Ground Zero:
Innovations in public management post-disaster, the Australasian experience

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Settings  Dismiss
Australia and New Zealand have significant experience and expertise in managing natural disasters

- Domestically through the experience of frequent severe events, esp in the past decade;
  - Supporting and assisting each other in major events; and
- Internationally, through the experience of contributing assistance, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region.
- Because governments have long expected natural disasters would become more serious and frequent, and that the associated costs would continue to grow
  - They have been evolving alternative policy responses aimed and promoting greater individual and community resilience to natural disaster events.
The capacity to coordinate and deliver

- Is closely linked to perceptions of governmental competence
  » Politically and administratively.
- The performance of individual agencies, but also the system as a whole, comes under intense scrutiny in the accountability and review phases that inevitably follow a significant disaster event.
Our work:

- Focuses on the capacity to coordinate and deliver across the three tiers of government in Australia’s federal system.
- It looks more broadly to the capacity for coordination within the networks of agencies and groups involved in disaster management in Australia across the PPRR framework.
- We also seek to identify barriers and impediments to building greater individual and community resilience, consistent with the strategic intent adopted by COAG through the NSDR.
Our research in Queensland suggests:

- The effective response to the ‘Summer of Disasters’ 2010/11, was anchored in the intergovernmental policy capacity of Australia’s disaster management system.
  - The framework for intergovernmental collaboration created structures, routines and relationships that supported coordination in the prevention and preparedness phases and enabled it during the crisis response.
  - It was also rooted in the network capacity of the state’s disaster management arrangements, which are deliberately ‘bottom up’ (Arklay & Tiernan 2012).
In Australia, responsibility for emergency and disaster management is shared:

- **Commonwealth government**
  - Provides assistance when State or Territory resources are insufficient and such assistance is requested.
  - Provides safety net financial assistance for disaster relief and recovery.

- **State and Territory governments**
  - Have principal responsibility for natural disaster preparedness response and recovery.

- **Local governments**
  - Work in partnership with states to ensure local disaster planning and preparedness.
In emergency and disaster management

- National policy and funding frameworks establish:
  - Clear thresholds and protocols about when and how the Commonwealth becomes involved.
  - That primary responsibility rests with state governments and their local counterparts.

- Intergovernmentally, it appears effective outcomes are more likely when arrangements establish:
  - A clear and shared understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the different tiers of government; and
  - Show respect for the principles of subsidiarity and jurisdictional competence.
The intergovernmental framework:

- Has been refined over more than a decade of collaboration and policy learning
- Has fostered a strategic policy intent that is shared
  - All levels of government have had a stake in its development and stand to benefit from its achievement
  - Agenda has remained remarkably consistent, despite political changes at national and sub-national levels.
Relationships and expertise

- There has been reasonable stability amongst key actors and across the policy community more generally
  - Frequent interaction required through the intergovernmental framework has helped support long-term relationships among key protagonists – especially senior officials.

- Cooperative arrangements between jurisdictions promote dialogue, exchange and policy learning.
  - Technical and specialist nature of emergency and disaster operations means there are agreed disciplinary perspectives (PPRR, risk analysis etc), international equivalents and professional norms.
  - But the policy community has learned together, through experience (positive and negative) and necessity.
These findings challenge themes in the international literature

- Which, based primarily (overwhelmingly?) on US experience, suggest that collaboration in disaster management tends to be ‘temporary and ad hoc’ (Robinson & Gaddis 2012).
- Thus highlighting the need for research into the experience elsewhere, notably Australia, New Zealand and the Asia-Pacific, where the majority of disasters occur.
Australia’s disaster management system

- Is far from perfect, but has shown itself to be flexible, responsive, capable of learning and adaptive to new information and circumstances.
- The policy community has invested in and made good use of evidence and data in policy-making.
  » But, though research and experience supports greater investment in prevention and preparedness, the primary focus (of attention and resources) remains on response and recovery.
There is a ‘policy gap’ in disaster management policy…

- Which has the potential to undermine COAG’s strategic intent of building individual and community resilience.
- We argue the ‘gap’ is the lack of a policy and funding framework to ensure the lessons learned in response and recovery are integrated back into prevention and preparedness.
- The feedback loops across the phases of the PPRR framework are weak and urgently need strengthening.
An integrated framework for disaster management

- Would focus on ‘all hazards’ with resilience as the desired outcome
- Effort and resources would be expended on preparation and prevention and lesson-drawing back into policy from response and recovery.
This requires...

- A commitment to addressing the serious imbalance/distortion in the allocation of resources
  - To response and recovery through the NDRRA;
  - Rather than to investments in prevention and mitigation remain modest, despite evidence of economic returns and resilience benefits.

- A willingness to overcoming programmatic impediments to implementing the ‘betterment’ provisions of NDRRA; and/or
  - To consider alternative strategies/funding models/incentives to encourage investment in prevention and mitigation.
It also requires:

- A commitment to systematic lesson-drawing, particularly about decisions and interventions in the recovery phase.
- Australian policy-makers are not strong on evaluation – needs to be built in as a means of strengthening the feedback loops to policy development and design.
Managing expectations

- Effective performance during and after disasters may increase expectations about what will happen during and after the next event.
  - Practitioners consistently cite the need to manage expectations as their biggest challenge during response and recovery.

- A key challenge in Australia is to ensure resilience is not undermined by government actions in recovery
  - This poses a serious dilemma for politicians and government agencies, particularly in the aftermath of a major event, with the media focus on affected individuals and communities.
To conclude:

- There is a serious policy gap in Australia’s disaster management arrangements that requires urgent attention and action by all levels of government.
- Developing an integrated policy framework that shifts the allocation of effort and resources from response and recovery to prevention and preparedness will be difficult, but is necessary to achieve the strategic intent of the NSDR.
  - The prospects for doing this in the disaster management arena are more promising than in other policy domains because of its intergovernmental and network policy capacities.
But…

- It will require collaboration between researchers and policy-makers to ensure policy-relevant knowledge and expertise can be brought to bear at all phases of the PPRR framework;
- The sustained commitment of first ministers, ministers, officials and others at all levels of government; and
- Creative policy thinking, which can transcend existing program and funding frameworks and perhaps too current organisational arrangements.