Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency

THE COORDINATION CHALLENGE

Lessons from a national Crisis Coordinator



The hazard starts the crisis. Its consequences, dependencies and competing demands define the coordination challenge.

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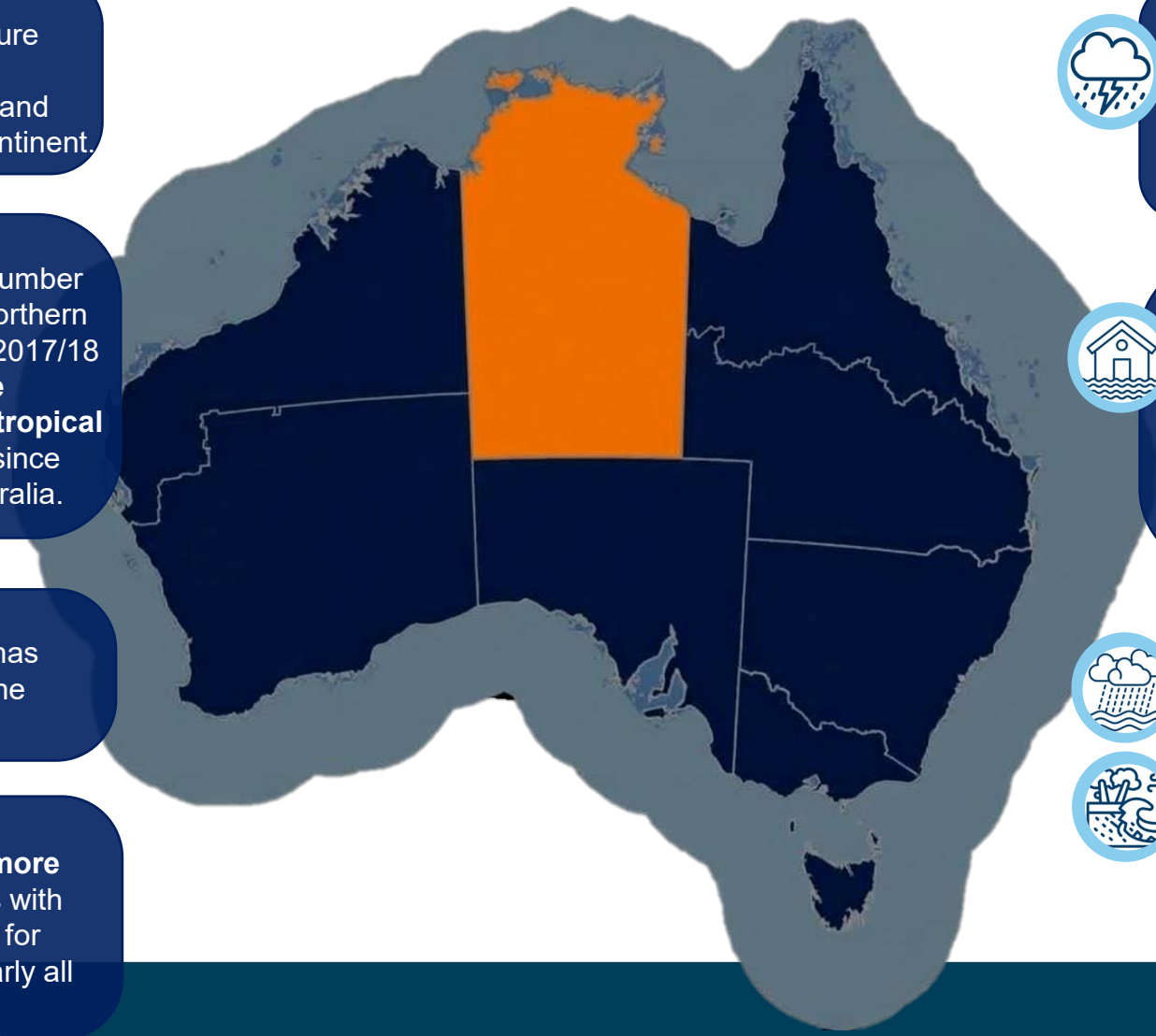
Past weather and climate hazards – NT Specific

OCEAN WARMING
Average sea surface temperature globally: **+1.08 °C since 1900.** Largest increases to the north and south-east of the Australian continent.

TROPICAL CYCLONES
There is no clear trend in the number of tropical cyclones over the Northern Territory during the 1981/82 – 2017/18 period. A slight **increase in the proportion of high-intensity tropical cyclones** has been observed since 1979, both globally and in Australia.

HEAT
Average annual temperature has **increased by 1.5 °C** across the Northern Territory since 1910.

BUSHFIRE
Fires have been larger and more frequent. The number of days with dangerous weather conditions for bushfires has increased in nearly all Northern Territory locations.



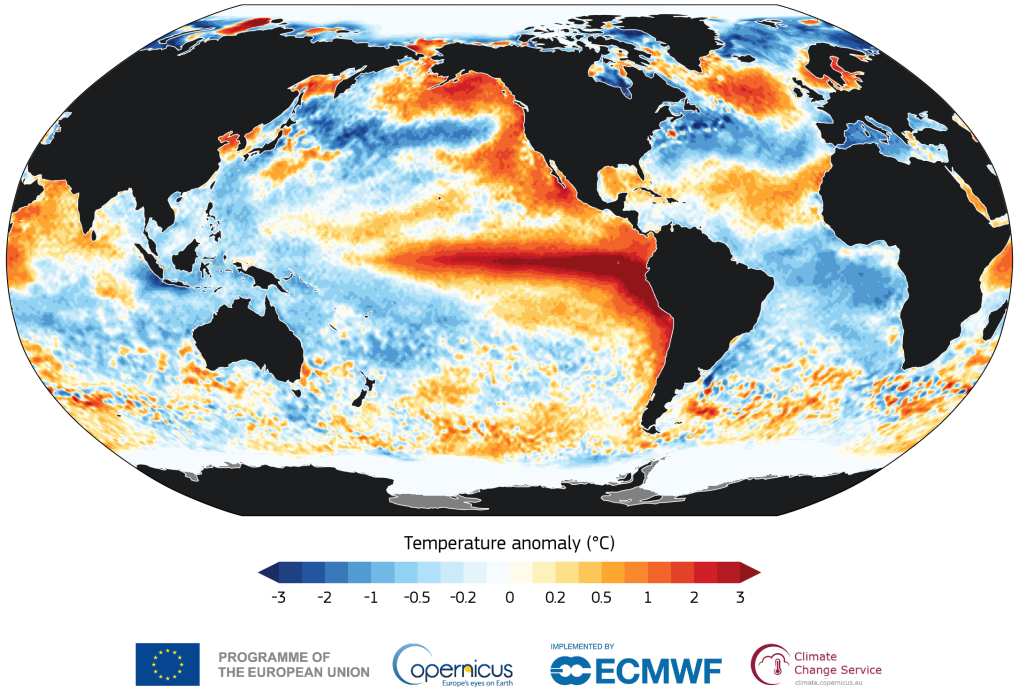
STORMS
The intensity of short-duration extreme rainfall events has increased by around 10%, particularly in northern Australian regions.

RAINFALL
December-February rainfall **increased** over almost all of the Northern Territory. **Seven of the ten wettest northern Australia wet seasons** have occurring since 1998. June-August rainfall declined over most of the region.

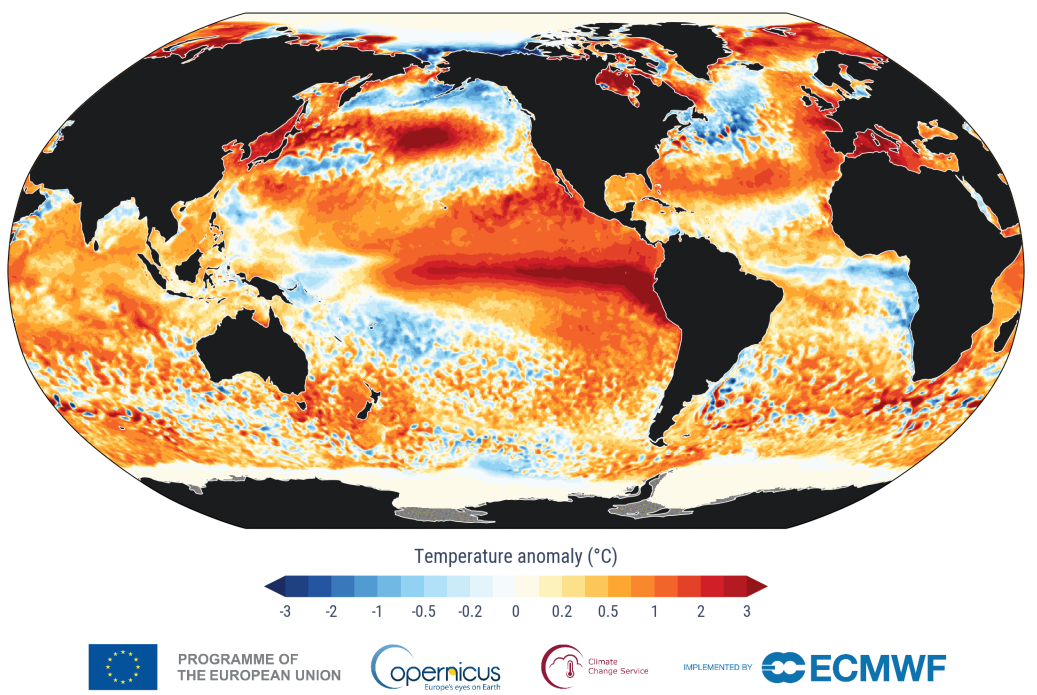
COASTAL HAZARDS
Global mean sea level: **+22 cm since 1900**, with half of this rise occurring since 1970.
Rising sea levels have amplified the risks of coastal inundation, storm surge, erosion and saltwater intrusion into groundwater systems.

El Niño, climate change and climate hazards

July 1997



July 2026



El Niño amplifies warming - global-averaged ocean temperatures are tracking warmest on record.

Rising temperatures are accelerating the global hydrological cycle, leading to:

- more extreme rainfall and more extreme droughts;
- more rapid swings from one to the other - 'climate whip-lash', and less recovery between events.

Consider consequences, not just the initiating hazard

‘Worst case’ is not a planning fiction.

It can become the reality.



INITIATING HAZARD
What may or has initiated the event / crisis?

DIRECT IMPACTS
Who and what will be or is immediately affected?

DEPENDENCIES
What else relies on the affected systems?

CASCADING CONSEQUENCES
How could impacts compound across sectors and places?

Distance, access, time zones and mobilisation can turn a manageable requirement into a critical constraint.

Foresight creates decision space before consequences narrow the available choices.

Foresight must translate into timed action



LOOK AHEAD

Potential impacts
Likely consequences
Credible worst case

SET TRIGGERS

What changes the posture?
Who decides?
What is the latest safe time?

UNDERSTAND LEAD TIME

Approvals
Mobilisation
Movement and access

ACT EARLY

Warn out
Pre-position where justified
Prepare escalation options

TRIGGER DISCIPLINE **Know what must happen, who must act, and when delay removes the option.**

TIME + GEOGRAPHY **Distance, access, time zones and mobilisation can turn a manageable requirement into a critical constraint.**

Build readiness across the system before the request arrives

RESOURCES

Identify likely capabilities, constraints and alternatives.

PARTNERS

Share potentialities early so others can plan and advise.

PROCESSES

Pre-build approvals, tasking, reporting, handovers and escalation paths.

RELATIONSHIPS

Know who to call and how decisions are actually made.



Run today’s operation without sacrificing tomorrow

Current operations and future planning need separate attention.

CURRENT OPERATIONS

The crocodile closest to the boat

- urgent actions
- immediate risks
- current requests
- today’s decisions

FUTURE OPERATIONS

What will confront us next?

- emerging consequences
- next decision points
- resource and relief needs
- transition and sustainment

LEADER’S INTENT

Clarifies the outcome, priorities, risk tolerance and what can be deprioritised when everything appears urgent.

Urgent and important are not always the same. Leaders must protect time for both.

Create a feedback loop that can reinforce or change course

Plans are hypotheses. Operations provide the evidence.

PLAN
- Intent
- Assumptions
- Triggers
- Resource settings

ACT
- Coordinate
- Deploy
- Communicate

OBSERVE
- Impacts
- Gaps
- Workload
- Partner feedback

ADJUST
- Reinforce
- Redirect
- Scale or de-escalate



The system must be able to absorb feedback, test assumptions and add resources before gaps become failures.

Plan to sustain the response, not just start it

A finite workforce is itself an operational constraint.

PEOPLE

Finite workforce

Role depth and relief

Fatigue and recovery

OPERATING MODEL

Rotations and handovers

Current vs future operations

Scalable structures

DELIVERY

Maintain critical outputs

Reduce non-essential activity

Prepare transition



SUSTAINMENT IS OPERATIONAL PLANNING

Staff welfare, relief, handover quality and organisational endurance directly affect the response that can be delivered.



Do not discover the endurance limit of the team by exceeding it.

Are we ready for what happens next?

- Have we looked far enough ahead?
- Are triggers, timelines and mobilisation times understood?
- Are partners warned and processes ready?
- Are current operations and future planning both protected?
- Can we reinforce, adapt and sustain the response?

The crisis will reveal the system we have built, not the system we intended to build.