



Emergency Management Conference 2024

The 2024 ESF Emergency Management Conference was held earlier this week in Melbourne, attracting over 400 delegates keen to network and listen, learn, and be inspired. Developed by a cross sector committee with their finger on the pulse of what's new and needed, the program provided plenty of new and interesting topics and presenters.

This year's EMC theme was *'Disasters Have No Boundaries: Navigating the Increasing Frequency and Complexity of Events'* and opening keynote speaker Cindi Preller, from the Pacific Tsunami Museum (PTM), Hawai'i began the conference by explaining how events in one part of the world cross boundaries to have such a devastating effect so far away. Her highly interactive talk demonstrated how children are being educated about tsunamis at the museum she heads up.

The Claire Zara Memorial Oration was an attendee highlight with Dr Margaret Moreton, Executive Director at the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, speaking about why we need gender diversity in disaster risk reduction and resilience, reflecting on the many women and gender minorities in particular who lead and advocate and never 'give in' despite their exhaustion in the face of barriers - trauma, cultural loss, historic and ongoing prejudice and bias.

Dr Scott Rawling, Director of Science and Reporting with the Victorian Commissioner for Environmental Sustainability, opened our eyes to the economic, social and cultural impacts of disasters and how these are being monitored through various data sources and offered to bring that science and research to agency planning.

Three very popular workshops looked at how emergency management agencies can build greater trust with communities, how to enhance disability inclusive emergency preparedness, and understanding engagement through diverse perspectives. The outcomes of these workshops will be shared with ESFs Stakeholder Council for further discussion and consideration.

ESF CEO Siusan MacKenzie outlined the programs and opportunities made available by ESF for people from across the sector to build their knowledge and skills around mental health and wellbeing. A lively panel shared over dinner how they tackled the mental challenge of a trek to Everest Base Camp to support ESFs work.

Over two days, people could choose from stimulating topics that covered the full spectrum of emergency management, including themes that considered the human impact of the job such as vicarious trauma, how separation and divorce affects ES workers, and a new early intervention pilot.

The event concluded with Emergency Management Commissioner, Rick Nugent, facilitating a discussion with sector leaders Libby Murphy, Victoria Police, Allyson Lardner, Emergency Management Victoria, Jason Heffernan, Country Fire Authority and Tim Wiebusch, Victoria State Emergency. The panel shared sobering personal insights into how the job has impacted them, and by association, their families and what they do to maintain their mental fitness.

ESF Chair Tony Pearce closed the event by saying, 'Another terrific ESF Emergency Management Conference attended by 400 delegates. Year after year we see the benefit of the learning opportunities and value that this event adds to our sector with world class speakers and contemporary themes. I am really looking forward to meeting everyone again next year at what will be the 25th anniversary of our conference, a time for celebration.'



RESPONSES

The main takeaway for me is the economic impact on people going through separation. More education and awareness about it would be a great thing and actually find ways to support people going through it. For me it's probably just socialising it a bit more at work and making it less of a taboo topic.

- Peter Komsta, Partnerships Director, Wildlife Victoria (on Angela Harbinson's presentation on 'Impacts of Family Breakdown on the Emergency Service Workforce - ESF study')

I really enjoyed being at the conference this year for a number of reasons. One of which is it's always an amazing opportunity to catch up with our sector colleagues and get to have those conversations we might not otherwise have. But secondly, it's been really great just to see the diversity in the program this year and some of the really good conversations, particularly with the workshops, it's been an opportunity to dive a bit deeper into some of the topics that are really important for the sector.

- Dawn Hartog AFSM, Senior Manager, Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action

This is my 15th EMC, I absolutely love this conference. It gets better and better every year. It's invaluable having the entire sector come together to collaborate, it makes everything work a lot smoother in our industry. I always end up having a lot more work after I come to this conference but as my boss says: "you don't want to be handing out business cards during an emergency". Our team now has a few actions and takeaway with meetings and follow ups with Department of Health, Emergency Recovery Victoria and Bhiemie Williamson from National Indigenous Disaster Resilience.

- Jess Meilak, Coordination and Planning Officer, National Emergency Management Agency

This year's EMC has been exceptional, it's great every year. A highlight for me was Cindi Preller's session on tsunamis, she was a fantastic keynote speaker. Also, the discussions about terrorism and cyber attacks, this is really pertinent in this day and age. The attendance and interest in the workshops was really pleasing to see with a lot of them full to the brim.

- Mark Swiney, EMC Chair and Assistance Chief Officer at Fire Rescue Victoria

What I really liked is the opportunity to connect with other ES agencies but also learning about the offerings ESF provides to strengthen those connections. This conference has given me so much more insight to how crucial ESF is to the sector. It is such an enabler for innovation and collaboration in the wellbeing space.