

## Response to Draft report of the Productivity Commission on Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements

Thank you for the opportunity to offer feedback on the draft report on Natural Disaster Funding in Australia.

The report offers a good analysis of the impending need for reform in Natural Disaster Funding. My comments concern the urgent need for innovation in disaster risk reduction. In the first part, I address the need to build capacity for innovation in Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) (please also refer to background information at the bottom of this document for more clarity). In the second part, I address the pivotal importance of the collaboration between practitioners, community members and researchers<sup>1</sup>.

Firstly, I would like to draw your attention to the urgent need to consider and encourage new forms of risk management that are not necessarily based on risk knowledge. To this end, the draft report does acknowledge the challenges concerning factors such as *uncertainty* and *community diversity*, which influence the capacity and capability of communities to build resilience. Uncertainty means that it is impossible to fully prepare the wider community to face a disaster. Community diversity implies that contextual approaches are needed to make sure we stay relevant to specific community needs. Both factors reinforce the message that 'one measure fits it all' and 'hard mitigation' strategies (Vol. 2, p. 329) have several limitations and can potentially result in lower levels of efficiency and effectiveness.

Despite this acknowledgement in the draft report, the two volumes are primarily based on probabilistic risk assessment methods. These approaches fail to consider the uncertainty involved. Moreover, the reductionist nature of the method makes it very hard to consider the context of a community, let alone its strengths whose understanding is crucial to support communities in building their own resilience.

Mitigation strategies are overbalanced towards specified resilience, that is, the resilience of hazards that can be assessed and reported according to the National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines (NERAG). While it is fundamental that information on known risks is shared and distributed, 'hard mitigation' has its limitations, as recognised by the Commissioners in the draft report. For this reasons, strategies to tackle known risks should be associated with strategies to build general resilience, a type of resilience that refers to any risks including the ones that are unexpected or unknown.

This is an important aspect that has been taken into consideration by OECD and reported in the forthcoming United Nations Global Assessment Report 2015 (GAR15). The assumption that individuals will inevitably pick up the information provided is only partially acceptable. This type of thinking can be associated with command-control logics that are still predominant in the disaster management world. While this logic seems to be still appropriate in response, risk mitigation needs to calibrate push and pull strategies; otherwise, success will fail to last long-term.

Mitigation strategies need to go beyond this belief and create systems that guide communities' self-organisation towards more sustainable and safer practices.

In its current form, the draft report does not mention how the reform will encourage relevant stakeholders to invest in building general resilience beyond traditional 'hard mitigation' approach to DRRM. Investing in resilience building activities that cut across a number of risks may help Governments increase community self-organisation and action. This in turn means communities

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<sup>1</sup> Conflict of interest disclosure: I am an international PhD student at the University of Adelaide and this feedback is based on my research findings.

are less dependent upon a continuous feed of information, resources and supports from Governments, and better able to manage uncertain risks, which cannot be managed through hard mitigation.

Flexibility and agility need to be planned for already at this stage. What are the instruments that the government will use to try out innovative, more efficient and more effective approaches? Recent research findings show that 'compliance as the goal' is still one of the biggest problems at all government levels. This way of thinking discourages state and local government from trying new approaches that would be more value adding in their communities.

Finally, research has progressed significantly in recent years. However, the fact that researchers have to compete for funding with a plethora of other non-academic projects is not an incentive for collaboration. Practitioners and researchers need to be incentivised to work together - funding schemes are fundamental to encourage collaboration across traditional academe, government and community-sector boundaries. The report refers to a number of academic sources; however, the central role of research and innovation in disaster risk reduction is neglected.

In conclusion, I suggest:

- 1) That the report encourages the utilisation of additional forms of risk management that aim to build general resilience in the wider community, that is resilience to any risks
- 2) That the report states the importance of innovation and exploration of further approaches to community resilience building processes and converts this into dedicated funding schemes
- 3) That partnerships between researchers and practitioners (government, NGOs, community members, businesses, etc.) are encouraged and supported by reforms

For background information:

[Submission 110](#): Difference between specified and general resilience (recommendations to the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction prepared for the HFA Thematic Review )

[Research undertaken in South Australia](#) involving State Government, Australian Red Cross, Adelaide City Council, City of Onkaparinga and community members

[Problematic aspects of the National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines \(NERAG\)](#)

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Antonella Cavallo

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SA 5005

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FACSIMILE +61 8 8313 7512

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