



Submission to the Second National Action Plan under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to inform the Second National Action Plan under the National Disaster Risk Reduction Framework.

Background

ALIA is the national professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector, founded in 1937. With 5,000 members across Australia, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. ALIA supports networks of special interest groups and advisory committees that are interest or geographically based, interconnecting library and information staff at multiple levels across Australia.

ALIA's core values include:

- promotion of the free flow of information
- connection of people to ideas
- respect for the diversity and individuality of all people
- preservation of the human record
- partnerships to advance these values.

ALIA is a founding member of Blue Shield Australia (BSA).ⁱ BSA is a network of peak organisations 'committed to the protection of the world's cultural property, and is concerned with the protection of cultural and natural heritage, tangible and intangible, in the event of ... natural- or human-made disaster'.

Australia's diverse library collections contain significant physical and digital materials and unique knowledge that comprises our nation's heritage. However, libraries can find their premises, collections, staff and users under sudden threat, from local events such as fire or burst water pipe in the building, or as part of a bigger disaster, for example a bushfire or flood. Larger scale disasters impact not just the library collection and buildings, but the wider community, with libraries often an essential support service afterwards, as happened in the 2009 Victorian bushfires and the 2011 Queensland floods.ⁱⁱ



ALIA has worked for many years in supporting libraries in disaster planning and preparedness, as well as in disaster recovery.ⁱⁱⁱ ALIA's responses to the discussion questions are shaped by its long-term involvement in disaster risk reduction.

Responses to Discussion Questions

The following responses to Discussion Questions three and five:

- outline the enablers that are fundamental to ALIA's efforts in reducing disaster risks (Q3)
- identify gaps that impede efforts to reduce disaster risks (Q3)
- highlight an opportunity to develop and deliver a collections disaster training course (Q5).

Question 3: What is enabling your efforts to reduce disaster risks? Why should it be addressed in the second National Action Plan? What is impeding your efforts to reduce disaster risks?

The following enablers or drivers are fundamental to ALIA's efforts in reducing disaster risks and supporting the work of libraries, and can play a key role in strengthening the second National Action Plan.

1. Understanding the core value of preserving heritage

Libraries hold significant collections of Australia's unique knowledge and heritage. The collections range from the papers of famous Australians and priceless artworks held in National Institutions through to local history collections in public libraries. What these collections have in common is that they are irreplaceable, if damaged or destroyed in a disaster they cannot be replaced.

In developing the second National Action Plan, ALIA considers it a priority to formally recognise and embed the preservation of heritage collections as a core value in a national disaster risk reduction framework. Conversely, ignoring the vital role of cultural heritage in disaster risk reduction leaves a major gap in the Plan and significantly reduces community resilience.

ALIA's view of the importance of safeguarding unique heritage is shared by peak international and national organisations. It is reflected in the United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction *Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction*^{iv} and by bodies such as Blue Shield International and Blue Shield Australia that recognise the importance of the 'vital expression of the culture that makes up unique communities' and that 'its loss during conflict and disaster can be catastrophic.'^v



2. Integrated approach to disaster management

A second enabler is ALIA's integrated approach that connects and aligns disaster risk reduction to cover both physical and digital library collections. This integrated approach is informed by recent research that has uncovered a major national and international disconnect: that the disaster management of physical and digital collections is largely divided and uncoordinated.^{vi} To mitigate this divide, ALIA has developed integrated disaster resources that include a guide and template that can be used flexibly to coordinate disaster risk reduction across physical and digital collections.^{vii}

ALIA also notes a further gap in disaster risk management that significantly impedes efforts to reduce disaster risks: the lack of engagement between cultural heritage stakeholders and wider emergency services providers and first responders.^{viii} There is a need to address this disconnect within the framework of the second National Action Plan.

3. Collections disaster resources and training

A third enabler is relevant disaster resources and training that build shared understanding, develop skills in preventing, preparing, responding and recovering from collection disasters and strengthening overall community resilience. ALIA has developed disaster resources that comprise a guide, disaster plan template and training scenarios are readily available from the website.^{ix} The ALIA disaster resources primarily focus on the key *Prevention* and *Preparation* stages in disaster risk reduction, and link to other useful resources the *Response* and *Recovery* stages.

While there are some Australian cultural heritage disaster training providers^x, the majority are conservators who focus on physical collections and are largely based in the eastern states. There is a major gap of a nationally accessible course that would build the skills of library staff in disaster risk reduction for collections, physical and digital. Noting that much of Australia's unique knowledge and heritage is held in library collections, we would like to highlight the opportunity to make a national difference by developing and delivering a collections disaster training course covering physical and digital collections. Furthermore, there is an opportunity for ALIA to be resourced to develop and deliver a collections disaster training course to its wide network of members and beyond through its existing education and training infrastructure.^{xi}



4. Coordinating role in communicating information, coordinating and providing support

A fourth enabler that mitigates the effects of disasters is the central role played by ALIA in:

- coordinating disaster response and recovery with other collecting organisations
- communicating information about libraries and other organisations that may have been affected by disasters.

ALIA's disaster resources highlight that during disasters libraries may be involved in a wide range of other roles and activities that can include:

- being a community safe-haven, providing temporary accommodation and shelter;
- helping community members recover personal treasures by providing useful references and hosting consultation sessions with a conservator;
- collecting and recording the history of the disaster.

Examples of ALIA's coordinating role include the following:


- the *ALIA Rebuilding with Books campaign* saw \$110,000-worth of books distributed to families who lost their homes in the Victorian bushfires of 2009
- in 2011, during the Queensland floods, ALIA coordinated communication and support for libraries
- in 2015, through the FAIR campaign, ALIA raised funds to restock school libraries in Vanuatu following the devastation of Cyclone Pam
- during the 2019/2020 bushfires ALIA provided support and resources to affected libraries and communities.

There is an opportunity for ALIA's coordinating and support role to be formally recognised and supported in the critical disaster infrastructure.

Question 5: If the second National Action Plan included ~5 nationally significant strategic initiatives or actions to focus collective efforts over the next 3-5 years, what should they be? What would make the most difference nationally?

The following strategic initiatives follow from ALIA's responses to question three:

1. Formally recognise the preservation of Australia's cultural heritage as a core value in a national disaster risk reduction framework.

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2. Formally recognise and embed an integrated approach to disaster risk reduction of physical and digital cultural heritage.
 3. Address the disconnect between cultural heritage stakeholders and wider emergency services providers and first responders.
 4. Strengthen and resource the delivery of a collections disaster training course, building on the existing education and training infrastructure of ALIA.

Summary

ALIA considers that recognising the preservation of Australia's cultural heritage as a core value is fundamental to getting the balance right in the second National Action Plan. As a significant proportion of Australia's unique knowledge and heritage is held in library collections, we would urge consideration of the recommendations above to better strengthen disaster planning and preparedness, as well as recovery.

We would be happy to provide further information and I can be contacted on the details below.



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ⁱ Blue Shield Australia <https://blueshieldaustralia.org.au/>

ⁱⁱ ALIA disaster planning <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Web/Members-Area/Disaster-Planning.aspx?hkey=34c06b7e-43cd-424d-b029-fe21a74660e1>

ⁱⁱⁱ See for example ALIA (2022) *Disaster Planning*. <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Members-Area/Disaster-Planning.aspx>

^{iv} United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). (2015). *Sendai Framework for disaster risk reduction 2015-30. Section 30 d*. New York, NY: United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNDRR). https://www.preventionweb.net/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordren.pdf

^v Blue Shield International. (BSI). (2021). <https://theblueshield.org>

^{vi} Brown, H (2021) Interconnected Disaster Management - Bridging the Physical and Digital Divide, *JALIA* 70(3), 263-286, <https://doi.org/10.1080/24750158.2021.1958464>

^{vii} ALIA. (2019). *Disaster management for libraries Guide, template and Scenarios*. <https://read.alia.org.au/alia-disaster-management-libraries-part-one-guide>
<https://read.alia.org.au/alia-disaster-management-libraries-part-two-disaster-plan-template>
<https://read.alia.org.au/alia-disaster-scenarios-staff-training-sessions>

^{viii} Examples of two initiatives that are working to address this are:

- See reference⁴ UNESCO. (2022).
- See the work of Dr Dolapo Fakuade in this field. AICCM. (2021). 10 agents over 10 months no. 8 Disasters. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=21ksYAq7ctU>

^{ix} ALIA. Disaster planning. <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Web/Members-Area/Disaster-Planning.aspx?hkey=34c06b7e-43cd-424d-b029-fe21a74660e1>

^x See for example AICCM find a conservator. <https://aiccm.org.au/find-a-conservator/>

^{xi} ALIA Education and training <https://www.alia.org.au/Web/Careers/Training.aspx>