CSDC Project Evaluation – summary results Snowy Monaro

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

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

In the Snowy Monaro, MFSS delivered NGO social services sector capacity building through:

- P-CEP train-the-trainer session

- Disasters Are Our Business workshop – disaster scenario on community preparedness

- Informal feedback to NGOs following community disaster awareness and preparedness engagement e.g. International Day of People with Disability

- Follow-up session at the quarterly Monaro Regional Interagency, to report back on the CSDC Project and develop a sector plan for disaster resilience and preparedness.

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', 25% of project stakeholders (N=8) and 70% of workshop attendees (N=13) gave an answer of improved or greatly improved. The most frequently selected response by project respondents was 'somewhat improved', and by workshop respondents was 'improved'. All project stakeholders considered the Snowy Monaro to have improved their awareness of disaster risk management at least 'a little'. One stakeholder thought that their awareness had not been improved at all by the Disasters Are Our Business workshop. See Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: To what extent has awareness of disaster risk management improved from the project/ workshop? (Snowy Monaro)
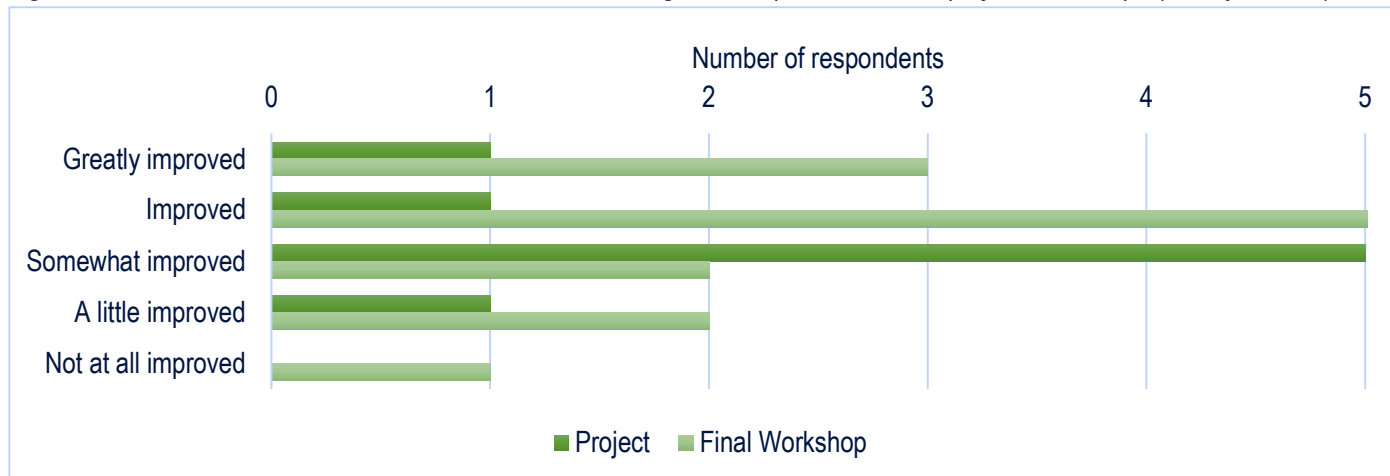
When asked what about the workshop was valuable to their organisation, 47% of 17 respondents nominated 'knowledge about disaster risk reduction' and 59% nominated 'awareness of local risks'.

Generally, respondents' self-reported expertise (Figure 2) increased by one rating level, with one respondent's self-rating remaining as 'proficient' before and after the project. None identified as 'expert' in disaster risk management, before or after their involvement in the project.

Figure 2: How respondents rate their level of expertise in disaster risk management, before and now (Snowy Monaro)
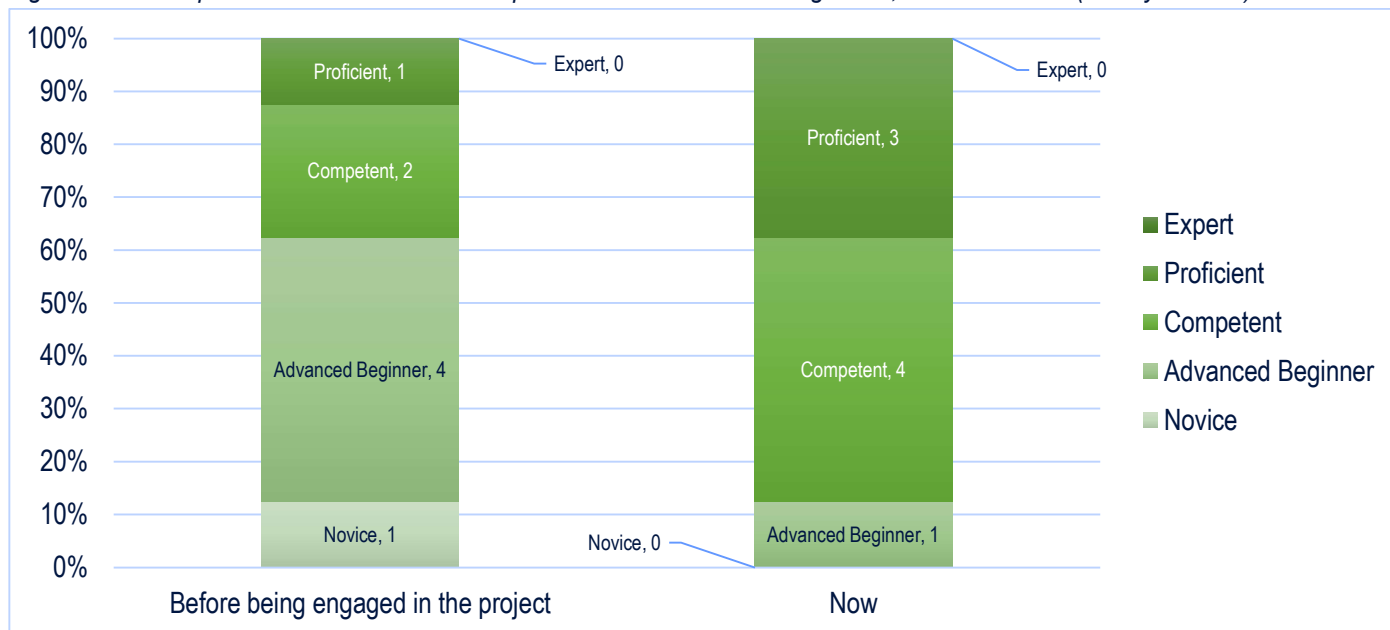
Interviewees discussed the impact of the Disasters Are Our Business workshop on their individual and collective understanding and capacity to reduce disaster risk impacting vulnerable groups.

Key learnings raised in interviews were:

- identifying and properly understanding the need for organisational readiness, and what 'readiness' looks like

- better understanding of the roles of emergency management agencies

- 'myth busting' about what to do and what not to do in an emergency
- the diversity of NGO social services and how they might work together to reduce disaster risk.

Community understanding and capacity

Community capacity-building activities were:

- community meetings with individuals and small groups
- community P-CEP and preparedness information and training events, and follow-up events
- community event and local street pop-up stalls, eg at Cooma International Day of People With Disability and Berridale School Wellness Day
- Let's Get Packing community resource including document list and storage guidance.

In the Snowy Monaro, the local host organisation MFSS delivered P-CEP workshops to small groups of community members in partnership with local emergency management agencies including the RFS, Police and/or the Red Cross. These workshops were designed to be community forums that combined P-CEP with information sharing about disaster response and recovery.

These workshops were highly valuable to stakeholders interviewed for this evaluation, whether they attended as presenters or as community members.

> People have typically already done some planning, but the workshop helped them to make sure those plans are comprehensive and practical, and communicated to neighbours and extended family members, make sure they've thought of everything.

Community stakeholders said in evaluation interviews that they came away with practical information about disaster readiness and risk reduction. Interviewees provided examples of the practical steps they learned, such as how to:

- store important documents (including which documents)
- plan together to overcome evacuation challenges such as transport access
- regularly review, update and share the household or local community plan with others
- think through different disaster scenarios, eg power outage, road closures.

These events also clarified the roles and responsibilities of emergency management agencies and what to expect from disaster response infrastructure such as evacuation centres.

Stakeholders all raised the importance of regular follow-up to capture new community members, update information, keep up community plans and discussions, and ensure that people's disaster readiness plans are active and fresh in their minds.

As in other locations, P-CEP was consistently raised by both internal (local host organisation) and external stakeholders as a valuable tool for structuring these conversations for individuals and also for communities.

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

Stakeholders described the Disasters Are Our Business workshop as an important starting point for collective planning and joint work to reduce risk for vulnerable groups.

> I met people I would not normally have met. This makes safety management possible. We can account for people who would not normally be accounted for.

> The small group discussions about what organisations can do separately and together.

They recognised that the value of the workshop is in its next steps. Future collaborative events similar to the Disasters Are Our Business workshop are important, both to take account of the dynamic nature of risk and planning, but also to bring along organisations in the earliest stages of disaster awareness and planning, who might not have been ready or resourced for the last workshop but might be ready in the future.

> There needs to be some kind of local plan. Vulnerable cohorts are going to change, services are going to change.

Interviewees who attended the workshop raised the impressiveness of the diversity of organisations represented in the workshop, including those working directly with vulnerable groups in disability, health and aged care services, and also in emergency management including the NSW Reconstruction Authority and Department of Communities and Justice. The local host organisation described the strategic process of establishing this diversity to enable higher-quality integrated planning.

Nearly three quarters of the 17 respondents in the event feedback survey on Disaster Ready Together workshop (71%) nominated 'collaboration' as something about the Summit they found valuable to their organisation.

The local host organisation and emergency management agencies highlighted the way the CSDC project has consolidated their ways of working together and connected them with new community groups, through the joint workshops and information events described at Section **Error! Reference source not found.** above.

> There are working channels for communication. There is genuine collaboration. We [MFSS] are not teaching people how to fight fires. We have the same problem but different goals.

> They connected the RFS with people that we would otherwise never see. Lots of people with mental health related disability, or no driver's

> license… and women in rural areas who have never been encouraged or supported to think through disaster risk reduction.

> During the last fires [2019/20] there were seventeen communities on fire at the same time. They need to be organised and be able to operate as a community.

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

47% of 17 event feedback survey respondents nominated 'ability to take action' as something about the Disasters Are Our Business workshop they found valuable to their organisation.

Five of eight survey respondents with project involvement beyond the Disasters Are Our Business workshop said they would take new or different actions as a result of their project involvement.

When expanded to include respondents who had been involved in the workshop only, three quarters of survey respondents (15 of 20) said there were new or different actions they might take to reduce disaster risk for themselves or others. Of the examples provided:

- 7 involved working differently with community members, with additional specific actions such as:
  - encouraging service users to prepare a plan for bushfires, including reviewing insurance policies
  - "prevention preparedness training and assistance to existing community groups in this space"
- 6 involved workplace improvements in planning and staff support for disaster management
- 1 highlighted an intent to work collaboratively with other organisations in this space.

The work led by MFSS with the RFS, Red Cross and Police to deliver community disaster preparedness workshops was raised by both participants and delivery stakeholders as an invaluable new way, brought about by this project, of working with vulnerable groups.

> The diverse people who came out, *together*, worked well because people took it on board. The elderly took it very seriously. They still talk about it. The way the different organisations answered questions collaboratively. It was a big day. They were very, very tired at the end of it. But they all stayed.

> The RFS is just coming away from being a very blokey culture. So people like the women in [joint workshop location] may never have connected with the RFS, never have been encouraged or supported to think through disaster planning.

> Multi-agency sessions are more cost-effective and more efficient. I can't set up community engagement sessions on my own. MFSS can fill a room.

Interviewees highlighted some of the new ways of working at a community level that have occurred as a result of the CSDC project:

- having MFSS on the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) was seen to be of benefit to the whole community (LEMC now has a subcommittee on vulnerability)

- the way that the Disaster Ready Together workshop created new professional networks for disaster planning and risk reduction

- introduction of P-CEP and training up social service organisations to deliver this model to their own service users

- creating an ongoing 'agenda' or impetus for disaster preparedness work, within organisations and at a community level

- local community groups are following up on disaster readiness with their members after P-CEP workshops (raised by multiple interviewees).

An external stakeholder observed that:

> If I could have wished for anything during the Black Summer fires, it would have been to have community service agencies on the LEMC. This would have improved both response and recovery. The absence of community service organisations on the LEMC directly impacted what happened to people in evacuation centres and in crisis.

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

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

MFSS managed their own data and records on target vulnerable groups and learnings from consultations with them on capability strengths and needs and what was learned from past events. They drew on their direct experiences of past events – particularly the 2019/20 bushfires – to inform CSDC project priorities.

Their working relationships with Snowy Monaro Regional Council, and Council's Monaro Regional Interagency forum also informed their work in this space as these networks informed the project's initial local priorities and helped embed project activities into the local community.

They have prioritised the hazards and vulnerabilities they identified through the project in their work to establish the Vulnerability Sub-Committee of the local LEMC. They have also advocated these priorities at a national level via the CSDC Project. The CEO of MFSS spoke as part of a panel on vulnerability and disability at the National Disaster Preparedness Summit convened by the National Emergency Management Agency in 2023.

Of the 8 survey respondents with project involvement beyond the final workshop:

- 100% agreed or strongly agreed that the project "helped to identify our needs and priorities in relation to reducing disaster risk for people in the Snowy Monaro area"

- 4 (50%) agreed or strongly that they were confident their "needs and priorities are going to be prioritised and acted upon", and 4 (50%) were neutral. This suggests that the Snowy Monaro project would benefit from more transparent planning and communication on how stakeholders' needs and priorities are actioned after they are identified, given that MFSS is highly active in the local and higher-level advocacy and policy impact space.

- 6 (75%) agreed or strongly 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", and no respondents disagreed (2 were neutral).

Figure 3: To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Snowy Monaro)

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

Multiple community representative groups who participated in local CSDC workshops (delivering P-CEP together with joint agency information sharing and community discussion, as described at Section above), described in interviews the ways that they have incorporated disaster preparedness into the way that community members work and interact with each other.

> We have met a second time. Everyone was more confident that they knew what would happen in the event of a disaster. Non-drivers had buddied up.

> People have started ringing each other to check if they were okay.

> As an organisation we now have capacity to follow up with community members and keep up conversations about disaster awareness.

Social service NGO representatives expressed a readiness and motivation to embed risk reduction and resilience activities into their business as usual, especially since the Disasters Are Our Business workshop. As in other locations, these organisations have become engaged and motivated by the project's first major collective event and are ready to discuss specific organisational and collective actions and access specific planning tools. They sought regular community meetings on this issue as a form of joint planning and organisational accountability.

> This was a step in the right direction in terms of thinking and getting organised.

> There needs to be another meeting to talk about what would be a plan. What do they do elsewhere?

> We need to plot out a map or directory of community services and develop a sub-committee to keep it up to date, to keep that momentum. They can call a meeting if there is warning of a weather event or disaster.

After the project evaluation interviews were completed, MFSS produced a final report on the Disasters Are Our Business workshop and presented the findings of the report to the Monaro Regional Interagency (with future plans to also present the findings to the LEMC Vulnerability Sub-Committee). These provided opportunity to embed the findings and next steps for local disaster preparedness from the CSDC project, into the future collaborative work of social service NGOs and emergency management agencies in the Snowy Monaro.

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

Monaro Family Support Service:

- is an observer on the Monaro LEMC and chairs the Sub-Committee on vulnerability
- has regular meetings and joint planning with Council including briefing on community disaster preparedness concerns and ideas
- engages in joint planning and delivery of P-CEP and preparedness information events with agencies such as RFS, Red Cross and Police
- consulted on local and state disaster strategy, e.g. Snowy Monaro Pre-Event Recovery Plan (NSWRA) and NSW State Disaster Mitigation Plan.

A broad range of stakeholders in interviews described the success of the CSDC Project in raising stakeholders' engagement in local risk identification and management. MFSS has advocated and

partnered on multiple fronts to communicate the needs identified within local communities to emergency management authorities and structures:

- MFSS now has a place on the LEMC as an observer

- the LEMC now has a Sub-Committee on vulnerability and MFSS is a member

- in community workshops jointly facilitated by MFSS and emergency management agencies, community members were able to raise local risks, and emergency management agency representatives said in interviews that this has improved their understanding of local risks and vulnerabilities

- community, emergency management and local host organisation stakeholders were confident that community workshops were reducing risks and vulnerabilities identified (acknowledging that systems change was also necessary in some areas, such as timing and circulation of evacuation advice).

The attendance of a broad range of government and emergency management agencies involved in disaster management and response allowed local NGO social services to directly raise concerns about the risks they identified in their own work and with their service user cohorts. Responses of government and emergency management agencies were reportedly variable.

> Some of them still have a culture of giving top-down advice without bothering to understand how that plan would apply at a local level. They get so involved in the details of their own role that they lose interest in the bigger picture and the complexities that come with different vulnerabilities.

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?

NGO social service sector engagement

Monaro Family Support Service observed a variable rate of engagement in project activities by local social service NGOs. Those that did not engage, or attempted to engage but could not commit sufficient resources, faced resource barriers, as described at Section **Error! Reference source not found.**.

> We have discovered varying abilities and willingness and opportunity for different community service organisations to engage deeply in this space. For example, fee-for-service organisations are not funded to participate. Organisations not locally based or managed may not understand the importance or relevance of the work. Not all of them will see equally that they have a role to play. It needs to align with their purpose and values.

An additional local project barrier raised during interviews was the momentum within the NGO social service sector to plan for a future disaster. In the context of competing priorities and absent or indirect funding for the work of disaster preparedness, some organisations had limited interest in disaster management after the initial recovery stage. Some had experienced relatively marginal impacts of the Black Summer bushfires on their operation and their service user groups and had less impetus to include disaster preparedness and risk reduction in their strategic policy and operations. In this context, the staff at MFSS described the amount of work involved in committing some organisations to participate in project activities.

> It took multiple follow-up phone calls and flexibility on the day about who turned up and who didn't. We were having to ask people to effectively donate their time to the work, which wasn't easy.

Project resources

The MFSS team found that the project's documentation, reporting and accountability activities were at times overwhelming, especially in the context of part-time employment and the high volume of local meetings necessary to keep program objectives on track. The splitting of the South Coast and Snowy Monaro into two projects resulted in significantly reduced resources for the Snowy Monaro project relative to the other three projects, contributing to the reporting burden for this project.

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 **Error! Reference source not found.**). 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?

4 out of 7 survey respondents responding as a stakeholder from an organisation said they worked differently with other organisations as a result of the CSDC project in the Snowy Monaro. Examples included: more active updates on each other's activities; and better understanding of each other's roles and potential strengths in the event of a disaster.

When asked whether the project had increased their connections:

- 88% (15 of 17) said they had new connections from the Disasters Are Our Business workshop
- 62.5% (5 of 8) said they had new connections from the project as a whole.

One survey respondent noted that, "there is a long way to go to develop communications and plans among local services and this is a great start."

100% of 17 event feedback survey respondents nominated 'networking' as something about the workshop they found valuable to their organisation.

Almost every stakeholder interviewed said that they wanted the networks and relationships that were started during this project to be honoured by continued investment.

> Relationships make everything work faster in a crisis.

> Having those networks established and having those community champions greatly assists disaster readiness. You would be building it from scratch otherwise. Networking is a disaster preparedness activity.

The relationships established by this project between emergency management authorities and NGO social service sector organisations, not just limited to MFSS, were highly valued by a number of project stakeholders.

> It was great having the Reconstruction Authority and other emergency management authorities in the room [at the Disasters Are Our Business workshop]. That broke down barriers and started new relationships.

Multiple stakeholders observed that the community workshops and events had helped small rural communities to re-establish neighbourhood relationships after COVID-19 and have informal discussions about disaster readiness.

> It has made people more aware of who is in the community. It's reduced isolation. That helps with their mental health … We can use regular events like bingo to check in on people's plans.

> COVID just trashed the whole community … The telephone communication [from this project] re-awakened old pre-COVID networks.

Key Evaluation Question 5

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

In the Snowy Monaro, the project's full potential with regard to advocacy for systemic change has been demonstrated. MFSS engaged effectively with project lead agencies, particularly NCOSS, to advocate for the local community's disaster readiness needs in state and federal government policy spaces (see Section **Error! Reference source not found.**). MFSS was also instrumental in the development of the Roles of NGOs in Disaster Management resource, published on the NCOSS website, which social services can use to scope their role in the various phases of disasters and to inform advocacy to government and Emergency Management agencies.

The MFSS demonstrated a creative and locally tailored approach to community resilience and preparedness, for example through their community 'Preparedness Support' sessions and their 'Let's Get Packing' resources. Leveraging their strong local reputation and networks, this project successfully engaged vulnerable community members to build disaster preparedness at the individual and community level. This provides proof of concept for the role of social service NGOs in disaster preparedness.

In their direct work with vulnerable communities, they complemented capacity-building activities with new pathways for escalating disaster risk reduction needs that require input, change or decision-making from local emergency management agencies, via the local LEMC and their vulnerability subcommittee.