

CSDC Project Evaluation – summary results

Bega and Eurobodalla

This is a summary extract of findings from the evaluation of the Community Sector Disaster Capability Project, specific to the Bega and Eurobodalla region of the pilot project and for the ease of reference of the Bega and Eurobodalla teams.

Extracts contain section references relevant to the Final Evaluation Report.

Key Evaluation Question 1

Does the project deliver its intended short, medium or long-term outcomes?

a. **Specifically, for ‘Education’ activities:**

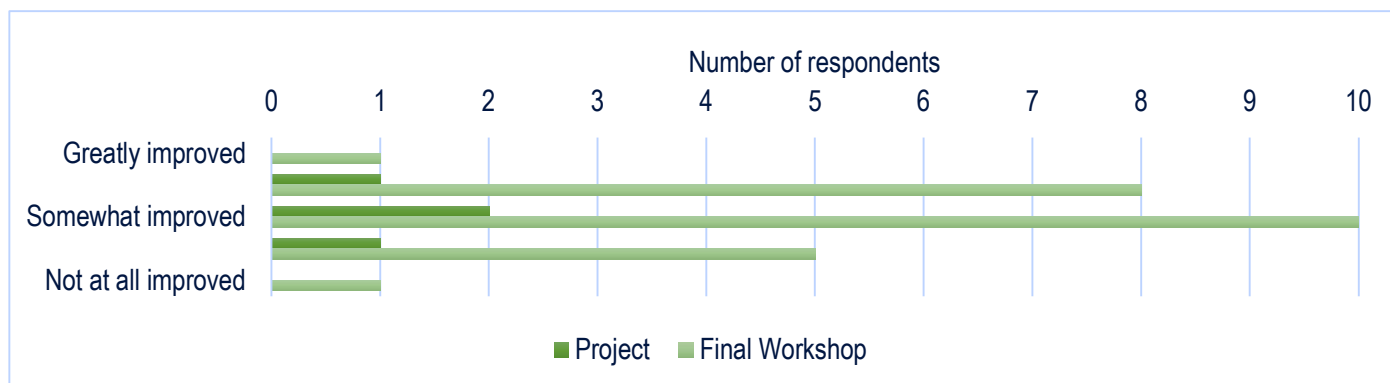
- **Participating organisations and communities have increased understanding and capacity to reduce disaster risk impacting vulnerable groups**

NGO social services sector understanding and capacity

Building on continuous community engagement and some early workshops on community resilience and preparedness in vulnerable populations, ECAC and Katungul convened Vulnerable Communities Emergency Preparedness Workshops in two locations, Bega and Moruya. ECAC is initiating a series of informal networking events (post-evaluation) towards network sustainability after the project concludes at end June.

Survey results show that the rate of awareness of disaster risk management generally improved for project stakeholders. On a scale of 1-5 from ‘not at all improved’ to ‘greatly improved’, 36% of workshop attendees gave an answer of 4 or 5 (improved or greatly improved). The most frequently selected response across project and Summit respondents was 3 (somewhat improved). Only one stakeholder indicated that the Bega/ Eurobodalla project or final workshops had not at all improved their awareness of disaster risk management. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: To what extent has awareness of disaster risk management improved from the project/ workshop? (Bega/ Eurobodalla)



When asked what about the workshop was valuable to their organisation, 31% of 26 respondents nominated ‘knowledge about disaster risk reduction’ and 27% nominated ‘awareness of local risks’.

Four project stakeholders responded to the project evaluation survey. For the most part, these stakeholders rated themselves as proficient before and after project involvement. One stakeholder indicated that their expertise increased from competent to proficient as a result of their project involvement.

Figure 2: How respondents rate their level of expertise in disaster risk management, before and now (Bega/ Eurobodalla)



During interviews, stakeholders described insights gained from the Vulnerable Communities Emergency Preparedness Workshops including:

- understanding the network of local services and agencies for disaster readiness planning and also disaster management – and the strengths and hurdles they share
- tools and resources for individual disaster planning
- ideas for organisational emergency planning.

Community understanding and capacity

Eden Community Access Centre has commenced networking and engagement with a broad range of community groups since it commenced project activities in December 2023. In May 2024, ECAC held Important Document Storage information sessions as disaster preparedness capacity building for community members who needed education on digital document storage.

Stakeholders within and outside the local host and partner organisations recognised that there had been limited time in the Bega/ Eurobodalla area to engage and build the understanding and capacity of community groups, especially vulnerable community groups. This was particularly the case for First Nations people and representative groups, despite being a target cohort. Reasons drawn from local and central interviews include:

- insufficient time in the region to build engagement with engagement and capacity-building activities commencing in earnest in January 2024, less than six months prior to the evaluation period
 - reflecting on the CSDC project’s overall challenges in engaging with First Nations communities, a stakeholder said that “organisations work at the speed of trust” and projects need to plan for time to build that trust – this did not occur in the Bega/ Eurobodalla region
- shift in project focus by Katungul as the local host organisation due to staff and leadership changes and reduced capacity within the team to deliver the project as initially planned – this saw Katungul focus project resources on the cultural burning program and local partner organisation ECAC, which is not an ACCO, take up community and NGO social service sector engagement and capacity building activities
- difficulties in engaging ACCOs and First Nations communities that arose in every location related to trauma and ongoing disaster recovery in First Nations communities
 - a central project stakeholder emphasised that disaster-related trauma in First Nations communities compounds other traumas related to historic and current acts of systemic and personal racism and violence.

Event feedback survey results from the CSDC project’s Important Document Storage Information Sessions were that session participants:

- found value in the event’s capacity building in relation to: ability to take action (4 of 5); knowledge about disaster risk reduction (2 of 5); and awareness of local risks (2 of 5)
- reported new actions related to important document identification and security including back-up
- had an improved (2 of 5) or much improved (3 of 5) awareness and understanding of relevant disaster risk and risk reduction needs
- were satisfied (2 of 5) or very satisfied (3 of 5) with the information sessions.

Some stakeholders observed a low representation of community representative and community development groups at the project’s sector workshops, such as local Men’s Sheds, Lions Clubs and Country Women’s Association (CWA) branches. They wanted to see these groups engage with the project to improve local community members’ understanding and capacity to reduce disaster risk. They pointed out that some vulnerable groups such as people who are elderly and living alone, and/or experiencing relative socio-economic disadvantage, may be accessing these kinds of local groups while falling under the radar of NGO community service, aged care or disability organisations.

- **Risk, strengths and capability information is shared and provides the basis for appropriate and coordinated DRR strategies and planning locally.**

In the evaluation survey and interviews, stakeholders in Bega and Eurobodalla described some strategic information sharing activities that have commenced as a result of the Vulnerable Communities Emergency Management Workshops, such as:

- establishment of a new disaster readiness interagency at Moruya, involving emergency management agencies and NGO social services, to be led by RA
- new partnership approaches to sourcing and delivering relevant training and other capacity building resources such as planning packages for service users
- new referral networks to meet the disaster recovery needs of vulnerable community members.

Most of the 26 respondents in the event feedback survey on the final workshops (81%) nominated 'collaboration' as something about the workshops they found valuable to their organisation. Recognition of collaboration as being of value from this event was higher than in other project locations.

Multiple stakeholders reported that a finding from their involvement with the project was the rapid attrition of organisational knowledge and experience of what to do in a disaster – observed within their own organisation or in organisations they work with – due to post-disaster staff burnout and turnover rates and also the difficulty of documenting disaster management learnings and experiences in an effective way.

This makes sector knowledge building activities important because staff and leaders in community organisations can learn from collective disaster management experiences.

Similar to other locations, stakeholders reported the challenges of finding organisational resources to participate in collaborative strategic work. This is described further at Section 4.1.5 below.

- **Participating organisations and community groups factor disaster risk information into their work and trial new risk reduction actions.**

16 of 25 survey respondents (64%) said there were new or different actions they might take for themselves or others. Of the 16 examples provided:

- 37% related to increased networking with new agencies
- 31% related to personal safety planning
- 25% were about working differently in the community, e.g. endeavouring to work more closely with the local LEMO
- 12% specified improving the way disaster risk was planned for within their organisation.

Nearly one quarter of 26 respondents (24%) nominated 'ability to take action' as something about the final project workshops they found valuable to their organisation.

As in other locations, project participants who were interviewed highly valued the support to build disaster preparedness into their work and sought continued involvement and more resources for ongoing disaster readiness planning.

There does just need to be that bit more community outreach to be able to prepare for events – through workshops or resources like home packages.

Some interagency initiatives have come out of the final Vulnerable Communities Emergency Preparedness Workshop as stakeholders seek ways to continue collaboration beyond the project's completion date. These are outlined at Section 3.5.5.

b. Specifically, for 'Risk assessment and strategic planning' activities:

- **Hazards, vulnerabilities, needs and aspirations in communities are identified and prioritized.**

A goal of the Vulnerable Communities Emergency Preparedness Workshops was to define 'vulnerability' in the local context. To inform workshop (and broader project) focus areas, Katungul and ECAC conducted two surveys to gather views on disaster risks, vulnerabilities, strengths and capacity building priorities. They received responses from 34 community members and 10 community service organisations.

In interviews, stakeholders said that as a group they identified that after the 2019/20 Black Summer fires and COVID-19 in particular, there is increased vulnerability on the South Coast related to mental health and trauma, and homelessness entrenched by risk factors such as low literacy and low socio-economic status that are a barrier to grant applications and insurance processes. People with disability were highlighted as being vulnerable to poor outcomes in the event of a disaster, and sector challenges were identified. A stakeholder from the disability services sector said that they gained multiple new connections at the workshop they attended, which would assist with disaster readiness planning.

We didn't know the RFS had a program called AIDER. Now we have linked up clients with that.

Workshop participants recognised the value of ongoing NGO social service sector collaboration in order to progress disaster preparedness for these local priority groups.

There does just need to be that bit more community outreach to be able to prepare for events, through workshops and home packages for disaster readiness. We need a centralised database for community services to go to, to get information about what people provide and who to link up with.

Drills are based on the assumption that emergency management agencies are going to show up. We need to work with scenarios that some or all emergency management agencies are not available – either they are too stretched or they physically can't get there.

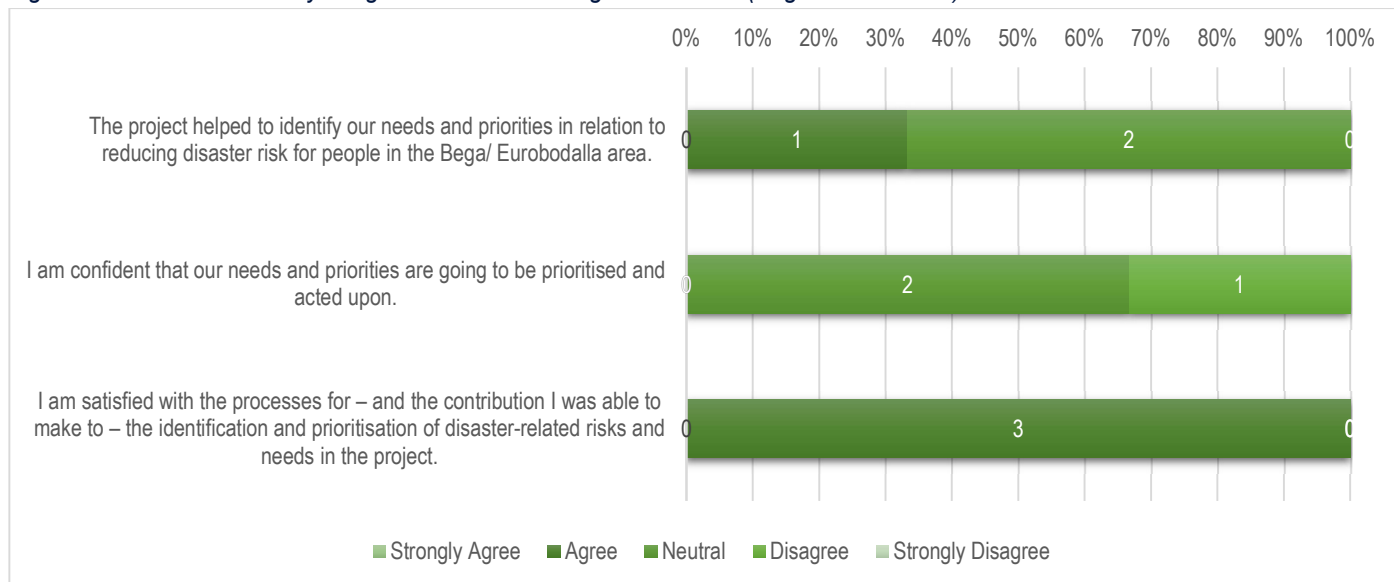
Of the 2 survey respondents who answered the project evaluation question about identification of community needs and priorities:

- 1 agreed that the project "helped to identify our needs and priorities in relation to reducing disaster risk for people in Bega/ Eurobodalla". 1 was neutral.

- 2 were neutral on whether they were confident their “needs and priorities are going to be prioritised and acted upon”.
- 2 agreed that they were “satisfied with the processes for – and the contribution I was able to make to – the identification and prioritisation of disaster-related risks and needs”.

This is in line with survey results in other locations, where there was less confidence that local needs and priorities will be acted upon.

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Bega/ Eurobodalla)



- **Risk reduction, resilience and adaptation activities are systematically embedded into business as usual practices**

Formal and informal networking and disaster readiness activities are underway as a result of the Vulnerable Communities Emergency Management Workshops:

- Eden Community Access Centre is initiating local informal networking events, with the intent that these will become integrated into local ways of working in the NGO social service sector and continue past the project conclusion date through collective commitment and initiative
- an interagency group for the Bega area is being established, spearheaded by local RA staff, as a result of discussions at the Bega workshop.

In interviews, external stakeholders described the reasons for their commitment to maintaining the momentum for collective disaster preparedness planning built by the workshops:

We really need to keep having these conversations. Things change, we need to keep on top of it.

With these connections we have a larger scope of what we can do, like different grant opportunities. We are stronger and more empowered, having that many services working together.

Katungul has completed a *Cultural Burning Road Map* for next steps on embedding cultural burning practices on First Nations community-owned and potentially also government and privately owned land. They are cognisant of the long timeframes likely to be required to achieve this.

This is the start of a decade of progress. It's not something that is knocked out in a year or two ... Getting continuity is critical in this sort of thing.

This was echoed in an interview with a First Nations stakeholder external to Katungul who had been involved with this part of the project.

Managing the forest is not a six-month program and then you go home. It's a lifetime dedication. We need to keep learning from Elders and also white experts ... Look at the environment, not the clock.

Stakeholders highlighted the potential for the cultural burning practices to be self-sustaining, by generating revenue as part of a broader program of active bush management using First Nations practices and principles combined with contemporary science. Examples of revenue raising activities are oyster leases or sustainable logging as part of thinning bushland for the purpose of hazard reduction. These ideas are based on the principle that Australian bushland was actively managed by First Nations communities for tens of thousands of years, and that current bush preservation practices may not be possible to continue in the context of climate change and modern deforestation, urbanisation and agricultural practices that surround national parks.

- **Socially inclusive stakeholders and beneficiaries' engagement in risk identification and management.**

Katungul is on Eurobodalla LEMC as an observer for the duration of the CSDC pilot with the possibility to remain on the committee if the work of the pilot is continued in any future arrangement. Endeavours to observe at Bega LEMC have not succeeded. Katungul engaged with local and central SES representatives on the agency's community engagement and capacity-building activities on the South Coast including a pilot of Flood Warden training (disaster management training for community members in two locations at risk of isolation during a flood), and establishment of a local Manager, Partnerships and Stakeholder Engagement.

As described at Section 3.5.5, Katungul has engaged with government, emergency management agencies, LALCs and other stakeholders on roadmap development to build a program of cultural burning for bushfire prevention and land management.

The CSDC project in Bega/ Eurobodalla had two aims with regard to the engagement of socially inclusive stakeholders and beneficiaries in risk identification and management:

- find ways for community priorities and concerns, as voiced by community members and representatives of the NGO social services sector, to inform local disaster management strategy, in line with broader project aims

- link up agencies using First Nations practices for hazard reduction burning with emergency management agencies, so that these cultural burning practices are recognised and accounted for as an effective disaster management approach on the NSW South Coast.

This dual focus was acknowledged by internal project stakeholders as ambitious and difficult to execute as timing became more critical.

In the Bega/ Eurobodalla area, the CSDC project is in the earliest stages of improving engagement between emergency management agencies, the NGO social services sector and other community representatives, and LALCs and other agencies willing to trial cultural hazard reduction burns.

Stakeholders interviewed were satisfied over-all with emergency management agencies' representation and engagement in the Vulnerable Communities Emergency Management Workshops.

Survey respondents from emergency management agencies involved in the project mentioned new or different actions they might take such as "I will investigate opportunities to work with NGOs to better align in future," and "better connection with newly identified local organisations I was previously unaware of".

Outside of the workshops, the local host and partner organisations' endeavours to engage with Local Emergency Management Committees was variable. Katungul had a place on the Eurobodalla LEMC as an observer for the duration of the project, with the possibility of continuation if the work of the pilot is able to be progressed in future. This has not been achieved with Bega Valley LEMC despite multiple attempts to engage via the LEMO.

With regard to cultural burning, Katungul has engaged with Aboriginal Affairs NSW and has had some initial discussions with local RFS teams, which have stalled while the RFS updates their Bush Fire Risk Management Plans. They observed in interviews that when it comes to local establishment of cultural burning practices, they "have not had a lot of success in terms of getting the RFS bureaucracy to understand they have a role to play".

A stakeholder in Katungul raised in an interview the level of skill and experience required to engage with ACCOs and also with government agencies. In both of these spheres, goodwill is "hard earned and slips away fairly rapidly," impacted by staff turnover at both ends, local and broader politics that shift organisational priorities, and project timeframes.

Discussions between the Bega LALC CEO and the RFS District Manager Far South Coast, were held in January regarding LALC representation on the Eurobodalla & Bega Valley Shire Bush Fire Management Committees. LALC representative have since joined the committees.

After the project evaluation interview period, final meetings were held with the CEOs of the Bega, Batemans Bay and Merrimans LALCs. All have confirmed the *Cultural Burning Road Map* will be helpful in providing direction to future cultural burning programs.

The Batemans Bay LALC ranger advised that an issue forecasted within the *Road Map* had already created delays to the Princes Highway cultural burning initiated by Transport for NSW, and that its recommendations provided guidance in dealing with those delays. He also advised that he would like to have a presentation on the *Road Map* made at the next LALC cultural burning workshop to be held near Batemans Bay later in 2024.

The limited progress to date in this outcome area is foreseeable given that project work in the area had only been active for six to seven months at the time of evaluation – and given the findings in this evaluation that effective stakeholder engagement takes time, especially with First Nations communities.

Key Evaluation Question 2

What were the barriers in implementing the project? What are the future issues, uncertainties, interdependencies, and risks in upscaling and replicating the project?

Stakeholder engagement

The engagement of ACCOs for both capacity-building and cultural burning project activities has been a core project challenge for the Bega/ Eurobodalla region.

For cultural burning in particular, Katungul's stakeholder engagement aims were ambitious in their intent to deliver new ways of working not only between Katungul and each of the seven local LALCs, but between LALCs and relevant government agencies. This requires trust built over the longer term.

Project timeframes

Contract delays reduced the period of operation for both Katungul and ECAC. Given the nature of the work, this reduced the local host and partner organisation's capacity to deliver project outputs and achieve its intended short-term outcomes, measurable after 1-2 years of service delivery.

Key Evaluation Question 3

What lessons can we learn for future work in disaster risk reduction:

- a. **for participating NGO social services?**
- b. **for Project Partners and funders?**
- c. **for Emergency Management and other local disaster management stakeholders?**

Lessons for participating NGO social services

NGO stakeholders reported that they made new connections and/or gained a broader understanding of their sector in the exercise of defining the social service 'sector' in their location that has service users who experience vulnerability in disaster events.

Some were reminded of the value of joining up and planning together – a practice impacted by COVID and funding shifts towards market-based service models and competitive tendering.

Lessons for project partners and funders

Learnings that project partners will take to any future iterations of this pilot primarily related to managing the dual timelines of place-based capacity building (best achieved gradually) and communicating program impacts to government bodies and funding agencies (best achieved promptly).

The scale of project ambitions across large geographical areas over short delivery timeframes was a salient lesson for project partners in the importance of robust project planning. Reporting and delivery pressures in within the project highlighted the need to ensure all activities are appropriately factored into project design and planning, including commissioning, contracting, relationship development and community development methods.

Project partners were interested in how the project might join up local action and state-wide advocacy in different ways in future. They acknowledged the level of government interest and were looking at ways to harness that while giving space for locations to actively listen to community stakeholders about disaster risk and risk reduction. At the local levels some stakeholders were more familiar with ways of working in this project area than others.

Some stakeholders have sought clarity on the project's purpose and intended deliverables. Government agency representatives in particular were more likely to request in their survey and interview feedback the delivery of community-based plans or actions they could resource, support or otherwise join up with. This is another area where government processes mis-align with the project's community development approach, but there was potential for these timelines to connect as sector events in the second half of the project built motivation, collective purpose and desire for community-wide planning and action.

Lessons for emergency management and local disaster management stakeholders

Most emergency management agency representatives who responded to evaluation surveys and interviews said that they connected with community members they had not been able to reach before, and that community engagement was much higher for them when partnering with NGOs. They saw the cost-effectiveness of joint disaster preparedness work with local social services and many sought better recognition of this from funding bodies and decision-makers in both sectors.

Some, on the other hand, sought better connection with project activities and goals, but this appeared also to be driven by their recognition of the value of joint work to influence community preparedness.

Broader lessons learned from the pilot

Broader key messages, detailed below, were raised by diverse survey and interview participants in every location (and from central project stakeholders) – across government, emergency management, community and NGO social service sectors.

Recognise the value of a community development approach to disaster readiness

Stakeholders frequently expressed that the project activities in which they participated were highly valuable to them and to the work they did, and they wanted this value to be recognised. This encompassed the formal networking and joint planning and also the informal engagement that local host and partner organisations invested in as part of their community development approach. Stakeholders were positive that local community and NGO social service sector stakeholders could contribute more to disaster management, to mutual benefit of community and government.

It's going to cost a lot less money to fund someone already embedded in the community and already proactive in the emergency preparedness space.

There is a currently a significant gap, with community development services and activities not funded for many communities, and community service organisations well placed to build local disaster preparedness capacity and capability closing down because of lack of funding.

Invest time

Stakeholders valued the CSDC project's investment in relationships and acknowledged that the establishment of trust can take more time than the pilot structure provided, particularly with vulnerable

groups experiencing disaster-related trauma (see Section 4). The community development approach of the CSDC project requires investment of time, and stakeholders had positive experiences with this approach and want the time to do the work of networking and capacity building properly and – when it comes to vulnerable groups traumatised by disaster - ethically.

We can reduce time spent in recovery [after a disaster event] by doing this work properly, but it's a process. It doesn't happen overnight.

The CSDC project approach and activities challenged local host and partner organisations to build new ways of working between the emergency management and social services sectors. This has been slow and complex work, and stakeholders saw a lesson for government and funding agencies that time must be committed to this important area of work so that it can continue to be a local priority. The project has identified opportunities for social service organisations to collaborate with emergency management agencies to build their understanding of vulnerability in the context of disasters - with two-way learning and capacity building based on mutual respect and recognition of each other's expertise and skillset.

Related to time is consistency. Stakeholders want to see this work as ongoing in local communities, so that disaster planning and capacity building can account for the dynamic nature of disasters and for change in the NGO social services sector.

Resource disaster preparedness in everyone's work

At every level of the project stakeholders have called for disaster preparedness to be resourced as part of core business for NGO social services managing risk for vulnerable groups, so that:

- organisations can afford to attend training (such as P-CEP), capacity-building (such as CSDC activities) and joint disaster planning
- organisations can document their lessons learned and plans for future events appropriately, so that working knowledge of disaster recovery is less likely to be lost after an event and more likely to inform future disaster planning
- there is more likely to be policy and practice development in the space.

There should be resources built into contracts for community wellbeing projects for disaster readiness. Then things can happen more quickly and easily when a disaster occurs.

We're in an environment where we are going to continue to be disaster affected, without a doubt. If you lose that knowledge and those skills and that information you then have to start again.

This work is long-term and it needs to be embedded in the community sector.

Part of value is recognition and measuring the contribution that community representative groups and agencies already make before, during and after a disaster.

The reality is we're not a 24/7 service. The preparedness infrastructure assumes that we are. Do not overestimate what NGO infrastructure offers to the community. They need to recognise the work we do and value and resource it properly.

Key Evaluation Question 4

What (if any) working relationships and/or networks are newly active or strengthened as a result of this project?

When asked if they had developed new connections for future action on disaster risk reduction:

- 92% of survey respondents (24 of 26) said they had new connections from the workshops
- 2 respondents (8%) said they had not made new connections from the CSDC project or the workshops specifically.

Diverse examples were provided by 17 respondents, spanning local service providing agencies, emergency management agencies, NCOSS, early childhood education and care providers and health services.

88% of 26 event feedback survey respondents nominated 'networking' as something about the workshop they found valuable to their organisation.

Out of 4 survey respondents with broader project involvement:

- 2 said they had new connections from the CSDC project
- 2 said their organisations works differently with other organisations as a result of this project.

Stakeholder interviews were undertaken too early in the Bega/ Eurobodalla's service delivery process to gain insights into networking and relationship building outcomes, especially in the community and NGO sector.

It is notable that survey results show the value of the Vulnerable Communities Emergency Preparedness workshops to local stakeholders, especially for networking and relationship development. This speaks to the calibre and collaborative structure of the events and ECAC's continuous engagement with stakeholders throughout their short delivery period.

The tenacity and time investment of relationship development activities in the cultural burning program are described at Section 3.6.5 and the Case Study at Section 3.6.1.

Key Evaluation Question 5

What (if any) local innovations and positive changes to disaster risk reduction can be described from this project?

Since the beginning of their involvement with the CSDC Project, Katungul has intended to achieve a program that supports NSW South Coast landowners – First Nations, government and private – to take up cultural burning practices. Their intent to deliver this in a way that reduces a number of

different disaster risks for local First Nations people and communities demonstrates an innovative response to a local risk:

- addressing vulnerabilities within target First Nations communities by creating local jobs that strengthen connection to Country and culture
- reducing risk of high-intensity bushfires in future by managing local bushland with combined traditional and science-based knowledge
- building capacity within the local community at every level to work collaboratively.

This is a shift that requires change at every level, from community to legislation.

While the cultural burning arm of this project has experienced a range of challenges and is in its earliest stages, its six-month program of negotiation with a range of stakeholders has initiated local discussions about disaster risk reduction and built capacity within Katungul to deliver this complex work in the longer term.

There are skills and experience required to work with LALCs but also to work with government agencies.