

Community Involvement in Planning

Final Report



Report prepared by Risk Frontiers and Molino Stewart Pty Ltd

For NSW State Emergency Service

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Executive Summary

Emergency planning in Australia has traditionally been inwardly focused on the roles, responsibilities and strategies of emergency services and other supporting agencies (Gissing, 2016), and engagement programs have largely focused on information provision (Australian Government, 2010). In recent years, however, there has been greater recognition of the need to involve the community in planning (Comrie, 2011, Paton and McClure, 2013), where community members are considered equal partners in decision-making relating to preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies.

There is a growing acknowledgement across the emergency management sector for the need to shift from planning for communities to planning with communities, where community members are acknowledged as equal participants.

The objective of the project was to deliver and test an evidence-based framework for the application of engagement processes to enable community participation in emergency planning, and define a range of localised strategies to engage communities in NSW SES-led emergency planning.

Risk Frontiers and Molino Stewart Pty Ltd were engaged to assist NSW SES to undertake the project.

The outcomes of the project have included:

- Evidence that there are benefits to adopting participatory-based approaches to emergency planning, and in building community resilience.
- That the wider adoption of participatory-based approaches to engage with communities should be encouraged throughout all phases of the disaster management cycle. However, the approach should not be seen as a silver bullet for generating behaviour change or building resilience. To be successful, approaches will need to be combined with other methods of community engagement and have the ability to experiment within individual communities to ascertain the most effective approach.
- That there is not a standard one-size-fits-all approach to involving the community. A series of evidence-based principles have been developed to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of participatory based approaches to emergency planning. Fixed organisational based objectives should also be avoided as objectives will need to be negotiated with communities, and will need to reflect the individual concerns and values of communities.
- That a sudden change in direction by NSW SES, however, is not likely to be feasible as there are currently significant organisational capacity and cultural constraints. The adoption of participatory-based approaches more widely will require a significant increase in the number and capability of NSW SES community engagement staff and volunteers, utilising an integrated resourcing model. The NSW SES will need to adopt a community-centric approach to emergency management, recognising community engagement as equal to emergency response functions, and that the community is an equal and active participant in emergency management. Not only will its approach need to change before events, its engagement with the community will need to become more open, and foster community trust across all other elements of the disaster management cycle.

A series of recommendations have been developed to assist with the implementation of the approach within NSW SES.

Recommendations

Based upon the conclusions and learnings of this project the following recommendations are made for consideration by NSW SES to further improve community engagement approaches.

Strategy

Recommendation 1 – That approaches to involve communities in emergency planning and in building community resilience be utilised by NSW SES more widely based upon the application of the twelve design principles. This should include recognising community involvement within local flood planning processes.

Recommendation 2 – That the NSW SES position community engagement as a core priority in its corporate strategy to build stronger community relationships and resilience.

Recommendation 3 – That NSW SES develop a Service-wide Community Engagement Strategy outlining strategic directions in community engagement, and where approaches to involve communities in emergency planning and in building community resilience fit within a broader framework of engagement techniques. The strategy should be commensurate with the flood risks faced by NSW and link to the Service's Corporate Strategy.

Recommendation 4 – That each NSW SES Region be required to develop an annual Region wide Community Engagement Plan commensurate with resources available in consultation with local NSW SES Units and the Community Engagement team outlining key strategies and targets. Performance against the Plan should be placed as an item in Regional Controller performance management agreements and monitored by their line manager. Plans should be consistent with the direction of a Service-wide Community Engagement Strategy.

Recommendation 5 – In line with the NSW Government Evaluation Guidelines, NSW SES incorporate evaluation as an essential component into its future engagement programs, to ensure lessons are identified and improvements made. This should include the development of a monitoring and evaluation framework, and longitudinal evaluations.

Recommendation 6 – That NSW SES explore opportunities to partner with other emergency services, non-government organisations and local government, and take an all hazards all agencies approach to involving communities in local emergency planning.

Community Engagement Practice

Recommendation 7 – That NSW SES establish and utilise community reference groups comprising of community leaders and key partners to design and implement community engagement programs including approaches to involve community members in emergency planning. This may be done in partnership with other emergency services or leverage existing community groups, or may require NSW SES to establish these groups locally.

Recommendation 8 – That NSW SES consider the use of skilled and independent facilitators in approaches to involve community members in emergency planning where significant community conflict is likely or the NSW SES may not be perceived as credible.

Recommendation 9 – That NSW SES shares the evaluation results of this pilot program and future programs publically with communities involved and with other partners.

Recommendation 10 – That NSW SES routinely engage with communities after flood and storm events, including re-engaging with the communities of Mooball, Burringbar and Chipping Norton after the June 2016 floods.

Recommendation 11 – That the design principles be incorporated into a NSW SES practice guideline on participatory approaches available to the public and all members, which also provides a series of case studies on the application and benefits of participatory based approaches.

Recommendation 12 – The design principles be incorporated into NSW SES Community Engagement Facilitator Training.

Capability and Capacity

Recommendation 13– That NSW SES considers options for improving volunteer community engagement resourcing through investigating models for targeted recruitment and the establishment of community engagement support units aligned to Region Headquarters.

Recommendation 14– That NSW SES develops a business case to enable appropriate resources to implement a future NSW SES Community Engagement Strategy.

Recommendation 15 – That NSW SES develops a professional development strategy for all staff and volunteers to enhance community engagement skills and knowledge of flood risk and planning.

Culture

Recommendation 16 – That NSW SES ensures that community engagement is recognised as a core role and priority in NSW SES induction and leadership development programs.

Recommendation 17 – That the NSW SES Manager Community Engagement develops regular reporting for the NSW SES Senior Leadership Team, identifying progress against a Service wide Community Engagement Strategy and any issues arising.

Recommendation 18 – That members of NSW SES Senior Leadership Team and Regional Managers promote community engagement as a core role and priority of the NSW SES.

Recommendation 19 – That NSW SES develop a change management plan to support the implementation of a Service-wide Community Engagement Strategy.

Project Background

The objective of the project was to deliver and test an evidence-based framework for the application of engagement processes to enable community participation in emergency planning, and define a range of localised strategies to engage communities in NSW SES-led emergency planning.

Risk Frontiers and Molino Stewart Pty Ltd were engaged to assist NSW SES to undertake the project.

To achieve this objective a review of global literature and a series of interviews with subject matter experts were undertaken to develop a series of evidenced-based principles to base the design of engagement programs upon.

Based on the design principles, consultation with local stakeholders, social analysis and an understanding of local flood risks, a series of engagement strategies were designed for piloting across three different communities – Narrabri (North West NSW), Burringbar/Mooball (North Coast NSW) and Chipping Norton (South West Sydney). Pilot communities were identified by NSW SES based upon advice by NSW SES Regional staff.

Reference groups were established across the three pilot communities to assist in understanding the community and gaining ideas from the community about how best to engage. These groups were established with community participation in Narrabri and Burringbar/Mooball, but despite attempts no community (i.e. non-SES members) representatives were successfully recruited in the Chipping Norton area.

The engagement activities were organised by NSW SES staff and volunteers. Activities were facilitated independently by Molino Stewart Pty Ltd, and were attended by community members and supported by NSW SES members.

Engagement activities were conducted across the three pilot areas from 27 April 2016 to the 8 May 2016. The following community attendance was registered as participating in the pilots:

- Narrabri – 15
- Burringbar/Mooball – 16
- Chipping Norton – 5

In addition to these activities a series of interviews were undertaken with NSW SES State Headquarters and Regional Staff to assess the capacity and culture of NSW SES to support community participation in emergency planning.

Reports have been developed outlining:

- Results of the research phase
- Program design and evaluation
- NSW SES culture and capacity to support community engagement.

This report provides an overall summary of the project and its outcomes.

Importance of Community Participation

Emergency planning in Australia has traditionally been inwardly focused on the roles, responsibilities and strategies of emergency services and other supporting agencies (Gissing, 2016), and engagement programs have largely focused on information provision (Australian Government, 2010). In recent years, however, there has been greater recognition of the need to involve the community in planning

(Comrie, 2011, Paton and McClure, 2013), where community members are considered equal partners in decision-making relating to preparing for, responding to and recovering from emergencies.

There is an acknowledged need for a shift in emergency planning from planning for communities to planning with communities, where community members are acknowledged as equal participants. When the community is not involved in the emergency management processes, the community may often question decisions that have been made (Pearce, 2003).

Traditional emergency management approaches have recognised citizens as spectators rather than active participants in decision making (Wehn et al., 2015). This is reflected in the practice of many emergency service community engagement approaches that have employed multiple one-way communication tools to inform and educate the public about the risks they face.

Interviews with NSW SES staff heard that traditional NSW SES community engagement approaches were typified by a command and control mentality of top-down communication, rather than utilisation of collaborative approaches typified by two-way dialogue (working with the community).

Top-down or one-way approaches to communication assume the community to be a uniform group of individuals with the same values and needs (O'Neill and Wales, 2004). This view is simplistic and the process of effectively informing the public is far more complex (Arnstein, 1969). It is critical that the design and implementation of programs involving the community be based upon a good knowledge of the community. Without such knowledge, programs may fail to take into account the public's experience, knowledge, interests, concerns, fears, values, priorities and preferences, and ultimately fail (Bier, 2001, Bird et al., 2009, Bird et al., 2010, Haynes et al., 2007, Haynes et al., 2008).

Though there is a growing amount of case studies utilising participatory approaches, public participation in planning and decision making has not been well evaluated. There are often difficulties in effectively evaluating the effectiveness of engagement programs such as the timelines for behaviour change to occur and that true preparedness benefits cannot be measured until a flood occurs. Where evaluated, however, positive benefits have been identified (Benson et al., 2016, Nous Group, 2013, Daellenbach et al., 2015, Bath and Wakerman, 2015, Reed, 2008). Benefits that have been identified include stronger local relationships, enhancement of social capital and improved understanding of risks (Nous Group, 2013, Daellenbach et al., 2015).

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience Community Engagement Framework places strong emphasis on the need to work with communities, stating that engagement means "*working in partnership with the community, building on existing networks, resources and strengths, identifying and supporting the development of community leaders and empowering the community to exercise choice and take responsibility*" (Attorney-General's Department, 2013; p. 3). The framework acknowledges that community engagement must be central to the business of the emergency management sector, being fully embedded within its culture, vision, policies, procedures and practice.

Positively, there is a growing shift both within Australia and abroad to move towards participatory based approaches. For example, the 100 Resilient Cities Challenge identifies shared ownership of decision-making as an integral attribute of a city that can withstand, respond to and adapt more readily to shocks and stresses. This same sentiment lies behind the realisation by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) of the need for a community centric approach. To ensure success FEMA's approach is to leverage all available resources through a *Whole of Community* attitude in preparing for, protecting against, responding to and recovering from all hazards (FEMA, 2015). Building from the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk

Reduction 2015-2030 also advocates a “*shared responsibility*” model (UNISDR, 2015; p. 6), where sharing refers to community involvement in disaster risk reduction.

There are numerous examples in Australia, including those led by NSW SES of the application of community participatory-based approaches. Some of these include NSW SES involvement in Eugowra, Uranquinty and Uki community-based planning projects; Emergency Management Victoria’s community emergency management model; initiatives by Local Governments such as Melton and Wyndham Councils (VIC) Emergency Ready Communities program; and faith-based communities developing plans such as the Jewish Emergency Management Plan in Victoria. These examples and more have been outlined in the research report and demonstrate current best practice in community involvement across the emergency management sector.

There is not a standard one-size-fits-all approach which encourages community participation, there are however a series of principles that must be followed. Based upon our research we have outlined twelve principles to inform the design and implementation of participatory-based approaches. These principles were tested and validated throughout the pilot programs. It must be acknowledged that behaviour change is a long term goal which requires sustained effort, adaptive management and the development of critical risk awareness amongst community members.

Design Principles

1. **Understand the community** - The implementation of community-based planning should be based on a thorough understanding of the full diversity of the at-risk population in terms of their needs, vulnerabilities and resiliencies. Stakeholders identified as relevant need to be well understood and represented within engagement processes.
2. **Engage early and often** - Community involvement should be considered as early as possible and throughout the engagement process.
3. **Allow sufficient time** - Timeframes should be identified with the community and not dictated to them.
4. **Be flexible and tailor approaches** - Participation methods should be tailored to the context. There will not be one single approach that works across all contexts or every time, the process needs to be flexible. A flexible approach is required to account for the complexities and the various commitments of community members, including time.
5. **Agree on objectives from the outset** - Objectives of any process involving the community need to be agreed among stakeholders, especially the community at the outset.
6. **Acknowledge the community as equals** - Community members must be acknowledged as equal partners in developing the plan, where their input is recognised as an important and equal contribution to decision making. Equality must also exist between participating community members.
7. **Engage in two-way dialogue** - Community participation should be based on mutual respect and trust and involve two-way deliberative dialogue dealing with the public value of propositions, resulting in decision-making being negotiated between all relevant stakeholders in a transparent manner. Community expectations need to be managed, where community members will not be able to influence a decision then participation is not appropriate and communities should be made aware of why.
8. **Utilise skilled facilitation expertise** - Skilled facilitation perceived as impartial, open to multiple perspectives, approachable and across technical details is essential to achieving an effective outcome.

9. **Utilise expert and local knowledge** - Institutional, scientific and local flood risk knowledge, including that provided by NSW SES members and local communities, must be utilised, and two-way learning between participants should be encouraged.
10. **Utilise and build social capital** - Strong social capital including local relationships and local capacity is as a critical enabler. Community involvement in planning should be designed to also build and support social capital.
11. **Evaluate programs** - A process of frequently evaluating and learning is essential to ensure the improvement of future programs. Communities should be involved in the evaluation process and evaluation design should be considered from the outset.
12. **Foster a culture of community participation** - An organisation's culture and leadership must champion the involvement of community members in decision making throughout the disaster management cycle.

Previous Reports

The recent independent review of the NSW SES operational response to the April 2015 East Coast Low and flooding in the Dungog Local Government Area made a series of recommendations relating to community engagement and involvement which have been supported by the results of this project. These are:

- *Recommendation 30 - That the NSW SES considers the appointment of a 'Champion' for Community Engagement within its senior leadership ranks and that a Change Management strategy/process is implemented for Community Engagement across the whole of the organisation.*
- *Recommendation 31 - The NSW SES needs to fully support the Community Involvement in Emergency Planning Project.*
- *Recommendation 32 - That the NSW SES review the result of the Uranquinty Community Led Planning exercise and consider implementing similar programs in smaller communities across the State.*
- *Recommendation 33 - That the NSW SES liaise with the appropriate NSW Government Agencies to ensure stronger linkages are forged at a local level between emergency responders, local councils and community development professionals.*

Pilot Results

Evaluation methods

The evaluation of the pilot project in the three pilot sites has focused on the following:

- Assessing achievements against stated program objectives
- Identification of benefits and challenges presented throughout the project
- Identifying unintended impacts both positive and negative
- Determining if the method of engagement has been suitable to meet the stated objectives
- Identifying the capacity and culture of the NSW SES to support community engagement including participatory approaches.

Primarily success indicators have been measured based upon perceived achievement of the objectives stated in the designs of each of the pilots.

The evaluation is summative in nature focused on the outcomes of the project and has been undertaken in a structured manner. Specific methods undertaken to evaluate the pilot project have included:

- Qualitative structured interviews with key stakeholders involved in the project including NSW SES, Local Government and Molino Stewart Pty Ltd representatives. Interviews explored the key successes and challenges of the pilot, identified future opportunities and evaluated the achievements of the activities against the program objectives.
- Surveys of program participants to collect quantitative data to ascertain possible changes as a result of pilot activities. Participants completed a short survey either online or via hardcopy survey form before (pre) and after (post) the engagement activities in each of the pilot areas.
- Analysis of social media posts and associated analytics to ascertain levels of community engagement with questions posed by NSW SES.
- Qualitative structured interviews with NSW SES staff to review NSW SES capacity and culture to support community engagement programs including participatory approaches.

The evaluation has been conducted consistent with the NSW Government evaluation guidelines.

Full evaluation results of the pilot program are outlined in the design and evaluation report. Key findings of evaluation are summarised below.

Results

The pilots have been well supported by the NSW SES Regions and volunteers involved. Though, the number of community members directly engaged through the process may be viewed by some as small, the process has engaged with leaders that have influence within their communities.

Significant benefits have been identified within the Narrabri and Mooball/Burringbar pilots including:

- Improved relationships between NSW SES and the community
- A wider appreciation by the community of flood risks and emergency management problems
- Improved awareness of NSW SES roles and of the NSW SES Local Flood Plan
- Possible improved awareness by community members of their roles
- Improved engagement capacity of NSW SES volunteers and staff, having gained awareness and experience of implementing methods involving community participation.

In both pilots there appears to be enough momentum generated by the pilots to see relationships continue to develop and for local community initiatives to be built. There also appears potential for the engagement activities to inspire wider discussions within communities, with many community members either speaking with or intending to speak with neighbours, family members and friends following the activities.

Though not as successful due to issues relating to the limited time available, and the inability to gain traction with the local community, the Chipping Norton pilot still provided benefits including:

- Improved knowledge of NSW SES volunteers and staff about local flood risks and community engagement techniques
- Confirmation of the challenges involved with engaging with metropolitan communities, where community networks are diffuse, and not necessarily defined by a geographical area.

Benefits across the pilot areas are consistent with those that have been achieved in other case studies of community participation identified within the research phase of this project.

Face to face engagement in the context of Narrabri appeared to be more successful than online engagement. In the context of Chipping Norton both the opportunity to engage face to face and online did not generate significant community interest.

Community reference groups consisting of community leaders to assist in the design of engagement approaches were found to be beneficial, though it is important that members of these groups understand their roles and the purpose of the group.

Key challenges that have been identified through the pilot process have included:

- The need to allocate time based upon consultation with the community, and to not dictate timelines to the community. Time was a critical limitation across the three pilot areas, resulting in insufficient time to engage with communities to the extent desired.
- There needs to be a critical awareness of flood risks for communities to engage. This was illustrated in the community of Burringbar where community leaders did not believe they had a flood risk, and subsequently did not engage in the pilot. This points to the need for participatory based approaches to be supported by engagement methods focused at raising the critical flood awareness of communities.
- Existing community conflict or issues can make it difficult to initially engage with communities. The role of the skilled independent facilitator was highly valued.
- Engagement with other agencies is important to gain support for initiatives. This can take time and a range of engagement methods to achieve support.

Based upon these conclusions the design principles established through the initial research phase of this project appear to be supported.

It is important that evaluation results be shared with local communities involved in the pilot area. Following the recent flood event in June 2016 impacting Burringbar/Mooball and Chipping Norton there is a significant opportunity to maintain engagement with these communities. Further activities are already planned in Narrabri and Mooball.

NSW SES Community Engagement Culture and Capacity

A series of interviews were conducted with seven NSW SES Regional and State Headquarters staff to ascertain insights into the capacity and culture to support community involvement in planning.

There is a degree of recognition within NSW SES that community engagement has an important role to play in building community preparedness and ultimately resilience. However, it is not accepted universally by all members as a key component of NSW SES' core priorities. There is no uniform culture supporting community engagement across NSW SES with support and approaches varying across Units and Regions. Some respondents suggest that NSW SES has paid 'lip service' to community engagement in the past and thoughts are mixed as to if this still is the case. It was said that there was no clear message from senior leadership about the importance of community engagement and that there is often a 'tick the box' mentality to community engagement, which may be associated with the lack of resources to effectively engage with the community. There is little understanding of the methodologies or requirements to deliver community engagement nor significant sustained effort to build capacity. Such a case likely leads to unrealistic expectations regarding what engagement/involvement strategies can achieve.

There is significant noise related to long standing organisational disruptions within the NSW SES at the time of writing which is believed to result in priorities being distracted away from community

engagement programs. Moreover, respondents believe that the NSW SES culture remains focused on response rather than preparedness and is described by some as being dominated by a 'command and control' approach to doing business, which conflicts with effective engagement approaches.

There is acknowledgement and support for the need to involve community members in emergency planning, though for some, the concept requires further definition. Support for community involvement was seen as a method to build trust and partnerships with the community to enhance how the community may respond during operations. It was recognised that communities may be keen to be involved, but that NSW SES may not currently have the appropriate capabilities, culture and capacity to effectively support the process in most locations.

There is a view that NSW SES doesn't know what works best to effectively engage with communities, with existing methods perceived to lack robustness. Some members are said to be looking for a community engagement 'silver bullet' that will deliver successful community engagement on a region-wide scale, without the recognition of the heterogeneous nature of communities, and the vast challenges and inherent complexities in developing tailored local approaches. There is acknowledgement by some that NSW SES needs the resources to experiment with various options to see what works best in different communities, also acknowledging the need for different approaches between metropolitan and rural communities.

It was recognised by most that a joint approach characterised by collaboration across emergency services and local government is essential for effective community engagement. Cross-collaboration can also be beneficial to programs that involve communities in emergency planning. Though there have been some instances where joint approaches have been used, there is considerable scope to increase joint approaches to engagement, and how agencies work together strategically. This may be being hindered by some parochial viewpoints that discourage sharing with and learning from others. Silos within NSW SES were also suggested as hindering overall effectiveness and that greater sharing and integration of approaches across community engagement, planning, operations and regions was needed.

Resources are viewed as a limiting factor in implementing programs within Regions. It is recognised that community engagement if done well is resource and labour intensive. Regions claim to be over-worked with administration and that response operations dominate organisational priorities. Currently nine community engagement coordinators are employed within NSW SES Regions and supported by a team of four at State Headquarters (in comparison VICSES employs 14 regional community engagement coordinators and some four staff within its head office). This also stands in contrast to significantly greater flood risk faced by NSW in comparison to Victoria. Victoria SES also has a dedicated senior executive solely focused on a community resilience portfolio.

Volunteers are viewed as being time poor, with not enough volunteers available to undertake appropriate engagement activities on a large scale consistently across the state. Some volunteers are said to still not acknowledge the importance of community engagement, or have a misunderstanding of what true community engagement is, instead relating it more to public relations activities. Though, in contrast some Units have grown in their understanding and acceptance of the need for community engagement. The recent EY organisational review found that 68% of member's surveyed said their Unit offers community education. One regional staff member suggested that there was not a clear pathway for volunteers to be involved in community engagement, whilst another suggested that the Service's expectations of volunteers to participate in community engagement must be clear, as it is everyone's responsibility. Recruitment strategies were also viewed as focusing on response roles.

Some methods that were suggested to improve the cultural acceptance of community engagement and community involvement in planning included:

- Increasing human resources available to implement programs
- Targeted recruitment of volunteers to undertake community engagement within Units
- Forming Community Engagement Support Units, i.e. a Unit based on function rather than geographic area
- Work with other best practice agencies both in emergency management and across similar fields (research, community development, engagement, communications, etc.) to build awareness, recognition, reward and acceptance of engagement / involvement processes within NSW SES.
- Having a clear strategy and evidence base for engagement methods
- Having a small grants program available to support community-led initiatives
- Provision of training programs for volunteers to enhance their community engagement skills
- Having the shared understanding, support and buy-in from NSW SES senior leadership
- Continued evaluation of programs to measure success and provide evidence
- Take advantage of inquiries or similar experiences in other jurisdictions to demonstrate value proposition
- Frame community engagement as having conversations with the community to minimise the misunderstanding of true community engagement
- Mentoring of community engagement members to enhance capabilities.

It is recognised that the approach to involve communities in emergency planning must be sustainable, which is a significant challenge given that engagement must be ongoing and that significant resources are required to maintain a two-way dialogue with communities. Once a conversation has commenced with a community it is a conversation for life. There are some concerns that capabilities including community development, people, and communication skills may not be common place across NSW SES therefore limiting NSW SES's capability to effectively engage with communities. It is also recognised that community engagement staff need to understand emergency planning and flood risk (e.g. being able to interpret flood studies and NSW SES Flood Plans).

It is acknowledged by some that the culture of involving communities must extend across other disaster management phases not just planning and preparation, with there being a risk of losing public trust if prior decisions made with community involvement are not respected in the response and recovery phases. It is also recognised though not necessarily acted upon, that there are obvious opportunities to engage and collaborate with communities after flood events to collaboratively debrief and develop plans for improvements.

It was recognised that the adoption of participatory based approaches was not without risk for NSW SES. One risk that was identified was the possible conflict between community wishes and NSW SES policy, for example the community wants to shelter in place and the NSW SES has a policy of evacuation. It was recognised that in such circumstances transparency is required to identify differences and how NSW SES works with communities to progress them.

Conclusion

There is evidence obtained from the pilots and wider research that there are benefits to adopting participatory-based approaches to emergency planning, and in building community resilience. Though only relatively small numbers of people were involved in the pilots, engagement occurred with

community leaders, and there is evidence that these people have had / or intend to have discussions about the activities within their networks. The timeframes imposed on the project proved to be significantly limiting. Had this challenge not arisen it is likely that more interest could have been generated within communities.

The wider adoption of participatory-based approaches to engage with communities is encouraged throughout all phases of the disaster management cycle. However, the approach should not be seen as a silver bullet for generating behaviour change or building resilience. To be successful, approaches will need to be combined with other methods of community engagement and have the ability to experiment within individual communities to ascertain the most effective approach. There is not a standard one-size-fits-all approach to involving the community, however a series of evidence-based principles have been outlined to guide the development, implementation and evaluation of participatory based approaches to emergency planning. Fixed organisational based objectives should also be avoided as objectives will need to be negotiated with communities, and will need to reflect the individual concerns and values of communities.

A sudden change in direction by NSW SES, however, is not likely to be feasible as there are currently significant organisational capacity and cultural constraints. The adoption of participatory-based approaches more widely will require a significant increase in the number and capability of NSW SES community engagement staff and volunteers, utilising an integrated resourcing model. The NSW SES will need to adopt a community-centric approach to emergency management, recognising community engagement as equal to emergency response functions, and that the community is an equal and active participant in emergency management. Not only will its approach need to change before events, its engagement with the community will need to become more open, and foster community trust across all other elements of the disaster management cycle.

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