



## Sharing responsibility – so what about it?

**Blythe McLennan, John Handmer**

Centre for Risk and Community Safety, RMIT University, Victoria

### Overview

The 'Sharing Responsibility' project is a three-year research project that aims to support emergency management stakeholders to make decisions about sharing responsibility for community safety and disaster resilience.

Since it began in July 2010, research has focused on unpacking the meaning of *shared* responsibility (a vision) and its significance for *sharing* responsibility (as practice). In addition to the reports and publications produced, a highlight has been the 'Visions of Sharing Responsibility for Disaster Resilience' workshop held in March 2012. Participants said the workshop had "a richness absent in most other forums" because it brought together "a great mix of groups that you don't usually see in the same room".

An important emerging focus in the project for the next year is the design and trial of interactive, multi-stakeholder workshops that wrestle with the implications of the shared responsibility vision for 'real world' management scenarios.

### Reflections

This project is as much about conceptualizing 'problems' and understanding their significance as it is about finding clear answers or recommending specific solutions. This is a complex subject and there are no simple answers, as much as we may want them.

From our research so far we can say that:

❑ **The shared responsibility principle has been reframed by the Victorian 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission and the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.**

There is now a fundamentally different national agenda developing for living with disaster risk.<sup>4,6,7</sup> As a workshop speaker stated: "we can't allow government to return to business as usual".<sup>4</sup> If the new ideas are carried through: things are going to change in emergency management.

❑ **We need to look at issues of shared responsibility through multiple windows.**

Similar issues are being wrestled with across many areas of public safety in Australia and abroad.<sup>2,5</sup> Many different conceptual approaches are used to make sense of them, each with different implications for our understanding and practices.<sup>1,8</sup> There is no single 'best' way to frame these issues: we need to look at them through multiple windows.<sup>1,3,8</sup>

❑ **Processes and relationships are as important as standards and outcomes.**

Stakeholders tend to focus on determining their preferred standards and outcomes for shared responsibility. Yet we need to focus much more attention on developing processes and relationships to support sharing responsibility as practice.<sup>2,5,7</sup> If the processes and relationships aren't 'right' the possible outcomes will be modest.

❑ **Forming appropriate and legitimate collective action institutions and governance arrangements are at the heart of sharing responsibility well in practice.**

Institutions for collective action provide the rules, norms and expectations that shape responsibility sharing processes and relationships.<sup>2,5,8</sup> In essence, sharing responsibility is about governance: engaging governments and citizens together to live with disaster risk.

### Selected reports and publications

#### Reports

1. McLennan, B.J., & Handmer, J. (2011). *Framing challenges for sharing responsibility*. Melbourne: RMIT University & Bushfire CRC.
2. McLennan, B.J., & Handmer, J. (2011). *Mechanisms for sharing responsibility*. Melbourne: RMIT University & Bushfire CRC.
3. McLennan et al. (Compiled by) (2012). *Visions of sharing responsibility for disaster resilience. Account of a multi-stakeholder workshop*. Melbourne: RMIT University, Bushfire CRC, NCCARF.

#### Peer reviewed publications

4. McLennan, B.J., & Handmer, J. (2012). Reframing responsibility-sharing for bushfire risk management in Australia after Black Saturday. *Environmental Hazards*, 11(1), 1-15.
5. McLennan, B. J., & Handmer, J. (2012). Changing the rules of the game: Mechanisms that shape responsibility-sharing from beyond Australian fire and emergency management. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, 27(2), 7-13.

#### Forthcoming

6. Eburn, M., & McLennan, B.J. Sharing responsibility and community resilience. In Clarke, M, Griffin, G. *Next Generation Disaster Management*. Canberra: Australian Security Research Centre.
7. McLennan, B.J. & Handmer, J. From risk to resilience: reframing disaster management in Australian policy. (Also presented at the IAWF Human Dimensions of Wildland Fire Conference, Seattle 17-19 April 2012)
8. McLennan, B.J & Handmer, J. Windows on shared responsibilities: a multi-theory analysis of public submissions to the Victorian 2009 Bushfires Royal Commission. (Report)

For more information go to [www.bushfirecrc.com](http://www.bushfirecrc.com)  
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Or contact the project team:

Blythe McLennan: [blythe.mclennan@rmit.edu.au](mailto:blythe.mclennan@rmit.edu.au)

John Handmer: [john.handmer@rmit.edu.au](mailto:john.handmer@rmit.edu.au)

Mick Ayre: [mick.ayre@pfes.nt.gov.au](mailto:mick.ayre@pfes.nt.gov.au)



Participants join in discussion at the 'Visions of Sharing Responsibility' workshop  
(Source: Nathan Maddock, Bushfire CRC)