

# The Australian Journal of Emergency Management (2006-2015): from risk to resilience in the third decade



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(<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>). Information  
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publication.

The opening foreword of the decade highlights how the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* (AJEM) is instrumental in identifying trends in emergency management, while remaining committed to providing access to knowledge for both researchers and practitioners. As noted at the time: 'The effective transfer and uptake of innovative practice, backed up where necessary with carefully targeted research, is critically important' (Ruddock, Vol 21/1, 2006).

Throughout the decade, the journal continues to publish peer-reviewed papers while increasingly serving as a vehicle for communicating government direction, policy developments, and Ministerial Council communiqués. AJEM also celebrates its 20th anniversary in February 2006 (Vol 21/1), marking both continuity and a period of transition.

## Catastrophic disasters and contested narratives

Catastrophic disasters shape the narrative of the decade. The Bali bombings, Indian Ocean tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, Black Saturday bushfires, Queensland floods, and Cyclone Yasi all feature prominently. These events not only tested systems but reshaped public expectations and policy direction.

Reflecting on Hurricane Katrina, Handmer (Vol 21/1, p.38, 2006) questions whether it is an exception or whether prevailing approaches are shaped by a form of collective, media-induced distortion.

His observation, remains highly relevant:

*Disentangling the myths, misreporting, various sorts of self-interest and agendas, the micro experiences of individuals, and the sheer heterogeneity and complexity of the event, is necessary before we can provide definitive answers.*

Mass fatality management emerges as a recurring concern. Scanlon (Vol 21/2, 2006) reports on cross-cultural handling of the deceased, while Eyre and Payne (Vol 21/2, 2006) examine recovery and return of property. Nicholls (Vol 21/4, 2006) explores disaster memorials as a communication channel between governments and communities. Together, these contributions reflect a dignified maturing of the sector.

## Risk management: from principle to system

Risk management continues to feature prominently. Tarrant (Vol 21/1, 2006) reflects on 20 years of practice, noting disasters are infrequent, large, and complex events requiring non-routine responses.

Lewis (Vol 21/3, 2006) argues that a risk-management approach focuses attention on actual risks and their community impacts, rather than resource- and process-focused frameworks such as PPRR (Prevention, Preparedness, Response, Recovery). Pitman (Vol 21/2, 2006) similarly suggests that goodwill and broad principles are no longer sufficient given the growing complexity of emergencies.

In the introduction to 2 special issues on risk assessment, Jones (Vol 23/4, 2008) outlines the introduction of a national all-hazards

risk assessment approach, signalling a shift toward more structured and evidence-based practice. Way ahead of her time, Cavallo (Vol 29/3, 2014) provides the first understanding of the systemic nature of disaster risk, adopting a system of systems approach.

## The emergence of resilience

This is the decade in which resilience emerges as a defining concept, culminating in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

The May 2007 edition signals this shift, with Bushnell and Cottrell (Vol 22/2, 2007) examining bushfire risk, Rohrmann (Vol 22/2, 2007) investigating accessibility of fire agency websites, and Maguire and Hagan (Vol 22/2, 2007) arguing for a more nuanced and integrated understanding of social resilience.

Goodman and Gawen (Vol 23/1, 2008) highlight latent strengths in individuals and communities. Ellis (Vol 27/4, 2012) challenges the framing of ‘prevention’, arguing for a focus on building resilience to hazards. Chia (Vol 25/1, 2010) introduces social capital, positioning relationships and networks as foundational to effective emergency management.

## From concept to practice

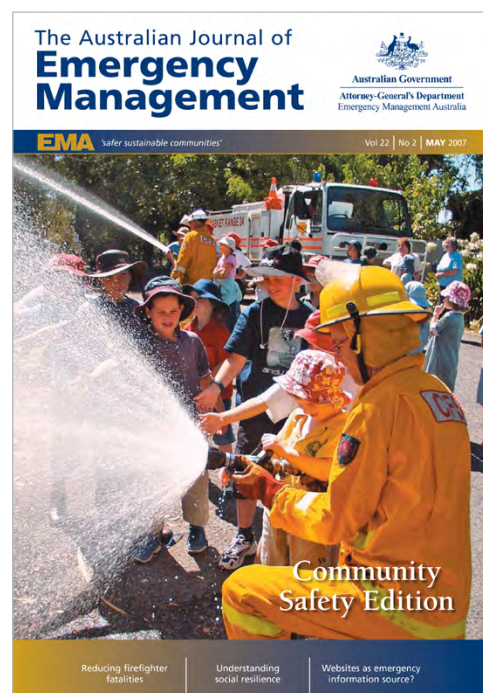
Prosser and Peters (Vol 25/3, 2010) argue that traditional policy approaches will not achieve the behavioural change required for disaster resilience, observing that ‘linear thinking is inadequate to encompass the interactivity and complexity inherent in building resilience’ (p.10).

Organisational resilience also emerges. Gibson and Tarrant (Vol 25/2, 2010), Tarrant (Vol 25/2, 2010), and Parsons (Vol 25/2, 2010) highlight that resilience arises from the interplay of organisational capabilities and that it is difficult to embed in formal plans.

Attention then turns to operationalisation. Arbon (Vol 29/4, 2014) proposes a community resilience scorecard; Neely (Vol 29/4, 2014) brings a lighter perspective drawing upon Vanilla Ice; McLennan et al. (Vol 27/2, 2012; Vol 29/3, 2014) unpack the challenges of shared responsibility. Together, these works overcome the difficulty of translating resilience from concept into measurable practice. Bajracharya et al. (Vol 27/3, 2012) present Gold Coast case studies demonstrating public-private partnerships in resilience, and the role of local government in facilitating them.

## Policy context and system influences

AJEM continues to engage with broader policy settings. Dwyer (Vol 21/3, 2006) examines federalism through Cyclone Tracy, highlighting how governance structures shape disaster management in Australia. Sullivan (Vol 23/4, 2008) outlines policy responses to increasing extreme weather linked to climate change, while Crompton and



MacAveny (Vol 23/4, 2008) argue for disaster risk reduction based on increasing economic costs of disasters.

Proudley's (Vol 28/2, 2013) 'Place Matters' article reinforces the importance of place-based understanding in resilience. Gibbs et al. (Vol 30/3, 2015) – including yours truly – advocate for a shift toward a community wellbeing approach grounded in public health.

## Gender, diversity and inclusion

A focus on gender emerges strongly in this decade. Earlier in the decade, Childs (Vol 21/2, 2006) identifies limited engagement with diversity in fire services, noting that references to 'diversity' more often relate to ecology or risk frameworks than workforce composition. A fabulous paper from Proudley (Vol 22/1, 2008) lifts the lid on women's experiences and roles in emergencies and the decisions families make. This paper was instructive in influencing Red Cross' Rediplan approach to support women as the key decision makers in household preparedness.

April 2013 was a special issue on gender and disasters that featured Owen's paper on women, men and incident management (Vol 28/2, 2008); Taylor's examination of gender, masculinity and bushfires (Vol 28/2, 2013); Parkinson and Zara's seminal paper on the domestic violence impacts after disaster (Vol 28/2, 2013), which still rates in the top 5 most downloaded papers from AJEM; and Hazeleger's examination of gender and recovery in Australia (Vol 28/2, 2013). The inclusion of Practical Stories in this special issue broadens the lens to lived experience, including women's resilience in Alpine Shire (Vol 28/2, 2013), the Myrtleford Men's Shed (Vol 28/2, 2013), and engagement with men after the Toodyay fires (Vol 28/2, 2013).

In looking at communities more at risk, 2 papers focus on Indigenous communities. Laidlaw et al. (Vol 22/1, 2007) identify the need for cultural heritage sites and assets to be documented and accessible in bushfire plans. The brilliant Moya Newman (Vol 21/1, 2006), a true trailblazer in Indigenous engagement in emergency management, gives an overview of the process leading to the Keeping Our Mob Safe Strategy. Fozdar and Roberts (Vol 25/1, 2010) detail a program in the then Fire and Emergency Services Authority in Western Australia to improve firefighters' understanding of Islam. Boon (Vol 28/3, 2013) sheds light on the important issue of disadvantage and equity in preparedness. Cornell et al. (Vol 27/3, 2012) caution against older adults being seen as a burden, arguing that their life experience and exposure to disasters over a long life can prompt positive behaviours and capacity. Every and Thompson (Vol 29/3, 2014) give us the first examination of homelessness and disaster preparedness, and ask 'can the homeless afford it?'

The first edition of 2014 focuses on young people, although as usual, the adults do the talking with only one paper where young people talk about their experiences by Hocking et al. (Vol 29/1, 2014). The papers focus on education (Raphael and Burns; Dufty; Towers et al.; Harwood et al.), emergency planning for children (Boon et al.; Ronan), evacuation planning (Davie et al.), and recovery (Gibbs et al.) (see Vol 29/1, 2014). The perennial question of 'how do we engage the young people of today?' is also addressed in Wajs-Chaczko's earlier paper on Generation Y (Vol 23/3, 2008).

## Recovery

Recovery receives sustained attention as it continues to evolve through the decade. This is a topic we examine further in this issue with Kate Brady's paper on the emergence of recovery. Norman's paper (Vol 21/4, 2006) on holistic recovery outlines a model of recovery encompassing social, built, natural, and economic environments, with communities at the centre. Like pavlova and Russell Crowe, there is debate about whether the Australians (Victoria) or New Zealanders first developed this model.

Brady (Vol 30/4, 2015) gives us pause to reflect on the language and the words we use in disasters and what their impacts are on survivors. Nicholls and Healy (Vol 23/3, 2008) recognise that one size cannot fit all in communications with survivors of disasters. This paper laid the foundation for Red Cross's 'Communicating in Recovery Guide'. Krolik (Vol 28/4, 2013) looks at the intersection of disaster management, and rights-based community development.

Leadbeater (Vol 28/3, 2013) gives us a brilliant account of the role of the Strathewen Community Renewal Association leading the recovery of their community post Black Saturday. Dean (Vol 30/3, 2015) gives a detailed case

study of a community development approach to recovery in Queensland after the floods in 2011. Kargillis et al. (Vol 29/2, 2014) explore the use of storytelling and narrative approaches to help improve recovery outcomes. Graham (Vol 27/4, 2012) outlines the differences in disaster assistance programs across the globe and makes recommendations around a greater community engagement on recovery programs, noting that the 'provision of assistance by agencies to a community does not in and of itself enhance community wellbeing, deliver better recovery outcomes, or build resilience' (p.6).

## Risk communication and media

Risk communications also receive significant attention through the decade. Cohen et al. (Vol 21/1, 2006) reflect on the deeper cultural issues encountered in bushfire representation in the popular media, and seeing disasters as panic pleasure. Hughes et al. (Vol 22/4, 2007) also examine how the media frames bushfires, and how the landscape is shifting away from formal informational media sources. Eburn (Vol 25/1, 2010) examines whether emergency service organisations can restrict the access of media to disaster sites. Howell and Rohan (Vol 25/1, 2010) dissect the role of traditional and emerging media in a novel emergency – equine influenza – and find the powerful role that radio plays in a wide-area emergency. Leadbeater (Vol 25/3, 2010) outlines the importance of joined up and coordinated public information in an increasingly complex disaster and media landscape.

The first edition in 2012 has a social media theme. Taylor et al. (Vol 27/1, 2012) provides a glimpse into the future





with an examination of the role of social media in disasters. They consider its role in providing psychological first aid, drawing on research after Cyclone Yasi. Furthermore, Bird et al. (Vol 27/1, 2012) examine at the role of Facebook, while Lo and Posetti (Vol 27/1, 2012) examine ABC and Twitter and information sharing. Dufty (Vol 27/1, 2012) outlines the role of social media in building resilience, and Nicholls (Vol 27/1, 2012) details good communications practice in influencing community resilience.

### Capability, volunteers and doctrine

Capability development shifts toward experiential learning in training and exercising. Wall (Vol 21/3, 2006) advocates for the place of storytelling in creating realistic narratives, Arciuli et al. (Vol 23/3, 2008) use drama methods, and Owen et al. (Vol 30/3, 2015) examine broader professional development approaches beyond command and control.

Conway questions whether AIMS doctrine remains fit for purpose (Vol 27/2, 2012). Ganewatta and Handmer (Vol 24/2, 2009) assess the economic value of volunteers, while Francis and Jones (Vol, 27/4, 2012) challenge assumptions about volunteer motivations across age groups. Dufty (Vol, 28/4, 2013) identifies 5 types of evaluation, calling for consistency and comparability.

### Risk practice and community behaviour

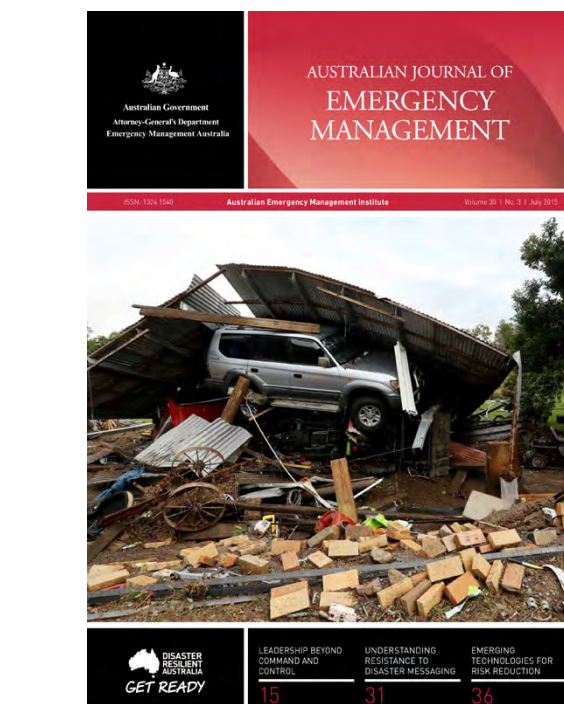
Volume 1 of AJEM in February 2009, published in the shadows of the Black Saturday bushfires, has a strong focus on risk: bushfire risk (Sherrah, Byrne, Hine et al.), landslide risk (Saunders and Glassey; Leventhal and Withycombe), and broad based risk (Osuchowski; Gabriel). Gissing, Keys and Oppen (Vol 25/2, 2010) detail the advances in understanding flood risk and consequences. King et al. (Vol 21/3, 2006) report on how well Innisfail prepared for Cyclone Larry.

Kelman and Karnes (Vol 22/1, 2007) introduce relocalisation of disaster risk reduction as a concept, and Vogt et al. (Vol 23/1, 2008) examine risk perception in flood-prone areas.

Loh (Vol 22/4, 2007) explores evacuation powers under stay-or-go policy, and Eburn (Vol 27/1, 2012) revisits failure-to-warn as a persistent legal challenge for emergency services amid rising public expectation that they will be warned.

### Human and animal health

On health and disasters, Hope (Vol 25/3, 2010) outlines healthcare worker challenges in disasters, while Ranse et al. (Vol 28/4, 2013) examine disaster education for nurses. Smith (Vol 22/2, 2008) questions workforce reliability in crises, Hagan et al. (Vol 23/3, 2008) explore pandemic behaviour, and Ryan et al. (Vol 28/1, 2013) introduce new environmental health frameworks. A very hidden



issue gets a focus in Jenner's paper (Vol 22/2, 2007) on the psychological impacts of responding to agricultural emergencies.

Volume 30, Issue 2 (2015) focuses on animals, both livestock and pets. It introduces the national principles for animals in disasters and explores the animal-human bond (see articles by Mills; Fowles; Thompson and Trigg et al.). Taylor et al. look at planning for companion animals, while Smith et al. consider the same for livestock. In the same issue, Westacott and Prelgauskas outline SAVEM, the South Australia Veterinary Emergency Management approach to post disaster animal welfare.

Much of this content helped drive the AIDR Planning for Animals Handbook.

### Conclusion

The third decade of AJEM reflects a field in transition. It begins with catastrophic events and a strengthening focus on risk. It progresses through the emergence and consolidation of resilience as a central concept, and expands to include gender, diversity, social capacity, recovery, communication, and systems thinking. This is captured at the end of the decade by Crossweller (Vol 30/3, 2015), then Director-General of Emergency Management Australia at the time, and way ahead of his time making a bold call to shift leadership thinking towards an ethical approach.

In doing so, the decade closes not with resolution, but with a clear and compelling call to lead differently—centred on ethics, grounded in humility and compassion, and responsive to the growing complexity of risk.