HAZARD NOTE

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HAZARDS CRC

USING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO STRENGTHEN CAPABILITY IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Diversity and inclusion: building strength and capability was a three-year project beginning in 2017 at Victoria University that focused on understanding what effective diversity and inclusion looks like in the emergency management sector, and what was needed to support more effective practice in this area. This was examined from community, organisational and economic perspectives, with researchers developing an evidence-based Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Emergency Management Policy and Practice and materials to support this.

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SUMMARY

Improving diversity and inclusion provides a tangible way to build robust and resilient social structures in communities and organisations. The emergency management sector has begun addressing the low representation of true diversity in its workforce, highlighting the need to understand not only the benefits of diversity and inclusion, but also how to improve the effective implementation

▲ **Above:** THIS PROJECT CONSIDERED DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SECTOR, AND WHAT IS NEEDED TO SUPPORT MORE EFFECTIVE PRACTICES. PHOTO: FIRE AND EMERGENCY NEW ZEALAND.

of diversity and inclusion in agencies. This includes understanding the risks associated with a lack of diversity and inclusion. This is an important starting point as it underpins workforce resilience and wellbeing and community safety.

This research, based at Victoria University, collaborated with people in the emergency management sector who are engaged in diversity and inclusion practice to develop an evidence-based Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Emergency Management Policy and Practice. The research was completed in three phases: understanding the context and current knowledge, developing the Framework,

and testing and refining the Framework with end-users in emergency management.

The Framework and supporting documents, available through the CRC's website on the Online Tools page (see also Resources, page 4), takes a whole-system approach constructed around four key components of effective diversity and inclusion: strategic, programmatic, inclusive growth and risk management. This project has effectively broadened and strengthened the conversation about diversity and inclusion in the emergency management sector, in particular the need to humanise risk using a deeper understanding of diversity and inclusion.

CONTEXT

It is acknowledged by the emergency management sector that action is needed to address the low representation of diversity in its workforce, driven by an imperative to better represent the communities it serves. The role of the sector has also shifted in response to ongoing unprecedented natural hazards and the need for more strategic approaches to building resilience. This means renegotiating the relationship between emergency service agencies and their communities, from working *for them*

to working *with them*. This highlighted the need to improve the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion practice and understand the value it brings to agencies.

BUSHFIRE AND NATURAL HAZARDS CRC RESEARCH

This project worked with people in the sector who are engaged in diversity and inclusion practice to develop an evidence-based Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Emergency Management Policy and Practice. This framework needed to be capable of

supporting more effective management and measurement of diversity and inclusion.

The research was completed in three phases: (1) understanding the context and available knowledge, (2) development of the Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Emergency Management Policy and Practice, and (3) testing and refining the Framework with end-users.

Phase 1: understanding the context
Phase 1 (summarised in *Hazard Note 60*, see Further Reading, page 4) used a mixed-

method approach that incorporated case studies, semi-structured interviews, focus groups, decision-making assessments, desktop reviews and ongoing review and feedback with end-users.

The initial literature review assessed where diversity and inclusion practice was considered effective, the contributing factors to effectiveness and its benefits throughout the emergency services. The emergency services were not well-represented in the literature and it was concluded that there were no suitable frameworks available. It was also found that the literature has shifted focus from addressing diversity towards understanding the role of inclusion. This switch highlights the role of systemic approaches and the importance of understanding context in relation to achieving effective outcomes.

Researchers then developed case studies with three emergency service agencies – Fire and Rescue NSW, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, and the South Australia State Emergency Service – to inform the context. Researchers conducted 33 interviews with representatives across different areas of each organisation, focusing on managers at all levels. The case studies highlighted that, while diversity and inclusion was present in all organisations, it was not well-integrated into systems and processes, or connected to day-to-day decision making and tasks.

The three community case studies of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and organisational assessments undertaken found that the limited cultural awareness of these communities and organisational cultures were key barriers for diversity and inclusion.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

Diversity refers to the blend of people in organisations or communities and how they are different, how they identify to their social and professional identity, and their ability to achieve goals and objectives.

Inclusion occurs when differences are valued and people can contribute fully, to enhance organisational performance though structures and ways of working that accommodate and support the needs of diverse individuals or groups.

The interaction between the two: put simply by lead researcher Celeste Young: "Diversity is what creates the changes and inclusion is how you manage it."

At the end of phase one, key components for the Framework were identified. These were organised across the following areas: a strategic process of change, a programmatic continuous-improvement process and organic bottom-up growth.

Phase 2: developing the Framework

The draft Framework's components were refined through a series of consultations with working group members and key stakeholders.

Researchers hosted a scenario workshop in 2018, which was attended by 21 diversity and inclusion practitioners from 10 emergency management, community, research and diversity and inclusion-related industry bodies and agencies. The workshop explored three scenarios, revealing the extent of diversity and inclusion-related risk to emergency service agencies. Inclusive practice was central to the mitigation and management of social, human and innovation risk and often not formally recognised or acknowledged. Identifying these risks provided the connection between day-to-day tasks and the business imperative for emergency service agencies. It also helped demonstrate the key role that diversity and inclusion plays in community and organisational safety and wellbeing. This provided a focus for the Framework and helped identify key activities, attributes, capabilities and skills that need to be included in risk management processes.

The economic case study undertaken of the Fire and Rescue NSW's Indigenous Fire and Rescue Employment Strategy program found that every dollar spent generated $20 of benefits. It also found that development of economic tools was needed to ascertain benefits for other areas of diversity, such as the CALD community.

The investigation into young people and CALD communities found that although culturally and linguistically diverse communities have many capabilities, these have not been examined with respect to various needs, which can be a barrier to their use (MacDonald, 2020).

Phase 3: testing the Framework

The Framework was adjusted in response to feedback from policy makers and practitioners, integrating the various mapping exercises and key findings collected in Phases 1 and 2. Researchers documented 15 case studies of best practice from interviews with program leaders. They also summarised key lessons learnt to date and identified practitioner

support tools. Guidance in relation to building inclusive partnerships with young people and CALD communities was also developed (see Resources, page 4).

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Emergency Management Policy and Practice

The final Diversity and Inclusion Framework for Emergency Management Policy and Practice (Young and Jones, 2020) and the supporting documents can be accessed on the CRC's website via the Driving Change Online Tools page (see also Resources, page 4).

The Framework (see Figure 1, page 3) is constructed around four components:
- strategic – transformational change
- programmatic – continuous improvement
- inclusive growth – bottom-up engagement
- risk management – human, social and innovation risk associated with diversity and inclusion.

It takes a whole-system approach, linking together these key components, and shows how diversity and inclusion is managed and measured. The key focus is the management of risk, which provides the starting point for integration across organisational systems and links it to practice and day-to-day tasks. By using current systems and a systemic risk approach, it is possible to embed diversity and inclusion in practices and policy so that it supports accountability, and places it in a context where it is visible and where established tools can be built upon.

The Framework guides the reader through the continuous improvement process, outlines what inclusive growth looks like from the bottom-up, explains how to integrate diversity and inclusion using the risk process, and identifies key areas of activity required for effective integration.

It is designed to be flexible and adaptable, to aid decision making in a range of different contexts, and to be useful in full or in parts, depending on the situation and context.

There are three supporting documents also available with the Framework on the CRC's Driving Change website (see also Resources, page 4):
- ***Learning as we go: developing effective inclusive management*** presents case studies of best practice and knowledge, highlighting that emergency services agencies are learning and building inclusive management as they go and that some of the best resources that agencies have are the practitioners themselves. It also provides resource

▲ **Figure 1:** KEY COMPONENTS OF PRACTICE IN THE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION FRAMEWORK FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT POLICY AND PRACTICE.

materials developed to support diversity and inclusion practitioners.

- ***Young people and the emergency services: working towards inclusive partnerships*** provides an overview of what is important to people aged 18 to 25, their areas of interest and their motivations to engage with community. It provides strategies (including links to existing resources and checklists) of how work with young people, and highlights the skills, attributes and capabilities that young people bring to an organisation.
- ***Building inclusive partnerships with culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities*** provides basic guidance for emergency services practitioners to support the building of respectful and inclusive partnerships with CALD communities. It focuses on general guidance that applies when working with all CALD communities, also highlighting the need to adapt practices that work with each community's specific needs.

Other key findings and concluding statements:

- Effective diversity and inclusion is an imperative for all emergency service agencies if they are to mitigate and manage the human, social and innovation risk associated with the changing risk landscape occupied by organisations and communities.
- Implementation of diversity and inclusion is present in emergency service agencies but often lacking and not well-integrated into organisational systems, focusing on 'obtaining (gender-based) diversity quotas' rather than creating an inclusive culture.
- The benefits of diversity and inclusion are often not well understood at an organisational level or are seen as a cost, showing that diversity and inclusion

skills are not being acknowledged in the same way as more technical skills. There is also a lack of awareness of what constitutes appropriate language use and behaviours in relation to diverse communities and individuals.

- The risks associated with diversity and inclusion are not new but are still largely unrecognised as part of formal risk management within organisations. Skills and capabilities associated with diversity and inclusion practice were, for the most part, being given a lower priority than those required to manage more established and accepted risks. If left unmanaged, diversity and inclusion risks are likely to 'impair the ability of emergency service agencies to perform their functions effectively' (Young & Jones, 2019b).
- Improving diversity and inclusion provides a tangible way to build robust and resilient social infrastructure in communities and organisations.
- Diversity and inclusion is not a fixed-point destination to arrive at. It is a series of destinations that organisations and communities move through as they work towards a desired, inclusive vision. This vision provides the destination that enables the development of the transitions needed to achieve an outcome.
- Inclusion is not about being permissive. It is about understanding the formation of new boundaries and who should decide what those boundaries are. It is also not one conversation, but many different voices coming together to negotiate a collaborative outcome.
- Statements of inclusion drafted by diverse groups that outline the terms of their inclusion are needed to enable negotiation from a position of empowerment. These statements support the development of respectful relationships that celebrate difference through a shared understanding of what is needed and how it is needed.

HOW IS THE RESEARCH BEING USED?

This project has effectively broadened and strengthened the conversation about diversity and inclusion in the emergency management sector, in particular the need to humanise risk using diversity and inclusion. The research outputs have received high levels of uptake during the project and are being used across a number of organisations and agencies in decision making, and to inform the development of frameworks and programs. This has been aided by the sector's focus

on progressing the diversity and inclusion agenda, and the work of peak agencies and end-user organisations to develop programs and leadership. Collaboration and commitment of the end-user group has been integral to the effectiveness and impact of this project, who have actively participated, supported and promoted the work.

A major impact reported by end-users has been the change of narrative from one about 'men and women' and 'the right thing to do to' to having diversity and inclusion as a risk-based business imperative that requires inclusive practice to be effective. Some organisations have also started to include these risks in their risk registers. For stakeholders, it has also provided a consolidation of practitioner knowledge that has been reported as useful and assisted in practitioners being able to articulate and provide evidence of the value of the work they do.

In December 2020, lead researcher Celeste Young (Victoria University) – alongside an all-female line-up from the CRC, Women and Firefighting Australasia, Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, and Fire and Emergency New Zealand – hosted an online forum called 'Diversity and inclusion in emergency management: from policy to practice' (see Resources, page 4). The forum was attended by more than 150 people from across the sector, for a valuable discussion about the evolution of inclusive practice, the purpose of diversity, and the critical role of inclusion within emergency service agencies, communities and other organisations.

This research was also recently highlighted in a report jointly published by the Male Champions of Change and AFAC, titled *Gender balance in fire and emergency: going beyond it's the right thing to do' – the case for change*, demonstrating the clear case for improving gender balance in the sector (see Further Reading, page 4). The report directly draws on the work of this project, noting that this research has been very effective in describing the significant risks associated with not taking action to address the challenges of diversity and inclusion in the Australasian emergency management sector.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Considerable work is still needed in developing measurement protocols, particularly those related to economic evaluation and the effectiveness of inclusion, as well as work to identify and document the specific capabilities and skills required to support this. As diversity

and inclusion is a long-term and dynamic issue, longitudinal evaluation is needed to assess returns on investment, ensure that visibility is maintained, and deeper understandings continue to develop.

The final Framework provides a basis on which to build. The outputs from this project also capture and consolidate some of the considerable knowledge that already exists within these organisations to be used as reference material. This project has shown that achieving truly diverse and inclusive organisations is a long road, but it is one that emergency service agencies are already travelling.

RESOURCES

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Young C & Jones R (2020) Diversity and inclusion framework for emergency management policy and practice, Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, accessible at www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/ diversity_inclusion_framework.

FURTHER READING

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