

Speech – ‘Long-term disaster resilience’ launch’

Word count: 1,300

Good Afternoon.

Thank you Susie for your warm welcome.

It’s a great pleasure to be with you all.

Firstly, I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today and pay my respects to the Elders past and present.

I also acknowledge

- Emergency Management Commissioner, Andrew Crisp
- Dr Caroline Spencer, Monash University
- Professor Frank Archer, Monash University.
- Dr Deb Parkinson
- Member for Indi, Cathy McGowan
- LP Candidate - Steve Martin

In Australia's harsh and challenging landscape, extreme weather events are inevitable – a constant in the lives of Australians over millennia.

The Australian Government recognises the significant impact these events have on communities.

In the past 30 years, over 9 million Australians have experienced a natural disaster.

Many more have been indirectly impacted, or are still recovering.

Over recent months, we have seen across the country, extreme weather events.

Severe drought along the east-coast, relentless bushfires in Tasmania, widespread flooding in Queensland and extreme hail storms in New South Wales.

Earlier this month, we commemorated the tenth anniversary of the Black Saturday bushfires – the 173 lives lost and thousands of properties decimated.

The effects from these kinds of natural disasters are immediate: the loss of, or damage to homes, businesses and livelihoods.

But the economic and emotional wounds often last long after the fires have been extinguished, waters receded and homes rebuilt.

When visiting Berowra in New South Wales earlier this year, I spoke with residents whose homes were damaged in an extreme hailstorm just before Christmas.

It was there that I met Brian and Rhonda Engert.

Their home was lashed by hail of up to 8 centimetres – which caused significant damage to the roof.

Sadly, the hail also destroyed their family car that had been left for them by Rhonda's late father.

A car with great sentiment to the family.

While visiting some of the worst impacted areas in North Queensland earlier this month, the community spirit shone through.

Communities backing each other in times of need – a reminder of the very best in us all.

I also saw this spirit of resilience, of rolling up your sleeves and getting the job done, in Berowra.

A call to arms was put to the local community via Facebook – and what started as a trickle of locals turning up to fill sandbags, quickly turned into a large number of community members putting up their hand to help.

It was the biggest uptake ever of 'spontaneous volunteers' in Sydney.

So many locals described it as empowering – they had something they could do. They were able to help themselves and their neighbours.

Another reminder that in the worst of times – we always see the best of Australians.

Of course, the goodwill and generosity can only do so much.

While we cannot prevent natural hazards, we can prepare for them and mitigate the impact.

Disaster resilience is a shared responsibility across all sectors of society – individuals, communities, businesses, the not-for-profit sector, and all levels of government alike – not just emergency management agencies.

As citizens, we all have a responsibility to prepare for and mitigate the impact.

Our communities are strengthened by our career and volunteer emergency services personnel; everyday Australians who overcome the basic instinct of self-preservation to protect their neighbours.

But it is important for all Australians to remember that they are the first responders.

Whilst our emergency services do a remarkable job, preparing for a natural hazard is a shared responsibility for us all.

As individuals, families, neighbourhoods and communities, we all have a responsibility to ensure we and our families are prepared to survive - before emergency services arrive.

The first time any of us think about how we would respond to a disaster should never be when the disaster occurs. Now is the time to have a conversation about what you will do if disaster impacts on you, your family, and your community.

Australia's disaster risk is growing. As the nature of natural hazards change, more people and property become exposed and vulnerable to these hazards.

As a result, the cost and impact of disasters is increasing for all sectors of society.

These include not only direct costs, such as damage to property and infrastructure, but also the indirect and often intangible flow on effects such as business and network disruptions and community connection.

Leveraging the excellent work undertaken across sectors in the last decade, Australia is better positioned than ever before to take a comprehensive approach to addressing the causes of disaster risk, rather than only dealing with the symptoms.

There is no doubt that improving our disaster resilience will reduce the impacts disasters have on our communities, livelihoods, infrastructure and economy.

It is about making our communities safer, stronger and more resilient.

Collaboration and sharing of information, such as research, is key in ensuring government policy reduces harm and minimises loss.

Our Government has a strong record of providing funding for research, including to *Goulburn Women's Health Network* under the National Partnership Agreement for parts of this research.

Additional projects undertaken in the wake of Black Saturday include:

- All On Board – Incorporating national gender and emergency management guidelines.
- Lesson in disaster – Education for resilience through men's and women's experience of disaster.

Turning to the project we are all here for today.

I first met Susie Reid, Executive Officer for Women's Health Goulburn North East in October last year.

Hearing about the research she was involved with excited me – especially in the way it captured the voices of survivors of natural disasters.

It became clear to me that often, the unaffected community misunderstands the long-term consequences of disasters.

Asking, “Aren’t you over it yet?” infers survivors are not resilient, and conveys a judgement of failure.

For many, there is “no getting over it”.

One comment I heard from an emergency management member was his recount of being told by a bushfire impacted community – “we were doing ok until the emergency services personnel arrived. They took over and excluded us.”

The findings of this research being launched here today, will help the emergency management sector better understand the long-term impacts of disasters on resilience.

It reinforces the importance of being well-prepared as a component of improving resilience – because by knowing how to help increase resilience, we can reduce the long-term impacts.

It further emphasises that having access to resources, emotional support and genuine community engagement can improve resilience.

The Australian Government remains committed to supporting all Australians to be resilient to natural hazards and remain safe in the face of disasters.

Importantly, I announced the \$26.1 million *Preparing Australia Package*, to enhance Australia's natural disaster preparedness and community resilience, including:

- \$750,000 to review new and emerging emergency warning technologies; and
- \$5 million for a *Prepared Communities Fund*, to promote resistance at the ground level.

In addition:

- More than \$100 million has been funded by the Commonwealth since 2013 towards disaster resilience, under the National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience in collaboration with states and territories;
- \$47 million over 8 years for the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre; and
- Over \$10 million to the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) to deliver a range of professional development and educational programs that promote resilience.

In 2018 the Australian Government also led the development of a National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework, in consultation with representatives from all levels of government and key non-government sectors, which I will be releasing soon.

Australia has a strong record and world class arrangements for preparing for, managing and recovering from disasters when they occur.

But, I know, we can do better. We can always do better.

Disaster risk reduction is each and every Australian's business.

And it is only by working together, and through research such as this, that we can reduce the potentially destructive impacts of future disasters.

Thank you.