

Ms. Sophie Dunstone
Secretary
Senate Environment and Communications References Committee

Dear Ms. Dunstone

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission to the Senate Environment and Communications Committee Inquiry into recent trends in and preparedness for extreme weather events.

As you may be aware, The Australian Risk Policy Institute (ARPI) has taken the lead in the development of new thinking and practice in the management of risk in society. With support from eminent national leaders, we have developed a new approach to understanding and managing risk in our uncertain, complex, and changing world. This is defined in our “Risk Policy Model”¹. The need for new thinking, new approaches and new institutions is to address major risks and actual failures of the systems the community benefits from and relies upon. The Risk Policy Model focuses actions on risks that have potentially catastrophic consequences for people, communities, industries and society as a whole.

The following comments are submitted for consideration.

It is our view that it is essential to move beyond the National Climate Change Adaptation Framework approved by COAG in 2007. “Positioning” Australia is not enough. The next stage is to engage the wider Civil Society in a Partnership focused on Response planning. The aim is to provide an integrated approach. This recognises that adaptation to extreme weather events is not something we can pass off to government; it is a problem set that will involve us all, individually, and in the private sector and in government. Further, our society is increasingly interconnected and interdependent; simply “up-scaling” current approaches would be a mistake. There is a need to respond at multiple levels at once.

A Partnership with Civil Society focused on adaptation to extreme weather events would encompass:

1. Agreement on a shared, recognisable, readily understood definition of what constitutes an Extreme Weather Event, and how to recognise one.

ARPI defines an Extreme Weather Event as constituting a specific impact of extreme weather on a vulnerable population, region or system so severe that those affected will be, to the extent of their knowledge and the limits of their preparation, unable to protect themselves, their region or their system.

2. The establishment as a national priority and as a basis for collaboration the identification and response to risks associated with extreme weather events with the most far reaching consequences; potentially catastrophic consequences for communities.

ARPI defines Catastrophic Public Risks as Vulnerabilities that: a) are so extended in scale; or b) would threaten essential services for an extended time; or c) would threaten basic existence. Catastrophic Public Risks are risks so enormous in their potential damage that one or more of them would be unsustainable.

¹ The Risk Policy Model:2012 can be found at: http://www.arpi.org.au/whats_new.html

Response planning would be achieved through:

1. The development of Community Response Plans to provide a strategy for a community to be prepared for extreme weather events, and to respond effectively. Here 'community' is not just defined geographically—a city, region, water catchment, etc. It is also defined by mutual interest, such as an Industry.
2. The establishment of new information sharing mechanisms—which ARPI calls Risk Knowledge Exchange Networks. These are purposeful collaborations designed for situations where potentially catastrophic consequences may eventuate from a failure to properly share knowledge; the knowledge is often highly sensitive.

The Australian Risk Policy Institute would welcome the opportunity to address the Committee at formal hearings stage to provide further detail to its submission for the benefit of the Committee's deliberations.

Yours sincerely

Tony Charge
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President