Aotearoa (New Zealand)



Got a book tip? Scan the QR code or visit this link to add your suggestion: tinyurl.com/mvjcs67

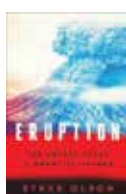
This book list began after great conversations at JCDR's Emergency Management Institute in March 2025, sparked by a talk from AIES President David Parsons CESM FAIES ESM on learning from past events. I shared a form online inviting recommendations for must-read books for emergency managers and students. Here are some of the books on the growing list. We will keep publishing titles over the coming editions of *National Emergency Response Journal*.

● Category ● Topic



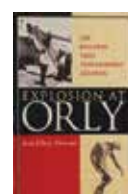
Emergencies only: An Australian nurse's journey through natural disasters, extreme poverty, civil wars and general chaos
Amanda McClelland, 2019

- Natural hazards
- Nursing



Eruption: The untold story of Mount St. Helens
Steve Olson, 2016

- Natural hazards
- Volcano



Explosion at Orly: The disaster that transformed Atlanta
Ann Uhry Abrams, 2002

- Human-induced
- Aviation



Factfulness: Ten reasons we're wrong about the world – and why things are better than you think
Anna Rosling Rönnlund, Hans Rosling, and Ola Rosling, 2018

- Human-induced
- Progress



Fatal storm: The inside story of the tragic Sydney-Hobart Race
Rob Mundle & James Hardy, 1999

- Natural hazards
- Storm



Fault lines: Views across Haiti's Divide
Beverly Bell, 2013

- Natural hazards
- Earthquake



Fire in paradise: An American tragedy
Alastair Gee, 2020

- Natural hazards
- Wildfire



Fire in the Grove: The Cocoon Grove tragedy and its aftermath
John C. Esposito, 2005

- Human-induced
- Fire



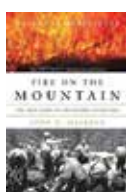
Fire in the night: 20 years since the Piper Alpha disaster
Stephen McGinty, 2008

- Human-induced
- Hazardous substances



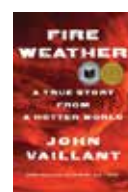
Fire on the horizon: The untold story of the Gulf Oil Disaster
Tom Shroder, 2011

- Human-induced
- Hazardous substances



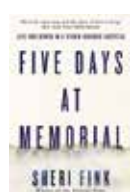
Fire on the mountain: The true story of the South Canyon Fire
John N. Maclean, 1999

- Natural hazards
- Wildfire



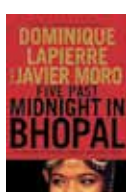
Fire weather: A true story from a hotter world
John Vaillant, 2024

- Natural hazards
- Wildfire



Five days at Memorial: Life and death in a storm-ravaged hospital
Sheri Fink, 2014

- Natural hazards
- Hurricane



Five past midnight in Bhopal
Dominique Lapierre, 1997

- Human-induced
- Hazardous substances



Flight 232: A Story of disaster and survival
Laurence Gonzales, 2014

- Human-induced
- Aviation



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2X Large	Chest 63 – Front Length 80	
3X Large	Chest 66 – Front Length 82.5	
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Provide Australasian emergency services and emergency management practitioners with a voice to advocate and contribute to the development of their industry's professional practices.

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Recognise

To recognise exemplary emergency management practice by members, individuals and organisations.

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- The ability to be part of an Australasia wide Institute dedicated to the progression and recognition of the Emergency Service role in the community
- Access to a Professional Development Fund
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