



Building Resilience in South Australia—A better understanding of risk

This case study is an example of action which contributes to HFA Priority for Action 2

Abstract

Some natural events are unforeseen and the resultant damage is serious and unavoidable, but this is not the case in many of the most severe events. Many communities experience repeated disruptions from natural disasters, and the effects of these events could be minimised through better risk management, planning and prevention. However, effective management of disaster risk is heavily reliant on accurate and accessible information about natural hazards. To improve the quality and accessibility of risk information South Australia has developed the Zone Emergency Risk Management System (ZERMS) Project to assess disaster risk from multiple hazards.

The ZERMS Project is being managed by the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM). Utilising rigorous risk assessment methodology the project works collaboratively with key stakeholders to better understand risk and build resilience across the social, economic and environment sectors of the community. The project has addressed multiple hazards across the full prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (PPRR) spectrum across South Australia’s eleven regions (“zones”).

The core aim of the project is to better understand the risks South Australian communities face by conducting risk assessment workshops across ten different hazards, including bushfires, earthquakes and floods. The ZERMS Project uses the National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines (NERAG), adopted in 2011 as Australia’s nationally agreed methodology for developing emergency risk assessments. The ZERMS project was the first time the NERAG methodology was rigorously applied in Australia at the regional level and the project team spent several months developing supporting tools – including templates, a workshop process and training programs – to apply NERAG at the regional level. The team has since shared this knowledge and tools with other Australian jurisdictions adopting the NERAG methodology.

The project team worked with specialists in each hazard and key regional stakeholders, including local councils, to conduct the risk assessment process, including:

- understanding the demographic, social, economic and environmental characteristics of each region
- identifying the impacts of natural disasters in each region on people, the economy, infrastructure, public administration, community wellbeing, and the environment
- understanding the effectiveness of existing capabilities and systems for managing the risks across the PPRR spectrum
- identifying options for new risk reduction approaches.

Key benefits from the overall process have included:

- a better understanding by the South Australian Government of disaster risks and existing systems for managing risk at the local, regional and state levels.
- fostering better networks between the state and local governments
- better integration between state and local government emergency management planning
- building disaster resilience at the local level by supporting local governments to better understand and manage disaster risks to local communities

Reflecting the *Australian National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, the target audience for participation in this project in each zone has been the emergency management community in the broader sense. To ensure the right stakeholders with the right knowledge participated in the process, stakeholder assessments were regularly conducted to identify the right people to engage across local and state governments, businesses, community leaders and the not-for-profit sector. Many of the people involved in the implementation of the project live and work in the zones and are part of the wider community.

Feedback, particularly from local government representatives, has consistently highlighted the benefit of the strong networks and partnerships that have been forged between local governments and state government agencies. Through the project hundreds of members of South Australia’s emergency management and broader community sectors have developed expertise in emergency risk assessment and a greater understanding of emergency management arrangements and capabilities across the state.



Government of
South Australia