In Search of the 'Prepared Community': the way ahead for Australia?

Roger Jones OAM provides a perspective on the 'prepared communities' concept and methodologies. ℝ

Introduction

Since the late 1980s, a key concept in Australia's approach to emergency and disaster management has been the need to develop 'the prepared community', whose basic requirements are summarised as:

- 'an alert, informed and active community which supports its voluntary organisations

- an active and involved local government, and

- agreed and co-ordinated arrangements for prevention, preparedness, response and recovery' (Natural Disasters Organisation 1989).

The most recent statement of national emergency management concepts and principles still refers to the 'prepared community' as an *element* in Australia's 'integrated approach' to emergency management, with that approach requiring co-ordination between the 'prepared community' and the 'efforts of governments, all relevant organisations and agencies' (EMA 2004).

This paper argues that:

- While considerable early effort between 1994-2004 was devoted to the development of an effective emergency risk management tool which had application in Australian communities, that earlier work has been effectively abandoned.

- While there have been significant international developments promoting the concept of the 'prepared community' as central to effective national emergency management policy, more recent developments have focussed largely on the community's 'shared responsibility' for responding to events.

- There is a clear and urgent need, both in Australia and overseas, for the development of a new and effective 'prepared community' concept and methodology.

An early Australian approach to community emergency risk management

In 1996 Emergency Management Australia (EMA) convened a workshop at its research and teaching establishment, the Australian Emergency Management Institute, to consider the application of the risk management standard and concepts to emergency management. This followed new international studies into the management of risk factors in disasters (Blaikie *et al.* 1994) and the publication of a new Australian/New Zealand Standard, AS/NZS 4360:1995 – Risk Management[1].

The three-day workshop concluded that effective risk management at community level is fundamentally about *managing the vulnerability of communities to risks*, recognising that 'vulnerability' is a function of community susceptibility and resilience to hazards. It was agreed that a variety of indicators were required when assessing vulnerability (e.g. demographic, health, economic, societal/cultural and physical factors). The workshop's principal recommendations were that:

- Australian emergency management embody a risk management approach, and

- guidelines (based on the Standard) be developed appropriate to the Australian 'emergency management industry' (EMA 1996).

The workshop outcomes were accepted in 1997 by the then National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC) and in 2000 EMA published the *Emergency Risk Management – Applications Guide* (revised and reissued as EMA 2004), as part of its Australian emergency management series of publications and resulting from studies by a national working party. A guide to emergency risk management for facilitators working with committees and communities was produced by EMA in 2001.

Severe flooding in central Queensland in 1997 led to the Queensland Department of Emergency Services (QDES) commissioning a flood risk study in the rural

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1. It needs to be recognised here that AS/NZS 4360:1995 (and its current version, AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009) is essentially a process for managing risks within an *organisation*, and thus needs interpretation and modification in order to be applied to the management of *community safety risk*.

Murweh Shire, a particular requirement being that it should be undertaken in the context of the risk management standard, AS/NZS 4360:1995. For the purposes of the study EMA authorised the use of material developed in the 'Applications Guide' working party process. The study's final report (Geo-Eng Australia Pty Ltd 1998), published in May 1998, included the outcomes of community consultation processes and vulnerability profiles based on the EMA workshop material.

The Queensland Government later commissioned a further study in three largely-urban coastal environments, using the process and methodology developed for Murweh Shire but in a multi-hazard application. The outcomes of both sets of studies were reported in the Winter 2001 issue of this journal (Durham *et al.* 2001). On the basis of these studies a refined community emergency risk management methodology and process was made available to all local governments in Queensland (Zamecka and Buchanan 1999).

It appeared that Australia was entering the first decade of the 21st Century well placed to develop a new approach to the concept of 'the prepared community' with the EMA and QDES community emergency risk management publications, both based on verifiable field practice, freely available.

Meanwhile, a new paradigm was developing internationally

During the 1980s and 1990s, the dominant paradigm in international emergency management theory had developed from a 1979 US National Governors Association workshop which identified the key emergency management elements as *mitigation, preparedness for response, response and recovery* (National Governors Association 1979).

In 1994, the mid-point of the International Decade of Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR), an international conference in Yokohama, Japan agreed the *Yokohama Strategy and Plan of Action for a Safer World*. The subsequent World Conference on Disaster Reduction was held in early 2005 at Kobe in Japan's Hyogo Prefecture. The conference produced the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters (HFA)*[2] which, having identified specific gaps and challenges in existing programs, adopted three strategic goals and five related priorities for the 2005-15 period.

The HFA follows in the footsteps of IDNDR in focussing on disaster risk reduction within the context of 'building resilience to hazards'. It clearly incorporates risk reduction processes into the full range of emergency management program areas—prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

One of the outcomes of HFA was the formation of the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction forum which meets every second year. The forum brings together national governments, relevant UN and regional agencies, and the non-government sector to maintain 'the world-wide momentum of disaster risk reduction'.

By late 2012, under Global Platform arrangements, 78 countries had nominated National Platforms and Focal Points for disaster risk reduction. A National Platform was defined as 'a nationally owned and nationally led forum or committee for advocacy, coordination, analysis and advice on disaster risk reduction', while National Focal Points are the designated national government agencies responsible for national DRR policies and programs[3]. Some regions have also established Regional Platforms and Focal Points.

At its 2009 meeting, the Global Platform group considered a detailed report, the *Global Assessment Report (GAR)*. Based on evidence from reviews conducted in some 62 countries and on additional commissioned research, GAR highlighted what it identified as 'the need to strengthen capacities to address three disaster risk drivers: poor urban governance, vulnerable rural livelihoods, and ecosystem decline'.

The 2009 meeting concluded that 'most countries still lack a determined and focussed high-level policy framework that addresses these drivers' and that 'the institutional and administrative responsibility for risk reduction has to be vested at the highest possible level of government, in order to have the necessary political authority and resources to influence development policy'.

The Global Platform report of its meeting in 2011[4] identified that there has been only marginal improvement in disaster risk reduction on a global scale, in spite of the hard work and good intentions of UN agencies and the 168 nations which endorsed the Hyogo Framework in 2005 and a number of significant initiatives which had been undertaken by some regional and national entities. The main aim of the 4th Session of the Global Platform to be held in Geneva in May 2013 seeks to '...continue the effort from all sectors ... to take shared responsibility in reducing risks and reinforcing resilience in our communities'[5]. It is anticipated that it will also provide an opportunity to consult on and progress the development of the successor to the *Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015*.

There is growing acceptance within the international community over the relationship between disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management (DM)[6]. Disaster management (or emergency management in US, Australia and some other jurisdictions) is defined as 'concerned with organising and managing the impacts and consequences of disasters and

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2. UN A/CONF.206/L.2/Rev.1 (22 January 2005)

3. http://www.preventionweb.net/english/hyogo/national/list/

4. http://www.iisd.ca/ymb/gpdrr/2011/html/ymbvol141num6e.html

5. http://www.preventionweb.net/globalplatform/2013/

emergencies if and when they occur'. There has also been some support for the use of the term disaster risk management (DRM)[7] as the higher-order term embracing both the disaster risk reduction (DRR) and disaster management (DM) functions.

Thus, following the declaration of IDNDR in 1989, there has been an almost unbroken 20-year period of development of a new approach to disaster risk management, an approach which sees a direct linkage between disaster risk reduction (what we currently term as 'prevention' or 'mitigation', the first P in PPRR) and preparedness for and management of emergency and disaster events (the central PR). Clearly, however, some issues of policy and methodology in the current international approach need to be resolved.

In Australia, not much has changed

Australia had been an active participant in the 1990s IDNDR program, one of its primary roles being to facilitate DRR in the Pacific[8], and has been a participant in both the 1994 Yokohama and 2005 Hyogo disaster world conferences on disaster reduction. It has also participated in the three sessions of the Global Platform. In general terms, the focus of most academic interest and research in the field of emergency management in Australia has parallelled the international recognition of the inter-relatedness of disaster risk reduction and disaster management.

Since 2004, however, in terms of policy and program development, there has been little evidence that the EMA's 'emergency risk management' process has been taken up either theoretically or in substance in application to the management of community safety risk in any jurisdiction (in spite of the earlier cited programs in Queensland in the late 1990s) or in any of the currently-advocated 'emergency risk management models', such as NERAG and CERM[9]. While those models themselves, and many of the published local government emergency risk management reviews and plans drawn from them, generally recognise communities and individuals as 'stakeholders' in the process and as necessary elements in the standard 'communication and consult' step, the treatment of communities and individuals is cursory and often limited to a listing of 'at risk' facilities and lifeline elements without much detail.

It is also noteworthy that other than in a brief discussion of 'improving community resilience' there is no direct reference in the Victorian Government's Green Paper to current comprehensive risk-based disaster management concepts, while in the current Australian *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*

(NSDR) they warrant only an indirect reference (COAG 2011). The *2009 COAG National Disaster Resilience Statement* on which NSDR is based, acknowledges that 'a national, coordinated and cooperative effort is required to enhance Australia's capacity to withstand and recover from emergencies and disasters' (*ibid.*, p. iv), but neither suggest specific and agreed arrangements to enable that effort effectively.
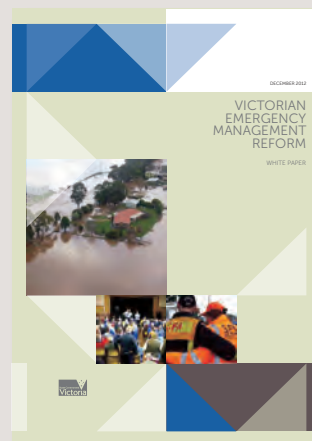
The Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper is an extensive overhaul of Victoria's emergency management system.

Again, neither the NSDR nor the COAG statements address the *issues* which need to be dealt with in developing that effort and the resultant resilient capacity. They are both silent on the *processes* by which that capacity might be attained. The NSDR suggested priority outcomes (*ibid.,* pp. 10-11) compare poorly both in scope and quality with the goals, priorities, key activities and implementation recommendations detailed eight years ago in the HFA. It is also clear that both are still significantly influenced by the response-focussed 'crisis and contingency management' approach which has dominated much of emergency management policy both in Australia and overseas since 9/11.

Australia and the US now appear to be among a number of countries diverging from the disaster risk management paradigm which has been developing internationally since the middle of the 1990s.

Where are we headed?

There is little doubt that today, as in the 1980s and 1990s, the international community remains concerned with the rising cost of disasters in terms of lives, property and national development, and that this

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6. Definitions of these terms are in http://unisdr.org/files/7817_UNISDRTerminologyEnglish.pdf

7. 'Disaster risk management (DRM)' is defined as 'the systematic process of using administrative directives, organizations, and operational skills and capacities to implement strategies, policies and improved coping capacities in order to lessen the adverse impacts of hazards and the possibility of disaster'.

8. See EMA 1999, Final Report of Australia's Coordination Committee for IDNDR, Canberra (ISBN 0642704724)

9. NERAG (http://www.em.gov.au/Publications), the 'National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines', is the current Commonwealth publication and CERM (http://www.ses.vic.gov.au/prepare/em-planning) is Victoria's 'Community Emergency Risk Management' guideline (drawn primarily from NERAG) – both publications are currently still in draft form.

concern has now been exacerbated by increasing anxiety about the likely effects of climate change. Some of the more recent international conferences seeking to renew political commitment to sustainable development, such as the June 2012 Rio+20 Summit held in Rio de Janeiro, have managed to obtain minor advances but have not significantly contributed to the reduction of community safety risk[10].

One reason for the lack of progress in global disaster risk reduction is undoubtedly that the three major drivers of disaster risk worldwide, identified in GAR as 'poor urban governance, vulnerable rural livelihoods and ecosystem decline', still remain the most intransigent problems faced by all countries, but especially by under-developed and developing nations.

A key factor contributing to this lack of progress has been the almost universal focus in the post 9/11 world on preparedness for and response to specific natural and man-made disaster events (which, of course, the UN itself now defines as *disaster management*). Much of this new focus has clearly arisen, particularly in many western nations, in the tendency to see terrorism as a primary threat to national stability and security, and in consequence to devote a disproportionate degree of attention to that threat. In Australia's case the 2002 Bali bombings could be seen as an additional factor in this, helping to promote a disproportionately heavy focus on anti-terrorism legislation and resource allocation (Roach 2011).

An additional issue arises out of varying uses of terms such as *prevention, protection, mitigation, resilience and vulnerability*, which is causing confusion in the current international DRR/DM dialogue.

As noted in the earlier section on international developments, however, while there has been growing acceptance of the necessary connection between DRR and DM, there are continuing difficulties in and disagreements about how that connection can be made effective at both policy and program levels. One of the countries recognised as having been the first to enshrine that connection in legislation is South Africa[11]. That country is reviewing its disaster management arrangements as its implementation has posed significant challenges, particularly at the level of local municipalities. Pacific countries, such as Samoa, have recently included disaster risk reduction in legislation[12], and have also experienced difficulty in its implementation at community level.

In countries such as Australia and the US, the theme of 'shared responsibility' in developing the capacity for 'resilience' has featured strongly in recent years, and consistently advocates a direct role for the individual and the community in disaster risk management. But other than in development of numerous 'self-help' or small-scale community resilience planning guides (e.g., Queensland's *Harden up* and Chapter 4 in UK's *National Risk Register*) there appears to be little real attention to the provision of effective guidance in the practical development of such a role.

At issue is the extent to which, since 9/11, national governments in western countries in particular, have been pursuing top-down disaster management policies and methodologies. This is perceived as in 'the national interest', while individual communities live with risks which are peculiar to, and only capable of management within those communities. These issues can only properly be addressed within those communities themselves.

Is this what 'the prepared community' should be about?

The way ahead for Australia?

In a recent opinion piece in this journal, headlined *Prevention is no longer a useful term in emergency management*, its author, Stuart Ellis AM, stated that current Australian doctrine 'ignores the reality that PPRR is out-dated' (AJEM 2012). Our PPRR concept, now over 30 years old, is hardly relevant to current international and Australian understandings of the purpose and scope of 'emergency management'[13].

Indeed, not only does 'prevention', as disaster risk reduction, lie outside the remit of today's emergency managers, but that can also be argued in relation to 'recovery', the long-haul process of restoration and reconstruction which can extend up to 10 years after disaster impact — although a proper linkage between the relief phase of response and recovery is vital (Burton *et al.*, 1978). There is clearly a need for revision to the existing Commonwealth Government publications

Australian Emergency Management Handbook Series provides principles, strategies and actions for a range of disaster events for emergency management professionals.

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10. See for example statements by a number of international leaders on www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-18546583 and from the Australian Prime Minister on www.abc.net.au/news/2012-06-23

11. In its *Disaster Management Act 2002*

12. In its *Disaster and Emergency Management Act 2007*

13. Yet PPRR terminology is still used in the recent Victorian Government's 2011 Green Paper and 2012 White Paper – and in the US has recently been expanded into 'PPMRR' – prevention, protection, mitigation, response and recovery (National Planning Frameworks developed following 'Presidential Policy Directive 8 and the National Preparedness System')

dealing with emergency management concepts and principles (Australian Emergency Management Series No. 1) and emergency risk management (Australian Emergency Management Series No. 5) to ensure that they address the purpose and scope of emergency management as is now defined.

Ultimately the goal must be, as recognised in both the 2009 COAG Statement and the 2011 NSDR, the development of *Safer, Sustainable Communities* (a motto until recently used by EMA). Promoting 'resilience' of itself neither addresses the *issues* which need to be dealt with nor puts in place the *processes* necessary to the development of that greater capability and capacity at community level.

Given constitutional arrangements for the division of powers between the Commonwealth and the States and Territories, these are tasks which fall to the latter, but certainly it is clear that COAG and the Attorney-General's Department could take a more active role in providing guidance and assistance in defining national aims and objectives. A useful start would be the development of a practical and community-based successor to the present emergency risk management concept and documentation.

At a recent Monash University Disaster Resilience Initiative Forum on 'Strengthening Community-Based Resilience', a noted Australian authority on emergency management issues suggested that we can only achieve community resilience by ensuring that communities 'are cognisant of the risks they face and the limitations of emergency service organisations', and concluded that 'communities that have involvement in and ownership of plans for their safety have a greater capability and capacity to look after themselves'[14]. We also need to note the Global Platform's 2009 statement of the need for 'constitutional and administrative responsibility for risk reduction ... to be vested at the highest possible level of government, in order to have the necessary political authority and resources to influence development policy'.

As noted earlier, Australia entered the first decade of the 21st Century well-placed to develop a new approach to emergency management. It is now time for us to review the stage we had reached in the development of that approach and to recognise that real 'resilience' needs to be based on 'the prepared community'.

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About the author

Roger Jones has practised in the field of emergency management for more than 35 years, joining the Australian Natural Disasters Organisation (later Emergency Management Australia) in 1974 as its inaugural Director, Operations and Plans. Roger was the Director of the Australian Emergency Management Institute from 1987 to 1994 and is currently a director and deputy chair of the Board of the Victoria State Emergency Service Authority. He has worked in the field internationally, regionally, nationally and at State/Territory and community level in Australia.

14. Monash University Disaster Resilience Forum, Melbourne, 15 August 2012 transcript, Neil Comrie presentation