

Foreword

BUILDING DISASTER RESILIENCE

By Mike Rothery, First Assistant Secretary, National Security Resilience Division,
Attorney-General's Department.



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Australia is struggling with a serious policy and operational dilemma.

The emergency management community is under pressure from ever-increasing demands by Australians for its services, finite limits to its resources, and a likely growth in risk from hazards. Meanwhile, the responsibility for protecting Australia from the impacts of such disasters cannot be borne by the emergency management community alone. Adopting a resilience approach to this dilemma would better enable Australia to adapt to change, reduce exposure to risk and bounce back from disasters.

The Australian community has been steadily increasing its expectations of the role of government in a variety of areas, including emergency management. Whilst advances in technology (particularly communications), have allowed emergency services to be predictive and effective, this success has also raised expectations that communities can be absolutely protected from hazards.

The community has also changed in other ways. We have an ageing population and our cities are sprawling along our coastlines and we are becoming ever more urbanised, with an expectation that the same services will be available wherever we choose to live. There is a growing expectation that governments will have a long reach to find, protect and support our citizens, wherever they may be in the world.

There is a growing exposure to risk. Some risks are newer and due to changes in our natural environment (such as climate change), while other familiar risks (such as bushfires, floods and storms) are likely to become more intense and more frequent in the years ahead.

Yet, governments are faced with finite capacities to meet these expectations. They are highly dependent on volunteers, with social change placing this resource under stress. They are also faced with constantly competing demands for funding in a context where continuously increasing operating budgets is simply not an option.

New challenges require new ways of thinking and responding. Addressing disaster risk is a complex policy challenge for governments that is not amenable to traditional approaches. As we rapidly approach the limits of our ability to increase our response capacity; 'more of the same' is not the answer.

It is in this context that the term resilience is rapidly becoming accepted as a strategic approach to bring together protective security, emergency management and business continuity management within organisations. Increasingly, this concept is being adopted as a more holistic approach to disasters, where preparation, prevention and recovery are considered equally. It is also a mechanism through which communities can have a clearer understanding of what they can expect of government, and be more adaptable, resourceful, empowered and equitable.

I believe that the contributions to this edition of AJEM are important for our response to this serious policy and operational dilemma as they each seek to provide a perspective on what the concept of resilience might offer for the future of emergency management in Australia.