**Be Prepared: Climate Change, Bushfire and Local Governments**

Expert Roundtable and Media Training 19th Feb 2019

Facilitated Discussion, Group 2

Facilitator: Professor Lesley Hughes

***Q1. How can local government better collaborate on these challenges?***

* Lack of resources is a major issue.
* There are opportunities for collaboration through groups such as WESROC and other joint council forums, however often councillors are not across the issues - need councillors to be more aware of the issues to take to the forums with other councils.
* Need councillors to be more in tune, have better relationships with their officers.
* Need to develop uniformity of knowledge within council and amongst councillors.
* There is also a wide diversity of opinions amongst councillors regarding climate change and its impacts.
* LGNSW could help with this, could play a role in delivering standardised training for councils.
* It is an opportunity for LGNSW to play a leadership role, educate councils about climate change.
* What role can organisations like RFS play in educating councils better, creating mutual understanding?
* RFS would play a role focused on how to adapt and deal with the challenges that climate change creates, e.g. new building standards etc.
* Is there a need to take the politics out of local government?
* Politics may be unavoidable so it is better to have it out on the table.
* However, the job of a council is not to be government and opposition, it is to be a board of directors for the community and some councils don’t seem to understand that.
* It is an issue that council is not regularly a voice at the table with National Parks and Wildlife Service, and the various fire services such as RFS, Fire and Rescue etc., this could help with coordination when emergencies happen.
* Councils need to understand the risks associated with the changing nature of fires, collaboration with fire services could assist with this.
* Often council does have the knowledge regarding bushfire risks but has trouble engaging with the local community, so what is the best way to educate the community?
* There is no simple solution, widely diverse communities, different target audiences that need different strategies.
* Using footage from actual bush fires is one tool that has been very effective in driving home the message, watching a DVD of a fire has been found to be as effective as experiencing the fire itself.
* It is important to educate leaders within a community.
* Multiple mediums of communication are necessary to make sure you reach people who don’t use the internet, don’t have reception, etc.
* The information also needs to come from someone in the community who people trust.

***Q2. What additional support do local governments need to be prepared?***

* Funding is always an issue - to do anything in terms of community education or resilience building councils need more funding.
* To be useful the funding needs to be received prior to the catastrophe not afterwards.
* Templates, procedures and standardised guides on how to run an evacuation centre, resources required etc. would be really useful.
* The people on the frontline of the issue need to be in the meetings with the councillors to give hands on advice and practical information about the outcomes of different government legislation.
* People in the private sector, experts, could communicate informally with councils for knowledge sharing.

***Q3. What are the knowledge gaps that still need to be addressed?***

* More preparedness for controlled burning, more communication about it and increased understanding.
* Need to educate the community about controlled burning, there is a massive deficit of understanding.
* There is a lack of knowledge about community profiles, need a greater understanding of who lives in our communities and how to customise the messaging to target particular people.
* For example, we need to warn people about controlled burning because of health issues, need to make sure they understand when it is happening, health risks.
* RFS has information about community profiles and carries out targeted messaging according to those profiles but can’t share that information generally, for privacy reasons and to prevent it being used in a negative way.
* There is a gap between science and practice, it would be really useful to have a cost benefit analysis of particular hazard reduction methods, taking into account the impact of climate change.
* The research is there but needs to be more specific, it is also currently based on moderately predictable patterns, and climate change is altering those. We need better predictability, and information on how we can do hazard reduction burns in a way that protects eco systems.
* Research being carried out by the RFS:
* Engaging people at the national level to develop a better understanding of climate modelling, trends, length of seasons, and what those things mean for RFS as a service.
* Developing a better understanding of climatology and trajectory.
* How to more effectively use resources.
* Huge amount of research into hazards, smoke inhalation.
* Research around different risks at different locations, local impacts, particularly contemporary risks.
* On the cusp of a new fire danger rating system based on vegetation types, which will be better than the old system.
* Working with researchers to project into the future, locally nuanced trajectories.
* There is an element of scepticism within the hierarchy about climate change, what’s the best way to deal with that?
* Present the science, keep explaining.
* Science is being better communicated now, the message is becoming more clear.
* The message needs to come from someone people trust – visible as an expert e.g., in a uniform. But often those people don’t have the language or ability to communicate, so training for those people around how to share the message could really help.
* Climate council recognises that need and is addressing it.
* General feeling of unease about a focus on hazard reduction, as hazard reduction would not have stopped a lot of the catastrophic fires.
* There is a gap in understanding on how to prepare a house physically, mechanically or building wise.