



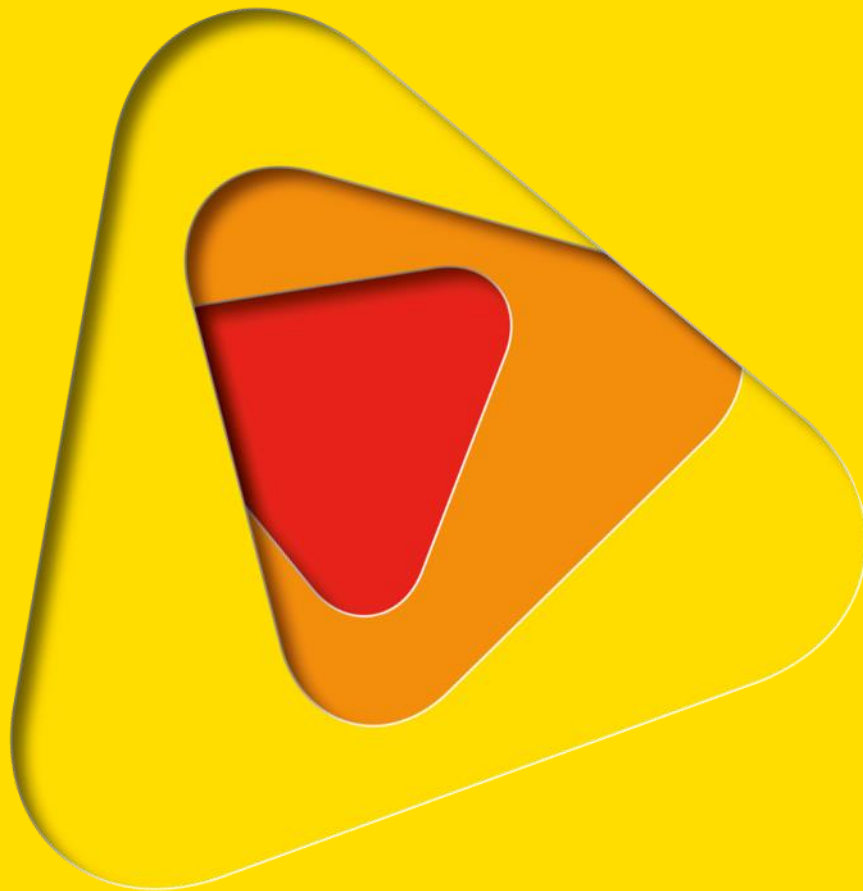
# WHEN POLICY, POLITICS AND EMERGENCY RESPONSES COLLIDE: MANAGING COORDINATION IN CRISES

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## ABSTRACT

Crises place a clear focus on how governments at different levels respond and highlight the important intersection between policy, politics and emergency responses in highly charged circumstances. Large scale natural disasters represent a significant test of the public sector's ability to respond in an efficient and coordinated way in the face of uncertainty and adversity. The intersection between policy, politics and operational response can be seen as a perfect storm where competing priorities and objectives may arise and require resolution. The pressures of managing crisis situations come against a backdrop in Australia where trust in government and public services from its citizens continues to decline. The public retain high expectations of government's ability to plan, prepare and respond to disasters in a timely manner. The level of scrutiny and accountability to which politicians, bureaucrats and responders are held to means that collective and collaborative action is a necessity. Crises are also occurring not in a vacuum but where changes in the public sector mean that whole of government, or connected forms of working are a highly pervasive mantra. It is within this context that political, bureaucratic and operational agencies work in the response to crises.

This presentation provides the finalised outcomes from a doctoral project which examined the abovementioned issues within the framework of Australia's two most significant events of the past decade: the 2009 Victorian bushfires and the 2011 Queensland floods (this work is currently being published as: *Disaster Management in Australia: Government Coordination in a Time of Crisis*. Routledge).

The research was premised on understanding how the states confronted each disaster and how they can be seen to epitomise the challenges of crisis management in Australia. The research was underpinned through a model which examined: whole of government arrangements, the nature of crisis management, executive leadership, inter-organisational coordination, organisational culture, social capital and institutions of state. It examined these thematic areas from the: policy, politics and emergency response perspectives. In doing so, it has established that these three streams of activity and the actors who work in each domain represent a symbiotic network. Within this network, the interfaces between these streams represents a critical part of preparation, response and recovery from major crisis events, as important as any of the individual components.