Australian Institute for
**Disaster Resilience**

# AIDR Submission

## Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience

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RECOMMENDATIONS:

- That the committee consider the need for an increased level of national focus, resourcing and support for disaster risk reduction and resilience building initiatives across Australia, to strengthen the work being undertaken by many organisations across the system, to reduce the demand on response workforces in future disasters, and to support stronger outcomes for the DRR workforce and for communities themselves.
- That any recommendations that are made about creating or enhancing future response workforces in relation to disasters, be considered carefully through the lens of enhancing community resilience outcomes in the immediate, intermediate and long term.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Senate Select Committee on Australia's Disaster Resilience. As the National Institute for disaster risk reduction and resilience, AIDR makes this submission to the Senate Inquiry as an important contributor to enhancing the capacity of the disaster resilience practitioners in both government and non-government organisations, and always with the goal of building on and enhancing the resilience of Australian communities.

## 2. OVERVIEW OF AIDR AND ITS ROLE

AIDR works to strengthen the resilience of Australian communities to disasters by sharing knowledge and collaborating across a broad range of sectors taking action to reduce disaster risk. AIDR connects, collaborates with, and supports a variety of stakeholders across multiple sectors, states, and territories including the emergency management sector, disaster resilience sector, all levels of government, the private sector, research sector, peak bodies, and the community sector. AIDR enables and builds the capabilities of these diverse groups, in order to enhance disaster resilience outcomes across this broad system of organisations, groups and individuals. AIDR does this by fulfilling the role of a knowledge and partnership enabler, broker and a facilitator of networks, knowledge and capability.

To achieve a more resilient Australia, AIDR's purpose is to:

- Create, grow and support a range of networks,
- Provide opportunities for learning, development and innovation,

- Share knowledge and resources to enable informed decision making and action,
- Facilitate thought leadership through national conversation.

AIDR's 'Theory of Change' (Appendix 1) drives our work.[1] Effective change requires working towards immediate, intermediate, and long-term outcomes to support the shared goal of a more resilient Australia. The goal of a more resilient Australia can only be achieved if everyone shares the commitment to achieving it.

### 3. AIDR's PROGRAM OF WORK

AIDR's program of work spans disaster risk reduction, prevention, preparedness, response, recovery and resilience. AIDR's services are aligned with, and enable contribution to, existing national and international policy and frameworks. The sector leadership and development that AIDR provides currently, as a partner of AFAC and the Australian Red Cross, and funded by the National Emergency Management Agency includes programs such as:

- **The Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection**: The Handbook Collection currently comprises 19 Handbooks on a range of topics related to disaster prevention, preparedness, response, and recovery. A suite of Handbook companion documents supports the practical implementation of the principles and practices. These resources are developed and reviewed with the support of expert working groups from diverse organisations and sectors across Australia to ensure the Handbooks reflect nationally agreed principle and good practice and help to build national capability and consistency.
- **Major Incidents Report**: AIDR's Major Incidents Report provides an annual record of major incidents from a national perspective that have been identified as significant by the emergency management sector. The recently released 2021-22[2] report describes 36 Major Incidents. The report highlights the consecutive, concurrent, compounding, and complex natural hazards that severely impacted communities across Australia and put significant pressure on the emergency management workforce.
- **Knowledge Management**: AIDR provides thought leadership for disaster resilience through the curation of contemporary knowledge products including the Australian Journal of Emergency Management, Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub, Knowledge Collections and Practice papers.
- **Networking and National Capability Events Program**: AIDR leads a national capability and events program so that individuals and organisations can build knowledge, skills and connections that support disaster resilience through a regular program of curated professional development events and learning opportunities tailored for the disaster resilience sector.
- **Volunteer Leadership Program**: AIDR develops local leadership capability for disaster resilience and emergency management volunteers across traditional emergency

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[1] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2020) Monitoring and evaluation plan. Melbourne.
https://www.aidr.org.au/media/8324/aidr_monitoring-and-evaluation-plan_2020-10-15.pdf

[2] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2022) Major Incidents Report 2021-22. Melbourne.
https://www.aidr.org.au/media/9574/aidr_major-incidents-report_2021-22.pdf

management agencies and with emerging disaster resilience volunteers from community organisations, not-for-profits, disaster relief organisations and local government.

- **Education for young people program:** AIDR promotes the development of disaster resilience education as a vital component in children and young people's learning through facilitating networks and professional learning opportunities for stakeholders from the education sector, emergency services, and youth-focused organisations.
- **Resilient Australia Awards Program:** AIDR delivers a national awards program that celebrates, shares and promotes initiatives that build and foster community resilience to disasters and emergencies.

In this context, AIDR is best placed to provide its expertise in response to Section 1.A.IV and Section C of the inquiry Terms of Reference.

## 4. RESPONDING TO THE TERMS OF REFERENCE

4.1 Section 1.A.IV of the Terms of Reference - *Current preparedness, response, and recovery workforce models, including: the role of Australian civil and volunteer groups, not-for-profit organisations, and state-based services in preparing for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters, and the impact of more frequent and more intense natural disasters on their ongoing capacity and capability.*

It is widely recognised that disasters are becoming more frequent, occurring concurrently and having significant, long-term impacts on individuals, communities, the environment and the economy. Climate change is predicated to increase the number of disasters and the impacts on Australians through longer and more intense fire seasons, more extreme heat events, less frequent but more intense cyclones, and an increased likelihood of cyclones moving further south[3]. While these disasters may be triggered by natural phenomena, disasters are not natural. Rather, disasters are caused by the interaction of a natural hazard with existing vulnerabilities across society. The extent of the impact from any event is related to the intersection between the hazard, the climate or weather conditions, and where and how populations live in the landscape.

Recent research and discussion papers have highlighted the challenges emergency management workforces face as a result of a changing climate.[4] With the increased frequency and intensity of disaster events, more and more communities are affected. Half of Australia's LGAs were subject to a disaster declaration in 2022[5]. This situation is clearly stretching the response and recovery workforce. This coupled with decreasing number of volunteers[6] leads to calls for a dedicated volunteer or response workforce.

AIDR's strong view is that there is a greater need to focus on disaster risk reduction (prevention and preparedness) initiatives, to curb the growing demand on response and recovery workforces when a disaster occurs.

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[3] BOM and CSIRO (2022) State the climate 2022 report. http://www.bom.gov.au/state-of-the-climate/
[4] Rickards, L and Keating, A (2021) Implications of climate change for emergency services operations: insights from the literature. Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC. https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/sites/default/files/02-2_implications_of_climate_change_for_emergency_services_operations_-_insights_from_the_literature_1.pdf
[5] https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/7960214/half-of-australia-hit-by-natural-disasters/
[6] https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/new-data-suggests-volunteering-impacted-harder-by-covid-19-than-paid-work/#/

Disaster risk reduction initiatives aim to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risk, by strengthening the resilience of people, systems and approaches. Investing in disaster risk reduction is a national priority to secure a safe, healthy and prosperous future. Greater resilience before an event reduces the need for and pressure on response and recovery arrangements. Australia is heavily reliant upon people volunteering their time and resources, either formally or informally, to help individuals and communities prepare, respond to, and recover from disasters.

As our depth of understanding the tasks required to help manage these challenges has become more complex, the range of stakeholders involved in risk reduction and resilience has grown beyond those traditional emergency service providers, such as local government, rural fire services and State Emergency Services. Organisations involved in resilience and recovery activities include a diverse groups of organisations such as Red Cross, Salvation Army, Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, local neighbourhood houses, health services and schools. Increasingly, new organisations such as the Monash University Fire to Flourish Initiative, Minderoo Foundation, as well as the private sector, such as Insurance Group Australia, Suncorp, and National Australia Bank are becoming active in supporting resilience building activities.

It is important to recognise and acknowledge that many communities also have capacities and social capital that supports resilience – before, during and after emergency events. Community members and groups build social capital and resilience in 'peace time' between emergency events. They also work to support disaster preparation and resilience building activities, to various degrees across the country. After a crisis, to support relief and recovery, these groups organise sporting teams, fundraising events, other community events, or by providing informal support to those experiencing tragedy. These actions all contribute to community resilience, as a well-connected community is more likely to be prepared and recover quickly from a disaster.[7]

In the context of more frequent disasters, communities, practitioners, and a diverse range of stakeholders are increasingly seeking out knowledge to support capacity building. There is a growing demand for further resources for building disaster resilience. The next section highlights AIDR's increasing leadership role in supporting the development and dissemination of this knowledge.

### 4.2 *Growing Demand for AIDR's Knowledge Products*
Since 2019, there has been a growing demand for AIDR's knowledge products and collaborative services. This demand for knowledge and access to networks and connections, can be clearly seen in the numbers of people, sectors, and jurisdictions participating in or drawing on AIDR's suite of knowledge products and collaborative services.

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[7] Aldrich, D. P. (2012) Building resilience: Social capital in post-disaster recovery. University of Chicago Press: Chicago

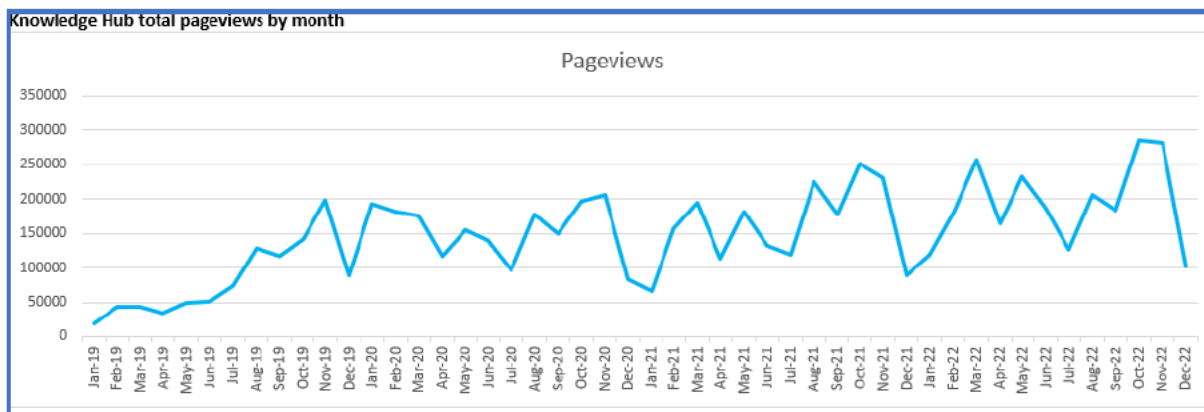**Knowledge Hub total pageviews by month**



**Pageviews**

**Figure 1: AIDR Knowledge Hub Pageviews – January 2019 to December 2022**

Figure 1 above shows the steady increase in AIDRs knowledge hub website usage over time. This highlights that a growing number of people are actively seeking out practical resources and knowledge. In 2021-22 alone, over 533,500 people accessed materials across the 3 AIDR websites with over 2,233,844 pageviews on the Knowledge hub. The number of people accessing AIDRs resources increases in times of disaster, as highlighted in the graph above, there are evident peaks during the 2019 – 2020 Black Summer bushfires and the 2022 floods.

The Australian Disaster Mapper was the most accessed resource with 306,285 pageviews, showing that people are interested in understanding disaster events, both recent and historical, impacting their communities. In 2021-22 AIDR connected over 5,214 people from a range of sectors and jurisdictions across Australia, including traditional and non-traditional emergency management organisations, by hosting 91 professional development events. AIDR engaged with 27 sectors, 9 jurisdictions, and 10,164 stakeholders over this period.

4.3 Section (c) of the Terms of Reference - *Consideration of the practical, legislative, and administrative arrangements that would be required to support improving Australia's resilience and response to natural disasters.*

AIDR adopts the UNDRR definition of resilience: "the ability of a system, community or society exposed to hazards to resist, absorb, accommodate, adapt to, transform and recover from the effects of a hazard in a timely and efficient manner, including through the preservation and restoration of its essential basic structures and functions through risk management."[8] AIDR strongly supports a focus on understanding the systemic nature of disaster risk and resilience, as identified in research and national and international frameworks.

Systemic risks emerge from the interactions of climate change and natural hazards with the complex, interdependent and interconnected networks of social, technical, environmental and economic systems[9]. Resilience is about more than improving physical infrastructure. People and communities, including the emergency management workforce, need to be equipped with tools, capability and knowledge that extend beyond traditional emergency management to resist, absorb,

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[8] UNDRR https://www.preventionweb.net/understanding-disaster-risk/key-concepts/resilience

[9] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2021) Systemic Disaster Risk Handbook. Melbourne. https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/9228/handbook_systemic_disaster_risk_2022-03-17_v11.pdf

accommodate, recover, transform and thrive in response to the effects and stresses.[10] There is a need to treat resilience as capacity building and take a community-level, place-based approach to understand the points where risk is realised, the things of value that are affected and who bears the costs.[11] Using systems thinking is critical to develop an understanding of the dynamic, complex moving parts that make up a resilient society (**Principle 3** - Systemic Disaster Risk Handbook). Since 2015, there has been an increase in activity and commitment to community resilience building by a range of players, funded from a range of sources. These include Australian Red Cross, Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal, Monash University's Fire to Flourish, and Minderoo Foundation among them. This increased activity is bringing resources and capabilities to be used by communities who seek to address their disaster risk and build resilience. However, this has all been done in a largely fragmented and uncoordinated way.

Australia's arrangements for improving disaster resilience are guided by a range of international and national frameworks, including the UN Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030[12], the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework (NDRRF)[13], the Australian Preparedness Framework[14] and the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR). The National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework identifies priority areas and strategies to assist Australia to achieve greater national coordination and accountability with respect to preparedness, resilience and risk reduction responsibilities are supported by five-year outcome statements. Australia's international agreements and national frameworks provide strong foundations with principles and priorities for improving resilience.

AIDR's program of work aligns with the principles outlined in international and national frameworks to accelerate disaster risk reduction. The Australian Preparedness Framework for example sets a common agenda for collective action and highlights the importance of:

- o Fostering partnerships
- o Planning and coordinating capabilities and partnerships
- o Enhancing and developing capabilities
- o Establishing effective governance roles and responsibilities

AIDR supports investing in the implementation of these very well researched frameworks in order to achieve a cohesive and impactful national approach to managing current and future climate and disaster risk and supporting resilience.

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[10] IBID

[11] IBID

[12] Australian Government National Emergency Management Agency (2022) Australia's National Midterm Review of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030 Report: Are we succeeding at making Australian communities safer in the face of growing disaster risk? https://nema.gov.au/sites/default/files/inline-files/Australia%27s%20National%20Midterm%20Review%20of%20the%20Sendai%20Framework%20for%20Disaster%20Risk%20Reduction%202015-2030%20Report.pdf

[13] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2018) National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-disaster-risk-reductionframework.pdf

[14] Australian Government Department of Home Affairs (2018) Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/australian-disaster-preparedness-framework.pdf

Building upon Australia's existing emergency planning arrangements, there is a need to focus more on action-based resilience planning to strengthen local capacity and capability, with greater emphasis on community engagement and a better understanding of the diversity, needs, strengths and vulnerabilities within communities. This is made clear in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.[15]

At a practical level, community resilience is developed and maintained by partnerships with all levels of government, non-government and corporate sectors through support programs, services and resources provided both pre- and post-disaster, such as those facilitated and provided by AIDR. Since its publication in 2018, the *Community Recovery*[16] Handbook has been downloaded 6,689 times making it the 5th most downloaded product on the Knowledge Hub. Additionally, the *Community Engagement for Disaster Resilience*[17] Handbook has been downloaded 3,515 times since 2020.

Key knowledge included in these guidance materials, is based on significant research and lived experience of DRR practitioners and community members alike. It is important to understand that disaster resilience cannot be developed for, or on behalf of, communities. Community engagement is the essential process through which all stakeholders come together to reduce the risk of disaster and enhance resilience collectively.

Effective community engagement for disaster resilience enables communities and partners to:

- develop an understanding of local risks and the actions required
- share and use diverse local information to better understand the assets, strengths and capabilities of the community
- provide opportunities to share and use knowledge, skills and ideas and to develop or enhance local disaster risk reduction and resilience activities
- provide mutual opportunities for learning and capability development
- build and strengthen networks and partnerships that promote trust, collaboration and a sense of shared responsibility for disaster risk reduction and resilience.[18]

Building resilient communities in the context of disaster integrates prevention, preparation, response and recovery and is a complex and continuous process, rather than a process with a definitive end point or conclusion. It is also a process that cannot be imposed on a community (before or after an emergency event) with any success.  AIDR's work with the Social Recovery Reference Group highlights underlying principles that must be adopted by any organisation or practitioner working with communities to increase their resilience, if they are to achieve success:

- Understand the context
- Recognise the complexity

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[15] COAG (2011) National strategy for disaster resilience. Pg. 2.  https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/emergency/files/national-strategy-disaster-resilience.pdf
[16] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2018) Community Recovery Handbook. Melbourne.
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-community-recovery/
[17] Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (2020) Community Engagement Handbook. Melbourne.
https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/7989/aidr_handbookcollection_communityengagementfordisasterresilience_2020.pdf

[18] IBID

- Use community-led approaches
- Coordinate all approaches
- Communicate effectively
- Recognise and build capacity.

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

AIDR recommends that there is a need for an increased level of national focus, resourcing and support for disaster risk reduction and resilience building initiatives across Australia.  Increased investment could strengthen the work being undertaken by many organisations across the system, reducing the demand on response workforces in future disasters, and supporting stronger outcomes for the DRR workforce and for communities themselves.

It is important that any new investment, or the creation of a new workforce or organisation, is considered in the context of the elements of the DRR system that are already in place, and in line with agreed principles and best practice.  It is also important that the focus on any such consideration be the desire to strengthen existing efforts, rather than to introduce or impose a new workforce or organisation onto the existing system or onto communities. Finally, any such consideration should be considered carefully through the lens of enhancing community resilience, in the immediate, the intermediate and the long term.

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## Appendix 1: AIDR Theory of Change



| Broader goals (shared) | Australian communities, economies and the environment are more resilient to disasters | People are drawing on trusted connections, expert knowledge, skills and evidence to influence values-based decision-making and action for disaster resilience in Australian communities | There is a greater awareness and understanding of the need for disaster risk reduction as a priority across all sectors of the Australian community |

| End of strategy outcomes (2024/25) | A growing community of people who are more connected, informed, knowledgeable and capable of evidence- and values-based decision-making for improved disaster resilience | AIDR is considered an influential and trusted thought leader in disaster resilience |

| Intermediate outcomes | Those new to disaster resilience are building their networks and knowledge base | People have a better understanding and awareness of good practice, and share insights and learnings across communities and sectors | People working across the resilience system better understand their interconnected roles and contribution to disaster risk reduction |

| Immediate outcomes | A reference point is available for those new to the system | Current and emerging practitioners are connected | People in education settings are supported to develop and apply skills and knowledge to reduce disaster risk | People working in disaster risk reduction have a greater understanding of disaster resilience terminology, frameworks and ways of working to reduce disaster risk and build resilience | Contemporary research-based knowledge and practice for improved disaster resilience is known, accessed and shared | There is more awareness amongst people working in disaster risk reduction of AIDR's role in disaster resilience |

| Influencing strategies | Actively support, grow and sustain a range of networks across sectors and jurisdictions | Enable those with a role in disaster risk reduction and resilience to come together to learn, develop and innovate | Collect, develop, curate and share knowledge to educate and promote good practice in disaster risk reduction and resilience | Provide a central focus point for national thought leadership on disaster risk reduction and resilience |
| | Stakeholder engagement | | | |

| Foundations | Existing knowledge, experience and capability in Australia and internationally | Partnerships | Education policy landscape | Collaboration groups | National principles and guidance for good practice | Research utilisation | Knowledge curation | Common terminology | Reference tools, e.g. NERAG, AEML | Disaster resilience policy landscape |

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