

# Foreword



**EMCAP Network Executive Committee**

The challenges facing Australia's hazards and disaster resilience sectors are becoming increasingly complex. Climate change is intensifying risk, communities are navigating compounding hazards, and researchers and practitioners are making decisions in environments characterised by public scrutiny and resource scarcity and increasing uncertainty. Meeting these challenges requires more than new knowledge; it requires new ways of working together.

In 2024, Natural Hazards Research Australia established the Early and Mid-Career Academics and Practitioners (EMCAP) Network to bring together those helping shape the future of the Australian emergency services and disaster resilience sector through research, practice and collaboration. Led by an executive team of 12 diverse researchers and practitioners from across Australia, the network hosted a 'Tomorrow Party' at the 2025 Natural Hazards Research Forum in Adelaide. EMCAP members were invited to imagine Australia's natural hazards research landscape in 2030. Their vision was one where research and practice are seamlessly connected, collaboration is prioritised over competition, communities are active and informed partners, and Indigenous knowledges are valued alongside Western scientific approaches. To realise this vision, they identified 4 key priorities: strengthening research translation, fostering more collaborative ways of working, creating equitable opportunities for career development, and building a more supportive and enabling sector culture.

These priorities speak directly to the conditions required for effective disaster recovery and management. Research must be accessible, useful and responsive to the needs and knowledge gaps facing the sector. Agencies, practitioners and researchers must work together to identify these gaps and co-design practical and implementable solutions. Complex challenges also demand broader perspectives, including those of Indigenous peoples, communities, young people, gender-diverse voices, and the social sciences and humanities.

Developing tomorrow's workforce requires strong relationships, supportive mentoring, and space to collaborate, experiment and build expertise. Many parts of the sector are already taking on this responsibility. Members of the EMCAP Network Executive Committee have experienced this support personally and seen its impact on colleagues through mentoring, collaboration and meaningful opportunities. These practices should be recognised and celebrated as the norm, rather than a nice-to-have aspiration.

Financial uncertainty and job insecurity across Australia's research sector pose a risk to national capability in disaster resilience, recovery and preparedness. Without sustained investment in early and mid-career researchers, Australia's hazards and disaster resilience sectors risks losing knowledge, capability and talented people to other industries and countries. Research capability cannot be rebuilt overnight. Waiting until the next major disaster to recognise its importance may mean the expertise and relationships needed are no longer readily available.

The EMCAP network's vision is ambitious, but practical. Australia's future natural hazards landscape will be shaped by the choices we make now about relationships, funding, institutions and whose knowledge is genuinely valued. EMCAPs play an important role in that transformation – not simply as the future of the sector, but as active contributors to changing it today.

As AJEM's 40th anniversary draws to a close with this edition, the journal continues its role as a forum for sharing ideas, challenging assumptions and connecting research with practice. The perspectives presented here demonstrate why supporting emerging voices and fostering collaboration across the sector has never been more important.