



Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience



WEBINAR SERIES

Resilience Matters



Acknowledgement of Country

AIDR acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you all join us from today and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people participating in this event.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present and celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters across Australia.





Housekeeping

- You will remain muted and your camera will not be activated for the duration of today's event.
- Today's event will be recorded and made available after the event.
- Please enter questions for our speakers in the Q&A function, not the chat box.
- Please use the chat box to share any thoughts or reflections during the presentation
- Please be respectful to each other when posting your comments or questions.



Welcome

John Richardson

Executive Director

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR)



Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency



Speaker Introduction

Dr Bhiamie Williamson

Associate Professor

Program Lead, National Indigenous Disaster Resilience

Associate Dean Indigenous, Monash University



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What we miss when we say 'disproportionate': A 4-pillar lens on Indigenous disaster resilience

Associate Professor Bhiamie Williamson

Thursday 18 September 2025



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of Country across Australia.
We pay our respect to them, their culture, and Elders past and present.





2025

Australia's National Climate Risk Assessment

The Australian Climate Service is a partnership of:



Climate Risk Assessment Report

- Extreme weather events (heatwaves, floods, bushfires, cyclones, storms) will be more frequent and severe.
- Annual costs of climate disasters could reach ~\$40 billion by 2050 (even under modest warming).
- Rising sea levels is already threatening low-lying island communities, with flooding and tidal intrusions putting millions of people living along the coast at risk.
- Many homes could become uninsurable in high-risk regions.



Climate Risk Assessment Report

- Health systems will be stretched, with cascading health impacts such as disease and infection more common
- Emergency services will become more overwhelmed, more often.
- Critical infrastructure such as energy, water, transport, and communications are vulnerable to damage and disruption.
- Financial impacts will become more pronounced including rising insurance premiums, disrupted food systems and supply chains.





Climate Risk Assessment Report

- Multiple disasters hitting together will strain all levels of society.
- Institutions will experience systemic stress with health, emergency, infrastructure, and social support systems pushed beyond capacity.
- Urgent need for resilience planning, adaptation, and coordinated response to reduce escalating impacts.
- No community is invulnerable — risks are nationwide.

Within this context of increased vulnerability *for all*, the ability to respond, adapt, and enjoy a greater sense of security and safety are more fully enjoyed *by some*.

It is well established that throughout the world, some nations have less ability to respond to the increasing impacts of climate change. These nations are generally known as the 'global south', a collection of nations that (generally) have fewer financial resources, administrative maturity, and infrastructure to cope with and respond to shocks from environmental disasters such as wildfires, floods, storms, heatwaves and rising oceans.

Global climate finance was established under the United Nations climate agreements to provide financial support from wealthier, high-emitting nations to developing countries, recognising their limited resources and disproportionate vulnerability to climate change driven natural disasters.



Just as it is widely recognised that inequality exists **between** nations,
inequality also exists **within** nations.



What do we mean by ‘disproportionate’?

STATE	DISASTER DECLARATIONS	# IMPACTED LGAS	AVERAGE INDIGENOUS POPULATION	AVERAGE INDIGENOUS POPULATION OF IMPACTED LGAS
Queensland	28	75	4.6%	28%
New South Wales	53	121	3.4%	9.6%
South Australia	4	37	2.4%	5.5%
Victoria	31	76	1%	1.8%
Tasmania	5	21	5.4%	7.9%
Western Australia	17	38	3.3%	18.5%
Northern Territory	9	10	26.3%	72.9%

What do we mean by ‘disproportionate’?

- ‘Disproportionate’ is used to describe the increased exposure of Indigenous populations to disaster events.
- Whether by LGA, state or territory, over different time scales and hazard events, Indigenous peoples represent a higher proportion of the population in areas where disasters unfold.
- The language of ‘disproportionate impacts’ allows us to describe a problem, but it doesn’t provide a framework for action to address it.



Legacies of colonisation

- The legacies of colonisation continue to reverberate throughout modern Indigenous communities.
- As well as the more commonly known aspects of colonisation such as introduced disease, massacres, displacement from land and removal of children, there were other political and economic disadvantages that had lasting impacts.





Legacies of colonisation

- Most (in some places, all) Indigenous peoples were not allowed to work, or those who were such as in the pastoral industries throughout northern Australia, were not paid for their work.
- Indigenous peoples were largely disenfranchised, being unable to vote or stand for representative positions in Australia's parliaments.
- With the exception of returned soldiers, Indigenous people were not permitted to own their own homes. Yet even if a soldier brought a house for their family, they could not transmit that to their descendants.
- The impacts of these economic and political disadvantages continue to have consequences for Indigenous peoples today.

Historical legacies, contemporary vulnerabilities

Contemporary vulnerabilities in Indigenous communities such as **lack of employment, political disempowerment, lower educational attainment, and lower rates of home ownership**, have their origin in historical legacies of colonisation and introduced systems of disadvantages forced on Indigenous communities and sustained through intergenerational inequality.

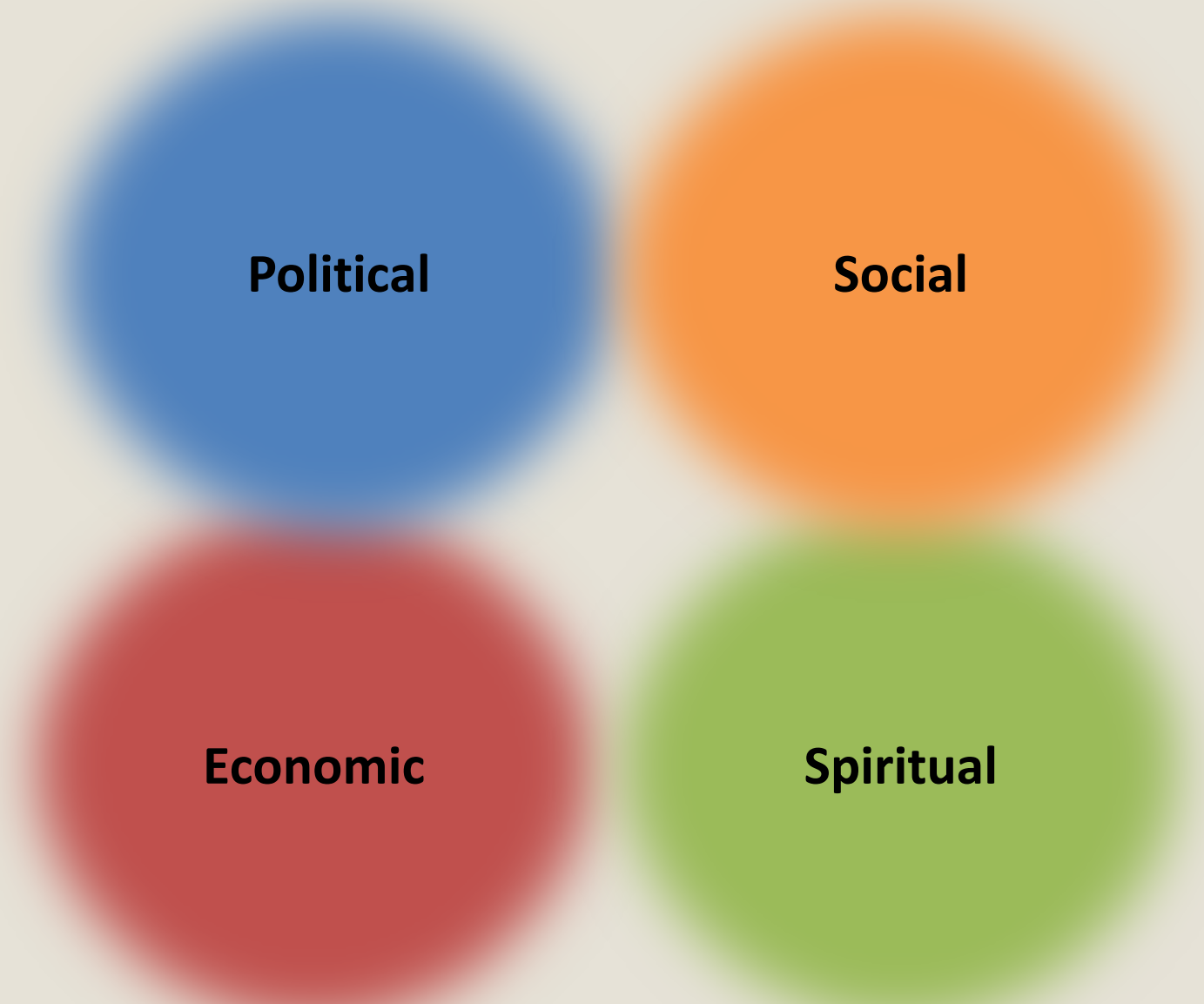


Without an appreciation of where these vulnerabilities come from, we will be **ill-equipped** and **unprepared** to support modern resilience building of contemporary Indigenous communities.









Political

Social

Economic

Spiritual

Political

- Restoration of pre-colonial political communities
- Sensitive to the forced political disempowerment of Indigenous groups
- Respecting the internal politics within communities, and between Indigenous groups and the wider regions they live within
- Laws change in response to prevailing political times
- Observing the political imperative for governments to be seen as supporting the resilience building of all communities, including Indigenous communities
- Indigenous community and representative organisations exercising the sizeable political capital they now hold





Economic

- Re-establishing land-based economies
- Understanding that Indigenous peoples have been made poor because of discriminatory laws and policies from successive governments
- Seeking out opportunities in the large-scale investment of community resilience
- Utilising periods of repair, recovery and reconstruction to address historical economic disempowerment
- Investing in the community controlled sector and building adaptable and resilience workforces for the future

Social

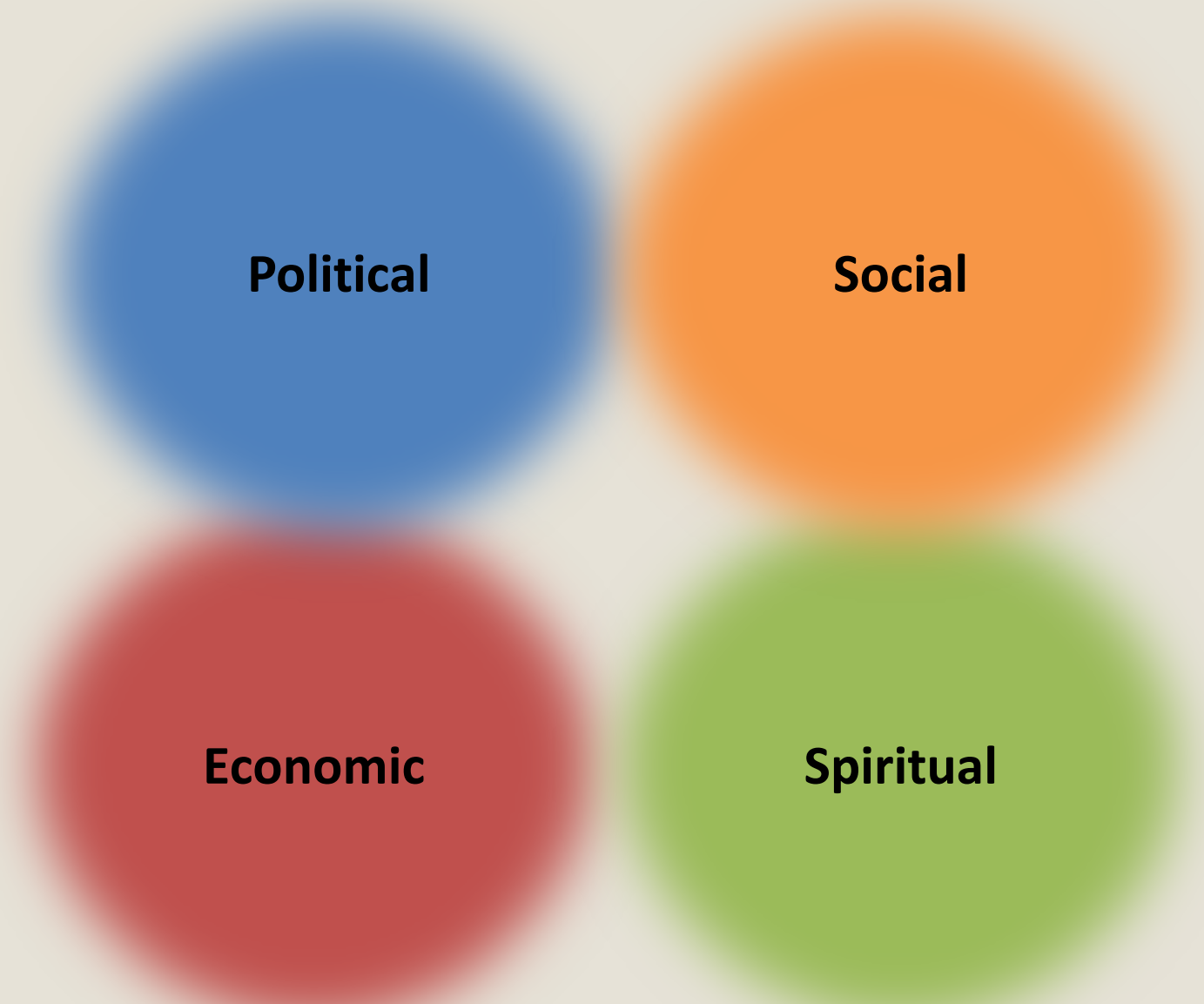
- Respecting the sanctity of Indigenous communities and kin networks
- Having regard for the importance of Caring for Country to promote social harmony
- Understanding the social disintegration of modern communities because of the depravities of colonisation
- Responding with respect to social challenges, while building on the strengths of modern Indigenous communities
- Reinforcing social systems, not applying additional pressure through policies, laws and financial grant opportunities





Spiritual

- Understanding the unique spiritual context of Indigenous communities, and the sanctity of connection with Country
- Knowing that assaults on Indigenous communities were assaults on the spiritual basis of life for groups
- Desecration to the land, including from major disaster events, contributes to the spiritual degradation of Indigenous groups
- Just as degradation contributes to the spiritual degradation of groups, so does land restitution and Caring for Country repair spiritual wellbeing
- Recognising that Indigenous groups have an inherent spiritual resilience, which needs to be accounted for in resilience planning and recovery efforts



Political

Social

Economic

Spiritual

Cultural determinants of Indigenous resilience

These four dimensions might be understood as cultural determinants of Indigenous resilience. They represent an intellectual framework to understand what might be done to enhance resilience, and distinct sites of recovery.



Cultural determinants of Indigenous resilience

Placing resilience and recovery within a broader historical timeline allows us to more accurately describes the status of Indigenous vulnerability, as emerging from the legacies of colonisation. Doing this builds power and agency within the sector as a distinct site where through our work, we can address historical injustices and take practical steps build resilience. Resilience practitioners then become agents of change.



- Australian Climate Risk Assessment Report – we're in trouble
- Inequity within nations
- Place Indigenous vulnerabilities within the context of colonisation
- Introduced four pillars of Indigenous resilience
 - Political
 - Economic
 - Social
 - Spiritual
- Cultural determinants of Indigenous resilience
- Appreciating that resilience and recovery are unique sites where it is possible to both enhance resilience and address historical injustice





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Q&A

Don't forget to put your questions in the Q&A function.



Event concludes

Thank you for attending today's webinar.

Next webinar:

2024-25 Major Incidents Report Showcase

Wednesday 1 October 2025,
1.00pm-2.30pm AEST



Register now.



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