# Resilient Australia Awards: Focus on collaboration brings collective impact

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The winners of the Resilient Australia Awards were announced in Canberra on 20 November 2024, recognising recent efforts and new ideas that build community resilience to disasters.

Now in its 25th year, the Resilient Australia Awards celebrated winning and highly commended initiatives over 10 award categories of National, Collaboration and Partnerships, Research for Impact, Business, Community, School, Government, Local Government, Mental Health and Wellbeing, and Photography.

Winning projects captured the value of education and engagement to reduce disaster risk, from youth recovery projects to disability-inclusive disaster preparedness. Projects across the award categories demonstrated resilience and recovery initiatives led and informed by First Nations Australians.

Dr Margaret Moreton, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) Executive Director and host of the Resilient Australia Awards National Ceremony at the Museum of Australian Democracy said that as a collective, the award finalist projects show how disaster resilience reaches into all cohorts of society.

'Each in their own way, this year's award winners are increasing disaster resilience and preparing Australia to survive and thrive in our hazard-prone landscape. Each project is another step that brings us closer to our goal of safer communities before, during and after disaster', she said.



NT Emergency Services Director Fleur O'Connor joins Jake Quinlivan, Ursula Chubb and Alec Moylan of the NT Government to celebrate the Resilient Australia National Award and Resilient Australia National Government Award with AIDR Executive Director Margaret Moreton.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

Federal Minister for Emergency Management Senator the Hon Jenny McAllister attended the ceremony and acknowledged the valuable contribution and dedication of each of the national finalists.

This year's award program saw 129 projects and images submitted from across Australia, and 43 were acknowledged as national finalists. The core judging panel for the 2024 Resilient Australia Awards included Bhiamie Williamson of Monash University and Fire to Flourish, Sally Kuschel from the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), Andrew Coghlan of Australian Red Cross and Dr Margaret Moreton from AIDR.

The guest judges across the award categories were:

- Monica Telesny, Australian Local Government Association
- David Younger, David Younger Psychology
- Marion Short, The International Association for Public Participation
- Dr Cheryl Desha, Natural Hazards Research Australia
- Professor Lisa Gibbs, Melbourne School of Population and Global Health
- Kate Cotter, Resilient Building Council.

## Resilient Australia National Award

### Winner: Local Indigenous Cultural Recovery Advisors – NT Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet

The core function of Local Indigenous Cultural Recovery Advisors (LICRAs) is to support emergency recovery functions and ensure all work is undertaken in a culturally safe and respectful manner. Formalising these positions and ensuring they were paid at an appropriate level was essential in recognising and renumerating community members as subject-matter experts, ensuring a value was placed on community's cultural knowledge and authority in emergency recovery activities. LICRAs were first employed during the Northern Region flood event in 2023, undertaking a range of activities including marking cultural sites, supporting repatriation, liaising with government agencies and delivering key community messaging.

NT Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet was recognised as the national award winner, selected from all the award category winners in the Resilient Australia Awards. This project was also recognised as the winner of the Resilient Australia National Government Award.

In presenting the award, NEMA Coordinator General Brendan Moon AM, said this simple but powerful initiative shone a light on the priority and importance of including First Nations voices in disaster management.

'This social recovery framework is very thorough and has involved considerable engagement with a broad group of organisations and emphasises an important approach to recovery, based on local cultural needs and inclusiveness', he said.

## Resilient Australia National Collaboration and Partnership Award

### Winner: Fire Centre: Building community resilience to bushfires through science – University of Tasmania

The Fire Centre at the University of Tasmania is a bushfire research hub that integrates methods from a broad range of biophysical sciences and the humanities. It aims to achieve a holistic understanding of bushfire disasters and develop cost-effective interventions and public education campaigns to build community resilience. Since its establishment in 2018, the Fire Centre has developed deep collaborative relationships with local councils, fire-management agencies, Aboriginal communities contributing traditional knowledge, and world-leading fire scientists.

The National Collaboration and Partnership Award is a new award category that recognises projects that encompass activity across 2 or more partners, sectors, states or territories, and consistently demonstrate the power of collaboration and partnership when working towards a goal or mission with partners combining efforts and resources.

Andrew Coghlan, National Manager, Emergency Services at the Australian Red Cross, presented this award and reinforced the importance of collaboration for resilience building.

'Without collaboration and the value of networks many of the important work we do both in our working life and day-to-day life would be far more difficult and draining. Having strong networks around you builds a safeguard for you when things get tough', he said.



Andrew Coghlan presents the Resilient Australia National Collaboration and Partnership Award to Professor David Bowman.
Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

Dr Cheryl Desha presents the Resilient Australia National Research for Impact Award to Hannah Mason and Professor Richard Franklin of James Cook University.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)



Professor Lisa Gibbs with Resilient Australia National Business Award winner Melanie Micalizzi of A2B Personnel Pty Ltd.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

## Resilient Australia National Research for Impact Award

### Winner: The Impact of Heatwaves on Health Services in Queensland – James Cook University and University NSW

Heatwaves pose a growing threat to health and wellbeing. This James Cook University project addressed a critical knowledge gap regarding heatwave impacts on health service delivery across Queensland. This project has significantly advanced understandings of heatwave impacts on health services in Queensland, informed policy, and laid the groundwork for continued research and preparedness efforts.

James Cook University was the inaugural winner of the new Research for Impact Award. This category was open to all tertiary institutions and attracted 11 applications nationally. Each finalist in this category showcased research that is having or will have a significant impact on knowledge, capability and practice and will enhance disaster resilience outcomes as a result. Applications for this category will only be received and judged at the national level.

Guest judge Dr Cheryl Desha, Science and Innovation Director at Natural Hazards Research Australia, presented this award, including the highly commended recognition to the Institute for Sustainable Futures, University of Technology Sydney and Energy Consumers Australia for the project Energy Ready: A Toolkit for Resilient Communities.

## Resilient Australia National Business Award

### Winner: Cultural Healing and Aboriginal Participation for October 2022 Flood Clean Up Victoria – A2B Personnel Pty Ltd

Of the 14 projects submitted to the Business Award category, A2B Personnel was named the national winner for its project Cultural Healing and Aboriginal Participation program for the October 2022 Victorian Flood Clean Up. A2B Personnel is an Aboriginal owned and operated organisation creating employment opportunities on major projects for First Nations people. The project created 38 jobs for local Indigenous people, many coming from unemployment and adversity. This included the Community Liaison program that provided an opportunity for local First Nations people to talk with community during a time of trauma and loss.

The award was presented by guest judge Professor Lisa Gibbs, Director of the Disaster, Climate and Adversity Unit in Melbourne School of Population and Global Health. Aurecon, Port of Brisbane and Queensland Investment Corporation (QIC) were also highly commended in the Business Award category for their project Global to local: Cross-sector Collaboration for Resilient Infrastructure.

## Resilient Australia National Community Award

### Winner: Walking alongside, building resilience: The First Nations Recovery Group – Australian Red Cross

### Winner: A holistic community-led model of disaster resilience – Fire to Flourish

Two winners were recognised in this category, reflecting the calibre of submissions. There were 28 projects submitted into this category, and the judges were impressed with the holistic approaches which incorporated different factions of a community and help build not just one group's resilience but whole systemic resilience.

The First Nations Recovery Group was established by Australian Red Cross to empower First Nations peoples to lead community resilience and recovery in Australia. This project was awarded for its influence to inform the emergency management sector on best practice principles and application for working with First Nations communities.

The other winner, Fire to Flourish, are partnering with bushfire-affected communities to pilot a new model of holistic support for inclusive, community-led action. Areas of innovation include processes that give community decision-making power over flexible grant funding, community governance processes that grow capabilities and strengthen networks, and Aboriginal leadership.

Assistant Coordinator General, Strategy and Resilience Policy Branch at NEMA, Sally Kuschel, presented this award, including a highly commended recognition to Women's Health Loddon Mallee for their project Women Rising: Empowering Flood Recovery – Women's Health Loddon Mallee.

## Resilient Australia National Government Award

### Winner: Local Indigenous Cultural Recovery Advisors – NT Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet

The NT Department of the Chief Minister and Cabinet was awarded the winner of this category and also was selected as the Resilient Australia National Award recipient. They were one of 15 projects submitted to the category.

Rob Webb, CEO of AFAC the Australian and New Zealand National Council for Fire and Emergency Services, presented this award, including the highly commended recognition to NSW Reconstruction Authority for the development of its State Disaster Mitigation Plan.

## Resilient Australia National Local Government Award

### Winner: The Adaptation Game - building climate resilience in Merri-bek – Merri-bek City Council, Amble Studio and Goodmorningbeautiful

The Adaptation Game is an inclusive story-telling experience that scales climate change and disaster preparedness down from overwhelming global fears to local risks. Merri-bek City Council partnered with researchers and community to prototype the game, which has since been localised with 9 other Victorian councils.

Matt Burnett, Mayor of Gladstone and President of the Australian Local Government Association, and the Local Government Association of Queensland, presented the winning project with this award and said it was a competitive category, with 27 projects submitted. This reflected the critical role that councils play in preparing our communities for natural disasters, responding when they happen, and supporting long term recovery.

There were 2 highly commended projects in this category; Townsville City Council's Get Ready Workshop for Deaf and Hard of Hearing and the City of Campbelltown's Cool Spaces for Summer 2023–24 Program.



Sam Savage and Erin Pelly of Australian Red Cross accept the Resilient Australia National Community Award from NEMA Assistant Coordinator General Sally Kuschel.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)



The Fire to Flourish team, Briony Rogers, Cara McLeod, Sarah Matthews, Kizzy Nye and Joe Brierley, collect the Resilient Australia National Community Award.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) President Matt Burnett presents the Resilient Australia National Local Government Award to Victoria Hart, Megan Mallin, and Ben Pederick.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

## Resilient Australia National Mental Health and Wellbeing Award

### Winner: Naturally Brave – Growing with Gratitude, Bushfire Kids Connect and Makers Empire

The Naturally Brave project is a forward-thinking initiative in disaster risk reduction, leveraging advanced 3D technology to engage and empower youth. Central to Naturally Brave is the use of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) to prepare young people for disaster resilience. The project includes an innovative online module for schools, co-created by students, featuring activities and lessons on disaster preparedness. This approach not only aids those affected by disasters but also nurtures empathy and readiness among others.

David Younger, a Clinical and Consultant Psychologist at David Younger Psychology, presented this award and observed that careful consideration of people's mental health and wellbeing can be seen in many of projects presented.

'A focus on individual and a community mental health and wellbeing is crucial to enable people to be better prepared when disaster strikes', he said.

Burnett Respite Services Ltd trading as Carinbundi were highly commended in this category for the Carinbundi Emergency and Disaster Readiness Training Program.

## Resilient Australia National School Award

### Winner: Wellbeing win for Lismore South students – Lismore South Public School



David Younger presents the Resilient Australia National Mental Health and Wellbeing Award to Ashley Manuel and Lap Leung.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

The 2022 floods in the Northern Rivers region of NSW significantly compromised community safety and wellbeing, highlighting the need for a proactive response to support children and young people on their journey to recovery. Stormbirds is an evidence-informed small group education program explicitly designed to aid the recovery of children and young people. The program offers a safe learning environment, enabling children and young people to acknowledge their experiences, understand the normalcy of their emotional reactions, develop coping skills, make positive choices, set goals, and make decisions. The program also helps them build a peer support network

The award was presented by Ella Wilkinson, the Senior Project Officer, Education and Engagement at AIDR who congratulated Lismore South Public School for such an important project, especially after losing their school building in the flood event.

'I believe the youngest people in our communities, when provided the opportunity, knowledge and skills can also make a huge impact and drive change for a more resilient future', Ella said.

## Resilient Australia National Photography Award

### Winner: Carinbundi Clients Complete Emergency and Disaster Management Training – Tina Marshall

People living with a disability can be among the most vulnerable in our community when disaster strikes as they are twice as likely to be injured or be socially isolated during a disaster. Carinbundi developed an Emergency and Disaster Management Training Program specifically targeted to the needs of adults with disabilities. The course provided participants with the opportunity to consider,

Ella Wilkinson congratulates Gaye Titcume and Larissa Polak of Lismore South Public School for winning the Resilient Australia National School Award.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)



AJEM Editor-in-Chief Melissa Parsons presents the Resilient Australia National Photography Award to photographer Tina Marshall and Carinbundi team members Tania Anderson and Sue Sohier.

Image: Gary Hooker (AFSM)

discuss and review their individual plans, connect to local emergency services and personnel, broaden their knowledge, and expand their circle of trust. The winning photo was taken at the last workshop, where clients proudly received a certificate and their own Emergency Kit after successfully completing the 5-week program.

Australian Journal of Emergency Management (AJEM) Editor-in-Chief, Melissa Parsons, presented this award. There were 21 photos submitted and national finalists were determined by a people's choice vote that attracted 779 votes. The winning photo was selected by the AJEM Editorial Committee and features on the cover of this edition of the journal.

Nikki Woods was highly commended in the Photography Award for her image 'We work as One'.

The Resilient Australia Awards program was launched in 2000, and AIDR has proudly run the program on behalf of the Australian Government since 2017. The Resilient Australia Awards are hosted by th AIDR and sponsored by the Australian Government in partnership with the states and territories. Submissions to the 2025 Resilient Australia Awards program will open in March 2025.



Carinbundi Clients Complete Emergency and Disaster Management Training

Image: Tina Marshall