

**‘What does success look like for  
emergency managers -  
or how do you know when you’ve done  
a good job?’**



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# This presentation

- Is reporting on research we've done for the Bushfire CRC.
- In it I will:
  - Review the problem;
  - Give some suggested measures of success and
  - Ask what is *your* measure?



## The harsh reality – ‘Black Saturday’ 2009

‘... if you look at the extent of the impact and how many people could have potentially died, and how many people were in that area and didn't die, and you got it right down to 173 out of say potentially 10,000 people. That to me is probably quite successful. You know, people see 173, they don't see how many people were in the area and affected and impacted.’

## The problem

‘Australian emergency management policy suffers from a lack of clear objectives or measures of success. This absence means that agencies, governments and citizens cannot identify whether or not policy objectives are being met and whether the emergency services are succeeding in their tasks or not.’ (Eburn and Dovers, 2012).

# What is emergency management meant to achieve?

‘What is the measure of success of the outcome of a bushfire. Is the loss of no lives the only performance measure? If so, how many houses is an acceptable number to lose? Does one performance indicator have the potential to cloud the ‘Shared Responsibility’ of all to build resilience of our community?’

Mick Keelty, *A Shared Responsibility: The Report of the Perth Hills Bushfire February 2011 Review* (Government of Western Australia, 2011) Transmission Letter, 3.

# What is emergency management meant to achieve?

‘Until there is a clear and specific goal or objective of emergency management policy, it is impossible to identify how that policy can be mainstreamed or the success (or otherwise) of the policy [can be] measured.’

Neil Comrie, *Review of the 2010–11 Flood Warnings and Response – Final Report* (Government of Victoria, 2012), 147.

## What's *your* task?

*Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)*  
s 59; the CFS is

- a) to provide services with a view to preventing the outbreak of fires, or reducing the impact of fires, in the country;

## What's *your* task?

*Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)*  
s 59; the CFS is

- b) to provide efficient and responsive services in the country for the purpose of fighting fires, dealing with other emergencies or undertaking any rescue;



## What's *your* task?

*Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)*  
s 59; the CFS is

- c) to protect life, property and environmental assets from fire and other emergencies occurring in the country;

## What's *your* task?

*Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)*  
s 59; the CFS is

- d) to develop and maintain plans to cope with the effects of fires or emergencies in the country; and

## What's *your* task?

*Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005 (SA)*  
s 59; the CFS is

- e) to provide services or support to assist with recovery in the event of a fire or other emergency in the country.

Similar provisions exist for the SAMFS (s 26).

## SASES (s 108).

- Is to assist the Commissioner of Police, the State Co-ordinator, the Chief Executive (within the meaning of the *South Australian Public Health Act 2011*), and the SAMFS and SACFS.
- To deal with any emergency caused by flood or storm or where no-one else has authority to deal with it.

## ‘A policy statement...

... should, inter alia, describe the desired policy direction and give details on how that will be implemented, measured, monitored, and evaluated.’

Stephen Dovers, *Environment and Sustainability Policy: Creation, Implementation and Evaluation* (The Federation Press, 2005), p 100.

## And you're not alone...

- ACT: 'to protect and preserve life, property and the environment';
- NSW 'to ensure that 'adequate measures' are taken to 'prevent, prepare for, respond to and assist recovery from emergencies';
- QLD 'to provide 'effective' response to a disaster or emergency and to have 'effective' disaster management'.

# So how do you know if you achieved your task?

- More importantly, how does:
  - the community?
  - the media?
  - the next judge, coroner or Royal Commissioner?



## Policy statements to the effect that:

- emergencies ‘may be controlled by combat agencies...’,
- agencies ‘can take appropriate and timely action to prevent or mitigate, respond to and recover from emergencies’
- an agency is required to take ‘... all necessary steps for the prevention and suppression of fires and for the protection of life and property’

imply that such control is possible; but this is not always the case.





# So how do we measure success?

## By what is lost rather than saved?

‘Generally most events, we measure success through in a negative context largely ... it's about measure of loss. How many houses were lost, or how many people died... there's got to be some measure there that relates efforts to things that have been saved, so people and houses.’

‘... what’s always reported is the losses rather than the saves ... ultimately we're judged usually by a couple of hours on a Saturday afternoon ... Where all your prevention and preparation works essentially counts for naught.’

## We did ‘the best’ we could?

‘So, to me, the measure of success ... [is] can we tick all the boxes and say we did everything possible?’

‘The expectation is ... everyone's done the best job they can ...’

# But

‘... it has to be borne steadily in mind that one can always find fault in a setting of such complexity. The temptation to criticise the minutiae of every decision that was taken by a group of individuals or by the individuals themselves is sometimes difficult to resist.’

Anthony E Schapel *Inquest Into The [Wangarry Fires]*  
(Coroners Court of South Australia undated) p xiv, [70].

## We followed the plan?

But ‘no plan survives contact with the enemy,’

Helmuth von Moltke the Elder (1800-1891)

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmuth\\_von\\_Moltke\\_the\\_Elder](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helmuth_von_Moltke_the_Elder)

Or: ‘Well, that's great, but then you've got the documents and then you've got the environment which you've got to operate it within. I'm yet to be convinced that the two will ever align.’

# Damned if you do...

“Mr Stewart, in particular, considered that the rescue operation was "a success". In his view he had adhered to the policies and procedures set out by [the] ... Fire and Rescue Service... There had been no casualties other than the one to whom the Service was called upon to rescue.

Unfortunately this was not a successful operation: a woman died who had not only sustained survivable though life threatening injuries, but who had also ultimately suffered and died from acute hypothermia ...”

Sheriff Desmond J Leslie, *Fatal Accident Inquiry ... into the Death of Allison Hume* [2011] FAI 51.

## And if you don't

‘... we're protecting the bureaucracy through more legalistic doctrine ... but is that helping me as an incident controller? Probably not one little bit. ... What does the plan say I need to do? ... If I don't follow that I'm going to have to answer for that in court. I better follow that. Even though this thing's doing something different, if I follow that I'll be all right legally. Well, I still don't see - I don't think that's the answer either’



## No responder deaths...

- Work Health and Safety (and, in the ACT and UK, occupational manslaughter) laws reinforce that the primary duty is to your own staff.
- ‘The aspirational goal is no loss of life, but not at the cost of more lives’.

## What do governments want?

‘How does the government see success? I think it will never say loss of life is acceptable ...’

‘I've got to stop having anything over about four houses, six houses ... and definitely no death.’

## And the public?

“Fire agencies are almost in a no win situation in the public arena. Behind the scenes the agencies and politicians can have discussions about yes, it was a satisfactory outcome or no, it wasn't, or whatever, but, publicly, it will always be it wasn't satisfactory, particularly if people die.”

# *The Media want someone to blame*

- Everybody blamed for bushfires.
- “No effective safety measures”.
- Throwing water on blaze of blame.
- The blame game behind bushfires.
- Bureau chiefs contributed to fire havoc, coroner told
- Findings hurt my reputation: Stanhope.
- Resign? Worthy idea, fat chance.
- Fireys' `blunders' to blame for deaths.
- Litany of failures `killed my family’.
- 'Scapegoat' CFA members may quit before next fires.
- Emergency chiefs blasted for failure of leadership.
- Public scents blood in Black Saturday report.
- More may go from FESA after Keelty report.
- Nowhere to hide for WA authorities on fire fiasco.
- WA Opposition wants minister sacked over fire.



# What's the risk we're dealing with...

- That people will die ... or
- The reputational and political risk?
- 'Resilient communities ... will not start the blame game when an incident occurs';
- Shared responsibility means 'that no one group or agency can be charged with blame or negligence after an event.'

## The measures of success...

- For the agencies; No responder deaths.
- For government, No loss of civilian life. An ‘acceptable’ loss of property.
- Incidents are ‘judged by [the] post incident conversation – governments and ESOs try to anticipate what that conversation will be’ but have no prior measure.’

# So what does success look like to you?

- What is success for
  - Prevention?
  - Community education?
  - Operations?
- And what would help you achieve it?

# Avoid developing policy by Royal Commission

- If Royal Commissions and Coroner's inquiries are meant to identify the lessons that need to be learned, either:
  - They're not identifying the right lessons;
  - or
  - No-one's learning.





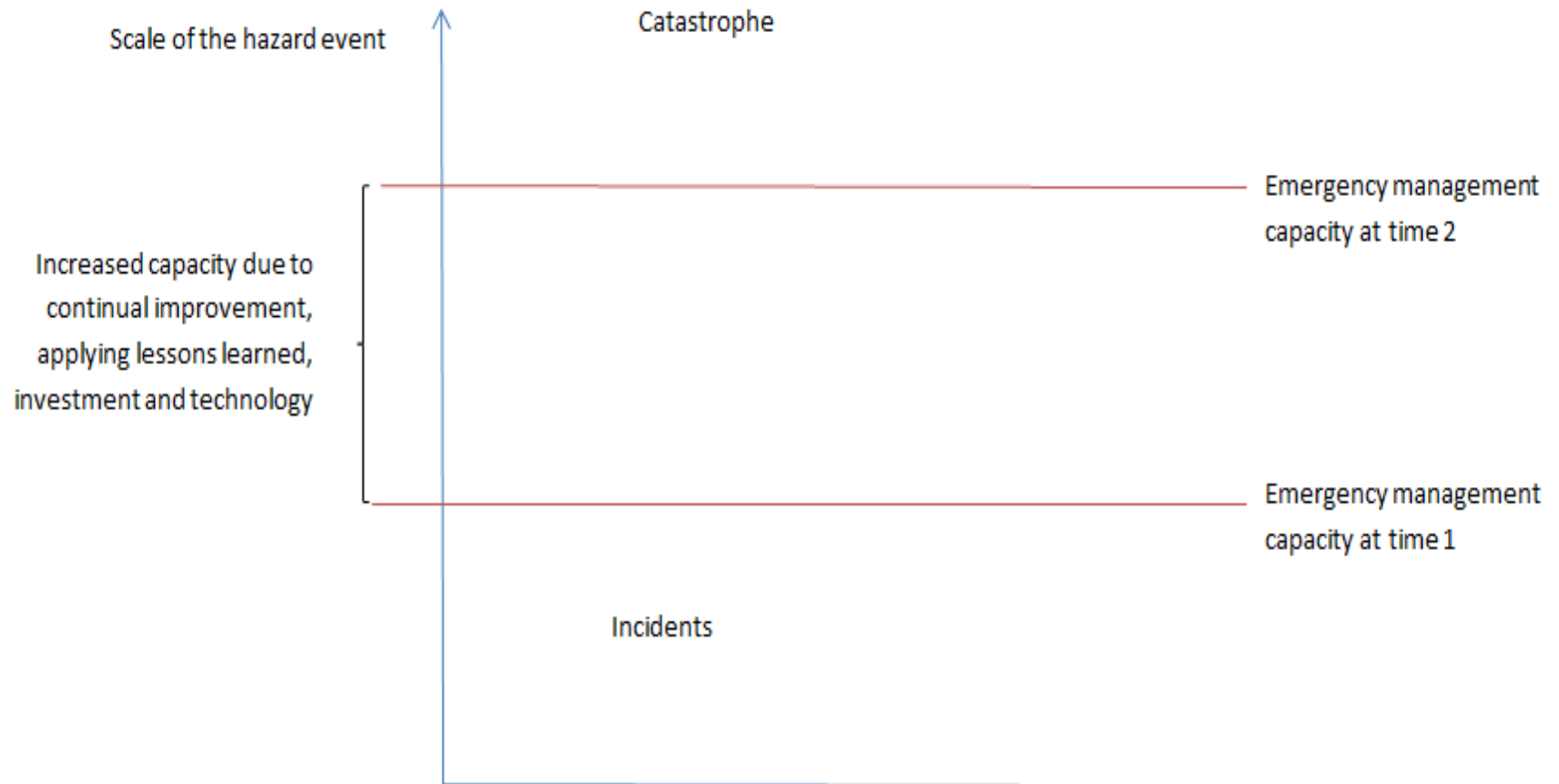
Faithfully implementing all the recommendations from the last inquiry may well prevent *that* event occurring again, but the next fire or flood will never be quite the same, and will usually be very different.

# What's needed is a more mature narrative of disasters

- That:
  - Recognises disasters are a product of the environment and human choices rather than a 'failure'; and
  - Identifies that 'Shared responsibility' requires an acknowledgment that outcomes reflect our choices and preferences.

## Ask what makes a disaster...

- Does a system/operational failure cause the event to become overwhelming; or
- Does an overwhelming event cause a system/operational failure?
- The emergency services do really well most of the time, people don't expect you to be overwhelmed, that's not their experience.



## In summary

- EM policy suffers from a lack of clear objectives or measures of success.
- The standard by which emergency management will be measured needs to be articulated.
- Governments and communities need to accept, that outcomes are the result of choices. Not all risk is manageable, at least not at a price we're prepared to pay.

Thank you

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