

# Sharing responsibility workshop

## RMIT 29 March, 2012.

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**Speaking notes for 5-10 minute presentation.**

### **Perspectives from current research**

Stephen Dovers/ Michael Eburn (Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU)

- Shared responsibility has gained traction since the report of the VBRC.
- The Commission said that shared responsibility did not mean equal responsibility, there were some things government could do better. The State needs to strengthen mitigation measures, provide warnings, education, evacuation advice, frank advice on the defendability of homes, fire suppression and manage people during an emergency.
- Our research was to ask chief fire officers what they understood by the concept of shared responsibility and what was it that they thought they were trying to achieve.
- Most chief officers saw the idea as meaning that homeowners needed to be proactive to understand the risks in the areas in which they lived and to have an idea of what they would do in response to a threat. That they would have thought about it and they would have a plan that did not depend upon the emergency services telling them what to do on the day. The plan had to be in place well before any actual threat appeared.
- But the notion of shared responsibility was not universally accepted.

*The problem with the shared responsibility is that being a shared responsibility implies that there is still significant government contribution towards particular risks and community issues.*

*... we try to avoid the shared responsibility catch line. Rather, we make it your responsibility to ensure that you're adequately prepared to either relocate from your property and/or defend in place... putting the onus onto the householder ... is preferable so that we actually get some action.*

**My idea of shared responsibility is that no one group or agency can be charged with blame or negligence after an event. Shared responsibility entails identifying the issues and constraints (including budget and resources) coming up with priority actions and agreeing on an implementation plan that involves actions and outcomes from all stakeholders.**

Shared responsibility is to the community not the individual

‘you can have a shared responsibility and you can make an informed decision up to the point’ but at some point the event is too large and ‘... a judgement call has to be made on the survivability of a fire and to me there are too many possible variables that come into play that can cause that decision to be the wrong decision’ so it’s the fire brigade that has to make the call as only the brigade will have the experience to make that judgement.

John Howard talked about ‘mutual obligation’ – the problem with shared responsibility is what’s shared and what’s not – who’s responsible for what? The concept of mutual obligation is stronger – if a party (a) doesn’t perform their obligation, party (b) may not be able to do their part.

Shared responsibility extends to making decisions about where you want to live.

## **Instructions:**

This one-day workshop will examine the idea and practice of sharing responsibility for disaster resilience. The idea of ‘shared responsibility’ is shaping emergency management thinking in Australia. It has gained significant policy traction following the Victorian 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission and the release of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. Similar ideas have been circulating in other sectors for some time. Yet it is not clear what the idea really means or what its implications are for policy and practice.

This Workshop will address two general questions:

- First, the idea: what does the idea of ‘shared responsibility’ mean, and what are its implications?
- Second, the practice: is it a useful policy concept, what needs to be done to implement it, and what could undermine it?

**Note:** *The workshop will prioritize time for group discussion. In all but the final session, panelists will speak for 5-10 minutes each, allowing time for open discussion. In the final session there will be 45 minutes open discussion, after which panellists will have 5 minutes each to make final comments.*

### **9:30-10.30am**

**Perspectives from current research** (Chair: Mick Ayre, Assistant Director - Northern Territory Fire and Rescue Service)

- John Handmer/ Blythe McLennan (Centre for Risk and Community Safety, RMIT University)
- Stephen Dovers/ Michael Eburn (Fenner School of Environment and Society, ANU)
- Barbara Norman (Urban and Regional Planning, University of Canberra)
- Leo Dobes (Crawford School of Economics and Government, ANU)