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Nature provides answers to reduce disaster impact

Natural Hazards Research Australia and insurer Suncorp have today released a discussion paper highlighting the power of the environment in reducing the impact of disaster.

The Nature Positive Disaster Risk Reduction Solutions discussion paper focuses on initiatives that enhance the biodiversity and ecology of the natural environment while providing social, economic and other wellbeing enhancements for people and communities.

Through domestic and international examples, the paper highlights the many opportunities for increasing investment in nature-based infrastructure such as wetlands, forests, coastal environments and urban green spaces, as well as practices such as cultural burning, to mitigate the risks of floods, bushfires, sea level rise and other natural hazards.

The paper, developed following a roundtable with more than 50 senior experts from government, research and industry in September, outlines four actionable ideas:

- Recognise the disaster risk reduction benefits of nature positive investments in planning and decision-making
- Enhance investment guidelines to encourage and support nature-based approaches to disaster risk reduction
- Enable public-private partnerships to drive the implementation of nature-based solutions
- Undertake pilot studies to demonstrate the effectiveness of nature-based solutions and build confidence in their application.

The paper also outlines considerations for nature positive disaster risk reduction solutions, such as selecting opportunities, financing and investment guidelines, insurance and consultation with local communities, including First Nations groups.

Suncorp Chief Executive Consumer Insurance Lisa Harrison said it is crucial to explore a broader range of solutions in disaster resilience.

“The purpose of this work is to engage key policymakers to make sure we are considering as many options as we can to lower risk, and impact, of extreme weather,” Ms Harrison said.

“To be successful, nature positive disaster risk reduction solutions require partnerships between government, business, not-for-profits, science and the community.

“Utilising natural based solutions, like wetlands to help reduce flooding, we can build resilience for communities, creating stronger natural defences and promote nature’s role in risk mitigation.”

Prof Cheryl Desha, Science and Innovation Director at Natural Hazards Research Australia, said the discussion paper shows ways that Australia can better work with the environment to reduce disaster risks.

“We must be courageous in planning for communities to be sustainable, safe and resilient,” Prof Desha said.

“Science and research can help us – the way to achieving meaningful action and results in by working together with partnerships across research, government, business, not-for-profits and community.

“Nature is incredibly resilient and offers us many opportunities – there are solutions out there that will help and there are options to develop pilot studies that further show how effective nature positive disaster risk reduction solutions can be. By working with our natural environment, we can learn to better live with what nature throws at us.

“By doing this, Australians all over the country, and our precious environment, will be safer, more resilient and sustainable in the face of our increasing natural hazard risk,” Prof Desha said.

The paper can be found at www.naturalhazards.com.au/naturepositive

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Media

Nathan Maddock - Natural Hazards
Research Australia
0410 998 600
nathan.maddock@naturalhazards.com.au

Kate Davies - Suncorp
0408 519 136
media@suncorp.com.au