



Australian Disaster Resilience  
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## Does saying we're resilient make it so? The Cairns Resilience Scorecard Project

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## *Does Saying We're Resilient Make it So?* The Cairns Resilience Scorecard Programme.

As a nation we are fond of talking up resilience. At the very mention of a challenging event resilience is associated, generally referring to the practical response actions undertaken by affected communities. But what does resilience actually look like - and does simply saying a community is resilient make it so? As one of just six Australian cities and the only Australian role model city signed up with the UNISDR Resilient Cities campaign, Cairns takes a pro-active, carefully planned approach to disaster resilience building. Realistically measuring resilience is an ongoing challenge, particularly in regions such as Cairns where the absence of a major disaster for many years begs questions of the future efficacy of community response and recovery. In 2015, three years after its community resilience programme began, the Cairns Regional Council's disaster resilience unit implemented a comprehensive stocktake of the state of resilience at social and infrastructural levels.

A unique combination of two resilience scorecard methods was undertaken to provide the most complete baseline understanding of resilience in the region:

The Torrens Resilience Institute scorecard process

[http://www.flinders.edu.au/fms/documents/NP1314\\_Revised\\_TRI%20Toolkit%20and%20Scorecard%20Version%202.pdf](http://www.flinders.edu.au/fms/documents/NP1314_Revised_TRI%20Toolkit%20and%20Scorecard%20Version%202.pdf) was used to measure representative community resilience,

involving community members from around the region ... while the UNISDR scorecard process

<http://www.unisdr.org/2014/campaign-cities/Resilience%20Scorecard%20V1.5.pdf> was

completed by local disaster management group members, partners and others involved in disaster management infrastructure.

Following International Association for Public Participation (IAP2) principles, decision questions directed the outputs and outcomes of the programme.

- What indicators of resilience do we see, hear and feel in the Cairns region?
- How can we all strengthen our region's resilience?

The programme comprised:

- Community mapping, to identify the geographic locations of those most vulnerable in Cairns – adding to existing knowledge of communities vulnerable through factors such as disability, language spoken, age;
- Surveys within those geographic communities based on the Torrens scorecard criteria;
- Community engagement activities in those locations;
- Research based on the previous two years of the *Be Ready, Cairns!* resilience building programme, including learnings and experiences from Tropical Cyclone Ita;
- Ongoing engagement work;
- Self-assessments by local disaster management group (LDMG) members, partners and contributing organisations;
- Collaborative workshops and discussion forums with those groups;
- Shared feedback and agreement about ongoing improvement practices.

### **Engaging communities**

Developing resilience is an ongoing, shared responsibility. No one action, group, person, agency nor initiative will create resilience! Throughout the Cairns region, the individuals and groups which comprise our communities and the wide range of organisations, agencies and entities

providing services and facilities all have a role. For this reason and because there had been little previous attempt to holistically assess and define resilience levels, wide-ranging input was needed for the programme. Until the programme began, resilience understanding tended to be based on the work of the Cairns disaster resilience officer or an un-tested general “belief” in local community resilience. We needed to ask our communities and stakeholders much more directly about demonstration of the features which create resilience.

For the purpose of the programme, different communities were involved in the two complementary scorecard processes. Four geographic communities were identified through a mapping project as exhibiting specific vulnerability factors for the Torrens Institute (social resilience) component while all members of the local disaster management group, relevant district disaster management group members and associated stakeholders participated in the UNISDR (infrastructural resilience) component.

Experiences in the years preceding the programme showed the value of direct, one-one engagement approaches within communities when discussing resilience-related topics. While on-line information and resource availability was useful, facilitating conversations about and developing enhanced understanding of resilience identifiers worked best through personal contact. Community members enjoyed these interactions and the genuine approach to engagement that was offered. Within the formal disaster management community there was an initial degree of surprise that active participation was being sought beyond asking for a generalised comment or written report. When participant suggestions about involvement were sought there was a tendency to retreat behind “sending an email”-type responses. An open approach to sharing information through direct contact attracted much greater collaboration over time.

## **Methodology**

Input from community members using the Torrens process was primarily gained through a survey. The survey was anonymous, although on completion participants could go in a draw to win a household emergency kit by providing contact details separately. The survey questions related to the individual’s knowledge and experience and the context of their local geographic community. Many participants commented on the “different” nature of the questions and how they valued the opportunity to think about these different aspects of their lives. The purpose of the survey prompted valuable discussions about related matters including community preparedness for all the hazards which could affect the region, the council’s role in disaster management and community safety. We talked about disaster readiness and effective response being an integral part of community strength.

As experiences to date had already shown the value of direct community contact, the survey was administered one-one at local venues such as corner shops, malls, events or as part of community activities. In some cases trust was well developed through existing relationships, in others trust was generated at the time through initiating wider discussions about personal safety and preparedness, facilitating communication processes elsewhere in the council or with other organisations or simply providing an opportunity to chat. At all community venues, information and free disaster resilience-related products were available including mobile phone power banks. At all community venues, the resilience officer was accompanied by either a community organisation volunteer, the local councillor or the fire service. These crews were especially popular as they readily attracted attention to our stand.

The UNISDR process was introduced to the LDMG at the conclusion of the Torrens process. Representatives now had a better understanding of levels of community resilience but their input was needed to complete the assessment. In a region which prides itself on “firsts”, the benefits of being the first in Australia to use the process, provide well-founded baseline data for the future

and promote the region's reputation were readily accepted. As the importance of LDMGs working more collaboratively had recently been raised by the Inspector General of Emergency Management, the process was an ideal opportunity to develop an environment of shared information, trust and problem-solving. Participants were reminded throughout of their contribution to high-level goals such as those within the Sendai framework, building the foundation of legacy for future resilience growth and the relationship of the work to Cairns' UNISDR role model city status.

In planning the UNISDR process, an analysis was made of which organisations could best provide the information needed for the resilience "essentials" (indicators) assessments. LDMG representatives, others on the district disaster management group and additional organisations holding resilience related information were identified through a collective activity. Given the large number of "essentials" in the process, they were distributed to the most appropriate organisation to individually assess, although many were termed an "all play" where everyone had an interest. This careful analysis reinforced the value of existing knowledge in some organisations while also emphasising it in others who had never previously been asked to contribute. The holistic nature of the UNISDR process takes it beyond traditional considerations of resilience which tend to be social – the process incorporates state-wide influences, environmental factors, financial measures, amenities, infrastructure and insurances. This unique opportunity was successfully promoted as a community or business contribution to organisations not formerly engaged in resilience development.

For the first time individual LDMG members and other stakeholders were asked a standardised set of questions about resilience and had to consider their individual responses objectively, then examine their efficacy as a collective. This proved much more challenging than providing feedback on local disaster management plans or policies, which tend to follow the standard process of provision as a draft and circulation for comment. In the UNISDR process, everyone began at the same level. Participants agreed to openly discuss their responses and decide on an appropriate resilience score for the various essentials/measures by consensus through two workshops. In most circumstances the information had never been presented in this kind of forum before.

## **Challenges**

Many of our communities were unused to being invited to participate in council activities with such an open purpose. They were suspicious about the motivation for asking questions and having discussions related so to local social capital. Additionally they were surprised to meet council staff "out of hours" at venues within their local community area. Many people had a very limited understanding of how disaster management works in Queensland and had not realised the council's critical role in it. By providing a focused, local presence with disaster management staff, sometimes joined by community volunteers, we were able to talk directly to community members, explaining why their engagement was essential and how it would make a difference to the work done on the ground as well as at procedural and policy levels.

Our local disaster management group was unused to working in a collaborative, participatory environment. Although many representatives had worked together for years and knew each other well at a surface level, sharing detailed information about their organisations and operations was new to them. There was nervousness about contributing information which might demonstrate a weakness. Sustained encouragement and promotion of the future benefit in being engaged had to be provided – this applied to representatives internally (council) and most of the external organisations. By demonstrating a "greater good" that would come from involvement and using an open, facilitated process, we were able to start getting past either a

divide and conquer mentality or beliefs that “this is our job and you don’t need to know about it”. The nature of the UNISDR scorecard process itself seeks out shared information .

A significant challenge was moving the LDMG’s tendency to regard resilience as a series of outputs (such as information or products) to a journey of achieving demonstrated outcomes. Because the region has a reputation for best practice in disaster management, group members had either never questioned the actual status of local resilience or simply accepted repeated positive media statements about how resilient Far North Queensland communities are.

## **Innovation**

Cairns is the first regional city in Australia to undertake the scorecard exercise. To our knowledge we are also the first local government to take the initiative of combining the Torrens Institute and UNISDR scorecard processes to gain a comprehensive baseline measurement of resilience. While the engagement approaches used were neither new nor innovative, the programme of itself was something completely different for the region in terms of breadth of engagement, the open nature of the engagement and following our promises to the public with regard to input to the decisions. The value of previous experience with identified communities, stakeholders and decision-makers was evident in the success of our interactions. All approaches were carefully tailored to our respective publics, referring to UNISDR and Sendai principles within a Cairns region context.

People were asked what were often considered unusual questions in the community survey. From discussion it was clear that seeking residents’ views on how connected they thought their community was, how much contact they had with the council and whether they belonged to a community group was of itself a novelty. We were quite often asked in return what these questions had to do with disaster resilience. This provided an easy education opportunity to reiterate the roles of community and local government in resilience building. Partnering with the fire service – having a fire engine in the nearest car park, fire fighters in uniform offering children stickers and resources, promoting free home fire safety checks – raised a new awareness of the council and Queensland emergency responders working together. Simple public appeal was embraced.

## **Results**

Completing the scorecard exercises using a genuine engagement approach was a primary aim and a significant achievement in terms of logistics, resources, gaining commitment and planning.

The outcomes were:

- Clear identification of the successful, comprehensive lead role in disaster preparedness response and resilience building undertaken by Cairns Regional Council;
- Clear identification of the roles, responsibilities and risk assessment gaps of organisations involved in disaster management within the region;
- Confirmation of sound infrastructural resilience in some areas, less in others;
- Enhanced presence in and involvement with identified communities and understanding of resilience levels and major gaps;
- A greater appreciation of the critical importance of community connectedness, contact with local government and community self-help;
- Key information gained on how to help communities better support themselves;
- A shared understanding of the importance of open participation in resilience assessment, planning and development.