

Vale

Distinguished Professor David M. Johnston



The sudden passing of Distinguished Professor David Johnston on 19 January 2025 has left a huge gap in the lives of all who knew him. David was first and foremost a beloved partner of Carol and father to Joshua and loved family member. He was a proponent of disaster research and emergency management, and the founder of the Joint Centre for Disaster Research at Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand. He was a friend to many, including colleagues worldwide, and countless students. David loved his work, his family, the great outdoors, and in later years his relationship with Rēkohu/ Wharekauri/ the Chatham Islands. He was a strong supporter of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and actively fostered partnerships with mana whenua. He lived life to the fullest and made the most of every opportunity.

David earned his Bachelor of Science and Master of Science at the University of Canterbury before completing a PhD in emergency management at Massey. In his early career David worked at the Institute of Geological and Nuclear Sciences (GNS Science) (1993–2018), developing a social science research team focusing on hazards and disasters. In 2006 he founded the Joint Centre for Disaster Research (JCDR), a joint venture between GNS Science and Massey University, located at Massey University Wellington campus. As Director he oversaw operation of the centre for nearly 20 years. At the JCDR, David nurtured the careers of numerous emergency management researchers and was a highly sought-after doctoral supervisor, having supervised 35 PhDs and 16 master's projects to completion.

David's research focused on multi-disciplinary theoretical and applied aspects of disasters and emergency management. He was passionate about collaboration and worked with physical and social scientists across organisations and countries. His research on human responses to volcano, tsunami, earthquake and weather warnings, crisis decision-making and the role of public education and participation helped in building community resilience and recovery. David authored or co-authored 260 articles in leading international peer-review journals in the fields of disaster management. He was the editor of the *Australasian Journal of Disaster and Trauma Studies* and was the founding Editor of the *Journal of Applied Volcanology*. He was also a member of the editorial boards for 2 international disaster management journals and was a long-term contributor and supporter of the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*.

As well as contributions within New Zealand, David was highly engaged in international activities. He led a 25-year research collaboration with emergency managers and researchers in Washington State, focused on earthquake, tsunami and volcano preparedness and had longstanding collaborations with Australian colleagues working in academia and practice. His collaborations provided joint benefits as it allowed the sharing of lessons across countries and the application of solutions to advance disaster risk reduction. In 2016, he became co-chair of the World Meteorological Organization's High Impact Weather Project Steering Group and had a particular passion for advancing citizen-led science for weather events. He also held a role as the Chair of the Integrated Research on Disaster Risk Scientific Committee (2013–15), a program co-sponsored by the International Council for Science, the International Social Science Council, and the United Nations International Strategy for Disaster reduction.

It is without question that David contributed tremendously to the social sciences in hazards, disasters and emergency management. Indeed, his contribution to disaster management cannot be quantified. His vision of the needs of the discipline and his understanding of, and relationships with, communities is something many of us admired and had respect for. His humility, willingness to 'muck in' and be boots on the ground garnered him enormous respect from academic colleagues and peers, and people dealing with the personal impact of disasters.

David was generous, kind, compassionate and humble. His Distinguished Professor Celebration was testament to the esteem with which he was held and the affection others had for him. It has been some comfort that David got to hear at his Distinguished Professor celebration how loved and respected he was. He was deeply moved by the event and the words spoken. David was dedicated to improving the lives of all those affected by disasters and emergencies and there is no doubt he achieved his aim through his own work and the support and mentoring he provided to students and colleagues in JCDR. His legacy is immense and his JCDR team are committed to its continuation.

**Professor Kirsty Ross, School of Psychology,
Massey University**

**Associate Professor Julia Becker, Joint Centre for Disaster
Research, Massey University**

**Associate Professor Raj Prasanna, Joint Centre for
Disaster Research, Massey University**