

# HAWKESBURY Project Report



**Community Sector Disaster Capability Project**  
*Identifying disaster risks, vulnerabilities, assets & strengths  
and defining future opportunities*



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction.....

Approach and Engagement.....

Research & Methodology.....

Preliminary Findings.....

Conclusions.....

Next steps.....

Future Opportunities.....

Glossary of Terms.....

Appendices.....

References.....

Disclaimer: Although funding for this product has been provided by both the Australian and NSW Governments, the material contained herein does not necessarily represent the views of either Government.



The Hawkesbury Community Sector Disaster Capability Project (HCSDCP) was hosted on the traditional lands of the Darug people. We pay our respects to Darug Elders, past and present, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participating in the Project.

The Community Sector Disaster Capability local project in the Hawkesbury LGA has been delivered by Peppercorn Services Inc in conjunction with Bligh Park Community Services. It is one of four local projects supported through the Community Sector Disaster Capability project – a disaster resilience and preparedness project led by the NSW Council of Social Service with the Local Community Services Association (LCSA) and the NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation (AbSec), funded from January 2023 to June 2024. The CSDC project promotes and facilitates the role of local community services organisations in supporting their communities to reduce disaster risk, particularly for those most vulnerable, and contributes to creating a more collaborative, networked approach to disaster management. Funded jointly by the Australian and NSW Governments through the Disaster Risk Reduction Fund, as part of the National Partnership Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction.

‘the Project aims to build a collaborative, networked approach to local disaster management, providing an opportunity for local community organisations, and the communities they support, to bring their expert knowledge and connections into play’. (1) The CSDCP is being undertaken in three disaster affected areas in NSW: the South Coast, the Northern Rivers and the Hawkesbury. Further information regarding the Project can be found at <https://www.ncoss.org.au/disaster-capability/#Whatis>.

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team undertook the project utilising a community development approach; allowing our local community organisations, and the communities they support, to share and grow their community capital. Community members, community organisations and other participating organisations, including emergency management services, Government Departments, NGOs and major charities brought their expert knowledge and networks into play enabling participants to grow and develop their capacity to identify, assess and mitigate disaster risks. The Hawkesbury CSDCP acted as a much-needed catalyst to strengthen working relationships between formal disaster management systems and communities. Community services organisations in the Hawkesbury LGA have successfully prepared for, responded to, and, recovered from seven natural disaster events in the past five years. The most recent of these was moderate flooding in April 2024.

The project was welcomed by our communities and service providers keen to share their lived experiences and knowledge. Individuals and organisational representatives alike shared experiences, knowledge and learnings in psychologically safe environments. This report presents a blueprint for disaster risk reduction (DRR) community engagement and data collection, and highlights findings from the Project.

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team thank all participants for sharing their time, expertise, knowledge and learnings with our project staff, other organisations and their communities. Special thanks go to Amy Barry and Maya Manojlovic, the Hawkesbury CSDCP Workers and Cath Murphy (Bligh Park Manager) for compiling the report

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CSDCP Hawkesbury Project Manager

## 1. INTRODUCTION

What is a disaster?

Natural disasters in Australia include : heatwaves, bushfires, droughts, floods, severe storms and tropical cyclones, earthquakes, tsunamis and landslides. Australia’s national science agency, the CSIRO, state unequivocally “we are experiencing more frequent and severe natural disasters”. (3)

Participants in the Hawkesbury CSDCP contributed a wealth of knowledge, experience and information via formal interview questions, group discussions, focus groups, questionnaires and informal conversations about their lived experience with disaster and disaster risk reduction (DRR). Participants described natural disasters, or disasters, to include the COVID-19 pandemic and the varroa mite incursion of bee hives in the Hawkesbury LGA. The Hawkesbury CSDCP team are aware that a declaration of a “natural disaster” is a legislative one and allows mechanisms for integrated response and recovery. The use of ‘disaster’ or ‘natural disaster’ in this report is not necessarily that of a declared natural disaster. The declared natural disasters in the Hawkesbury LGA since 2018 were drought, bushfire and (repeated) flooding. The COVID-19 pandemic was a declared public health emergency. The varroa mite incursion was declared as a biosecurity emergency.

Disaster in the Hawkesbury

The Hawkesbury LGA is located around 50kms from Sydney on the north-western fringe of the Sydney metropolitan area. The population is just over 68,000 with most of the population located in the south-eastern part of the LGA. The highest density population centres are Richmond and surrounding districts, Bligh Park & South Windsor, Windsor and surrounds, and North Richmond, with many smaller urban areas and villages throughout the LGA. The majority of the LGA comprises State and National Parks – over 70% of the LGA’s approximately 2,800 square kms. This physical proximity of the human population to State and National Parks correlates to an increased risk of the impacts of bushfire. "Analysis by Risk Frontiers of major historical bushfires shows distance from the bushland fringe to be the single most important factor determining the probability of building destruction given an extreme fire in adjacent bushlands," the group's general manager Andrew Gissing said. "The vast majority of homes that are destroyed in fires are within 500 metres of bushland," he said, noting that in the 2018 Tathra bushfire some 73 per cent of properties destroyed were within 100 metres and no home was razed further than 630 metres. (4) In addition to the high risk of losses and damages from bushfires in the LGA, the Hawkesbury – Nepean Valley is the most flood exposed region in NSW. The Hawkesbury is divided by 5 river systems; the Nepean, Hawkesbury, Grose, Colo and MacDonald rivers.

The Hawkesbury LGA has been exposed to bushfire, drought, heatwave, varroa mites and the COVID-19 pandemic since 2018. Repeated disaster events in the Hawkesbury have meant that local residents have been forced to repeatedly prepare for, respond to, and recover from: drought, floods, pandemic and bushfires. The Hawkesbury CSDCP sought to understand how the lessons learned by communities and individuals through repeated exposures to disasters could provide learnings that will improve DRR in the Hawkesbury; and if these learnings be replicated or duplicated to benefit other communities.



## A Disaster Risk Reduction Approach

Given the increasing frequency and severity of natural disasters across Australia the Australian Commonwealth, and State and Territory Governments, are working together to mitigate the impacts of disaster on communities and individuals. The National Partnership Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction (NPADRR) is an agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia and the States and Territories with the stated objective: “to proactively reduce the risk and limit the impact of disasters associated with natural hazards on Australian communities and economies”. (5)

In 2021 and 2022 catastrophic floods across NSW had a devastating effect in terms of loss of life and property. “The northern rivers floods (2021/22) were Australia’s biggest natural disaster since Cyclone Tracy in 1974. It was the second-costliest event in the world for insurers in 2022, and the most expensive disaster in Australian history.” (6) How Government Departments, Agencies and Emergency Management organisations responded to these floods was the subject of the NSW Legislative Council Select Committee Enquiry and subsequent report (Report No.1 of the Select Committee on the ‘Response to Major Flooding across New South Wales in 2022’).

The report made twenty-one findings and thirty-seven recommendations. Recommendation 2 was that the NSW Government consider abolishing Resilience NSW, the then NSW Government Executive Agency charged with disaster management. This recommendation was adopted and the NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA) was established in December 2022 (replacing Resilience NSW). The NSW RA was established as a result of the Select Committee enquiry and is dedicated to disaster preparedness, recovery and reconstruction and “to proactively reduce the impact of future disasters across NSW and to help communities recover from them faster”. (7)

As part of the NPADRR, the NSW RA made funding available through the Local and Regional Stream of the Disaster Risk Reduction Fund. The consortium of NCOSS, AbSec and LCSA were successful in accessing funding through this funding stream for the Community Sector Disaster Capability Project (CSDCP). NCOSS, as the lead agency of the consortium, invited local community service organisations to tender for the role of ‘Host Organisation’ to deliver the CSDCP in three selected areas of NSW. The Project Host Organisation in the Hawkesbury is Peppercorn Services Inc. (PSI), working in collaboration with Bligh Park Community Services Inc. (BPCSI).



*Community Organisations Breakfast, SES presentation*



*Bowen Mountain Preparedness Day*



*Disaster Scenario Symposium Breakfast*

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### Background

This report describes the work undertaken in the Hawkesbury LGA as part of the NSW Community Sector Disaster Capability Project (CSDCP). The CSDCP lead agency, NCOSS, view the project as:

- *Increasing awareness of the nature and extent of disadvantage and vulnerability in the community, and the role of community service organisations in reducing disaster risk for relevant population groups and locations*
- *Equipping local community service organisations with tools, resources, training, and access to expertise to support vulnerable population groups to reduce risk.*
- *Building ongoing relationships between the social services sector and government/non-government disaster management agencies, to further understanding and inclusion of the strengths and needs of vulnerable population groups in relevant processes from the outset, in particular risk reduction. (2)*

### Aim

The aim of CSDCP is to strengthen the role of local community services organisations in disaster risk reduction (DRR). The role of local community services organisations in DRR in the Hawkesbury is informed by the lived experience of project staff and participants during the six floods, one catastrophic bushfire, drought, the detection of the varroa mite, and the COVID-19 pandemic that impacted the region from 2018 - 2024. Project management & staff planned, designed, developed, and coordinated relevant research; undertook targeted community engagement; community capacity building, and collection, collation and analysis of data. From the 5<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> April 2024 the Hawkesbury LGA was affected by moderate flooding. Project management and staff were able to reflect on the impact of the Hawkesbury CSDC Project in the context of this most recent flood event in particular to analyse any differences in community services organisations; disaster preparation, response and recovery: and if these differences are attributable to DRR efforts in the Hawkesbury LGA.

## Approach, Methodology & Engagement

**Research** – Supported by the Hawkesbury CSDCP team’s extensive background knowledge and experience; the research was designed to explore attitudes, perceptions and beliefs of five distinct groups of stakeholders:

- Community services organisations, NGOs & charities,
- Isolated communities at high risk of catastrophic effects of disaster,
- Vulnerable community members,
- Government department and statutory authority representatives, and
- Emergency Management personnel/organisational representatives.

**Methodology** – the Hawkesbury CSDCP utilised active research and a mixed-methods approach to data collection including formally arranged interviews: informal conversations with community members at community events: surveys utilising ‘survey monkey’: and large and small group consultations where data was collected via responses to questions through the Slido polling platform. The project team undertook both quantitative and qualitative data analysis and utilised qualitative research software to better organise our mixed methods data collection. The software used was ATLAS.ti.

**Engagement** –was facilitated utilising community development principles and took the form of local community services and community engagement, mapping and capacity & resilience building activities. These included team members: attendance at (events, open days etc.): organisation of events, including the Bilpin Seniors Preparedness Day, Boots on the Ground Volunteers Conference; Community Sector Disaster Capability Breakfast Event, and the ‘Dismiss the Myths’ DRR Symposium: the provision of resources to over fifty local community organisations: and continued community conversations with special interest groups.

## Findings

Participants in the Hawkesbury CSDCP were drawn from community members, community organisations, and Government Departments and agencies (Annexure 1). Our findings are organised thematically across a number of domains broadly identifying: community and organisational disaster risks: disaster vulnerabilities: assets and strength in times of disasters: and defining future opportunities for DRR in the Hawkesbury. Those individuals most at risk of the impact of disasters in the Hawkesbury are those who present with seven distinct, measurable vulnerabilities. Communities most at risk were those geographically isolated with one road in and out. Most commonly reported organisational vulnerabilities were lack of resources – physical, human and financial – that may mitigate the effects of disaster. Assets were the enhanced preparedness capabilities of individuals and organisations since 2021, much of which was built through networking and partnerships.



Strengths were positive partnerships with organisations and Government; and community's and individual's willingness to support each other. Future opportunities were viewed as mostly contingent upon adequate resources and/or funding being available to organisations to undertake DRR work. Concerns were also raised by community service organisations that further work in DRR may result in censure from current funding partners.

## Conclusions

The Hawkesbury CSDCP has demonstrated effective, targeted community planning, community engagement, data collection, organisational capacity building and data analysis to assist in mitigating the negative impacts of disaster in the LGA. We have ensured that we, and participating community organisations, are part of local Emergency Management approaches that align with risk reduction, response and recovery operations; and contribute to preparedness. Via this report, our planning, approach, methodology and engagement strategies will be accessible to community service organisations across NSW. We have developed networks and partnerships to strengthen individual and community disaster risk capacity, capability and resilience. Our data analysis allows us to better understand the relationships in the Hawkesbury between DRR in the community, and the effectiveness and efficiency of preparation, response and recovery in disaster management. We have highlighted a number of themes that identify and describe the Hawkesbury LGA success in mitigating the impacts of disaster. Hawkesbury CSDCP have continued to build community and community organisations capacity in DRR during the life of the project.

## Next steps

For the remainder of the life of the project – to 30th June 2024 – the Hawkesbury CSDCP team will continue to explore our data and test our assumptions as opportunities arise. We will continue to work with individuals and community organisations in the LGA to further strengthen individual and community disaster risk capacity, capability and resilience. The project will host a final event to highlight the project findings and provide individuals and organisations with available links and resources. The project team are exploring options to advocate for the two issues that were highlighted in the data as most urgently needing attention. These issues are:

- Earlier opening of evacuation centres to allow those most vulnerable in the community to 'leave early', and
- More options available to temporarily accommodate stock, household pets and wildlife during disasters.

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team are in a uniquely strong position to continue to leverage current community services, assets and capital and to strengthen existing collaborative partnerships between the community and those involved in the disaster risk reduction and recovery process. Our team will be valuable conduits and coordinators; guided by experience and expertise, using skilled, authentic and capable community leadership.

## Future opportunities

The Hawkesbury LGA experienced the catastrophic Black Summer bushfires of 2019 and six floods (three major) between February 2020 and April 2024. Along with the rest of the world, we were severely impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic of 2020/21. Community Organisations, non-Government-organisations (NGOs), Local Council, Emergency Organisations, Government Organisations, major charities and hundreds (if not thousands) of volunteers worked tirelessly throughout these disasters. Despite the enormous losses, the residents and communities of the Hawkesbury demonstrated their ability to prepare for, respond to, and recover from, disasters. The Hawkesbury CSDCP team recognizes that the Hawkesbury's preparedness capability, and recovery resilience, relies on integrated community support. Future opportunities for community services organisations in DRR in the Hawkesbury are to fill the current gaps in:

- Facilitating isolated communities' disaster planning:
- Continuing organisational and individual disaster preparedness:
- Working with Emergency management agencies to identify those in the community at the highest risk of negative impacts of disaster, and work towards mitigating this risk for individuals: and
- To act as a conduit to NSW Government Departments and Agencies to identify DRR opportunities in the Hawkesbury LGA. These opportunities require ongoing funding commitments.

The greatest concern of the Hawkesbury CSDCP management & team is that without an ongoing, dedicated funding stream, future opportunities; and individual and organisational knowledge will be lost.

*"Another barrier is the fact that a lot of positions in response or recovery or preparedness are grant funded. So, we have staff turnover, a lot of staff turnover. Because people are nervous about having secure income, so they have to find another job. Or that the position ends, and you're hoping for an extension... And also, I think, what can be a barrier is people in the community know that those roles are only temporary, so we do hear a fair bit, 'well what's going to happen next year?'" –Anonymous*

*"From that and any disaster that I've been involved in from the last forever, the funding of helicopter projects, bringing people in to work with recovery rather than providing that funding from before the incident to build that community relationships, you need to have a repour with your community. And I think having embedded within Councils and other community service organisations having those people embedded and fully funded permanently builds those relationships so that things like isolated communities, what people are able to do not able to do, is known. It's a known factor that then can be managed or worked with, so people are aware, the emergency services are aware of what is*

*happening and where people may need further assistance. But it's just those community connections, you really need that, embedded prior to and after events." –Anonymous*

*"One of the main barriers is because we are Bligh Park Community Services, because we are a community centre and because we are visible, and we're at the micro level, when there's a disaster or when people don't know what to do they will turn to us. Our funding partners seem, or at least pre Covid, seemed to be unaware of that. That we played that role in the community. And they saw that their funding was given to us for a specific purpose and we should use it for that purpose and without understanding that within our work you have to, and especially around disaster and as they become more prevalent, you have to be able to make a one-eighty degree turn in a day in the work that you do."- Bligh Park Community Services Inc*

*"The funding arrangements need to be changed, there needs to be a lot more coordination between funding and groups so that rather than having one off projects that might last for twelve to eighteen months and then disappear, you get a report and that but nobody knows about it. Have those projects put together to build into business as usual, whether it be at Councils or within community service providers."- Anonymous*

*"Going forward, I do believe that there needs to be more interlinking, formerly between bodies that administer flood recovery grants and the funded recovery support service because it doesn't make sense that they don't recognise our role in the recovery process and they don't recognise us as an official partner." – Anonymous*

*"There wasn't enough trust put into the people that were handling the cases, that were doing the job. And that was a part of the problem with the back to home grant. I mean we were going out speaking to people in there in their homes, we were seeing the devastation of it."-Anonymous*

## 1. CSDCP OBJECTIVES

### 1.1 Community Sector Disaster Capability Project Objectives

The Community Sector Disaster Capability Project (CSDCP) objectives are to:

- Increase understanding of the strengths and disaster risks of local communities, especially people experiencing vulnerability, by undertaking engagement and mapping activities and reviewing lessons learnt during recent disasters.
- Strengthen organisational and community capacity and networking to assess disaster risk for vulnerable population groups and work with these groups and other local partners to develop skills and implement approaches to reduce risks, enabling locally led and owned place-based disaster risk reduction.
- Build relationships and promote ongoing collaboration to influence formal emergency management processes, promoting inclusion of the community sector and the vulnerable populations they support in planning and preparatory risk reduction.

### 1.2 The objectives of the Hawkesbury CSDCP were to:

- strengthen the role of local community service organisations in disaster risk reduction (DRR),
- highlight the role of local community service organisations in successfully building community resilience pre and post disaster,
- better support the wellbeing and safety of vulnerable community members by increasing emergency responders and Governments' understanding of the relationship between disaster risk and vulnerability

## 2. HAWKESBURY CSDCP OUTCOMES

### 3.1 The outcomes of the Hawkesbury CSDCP were:

- Community services organisations in the Hawkesbury are engaged and equipped with knowledge and capacity to take actions to reduce disaster risk
- Community and individuals' disaster risks and needs are identified and prioritised, including for vulnerable groups and communities and those with specific needs



- Community services organisations and community groups factor disaster risk information into planning and decisions
- Emergency management processes, plans and structures are more inclusive of the community services sector and the vulnerable populations they support in planning and preparatory risk reduction, and shaped by an understanding of community strengths and vulnerabilities.

### 2.1.1 Outcome 1 - Community services organisations in the Hawkesbury are engaged and equipped with knowledge and capacity to take actions to reduce disaster risk

Strengthening the role of local community service organisations in disaster risk reduction means ensuring that local community services organisations are engaged and equipped with timely and relevant information and resources; which enables them to build their own capacity and take actions in their community to reduce disaster risk. The following steps demonstrate the Hawkesbury CSDCP step by step engagement, information provision, data collection and capacity building.

#### Preparation and Planning

- Recruitment of Hawkesbury CSDCP management & staff who had strong experience in community development; disaster preparedness and recovery; and building community resilience: and had knowledge of community development principles and practice, and understanding of data collection, collation and analysis.
- Robust planning including setting targets, goals and milestones for the life of the project.
- Defining the stakeholders. The Hawkesbury CSDCP's planning, design and delivery of the project was underpinned by the CSDCP's team extensive background knowledge and experience. CSDCP management and staff considered an analysis of the experiences, insights and learnings of a minimum of five groups of stakeholders as integral to the project. These stakeholders are:
  - Community services organisations, NGOs & charities
  - Isolated communities at high risk of catastrophic effects of disaster especially bushfire/flood
  - Vulnerable community members and their agents
  - Government department and statutory authority representatives
  - Emergency management personnel/organisational representatives

## Stakeholder engagement

- CSDCP management and staff understood that successful community services organisations occupy a unique position as embedded, known and trusted grass roots organisations. In addition to having the trust of their communities; these organisations recognise that effective services are designed with, and for, people and communities; not delivered top down for administrative convenience.

*“We act as a linking pin to a lot of the emergency management organisations”- Bowen Mountain Association*

*“We have learnt, because we’ve had consecutive disasters, a bit more about what organisations do or where they’re place in terms of disaster recovery or disaster timing. We know where the evacuation places are, you can basically rattle them off, whereas before you might have had to look them up. We know basically what different services are going to do at the time. I think that’s good. I think in some ways, even though we talk a lot about the isolation and social disconnection, it has kind of built a bit of resilience, we do know we will get through it. We do know after three floods, people have lost their houses three times, surely, we know there is light at the end of the tunnel. Two lockdowns, we know we’re going to come out of it. But those learnings have come at a cost.” – Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury Inc*

*“We’re not ready emotionally for another disaster, we may not get the choice, but I know that we’ve not really recovered as a community and then as individuals, paid or volunteers. We’ve just not. The impact is more than, I don’t think anyone can really measure that. I’ve seen professionals, like people who are working for organisations and so they have funded positions, but I’ve seen them pack up and move, even to the point where they go ‘I can’t be anywhere near the Hawkesbury, near the river or near the fires’. And they’ve gone as far away from here as they can.” – Kurrajong Baptist Church*

- Stakeholders were visited in person, contacted via email and phone and formally invited to the Hawkesbury CSDCP launch Breakfast. 35 organisations were represented by 50 individuals. **Hawkesbury CSDP Breakfast Participating Organisations:**

- Bligh Park Community Services Inc
- Bowen Mountain Association
- Department of Primary Industries
- Department of Communities and Justice
- Glossodia Community Centre
- Hawkesbury City Council
- Hawkesbury Community Kitchen
- Hawkesbury Community Outreach Services
- Hawkesbury Valley Baptist Church
- Hawkesbury Chamber of Commerce
- Inner Sydney Voice
- Kurrajong Baptist Church
- Kurrajong Nursing Home
- LCSA NSW
- MP – Federal Member for Macquarie
- Mad Mob Aboriginal Corporation
- Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District
- NSW Reconstruction
- NSW Police
- NCOSS
- Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network
- NSW SES
- North Richmond Community Centre
- Peppercorn Services Inc
- Red Cross
- Richmond Community Services Inc

- Strong Nation Community Services
  - Salvation Army
  - Search Dogs Sydney Inc
  - The Jeremiah Project
  - Psychosocial Wellbeing and Disaster Recovery in the Hawkesbury – PhD Research
  - Wesley Mission
  - Wallacia Progress Association
  - Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils
- Hawkesbury CSDCP staff attended events hosted by local community services organisations, Government Departments and Agencies, emergency management organisations and Hawkesbury City council (HCC). These events afforded opportunities for community conversations and collection of data through structured surveys. Events attended by Hawkesbury CSDCP staff include:
    - AFAC Conference
    - Blitz Disability Expo
    - HWASP
    - Bligh Park Halloween Event
    - Heatwave and Health Conference
    - ‘Get Ready’ Weekend at Blaxlands Ridge RFS station
    - ‘Get Ready’ Weekend at Cumberland Reach RFS station
- Hawkesbury CSDCP staff attended meetings, workshops and forums including:
    - Link Wentworth Housing Preparedness session
    - Heat Watch team
    - Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils
    - Services Australia Hawkesbury Stakeholder Meeting
    - HNV DAP community organisation engagement session



- Recovery on Wheels (ROW)
  
- Hawkesbury CSDCP staff conducted formal data collection structured interviews with 30 community services organisations.
  - Bligh Park Community Services Inc
  - Bowen Mountain Association
  - Bridges Disability Services
  - Department of Communities & Justice
  - Glossodia Community Centre
  - Hawkesbury Community Kitchen Inc/The Jeremiah Project
  - Hawkesburys Helping Hands
  - Hawkesbury Valley Mens Shed
  - Hawkesbury City Council
  - Hawkesbury Community Outreach Services
  - Hope4U Foundation
  - Inner Sydney Voice
  - Kurrajong Baptist Church
  - Legal Aid
  - Link Wentworth
  - Lions Club Richmond
  - Macdonald Valley Association
  - Mad Mob
  - Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury Inc
  - NBMPHN
  - NEMA
  - North Richmond Community Centre
  - Peppercorn Services Inc
  - Richmond Community Services Inc
  - Salvation Army Windsor

- Strong Nation Community
  - The Womens Cottage
  - Upper Colo Progress Association
  - Wallacia Progress Association
  - Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre
- Hawkesbury CSDCP staff:
    - Organised disaster preparation days for geographically isolated communities,
    - Co-organised a “Boots on the Ground” Volunteers conference for Hawkesbury based volunteer organisations and volunteers from emergency services, local community groups, local NGOs and NFPs
    - Facilitated setting up a new local services Committee,
    - Collaborated with Hawkesbury City Council CRO to design, develop and deliver the Bilpin Seniors Disaster Preparedness Day
    - Collaborated with Hawkesbury City Council CRO to design, develop and deliver Bowen Mountain Seniors Preparedness Day
    - Collaborated with Glossodia Community Services, Winmalee Neighborhood Centre to deliver three free First Aid training sessions to the community

### **A strengths-based approach – Breakfast Event, Project Launch**

In the context of disaster capability CSDCP Hawkesbury define our strengths-based approach as identifying the existing community and social capital that will ensure community members are aware of the risks of future disasters; and will lead to the reduction of the adverse impacts of disasters on individuals and their communities.

Representatives from all stakeholder groups were brought together for the Project Breakfast Launch utilising the above community development framework. Community development in the context of disaster risk reduction necessitates empowering individuals and communities to bring about positive change founded on the principles of social justice, equality and inclusion. Participants at the CSDCP Breakfast event were selected based on either their direct involvement in disaster preparedness, response and recovery in the Hawkesbury LGA; or on their expressions of interest in becoming involved in community disaster risk reduction in preparation for disaster, response to disaster and recovery from disaster.

The CSDCP Breakfast Event opened with introductions and project and funding partner speakers and topic experts, who provided context and background to the Hawkesbury CSDCP. Questions were taken and disaster narratives were shared by participants. Adequate time was allotted to allow participants to process information and emotion.

Participants were provided with table numbers. At the conclusion of the speakers, questions and narrative sharing; participants were seated according to their table number. Participants were grouped according to commonalities of organisational purpose. This strategy was utilised to ensure free and frank discussion among participants. The groups reflected our five key stakeholder groups with group 'vulnerable community members' interspersed within the other four groups, Community services organisations, NGOs & charities, representatives from isolated communities at high risk of

catastrophic effects of disaster, Government department and statutory authority representatives, and Emergency Management personnel/organisational representatives.

Hawkesbury CSDCP staff guided participants through the following questions:

- I. Thinking about recent disasters who, what or where was more at risk or most impacted by recent emergencies and prolonged recovery?
- II. What did your organisations or others do well in preparing, responding and recovering from recent emergencies?
- III. What would help services and communities in the Hawkesbury be better prepared and linked in when the next emergency happens?

Responses were collated via Slido and later added to ATLAS.ti software. See results in "Findings".

**Outcome 1 was met** through applying robust front-end procedures in recruitment, planning and organisation followed by appropriate stakeholder identification and engagement. Project staff provided up to date information, resources and access to topic experts for all participants. Strengths based capacity building ensured the role of local community services organisations in DRR has been strengthened; and these organisations are engaged and equipped with knowledge and capacity to take actions to reduce disaster risk in the Hawkesbury LGA. Outcome 1 meets the three consortium CSDCP objectives.

### 3.1.2 Outcome 2 – Community and individuals’ disaster risks and needs are identified and prioritised, including for vulnerable groups and communities and those with specific needs

Hawkesbury CSDCP management and staff ensured all participants in this Project were able to work collaboratively, under a community development umbrella, to:

- identify disaster risks, vulnerabilities, assets and strengths,
- define future opportunities to reduce the negative impacts of disasters, and
- build individual and community resilience that will positively impact the quality of their own lives, and of their communities, post disaster.

#### Identifying disaster risks and needs

The overarching aim of the CSDC Project was to strengthen the role of local community services organisations in disaster risk reduction. In addition to the work done by community organisations prior to a disaster or hazard event (DRR), the Hawkesbury CSDCP researched the role of community organisations in the immediate disaster response phase and post disaster. The Hawkesbury CSDCP research and data collection was designed as action research in order to realise our objectives of identifying communities and individuals most vulnerable to the impacts of disaster: identifying disaster risk: assessing disaster risk: and analysing what is proven, successful risk mitigation in the Hawkesbury LGA. We utilised mixed methods data collection which included:

- Formally arranged interviews
- Informal conversations with community members at community events
- Surveys were distributed at community events
- Group Consultations
- Community Sector Disaster Capability Breakfast Event data was collected

All interviews, group work and conversations were conducted utilising a trauma informed approach. At focus groups individuals were grouped according to similarities, allowing them to share genuine and truthful observations and opinions. Using open questions allowed our project team to reflect on and gain insight into participants values, perspectives, knowledge and ideas. Our participants were active partners in our research. The project accessed AI qualitative research software to more efficiently collate and code or data.

Questions were designed specifically for the format in which they were used, be that formal interviews, consultations, surveys or the CSDCP Breakfast. In addition to the questions asked at the breakfast, Hawkesbury CSDCP staff posed the following formal interview questions:

- Tell us about your organisation.



- What disasters has your organisation experienced or seen in the Hawkesbury?
- What impact did these disasters have upon your organisation and community?
- What activities did your organisation undertake in preparation for future emergencies or in recent disasters and recovery?
- What preparedness work? How did you help the community?
- What were the barriers to your organisation in carrying out disaster response, recovery or readiness work?
- What were your organisations learnings from previous disasters?
- Thinking of the recent disasters in your community, who, what or where was more at risk to the impact of emergencies and prolonged recovery?
- How could this risk be addressed?
- What should be done? Who needs to be involved?
- When you think of future disasters in your area, what worries you the most? Why?
- What can be done to help address this concern?
- Thinking of the recent disasters, what were the strengths and assets in local organisations and the community in preparing, responding and recovering from emergencies more effectively?
- Examples? Who or what did individuals and the community turn to for support? Where did individuals and community go to for support? What worked well? How could this be improved or extended?
- As an organisation, what would you like to do in the disaster space in the future?
- What skills, information or resources would your organisation or staff need to carry out this work?
- What would help local community organisations and groups better prepare for their roles in future disasters? What resources would need to be available? How could local organisations work together to achieve this?

**Outcome 2 was met** through by accessing data analysis software to more efficiently collate and code our data. Hawkesbury CSDCP management took the decision to utilise ATLAS.ti data analysis software due to the large volume of raw data collected and collated during the project. The process of revising, deleting, amalgamating and assigning group codes after our software analysed ‘first-tranche’ codes meant our project staff could utilise their lived experience, knowledge and learnings of the impact of disasters in the Hawkesbury to assign categories to our data. This content analysis can be used both quantitatively and qualitatively; and relied upon team members re-visiting transcripts to ascertain meaning and context of the observations. By its’ very nature there is

significant overlap of content and thematic analysis. The Hawkesbury CSDCP team generated themes from the dataset as well as assigning categories to codes. The team are presenting these findings as thematic analysis. The thematic analysis is underpinned by the skills, background knowledge of DDR in the Hawkesbury, and expertise of the project team members. The data has the potential for further thematic analysis and the project team strongly recommend that observations and hypotheses are further tested by ongoing research. Community and individual's disaster risks have been identified and prioritised. The Hawkesbury CSDCP places particular emphasis on the needs of vulnerable population groups. The first step in meeting these needs is identifying disaster risk vulnerabilities in populations. The Hawkesbury CSDCP has achieved this.

### **3.1.3 Outcome 3 – Community services organisations and community groups factor disaster risk information into planning and decisions**

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team posed the following questions to project participants:

- What activities did your organisation undertake in preparation for future emergencies?
- When you think of future disasters in your area, what worries you the most? Why? What can be done to help address this concern?
- What would help local community organisations and groups better prepare for their roles in future disasters? What resources would need to be available? How could local organisations work together to achieve this?

Participants representing over 40 local community organisations had the opportunity to consider these questions with organisational or community colleagues or both. Responses to these questions indicated that local community and community services organisations were undertaking engagement and mapping activities and reviewing lessons learnt during recent disasters. Software generated summary of responses to dot point 1 above includes:

- Conduct more disaster preparedness events and provide support tailored to different community needs, especially for older and vulnerable populations.
- Open evacuation centers earlier and conduct practice drills.
- Improve communication about approaching bushfires and evacuation plans.
- Develop community disaster plans and maintain consistency in evacuation centers.

Responses to dot point 2 include:

- Local organisations in the Hawkesbury area highlighted concerns about various disaster scenarios, with a focus on bushfires, floods, and communication challenges.
- The worries include mass fatalities, lack of evacuation routes, poor communication networks, isolation, and challenges in assisting vulnerable populations like the elderly.

- Preparation efforts involve prioritizing emotional readiness, ensuring holistic support services, and establishing effective collaboration among agencies for efficient disaster response

Responses to dot point 3 above includes:

- Collaboration, communication, engagement, and tailored support are identified as key strategies for improving disaster readiness and response in these communities.
- Centres need to be prepared for disasters with good communication and flexibility.
- Community connectedness is important in responding to disasters. Post-disaster reporting is crucial for understanding outcomes.
- Community service providers may face challenges in funding and resource allocation during disasters.
- Organisations should focus on promoting community wellness and disaster preparedness.
- Communication and collaboration between organisations are vital for effective disaster response.

These responses indicate that community organisations and community services organisations in the Hawkesbury LGA have commenced factoring disaster risk information into organisational strategic planning and decision making. **Outcome 3 has been met.**

### **3.1.4 Outcome 4 – Emergency management processes, plans and structures are more inclusive of the community services sector and the vulnerable populations they support in planning and preparatory risk reduction, and shaped by an understanding of community strengths and vulnerabilities.**

Build relationships and promote ongoing collaboration to influence formal emergency management processes, promoting inclusion of the community sector and the vulnerable populations they support in planning and preparatory risk reduction.

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team have built strong and pro-active working relationships with local emergency management organisations and personnel. These relationships were built by the project team understanding the role/s of emergency management personnel and ensuring the emergency management personnel understood the parameters of the role of the project team. This shared understanding led to identification of how and where emergency management personnel and Hawkesbury CSDCP staff could work together. The team have successfully worked with RFS and SES at open days, door knocking, disaster preparation days and at the Disaster Recovery Centre and the ROW. Once a strong, professional and mutually beneficial working relationship has been established CSDCP staff ensure they continue to honour their professional commitments. With these strong working relationships in place, the Hawkesbury CSDCP team are looking forward to sharing the findings of the project to emergency management organisations, especially those findings that

enable us to more easily identify vulnerable communities and individuals. Local emergency management organisations and personnel have demonstrated their willingness to work with us through attendance at our events and symposiums, their willingness to act as topic experts, their invitations for us to attend events with them, and their interest in co-hosting activities in DDR. This demonstrates that **Outcome 4 has been met.**

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team consider that all project objectives have been successfully met and we have provided a replicable methodology for DDR for community services organisations which includes:

- Preparation and Planning
- Stakeholder engagement
- Research methodology
- Capacity building through a strengths-based approach
- Identifying disaster risks and needs
- Data collection
- Embedding DRR into business as usual in local community organisations
- Assist in shaping emergency management organisations understanding of communities' strengths & vulnerabilities

*“Preparing I think we can do better... I think people need to personally take some responsibility and be better prepared.” Hawkesburys Helping hands*

*“Unfortunately until the most recent floods it was thirty years, so how many people grew up with no idea of what a flood was like in the Hawkesbury?” Hawkesbury Valley Mens Shed*

This report outlines how small, local community service organisations operating within a community development framework can leverage their expertise, and their community's social capital, to support significant reductions of the negative impacts of disaster; particularly on those most vulnerable. The Hawkesbury CSDCP highlights the relevancy of local, place-based organisations to lead the work in: identifying lessons learned from recent disasters and undertaking local engagement, and mapping and capacity building activities.

*“The best thing about working in this sector is that I believe we have the ability to change direction really quickly. And provide what’s needed really quickly... Small grass roots community organisations like us can start delivering the next day... if we lose the ability to do that, how much more will the community suffer?” -Bligh Park Community Services Inc*

The Project also succeeded in strengthening the relationships and two-way exchanges between the Community/NGO sector and local emergency management systems and agencies.

## 1. FINDINGS

### 4.1 Risks

Those most at risk of the impact of disasters in the Hawkesbury are the elderly who have other vulnerabilities such as disability or social isolation, and who do not have private means of transport.

#### 4.1.1 Who is most at risk of the negative impacts of disaster in our community? (Individuals)

In the Hawkesbury LGA the population group assessed to be most at risk of negative impacts (including death or serious injury) in a major disaster event, across all disasters, are the elderly who have other vulnerabilities. This risk of greater negative impacts was not based simply on age. The risk was based on individuals who:

- Are aged 65+, AND
- Live alone **or** live in an older (65 years+) adult household, AND
- Have a disability **or** current medical condition, **or** chronic medical condition; **or** have mobility issues, AND
- Have no private transport or unreliable private transport, AND
- Do not have access to, **or** cannot comfortably and competently use technology such as mobile phone apps, Facebook, texting etc. AND
- Identify as being socially isolated, AND
- Identify as being geographically isolated.

The risk factors listed above are seen as the **highest risk** for negative impacts during a disaster event. Other vulnerabilities also contribute to risk – see vulnerabilities below. An individual assessed as demonstrating all seven of these risk factors should be determined as at critical risk in a disaster event. Any individual who was assessed as demonstrating five or six of these risk factors should be viewed as at extremely high risk. Any individual assessed as demonstrating three or four of these risk factors should be seen as of high risk for

negative impacts of disaster. Future opportunities could allow the Hawkesbury CSDCP team to develop a weighted risk assessment tool, including the above and other vulnerabilities, to be used to mitigate risk in future disaster events. This tool could inform emergency services of location of at-risk community members.

*“There’s lots of single older people, and one comment I’d like to make is that they don’t know that they’re old. And this is one thing that I’ve noticed, I’m ten years older than when I moved here, right? And we’ve got neighbours that have probably moved here in their forties to fifties... and they forget their eighty now, and they think, ‘oh we’re right, we’re good’... ‘Oh you know we can do the generator, we’ve got chainsaws, we can cut down the tree’. And they can’t anymore.” – Macdonald Valley Association*

*“There has to be better warnings... because elderly don’t have phones, that’s why we need boots on the ground” – Mad Mob*

*“In terms of the floods, I have to say I was a bit frustrated with the lack of response to at least get roads cleared. Especially because we have quite an elderly section of the community in different parts of the Valley. In the end what it got down to was locals getting machines, Bill had his bobcat out, cleared the road, I got my tractor and my saws out and we cleared the trees on the roads. Just so we could get access to people.”- Anonymous*

#### **4.1.2 Who is most at risk of the negative impacts of disaster in our community? (Communities)**

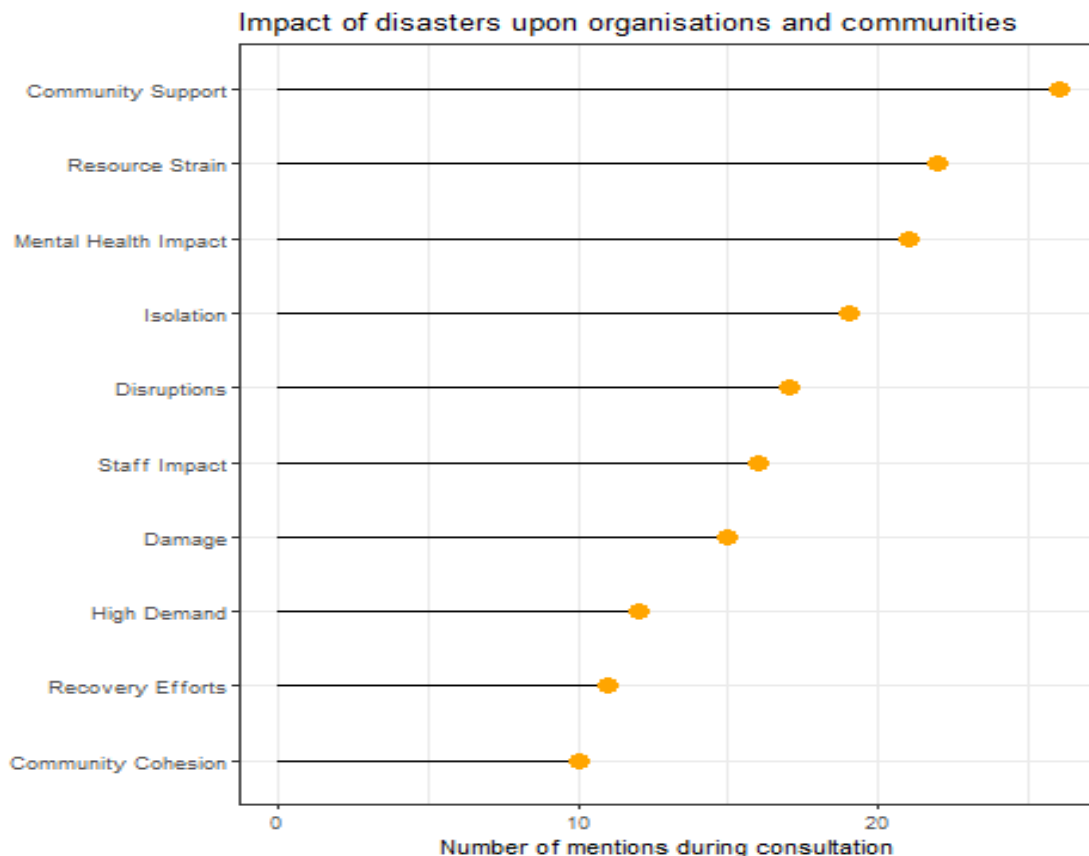
Participants responded to this question referencing both communities of geography and communities that shared common characteristics. As discussed earlier in this report, over 70% of the Hawkesbury LGA comprises State and National Parks. This physical proximity of the human population to State and National Parks correlates to an increased risk of the impacts of bushfire. The highest risk of bushfires were isolated communities, surrounded by State or National parks, especially those with one road in and out. In addition to the high risk of losses and damages from bushfires in the LGA, the Hawkesbury – Nepean Valley is the most flood exposed region in NSW. The ongoing, high risk of catastrophic flooding, and the recency of repeated flooding; meant that for many research participants floods were the primary disaster risk. The geographic areas defined as at greatest risk in floods were any low-lying areas close to the rivers but especially those in isolated communities and those on large properties, in Lower Portland, Macdonald, St Albans, Wisemans Ferry, and Upper Colo.



The largest, non-geographic vulnerable community group identified were those who were financially disadvantaged. This vulnerable cohort included people who were homeless, people who were full-time residents of caravan parks, and people who were social housing tenants. Conversely, individuals and families whose income was derived from disaster affected property were also considered vulnerable, especially after repeated disaster events. These individuals and families would not usually be represented on financial vulnerability indices.

### 4.1.3 What are the negative impacts of disaster for community organisations (organisations)

Participants responded to the question: What impact did disasters have upon your organisation and community? Most frequent responses were:



- Increased need for Community Support
- Considerable resource strain on the organisation
- Negative mental health impact on staff
- The organisation becomes physically isolated (flooding and/or road closures)
- Disruptions & Closures

*“It’s hard to sit down and repeat your story to every single table that you went to, and you just feel like you’re repeating yourself, you’re not being heard, because you’re still repeating. And then they want to know what you lost, and I’m thinking, ‘you’re not going to know what I’ve lost’. I know what I’ve lost, I’ve lost artefacts from Arnhem Land and Kakadu, that floated over my back fence. And I’ll never see them again, you can never replace them, unless I go there.” -Mad Mob*

*“There’s a whole group of kids who are going to be adults who have missed a huge amount of their education. And they’re the most disadvantaged kids in some respects, their low-socio economic, they come from houses with violence sometimes, their parents don’t often have a high level of education, so all those factors we know... creates trauma for them as adults.”- Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury*

*“The whole preparedness, it’s got to come from the top, and it’s just not happening... it can’t just be done by one Council, one area... They’re still dribbling, dribbling and carrying on about the Northern Rivers. The Hawkesbury’s been totally forgotten.”- Richmond Lions Club*

## 4.2 Vulnerabilities

### 4.2.1 What makes individuals more at risk of a prolonged recovery following a disaster event (What vulnerabilities impact individual resilience following disaster)?

The dominant theme was that those who are disadvantaged pre-disaster will be exponentially negatively affected during and post disaster. Repeated disaster events were thought to be the highest risk factor a prolonged recovery. Vulnerabilities included:

- Poverty and/or financial disadvantage
- Living alone
- Single parent with young and/or pre-teen children
- Lack of private transport
- Social isolation
- Older people 65 years+
- Disability, illness, injury; especially if restricting mobility
- Mental illness or poor mental health
- No, or low literacy, in English (including newly arrived migrants)
- Restricted access to technology/telecommunications

*“One of the key areas that we find a big concern here, especially on the river is the people that are living in the caravan parks. Usually very low in their socio-economic ladder. And*

*often the greatest impacted by the floods, they've got the fewest resources, the fewest family connections that they can rely on in these areas. Often, they're on their own, high needs situations that they might be in. And we find that during these events they seem to be impacted the most severe of any of the community we see." – Anonymous*

*"Yes government can be their worst enemy. So when you talk about anything from day to day Centrelink and how the energy you need to stay on Centrelink particularly if you're vulnerable. You get your professional people who learn the ropes and can manage it. But people who are vulnerable don't have the energy. So that sort of funded bureaucracy means that all of these people, and I'm talking taken even, no crisis, just mental health, struggle to access. Because they go, 'I can't, I can't pay that price. You know, I can't turn up'. And they're genuinely too sick or broken." – Kurrajong Baptist Church*

*"People who need transport, that was a huge issue, even if they understood where they were going, how the hell were they going to get there? They don't own a car and all the support services are out." – Inner Sydney Voice*

*"As we know, disasters don't discriminate and anyone can be affected by disaster, but certainly in our experience has been that people with already existing disadvantage, a disaster then comes and really compounds that disadvantage. So maybe people already have existing issues like financial hardship and debt and then the result of a disaster really compounds more harshly on people in those circumstances than it does on people without those existing problems. Specifically in the Hawkesbury we again saw a lot of people impacted that are living in caravan parks. And, look caravan parks as an accommodation option, what we found in practice that it's often being people that are living there as a refuge of last resort. So, they're perhaps on a black list for social housing and are unable to reside in there, or affordability issues of the of the private rental market. And so having that impact on them in their housing situation which was already their last option that again is really compounding their disadvantage" -Anonymous*

*"Our organisation wasn't set up to do disaster response, it wasn't at all, it was a progress association. It definitely wasn't a role we were set up to do. Because the RFS has that role, and the SES has that role, so I guess in the first instance people were asking, 'well why would you be doing this?' And that's a good question, and I think it's because there isn't an SES depo... here at all. They set a temporary one up in Wisemans Ferry in a disaster. Wisemans Ferrys is in a different Council... so there's real bad communication. And we thought, as a local a very local thing just for the Valley, were not getting supported by the SES, RFS are not equipped to deal with floods." -Macdonald Valley Association*

#### 4.2.2 What makes communities more at risk of a prolonged recovery following a disaster event (What vulnerabilities impact community resilience following disaster)?

- Communities that are geographically isolated pre-disaster
- Communities that are affected by telecommunications outages (some overlap with geographic isolation)
- Communities that are cut off for prolonged periods due to disaster

#### 4.3 Assets

Assets included the enhanced preparedness capabilities of individuals and organisations since 2021. A key quote describing assets is *'Our strength and assets is our history with disasters'*. (Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre). It was overwhelmingly reported that an asset to DRR was (unfortunately) the previous experience of the Hawkesbury LGA of multiple, back-to-back, natural disasters. These 'experiences' were repeatedly cited and referenced as a key reason for better preparation, faster responses to preparation and prepare to evacuate warnings, and enhanced resilience and recovery. This requires further exploration to determine if 'emergency drills' and 'mock evacuations' may be worth consideration in high-risk communities. Assets reported:

- NSW Government agencies responding quickly from issuing warnings to removing red tape during recovery,
- NSW Government Agencies making decisions quickly
- Community Services Organisations assisting people quickly before, during and after, disaster events,
- More trained and experienced people 'on the ground' before, during and after disaster events,
- More organisational capability in communities before, during and after disaster events,
- Communities uniting to assist each other
- Organisations working together to assist the community

*“Things have changed, and I think the community would also see that from 2020 all the way through to the last flood in October 2022 there are massive changes in how we reacted, worked with other agencies, and got other agencies on the ground in a lot more of a timely fashion reacting to what needed to be done. And that was not only the physical work in cleaning up, but also the people there as a support for our residents that needed mental health pick up.” -Local Emergency Management Co-ordinator*

- Thinking of the recent disasters, what were the strengths and assets in local organisations and the community in preparing, responding and recovering from emergencies more effectively?
  1. Community Support
  2. Collaboration
  3. Resource Access
  4. Effective Response
  5. Effective Communication
  6. Resilience

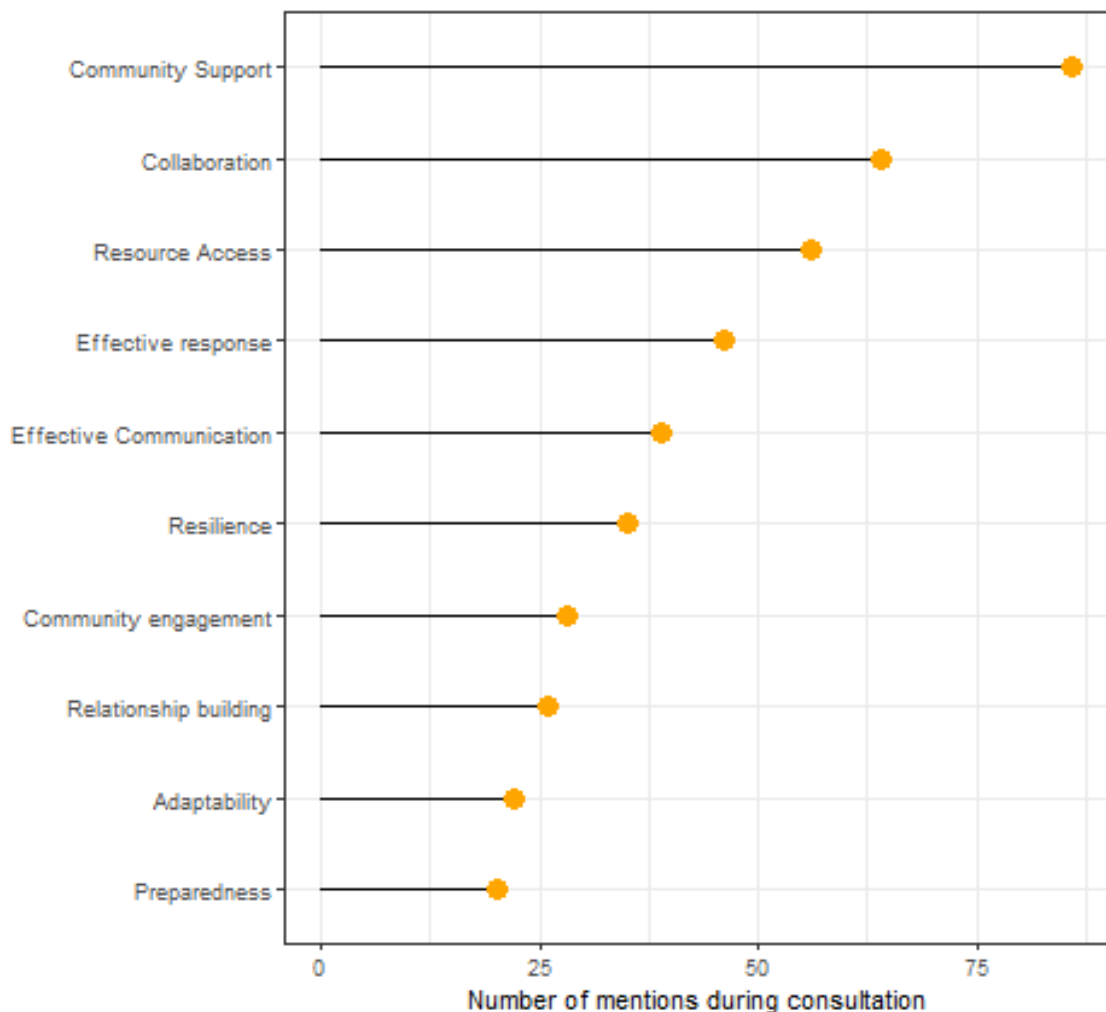
#### 4.4 Strengths

Thematically the three major strengths in the Hawkesbury were:

- Community support for those impacted by disaster,
- Collaboration between community services providers, Government Departments and other providers to assist those affected by disaster, and the
- Availability of resources to assist those affected by disaster

Organisations in the Hawkesbury community emphasise the importance of quick and direct action in responding to disasters. The focus is on practical solutions, accessibility, and community collaboration to ensure effective and efficient response to disasters. The community has shown resilience and support through donations and aid distribution during crises. The success of recovery efforts is attributed to proactive leadership, community connections, and innovative initiatives. Collaboration, training, and communication are key for effective disaster management and community resilience. Challenges remain in coordinating responses for various needs, but leveraging community expertise and resources enhances preparedness and recovery efforts. Additionally, improving communication, coordination, and collaboration among different sectors will strengthen disaster response capabilities.

Strengths and assets in local organisations and the community in preparing, responding and recovering from emergencies more effectively





*“I think that’s what the Hawkesburys always done brilliantly. I think the fact that we’ve always been so under resourced, and because I’ve worked over in Nepean and outer lying areas... Their spoilt rotten, they really are in terms of funds, in terms of specialised workers, in terms of being able to go ‘that’s not my job I’m not doing that, I’m just going to put that down’, being separate from their community in I’m a worker today and I’m not tomorrow. Those sorts of things that have seemed like a negative for many many years in our industry, in the Hawkesbury, it’s been the biggest positive ever. Because you have to pull together, you have to step outside of your job, you have to work with everybody whether you like it or not because there aren’t that many people, you can’t just go to your perspective corners and stay there and not talk to people. You have to work your stuff out. So that sort of stuff in those times makes you a better worker, a better service, and a better community. Because you can put your differences aside and you can get the job done and everybody bogs down and does their bit.” – The Women’s Cottage*

*“If we used St Albans as a localised example in the Hawkesbury, some of the strengths and the assets were individuals who took it upon themselves band together without any external community or organisation support. They sort of came together and said, ‘this is what we need’. They rose to the challenge. There’s little projects, like volunteers being able to assist people to cut wood, or to put up a fence, or to come and help to shoot an animal that needs to be put down. Particularly because those isolated areas don’t always have the Aged Care resources, the health resources, they don’t have the specialists. There’s this need, for not only transport, but for those services to go into those areas. So the strengths and assets are the people that came together to be able to provide that.” - Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the [Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network](#) .*

Organisations in the Hawkesbury community emphasise the importance of quick and direct action in responding to disasters. The focus is on practical solutions, accessibility, and community collaboration to ensure effective and efficient response to disasters. The community has shown resilience and support through donations and aid distribution during crises. The success of recovery efforts is attributed to proactive leadership, community connections, and innovative initiatives. Collaboration, training, and communication are key for effective disaster management and community resilience. Challenges remain in coordinating responses for various needs, but leveraging community expertise and resources enhances preparedness and recovery efforts. Additionally, improving communication, coordination, and collaboration among different sectors will strengthen disaster response capabilities.

## 1. APRIL 2024 FLOOD

The sixth flood event in five years in the Hawkesbury took place from the 5th – 10th April 2024. The Hawkesbury CSDCP team examined the response to the latest flood event in the context of the DRR work undertaken by the team and participating community organisations. The following was noted:

- The Hawkesbury CSDCP team acted proactively and emailed services who had not yet become part of ROW to let them know that HCC were conducting an emergency ROW meeting after the flood event and there was still time to become involved in the recovery effort. As a direct consequence of this, there were a number of services who were new to ROW who attended. The meeting resulted in the organisation of a flood support event at Wilberforce School of Arts.
- The Hawkesbury CSDCP team attended ROW interagency and noted a large presence of agencies in the meeting. NSW RA acknowledged the fantastic work staff from the Hawkesbury have done and thanked all organisations involved in a quick response to the recent disaster event.

### Improvements noted since last flood event:

- Evacuation Centers were activated in a timely manner
- Evacuation messaging and information relayed to the community has improved with faster and earlier warnings. More notice given to residents to evacuate, resulting in more time for residents to prepare to leave.
- Sandbags available earlier than previous floods.
- Hawkesbury City Council activated a disaster recovery hub swiftly. With a robust number of agencies/ organisations attending to provide services and support for flood effected residents.

The most recent flood event shows improvements in disaster response. Also noted is the coordination role the Hawkesbury CSDCP team were able to undertake. Are the improvements a result of the DRR work undertaken in the Hawkesbury LGA? The Hawkesbury CSDCP team posit that ongoing funding of DRR would enable us to quantify how to best improve community services organisations' responses to disaster and to play an active and ongoing role in community DRR.

## 2. URGENT ISSUES

The two issues highlighted in the data as most urgently needing attention were:

- Earlier opening of evacuation centres to allow those most vulnerable in the community to 'leave early', and
- More options available to temporarily accommodate stock, household pets and injured/displaced wildlife during disasters.

### **Earlier opening of evacuation centres for vulnerable, at-risk individuals**

The Hawkesbury CSDCP team have identified seven key risk factors for individuals at critical risk in a disaster. To prevent loss of life or serious injury, individuals at critical risk of death or serious injury, must be encouraged to leave their residence prior to a mandatory evacuation order. Individuals at critical risk who do not leave early are more likely to require emergency management resources – ambulance, air flight etc. – to assist with their evacuation. These individuals will not have family or friends who can accommodate them, nor will they have the disposable income necessary to pay for

alternative accommodation. These individuals will be reliant on evacuation centres for emergency accommodation.

### **Temporary accommodation of stock, household pets and injured/displaced wildlife during disasters**

- There is a capped limit on horse and animal evacuation space at Hawkesbury Showground.
- Community unable to provide assistance to injured wildlife due to road closures and road barriers.
- There was not enough temporary accommodation available for displaced persons with animals. Pet boarding needed to be organised. Individuals who could not afford the cost of boarding pets elected to return to unsafe housing or became homeless.

- People will risk their lives to save animals in distress. Animals may be pets, stock or wildlife.

## Recommendations

**Recommendation 1** – That NSW Government ensures earlier opening of Evacuation Centres for those individuals identified as at greatest risk of death or serious injury in the event of disaster.

**Recommendation 2** – That there is more research undertaken to explore options available to temporarily accommodate stock, household pets and wildlife during disasters.

*“Whilst working at the evacuation centre I came across some community members that were very traumatised after having to evacuate from the floods. And one of them was a man that was living in a vulnerable situation in a caravan park, and he only had a motorbike as his vehicle. After staying there for a night, he was told the next day that he would need to leave the evacuation centre and go to accommodation that was arranged for him in Penrith. But the difficulty with that was that he had to travel from Bells Line of Road that was heavily potholed. There were landslides and it is not a safe road for a tiny bike. I offered to escort him all the way down from Bells Line of Road down to the Great Western Highway to Hazelbrook. And also during that time it was in pouring rain and there was trucks barrelling along so I got the feeling that he was pushed out of his accommodation when it probably would have been beneficial for him to stay at least another one or two days just so his nervous system can come down and be much more calmer, **other than being no** he needed a place to rest and the feedback I got from two other ladies I spoke to who really wanted to stay longer and got pushed out the day after staying there overnight... Well as far as I'm aware the evacuation centre was still open when they pushed those people out so and that my understanding was that would be paid for. Clearly, they could have just let them stay, even if it was overnight, just to let them have a good night sleep because they were still really distressed.” – Anonymous*

*“At the recovery centres and the evacuation centres I feel that the staff need to have trauma informed training and also there needs to be break out spaces to take clients or members of the public so that if they need to go into a counselling debrief there is spaces for that so you're not breaching confidentiality. Because in recovery centres also crowded, there is no space for someone crying.” – Anonymous*

*“I think that the other thing was the animals side of things. That was a big debacle as well because a lot of people take the animals with them, which made them not want to leave so they delayed evacuating. And then people took their animals, got to the shelter and were told, ‘no, you’re not allowed to bring your animals in’. So, I had one lady sleeping in the car with her dog because her dog was really her companion animal.” -Person Centred Emergency Preparedness facilitator, Peppercorn*

*“The idea would be to have a pamphlet out saying, ‘this is where you can go to for your information. Which community centres are open. Who’s taking animals, who’s not taking animals.’” – Bridges Disability Services*

*“My next door neighbour, who’s in her forties but no technology, didn’t even know we had a bushfire coming towards us.” – Bridges Disability Services*

*“There’s a lot of initial trauma, initial drama, trauma and shock. People turning up, you know sometimes with animals, worst one was... when the Caravan Park was evacuated... that was a massive drama, had people turned up, they were forcefully evacuated from the Caravan Park, brought here by the police. Sometimes wet. We had no spare clothes, no showers, no nothing. We had nothing here. Which is when then the local church jumped to the rescue and they said ‘what do you need?’ And they put it out to their congregation and brought things.” – Anonymous*

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

The Hawkesbury CSDCP has met the aims and objectives of the Community Sector Disaster Capability Project by building a collaborative, networked approach to local disaster management:

- increasing understanding of the strengths and disaster risks of local communities:
- strengthening organisational and community capacity and
  
- networking to assess disaster risk for vulnerable population groups, and
- building relationships and promoting ongoing collaboration within the community services and emergency management sectors.

We have collected, collated and analysed data that informs our extensive knowledge base.

We have provided a replicable model that will enable community services organisations in NSW to work successfully in DRR in their local communities.





## Acronyms

AbSec	NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Corporation
BPCSI	Bligh Park Community Services Incorporated
CSDCP	Community Sector Disaster Capability Project
CSDCP	Community Sector Disaster Capability Project
DPI	NSW Department of Primary industries
DRR	Disaster Risk Reduction
DRRF	NSW Reconstruction Authority Disaster Risk Reduction Fund
HCC	Hawkesbury City Council
HCSDCP	Hawkesbury Community Sector Disaster Capability Project
LCSA	Local Community Services Association
LEMC	Local Emergency Management Committee
LGA	Local Government Area
NCOSS	NSW Council of Social Service
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
NPADRR	The National Partnership Agreement on Disaster Risk Reduction
NSW	New South Wales
PSI	Peppercorn Services Incorporated
RA	NSW Reconstruction Authority
ROW	Recovery on Wheels

## APPENDIX 1

### Definitions

#### Hazard

A process, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, social and economic disruption, or environmental degradation. *(United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://www.undrr.org/terminology>)*

#### Disaster Risk

The potential loss of life, injury, or destroyed or damaged assets which could occur to a system, society, or a community in a specific period of time, determined probabilistically as a function of hazard, exposure, vulnerability and capacity. *(United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://www.undrr.org/terminology>)*

#### Disaster Risk Reduction

Disaster risk reduction is aimed at preventing new and reducing existing disaster risk and managing residual risk, all of which contribute to strengthening resilience and therefore to the achievement of sustainable development. *(United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://www.undrr.org/terminology>)*

#### Vulnerability (in the context of disaster risk)

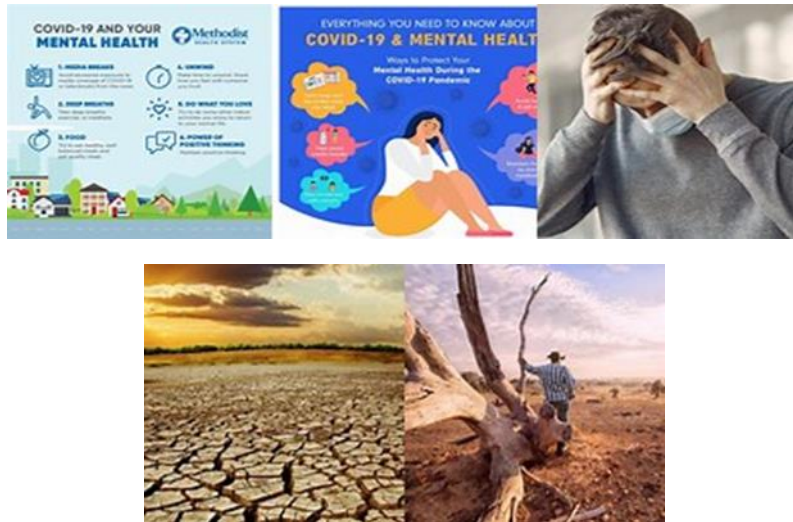
The conditions determined by physical, social, economic and environmental factors or processes which increase the susceptibility of an individual, a community, assets or systems to the impacts of hazards. *(United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://www.undrr.org/terminology>)*

#### Capacity (in the context of disaster risk)

The combination of all the strengths, attributes and resources available within an organisation, community or society to manage and reduce disaster risks and strengthen resilience. *(United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction, <https://www.undrr.org/terminology>)*

## Strengths and Assets

Community capitals - natural, social, financial, cultural, built, political, and human – that contribute to community wellbeing and resilience. (Phoenix Australia, *The Recovery Capitals (ReCap) Framework*, <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/disaster-hub/resources/recovery-capitals/about-the-project>)



## APPENDIX 2

### Formal Interview Questions

1. Tell us about your organisation.
2. What disasters has your organisation experienced or seen in the Hawkesbury?
3. What impact did these disasters have upon your organisation and community?
4. What activities did your organisation undertake in preparation for future emergencies or in recent disasters and recovery?

*What preparedness work? How did you help the community?*

5. What were the barriers to your organisation in carrying out disaster response, recovery or readiness work?
6. What were your organisations learnings from previous disasters?
7. Thinking of the recent disasters in your community, who, what or where was more at risk to the impact of emergencies and prolonged recovery?
8. How could this risk be addressed?

*What should be done? Who needs to be involved?*

9. When you think of future disasters in your area, what worries you the most? Why?
10. What can be done to help address this concern?
11. Thinking of the recent disasters, what were the strengths and assets in local organisations and the community in preparing, responding and recovering from emergencies more effectively?

*Examples? Who or what did individuals and the community turn to for support? Where did individuals and community go to for support? What worked well? How could this be improved or extended?*

12. As an organisation, what would you like to do in the disaster space in the future?
13. What skills, information or resources would your organisation or staff need to carry out this work?
14. What would help local community organisations and groups better prepare for their roles in future disasters? What resources would need to be available? How could local organisations work together to achieve this?

## APPENDIX 3

### Formal Interview Participants

Bligh Park Community Services Inc

Bowen Mountain Association

Bridges Disability Services

Department of Communities & Justice

Glossodia Community Centre

Hawkesbury Community Kitchen Inc/The Jeremiah Project

Hawkesbury Helping Hands

Hawkesbury Valley Mens Shed

Hawkesbury City Council

Hawkesbury Community Outreach Services

Hope4U Foundation

Inner Sydney Voice

Kurrajong Baptist Church

Legal Aid

Link Wentworth

Lions Club Richmond

Macdonald Valley Association

Mad Mob

Merana Aboriginal Community Association for the Hawkesbury Inc

NBMPHN

NEMA

North Richmond Community Centre

Peppercorn Services Inc

Richmond Community Services Inc

Salvation Army Windsor

Strong Nation Community

The Women's Cottage

Upper Colo Progress Association

Wallacia Progress Association

Winmalee Neighbourhood Centre

## APPENDIX 4

### Survey

SUBURB:

- 1. Tell us about your experience in the recent disasters. What were your learnings?**
- 2. Who, what, where did you turn to for support, information and assistance in the community during and after a disaster?**
- 3. What worked and didn't work well in the community before, during and after the recent disasters?**
- 4. What would help the local community and organisations better prepare for future disasters?**



## References

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