

Does saying we're resilient make it so?

The Cairns Resilience Scorecard Project

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Presented at the Australian Disaster Resilience Conference 2019.

Across the nation resilience has become a buzzword. At the very mention of an adverse event resilience is associated, generally referring to the practical response actions undertaken by affected communities. But what does resilience actually look like - and does simply saying a community is resilient make it so?

As one of just six Australian cities and the only Australian role model city signed up with the UNISDR Resilient Cities campaign, Cairns takes a pro-active, strategically planned approach to disaster resilience building. Realistically measuring resilience is an ongoing challenge, particularly in regions such as Cairns where the absence of a major disaster for many years breeds complacency and urban myth.

In 2014, two years after its community resilience programme began, the Cairns Regional Council's disaster management unit implemented a comprehensive stocktake of the state of resilience at social and infrastructural levels. An assessment of two resilience scorecard methods was undertaken and the decision made to use both, to provide a more complete baseline understanding of resilience in the region. Aiming concurrently to build empowerment of the many communities involved in building resilience, the UNISDR and Torrens Institute scorecards were completed using a participatory approach which incorporated community research and mapping and directly engaged community members, groups and organisations, disaster management agencies and individuals. Methods included self assessments, surveys, focus groups, workshops, discussions at community events and one-one interviews, with the information gained shared collaboratively.

As a result, those involved have reported a much deeper understanding of the importance of holistic resilience and their role in maintaining and developing it into the future. Gaps which were identified continue to be integrated into resilience building projects, with the scorecard due for reassessment in 2020. The programme won IAP2's 2018 Australasian Core Value awards for Disaster and Emergency Services.