

Foreword

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Tropical Cyclone Debbie has reminded us of the influence that severe weather events can have on our lives. What started as a tropical cyclone crossing the coast near Airlie Beach in Queensland became a severe storm event that caused flooding in coastal towns from mid-Queensland down to northern New South Wales. If that wasn't enough, the same weather system then caused significant flooding on the north island of New Zealand.



The volume of rain that the weather system dropped on Queensland was so large and widespread that, at the recent Local Government Association of Queensland Disaster Management Conference, the mayor of a coastal municipality said that in their council area, there were five separate water catchments and, until this cyclone, they had never experienced all five of them in flood at the same time.

In this issue the breadth of topics covered reflects the complexity of the challenges facing us as we continue striving to build our national resilience to disasters. The papers include a contribution from Sunshine Coast Council that used their Resilient Australia Award-winning Disaster Hub to provide valuable and timely information to their community and to their disaster management team during Tropical Cyclone Debbie.

In contrast to the warnings that preceded the landfall of Tropical Cyclone Debbie, the thunderstorm asthma event that was experienced across the greater Melbourne and Geelong areas in late 2016 arrived without warning and with rapid onset. In the final report from the Victorian Inspector-General of Emergency Management, it is clearly stated that: 'There was no evidence to suggest that these storms and other non-meteorological factors would result in a health emergency of unprecedented scale and consequences'. The additional complication of this health emergency was that it was spread across the greater Melbourne and Geelong areas, with no single local focus that could be addressed by a concerted emergency response. The question for all of us is what do we need to do and how do we prepare for the next unexpected, rapid-onset emergency?

Core to the building of sustainable disaster resilience is:

- Easy access to and use of the knowledge that we have from past events; from inquiries and reviews, and from research. The recent launch of the upgraded Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub (www.knowledge.aidr.org.au) is one important element in capturing and providing free access to important knowledge.
- A workforce with the skills and capabilities to review, analyse and interpret that knowledge and the ability to use it to guide our adaptation in a world of evolving and emerging natural and human-caused disasters.
- Moving away from a reliance on processes alone to guide our actions. The recent launch of the series of Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook publications on 'Managing the Floodplain' marks the beginning of the transformation of this valuable publication series, moving the focus from systems and processes to principles and guidance.

The challenge for us all is to embrace the changes and challenges that are confronting us and to be as prepared as we can for the future by engaging in discussion and dialogue on topics of national interest. This will, by necessity, take us all out of our comfort zones as we imagine what is possible and work hard to minimise the impact of the power and complexity of real disasters as they unfold before us.

Dr John Bates