

POSITION PAPER EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

JULY 2024

ABOUT THE KIMBERLEY REGIONAL GROUP

The Kimberley Regional Group (KRG) is an alliance of the four Kimberley Shires, being the Shire of Broome, the Shire of Derby West Kimberley, the Shire of Halls Creek and the Shire of Wyndham East Kimberley. Our Vision is to maintain and enhance the rich diversity and liveability of the Kimberley for its people and the world. Collaboratively the group seeks to drive positive impact across the region through improved social, economic and cultural outcomes. This paper is designed to highlight the issues as known to Local Government at the time of writing and the potential pathways that are supported.

CONTEXT

A natural disaster is an event that overwhelms the resources of a community and causes significant harm to people, buildings, infrastructure, the environment and economy. A coordinated response is needed to assist communities to cope with and recover from the disaster's consequences.

Climate change is increasing the timing and severity of natural disasters, including extreme weather events. An example of this included extensive flooding in the Fitzroy Valley in January 2023. Natural disasters have significant social, economic, cultural and environmental impacts. Modelling in 2021 by Deloitte showed that natural disasters cost the Australian economy on average \$38 billion per year, with this expected to increase to \$73 billion per year by 2060¹.

In Australia, emergency management is a partnership between Federal, State and local governments and local communities. Federal Government frameworks provide

the national emergency management architecture. This includes the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework² and the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (NDRRF)³. The NDRRF has four priorities to drive action to reduce disaster risk:

- 1. Understand disaster risk;**
- 2. Accountable decisions;**
- 3. Enhanced investment; and**
- 4. Governance, ownership and responsibility.**

Commonwealth funding, in partnership with the State, is critical to support local governments to plan for and undertake emergency management responses.

Under the Western Australian Emergency Management Act 2005, local governments are required to have local emergency management arrangements (LEMA) in place including local emergency management plans, local recovery plans and pre-evacuation plans⁴.

In 2023 the WA Government released the WA Community Disaster Resilience Strategy⁵ to support a collaborative and community-led approach to disaster resilience, to enable a stronger and more effective emergency management across disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

There is an increasing international and national focus on supporting communities to be more resilient by reducing disaster risk. This shift aims to address the causes of disaster risk, rather than focusing on the symptoms. Community disaster resilience means being able to cope with the impacts of a disaster, to recover afterwards and to adapt to changed circumstances⁶. Along with being able to respond to and recover from natural disasters reducing disaster risk is seen as critical to supporting communities to be resilience when a natural disaster occurs.

OBJECTIVE

- » **Resilient Kimberley communities that can effectively prevent, prepare, respond and recover from a natural disaster event.**
- » **Kimberley communities have access to the funding and resources to build disaster resilience and to effectively respond and recover quickly from natural disaster events.**
- » **Better outcomes from government investment by building back better after a natural disaster event to create more resilient communities.**

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The following guiding principles should inform an emergency management response in the Kimberley:

- Evidence based prevention, preparation, response and recovery informed by local knowledge.
- Clear, shared responsibilities between government, industry, business and the community.
- Inclusive engagement with local government and local communities.

- A focus on prevention and preparedness to mitigate impact and reducing the recovery period.
- A focus on activities that build community resilience to natural disasters.
- Timely, integrated action and funding to support local government's response and recovery.
- Mitigation and adaption to climate change through the use of renewable energy and sustainable technologies.
- Harness the expertise of Aboriginal people's knowledge of country and community to inform disaster preparation, planning, response and recovery.

POLICY PRIORITIES

1. Timely Access to Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements

- 1.1 Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) is an arrangement, not an agreement, between the Commonwealth, states and territories. The process between the West Australian and Federal Government is outlined in the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Western Australia (DRFAWA) managed by the WA Department of Fire and Emergency Services.
- 1.2 Kimberley Regional Group members have found that accessing DRFAWA is administratively burdensome with funding success uncertain. There is no consideration of the impact of remoteness and weather conditions in the Kimberley to undertake works by the funding or auditing process leading to considerable delays in mobilisation. There is a lack of timeliness for reimbursement of funds placing financial risk on Councils. There is a need for:
 - a. Shorter assessment period for DRFAWA claims.
 - b. Immediate access to funding to commence works.

- c. Staff from State or Federal government located in local authorities to assist with a disaster response.
- d. Eligible costs to include Local Government staff wages and equipment, and the associated ordinary use of Local Government plant and equipment.
- e. Capping of local government contributions at an agreed threshold above which the State government fully funds restoration.

2. Funding for betterment in Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements WA (DRFWA)

- 2.1 Betterment funding that allows local governments to rebuild infrastructure to a more resilient standard to better withstand the impacts of future natural disasters.

3. New and increased investment into building community disaster resilience

- 3.1 New and increased investment for local government to assess their level of resilience and to implement activities to build resilience in line with the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.
- 3.2 Increased, accelerated investment into the infrastructure needed for emergency response and recovery and to support food and fuel security, and supply chain resilience, including evacuation centres, telecommunications, roads, airports, ports, flood warning systems, utilities, food storage facilities, temporary accommodation options, and social and affordable housing.
- 3.3 Investment into priority projects to build disaster resilience including:
 - a. Tanami Road Activation Strategy which includes a freight transport hub and warehousing facility in Halls Creek.
 - b. First Point of Entry Status for Kimberley ports.

- c. Sustainable warehousing, including cold and dry food storage facilities at strategic locations to ensure food security.
- d. Development of a waster strategy for biohazards.
- e. Upgrading telecommunications infrastructure.
- f. Addressing coastal vulnerabilities and increasing flood warning system.
- g. Increased investment into multipurpose evacuation facilities and social and affordable housing to enable people to evacuate in place.

- 3.4 Increased investment into services critical to support community resilience, with a particular focus on the needs of vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities, the elderly and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes local health, mental health and family support services.
- 3.5 Increased investment into infrastructure and services that support animal welfare including domestic pets, livestock and wildlife.

4. A new funding pool to support Aboriginal communities to build disaster resilience

- 4.1 The Kimberley has a strong and diverse Aboriginal cultural with over forty-two language groups and over one-hundred Aboriginal communities. These communities range from small outstations to substantial settlements with up to 850 people. Due to their remoteness and lack of services, many communities are highly vulnerable to the impacts of natural disasters. Traditional understanding of country can inform disaster management and response. However, this understanding is not integrated into traditional emergency management planning and responses.

There is a need for:

- a. New and increased investment to Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations to work with their communities to build disaster resilience.
- b. New and increased investment into Increased investment into on-country programs and their integration with emergency management planning⁸.
- c. Increased investment into Aboriginal Community Layout Plans, with a greater focus on integrating emergency management risk such as flood risk into the plans⁹.
- d. New and targeted investment in Aboriginal community infrastructure, services and resources to build resilience and to facilitate better recovery from natural disasters.

5. Investment to support local business build resilience and recover from natural disaster events

Natural disasters impact on business due to supply chain disruptions and the availability of goods and services. This impacts on freight costs leading to increased costs for businesses and consumers. The cost of insurance for businesses and residents means many people are not able to purchase insurance for natural disasters. There is a need for:

- a. Fit for purpose freight subsidies in place to facilitate business continuity and to ameliorate the cost and price of goods and services for local business and consumers.
- b. Accessible grants available to business to assist with the costs of response and recovery from natural disaster events.
- c. A review of insurance products to address barriers to insurability in the Kimberley.

ENDNOTES

1. <https://www.iag.com.au/newsroom/community/natural-disasters-estimated-cost-australia-73-billion-year-2060>.
2. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/australian-disaster-preparedness-framework.pdf>.
3. <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-disaster-risk-reduction-framework.pdf>.
4. <https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/state-emergency-management-committee/local-emergency-management-arrangements>.
5. https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2023-11/community_disaster_resilience_strategy.pdf.
6. Commonwealth of Australia (2018) National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, page 7
7. <https://www.dfes.wa.gov.au/recovery/funding>.
8. Further information about Aboriginal Ranger Programs can be found at <https://www.niaa.gov.au/indigenous-affairs/environment/indigenous-ranger-programs> and <https://www.dbca.wa.gov.au/management/aboriginal-engagement/aboriginal-ranger-program>.
9. Layout Plans are a type of town plan developed specifically for Aboriginal settlements in WA. Layout Plans are prepared and endorsed under State Planning Policy 3.2. Further information can be found at <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/document-collections/aboriginal-settlement-layout-plans>.