

Foreword

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Welcome to the latest edition of *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, an edition focused on lessons management. I was pleased to be asked to write this foreword as lessons management is an issue I am passionate about. As I prepared to put pen to paper, my attention was drawn to media statements about the recent fires in New South Wales and Victoria and the views of several commentators advocating the need for us to learn lessons from these tragic events.



If I can be a provocateur in this field, I must ask what it is that we expect to learn that we didn't or shouldn't have already known, and what has prevented these issues being addressed before now?

Raised proudly as an outcome of post-event debriefs and analysis, the term 'lessons learnt' is often used to infer that 'opportunities for improvement' have been identified and corrective actions put in place to prevent similar circumstances recurring. Yet similar observations are often made at future events.

So, what confidence can we give our key internal and external stakeholders that we really do learn?

As dedicated professionals within an emergency management system, we are well-practiced at after-action reviews, debriefs and operational analysis. However, as a sector that encompasses local, state, and commonwealth governments, private industry, not-for-profit and auxiliary organisations, I would argue that we are yet to truly learn how to effectively institutionalise change at a cultural and a whole-of-system level.

My observation is that many processes are overly focused on examining how emergencies were managed rather than considering a complete PPRR approach. Equally, they also often seem to look for deficiencies rather than actively discovering and sharing the very good practices that occur.

We need to embrace a broader 'lessons management' approach. We need an approach that creates and embeds a culture of learning rather than a clinical and rearward looking evaluation process.

We need to clearly focus on those who will ultimately benefit—our communities. Lessons management needs to be a shared, collaborative initiative across all agencies and all levels of government with the community at the core of thinking and planning.

I am encouraged by the tireless work of several individuals in this field and the agencies that are embracing this broader lessons management approach. There are many examples of these in this edition—examples we can all learn from in our endeavours to improve outcomes for our communities.

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