

# DISASTER RESILIENCE, MANAGEMENT AND PREPAREDNESS IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES IN DARWIN AND PALMERSTON

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FINAL REPORT JANUARY 2016



LARRAKIA  
NATION

the  
power of  
humanity



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Cover image: Yolŋu Long Grassers talking with project researchers at Nightcliff foreshore.

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Consultation at Lambell Terrace Park



# Executive Summary

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This project was funded by the Northern Territory Emergency Services (NTES) through the Northern Territory Natural Disaster Resilience Program; and was run as a partner project by Australian Red Cross and the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC).

In June 2015, Australian Red Cross commissioned the Northern Institute of Charles Darwin University to carry out a series of consultations focused on the experiences of Indigenous communities in Darwin and Palmerston during emergencies.

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Darwin when a cyclone, bushfire or severe weather event strikes and in its aftermath, and to identify determinants of vulnerability from the perspective of these communities.

Initial consultations were carried out with Indigenous people living in each of the seven Town Communities in the greater Darwin Area: Bagot, One Mile Dam, Acacia, Knuckey's Lagoon, Palmerston Indigenous Village, Kulaluk and Minmarama, as well as with small groups of Indigenous people living in Long Grass camps around Darwin.

Residents of these communities frequently experience severe and extreme weather events. They represent vulnerable populations which are catered for within existing regional and Territory based Emergency Management Plans, but who have not previously been consulted about their experiences of emergency events.

During these project consultations, we spoke with Larrakia, Tiwi, Yolju and Desert people living in Darwin and Palmerston. They told stories

of emergency events they had experienced in the past, and explained how they had managed during these times—working together with friends and family, as well as with government agencies and service providers.

Emerging out of these discussions, we have found that residents of the Town Communities and Long Grass were more prepared for adverse weather than we had anticipated. They were generally alert to means by which they may work together and with Northern Territory Emergency Services and Larrakia Nation to remain safe, and to manage the effects of bad weather. At the same time, these consultations also pointed to a number of gaps and potential actions which may be taken by government and non-government organisations to maintain and improve emergency management practices in the future.

In Part 1 of the report, we summarise our discussions with people in Town Communities and the Long Grass, categorising them in relation to four stages of emergency management as operationalised in the Northern Territory Emergency Plan 2015 ([www.pfes.nt.gov.au](http://www.pfes.nt.gov.au)).

In Part 2, we draw on a series of discussions with government departments and service providers, and translate these consultation findings into possible service delivery responses and a communications plan, supporting the further development of emergency management practices going forward.

# Key Findings

- Almost all of the people we spoke to in both the Town Communities and Long Grass were aware of the dangers of severe weather and the cyclone season and could name the location of nearby cyclone shelters.
- Those we spoke to frequently named specific strategies that they put into place when bad weather approaches. These strategies involved working in a coordinated fashion with friends and family to ensure that the young, sick and elderly are able to access shelter.
- There was a general appreciation for existing measures supporting Indigenous people from the Town Communities and Long Grass during emergencies, particularly in relation to the provision of transport services and food, dry clothes and bedding after extreme weather events.
- All those we spoke to agreed that the Night Patrol and other Larrakia Nation outreach services play a crucial role in supporting Darwin and Palmerston's Indigenous communities, and play a very significant role in the management of emergency events.
- There was also a clear agreement that increased levels of support around current emergency management practices would help improve safety and well-being in times of crisis. Specifically, assistance with clean ups and increased levels of general housing maintenance in the Town Communities, increased availability of transport to shelters, and earlier and more localised access to shelters for those in the Long Grass.
- Housing availability and maintenance was an issue regularly raised by project participants. People in the Town Communities were often worried that their houses were not adequately coded or maintained, at the same time as describing themselves as feeling safer in their homes and preferring to stay there during extreme weather events.
- There were both similarities and differences in the responses provided by participants at different Town Communities (e.g. all communities mentioned transport and housing as significant to their safety during emergencies. However, Acacia and One Mile Dam were the only communities where fire emerged as an issue, and One Mile Dam was the only community where flooding was a semi-regular occurrence).
- Through our discussions it became clear that early warnings of bad weather came through a number of routes including standard media outlets (e.g. TV and radio), informal community interaction (e.g. conversations at the bottle shop), family networks (e.g. through visits and text messages) and through traditional sensitivities to weather patterns and changes.
- It was also apparent that face-to-face interaction was likely to be the most effective way for NTES, service providers and other organisations to communicate with people in the Town Communities and Long Grass, and to provide education or information ahead of emergency events.
- There was some recognition that Town Community and Long Grass residents felt more comfortable engaging with Indigenous staff and volunteers around emergency events (i.e. during preparations, and at shelters and recovery centres), and that employing Indigenous staff to liaise between Indigenous communities and official agencies may help limit distress and cross-cultural miscommunication at these times.
- There was a general interest amongst those that we spoke to, to be more significantly involved in preparations and management of emergencies; both in relation to general maintenance to be carried out year round, and in the event of an emergency.



## Background

This project was funded by the Northern Territory Emergency Services through the Northern Territory Natural Disaster Resilience Program. The Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance Team, Northern Institutem, Charles Darwin Universit were invited to join this project in June 2015. Our experience is in the collaborative design of research projects and services, working with Indigenous researchers, consultants and knowledge authorities in Darwin and remote communities.

Throughout this project we have been guided by, and supported, several key Indigenous researchers—Kellie Pollard, Donna Jackson and Maurice Fejo from the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation, James Gaykamanju from the Bagot Community, and Yirrininba and Bulkanhawuy from Raki' Mala Indigenous Consultants. Without the knowledge, experience and engagement methods of the Indigenous co-researchers, it would not have been possible to meet with so many people and work carefully with their ideas and experiences.

As we began work on the project Australian Red Cross introduced us to the existing project plans and objectives. Key Northern Territory Emergency Services staff also emphasised that hearing the stories and experiences of vulnerable people in adverse weather would be of particular benefit as they devised future emergency management strategies and community engagement activities.

We met with Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation (LNAC) to discuss their current role in working with vulnerable Aboriginal populations, and to devise a working plan for the project. All subsequent activities have been carried out under the guidance of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation, and as a collaboration between Charles Darwin University and Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation researchers.

It was agreed that while aspects of traditional knowledge may arise in these consultations, they would not be a primary focus of the research. The project was instead more significantly focused around the identification of tangible local outcomes supporting the safety and well-being of Indigenous communities during future emergency events.

To guide these outcomes, we have sought feedback from the appointed Stakeholder Engagement Group throughout the duration of the project.

# What We Did

## Preparation

Beginning the research, we looked at and produced various 'maps' which may be useful to develop or make more public as part of a broader Northern Territory Emergency Services strategy.

- Map of cyclone shelter locations—we have located the 'CYCLONES—GET READY GET THRU' leaflet produced by the Northern Territory Emergency Services which has useful information on 'What do I need? and What do I do?' as well as good maps of shelter locations. We considered whether it might be worthwhile to develop a plain English version of the leaflet, but the people we interviewed all knew where the shelters are, what their options and services are, so new versions of the leaflets may not serve a significant purpose.
- As part of our research with the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation we have developed a map showing the location of Long Grass populations, the different remote communities of affiliation, and the Long Grassers' names for the different places. This information is well known to the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation Night Patrol and the police, so we suggested that there may not be a lot of use in reproducing this map for official purposes. In the short period of this research project, we found that due to the highly mobile and itinerant nature of these communities, these maps had a very limited lifespan.
- The Australian Red Cross provided us with an excellent organisational diagram of the services involved in NT Response and Recovery. We found that people in government and in the non government organisations were very well across these structures and services and the relations between them, and we suggested that communicating information about those government organisations and non government organisations to the residents of Town Communities and the Long Grassers would not really serve any significant purpose, and could cause confusion.

The mapping exercise helped us and the Indigenous co-researchers understand the scope of the research project. For further discussion, see the communications plan in Part 2 below. We received no feedback from Northern

Territory Emergency Services or the Steering Committee to indicate that they thought that any further work on these maps would be useful at this time.

## Consultations

Initial project consultations took place between July and October 2015. Researchers from the Charles Darwin University, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Raki' Mala Indigenous Consultants meet with Town Community leaders, and conducted a total of 96 interviews. A further 15 interviews were also conducted by Bagot community elder, James Gaykamanju, and served as the basis of a report which was submitted to the research team (see appendix).

All consultations were carried out as informal conversations or 'yarning sessions' where we sat down with people in small family groups and discussed the project. We explained that we were interested in hearing about their experiences of bad weather, cyclones and other emergencies, and we took with us a set of prepared questions which we used to initiate and guide the discussions. These questions were based on key issues raised in the project proposal, and were sent to members of the steering committee to review and comment on prior to their use within the consultations.

Selection of participants was opportunistic (particularly when working in the Long Grass), and often followed family relationships within community groups. We generally found that we were working evenly with women and men, and primarily consulted across three age groups: 25-40, 40-55, 55-70 with a small majority of participants falling in this middle range.

## Town Communities

We visited all of the seven Town communities in Darwin and Palmerston: Bagot, Acacia, Palmerston Indigenous Village, Knuckey's Lagoon, One Mile Dam, Kulukuk and Minmarama, and interviewed a total of 49 people.

When visiting Town Communities prior permission was sought from community leaders before any consultations took place. An Indigenous co-researcher was always present at these consultations.

We were always flexible with our research schedule, organising visits around the availabilities of Town

Community leaders, project participants and members of the research team. On a number of occasions we found ourselves cancelling, or initiating consultations at very short notice as 'sorry business' arose, or unexpected windows of opportunity opened up.

At times we found it useful to coordinate our discussions so as to take advantage of meetings which were already occurring e.g. Bagot town safety committee meeting, and Amity men's and women's groups. All participants involved in these consultations were paid for their time with food, grocery vouchers or power cards.

### Long Grass

- We visited Nightcliff Foreshore, Stuart Park, Mindil Beach, Fannie Bay, Lake Alexander, The Narrows Park, Lambell Terrace Park and Rapid Creek Bridge, and interviewed a total of 47 people.
- An Indigenous co-researcher was always present at these consultations in the Long Grass, and would always be the first to speak and introduce the project.
- When visiting the Long Grass, we often relied on footwork and word-of-mouth to learn where people were camping. We would attempt to arrive at camps early in the day, before people had left to go about their daily business.
- All participants involved in these consultations were paid for their time with food or grocery vouchers.

In both the Town Communities and the Long Grass, the majority of our conversations were carried out in English. However, there were occasions when consultations were carried out in a mixture of Yolŋu matha (language) and English, with Yolŋu researchers from the Raki' Mala Indigenous Consultancy facilitating the discussion in these cases.

Discussions were recorded via notes made by researchers during and after consultation meetings. In some instances audio recordings were also made, allowing subsequent clarification and/or translation.

We attempted to visit the camp behind Darwin Hospital on a number of occasions. However, the group that frequently stays there had returned to Oenpelli for ceremony for an extended period of time, and we were not able to meet with them during the period of our research.

### Other stakeholders

We met with a number of stakeholder groups to discuss the project: Welfare Group, Public Health Group, Transport Group, Emergency Shelter Group (by phone and email), Northern Territory Police, Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and Australian Red Cross.

These stakeholder groups were approached in response to particular issues which arose within the consultations, and/or in response to recommendations by other stakeholders

When speaking with these stakeholders we sought to learn about their key roles in emergency management, as well as their particular interactions with vulnerable populations in the Town Communities and Long Grass during emergencies.

### Follow-up consultations

In October 2015, after completing our initial round of discussions, we produced an interim report detailing consultation findings and service delivery responses. This report was circulated amongst members of the Stakeholder Engagement Group and other interested parties, and their comments were sought.

In November 2015, the project researchers returned to the Town Communities and Long Grass camps that we had visited, to seek endorsement of the report findings and recommendations from those we had consulted with previously. During this second round of interviews we met with a total of 52 people.

We revisited 33 people in the Town Communities of Bagot, Acacia, Knuckey's Lagoon, One Mile Dam, Minmarama and Palmerston Indigenous Village. We were unable to revisit Kulaluk due to difficulties in scheduling a meeting with the Town Community leader, Helen Fejo.

We also visited 18 people in the Long Grass, returning to Mindil Beach, Fannie Bay, Lake Alexander, Stuart Park and The Narrows Park. Where possible we tried to revisit the same participants we had met with during the first round of consultations, however we were not always successful.

Comments arising from these follow-up discussions are reported on, and have been incorporated into, the findings and service delivery responses detailed below.



Filling in project consent forms at Nightcliff foreshore

# Part 1: Consultation Outcomes

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In this section we report only on the consultations carried out in Town Communities and with people in the Long Grass. The views presented are those of the participants we spoke with. In Part 2 of this report, we translate these views into possible service delivery and communication responses.

In both the Town Communities and the Long Grass, the people we spoke to were very interested in maintaining existing good relationships with emergency services and service providers, and sought if possible to extend and enhance (rather than significantly alter) services which are currently provided.

Those in the Town Communities told stories of ways that they had organised themselves and others in their communities during previous emergency events - collecting food, alerting neighbours and either preparing to remain in their houses, or organising private and

community vehicles to transport themselves and others to shelters.

In speaking with Long Grassers in particular, we found that people were generally very appreciative of the support that they received from emergency services organisations during adverse weather events.

The work of the Police and Night Patrol assisting to transport people at these times was highly valued, as were the efforts of government agencies and service providers assisting people with food, shelter, bedding and medical attention following a cyclone or other emergencies.

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## Town Communities

Reporting on our discussions in Town Communities, comments have been roughly arranged so as to correspond with the key principles of emergency management which are mobilised in the Northern Territory Emergency Plan, 2015. We have italicised points which could be relevant to the development of improved safety strategies or communication.

### 1. Prevention/Mitigation activities

Very early on in our consultations housing emerged as a key issue. This was both around the number of cyclone coded houses available to residents, and around clarifying responsibilities

- Residents were not always clear which houses in their communities were cyclone coded and/or remained coded given structural and other deterioration which had taken place. "Some of the houses are up to code, and some aren't. We are not always sure which is which." Bagot
- At One Mile Dam, it was expressed that if there were greater numbers of cyclone coded houses, residents could stay safely in their homes throughout cyclones and bad weather and this is what they would prefer to do. "If the houses were cyclone safe and up higher

for housing maintenance. The importance of involving Yilli Rreung Aboriginal Housing Corporation as a key stakeholder in discussions around cyclone safety was reiterated on a number of occasions.

- then we could stay, wouldn't have to go anywhere else." One Mile Dam
- At Acacia, people also want to be able to be together and help each other out during cyclones. "In some of the houses the bathrooms are coded but if it gets bad we go to the shed (which the Town Camp leader believes is cyclone coded)."
- At Knuckey's Lagoon, some houses are coded and some are not, and again there was confusion around which houses are coded. "...But [even so] some people will stay

behind because there isn't transport to get to the shelter."

- At Bagot, residents expressed a desire for Yilli Rreung to be much more significantly involved in checking houses (fixing doors, windows and drains) and reviewing houses for compliance with minimum safety standards in collaboration with Northern Territory Emergency Services.
- Similar sentiments were expressed at Minmarama: "Because the roofs don't extend out, whenever it rains we have to go inside and close all the windows, otherwise the water all comes in and the lounge room gets flooded. There is no air circulation. There should be a lot more work between Northern Territory Emergency Services and Yilli Reung."
- Issues around flooding and flood damage prevention were mentioned in two communities:  
"The water comes up around those two houses, and you can't get up to the road, can't cross the road. Those two houses get cut off very early and we need to be ready for that."  
One Mile Dam

"There used to be flooding, but now its not really a problem. There is a wall with dirt, bits of bitumen and other things in it. It helps to stop flooding. Of course if there was a tsunami it wouldn't help." Kulaluk

## 2. Preparedness activities ('before')

We asked people if their communities had formal plans or procedures to follow in event of a cyclone. While some people could describe personal strategies for managing cyclones that they had enacted in the past, no community reported having a pre-prepared cyclone plan.

- At Acacia there was general advice that people tended to follow: "If it's bad, then come to the shed. Otherwise stay at home, or go to Berry Springs as a last resort."
- At Palmerston Indigenous Village (PIV) : "... there is no plan at all, a number of the houses are coded, the tin houses are not."
- At Knuckey's Lagoon, when asked about a plan residents said that they warn each other, and that the community leader takes on a role as coordinator during crisis times.
- At One Mile Dam, no-one was aware of a plan, but did suggest that they often followed the advice of the Town Community leader.
- At Minmarama we were told that: "...everyone

generally goes to the cyclone shelter if it is bad. We lock the dogs in the house, with some food and water."

- Those we spoke to at Kulaluk described themselves as well prepared for bad weather. "We know what is going on. We listen to the radio and decide if we will stay or go. If we are going to go, they tell everyone that it is not safe to stay. We wait and listen for the category. We wait by the category; we know that if it goes above a category two we have to get ourselves to the shelter."
- At Bagot there is no current plan, however, it was mentioned that Bagot Council may be working on a formal cyclone plan, and that this may be something that could be further developed with Northern Territory Emergency Services support.

Preparations for cyclone season frequently took the form of rubbish collections in the community. In some places this took the form of a coordinated collection early in the season, however in others this occurred hurriedly after a cyclone warning was announced.

- Acacia community has rubbish collections before and after cyclones. Yilli Rreung does come and help with these clean ups "if you pester them", but the community would like to be included in the Darwin/Palmerston cyclone clean-up campaign.
- At Palmerston Indigenous Village there is concern about a large number of car wrecks on the property which will be missiles during a cyclone. Residents cannot move these on their own, and would appreciate assistance in removing them.
- At Bagot residents talked about informal clean-up arrangements with Yilli, and Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation and a private company called "Able" who did not charge to remove some larger rubbish items. As well as about semi-formal clean ups initiated by Yilli Rreung prior to the cyclone season.
- At Knuckey's Lagoon residents said that they needed help to remove rubbish and cars from the community.
- At Minmarama: "Yilli comes and picks stuff up. But we have to pay for our own skip bins... If there was CDP in the community, people could do cyclone clean up here and then they don't have to worry about going out and being shame."
- At Kulaluk it was remembered that the

council used to collect rubbish, but now the responsibilities have been handed over:

“In the past the city council would come in and give people fliers. Now Yilli give people a big skip bin. We all put our stuff in there. But Yilli still has to come by and get the big stuff (and you have to complain to get them to come).”

- At One Mile Dam, those we spoke to explained that when they heard a cyclone was coming they would run around, and pick things up. Rubbish and other large objects.

When asked about whether there were regular interactions between Emergency Services (government and service providers) and Town Communities there seemed to be a discrepancy between the city communities and those further out.

Residents of camps located in Darwin talked about frequent interactions with police, fire brigade and others.

- “(Laughing) The fire brigade are always here. We have so many grass fires.” One Mile Dam
- “We have good relations with the Police. Meet with them every month.” Bagot
- “The fire brigade comes if they are called; they also sometimes come to do burning off. It would be nice if they let people know when it was going to happen, if they could come by with some leaflets a few days before.” Minmarama

Residents at Acacia, Knuckey's Lagoon, PIV and Kulaluk suggest they would like more frequent interaction, helping preparedness for emergencies.

- “There is no support at all, no outside help from government or other people. Batchelor police have sometimes checked and warned us just before, sometimes afterwards. But we want the authorities to always check. We don't want to be forgotten.” Acacia
- “We don't have support from government and other organisations.” Palmerston Indigenous Village
- “We need as much help as we can get from Police and Emergency Services to warn us and assist with evacuation.” Knuckey's Lagoon
- “It would be really good if they could come out and let people know if there was a warning and things were about to get really bad. Then people could go and get their stuff, particularly sick people, and people on puffers. It would be good to know early because of the elderly people who can't walk, you have to go and

motivate them. We need to have warning to get these people up and going.” Minmarama

Several Town Communities were concerned about bushfire, i.e. One Mile Dam and Acacia. At One Mile Dam there is no controlled early burn off. At Acacia they do almost all burning off and bushfire protection themselves. There used to be training that taught people about fire management, however it was closed down. Nowadays they would like for there to be planned checks by the Bushfire Council, rather than the community needing to chase him before something can be done.

- “Bushfire mob are hopeless because they have to be chased to get them out to the community.” Acacia
- “There is always change of personnel.” Acacia
- “Furies should be made to do regular checks on communities in their zone, and don't wait until being called to come out.” Acacia

### 3. Response Activities ('during')

We spoke with people about where residents get their information in event of a cyclone or other emergency.

- Knuckey's Lagoon: TV, radio, Police, Night Patrol, word of mouth.
- PIV: “We see TV, listen to radio newspapers.”
- Acacia: “Listen to radio and TV to access news. Or text to contact people.”
- One Mile Dam: “TV or radio, but we don't always have electricity. Or David [Town Community leader] talks to us.”
- Bagot: “We don't get messages directly from the NT police, fire and emergency services and people think there is a breakdown in communication and coordination.”
- Kulaluk: “We listen to the radio, and decide if we will stay or go.”

There was no mention of social media as a current source of information (although this may have been different if we had spoken to younger people who are more familiar with facebook and the use of smart phones).

There were a few people in Town Communities who were not aware where the nearest shelter was (One Mile Dam). However, most named shelters nearby to where they were living as a place to go, and almost everyone knew the Casuarina car park.

- Bagot: “Last cyclone everyone went to Nightcliff School.”

- One Mile Dam: People recounted experiences going to the Supreme Court and to Casuarina.
- Knuckey's Lagoon: "Kormilda College is the nearest shelter."
- PIV: "We can go to Howard Springs school."
- Acacia: "If it's bad go to the community shed. There is also the shelter in Berry Springs, but we don't recall using it."
- Minmarama: "If a cyclone comes we go to Nightcliff. Going to the shelter is good. Everyone gets together and has a bit of a chat. Its good to get people together and to understand and help each other. Because other times, people can be in their houses, different communities and you don't always see each other."

Transport was raised as a significant issue at all of the Town Communities we visited. There were various strategies mentioned for making do with available vehicles, as well as requests for better transport services to be provided.

No-one in the Palmerston region reported being picked up by police and Night Patrol.

- "The main problem is transport, most people in the community don't have working cars, so if evacuation is necessary then they have to rely on each other and the vehicles that are here. There was often agreement that transporting often took place too late, when the rain was coming down very heavily, often combined with 'big wind' and some flooding making the transporting of people quite hazardous." Acacia
- "One of the big issues here in disaster times is transport." Palmerston Indigenous Village
- "We are just relying on relatives cars to get out, we prefer to go to the shelter, but it is hard to get there." Knuckey's Lagoon
- "Everyone is pretty all right in town, its further out that they struggle with transport." Kulaluk

However, in the Darwin Town communities it was common for people to recall being picked up by the police or night patrol.

- "Sometimes if a cyclone is coming we go into Casuarina, yeah us mob, we go to the carpark." ("How do you get there?") "Some coppers come pick us up." One Mile Dam
- "The emergency services people have a bus to pick people up. They come here, not the Night Patrol (Note: Kulaluk and Minmarama are not serviced by Larrakia Nation). They ask if people want to be picked up." Minmarama

At the same time, some residents also organised their own transport, or missed out.

- "I took people to the Nightcliff shelter in the church bus. We could use the church bus. There were lots of loads of people to be taken. I just kept going back and forth. Then I came back and stayed here in my house." Bagot
- "Some people went in their own cars, but it is good to go together as a group." Bagot
- "Most of us mob have cars. Here the community supports each other; we give all the kids a lift. Northern Territory Emergency Services come here, we haven't seen the Police or Night Patrol [see above]." Minmarama
- "A couple of years back during this bad weather, the Police and Night Patrol they didn't let people know before the rain. It was only last minute, when it was really pouring down heavy that people would come help us. Then they would come and pick people up." One Mile Dam
- "A few years back there was a big cyclone, no-one told me. It was too late for me, I was soaking. I lost everything." One Mile Dam

#### 4. Recovery Activities ('after')

Following a cyclone or severe weather event, residents spoke about clean-ups as the primary means by which they could work together and help things to get back to normal.

- "Afterwards we check our house, put rubbish on the road, assess damage, move trees – work together." Acacia
- "We do a community clean up afterwards." PIV
- "Afterwards, some residents have a generator, a chain saw. They do a clean-up. They have food prepared. They want to be able to help themselves, don't want to rely on others." Kulaluk
- At Bagot when asked if anyone provided assistance after cyclones, all participants said it was "no-one... just everyone for themselves". It was however agreed that Yilli do provide some immediate house repairs after cyclones, especially when there has been infrastructure damage to houses, roads, etc.

## Long Grass

Speaking to people in the Long Grass, there were some permanent and long-term residents, who had been in Darwin for many years and who planned to remain—through both wet and dry seasons. There was also a significant itinerant population, who told us that if bad weather was coming they would leave and return home (e.g. to communities in Arnhem Land or Katherine). They were curious about why we were doing this research in the dry season, because by the ‘wet’ they would be gone and everything would be different.

Those who have been in the Long Grass a long time recall a number of cyclone events, and related our questions to events they had experienced in the past (Cyclone Tracy in particular).

- “This big wind came up, everything was ripped and flying around. Iron poles were ripped up and rocks. Afterwards everything was flat.” Rapid Creek Bridge
- “Tracy is the ‘mother cyclone’ and the others are her children. She came out from East Point and dropped her eyes at Nungalinya. There is a rock you can see, this is where she got stuck.” Rapid Creek Bridge
- “People were trying to leave (after the cyclone), but there were too many to get out. They were putting people on planes.” Rapid Creek Bridge

### 1. Prevention/Mitigation activities:

It became clear early in our consultations that the term ‘shelter’ had various connotations for the people we were talking with. One of the Indigenous co-researchers began to speak to people about this, making sure that they were aware that there are four types of shelters in Darwin. She would tell them that:

- One is only for women who are facing problems at home and with violence.
- Another is the sobering up shelter—the ‘spin dry’—which is just for when you are full-drunk.
- Then there are cyclone shelters for when a cyclone is coming.
- Finally there are the houses of family, where you can also go when there is bad weather, if there is room and their houses are cyclone proof.

We made a point of differentiating between these forms of shelter, and emphasising that



were talking to people about the last two kinds making sure that they were aware of these, for their own safety.

## 2. Preparedness activities ('before')

When asked how they are informed about bad weather, some participants suggested that they knew it was coming because they knew to look for changes taking place.

- "Blackfellas know when the cyclones come. We know the seasons." Lake Alexander
- "There is lots of animal activity. The birds are flying in, fighting each other." The Narrows Park
- "First of all if all the bird sounds go silent, if you listen and there is not a single sound, then you know the cyclone is coming. After that the wind will come. Blow and stop. Blow and stop. Then everyone knows the cyclone is coming." Mindil Beach

The Long Grassers that we spoke to also remained connected to other networks and sources of information.

- Messages from the weather bureau, radio and Yolŋu radio.
- If there was a sense that bad weather was coming, people talked about all moving into the hospital so they could see the news on the TV. "In the hospital and in the hostels the TV is on 24-hrs a day, and people can learn from staff." Nightcliff foreshore
- A number of times when we sat with people in the Long Grass, they were being visited by friends or family who were housed. These visitors were looking after their friends and family, and would also do the same during bad weather, keeping Long Grassers informed (in person or by phone) if bad weather was coming. Many Long Grassers were also in constant contact with relatives in communities who would keep tabs on their health and safety, and keep them up to date with important information—such as approaching storms and cyclones.
- Those we spoke to along the Nightcliff foreshore, near the Rapid Creek Bridge, also said that the people in the general community, such as the staff at the bottle shop would tell them when very bad weather was coming.

We asked about phones and ways that people might be contacted about cyclones that were coming, or given safety warnings early in the season.

- At times people had phones, but they would often get broken or go flat.
- Family members do keep in touch with others in the Long Grass through phones, and passing messages from person to person.
- On a number of occasions, when we spoke with people in the Long Grass, there was no member of the group who had a working phone. It was generally agreed, that if important information needed to be conveyed to them by Larrakia Nation, government or other organisations, that visiting in person would be the best way to do this.

## 3. Response Activities ('during')

Many people we spoke to were very comfortable being picked up by Police and Night Patrol, and that they were confident that these services were there to help them.

- "Night Patrol know where we are, at Casuarina, other places. They come and get us." Rapid Creek Bridge
- "If there is no shelter, we call the police and ask them to take us to the spin dry. We can be safe there." Rapid Creek Bridge
- "When the cyclone is coming, we see people rushing into their camps. We are not scared because we know there are people here to help us." Stuart Park
- "We look after each other. If we hear from others that a cyclone is coming, and see LNAC or the Salvos, or the Night Patrol we know they will help us get to shelter." Stuart Park

Some people have strategies in place to help these services find them and pick them up in the event of a cyclone.

- "When very bad weather comes, straight away we pick up all our things, and we go over there to that toilet block [pointing]. We all crowd in there, wait for the Police or Night Patrol. We get to the shelter, wait to be picked up." Mindil Beach
- "We walk over to the BBQ shelter, or we go to the Beach front bottle shop. Stay under the shelter there." Rapid Creek Bridge
- "We try to go somewhere safe to get picked up." Rapid Creek Bridge

Others mentioned that they preferred not to go to a mainstream shelter, but would make their own alternative arrangements.

- "We move into the shower block. No-one tells us where else to go. The women go to the

women's toilets, and the men to the men's. Or sometimes a man goes into the ladies so we can look after each other." Lake Alexander

- "If a cyclone comes there are safe places, with family, where I can go. I go there myself." Lambell Terrace Park

And then there were also a number of people who talked about wanting to stay out, rather than to go into other forms of shelter.

- "I want to stay with my things. Not lose my spot." The Narrows Park
- "Through cyclones and floods there is always someone [above] who is with us." Rapid Creek Bridge
- "I have stayed out in a cyclone before, I am a strong man. I am my own boss." Nightcliff foreshore
- "Bad weather, good weather. It is all the same." Lake Alexander
- "I'll just stay under the stars. Just wait outside." Fannie Bay
- "The cyclone brought fighting and argument from the animals. If I moved around I would get hurt. I just stayed there and hugged myself to stay safe and not get hit by the irons flying in the air. I stayed still and put a blanket over myself." The Narrows Park

Some also described various strategies for heading to shelter, depending on the conditions.

- Long Grassers camping along Mindil Beach said that they were generally fine staying where they were. But they could go into the toilet blocks if they needed to, or if it was really bad go up to Darwin High School.
- Along the Nightcliff foreshore people mentioned seeking shelter at Nightcliff School. In bad weather they could go over there and take shelter under the covered areas.
- "During Larry everyone was running around and drinking, but the police told us to go to the Supreme Court. They told us it was one of those safety places. We went there and the security people told us we couldn't stay, but then the police said we could stay there until 6am the next day. We had our own food and blankets, and we stayed there." The Narrows Park.
- With regard to this issue, feedback provided by the Emergency Shelter Group on the first draft of this report stated: "Alcohol is not allowed in the public shelters and accordingly people were asked to leave their alcohol outside. Apparently a small group of people declined

to leave their alcohol and accordingly chose not to enter the shelter. Later, assuming grog was all consumed, people gained entry in the normal way."

- "I was staying in the car park near Galawu hostel, and so we went over there and went to the shelter with the hostel bus." The Narrows Park

#### 4. Recovery Activities ('after'):

Those we spoke to recalled times when they have been evacuated by the police, and when they have been helped by service providers.

- "They took us to the courtroom, we were all in there together." Mindil Beach
- "We were given food, and blankets. The social services talked to us, the medical people too. It was good." Mindil Beach
- "At the shelter everything was all organised, they had food and coffee." The Narrows Park

If people did lose their possessions in bad weather, they did not recall getting assistance to replace their food, dry clothes or blankets.

- "No-one came and gave us new things." Lake Alexander
- "The police take us to a shelter; they make sure we are OK. They provide a torch and food and water. But when you come back, you have lost all your possessions; they are gone, or wet and damaged by the water." Lake Alexander

Consultation with Tiwi Long Grassers at Lake Alexander



# Part 2: Emergency Management

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## Service Delivery

We suggest some service delivery responses below. These have arisen out of the consultations with residents of the Town Communities and Long Grass, as well as discussion with stakeholder groups. A number of these suggestions reaffirm the value of existing services and the need for their ongoing support; others propose possible new actions. These suggestions have been developed through close collaboration with Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation researchers. In the event that any of these processes are developed further, this should be in consultation and collaboration with Larrakia Nation.

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## Town Communities

### 1. Prevention/Mitigation activities

#### NTES Town Camp visits

- Bi-annual 'checks' by relevant emergency services pre-cyclone season and pre-fire season would help to identify any significant hazards in communities; and to maintain good community relations.
- These visits could be coordinated with the assistance of an allocated (paid) 'Safety Leader' in each community and could be coordinated with a general 'cyclone awareness' community event.

#### Clean ups

- Include the Town communities in the mainstream council clean-ups in Darwin and Palmerston.
- And/or liaise with Yilli Rreung around increased servicing of communities pre-cyclone season and pre-fire season.
- There is scope for developing a clean-up program through connecting with Department Correctional Services and prisoner care programs. This group already has equipment appropriate to this work, and could assist at specified times throughout the year.

#### Housing

- Residents of Town Communities often like to remain in their homes during cyclones and adverse weather. This reduces pressure on transport services, and is possible if houses

and/or community sheds are up to code, well maintained and well signposted.

There is scope to more fully involve Yilli Rreung as a stakeholder in emergency management planning, with a view to:

- Focussing on housing maintenance as a safety issue.
- Increasing the number of cyclone coded houses and/or shelters in Town Communities.
- Communicating clearly around the coding levels for community structures (including signage on coded houses and other structures).

#### Fire Strategy for One Mile Dam and Acacia

- Collaborative development of a community fire strategy which includes:
- Visits and hazard checks by the Bush Fire Council, in cooperation with proposed 'Safety Leaders' (with one week's notice provided to the community before this occurs).
- Appropriate fire prevention activities e.g. burning fire breaks, removal of Gamba Grass and other high fuel loads including hazardous materials (old car bodies, impromptu dumps etc).

### 2. Preparedness activities ('before')

#### Community relations/education

Appointment of 'Safety Leaders' in each community.

- These staff would be coordinated Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation and would

report to both Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation and Yilli Rreung.

- These 'Safety Leaders' would be a point of contact for northern Territory Emergency Services, service providers, and community members.
- They could be offered a clearly defined paid role, which would include a uniform (e.g. hi-vis vest with 'Safety Leader' printed on the back), and involve formal training, and a mobile phone before and during emergency events.
- In the first instance this role may be offered on a 3 month trial basis, and it may be offered to more than one person in each community.
- Duties may include: community education, monitoring and maintenance of hazards outside of emergency events, transport coordination during emergency events, responsibility for distribution of cyclone packs, responsibility for upkeep of community signage, familiarity with social media as a means of receiving up-to-date information during emergency events.

Distribution of up-to-date information.

- Plain English brochures, including maps of shelter sites, could be handed out at community events, and also kept at Yilli/Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation or in community offices to be handed out in event of a cyclone (see communications strategy).
- Signs and posters could be put up in community areas (see communications strategy).

Pre-cyclone events to be held in Town communities as an opportunity to maintain connections between Northern Territory Emergency Services and communities, and to develop preparedness plans.

- Could take the form of 'community days' and include a BBQ, visits by a fire truck and games for the children.
- Communities would appreciate some advance notice of such events (and/or may be involved in their coordination).

### **Transport**

Increased levels of support for the Night Patrol  
Increased funding for drivers and vehicles could enhance their emergency capability.

- Strategies for training and employing a group of emergency drivers, and identifying useful vehicles to be deployed only when necessary may also be beneficial.

Continued and enhanced support for public transport services:

- Liaising with Buslink and taxis to develop strategies for emergency events e.g. allowing those without money for a fare to travel, including information bus shelters and buses about what to do and where to go in event of a cyclone, asking bus drivers to inform passengers of the location of shelters.
- Guiding Town Community residents to continue to use familiar travel routes in the lead up to a cyclone event, and inform them that services will still be running.

Promoting clearer understandings of when it is possible to remain in your home, and when it is necessary to leave.

- Liaison between Northern Territory Emergency Services, Yilli and Town Community residents: visiting houses and clarifying the conditions under which it would be possible to remain at home, and when it is necessary to head to a shelter.
- Education of residents and/or 'Safety Leaders' around self-assessment of housing safety.

The development of a general transport strategy for Town Communities, which includes:

- Developing a plan with Night Patrol and other Indigenous non government organisations around the servicing of all Town Camp communities in the event of an emergency.
- Agreeing how many vehicles will be available and clearly identifying/allocating which non government organisations will service which community.
- Prioritising particular vulnerable groups in these plans e.g. elderly, pregnant women, children and particular vulnerable communities e.g. One Mile Dam floods quickly.

## **3. Response Activities ('during')**

### **Shelters**

- Some residents of Town Communities do not have access to permanent under-cover shelter e.g. One Mile Dam where many houses are open and some residents live in tents. Early opening shelters such as Ozanam House (St Vincent de Paul) offer beneficial support for these people. As Ozanam House is primarily for men, opening several other shelters of this kind for women and families would benefit a broader cross-section of the community.

- At some shelters, it was suggested that entry has been refused unless people are carrying their own supplies. Possibilities for creating basic cyclone packs which may be stored in Town Communities and distributed when necessary could be investigated. These could be similar to the packs that Power and Water distribute to Seniors. Feedback from the Emergency Shelter group stated that: ‘We do not screen or check people as they arrive. Shelter managers are advised to record numbers of people entering and any special issues declared by the person on arrival, i.e. oxygen dependant, pregnant etc. I think it’s a good idea to have a supply of emergency packs for homeless people prepared by Australian Red Cross or others...this claim that people are turned away should be clarified. In one of the consultations a resident of Bagot Community mentioned that “everyone is welcomed at the shelter, no matter who they are, or what they have”.
- Some Town Community residents may select shelters to visit based on whether pets and smoking are allowed, so it is helpful for this information to be clearly included on any signs or brochures.

### Communication

Sometimes there is a perceived breakdown in the flow of official information to Town communities, e.g. warnings, Northern Territory Emergency Services updates, Bureau of Meteorology weather reports.

- Communication between Northern Territory Emergency Services and Town communities during a cyclone can be via phone/radio to the ‘Safety Leaders’.
- Training ‘Safety Leaders’ around the use of social media to access information during an emergency event may be useful (e.g. through Secure Northern Territory, Power and Water Twitter feeds, ABC News facebook and Twitter feeds).
- Family, Town Camp or other nominated leaders may be sought out to support communication between Northern Territory Emergency Services and service providers at shelters during the cyclone and in relation to recovery directions.
- Presence of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation staff, or Indigenous staff from other service providers, at the shelters may also help communication and support of vulnerable Indigenous populations.

## 4. Recovery Activities (‘after’)

### Clean ups

- Clean ups have been identified as important to the process of getting back to normal after the cyclone.
- Liaison with Yilli Rreung and other relevant stakeholders to support joint community/ service provider clean-up efforts.

### Recovery centres

- There has been general appreciation for food, bedding and clothes available at recovery centres, and recognition that maintaining this service is crucial for Town Community residents who are likely to have all their possessions soaked or lost in a cyclone or severe weather.
- The presence of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation staff, or Indigenous staff from other service providers, may assist relations and communication with Town Community residents, particularly around payments, identification and arrangements for returning home.

## Long Grass

### Prevention/Mitigation activities

#### Shelters

- More ‘early opening’ shelters such as Ozanam House which cater for women and families, and which provide respite in the lead up to a cyclone, and/or in a severe weather event.
- Informal shelters (e.g. toilet blocks along the beach) are used by Long Grassers during severe weather and cyclones. This relieves strain on transport systems, but increases risk to those using these shelters.
- Small shelters could be built along beachfront areas, or added onto existing structures, e.g. toilet blocks. These could be controlled by Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation, opened when necessary (in cyclones and severe weather).

### Preparedness activities (‘before’)

#### Transport

- Increased support of the Night Patrol program, so that increased numbers of vehicles and drivers are available during emergencies.
- Public transport options:
  1. Long Grass communities are familiar with bus routes and using taxis to get around. Outreach services focussing on emergency safety could emphasise services will still be running prior to a cyclone.
  2. Liaising with Buslink and taxis around transport of vulnerable people ahead of a cyclone—

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allowing those without money for a fare to travel, asking bus drivers to inform passengers of the location of shelters, and including information in bus shelters and buses about what to do and where to go in event of a cyclone.

### Response Activities ('during')

#### Shelters/resources

- People living in the Long Grass may not have access to supplies or materials conventionally contained in cyclone kits.
- They also report that the clothing and bedding that they do have is likely to be wet well before they arrive at a cyclone shelter. The creation of Cyclone Packs (e.g. packs distributed to Seniors by Power and Water,) to be carried and distributed by the Night Patrol or Police/ Northern Territory Emergency Services vehicles could be investigated.

#### Communication

- When people arrive at shelters during a cyclone, group leaders may be sought out as a primary point of contact between Long Grass/ family groups and government or other organisations.

### Recovery Activities ('after')

#### Recovery centres

- There has been general appreciation for food, bedding and clothes available at recovery centres, and recognition that this service is crucial for Long Grass residents who are likely to have all their possessions soaked or lost in a cyclone or severe weather.
- The presence of Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation and/or Indigenous staff and volunteers at Recovery Centres may assist relations and communication with Long Grass residents, particularly around payments, and arrangements for returning home.

### Follow up consultations

There was an expectation amongst many of those we spoke to, particularly in the Town Communities, that we would return to discuss the project findings with them. When we did so, there was a general agreement with the suggestions made in the interim report, and agreement that cyclones and emergency management was an important issue to be talking about together.

There were some more specific suggestions made, which we have incorporated into the report. These have included:

### Town Communities

- Noting that there are sometimes existing programs or meetings in Town Communities which would support ongoing engagement between Northern Territory Emergency Services and Indigenous people in Darwin and Palmerston (e.g. the Bagot Community safety committee meetings), and that these could provide a springboard for ongoing or enhanced engagement and coordination between relevant parties (Bagot).
- Affirming that the appointment of 'Safety Leaders' in each community may be a good way to promote engagement with emergency management within Town Communities and to support and maintain high levels of engagement between Northern Territory Emergency Services and Town Communities (Minmarama).
- Noting that the priority for any increased provision of transport services as part of emergency 'response' activities be directed towards particular priority groups, such as the young, elderly, sick, disabled and people living in the Long Grass (Acacia and Minmarama).
- Noting that lack of awareness about what houses are cyclone coded, and which are not, is a source of confusion around cyclone events (Bagot and Minmarama).
- Suggesting that one week's notice would be appreciated before events or visits to Town Communities by NTES or other services (Acacia).

### Long Grass

- That signs (in the style of fire warning signs) informing people of the category of an approach-ing cyclone would be very helpful. People often know that bad weather is coming, but they don't always have access to up-to-the-minute information about what category to expect. If it is a low category then they might stay where they are, but if it is a high category "we will know to go straight to the shelter." Fannie Bay
- That "early opening shelters (which might be coordinated differently or separately to the official shelters opened by Northern Territory Emergency Services) would be very beneficial to people in the Long Grass experiencing storm conditions but not a cyclone event." Lake Alexander, Narrows Park

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## Communication

### Pre-cyclone visits

- For Long Grassers, face-to-face communication is the best way to raise awareness around what to do in an emergency.
- Sitting with people and talking about safety may improve awareness around what to do in event of a cyclone or other emergencies.
- This could be carried out as an extension of existing Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation outreach programs (such as the HEAL program), or by a small team of two or three safety outreach officers from Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation who could be employed to do this work just prior to the cyclone season.

### Phones

- We have canvassed the idea of using phones and text messages for official warning messages and updates. We found that people in Town Communities frequently have access to mobile phones, which belong to themselves or a relative. Long Grassers are frequently visited by housed relatives, but are themselves much less likely to have access to mobile phones as they are easily damaged, and hard to charge.
- Mass-messaging to phones could not be relied upon as a means to contact all vulnerable Indigenous residents of Town Communities and the Long Grass ahead of an emergency. However, if mass-messaging was to be used, then text should be in plain English but would not need to be in Aboriginal languages

### Safety Leaders

- Making reliable connections within Town Communities can be difficult. Employing an officially endorsed 'Safety Leader' in each community may provide an invaluable point of contact for Northern Territory Emergency Services and service providers. They could also have roles which include other functions apart from disaster resilience, management and preparedness.
- This approach would require further funding and support from local government, Northern Territory Government and Northern Territory Emergency Services, and could be initiated on a trial basis in the first instance. Larrakia

Nation Aboriginal Cooperation Night Patrol and Rangers could also be funded/resourced to assist with clean ups, before and after disasters, with early burn offs etc.

### Signs

- On a number of occasions signs have been suggested as a way to inform people of appropriate actions to take in the event of a cyclone.
- It is unclear whether increased signage in Town Communities and along the foreshore, and in other locations where
- Long Grassers camp, would make a demonstrable difference to behaviour or levels of awareness.
- Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation researchers have proposed a version of this sign which would mirror fire safety warning signs, and illustrate a number of stages of preparedness and detail appropriate actions for each situation e.g. Normal/Rain/Watch/Warning/Leave with caution/All safe. Each of these stages would be accompanied by directions as to appropriate actions to be taken by residents with regards to an approaching or current cyclone.
- Alternatively, as suggested by a number of Long Grassers we spoke to, these signs could list the category of any approaching cyclone. This way people would know whether they were able to wait the storm out, or if they need to go straight to a shelter because a Category 5 cyclone is approaching.
- There are some issues around the management of signs which (possibly) require manual operation that would need to be resolved in these cases. In the Town Communities, maintenance of the sign could be the responsibility of appointed 'Safety Leaders', however this would not be the case in Long Grass camps and along the foreshore.

### Booklets

There are some booklets already available which detail the location of shelters and appropriate actions leading up to and during cyclones (e.g. the Northern Territory Emergency Services publication 'CYCLONES—GET READY GET THRU').

However, if there were interest in pursuing this route, Charles Darwin University and Larrakia

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Nation Aboriginal Cooperation researchers could assist with the development of a Plain Language Cyclone Awareness booklet.

Potential content would include:

- A table with the cyclone categories 1–5 and severity warnings.
- A picture of what to include in a cyclone kit – food, water, torch, radio, blanket.
- Map with location of the shelters and what people can expect at each shelter.
- Emergency numbers to call.

These booklets might best be used as reference guides to be used/distributed by ‘Safety Leaders’ in Town Communities.

### Posters

The development of posters which convey similar information as the proposed signs and booklets. These could be put up in indoor areas (e.g. Town Community offices, inside covered notice boards), be specifically designed for each Town Community or hostel, and used for community education purposes.

## Getting Started

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As the research for this project drew to a close, there was a sense amongst many of the Town Community participants, and the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation research team, that the work of developing emergency management practices in Town Communities and in the Long Grass had only just begun.

The end of the project consultations coincided with the onset of Darwin’s wet-season, and preparations for potential cyclone events. At this time there was significant interest in further developing working relationships between the Town communities, Northern Territory Emergency Services and other organisations involved in emergency management.

The focus of these relationships would not be on the development of large-scale strategies, but on specific local activities that would enhance the capacity for particular communities and groups to remain safe during bad weather or other emergency situations.

For participating organisations such as the Northern Territory Emergency Services and Australian Red Cross, this emphasis on local activities and community capacity building may carry implications for the development of new policy practices going forward, particularly in relation to how they may support and participate in collaborative design of community-based emergency management strategies.

Already outlined in the previous section, are a number of possible initiatives and policy responses that have arisen out of the project’s research findings. Going forward Northern Territory Emergency Services and Australian Red Cross may seek to focus their future policy development around these proposed suggestions.

It is in beginning to develop some of these discrete initiatives that they may also seek to work on more systemic policy shifts relating to their own organisational practices and means for relating to differing knowledges and lived experiences as part of their efforts to shaping future practices of emergency management.

### Early initiatives

Out of the consultations, there were a few initiatives that emerged as promising places to begin developing new practices of collaborative action.

### **a) Development of 'Safety Leader' positions in interested Town Communities**

In all communities we visited, there was clear support for this initiative which couples employment and capacity building within Town Communities with a commitment to culturally appropriate disaster response and good working relationships between Town Communities and emergency management organisations.

Any action in this direction should be undertaken on a trial basis, and may only be undertaken in a few pilot communities in the first instance. It would involve clear identification of the role and its responsibilities, as well as training programs and appropriate institutional support from Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation and one or more other organisations.

### **b) Collaborative development of emergency management strategies in Town Communities where a need has been identified.**

The focus of this project has been on hearing stories and learning about the experiences of indigenous people in greater Darwin during emergency events. It has not been on the negotiation of community-based strategies for disaster management. However, in several communities (e.g. Acacia, Palmerston Indigenous Village and Bagot) this has presented itself as a possible next step.

The development of these strategies would take place in the Town communities themselves, and may differ considerably from community to community. The focus of this work may not necessarily be to seek the close integration of Town communities and Northern Territory Emergency Services systems of operation, but may offer communities the opportunity to focus on their own ways of managing emergency events, and how they may seek to productively connect with services or assistance able to be offered by external organisations.

This work may be connected to the appointment and development of 'Safety Leader' positions, and would require involvement of Larrakia Nation and a team of research or community support staff.

### **c) Prioritise working through existing Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Cooperation outreach**

### **programs as a means to support those living in the Long Grass during the wet season.**

Indigenous people living in the Long Grass are frequently well connected to family in the area and in remote communities and are often aware of how and where to access shelter in event of a cyclone.

Those who are not able to seek shelter with family at these times often do remain reliant on transport provided by Larrakia Nation Night Patrol, or NTES and Police vehicles.

Larrakia Nation staff maintains constant contact with Long Grass communities through their outreach programs, and have an up-to-date sense of where people are camping and their particular vulnerabilities at any point in time.

This knowledge, and these face-to-face relationships, are a great resource for any external agencies seeking to work in the Long Grass, particularly around assessing and supporting preparedness prior to severe or extreme weather events. Any further work supporting awareness and preparedness in the Long Grass should also support and operate through, or in connection with, existing Larrakia Nation programs.

### **Key constraints**

There are a number of key constraints arising within current policy approaches which were revealed by the research, and which may be beneficially considered when developing new policy approaches or initiatives going forward.

Current strategies for emergency management tend to be focused around the coordination of people. This includes the coordination of staff in government and other support organisations, as well as individuals and groups experiencing emergency events. While these approaches have been described as working well to keep people safe, and to maintain appropriate levels of coordination and communication during and after emergency events, they tend to miss the important work around the maintenance of infrastructure and public or Town Community facilities which may be attended to before such an event, but which have been reported as key determinants of vulnerability when a crisis does arise.

Many Indigenous residents living in Town Communities and the Long Grass recall the way that Northern Territory Emergency Services have responded to past events, and how communities

and services have worked together to keep people safe. While there is currently a shift towards forms of emergency management that recognise shared responsibilities between individuals and support agencies in times of crisis, there appears to have been little explicit negotiation around the potential character of these responsibilities and how they may be appropriately negotiated.

In undertaking such negotiations, the viability of collaborative management strategies may sometimes hinge on the capacity to recognise and negotiate around differing understandings of what an emergency is, and the appropriate means by which involved parties may collectively take responsibility for its management. Negotiations which are not able to account for such differences, are likely to present emergency management strategies which may fail to connect with current needs or be experienced as an imposition.

The project participants we spoke to frequently did not differentiate between the work of managing emergencies and the work of finding appropriate means to support and strengthen their communities. Negotiations such as those suggested above are therefore likely to include a broad vision of emergency management, calling for support around the building of resilience within communities through providing paid employment and training for Indigenous emergency management staff and engaging with Yilli Rreung or government housing programs.

There are diverse levels of knowledge and understanding of mainstream disaster management and relief services amongst residents of Town Communities and the Long Grass. There are also differing commitments to personal and collective safety which arise amongst the individuals and groups we have spoken to. On some occasions these differences may be interpreted as a failure of policy development or implementation. However, maintaining an awareness of these differences, and continuing to permit informal ways of respecting their presence on the ground remains a crucial part of ongoing disaster management work.

### **Policy directions**

From this research, a focus on several key areas may be flagged as important for future policy work.

#### **Working with the community:**

In many of the communities we visited, residents sought further collaborative engagement with

emergency services. This was both around the development of future disaster management strategies and around service provision.

Continued engagement with elders and prominent community members was seen as respectful practice, and an appropriate way to go about negotiating emergency management responses in the future.

#### **Information/knowledge sharing and awareness raising:**

This is the first time that many residents of Town Communities and the Long Grass have been invited to tell their stories, and share their experiences of cyclones and other disasters.

Starting at 'ground level' was appreciated as a good way to begin understanding the realities of cyclones and other emergencies for these communities. A continued commitment to information and knowledge sharing between Indigenous communities and government/service providers is seen as important for the further development of appropriate management practices.

#### **Locally specific responses:**

Each of the communities had particular structures of authority which we worked with, and also identified different strengths and weaknesses in their emergency management responses.

Any future development of emergency management strategies should be community specific, and negotiated with the appropriate elders and community members. Strategies that are not negotiated in this way may struggle to be effective as they are unlikely to connect in with existing local roles and structures.

#### **Local employment:**

The conduct of this project has relied on the skills and networks of Indigenous researchers. While participating in the project these researchers were offered employment and professional development support.

In a similar fashion, it was stated clearly by project participants, that any future community engagement, scenario planning or strategy implementation should include local Indigenous residents who would recognise facilitation and cross cultural brokering as part of their official responsibilities, and be employed to carry out this work. Supporting employment and capacity building in this way is not separate to the work of improving emergency management, but is crucial to its success.

# Conclusion

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Over the course of the project, we have consulted with Larrakia people in the in Town Communities and Long Grass, as well as with Tiwi, Yolŋu and Desert people currently living on Larrakia Land in Darwin and Palmerston.

Our approach has been to sit with people in the Town Communities and Long Grass, listening to their stories and experiences of past emergency events, and learning about their current strategies for remaining safe during these times.

Working with government departments and service providers, we have begun to look towards tangible local actions which will continue to support the safety and well-being of Indigenous people during future emergency events.

In amidst policies focused on assisting Northern Territory residents to be responsible for their own preparation, safety and recovery in times of crisis, these consultations have affirmed the significance of certain basic supports (e.g. public shelters, transport assistance and forms of material assistance). The maintenance, and extension, of these supports remains crucial for

those who are unsure about the safety of their living environments, or unable or ill-equipped to remain in their homes at these times.

These consultations have also begun to articulate some of the diverse means for coping with emergency events that are currently employed by Town Community and Long Grass residents; and has identified a strong interest on the part of many Indigenous residents to work collaboratively with NTES and other organisations towards more formalised, localised and better resourced strategies for disaster management.

The work of brokering and negotiating such strategies reaches beyond the brief and capacity of this current project. However, there is considerable scope for future collaborative work in this direction, and for the ongoing development of emergency management strategies that are negotiated in good faith while taking into account local differences and diversity.

# Appendix

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## Report from James Gaykamaŋu, Elder and Project Advisor

During this project, researchers were assisted by James Gaykamaŋu (Yolŋu elder, Bagot Community)

Mr Gaykamaŋu produced a report detailing the outcome of some of his discussions with members of Bagot Community and people living in the Long Grass. This report may be accessed in full via the Charles Darwin University Ground Up website: <https://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/groundup/drmpr.html>

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