ANU Public Policy Week 2013

Disaster Policy and Emergency Management

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Today…

- Disasters and emergency management as public policy problems:

- **Four questions:**

  ➔ *is there a policy trajectory?*
  ➔ *are we maintaining that trajectory?*
  ➔ *do we learn, or panic and blame?*
  ➔ *some policy options?*

Acknowledging…

- @ANU: Michael Eburn, Peter Weiske, Karen Hussey and the adaptation/floods team, Geoff Cary and the Fire Lab team…

- @RMIT: John Handmer.

- Many senior emergency managers.

- Bushfire CRC and NCCARF.

- Handmer, J & Dovers, S. 2013. *Handbook of disaster policies and institutions*. London: 2nd edition. Routledge/Earthscan.

Policy context

- C'wealth: - funding, some policy development, coordination, some operational capacity.
- **Dominant: state and territory emergency agencies.**
- Other state agencies and processes (planning, transport, forestry, parks, health, etc).
- Strong volunteer base.
- Local government (oft-forgotten).
- + Private sector, NGOs, communities, spontaneous volunteers…
- Impacted by many other policy sectors (constructing vulnerability)

→ *uncertainty; variable in time and space; high stakes; institutional complexity; poorly understood legal and policy settings; fast and hard feedbacks…*

Changing policy landscape

- Greater national profile and policy development.

- Apparent greater frequency and intensity of extreme events; increasing vulnerability.

- Rising, and confused, expectations on EM.

- EM cleans up other people's messes – can we "mainstream" disaster and emergency policy to decrease the need to respond and recover?

- 2 new national social and policy goals:
  → *"shared responsibility"*
  → *"disaster resilient communities".*

1. Is there a trajectory?

Yes, a steady evolution >20 years **(Salter 1998)**

- **FROM:**
  - Focus: hazards
    - Reactive
    - Single agencies
    - Science-driven
  - Response management
  - Planning <u>for</u> communities
    - Communicating <u>to</u> communities

- **TO:**
  - Focus: vulnerability
    - Proactive
    - Partnerships
    - Multi-disciplinary
  - Shared risk management
  - Planning <u>with</u> communities
    - Communicating <u>with</u> communities.

2. Are we maintaining that trajectory?

- **Answer #1**
  → *yes, in a steady but inevitably incremental, messy evolution of policy and practice within EM.*

- **Answer #2**
  → *no, as political, media and research interests engage and thrash about unthinkingly.*

… so, what's new?

- "Shared responsibility"
- "Disaster resilient communities"

→ *not new – part of a long evolution of policy and practice within emergency management*

→ politics, media and researchers catching up?

3. Do we learn, or panic and blame?

- Unpredictability, uncertainty and down times = difficult to maintaining policy attention.

- **"Policy windows", or forgetfulness, then spasms of panic and blame.?**

- Three issues for today:
  → *increasing scrutiny, media scrums, and blaming EM officials.*
  → *the dangers of proceduralism (eg. Wivenhoe).*
  → *and adversarial inquiries…*

Post event inquiries & policy learning

- **'Omnibus' post-event inquiries: media feasts and major drivers of policy change:**

- <u>Purposes</u>: political imperative to act, evaluation of events and response, hear community voices, investigate specific issues, gather evidence, make recommendations.

- <u>Problems</u>: variable forms and processes, defined by a one-off event, limited by ToR, too slow, adversarial, cover too many very different things, long list of (non-binding) and sometimes imperfect recommendations.

4. Some policy options

- **Mainstreaming**: weighting of ESO advice in policy and planning processes?

- **Proceduralism**: can we explicitly recognise uncertainty and unpredictability, and legitimize professional judgement in procedures?

- **Blame & trepidation**:
  → *legal and inquiry training for EM practitioners*
  → *clarification of expectations and establish measures of success in objects and policies.*

- **Inquiries…**

Alternatives to inquiries:

1. Institutionalised lesson-drawing and analytical facility (AEMI, other models?).

2. **Two stage inquiry process:**

   → *independent panel, to hear experiences and identify issues, quickly, wide ToR.*
   → *recommend <u>specific investigation processes</u> suited to the issues identified – administrative coordination, communications, land use planning, local capacity, statutory reform, liability.*

(With apologies to Dorothea Mackellar)

I love a populist country
A land of sweeping claims
Of self-appointed opinion leaders
Of greed and near term gains.

I love her weak land use planning
The hypocrisy that is so strong
The headlines and litigation
And the blame when things go wrong.