

The Resilience Digest

Stories from the Resilient Australia Awards

2026 edition

Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency

Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience

About AIDR

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) is the National institute for disaster risk reduction and resilience. We collaborate across sectors to strengthen the resilience of Australian communities to disasters. AIDR creates, grows, and supports a range of networks; provides opportunities for learning, development, and innovation; shares knowledge and resources to enable informed decision making and action; and facilitates thought leadership through national conversations. AIDR is managed by the Australian and New Zealand Council for fire and emergency services (AFAC) on behalf of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA).

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Cover photo: Mapping the patterns of rain.
Photo by Arathi Sasikumar.

The Resilience Digest is produced by AIDR. It brings together news, research, resources and examples of good practice from across Australia's disaster resilience and emergency management sectors.

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Acknowledgement of Country

The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and culture.

We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this report may contain images or names of people who may have since passed away.



Chasing rainbows to school. Photo by Chandler Mcminn.

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Foreword

NEMA

As the Interim Coordinator-General of the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), I am pleased to present the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) Resilience Digest 2026.

The Resilient Australia Awards celebrates the outstanding achievements of award recipients and their contributions to best practice and innovation in disaster resilience.

This year's submissions were of an exceptional standard, with the diversity of resilience work underway across Australia emerging as a strong theme. Investment spans locally led community initiatives through to government programs, business continuity, school-based projects, mental health and wellbeing, and research translated into practical action.

A key lesson that embodies resilience for both NEMA and AIDR is that the strongest initiatives place communities at their centre. From the outset, the programs highlighted in this digest build effective partnerships across sectors and demonstrate approaches that can be sustained or adapted elsewhere. The awards not only recognise achievements but also share practical ideas and lessons that can strengthen resilience more broadly.

The Australian Government's long-standing partnership with AIDR is founded on collaboration and knowledge sharing across the emergency management sector, which are critical to our efforts to build a resilient nation. The awards highlight innovative thinking and action across communities, institutions and the private sector. This type of initiative and ingenuity is vital to meet the challenges of increasingly complex and frequent disasters.

Looking ahead, emerging challenges will create increasingly complex risks. The Resilience Digest showcase the teamwork, collaboration and stewardship needed to address vulnerabilities and strengthen our collective resilience to better prepare and support Australian communities.



Pat Hetherington

Interim Coordinator-General

National Emergency Management Agency

Foreword

AIDR

At the Resilient Australia Awards National Ceremony last year, I paraphrased the great Tim Rogers, as his band, You Am I, was being inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame: 'God I [expletive deleted] love disaster resilience and this is the time we showcase the best of the best.'

The Second National Action Plan for the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework identifies building evidence, intelligence and insights by integrating local knowledge and lived experience, including traditional knowledge, to inform effective decisions, as an action under Priority 1: Understand disaster risk. The Resilient Australia Awards are one way of gathering local knowledge and lived experience.

The Resilient Australia Awards have been a fixture in our system for more than 25 years now. Each year someone, somewhere looks at the work they have been doing and thinks, 'Yes, I believe we have made a difference in reducing someone's disaster risk and consequence, or helped them navigate through the worst days of their lives'. Someone else might have said to them, 'Hey, what you've done is really good; you should share your work through the Resilient Australia Awards'. And so, they do.

From ceremonies across the country, we came together to judge the best each state and territory had to offer to find the national winner. It is truly wonderful to see the joy on people's faces when their names are announced.

But when you delve into it, there are so many good projects that deserve to be showcased. Although we have the knowledge and practice to address the challenges we face, we are not great at mobilising that knowledge and putting it in the hands of the people helping others. Too often we duplicate efforts because we don't check whether the work has been done before. And if we look, we may not find it, or sometimes we assume there are better ways to do it.

There is a lot going on in the background to make the awards run smoothly, from the state and territory convenors, through to the team within AIDR and AFAC events that make the event run seamlessly. I thank everyone for their hard work.

This digest seeks to bring together all this fabulous content into one place, so it is easy to find, digest, and utilise. Through this, we hope to inspire individuals and communities to pick up these projects and initiatives and say, 'I can do this in my neck of the woods'. This is how disaster resilience builds momentum across the country and makes communities a safer place to live so that hazards do not become disasters.



John Richardson

Executive Director

AIDR

Where these stories come from

The case studies featured in the Resilience Digest are drawn from projects recognised through the Resilient Australia Awards, Australia's national awards program celebrating initiatives that strengthen disaster resilience and help communities prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters and emergencies.

Since 2000, the awards have showcased successful approaches from across Australia, highlighting the people, partnerships, and projects making a tangible difference in reducing risk and building resilience. They capture a diverse range of initiatives, from community-led preparedness programs and risk reduction projects to innovative recovery approaches, research, and collaborative partnerships.

The Awards provide a unique window into resilience in practice. While every community faces different hazards, challenges and circumstances, the experiences captured through the Awards offer valuable lessons, insights and ideas that can be adapted and applied in other contexts. Together, these case studies demonstrate that resilience is built through shared responsibility, collaboration, innovation, and sustained investment over time.

The projects featured in this publication were selected from Resilience Australia Award recipients and finalists from across the country. They represent a cross-section of sectors, communities and approaches, illustrating the many ways individuals, organisations and governments are working to create safer, more resilient futures.

National award categories

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Collaboration and Partnership Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Government Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Business Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Mental Health & Wellbeing Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Local Government Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National School Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Community Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Photography Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Research for Impact Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State Government Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State Business Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State Mental Health and Wellbeing Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State Local Government Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State School Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State Community Award

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
State Photography Award

Business



Stand up paddleboarding. Photo by Larry Gray (Primal Vision).

Embedding enterprise resilience to safeguard essential community services

Mission Australia

NSW

Mission Australia is one of Australia's largest, most trusted community service and housing providers. A national Christian charity with more than 165 years of experience, it delivers safe, secure homes and excellent community services to more than 140,000 people each year, while advocating for a fairer Australia to meet the growing needs of people across the country. Communities rely on Mission Australia to be there in times of need, particularly when people are experiencing vulnerability.

Experience through COVID-19, extreme weather, and other disruptions showed that traditional business continuity approaches were no longer sufficient. When an event happens, it is not the time to work out what to do. Mission Australia's Enterprise Resilience and Business Continuity initiative created a consistent, organisation-wide approach to preparedness across more than 250 services, embedding resilience into everyday leadership and operational practice through a crisis management plan, an extreme weather event framework, site-specific business continuity plans, trained teams, practical tools and regular exercises. It provides consistency while allowing local leaders to respond to the circumstances of their community, scaling up or down according to the risk.

During Cyclone Alfred in 2025, local, regional, and enterprise-level responses operated in parallel, supporting staff safety and service continuity for affected communities. The post-incident review led to further improvements, including new resources for safely reactivating sites.

By putting people at the heart of its planning, Mission Australia has turned static planning into an active capability that is regularly practised, refined and applied, helping ensure essential services remain available when communities need them most.



Every connection starts with a conversation. By putting people at the heart of our resilience planning, Mission Australia is better prepared to continue listening, supporting and standing alongside Australians, helping ensure essential services remain available when communities need them most.

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA

National Business Award 2026

WINNER

Project Overwatch – preventing and preparing our stores for disaster

Woolworths Group

QLD

When disasters cause damage, power outages, or disruption, supermarkets can lose fresh food, and communities can lose access to essential supplies. This is especially serious in remote areas where a supermarket may be the community's only source of food and other necessities. Project Overwatch was developed to help Woolworths prepare for these disruptions before they happen, rather than relying on reactive responses once a disaster strikes.

The initiative brings together Woolworths' operational, finance, climate, procurement, and safety teams, alongside external weather information providers. Its impact extends beyond reducing business losses. Keeping food safe means less waste and a better chance that communities can continue accessing essential supplies during prolonged outages. The project strengthens store leadership's severe-weather readiness and optimises resource-deployment decisions.

The project identified high-risk stores and introduced practical measures to protect assets and essential stock during emergencies. One key intervention is the use of thermal refrigeration blankets, which keep chilled food safe for up to 4 additional hours during refrigeration failures. During live trials, the blankets protected up to 96% of vulnerable stock and saved approximately $174,000 in a single event at the Warner store. Funding has since been approved to install upgraded blankets at 176 priority stores, many in regional and remote areas.

By making resilience part of everyday store planning, Project Overwatch is helping protect food security before disasters occur. For people in regional and remote communities, this means a greater chance of finding essential food and supplies when you need them most.



Maryborough Woolworths, Queensland 2022.

Flying the KITE: Co-designing cultural tourism as a First Nations-led strategy for drought resilience

Flinders University

SA

Drought and climate change pose significant risks to the economic and social sustainability of SA's Riverland, where agriculture is the dominant economic sector.

Flying the KITE (Katarapko Island Tourism Experience) addresses this challenge by exploring a different question of how resilience could also come from creating new economic opportunities.

The project, led by Flinders University in partnership with the River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC) is exploring a community owned cultural tourism experience on Katarapko Island, a place of deep cultural and ecological significance. The Riverland sits within the Murray-Darling Basin, one of Australia's most climate-exposed regions, where drought frequency is increasing and the economic vulnerability of agriculture dependant community is well documented.

At the centre of the project is First Nations leadership and self-determination. Through a structured co-design process, RMMAC members, Elders and Traditional Owners determine what cultural knowledge is shared, how it is shared and on whose terms. More than 40 First Nations, government, industry and community participants have contributed to shaping a proposed ranger-led cultural tourism experience, including its tour route, cultural protocols, and culturally determined No Go Zones.

The project has also created stronger connections between local businesses, tourism organisations, government agencies and community groups, opening opportunities beyond the initiative itself. Government agencies responsible for Katarapko Island have also engaged directly in the design process, including exploring streamlined permitting for future pilot operations.

Flying the KITE demonstrates that drought resilience can extend beyond traditional agricultural responses. By transforming First Nations cultural knowledge and community strengths into sustainable economic opportunities, the initiative supports self-determination, employment pathways, regional economic diversification, and stronger cross-sector connections.

At its core, the project demonstrates that when communities are trusted to lead, resilience building can strengthen not only economic capacity, but also the cultural and social foundations of a region.



Dr Naser Pourazad and Professor Paul Arbon at River Murray and Malee Aboriginal Corporation (RMMAC) headquarters.

Primary Care Emergency Exercise Toolkit

Murray PHN

VIC

During emergencies, primary care services are often the first point of contact for people seeking community support.

When an event disrupts normal operations, organisations must make critical decisions quickly, often under challenging conditions and with limited resources. While many organisations have emergency plans in place, these plans are not always tested, creating a gap between documented procedures and the practical actions required during a disruption.

To address this challenge, Murray PHN, in partnership with Strategic Disaster Solutions, developed the Primary Care Emergency Exercise Toolkit. This discussion-based resource supports primary health services to move beyond planning and put their emergency arrangements into practice. Featuring structured scenario templates, escalating injects, facilitator guides and debrief frameworks, the toolkit enables general practices, pharmacies, community health services, aged care providers, allied health services, mental health services and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to test realistic emergency scenarios without the need for specialist facilitators or significant resource investment.

The toolkit is already supporting primary care organisations to strengthen preparedness and build organisational resilience. Through facilitated discussion exercises, participating services have identified vulnerabilities, validated response arrangements, clarified roles and responsibilities, and strengthened decision-making processes. In one cyber disruption scenario, a participating organisation identified a previously unrecognised weakness in its document management processes, resulting in improved safeguards against ransomware and enhanced system recovery arrangements. The exercise also informed broader policy and practice improvements, including the integration of regular emergency exercises into preparedness activities.

For participants, the benefits extended beyond strengthened systems and processes. Exercises increased confidence in responding to unexpected disruptions and provided greater clarity around priorities and decision-making during the critical early stages of an incident. As one participant reflected:

'The unknown scares you more. Walking through the scenario made the first ten minutes clearer.'

The Primary Care Emergency Exercise Toolkit demonstrates that effective emergency preparedness does not need to be complex or resource intensive to achieve meaningful outcomes. Its adaptable design provides a practical and scalable way to strengthen readiness across the primary care sector. By helping organisations test plans, identify vulnerabilities and refine response arrangements before an emergency occurs, the toolkit supports more informed decision-making and embeds preparedness into everyday business operations.



Bushfires near Corryong, North East Victoria 2020.

Community



The renegades. Photo by Simon Lewis at St Kilda Pier, Victoria.

Rebuilding the social fabric: 5 years of community recovery

Reclink Australia

VIC

When the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires devastated East Gippsland, the damage extended far beyond homes, businesses, and landscapes. Communities across the region were left grappling with trauma, uncertainty, and disruption. Before recovery could gain momentum, COVID-19 restrictions further isolated already vulnerable communities, disrupting social connections, volunteer networks, and community participation at a time when they were needed most.

For Reclink Australia, the challenge was clear. While significant attention was being directed towards physical rebuilding and formal support services, communities were also experiencing a quieter loss: the erosion of connection, confidence, and belonging that helps people recover and thrive. Rebuilding the Social Fabric was created to address this gap.

Working across remote and rural communities including Mallacoota, Cann River, Genoa, and surrounding areas, Reclink adopted a community-led approach focused on rebuilding social infrastructure through participation, connection, and trust. Rather than delivering a predetermined program, the team worked alongside communities to understand local needs and design activities that were welcoming, relevant, and accessible.

Over 5 years, the initiative delivered a diverse range of sport, recreation, arts, and wellbeing programs as low-barrier entry points into recovery, including basketball, gentle exercise, photography, music, arts workshops, nature-based activities, and community events. Programs were free, delivered in familiar community spaces, and facilitated by trusted local staff and community members. Beyond attendance, each activity created opportunities for people to reconnect, re-engage with community life and rebuild confidence at their own pace.

The flexibility of the model allowed programs to evolve alongside community needs. In Mallacoota, what began as a surfing initiative evolved into an ocean confidence program after community consultation revealed that many participants lacked confidence around water safety rather than surfing itself. Over time, participants progressed into surf lifesaving pathways, with some completing Bronze Medallion qualifications and becoming active members of the local surf lifesaving club.

In Cann River, a community photography program helped participants reconnect with both place and community after the fires, evolving from a small social activity into a public exhibition celebrating the region's recovery and natural beauty. Community music programs similarly connected residents from isolated communities including Cann River, Bemm River, Chandlers Creek, and Rockton, creating opportunities for performance, creativity, and social connection.

The impacts extended beyond participants. Strong partnerships were established with local schools, neighbourhood houses, recovery committees, health and wellbeing providers, emergency services, community organisations, and cultural groups. Organisations including Ambulance Victoria, the Royal Flying Doctor Service, Surfing Victoria, Tennis Victoria, and the Melbourne Chamber Orchestra contributed to activities and strengthened pathways into broader community support.

A particularly innovative outcome was the development of informal social prescribing pathways, enabling health professionals to connect patients experiencing isolation, anxiety or social withdrawal into Reclink activities as an alternative pathway into wellbeing support outside traditional clinical settings.

Local employment was another cornerstone of the project. Over 5 years, more than 10 local women were employed across Far East Gippsland, creating meaningful employment opportunities while ensuring programs were delivered by people with trusted community relationships and lived local knowledge.

As recovery progressed, many participants transitioned into volunteering, mentoring and leadership roles. Community members who initially attended activities for social connection became organisers, facilitators and local champions, helping to strengthen community capability and reduce pressure on existing volunteer networks.

Today, the project's most enduring legacy can be seen in stronger social connections, reduced isolation, increased community participation and renewed community confidence across some of Victoria's most remote communities. Participants frequently describe the initiative as ‘the best thing to come out of the bushfires’, reflecting its lasting impact on everyday community life.

Rebuilding the Social Fabric demonstrates that disaster recovery is not simply about rebuilding infrastructure. It is also about rebuilding the relationships, trust and sense of belonging that enable communities to recover, adapt and thrive. By investing in social connection over the long term, Reclink has shown how community-led recovery can strengthen resilience long after disaster has passed.



Mallacoota Reclink Team, 2022. Photo by Mike Amos.



Fluro fitness group, Reclink, 2021.

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Community Award 2026
WINNER

Outdoors under pressure: Building outdoor sector-wide disaster resilience and risk reduction

Outward Bound Australia and the National Centre for Outdoor Risk and Readiness (NatCORR)

ACT

Australia's outdoor sector is highly vulnerable and increasingly exposed to bushfires, floods, heatwaves, storms, and extreme weather, yet many organisations are small, geographically dispersed, and lack the capacity to develop their own individual disaster resilience measures.

In response to the 2019-20 Black Summer bushfires – during which Outward Bound Australia lost 3 of its 4 operational sites – the National Centre for Outdoor Risk and Readiness (NatCORR) was established. This initiative of Outward Bound Australia aims to help the sector move from reactive response to preparedness and resilience. NatCORR brings together expertise from outdoor education, emergency management, weather services, academic, and government to ensure tools and resources reflect the needs of the outdoor sector.

NatCORR resources and facilitates professional development opportunities, including workshops, national collaboration forums, and sector-specific research publications. Most significantly, its National Outdoor Risk and Resilience Symposium and the Outdoor Risk Intelligence (ORI) platform bridge the knowledge of incident response, weather interpretation, organisational resilience, heat forecasting, and risk assessment tools, integrating weather data with human heat-response modelling. The development of the ORI Heat module to provide heat stress rating, hints, and tips specific to the needs and demands of the outdoor sector was a significant piece of collaboration and delivery to support a safer outdoor sector.

To date, NatCORR has delivered more than 20 professional development workshops and convened the 2025 National Outdoor Risk and Resilience Symposium, engaging 486 participants. Its sector-specific resource website has attracted more than 3,000 users, while disaster resilience content has been presented at more than 20 events and conferences. Participants report using NatCORR tools and information to proactively adapt activities in response to forecasted conditions, to reduce risks while maintaining service. This ultimately supports safer decision-making and improves organisational preparedness.

The result is a more connected and informed outdoor sector, with organisations increasingly sharing knowledge, accessing specialist risk management tools, and adapting activities in response to environmental conditions. This approach demonstrates how a sector-wide collaboration can support safe outdoor participation and a more resilient Australian community. Lastly, this also offers a scalable and transferable model that could be adapted to other sectors exposed to environmental risks, such as education, tourism, and community services.



Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) Peer Leadership Development Program

Queenslanders with Disability Network

QLD

People with disability have valuable knowledge of their own needs during emergencies, yet they have often been treated as recipients of emergency information rather than as people who can shape disaster planning. The Disability Inclusive Disaster Risk Reduction (DIDRR) Peer Leadership Development Program addressed this gap by supporting people with disability to become leaders in their communities' preparedness and response.

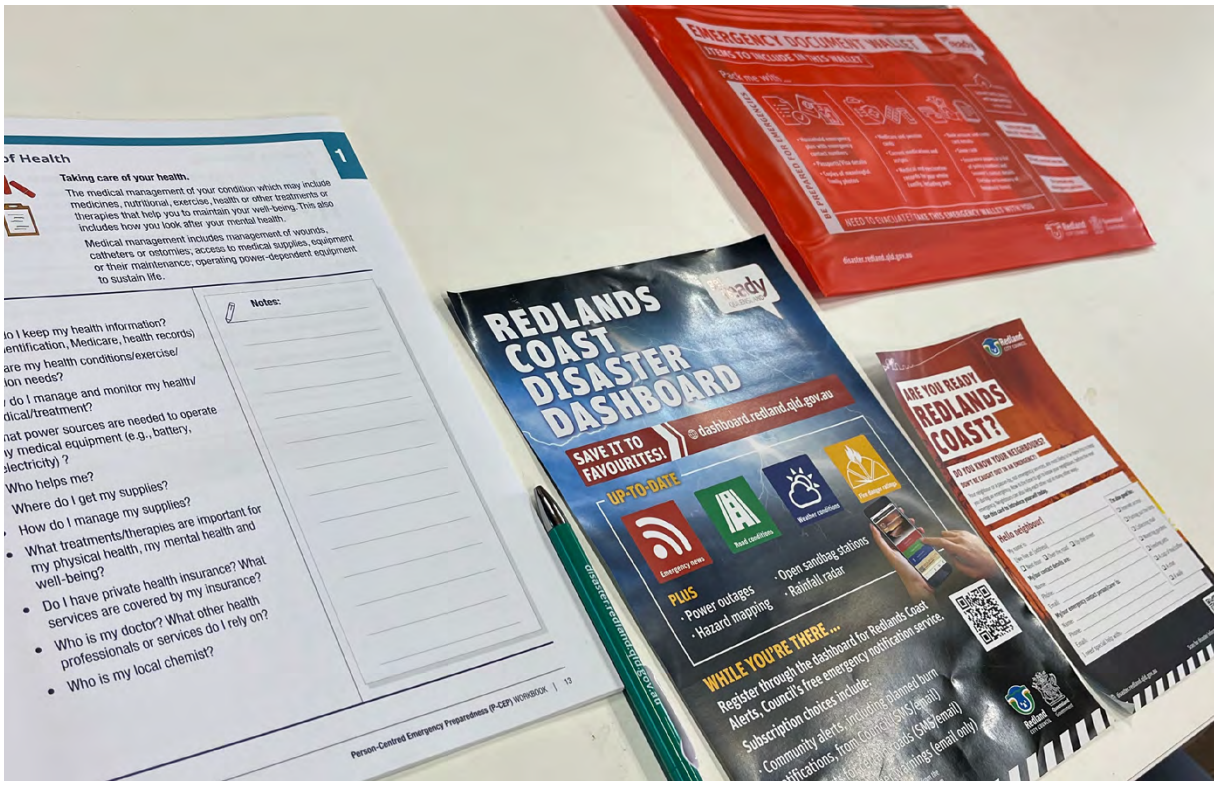
The program brought together Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN), councils, emergency services, disability organisations and community members. From this, 2 communities of practice were established to help maintain relationships and share knowledge beyond the program. Most importantly, people with disability gained greater confidence to influence decisions, share their experiences and help others prepare. Councils and emergency services gained a stronger understanding of the needs and capabilities of people with disability.

Delivered across Redland, Bundaberg, and Southern Downs, the program helped participants build emergency planning, leadership and advocacy skills.

Through the program, 8 people with disability became peer leaders, supported by 12 local champions. Independent evaluation by the University of Sydney found that participants developed a better understanding of local hazards, greater confidence in emergency planning and stronger preparedness behaviours. These changes translated into practical community action.

In Southern Downs, a local champion worked with a pharmacy, the council, police and emergency services to run an accessible preparedness workshop covering emergency planning and medication continuity. In Bundaberg, participants identified gaps in disability service providers' preparedness, contributing to a Disability Inclusive Emergency Planning Forum. Redland participants also promoted preparedness through community events and local partnerships.

The result is a more inclusive approach to disaster resilience, where people with disability are not simply considered in emergency planning but actively help shape safer, better-prepared communities.



Emergency preparedness resources and local disaster information provided during a Person-Centred Emergency Preparedness (P-CEP) workshop, Russell Island, 2026.

Be Ready Bruny

Australian Red Cross

TAS

Delivered by Australian Red Cross in partnership with Kingborough Council, Be Ready Bruny supported Bruny Island residents to better understand local risks and build practical and psychological preparedness for disasters.

Recognising the unique challenges of an island community, the project engaged 418 community members through workshops, school programs, pop-up sessions, community events and informal gatherings. Rather than relying solely on formal meetings, the project met people where they were, helping make disaster preparedness part of everyday community life while strengthening community connections.

The project has created lasting benefits beyond its formal activities. Residents continue to share disaster preparedness information through the Bruny News, while a community-led property numbering initiative is helping emergency services locate properties more efficiently during emergencies.

The project strengthened relationships between residents, emergency services and local government, increased awareness of local hazards, and supported the community to take ownership of resilience-building actions. As a result, Bruny Island is better connected, better informed and more confident in preparing for and responding to future disasters.



Community members participate in a RediCommunities workshop, assessing local disaster risks and preparedness using the Australian Red Cross RediCAT (Community Assessment Tool), Bruny Island, Tasmania, 2025. The workshop helped identify community strengths and priorities, informing future resilience and preparedness initiatives.

Implementation of the SES storm warning system

Department of Police, Fire and Emergency

TAS

When severe weather threatens, clear and timely information can make the difference between uncertainty and action. In May 2026, Tasmania State Emergency Service (SES) implemented the Australian Warning System (AWS) for storms, giving communities clearer information about the risks posed by storms and, most importantly, what they should do to stay safe. Storm warnings now use the AWS 3 tiered warning levels, nationally consistent icons, colours and calls to action, helping people recognise and understand warnings across different hazards and jurisdictions.

Integrated into TasALERT, Tasmania's official source of emergency information, the system translates complex weather information into practical, impact-based advice for communities. AWS storm warnings issued by Tasmania SES complement the Bureau of Meteorology's weather warnings, helping people understand not only the forecast severe weather, but how it may affect them and what action they should take to stay safe.

The initiative also introduced an automated process that imports Bureau of Meteorology warning areas directly into TasALERT, reducing delays in issuing warnings. A targeted public awareness campaign reached more than 390,000 accounts, helping build familiarity with AWS storm warnings. By making warnings more consistent, accessible and action-oriented, the project strengthens Tasmania's ability to support people in protecting themselves, their families, property and livelihoods during severe weather.



Preventing bystander rescuer drowning through community co-design of public rescue equipment

Life Saving Victoria

VIC

Public rescue equipment in Venus Bay is a state-first drowning prevention initiative to reduce drowning risk and improve community safety in one of Victoria's highest risk coastal locations through co-designed emergency response infrastructure and public education.

Created in partnership between Life Saving Victoria, Venus Bay Surf Life Saving Club and the local community after a bystander tragically fatally drowned attempting a rescue, the project established 5 public rescue equipment stations at key beach access points. Each station combines rescue equipment with an emergency call button providing 2 way communication to Triple Zero (000), with supporting communications technology from Control Centre Solutions (CartGIS). They also contain an emergency marker, instructional and long-range signage, and multilingual information. The approach helps bystanders rapidly connect to emergency services and provide support without unnecessarily entering the water themselves. The rescue tube also enables strong ocean swimmers to promptly rescue or provide flotation to those in need.

Community co-design was central to the initiative. More than 300 residents, visitors, club members and stakeholders participated through consultation, surveys, focus groups, education, public awareness, and other engagement and evaluation activities. This helped ensure the final infrastructure and communication materials reflected local needs, behaviours and different levels of swimming ability and confidence.

The initiative has demonstrated strong early outcomes. The stations have supported multiple rescues and lives saved, including 6 lives being saved within 8 days of the equipment's launch in December 2024. Evaluation also identified increased awareness of public rescue equipment and improved understanding of safer ways to respond to an aquatic emergency.

Early and consistent community engagement, strong partnership and evidence-informed design can help communities develop practical, place-based solutions that help address local risks. The trial of public rescue equipment at Venus Bay promotes the value of designing emergency preparedness measures with and for people with different levels of capability, rather than universal response assumption.

The project substantiates how disaster resilience is strengthened through proactive risk reduction, community capability and locally designed solutions. Its combination of infrastructure, emergency response, education, co-design and evaluation provide a framework that can be adapted to other high risk coastal and inland environments.

The initiative is part of the Surf Life Saving Australia Beach Drowning Blackspot Reduction Program, funded by the Australian Government; and education, promotion, and public awareness campaign project elements are funded by the Andrews Foundation.



Photo by Andrew Paloczi, South Gippsland Sentinel Times.

Government



Home Energy Support: Social Housing Upgrades Project

ACT Government

ACT

The Home Energy Support: Social Housing Upgrades Project is a large-scale ACT Government initiative improving the resilience, comfort, and energy efficiency of social housing while reducing tenants' energy costs and household emissions. The project delivers fully funded ceiling insulation and replaces gas appliances with efficient electric alternatives in public and community housing properties across the ACT, with funding support from the Australian Government's Social Housing Energy Performance Initiative.

The project responds to the heightened risks that extreme heat and cold pose to people living in energy-inefficient homes. These risks can be particularly significant for low-income households, older people, people with disability and single-parent families. By improving thermal performance, the upgrades help homes remain cooler during heatwaves and warmer during cold weather, while reducing energy demand and helping tenants manage their energy costs.

Delivery is underpinned by collaboration across government, industry, the training sector and housing providers. Housing ACT leads communication and engagement with public housing tenants, while the City and Environment Directorate manages the upgrade program and supplier delivery. Collaboration with industry and the Canberra Institute of Technology has also supported the development of training and certification pathways for insulation installers, helping build the workforce needed to deliver upgrades safely and at scale.

Almost 5,000 properties have received upgrades. Project evaluations show measurable improvements for tenants. For example, among surveyed public housing tenants, 75 per cent reported improved home comfort, 63 per cent reported an improved ability to cope with heatwaves and 50 per cent reported an improved ability to cope with extreme cold.

By combining targeted housing upgrades, coordinated tenant engagement, workforce development and large-scale delivery, the project is reducing climate vulnerability across the ACT's social housing sector. Its scalable delivery model and measurable improvements in thermal comfort and tenants' ability to cope with extreme weather demonstrate how investment in energy-efficient housing can reduce both energy hardship and disaster risk.



Strategic climate resilience in First Nations social housing

Aboriginal Housing Office

NSW

First Nations communities and social housing tenants are increasingly exposed to the impacts of climate change, with more frequent and severe disasters placing homes, health and wellbeing at risk. The Aboriginal Housing Office's (AHO) Strategic Climate Resilience in First Nations Social Housing initiative is focused on a simple but significant outcome: keeping First Nations tenants safe, secure, and connected to Country as climate risks increase.

Supported through NEMA's Disaster Ready Fund, the AHO has developed a proactive, evidence-based approach to strengthening resilience across its portfolio of more than 13,000 social housing properties, home to approximately 32,000 tenants. The initiative represents a shift from reactive disaster recovery towards targeted investment that reduces risk before disasters occur.

The project combines climate risk modelling, property condition and resilience assessments, and economic analysis to identify where resilience upgrades will deliver the greatest benefit. Importantly, the approach considers not only the potential physical damage to homes, but also the broader social and cultural impacts of disasters, including displacement, disruption to community connections, loss of connection to Country, and adverse health and wellbeing outcomes.

By creating a clear understanding of risk across the portfolio, the project provides a practical roadmap for future investment in climate resilience. Targeted upgrades can help reduce exposure to extreme heat, improve resilience to natural hazards, and strengthen the ability of homes to withstand climate-related events.

For more than 30,000 tenants, the benefits extend well beyond the physical asset. The initiative supports safer homes, reduces the risk of displacement, helps maintain community connections, and enables First Nations families to remain safely on Country during times of increasing climate uncertainty.

Through this work, the AHO is demonstrating how data-driven planning, long-term thinking and a strong focus on community outcomes can improve resilience for some of NSW's most vulnerable communities while delivering lasting social, cultural, and economic benefits.



Resilient Homes Fund

Department of Housing and Public Works, and Queensland Reconstruction Authority

QLD

After Queensland's severe 2021–22 floods, thousands of households faced damaged homes, financial pressure and uncertainty about whether they could safely return. Around 7,000 homes were damaged across 39 local government areas, with almost half becoming uninhabitable. The Resilient Homes Fund was established to help affected households rebuild more safely and reduce the risk of experiencing similar damage in future floods.

Jointly funded by the Queensland and Australian Governments, the $741 million program offered home raising, resilience upgrades and voluntary buy-backs for properties facing severe flood risk. It also helped homeowners understand their risks and connect with builders and other support.

More than 1,300 homeowners have completed resilience works, while a further 685 high-risk properties have been bought back. These buy-backs reduce the likelihood of families being exposed to repeated flooding in homes that are difficult to protect. The benefits are evident in homeowner feedback and real-world experience. Among surveyed homeowners, 82 per cent reported a better understanding of flood risk, while 68 per cent said they felt less concerned about severe weather after their resilience works.

During Tropical Cyclone Alfred, all surveyed owners of raised homes reported no damage to habitable areas, and 95 per cent of surveyed retrofitted homes sustained no damage to the resilience works. These findings suggest that upgrades can provide practical protection when severe weather returns.

The program relies on collaboration between government agencies, councils, builders, insurers and community support organisations. Case management and education also helped vulnerable homeowners navigate the recovery process. For households, resilience means more than stronger buildings. It means greater confidence in their homes, less fear when heavy rain arrives, and a lower risk of displacement and another difficult recovery.

By helping families make their homes more resilient before the next flood, the program is supporting more secure households and stronger communities.



Final home settlement, Wilston, Queensland, June 2024.

Resilience starts with foresight, not hindsight

Department of Premier and Cabinet Tasmania

TAS

Tasmania is facing an increasingly complex risk environment, from bushfires and floods to severe weather, cyber incidents and the impacts of a changing climate. Recognising that resilience cannot be built through emergency response alone, the Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy brings government, local government, industry, community organisations, academia, and community members together around a shared vision for a more resilient future.

The Strategy was shaped by statewide consultation and more than 100 participants in strategic foresight workshops delivered with the Australian National University National Security College Future's Hub. Participants explored emergency risks, challenged assumptions and considered how social, economic, environmental, and technological changes could shape Tasmania's future. Community engagement at the Hobart and the Burnie Shows alongside targeted consultation with young people and people with disability, ensured that lived experience was part of the conversation.

The resulting strategy provides a flexible, statewide framework to guide resilience planning, investment and decision making across Tasmania. Its impact extends beyond the strategy itself, the process strengthened relationship between sectors, built capability in strategic foresight and created a shared understanding of the need for long term coordinated action. By looking ahead rather than relying on the lessons of past disasters, the project is helping Tasmania prepare for risks that have yet to emerge and build resilience that can adapt to an uncertain future.



Tasmanian Disaster Resilience Strategy, launched in 2025.

Schools in Fire Country

Country Fire Authority, Victoria

VIC

Children living in bushfire-risk areas are disproportionately affected by emergencies, yet traditional bushfire education has largely positioned them as recipients of safety messages rather than active contributors to community safety.

Schools in Fire Country is a curriculum-aligned, place-based bushfire education program, designed to give Year 5 and 6 students the opportunity, confidence and resources to learn about local bushfire risks and play an active role in addressing them. Drawing on over a decade of child-centred disaster risk reduction (CCDRR) research, the program has been developed collaboratively across multiple agencies, sectors and expertise. It receives national support and funding from NEMA, and the Victorian State Government Safer Together program.

Through inquiry-based learning, students work with teachers, Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers, emergency management practitioners, Traditional Owners, and other local experts to explore cultural burning, fire ecology, bushfire behaviour, and risk. Across 3 phases – discover, investigate, and take action – they build their knowledge, identify local challenges, and develop practical solutions. This approach places student voice and local knowledge at the centre of learning, while encouraging students to share their projects and initiatives with families and the wider community.

The program is grounded in the principle that children can play a valuable role in disaster risk reduction as agents of change. By giving students opportunities to investigate real issues and take meaningful action, it helps build their confidence and creates opportunities for preparedness initiatives to extend beyond the classroom.

Participating schools report increased student confidence in understanding and discussing bushfire risk, with teachers observing that greater knowledge can help reduce fear and anxiety. The program has also strengthened connections between schools, emergency services and local communities. With 90 per cent of participating schools willing to repeat the program, there is sustained interest across a range of Victorian communities.

Schools in Fire Country demonstrates how research can be translated into practical approaches to emergency management and education. The inclusion of the program within the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan and Victoria's Bushfire Management Strategy reflects its contribution to broader strategic priorities. By supporting young people to learn about and address local risks, Schools in Fire Country provides a practical, evidence-informed model that ensures the participation and leadership of young people in building disaster risk resilience now and into the future.



Diorama preparation, Chewton Primary School, Victoria, 2023.

Mental health and wellbeing



Resilience on stilts. Photo by Carol Holden, Bega, NSW.

Embedding mental health in disaster response: Disaster Wellbeing Officer Surge Workforce Model

Canberra Health Service

ACT

Disasters can have significant and prolonged impacts on mental health and wellbeing. A coordinated and timely psychosocial response can help reduce these impacts by providing practical support, fostering recovery and connecting people with ongoing care as needed. However, children and young people, people with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse communities, and people experiencing socio-economic disadvantage can face barriers to accessing timely and appropriate support.

Partnerships across government, health and community sectors, together with joint training and engagement, have strengthened coordination and increased the reach of mental health and wellbeing support from response through to recovery.

The Disaster Wellbeing Officer Surge Workforce Model is a system-level initiative designed to strengthen disaster mental health preparedness, response and recovery across the ACT. It establishes a trained and coordinated workforce to provide early, trauma-informed psychosocial support, assistance and connection to ongoing services. Its 3-tiered model allows responses to be scaled according to the size and complexity of a disaster, while supporting a seamless transition from immediate response to longer-term recovery.

The model demonstrates the value of embedding disaster mental health capability within existing health, government and community systems rather than relying on ad hoc responses during crises. Defined workforce roles, governance arrangements and tested activation processes support timely mobilisation when disasters occur.

Underpinning the model is a multi-agency community of practice that strengthens relationships, builds shared capability, and promotes a common understanding of evidence-informed approaches across sectors. Together, these elements have strengthened workforce readiness, interagency coordination and continuity of care, giving communities greater access to appropriate mental health support before, during and after disasters.



Evacuation Centre, Canberra Health Services disaster wellbeing officer lead and ACT Minister for Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith. Dickson College, Canberra ACT, 2020.

Safe Haven North Coast

Healthy North Coast

NSW

Following the 2022 Northern Rivers floods, many people continued to experience psychological distress, housing insecurity, financial hardship, social isolation and disrupted access to support services long after floodwaters receded. The ongoing impacts of the floods highlighted the importance of accessible, long-term mental health support throughout the recovery process.

Safe Haven North Coast was established in response to the 2022 Northern Rivers floods, as part of the NSW Government's 2022-25 Mental Health and Wellbeing Flood Recovery Package, to provide a welcoming, community-based alternative for people experiencing emotional distress and the ongoing impacts of disaster. Operating across Lismore, Mullumbimby, Murwillumbah, and Woodburn, the service allows people to access support without a referral, diagnosis or formal intake process. Delivered by The Buttery and commissioned by Healthy North Coast, Safe Haven connected people with peer workers, clinicians and case managers, while also helping them navigate housing, alcohol and other drug services, financial supports, and broader recovery services.

During disruptions such as Cyclone Alfred, Safe Haven's staff were able to support recovery centres while continuing usual services. This complemented the greater continuity of care and social connection, sustaining access to trusted support throughout long-term recovery. For individuals and communities, recovery becomes more about having a place where they can be heard, receive practical help, and remain connected through difficult times.

Safe Haven North Coast demonstrates the importance of accessible, community-based support throughout long-term recovery. By providing a place where people can be heard, receive practical assistance and stay connected to their community, the initiative is helping build individual wellbeing, community resilience, and stronger pathways to recovery after disaster.



Announcement of the first North Coast Safe Havens extension, Mullumbimby, NSW, 2021.

ICare Friday Lunch: Connections create a thriving resilient community

Livingstone Shire Council

QLD

Strong social connections help people cope with hardship and are an important part of disaster resilience. In Livingstone Shire, increasing loneliness and isolation- particularly among older people, carers and vulnerable residents- highlighted the need for a welcoming place where community members could build relationships, access support and feel connected.

ICare Friday Lunch began as a small gathering held 3 times a year, with around 35 participants. Over the past 3 years, it has grown into a free fortnightly lunch attracting 100–120 people, with a team of 19 volunteers that help keep the initiative running. Alongside shared meals, the program creates opportunities for people to meet emergency services, learn about local risks and take part in practical preparedness activities.

The regular gatherings help make preparedness part of everyday community life. Participants can ask questions, build relationships with local service providers and learn about emergency planning in a familiar, relaxed environment. Preparedness packs and themed activities help turn information into practical steps people can take back home. Feedback from participants also points to improved wellbeing, greater confidence and stronger social networks.

Livingstone Shire Council supports the initiative, alongside Queensland Ambulance Service, Queensland Police Service, aged care providers, schools, local organisations, community leaders and other partners. Their involvement connects residents with services and knowledge they may need during difficult times. The program's growth also shows that people value having a consistent place to gather, particularly when isolation makes it harder to seek support.

ICare Friday Lunch demonstrates that resilience is not built through emergency information alone. It grows through trust, familiarity and relationships that exist before a crisis begins. By helping residents feel less isolated and more connected to neighbours and local services, the initiative strengthens the informal networks people can rely on during hardship. These connections give community members greater confidence to ask for help, share information, and support one another when disaster or other challenges arise.



Yeppoon Community Centre Gardens.

EmergencyRedi South Australia: Strengthening individual and community disaster preparedness through inclusive local workshops

Australian Red Cross

SA

Disasters can affect everyone, but many households, particularly people at increased risk and communities that have traditionally been underrepresented in emergency planning remain underprepared. EmergencyRedi, delivered by the Australian Red Cross, tackles this gap by turning preparedness from information into action.

Through inclusive, locally tailored workshops, participants learn about their local risks, develop household emergency plans, explore emergency kits and build psychosocial readiness, supported by Red Cross' evidence based RediPlan.

The program brings together Australian Red Cross, NRMA Insurance, local governments, emergency services and community organisations, including disability, carer and multicultural networks. These partnerships enable trusted, accessible and culturally responsive delivery, while local risk and insurance data strengthens relevance. NRMA Insurance's support has enabled the delivery of free sessions across 3 states over the last 2 and a half years.

By combining behavioural change, psychosocial preparedness, inclusion and community connection, EmergencyRedi demonstrates that effective disaster resilience is built through practical action and shared responsibility. Its measurable shift from intention to behaviour, broad community reach, and scalable partnership model gives a compelling proof of value and a foundation for sustained disaster preparedness.

EmergencyRedi at a quick glance:

Since April 2024

789 workshops delivered acoss 3 states

9,794 people reached

In SA:

324 workshops

3,869 participants

What changed?

91.1% increased confidence in preparedness

94.8% intended to take action

SA participant outcome following EmergencyRedi workshops

Within 3 months, participants reported taking practical steps to prepare:

91.1%
increased confidence in preparedness

94.8%
intended to take action



RESILIENT AUSTRALIA

National Collaboration and Partnership Award 2026

WINNER

EmergencyRedi workshop.

Disaster Resilience Education Project

Department of Fire and Emergency Services

WA

For young children, experiencing a flood, bushfire or cyclone can be frightening and difficult to understand. The Disaster Resilience Education Project was developed to help children in regional WA build confidence, understand risks, and learn simple ways to respond safely.

Led by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), the project created disaster resilience resources specifically for students in communities experiencing significant hazard risks and, in some cases, isolation and the impacts of previous disasters.

The program makes preparedness accessible through storytelling, animation, play and practical classroom activities. Children learn about trusted helpers, warning signs, evacuation and ways to talk about feelings of safety. Importantly, resources were co-developed with 3 regional school communities, so they reflect local environments, experiences and cultural knowledge.

Evaluation of the program found that participating children could identify people they could turn to during an emergency, recognise warning signs and choose appropriate items to take during an evacuation. Teachers also reported strong engagement and described the resources as highly valuable and well suited to the age group, with the program helping to reduce anxiety around hazards.

The program is designed to have a lasting benefit. Through its 'teach the teacher' model, educators can continue delivering the resources in future years, while online and hard copy formats help make them accessible to schools across regional and remote WA.

By introducing preparedness in a familiar, positive and age-appropriate way, the project is helping children build the knowledge and confidence to understand emergencies and feel safer before, during and after an emergency.



Establishing a baseline understanding and knowledge about preparedness for cyclones and relationship building, Northhampton Pre-Primary 2024.

Strengthening teacher and student resilience through Climate Superpowers

University of Melbourne and Climate Superpowers co-designers

VIC

As climate change intensifies, school communities are increasingly experiencing both the direct impact of disasters and the emotional burden of anticipating future events. Many young people report feelings of helplessness, frustration, and anxiety about the future, while teachers are often expected to support students through these challenges while managing their own emotional response. The Climate Superpowers initiative helps to shift this experience into one of strength, connection and action.

Despite growing awareness of eco-anxiety and climate distress, there were few practical resources designed with young people themselves, and even fewer that supported teacher wellbeing alongside student resilience. Schools needed a way to move beyond fear and empower both students and educators to take meaningful action.

Co-designed with over 100 young people and teachers across Australia – including many who had experienced disasters – the University of Melbourne's free Climate Superpowers resources help students and educators identify and apply their existing strengths to build climate and disaster resilience. The initiative began as a youth-focused website with a quiz to help young people explore their diverse superpowers – social, natural, cultural, built, financial, human and political. It has since evolved into a suite of classroom and teacher wellbeing resources, recognising that the adults who teach and care for young people are themselves on the front line of climate change, and that their resilience matters too.

At its heart, the initiative is about changing how people experience climate risk. Rather than focusing only on what is going wrong, Climate Superpowers helps young people and teachers recognise their strengths, knowledge, and capacity to act. By celebrating the diverse contributions that students and teachers can bring, the resources spark creativity and collaboration – so that no one faces climate change alone. As one teacher said, 'I already feel invigorated to use this resource as a basis to create something new'.

The proof of value is this shift from anxiety to agency. Climate Superpowers provides practical, evidence-based tools that help school communities build the psychological and social resilience they need – before, during and after disasters.

Climate Superpowers website – reach and engagement			
27,000+ website visits	**9,000 quiz completions**	**40+ young people and 70+ involved as co-designers**	**100% of pilot teachers planned to continue using the resources**



RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Mental Health and Wellbeing Award 2026
WINNER

Students and teachers embracing their Climate Superpowers.

Local government



Weathering Well

Wagga Wagga City Council

NSW

Drought and ongoing adversity can affect much more than agricultural production. Across rural communities, challenges such as social isolation, financial pressure, limited access to services, and the stigma associated with seeking help can impact mental health, wellbeing and community resilience. Building resilience in these communities requires opportunities for people to connect, support one another and strengthen local networks.

Weathering Well was developed to create those opportunities. Operating across communities including Uranquinty, Lockhart, Pleasant Hills, Ladysmith, Tarcutta, Yerong Creek, and Wagga Wagga, the initiative combined mental health training, wellbeing programs, community events, and social activities to create welcoming and accessible pathways to support. Activities included Mental Health First Aid, LivingWorks safeTALK, suicide prevention sessions, community concerts, and shared meals. Programs such as The Unbreakable Farmer brought conversations about wellbeing directly into rural communities, while the free Laugh Bus connected residents from smaller towns to the Wagga Comedy Fest, reducing transport barriers and creating opportunities to connect through shared experiences.

The project's impact was evident not only in attendance numbers, but in the connections, it helped create. A 'Having a difficult conversation' session in Pleasant Hills saw residents stay long after the event had finished to continue conversations over a community barbecue. Service providers also reported strong engagement from rural men, a group often difficult to reach through traditional mental health programs. By bringing support into familiar and social settings, Weathering Well created opportunities for conversations and connections that may not otherwise have occurred.

These activities provided entry points into connection, allowing people who may not have sought formal support to become part of a wider community network. Most particularly, service providers reported high levels of participation from rural men. This shows how bringing support into social and familiar environments can create opportunities to engage that might otherwise not happen.

The initiative demonstrates that resilience is built through relationships as much as services. By reducing barriers to participation, encouraging social connection and creating trusted spaces for conversations about wellbeing, Weathering Well helped strengthen community networks and improve awareness of available support. The knowledge, confidence and relationships developed through the program continue beyond individual events, leaving communities better connected and better equipped to support one another through future challenges.



Morning tea time at the 'The Unbreakable Farmer' keynote hosted in the Wagga Wagga Livestock Marketing Centre, May 2026.

Live flooded road alerts for safer communities

Fraser Coast Regional Council and FloodMapp

QLD

Floodwater makes roads dangerous with little warning, leaving drivers to make decisions without knowing which routes are safe. Traditional warnings on websites, social media or signs may not reach people at the moment they need them. This creates a serious risk for communities, particularly when roads and access routes change quickly during heavy rain and flooding. Just 15cm of fast-moving water can float a vehicle or sweep it off the road. In Australia, more than half of all drownings occur in vehicles.

In 2025, Queensland Fire Department swift water crews were pre-deployed or called to 800 incidents, helping more than 200 people to safety. To tackle this problem, Fraser Coast Regional Council partnered with FloodMapp, with support from the NRMA Insurance HELP Fund, to deliver live flood alerts through Waze and, where available, Google Maps. The system updates in real-time as rainfall and river conditions change, providing location-specific warnings through navigation platforms people already use. This helps drivers make more informed travel decisions and gives council a clearer picture of flood impacts across the region.

During a single March 2026 flood event the system has issued more than 360 flooded road alerts, contributing to over 600 impacted journeys reported through Waze, community members also submitted 28 validations to help confirm whether alerts remained relevant. These contributions help connect local observations with flood information as conditions evolve. The project depends on collaboration between council staff, FloodMapp, the funding partner, navigation platforms and community members. Council provides local knowledge of flood-prone roads and operational needs, while community feedback helps validate changing conditions.

The main benefit is that warnings can reach people from the moment they get in the car and plan their route, and as they approach dangerous flooded roads. Better information can help drivers make better decisions, avoid flooded roads, reduce exposure to dangerous conditions and support safer journeys. It also helps councils understand where disruption is occurring and respond more effectively. By using familiar technology to deliver timely local warnings, the initiative gives residents a practical way to make safer decisions when floods threaten their communities.



The image illustrates flooding at Mungar Road near Tiaro during the March 2026 Mary River flood. It brings together FloodMapp's NowCast flood extent mapping (left), a Queensland Government flood camera image showing conditions at the crossing (inset), and the corresponding road closure alert visible to drivers in Waze (right). Together, these views demonstrate how live flood intelligence translates into practical warnings to support safer journeys.

Community support hubs for local resilience

Adelaide Hills Council

SA

The Adelaide Hills faces significant bushfire, storm, flood and extended disruption risks. While communities are often ready to help, they can lack the structure, tools, and confidence needed to respond safely and effectively.

Community Support Hubs for Local Resilience, led by Adelaide Hills Council in partnership with BRM Advisory, addresses this gap by supporting communities to establish and lead locally tailored Community Support Hubs that strengthen preparedness, build local connections, and complement formal emergency management arrangements.

The initiative provides practical guidance, training, governance and risk management resources, including role cards, starter kits, factsheets and tailored workshops. It has been supported by a broad network of emergency services, government agencies, community organisations and volunteers, helping ensure the model remains community-led while aligned with formal emergency management systems.

Four Community Support Hubs have now emerged across the Adelaide Hills, each reflecting local strengths, volunteer capacity, and community need. Interest continues to grow, with several communities in the early stages of development and Council engaging with others to explore locally led approaches to preparedness and resilience. Across the region, hubs are working alongside emergency services and local organisations to deliver preparedness activities, facilitate community exercises, share emergency information and strengthen local connections before, during and after emergencies. The model has also informed the LGA South Australia Community Support Hub Guide 2026, extending its impact beyond the Adelaide Hills.

At its heart, the project is about helping communities turn willingness into capability. It recognises communities not simply as recipients of support, but as capable partners in building resilience.



Bridgewater and Aldgate Community Support Hub (BACSH) team.

Ready and resilient at-risk communities

Baw Baw Shire Council

VIC

Research from Financial Counselling Victoria (FCVic), the Australian Red Cross and AIDR, indicates that people living with disability, chronic illness, isolation, language barriers and other vulnerabilities are facing disproportionate social, health and economic burdens post disasters. The services they need to respond, and recover are often not well connected.

Baw Baw Shire's Ready and Resilient at Risk Communities initiative changed this by bringing 24 organisations together to build a shared approach to supporting people most at risk before, during and after emergencies.

Rather than expecting individuals to navigate emergencies on their own, the initiative focused on building the network around them. Agencies worked together to identify local risks and gaps in support, while tailored emergency readiness sessions reached multicultural, First Nations, low income, remote, and disability communities in places where people already felt safe and connected. More than 500 primary school children also took part in programs focused on preparedness, emotional regulation and resilience.

The impact has been more than participation. It has created new relationships, knowledge and practical capability that did not previously exist at this scale. Community organisations are now better equipped to incorporate emergency planning into their work, communities have strengthened their local leadership and connections, and individuals have gained practical skills to prepare themselves, their families and their neighbours.

Research by Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) and Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR) initiative show that connected communities are better able to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters. Rather than focusing solely on individual preparedness, Ready and resilient at-risk communities invested in strengthening the networks around people most at risk. Through ongoing collaboration, shared planning and practical resources, the initiative has created stronger links between organisations, community groups and residents, helping build a more coordinated and inclusive approach to emergency preparedness and recovery.



Get Ready, Get Techy, Go! session for Multicultural Friendship Group of Baw Baw. Held at the Warragul Community House in May 2026. Photo courtesy of the Warragul and Drouin Gazette.

Exercise Dicheall: Strengthening community resilience through a multi-agency emergency management exercise

City of Stirling

WA

Emergencies rarely stop at local government boundaries. When multiple communities are affected, effective coordination between local governments, emergency services and community organisations is critical to supporting response and recovery. To strengthen regional preparedness and test these arrangements in a realistic environment, the City of Stirling designed and delivered Exercise Dìcheall, a large-scale, multi-agency emergency management exercise.

The exercise brought together the City of Stirling, City of Vincent and City of Bayswater, alongside 3 local emergency management committees (LEMCs) and associated SES units. Participants worked through a complex, escalating multi-hazard scenario spanning both response and recovery phases, including the activation of a combined Local Recovery Coordination Group across multiple local government areas.

A key feature of Exercise Dìcheall was its commitment to inclusion and accessibility. The exercise incorporated people with lived experience of disability, including blind participants and wheelchair users, as well as displaced residents and individuals requiring accessibility support. Their participation challenged agencies to consider real-world barriers that can arise during emergencies, from accessing information and navigating evacuation processes to receiving timely and appropriate support. This created valuable opportunities to test plans, assumptions and decision-making through a more inclusive lens.

The exercise strengthened capability, confidence and relationships across participating organisations. Participants reported an improved understanding of roles, responsibilities and escalation pathways, while the exercise validated arrangements for coordination, resource sharing and decision-making across jurisdictions. The evaluation process also identified opportunities for improvement, directly informing updates to local emergency management procedures, training programs and future exercising activities.

Exercise Dìcheall demonstrates the value of preparing together before disaster strikes. By providing a safe environment to test systems, strengthen partnerships and learn from shared experience, the initiative enhanced regional emergency preparedness and reinforced a collective commitment to supporting communities during times of crisis.

The exercise has left participating organisations better equipped to deliver coordinated, inclusive and effective support when emergencies occur, ultimately contributing to stronger community resilience across the region.



State Emergency Service (SES) personnel participate in a simulated rescue operation during Exercise Dicheall, with volunteers portraying affected community members, conducted in the City of Stirling, 2026.

Resilient home design guidelines

City of Gold Coast

QLD

Every day, homeowners make decisions that affect the safety, comfort and resilience of their homes. Yet when it comes to preparing for natural hazards and a changing climate, understanding what actions to take can be difficult.

Technical information is often fragmented, complex or aimed at industry professionals rather than the people making decisions about their homes. The City of Gold Coast's resilient home design guidelines were developed to bridge that gap.

This free suite of guides helps homeowners, renters, landlords, builders, and small-scale developers make practical, informed decisions to improve resilience to flood, bushfire and extreme heat. By translating research, building science and technical guidance into clear, accessible design solutions, the project empowers communities to make improvements before disasters occur.

The initiative responds to challenges that are becoming increasingly familiar across Australia. More than half of the Gold Coast is exposed to bushfire hazard, the region has experienced several significant flood events in recent years, and extreme heat is emerging as a growing threat to health, wellbeing and liveability. Recognising that these hazards rarely occur in isolation, the city adopted a pioneering multi-hazard approach that helps residents understand risks and identify practical solutions that improve the resilience of their homes over time.

A key innovation is the inclusion of a multi-hazard prioritisation framework that helps users identify solutions delivering benefits across more than one hazard while avoiding unintended trade-offs. This approach enables residents to make informed decisions that strengthen resilience while improving everyday comfort and liveability.

The guidelines are designed to be practical and inclusive. They provide options ranging from simple, low-cost improvements for renters and landlords through t ir circumstances and budget. Guidance is provided for a variety of housing types, including detached o major renovations and new home construction. Residents can explore measures such as improved shading, ventilation, building upgrades and landscaping, depending on the homes, dual occupancies, townhouses and secondary dwellings, ensuring the information is relevant to a broad cross-section of the community.

With planned integration into the Gold Coast Planning Scheme, they also create an opportunity for safer housing decisions to become part of future development. Ultimately, residents gain clearer ways to protect their homes, improve comfort and prepare for the hazards facing their communities.

Many of the recommended measures can improve thermal comfort year-round, reduce energy consumption, support healthier living environments and enhance everyday liveability. By positioning resilience as part of good home design rather than a response to emergencies alone, the project encourages proactive action and builds community capacity before disasters occur.

The initiative was tested through a series of real-world residential case studies undertaken by Southeast Queensland design professionals, demonstrating that resilient design measures can be incorporated into a range of housing styles and budgets. As a freely available public resource, the guideline suite also provides a model that can be adapted by other local governments seeking practical ways to help communities prepare for increasing climate and natural hazard risks.

By putting practical resilience information into the hands of residents, the resilient home design guidelines are helping build safer, healthier and more adaptable communities.

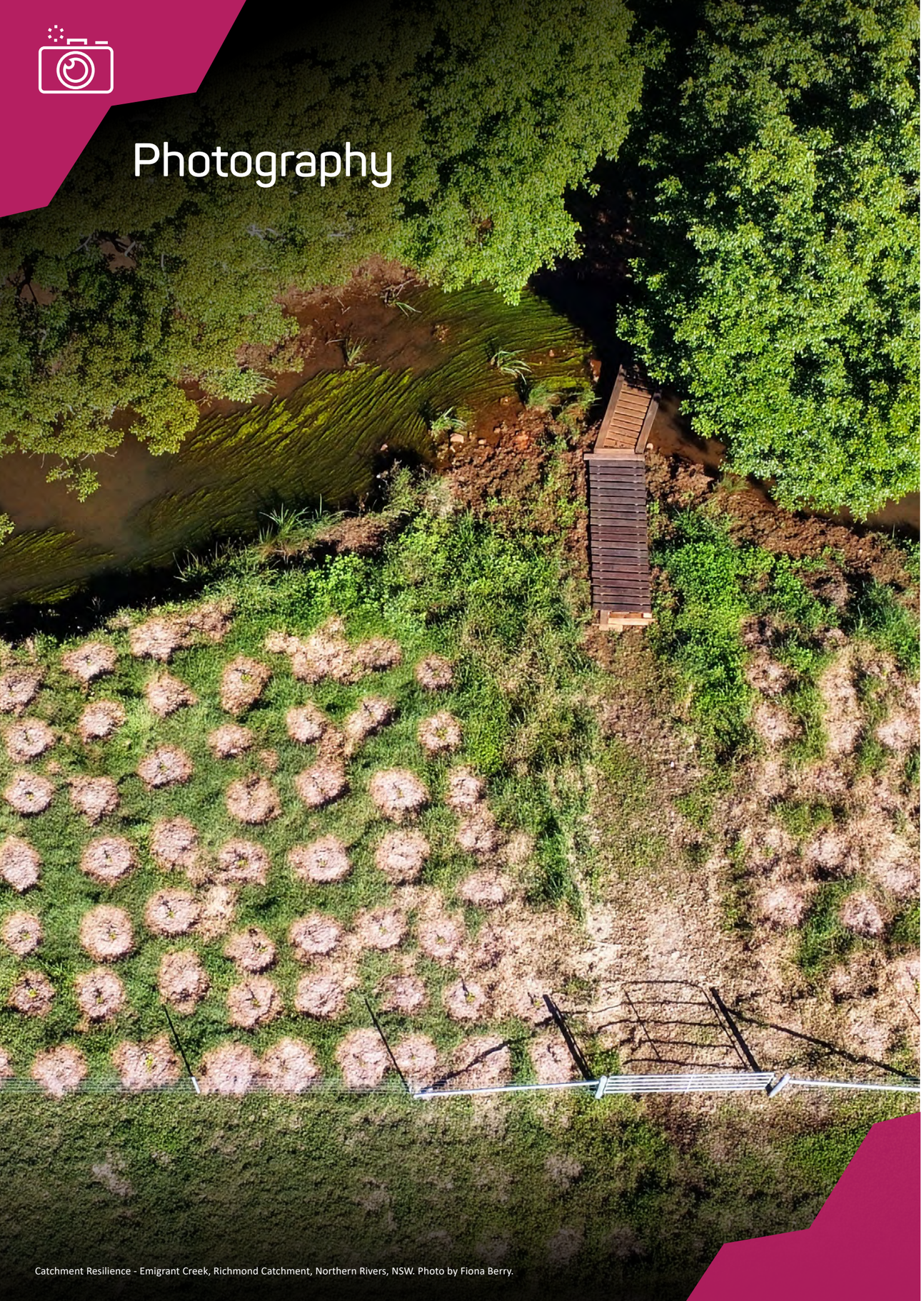


Gold Coast Resilient Home Design Guidelines.



Home after renovations. Photo by Justin Hymphrey Architects.

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Award 2026
WINNER



Catchment Resilience - Emigrant Creek, Richmond Catchment, Northern Rivers, NSW. Photo by Fiona Berry.

Catchment Resilience, Emigrant Creek

Fiona Berry, North Coast Regional Landcare

NSW

This image captures riparian restoration and resilience in action, through a birds-eye drone shot of the successful planting of 3,300 trees and shrubs, and installation of one kilometre of cattle exclusion fencing at Emigrant Creek in the Richmond Catchment of the Northern Rivers NSW.

Thousands of seedlings are visibly thriving along the previously flood affected riparian zone of Jeff's property, a successful grant recipient for the Caring for Catchments (CfC) project.

In partnership with Reforest Now and CfC, Jeff has successfully improved flood resilience and catchment health by stabilising riverbanks, slowing and filtering water, reducing erosion and sedimentation, enhancing water quality, and supporting the biodiversity and ecosystem functions that underpin resilient landscapes and waterways.

The true depth of this photograph lies in the collective effort behind it. Across 35 community-led projects delivered by Caring for Catchments from 2024-26 over 72 hectares have been revegetated, 43km of riverbank restored and more than 100,000 native trees and sedges planted to reduce erosion and improve the condition of creeks and river systems. The projects span the Richmond, Tweed, Brunswick, and Clarence catchments.

But landscape resilience cannot exist without community resilience. CfC has educated and inspired over 8,900 people on the vital importance of nature-based solutions, directly engaging locals and decision makers to plan, weed, plant, and maintain our local catchments.

Ultimately, this photo captures what resilience really means, if landscapes are strong, communities are strengthened and connected and through landcare, they are building strong social capital. This capital is the engine behind healthy catchments: the sign of true recovery and resilience.

Images such as this show us what makes communities more resilient to future floods, droughts and bushfires both ecologically and socially.



South Australia State Emergency Service, Deep Creek National Park, South Australia. Drone Pilot who captured the image was Adam McDonough (Volunteer with SA SES).

Hotspot spotlight

SA State Emergency Service

SA

What captured your attention first, thousands of glowing hotspots scattered on the horizon, the fire burning in the valley or the red and blue lights below revealing the scale of an operational response?

The closer you look, the more you realise the size of the area already burnt and the commitment of many people from several organisations contributing to one coordinated response. A landscape under threat, a community being protected, and people working together to achieve the safest possible outcome.

Resilience depicted in this image is not one agency, one capability or one strategy, Resilience multiplies when communities and response organisations trust one another, share reliable information and work together to combine their strengths.

This picture was taken during the Deep Creek bushfire response that began on 1 February 2026. In total, the fire burned 4,500 hectares across private and public land, representing 40 per cent of Deep Creek National Park and 98 per cent of Talisker Conservation Park. The fire developed a perimeter of 60 kilometres and challenged responders operating in rugged, and often inaccessible terrain.

SA Country Fire Service (CFS) requested remotely piloted aircraft support from SA SES to operate after water-bombing operations had finished for the day. Drone team members captured high-definition visual and thermal imagery of the back burning operations for the incident controller and simultaneously livestreamed to regional and state coordination centres, creating a shared view of the evolving fireground.

The aerial perspective enables incident personnel to understand the fire's scale, identify areas of continuing heat and make informed decisions of where crews and resources were directed. This intelligence strengthened responders plans to focus effort where it would have the greatest impact. The technology mattered because of the people using it, interpreting what they were seeing and turning it into safer, coordinated action.

SA CFS described the incident as an extraordinary multi-agency and interstate response. Firefighters, emergency-service volunteers and staff, aircraft crews, land managers, logistics teams, local organisations, and interstate personnel combined their capabilities over many demanding days.



Endewering, Clarence Point, Tasmania. Photo by Kate McClafferty.

Endewering

Kate McClaffery

TAS

'Endewering' represents a powerful metaphor for disaster resilience. At its core, the photograph shows a structure that is both delicate and remarkably durable. A spider web is engineered for flexibility, capability and rapid repair, qualities demonstrated by humans in response to disasters.

The fence provides a stark contrast: rigid, human-made, and symbolic of the constraints, boundaries, and environmental pressures that communities often face. Yet the web, anchored to the fence, uses this structure as an opportunity rather than an obstacle. This signifies how resilient communities work with realities of their environment, such as geography, infrastructure, climate, and risk instead of resisting them. They build systems that integrate with existing conditions, even when those conditions are challenging or restrictive.

The dew droplets add another layer of meaning, representing the ephemeral nature of human life and the shifting pressures that disasters bring. A droplet forms and grows, adding weight to the web. The web holds, it does not collapse. When the droplet releases, often suddenly, the web remains. This provides a reminder that circumstances change, often quickly yet some structures, relationships, and strengths endure.

Together, these elements create a visual narrative of disaster resilience. The image reminds us that strength is not always rigid, that adaptability is powerful, and that even the most fragile systems can endure when designed with flexibility, connection and purpose.



Aaron Cuthbert, Department of Fire and Emergency Services, Caversham, Perth, Western Australia.

Into the furnace

Aaron Cuthbert, Department of Fire and Emergency Services

WA

Resilience is not the absence of danger, it is the ability to confront it head on with preparation, coordination and resolve. Working methodically despite extreme heat, reduced visibility, and unseen dangers hidden within.

In this moment resilience is expressed through actions with trained individuals applying skill and experience to slow the fires spread and create opportunities for control.

Each step on the fire ground showing commitment to persistence in the face of overwhelming conditions.

The combination of training, teamwork, courage, determination, and the will to succeed, all contributing to the resilience of fire crews dealing with the threat of fire to our community.



Country Fire Authority, Belgrave South, Victoria. Photo by Siobhan Green.

Fire Wise Kids in action

Country Fire Authority

VIC

Fire Wise Kids is a new educational program developed by the CFA in collaboration with students, educators, CFA members and other subject matter experts.

Topics include everything from matches and lighter safety to emergency readiness to bushfire preparation. Each lesson is tailored to the developmental level of students and centres on a few key messages and actions.

This photograph was taken during the development process of the program. Belgrave South Primary School were kind enough to allow us to deliver our second iteration of test lessons. Students and teachers then shared their feedback on what they felt was worked well, what still needed to be improved, which messages they remembered and what questions they still had. In this image, the Year 1 and 2 students were practising crawling low under smoke using a play parachute to simulate the smoke above them.

During this activity I was crouched low on the floor, at eye level with the students crawling under the parachute. This picture was taken while students were participating in the lesson in real time – no posing took place – just a genuine smile captured as the student emerged from under the smoke parachute. Throughout the activity I could feel the exuberance as the students navigated their way across the floor and out the other side, and I tried to capture the movement and excitement with my camera.

This image highlights many of considerations that went into developing the program. The physicality of the activity makes messaging more concrete and familiar if students need to enact it in an emergency.

You can also see the joy and excitement students are experiencing during the activity, ensuring students leave the lesson feeling confident about their abilities instead of fearing potential emergencies.

Their teacher and CFA presenters observe and support, but the students are in control of the parachute, representing them taking responsibility for their own safety.

Fire Wise Kids extends far past what you can see here too. Students are encouraged to go home and work together with their family to implement the safety actions discussed in class. This extends the impact of the lessons beyond the students and improves their family's resilience too.

When students understand how and why fires happen, as well as how they can be prevented, prepared for, or responded to, it reduces anxiety that is caused by fear of the unknown and feeling out of control. Practicing simple actions ahead of time keeps them safer and more capable during emergencies. Fire Wise Kids remain confident and more resilient before, during, and after fires.

Schools



Fire poetry display, Chewton Primary School, 2023.

Bushfire advocacy for youth, by youth

Upwey High School

VIC

In the Dandenong Ranges, bushfire risk is part of everyday life. Yet for many students, emergency planning is something done for them, rather than with them. Information is often delivered to young people, but they are rarely asked how emergency plans work from their perspective, or what could be improved.

A group of students from Upwey High School set out to change that.

What began in 2023 as participation in a research project with RMIT University and LeadRRR quickly became a student-led movement challenging assumptions about the role young people can play in disaster resilience. Through focus groups and planning forums, students contributed directly to the development of a framework for student participation in school bushfire planning.

Rather than allowing the work to end with the research project, the students continued their advocacy. Living in one of Victoria's most bushfire-prone regions, they recognised that many young people lacked an understanding of local bushfire risk and their school's emergency procedures. They believed students should have a voice in shaping those plans.

Working with school leaders, the students introduced a new approach to bushfire planning at Upwey High School. Their involvement helped make procedures easier to understand and more inclusive of students with mobility challenges, disabilities, medical conditions and anxiety.

The impact has been significant. Students report feeling more informed, confident and prepared to respond during a bushfire emergency. School leaders have also gained a deeper understanding of the value of student perspectives, creating a culture where preparedness is increasingly seen as a shared responsibility.

Over the past 3 years, the students have taken their work well beyond the school. They have presented to the Yarra Ranges Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee, Yarra Ranges Council, the Victorian Emergency Management Conference, emergency management agencies, Members of Parliament and national audiences through AIDR.

They have also built partnerships with organisations including the CFA, Yarra Ranges Council, the Department of Education, AIDR, RMIT University and Leadrrr, creating opportunities to influence youth participation in emergency management at local, state and national levels.

Upwey High School is now embedding student-led bushfire education within its Year 7 curriculum, helping ensure future students understand local risks, contribute to emergency planning and take part in preparedness activities from the beginning of secondary school.



Students at Upwey High School working with ABC News and Yarra Ranges Council Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee.

Global connections for disaster resilience

Tallebudgera State School

QLD

After Cyclone Alfred affected the Tallebudgera community, Year 6 students at Tallebudgera State School had direct experience of how disasters can disrupt homes, roads, and daily life. A survey of 84 students found that 61 per cent had experienced damage to their home or community, and 14 per cent had evacuated or prepared to evacuate. Only 11 per cent identified school as a source of cyclone preparedness knowledge before the event, highlighting an opportunity to strengthen disaster education.

The Global Connections for Disaster Resilience project used students' lived experiences as the starting point for learning. Students took part in immersive virtual reality activities exploring disaster scenarios and then connected with a primary school in Japan to compare preparedness approaches. They created bilingual disaster preparedness posters in English and Japanese and presented their ideas to an international audience. The project combined technology with reflection, discussion and practical communication. Rather than only receiving information about disasters, students used what they had learned to develop resources that could help others understand preparedness.

Their posters and presentations provided tangible evidence of how students translated learning into practical messages, while the international partnership supported intercultural understanding and communication skills. Teachers coordinated the activities, Mindflight7 provided the virtual reality experience, and the Japanese school offered an authentic setting for sharing knowledge. The Queensland Department of Education's International Education Global Competency Fund supported the project. The resulting posters, photographs, videos and reflection activities can also be used with future student cohorts.

The project helped students connect disaster education with events they and their families had experienced. It gave them opportunities to build knowledge, communicate preparedness advice and take an active role in community safety. Instead of seeing young people only as recipients of emergency information, the initiative positioned them as contributors who can help others prepare. Students leave with a stronger understanding of disaster resilience and the confidence to share what they have learned with their families, peers, and wider community.



Year 6 students participating in Virtual Reality experiences, including natural hazards and ecosystem exploration. Tallebudgera State School, Gold Coast, November 2025.

RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National School Award 2026
WINNER

Research for impact



First Nations women, cultural fire knowledge, wellbeing and memory

Zoe Schultz, National Indigenous Disaster Resilience (Monash University), Queensland Fire Department, Gambir Yidinji Cultural Heritage and Protection Aboriginal Corporation, Queensland Parks and Wildlife Service

QLD

First Nations women bring distinct and invaluable strengths to their roles as firefighters, land managers and rangers across Australia. Community connections, cultural knowledge, and diverse lived experiences are some of the many strengths that First Nation women bring and use to do their jobs well alongside communities and Country.

While improvements in gender equity have been made in fire and land management, there is little evidence that First Nations women have been encouraged and supported across this workforce.

This project, led by National Indigenous Disaster Resilience at Monash University and funded by Natural Hazards Research Australia, evaluated Australia's first Women-in-Fire Prescribed Fire Training Exchange (AUS WTREX), which brought together 30 First Nations women from across Australia and internationally to North Queensland. Through Indigenous and government-led learning on Country, the 12-day program aimed to strengthen cultural and western fire practitioner skills while creating space for connection, knowledge exchange and new relationships.

Rather than measuring success solely through participant satisfaction or operational skills, the research examined how the program impacted women's wellbeing (physical, social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing). The research methods included interviews before and after the program, reflective participant journaling and an embedded researcher model (participant observation). Gamilaroi researcher Zoe Schultz and Palawa researcher Jessica Walters participated in the program in their dual roles as Aboriginal women and researchers. This embedded-researcher approach centred First Nations women and provided a deeper contextual understanding of the program and its impacts on participants.

The evaluation identified 6 interconnected areas of impact: safety and support; confidence and empowerment; reciprocal exchange; connection and healing; cultural, personal and professional growth; and reincorporation (or returning) to families, communities and workplaces. The findings showed that the program had overwhelmingly positive impacts for participants. It went beyond a networking and training opportunity, with all participants describing increased confidence and a strengthened sense of empowerment. Participants found a sense of companionship within a workforce that can be challenging and isolating for First Nations women.

This research highlights the existence of a highly capable and skilled workforce of First Nations women in fire and land management. It demonstrates that investment in targeted programs such as AUS WTREX can strengthen the wellbeing of this workforce, benefiting both First Nations women and the broader sector. With ongoing support and resourcing, this workforce has significant potential to continue to grow and strengthen, contributing to a more connected and resilient sector.



Attendees and program support staff at Yaramulla Ranger Base on Ewamian Country (Undara Volcanic National Park). May 2025. Photography by Sarah Ebsworth (Queensland Fire Department).

Foundations in disaster recovery: Transforming research to practice through an innovative short course

Dr Claire Leppold, University of Melbourne, Dr Kate Brady, University of New South Wales

VIC

Disaster recovery can continue for months and years after an emergency, affecting people's wellbeing, housing, finances, relationships, and sense of community. Yet recovery workers often have limited access to professional development focused on these long-term impacts.

Developed by researchers Dr Claire Leppold and Dr Kate Brady, the University of Melbourne's Foundations in Disaster Recovery short course was established to bridge this gap by translating decades of disaster recovery research into practical knowledge for people supporting affected communities.

Designed in consultation with 186 recovery workers across Australia, the course responds to the need for flexible, accessible learning that fits around the demands of recovery work. It combines self-paced online modules, expert-led webinars, research resources, and an optional in-person workshop, bringing together practitioners, researchers and community leaders from different organisations and jurisdictions. A dedicated scholarship scheme has provided 86 fee-free places, particularly supporting community leaders, volunteers and workers in regional and remote areas who may otherwise face financial barriers to participation.

Since 2023, the course has been completed by 313 participants. Pre- and post-course surveys demonstrate increased confidence in accessing research, applying evidence to practice and identifying relevant resources. Its influence is also evident in the use of course materials to support recovery initiatives and funding proposals, and its adoption by NEMA as mandatory training for employees in its response division in 2024.

Participant evaluations of the course also highlight the immediate impact it has had on their work:

'I loved how passionate the lecturers are – it's really changed my perspective on universities.'

– Community worker participant

'The evidence-based approach and focus on real world application significantly strengthened the quality and success of the funding proposals I developed to support disaster impacted communities to respond, recover, and prepare.'

– Non-government organisation participant

By strengthening recovery workers' knowledge, networks and confidence, the initiative supports more informed, inclusive, and sustainable approaches to recovery for disaster-affected communities.



RESILIENT AUSTRALIA
National Research for Impact Award 2026
WINNER

The in-person workshop for Foundations in Disaster Recovery, held at the University of Melbourne.



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