

Future Proofing Our Nation

Quality data leads to better analysis; analysis drives insight and greater insight changes behaviour

Increasing Australians' understanding of their exposure to natural perils is vital to improving the resilience of our communities.

Natural disasters are by their nature infrequent and difficult to predict. When they do occur their effects are devastating. We can't expect Australians to be able to adequately protect themselves against these risks without critical information that helps them safeguard life and property. Natural perils mitigation is and will remain a problem shared between communities, businesses and governments. We need to work together to make Australia safer.

Key to better understanding the impacts of natural perils is the availability of accurate, current data and relevant research. Yet, crucial natural disaster information is difficult and costly to access, often incomplete or out of date and frequently duplicated across sources. It is often single purpose and the needs of multiple stakeholders have not been considered.

Through the research set out in *'Building an Open Platform for Natural Disaster Resilience Decisions'* we show that a fresh approach to the collation, co-ordination and analysis of natural disaster information and research is fundamental to the prioritisation of mitigation decisions that will help strengthen and safeguard our communities.

In this paper, the Roundtable calls for:

- The centralisation of key natural perils data through the development of a national open source platform which provides more timely, relevant information;
- Focused research attention through the removal of barriers to research and greater collaboration and engagement between stakeholders; and

- The establishment of a national prioritisation framework for funding resilience initiatives and research.

As business leaders representing a large and diverse cross section of the Australian economy, along with the Australian Red Cross, an auxiliary to government, we formed the *Australian Business Roundtable for Disaster Resilience and Safer Communities* and commissioned a White Paper *'Building our Nation's Resilience to Natural Disasters'*.

This Paper estimated that natural disasters cost the Australian economy \$6.3 billion per year and forecast costs to rise to \$23 billion annually by 2050. The research also demonstrated that carefully targeted resilience investments of \$250 million per annum have the potential to generate budget savings of \$12.2 billion for all levels of government and would reduce natural disaster costs by more than 50% by 2050.

We have encouraged the Australian Government to:

- Promote resilience to the centre of government decision-making;
- Consider a comprehensive, national co-ordinated approach; and
- Commit to a long-term annual pre-disaster resilience fund.

Our recommendations highlighted that natural perils information is fundamentally important to decision making.

'Building an Open Platform for Natural Disaster Resilience Decisions' expands on these recommendations and proposes an open platform framework for the consolidation of existing information and the commissioning of additional research to address gaps and disparities in natural disaster understanding. Core to achieving this are the principles of openness, collaboration, transparency and effective prioritisation as committed to by the Australian Government in 2010. It is only when decision making is co-ordinated and supported by reliable data and research that awareness and action can increase.

The research shows that governments have allocated an estimated \$280 million to natural disaster research over the period from 2009 to 2021. Consistent with the trend identified in our first Paper, the majority of research funds are allocated to disaster response and recovery rather than mitigation solutions that will help save lives and property.

All natural disasters have the potential to cause loss of life and property, however the report reveals disproportionate research spend on some disaster types with little to no spend on others. For example, despite the expected annualised cost of bushfires being relatively low when compared to other perils, it has the highest research spend. Significantly, only a small amount of research has been conducted into the effectiveness of mitigation and into the social and psychological impacts of disasters.

We demonstrate that through the provision of wider access to accurate, relevant natural disaster data and research, better local responses from governments, businesses and communities would generate additional potential savings for Government of between \$500 million and \$2.4 billion over the period to 2050.

Both of the Roundtable's commissioned research papers outline a new approach to pre-disaster investments in Australia. They highlight the importance of integrated information and activity across governments, businesses and communities. By centralising decision-making and funding, and establishing a national research agenda, Government will be better able to co-ordinate and prioritise resilience activities across relevant departments and levels of government.

Adopting the key recommendations of these Papers will materially reduce economic costs and relieve long term pressures on budgets.

Governments, businesses and our communities need to be aware of the risks they face. We believe that access to timely relevant data will enable communities to better prepare for natural disasters and to build a safer and more productive society.

Together, we can build a more resilient Australia.



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