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Civil Preparedness in the Northern Territory Preparing Communities for Disasters – Natural and Man Made

Wayne Snell

Chief Officer, Northern Territory Emergency Service

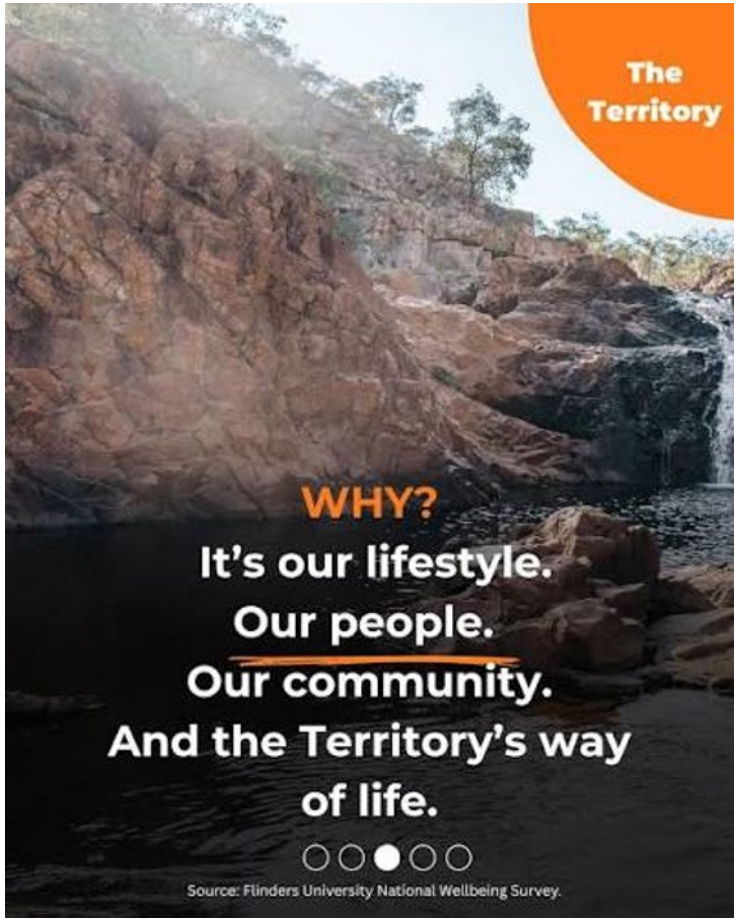
Northern Territory Fire and Emergency Services

13th October, 2026

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Northern Territory – Our Home & Our Responsibility

- What is the NT from a National Perspective?
- More Importantly – What is it to us?
- Why is this important?



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What is Civil Preparedness?

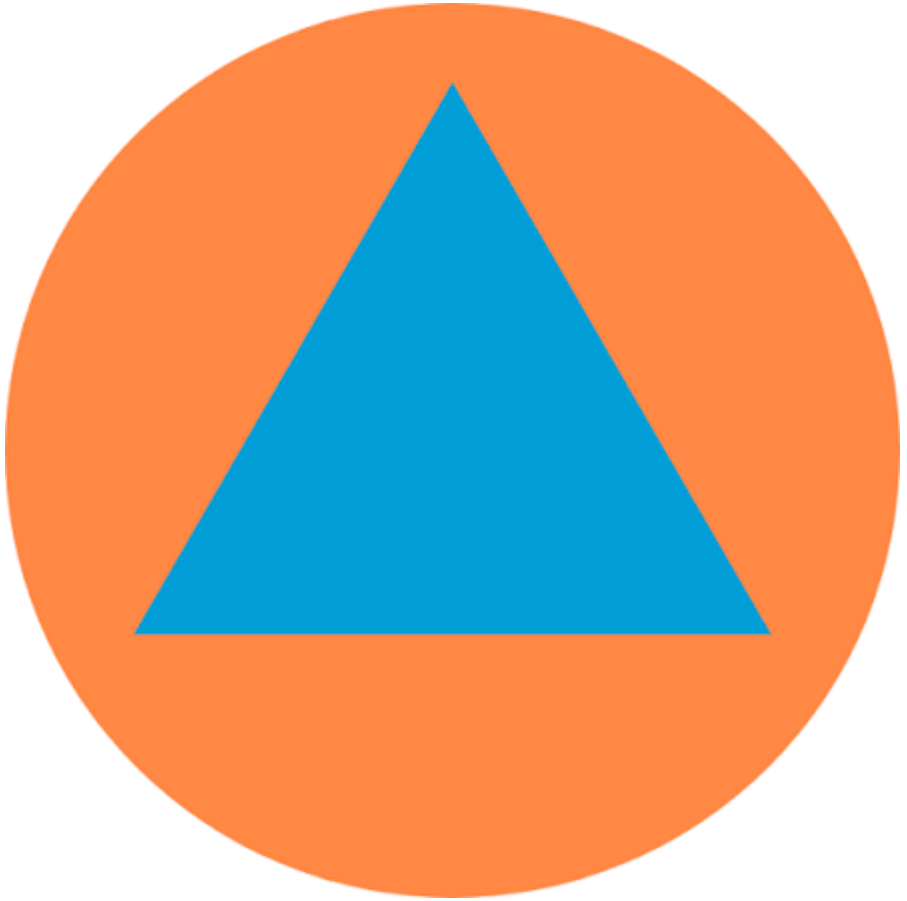
- **Civil preparedness** refers to all proactive measures, plans, and activities undertaken in peacetime by civilian agencies, governments, and communities to minimize the impact of disasters, **armed attacks**, or hybrid threats. It ensures that societies can withstand major shocks and maintain core functions during a crisis.

- Additional Critical Dimension of Armed Conflict/Violence

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Civil Preparedness & Civil Defence

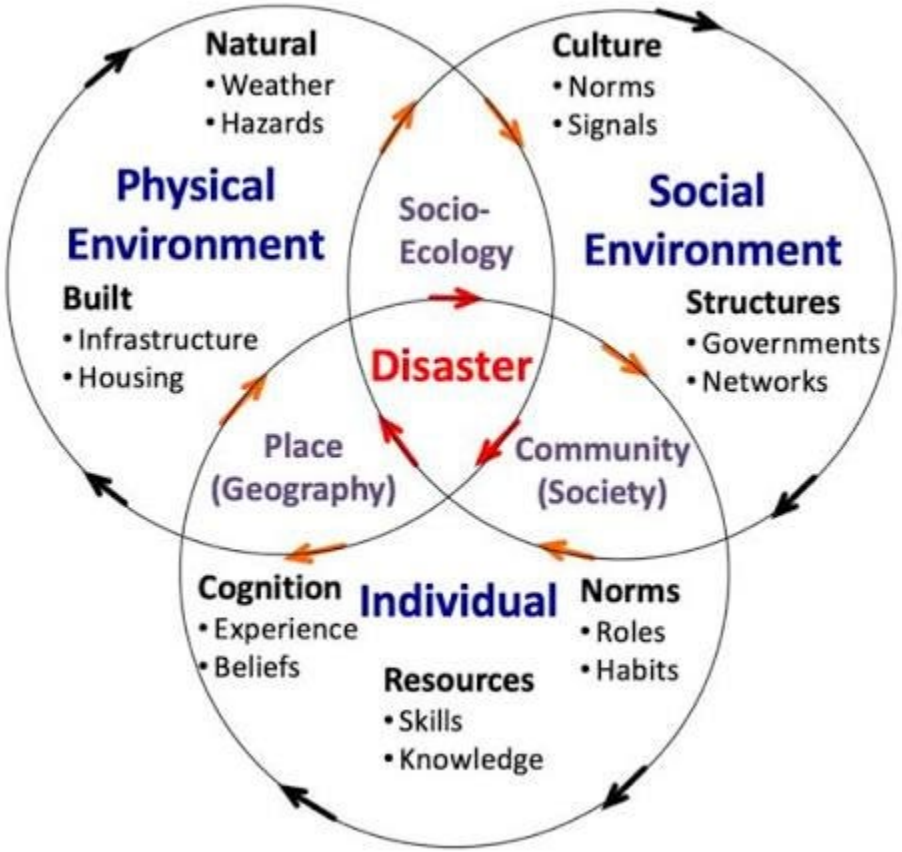
- Enshrined in International Law
- Endures in Domestic Law in Australia
- Illustrated in Popular Culture
- Chronicled in the History of Darwin



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Dimensions of Preparedness

- Intuitive?
- Physical
- Technological
- Organisational
- Intellectual – Critical Dimension



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History of Civil Preparedness in Australia

- Long History – 1930's through to the 1970's
- 'Whole of Nation' Ethos Born During this Period
- Community Acknowledgement of Responsibility
- Enduring Structures and Organisations to Support
- Maturity of Government – Facilitating Community v Controlling
- Civil Community Assistance to Defence



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Civil Preparedness on the National Agenda

- **Inquiry into Australia's national civil preparedness and resilience**
- The Parliamentary Joint Committee on Defence has commenced an inquiry into Australia's national civil preparedness and resilience. The inquiry was adopted on 27 July 2026, following a referral from the Deputy Prime Minister and the Minister for Defence.
- The Committee requests submissions responding to the inquiry's terms of reference by **Friday, 6 November 2026**.



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Risk/Threat Landscape and the NT

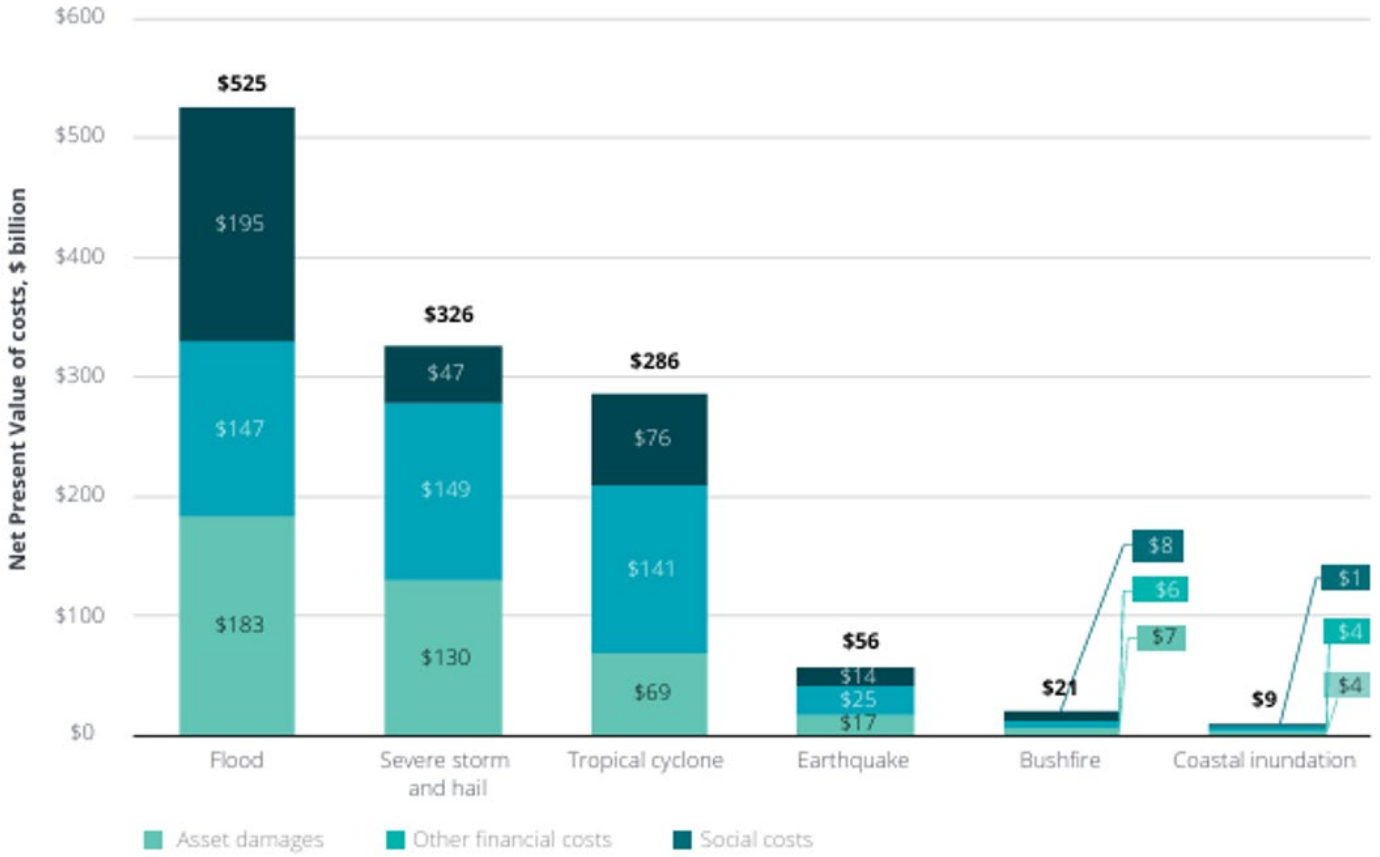
- Climate Change and Resultant Consequence
- Geopolitical Issues
  - The Davidson Window
  - Strategic Cyber Threat
- Community Cohesion and Resilience



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Civil Preparedness as Mitigation

Chart 3.1: Present value of economic costs and the components of costs under low emissions scenario by type of natural disaster, $billion

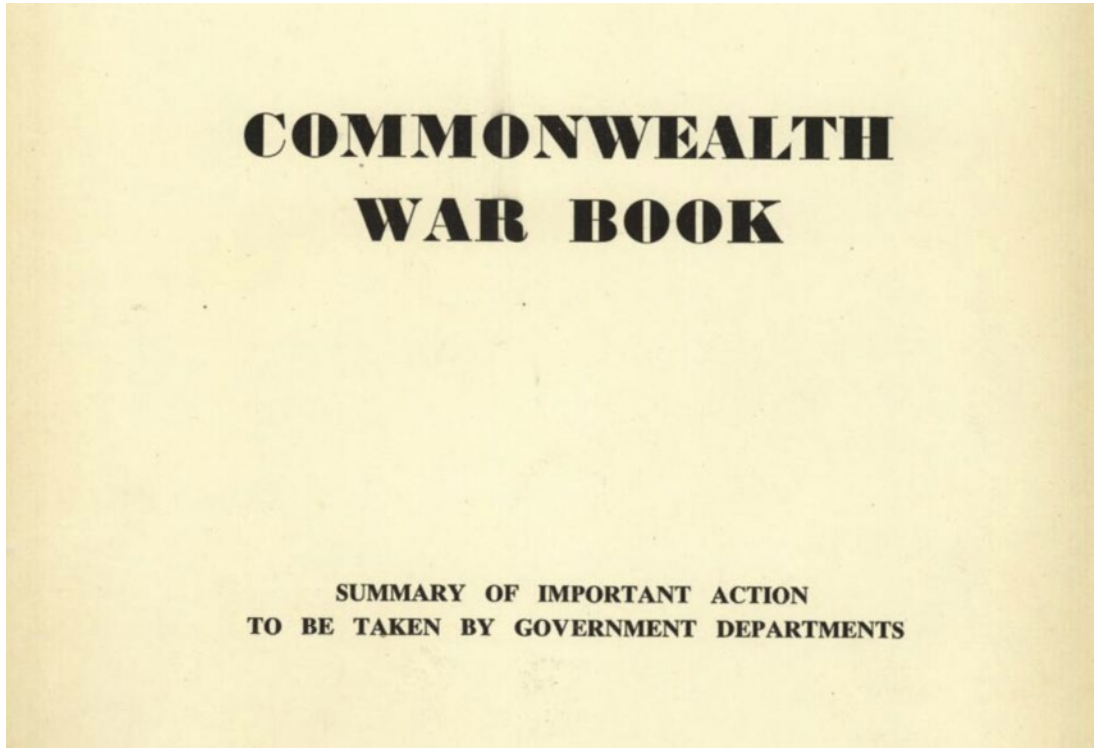


Source: Deloitte Access Economics 2021

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Mitigation

- Key Strategy – Shape and Influence
  - Recognition and Prioritisation
  - Community Education and mobilisation
  - Government Reinvigoration and Facilitation (Surge Workforce as an Example)
- Resulting in:
- Universal Culture of Preparedness
  - Government
  - Industry
  - Community



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Challenges for Civil Preparedness in the NT

- Concurrency of our Challenges
- Police Roles – Now and Into the Future
- ‘Fire Brigade Model’ – Learned Helplessness
- Denial of the Risk – Potential and Already Realised
  - Access to Security Information
- Defence in a ‘Garrison Town’ – Community Reliance
- Atrification of the Horror of State & State Centred Violence
- Human Ability/Capacity to Deal with Complexity



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NORTHERN TERRITORY DISASTERS

Natural Hazards | Man-Made Threats
Prepared Communities | A Safer NT



CYCLONES & STORMS
e.g. Cyclone Tracy, Darwin



FLOODING
e.g. Katherine, Daly River, Darwin



BUSHFIRES
e.g. Arnhem Land, Daly River, Kakadu



STORM SURGE
e.g. Darwin Harbour



CYBER ATTACK
e.g. Government, critical infrastructure, utilities



FOREIGN MILITARY BUILD UP
e.g. Increased regional presence, strategic activity

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Thank you!

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