

EGU2020-13758

<https://doi.org/10.5194/egusphere-egu2020-13758>

EGU General Assembly 2020

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Post-Event Reviews for building Wildfire Resilience: The case of Tasmania, Australia

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Wildfire frequency and severity is dramatically increasing. Wildfires cause loss of life and destroy human and natural assets; smoke chokes cities; large fires release significant amounts of carbon; and fires can permanently change ecosystems so they are less effective carbon sinks. Countries with a history of wildfire, such as Australia, are facing unprecedented fires that outstrip response capacity.

Yet even in the worst catastrophes, scant attention is being paid to the massive potential for community-based initiatives to reduce risk and enhance resilience. The vast majority of wildfire reviews focus on suppression operations, and there is a clear need for these to be complemented with broader learning that provides holistic insights about how wildfire risk is generated, and how resilience might be increased.

This presentation will report on the findings from one such comprehensive and holistic review of a wildfire disaster in southwest Tasmania, Australia, in January 2019. The event resulted in a locally unprecedented human and animal evacuation, and burnt through large swathes of precious wilderness world heritage area. Utilising the Post-Event Review Capability (PERC) methodology, this study investigated the causes, successes and failures of this disaster. This presentation will present findings and recommendations that are locally actionable yet provide a number of generalised lessons pertinent across multiple risk contexts. Findings demonstrate the significance of community-based actions for wildfire risk management.