



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE



CASE STUDY - TROPICAL CYCLONE LAM

Support provided to the Galiwinku community

Superintendent Ben Millington
May 2015

Background

- Recent national and international disasters have resulted in the mass evacuation and displacement of significant populations.
- Australia last mass evacuation experience was Cyclone Tracey in 1974 where 35 000+ residents were evacuated over four days.
- Such events have required extraordinary mass care and welfare arrangements to be employed, including the establishment of mass evacuation centres.

Planning requirement

- Research shows intensity and frequency of natural disasters increasing.
- Mass evacuation & care is complex and requires a higher level of co-ordination.
- International events have clearly demonstrated need for such planning and efficiencies.
- Arrangements could be employed for Disaster Reception events.

Planning to date

- The NSW State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) first endorsed a Working Group in 2007 to develop a framework for Major Evacuations.
- An *Evacuation Management Guideline* and *Major Evacuation Centre Guideline* were approved in 2014 by the SEMC.
- NSW RFS base camp cache and draft arrangements were used to establish the Temporary Accommodation Centre in Deniliquin during the 2011 floods.



Large and
Hunting Dogs

Site
Control

Recreation
Area

Cats &
Small
Dogs

Accomm B

Accomm A

Children's
Area

Dining Area &
Catering

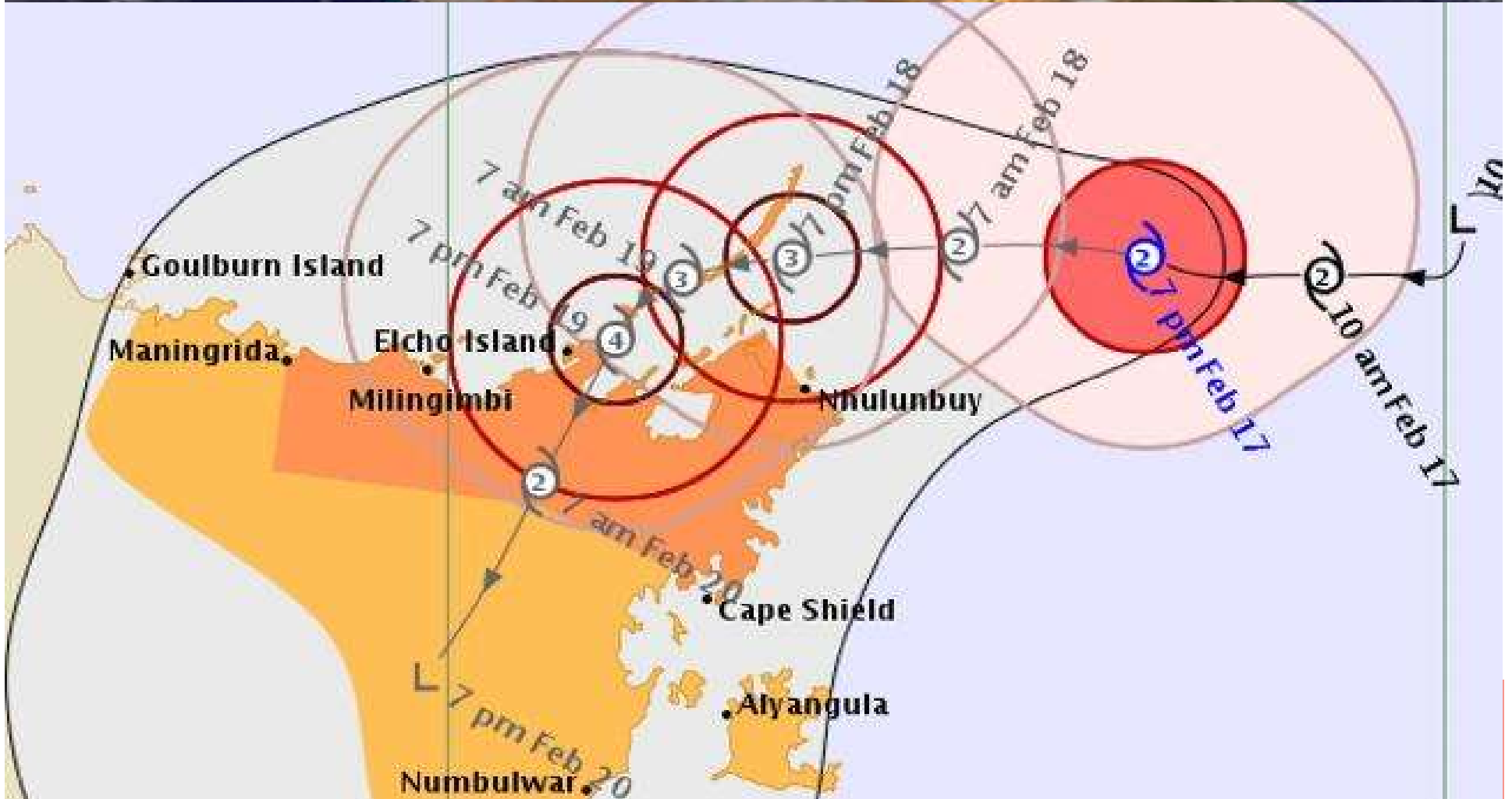
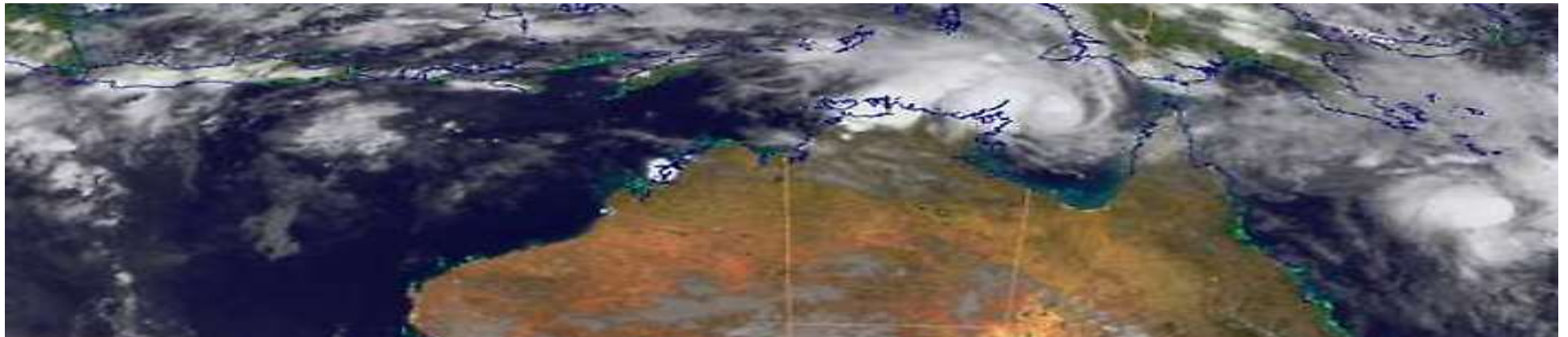
Registration
& Warehouse

Secure
Entry

Ablutions &
Laundry

Tropical Cyclone Lam

- Tropical Cyclone Lam formed in the Coral Sea and moved into the Gulf of Carpentaria as a Category 4 system in February 2015.
- This system was the strongest since Tropical Cyclone Monica in 2006.
- The system made landfall approximately 300 kilometres east of Darwin on 19 February 2015.
- Up to 40% of residential dwellings and other infrastructure sustained severe damage.



Elcho Island

- › Largest Indigenous community in northeast Arnhem Land.
- › Approximately 2,200 residents, including 70 non-Indigenous residents.
- › Administered by the East Arnhem Regional Council.
- › Services include Police Station, Medical Clinic, School and General Store.
- › The island is serviced by an airport and barge landing facilities.

Request

- NSW RFS was invited by the Northern Territory Government on 23 February 2015 to travel to Elcho Island to assess suitability for 'base camp' to be established.
- 2 x NSW RFS officers and 1 x Emergency Management Australia (EMA) officer travelled to Elcho Island on 24 February 2015.
- Formal request was received 25 February 2015 to provide emergency accommodation & support for up to 300 people for up to 14 days.

Concept

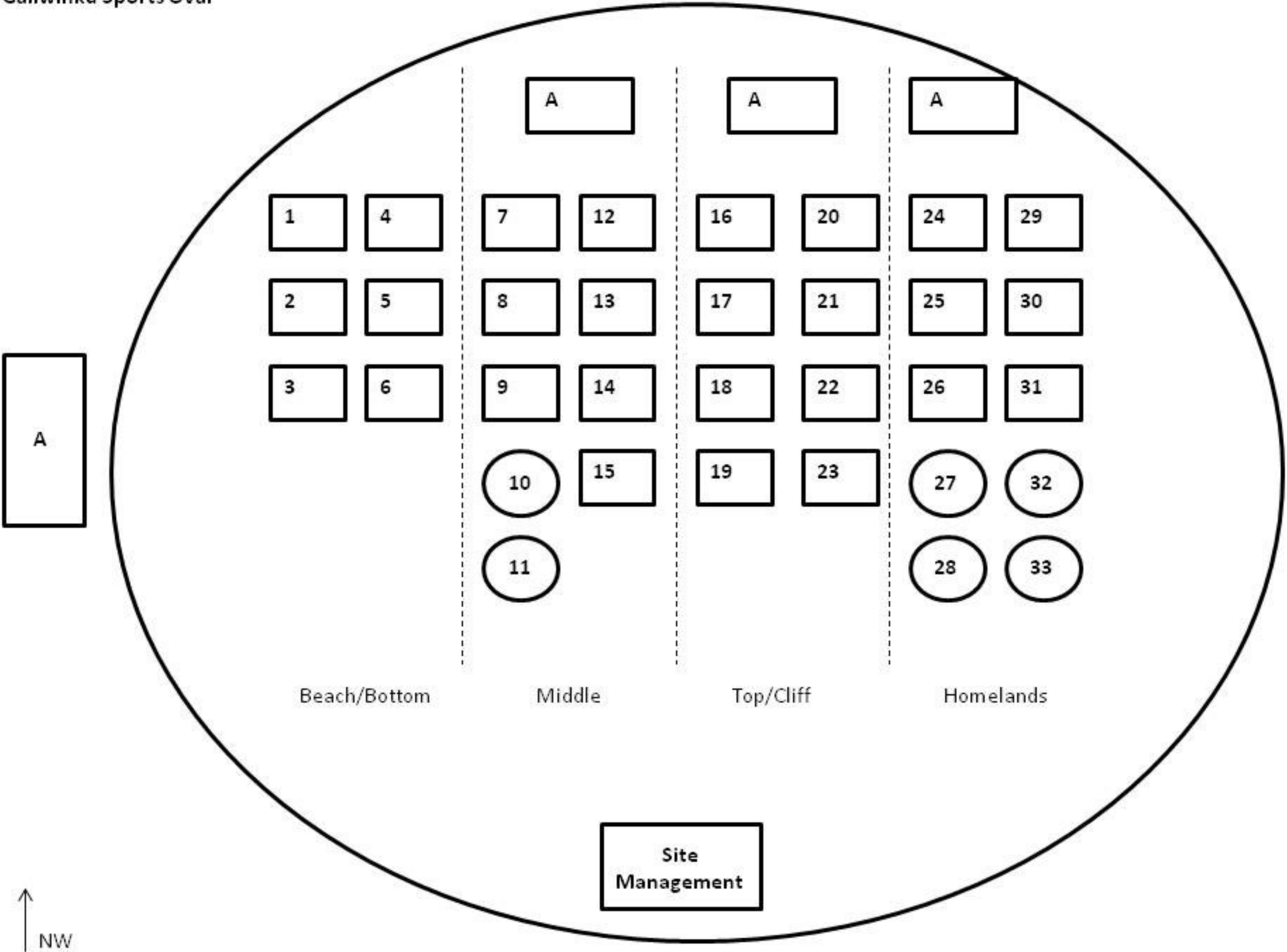
- 30+ Western Shelters (6-10 persons) from the NSW RFS cache to be erected on the Sports Oval.
- Ablutions would be acquired and positioned adjoining the site. Some remedial works required to support these.
- The School Hall (nominated Cyclone Shelter) to be used for meals and 'reactivated' as required.
- Staff from across the Northern Territory Government to support the facility, supported by local community members and NSW RFS.



Consultation

- Significant consultation occurred in the lead up to establishment in co-operation with the Local Recovery Coordinators.
- This included East Arnhem Regional Council, School Principal, local Police and Elders group.
- Various issues were discussed including infrastructure, local resources, cultural considerations and identified sacred sites.
- Detailed Site Management Plan developed.

Galiwinku Sports Oval



Logistics

- Defence Assistance to Civil Community (DACC) request raised to transport cache from RAAF Richmond to Darwin.
- Due to runway limitations, cache was then shipped by barge from Darwin to Elcho Island taking some 36 hours.
- 18 NSW RFS and Northern Territory Fire & Rescue Service (NTFRS) personnel travelled to Elcho Island to facilitate establishment of shelters on 01 March 2015.
- Establishment was completed in under 48 hours.













Insert Drone Footage

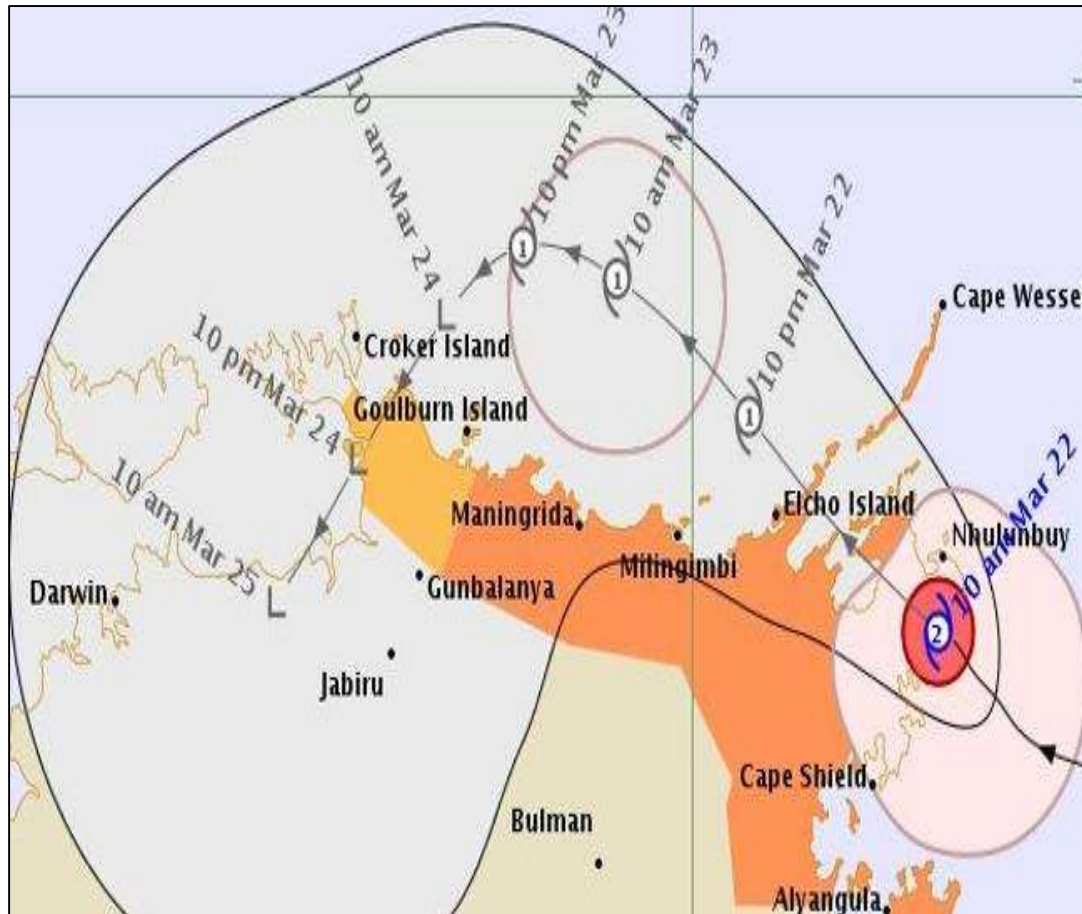
Issues

- First group of residents did not move into Camp Elcho until 09 March 2015 due to infrastructure delays.
- Logistical support & subsequent timings did not always go to schedule.
- Media scrutiny and perception of 'tent accommodation' being sub standard.
- Recovery & reconstruction arrangements prolonged the provision of NSW RFS support.





Tropical Cyclone Nathan



Second system impacted the region on 22/23 March.

Significant amount of planning undertaken as a precaution.

Emergency demobilisation occurred on 21 March with shelters re-erected on 26 March.

Current Situation

- As at 21 May 2015, there are 338 residents registered for meals and accommodation in Camp Elcho.
- 2 NSW RFS personnel remain on Elcho Island to support the Camp Manager.
- The first shipment of transportable homes have recently arrived on Elcho Island. Completion and installation is expected by 30 June 2015.
- All shelters will be dismantled and returned to the NSW RFS in early July 2015 ahead of the pending fire season.

Lessons Learnt

- Local consultation & involvement is crucial to success of this type of operation.
- Agency capabilities/resources can be used across hazards and to supplement supporting functions. Need for capabilities/resources to be documented centrally.
- Need for mass evacuation/care policy, training and exercising.
- Logistics co-ordination and project management skills were essential in this process.