



## Resilient ALIES

What do the fire, police, ambulance, primary industries, forensics, Customs, Bureau of Meteorology state, and federal agencies across Australia and New Zealand have in common? They are representative of the membership of the Australasian Libraries in the Emergency Sector (ALIES) network.

The ALIES 2010 annual conference, hosted by the Attorney-General's Department, was held at the Australian Emergency Management Institute at Mount Macedon, Victoria, from 29 March to 1 April 2010. ALIES collaborate to fulfil the information needs of the emergency sector throughout Australia and New Zealand by:

- exchanging and sharing knowledge, skills, and resources
- maintaining a distributed Australasian emergency management collection
- providing an expert information service.
- The theme for the 2010 conference was 'resilience' and covered aspects of community, personal, and organisational resilience. The 2010 conference was designed with three streams.
- Resilience in the community: what is resilience and what difference does it make? How will the right information at the right time contribute to a community's ability to prepare for, survive and recover from emergencies and disasters?
- Resilience in the library community: how do we build on our strengths to thrive, rather than just survive, in turbulent times of constant change?
- Information and resilience: how can we take what we have learned and help our broader communities deal with adversity?

Keynote speakers from many national and state agencies and organisations spoke about resilience in relation to national security, community preparedness, and recovery, engaging communities in times of crisis and epidemics.

Using the experiences of disasters such as Black Saturday, Andrew Coghlan and Kate Brady from the Australian Red Cross discussed the role that libraries and information can play in supporting emergency services and the communities with which they work. Kate highlighted that this role can include informing best practice; supporting policy makers; promoting the use of new technologies; assisting with the development of new services; information sharing; and supporting evidence-based decision making.

Heather Wood, Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner, provided insights into how information was collected, collated, and captured for the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre following the Victorian bushfires on 7 February 2009.

Jane Grace from the Yarra Plenty Regional Library explained how, after the Black Saturday bushfires, as people began to rebuild their homes and their lives, they needed support through books to help them rebuild. Sue McKerracher, from ALIA, talked about their activities in preparing libraries for disasters, and the work of Blue Shield Australia in protecting cultural heritage in times of disaster.

Through a facilitated group discussion and workshop, participants explored how to ensure resilience in their own libraries and in the ALIES Network. They developed strategies and actions that ALIES members can put in place. Three ALIES Libraries presented case studies illustrating how to build on existing strengths during turbulent times.

This theme was further explored through a hypothetical discussion. This proved to be a fun and engaging way to look at issues affecting special libraries. The hypothetical provided an understanding of how libraries can be perceived, and highlighted strategies for ensuring library services remain relevant in times of economic uncertainty.

That information is a core component of resilience, and that there exist strong links between the concept of resilience and the work of the ALIES network, was well demonstrated throughout the conference. Participants identified how ALIES currently contributes to resilience in the Australasian region.

ALIES contributes to the wider community's resilience by:

- supporting organisational best practice in information and knowledge management through evidence-based decision and policy making,
- assisting in the development of new services,
- sharing information,
- providing multi-agency, cross-border, cooperative and collaborative one-stop-shop for information about emergency management,
- facilitating access to information on lessons learned and past practices,
- working as a community of practice to share expertise, knowledge and contacts.

ALIES contributes to member organisations' resilience through:

- ensuring alignment of individual library goals with parent agencies' strategic directions to strengthen national capacity and planning,
- providing a shared understanding and coordination of information needs in the emergency sector,
- providing an expert system of people and information resources.

ALIES contributes to individual member libraries' resilience through:

- building on the principle of support between member libraries to grow and develop the network,
- acknowledging the capacity to provide assistance to other member libraries as needed, and in turn soliciting assistance when required
- using ALIES to promote members' business and demonstrate value to stakeholders.

Any library whose parent body operates within the emergency management sector may be eligible and welcome to join the ALIES Network. If you are interested in becoming an ALIES library e-mail [em.library@ag.gov.au](mailto:em.library@ag.gov.au). More information about ALIES can be found at - <http://www.ema.gov.au/alies>

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