Promoting sustainability: Innovations in flood management PERNILLE CHRISTENSEN[[1]](#footnote-1) and KIMBERLY WINSON-GEIDEMAN[[2]](#footnote-2)

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# Abstract

**Problem/Purpose***: Developing flood preparation and mitigation plans is of increasing importance in Australian cities, particularly since the devastating Queensland floods of 2010 and Victorian floods of 2011. Local planning is generally more effective than national planning as the factors that impact areas including weather patterns, geography, and population density vary widely by region. This study comprehensively analyses aspects of flood preparation, mitigation, and relief plans in two coastal cities in the United States and offers those strategies as approaches that can be implemented in flood-prone areas of Australia.*

*The case studies provided here include King County, Washington and Galveston, Texas. King County, Washington, home to the city of Seattle, is notable for its highly rated disaster mitigation plan while Galveston is regularly subject to seasonal hurricanes and flooding issues.*

**Design/methodology/approach:***Using a case study approach, this research investigates innovative approaches to flood management used in the United States.*

**Findings:***The research offers several best practice approaches to flood management that can be implemented in flood-prone areas in Australia.*

**Research limitations/implications:***The solutions investigated were overseas and some adjustment may be necessary considering the different political climates and land regulations of Australia.*

**Takeaway for practice:***Flooding events in Australia have increased in the past decade, and each has had an increasing economic impact from damage to the built environment. This paper offers alternative approaches to flood management, which, if implemented, may reduce the social and economic impacts of future flooding events.*

**Originality/value:***This paper offers alternative flood mitigation and disaster preparedness strategies for use by Australian policy-makers, planning and property professionals. We investigate and present responsible, pro-active approaches to flood management that have the potential to reduce the social and economic impacts of future flooding events.*

**Key words:** flood mitigation strategies, flood adaptation, urban resilience, sustainability, disaster planning

**INTRODUCTION**

Australia is subject to a number of regularly occurring natural disasters including floods, bushfires, tropical cyclones, and drought, events that occur as part of natural weather patterns and some that are exacerbated by alterations to the landscape through development, farming and other man-made causes. The government is proactive in its attempt to prepare policies and plans to respond to and minimise impacts during these crises, but recent events have proven much of that planning to be insufficient. Flooding has been of particular concern as several large-scale events have impacted the three most populous states since 2010 with damages estimated at well over AU$1 billion. Specific incidences include the Brisbane and Queensland flood of 2010-11 that resulted in three-quarters of the state being declared a disaster zone. Later in 2011 fifty Victorian communities were inundated with significant flooding, and in 2013 cyclone-related flooding in New South Wales and Queensland forced one of the largest evacuations ever, with over 700 businesses and 2000 homes affected.

Effective local disaster mitigation plans need to be supported by both federal and state policy (Berke, Lyles and Smith, 2014). Because a proactive approach to flood prevention is not always the most politically expedient one, incentives need to be in place at all levels to help motivate the implementation of protective measures. The costs of reconstruction, especially after large-scale disasters, are most often borne at the federal level; as a result local governments are often unwilling partners to disaster mitigation efforts. Plans are typically long-term, outlasting the tenure of politicians, and may include areas outside of their jurisdiction - e.g. delineated by watershed or geography rather than arbitrary political boundaries. Furthermore, because prevention measures are sometimes hidden, in contrast to post disaster actions which has immediate and apparent impacts (Burby et al. 1999; Burby 2006; Mileti 1999) politicians sometimes struggle to justify the investment in these measures.

Hazard mitigation is typically defined as action taken to reduce the effects of natural hazards on a place and its population. This research focuses on flood preparation as part of an overall disaster preparedness plan. We examine two highly rated plans in the United States, one in King County, Washington and another in Galveston, Texas, extracting key lessons that can be used as a framework to improve and enhance disaster plans in the Australian context. We recognise that while it is unlikely all aspects of these plans will be applicable, we hope to provide some general insight and fodder for future mitigation and preparedness efforts.

**UNITED STATES NATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT**

Disaster mitigation policy in the United States is a combination of mandates and incentive-based programs designed to encourage state and local governments to develop plans and mitigation procedures that best protect against the hazards and conditions they are commonly subject to. The creation and implementation of these policies has been ongoing since the establishment of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP) under the National Flood Insurance Act of 1968.

One of the most successful components of federal flood mitigation policy is the Community Rating System (CSR), a voluntary, incentive-based program administered by the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) and established under reforms to the NFIP in 1994. CSR recognizes proactive efforts made by communities to exceed the minimum mandated requirements of the NFIP and incentivises the establishment of flood protection and mitigation systems. As communities achieve greater level of compliance with the program objectives, policyholders receive insurance premium reductions ranging from 5%-45% which reflects the relative reduction of flood risk resulting from community efforts toward achieving the three CRS goals of

1. Reduced flood damage to insurable property;
2. Strengthened support for the insurance aspects of the NFIP; and
3. The development of a comprehensive approach to floodplain management.

Communities are classified on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the best, 10 not participating). The CRS Classes are based on completion of 19 creditable activities organized into 4 categories: public information, mapping and regulations, flood damage reduction and warning and response. Premium reductions are incrementally assigned based on corresponding classifications (NFIP, 2015). As of October, 2014, 1,313 U.S. communities were participating in the CRS, representing 69% of the 5.5 million NFIP policy holders (NADO, 2014).

More recent policy endeavours broaden the approach to flood planning as part of a comprehensive disaster preparedness plan and includes incentives that tie preparedness with access to disaster assistance. On October 30, 2000, President Clinton signed into law the *Disaster Mitigation Act of 2000* (DMA 2000), requiring both State and local governments to create mitigation plans. The DMA 2000 establishes a pre-disaster hazard mitigation program, mandates a prescriptive planning process, and sets new requirements for the national post-disaster Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP).

The mitigation planning requirements of the DMA 2000 are further specified in the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) *Interim Final Rule* (IFR) which sets forth guidance and regulations under which such plans are may be approved and implemented. The IFR provides detailed descriptions of both the planning process that states and localities are required to observe as well as the content of the plans. Jurisdictions without compliant mitigation plans are ineligible for future mitigation funding from FEMA (pre-and post- disaster) until a plan is adopted.

Additional planning assistance emerged in 2012 when FEMA released the *Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment (THIRA)* process – a standardized four-step risk assessment process aimed to help communities identify and understand potential hazard threats and risks, develop specific capability targets for each core capability identified in the National Preparedness Goal, and estimate the resources needed to reach each target (FEMA, 2013). The THIRA process builds on existing Hazard Identification and Risk Assessments (HIRAs) by: broadening the threats and hazards considered to include human-caused threats and technological hazards, incorporating the whole community into the planning process, and providing increased flexibility to account for community-specific factors (FEMA, 2013).

The communities we highlight in the following sections incorporate these and other elements into two of the most effective disaster prepardness plans in the United States. While our focus is primarily on the flood-related components, it should be noted that each of these plans are comprehensive in their assessment and approach to hazard planning (both natural and man-made/technological).

**KING COUNTY, WASHINGTON, USA**

**Background**

King County, located in the state of Washington in the upper northwest corner of the United States, is susceptible to a number of flood and flood-related issues including dam failure, earthquakes, landslides, severe weather and volcanoes. The county has received 24 presidential disaster declarations since 1964, declarations that are reserved for disasters with excessive financial impacts and where help is needed to mobilise rescue, recovery and other resources for victims. Seventeen of the 24 were for flood and flood-related incidences, many with effects so widespread they affected nearly every person living in the county (King County, 2010, Table 7-1, p. 7-6). This area is also affected by issues associated with climate change which has the potential to intensify disasters as landscapes change, sea levels rise and storms become stronger and more frequent (King County, 2010, p. 7-5). For these reasons and others, King County has developed one of the most comprehensive, successful and highly regarded preparation and mitigation plans as measured by the CRS floodplain management program. King County has achieved a CRS Class 2 rating, enabling King County insurance holders to earn a 40% reduction in their flood insurance policy premiums.

**Governance**

State-wide legislation in Washington permits the development of locally controlled flood management districts. In 2007 the King County Council created the independent, special purpose King County Flood Control District (hereafter “the District”), making it responsible for mitigating flood risks throughout the county. Specifics of the District’s charge include the “rehabilitation of levees and revetments, acquiring repetitive loss properties and other high-risk floodplain properties, increasing public awareness of flood hazards, improving countywide flood warning, and expanding flood prediction capabilities” (King County, 2010, p. 8-1). The 500 flood protection facilities that the District is responsible for protect large centres of employment including the Boeing aerospace facilities and distribution facilities worth about a billion dollars of assessed value (King County, 2010).

Aging infrastructure is a significant problem in King County with most flood control facilities built in the early 1960s. Many have reached the end of their useful life and are in need of structural repairs, engineering upgrades or need to be completely rebuilt. In 2010 the cost of conducting such work was estimated to be $385 million, an amount grossly underfunded before the District was established. Since then an ad valorem levy of .1 per $1000 of value has been assessed with the District now collecting about US$35 million per year (approximately $40 on a $400,000 property). These funds have been leveraged to increase the number of flood control projects from 2 to 3 annually to over 55 in 2008.

The District includes four basin technical committees, each overseeing one of the major river basins including Snoqualmie/South Fork Skykomish Rivers, Cedar/Sammamish Rivers, Green/Duwamish River and White River. The committee members include staff from local governments as well as tribal governments and District employees who coordinate with state and federal partners. Their purpose is to develop recommendations to further the goals of the District at the individual basin level and deliver those recommendations to the District Board of Supervisors. Once approved, implementation is the responsibility of the King County Department of Natural Resources and Parks’ Water and Land Resource Division, River and Floodplain Management Section (King County, 2010, p. 8-1).

**Plan Details**

The District’s plan comprehensively assesses the risks and impacts associated with a variety of hazards (King County, 2010, p. 16-1). It looks at the probability of occurrence, prioritising those hazards that are likely to occur in the near future. Earthquakes, floods, landslides and severe weather are ranked the highest and are likely to occur within the next 25 years. Dam failures rank second and are expected to occur within the next 100 years. Volcanic eruptions and wildfires have a low probability of occurring within the next 100 years. Estimates of risk are based on HAZUS-MH methodologies promoted by FEMA, assessing the impacts on people, property and operations within the District.

Hazards are also assessed based on the extent of the expected impact with each weighted based on the anticipated impact on people, property and operations, respectively. The hazards estimated to have the greatest impact are flood, dam failure, and earthquake. Severe weather and landslides rank second, followed by volcanoes and wildfires.

The mitigation plan takes a worst-case scenario approach, incorporating climate change forecasts that predict warmer and wetter winters likely to test the capabilities of existing flood-related facilities. Historic data is eschewed in favour of models that anticipate significant and possibly extreme changes and shifts in weather patterns, climate events, and emergency response needs (King County, 2010, p. 9-13). The mitigation plan avoids focus on a single hazard, anticipating not only the impact from flooding but also peripheral hazards that lead to floods such as earthquakes and severe weather.

The District’s action plan for flood hazard mitigation is based on the 2006 King County Flood Hazard Management Plan (hereafter the Plan). Stated goals of the Plan include “reduce risks from the flood and channel migration hazards; to avoid or minimise the environmental impacts of flood hazard management; and to reduce the long-term costs of flood hazard management” (King County, 2010, p. 17-1). The Plan focuses on two areas of primary interest where immediate and future activities can take place – Programmatic Work Programs and Capital Improvement Programs – and the District’s budget services these activities. Programmatic Work involves items such as flood preparedness, grants, public outreach and general administration among other things. Capital Improvement Programs focus on capital improvement projects as well as acquisitions and elevations.

A cost-benefit analysis evaluates a series of criteria that help prioritise actions and activities related to flood prevention and mitigation as well as establish a hierarchy for flood risk. Current land use, the seriousness and extent of potential impacts, and how soon an event is likely to occur are all weighted, and the total score divided by the total points a project can accrue (38) results in the associated flood risk factor. Projects with a risk factor of 67% or higher are deemed to be of high benefit, those scoring 33-66% medium, and those less than 32%, low. This is balanced against subjective ratings of high, medium and low for costs when projects total $5 million plus, $1-5 million and less than $5 million, respectively. The benefit/cost ratio prioritises high over high, high over medium and medium over low projects as they are deemed most cost beneficial.

Mitigation strategies are also prioritised based on project objectives. High priority projects meet multiple objectives, are or are expected to be funded, and can be completed in the relatively short-term (less than 5 years). Projects considered medium priority meet at least one objective and are expected to be complete in a 1-5 year period (subject to funding). Low priority projects have a longer-term horizon of 5-10 years and lack funding. Assignment to a category is not static and can change based on the availability of funds, for example.

**GALVESTON, TEXAS, USA**

**Background**

The City of Galveston, located approximately 50 miles southeast of Houston in south eastern Texas, is a barrier island approximately 2 miles off the coast. The island is almost 28 miles long and only 0.5 to 2.5 miles wide, and is bounded to the north by West Bay, to the northeast by Galveston Bay and Galveston Channel, to the south and east by the Gulf of Mexico, and to the west by San Luis Pass. Its geography and topography make it particularly susceptible to a variety of natural and weather related hazards. More than 95% of Galveston’s jurisdiction is located within a Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA)[[3]](#footnote-3) (City of Galveston, 2011, Map 6.3.8-1), including the vast majority of residential structures, historic assets, critical facilities, and City-owned assets.

Galveston was the location of the Great Storm of 1900, the deadliest natural disaster in U.S. history. A storm surge of over 15 feet inundated the entire island destroying over 3600 homes, leaving 30,000 residents homeless, and amassing a death toll estimated between 6,000 to 12,000 residents (City of Galveston, 2011). The Great Storm prompted the building of Galveston’s Seawall, started in 1902 with an initial segment of 3.3 miles and further extended between 1904 and 1963 to over 10 miles in length. With a height of approximately 17 feet above sea level and 16 feet thick at its base, it withstood the storm surges of Hurricane Alicia in 1983 and was estimated to have prevented in excess of US$100 million in damages. However, the Seawall was no match for Hurricane Ike (2008); its storm surges ranged between 15 and 20 feet and topped the Seawall, resulting in widespread flooding of up to six feet throughout the downtown area (City of Galveston, 2011).

Between 1950 and 2010, the City of Galveston has experienced at least 88 weather-related hazard events, (NOAA NCDC). In 1971, the City joined NFIP and has maintained uninterrupted good standing with the program. Galveston has received six Presidential Disaster Declarations since 2001 - five of which were related to the impact of flooding from tropical systems. (City of Galveston, 2011, Table 6.2.1-1) - prompting the National Hurricane Center in 2005 to name Galveston as one of the top five most vulnerable places in the United States. This designation was validated in 2008 when Hurricane Ike damaged 16,426 residential parcels in the City (88% of all residential parcels), with 947 structures (6%) classified as substantially damaged. 35,248 National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP)[[4]](#footnote-4) claims were paid following Ike in the State of Texas, totalling more than US$2 billion in damages (NFIP, 2015). In total, Ike caused more than US$50 billion in damages and claimed dozens of lives (Merrell, 2015). The City’s growing awareness of the potential impact of natural hazards - particularly flood and extreme wind - to the people, built environment, and operations of the City of Galveston impelled the City to begin the process of creating a hazard mitigation plan in 2010.

**State Level Governance Challenges**

In Texas the most destructive natural disaster is flooding, when considered from the perspective of economic loss to citizens. Texas ranks among the worst of any state for flood-control spending despite being second only to Louisiana for flood claim pay-outs, with nearly US$5.5 billion in paid out for 237,251 flood loss claims between 1978 and 2011(TASCE, 2015). In 1999, state legislation was passed requiring all counties and cities to meet the eligibility requirements of the NFIP; the legislation does not, however, require communities to enrol in the NFIP (TFMA, 2008). Despite this, Texas ranks second only to Florida in the number of flood insurance policies issued, accounting for approximately 12% of the total flood policies, insurance coverage in force, and total premiums paid in the United States (TASCE, 2015). The legislation also gave communities the authority to regulate development with stricter local floodplain management requirements (TFMA, 2008).

With over 12% of the state’s land area subject to flood events, there has been over 400 deaths and $4 billion in damages as a result of flood-related incidents since 1988 (TFMA, 2008). Despite the severity of flooding impacts on the state, Texas does not have a state-wide flood management plan, and none of the three state agencies responsible for flood mitigation planning across the state have authority to create, implement or provide floodplain management policies for any of the state’s 23 river basins (TASCE, 2015). However, a State of Texas Hazard Mitigation Plan (SHMP) was developed and approved by FEMA in 2004, and has since been updated in 2007, 2010 and 2013. As a result, Texas is eligible to receive Hazard Mitigation Assistance (HMA) funding to help achieve mitigation goals at both the state and local levels. The primary role of the THMP is “to motivate state agencies and local government, as well as the private sector, to prevent catastrophic impact to property and people from natural hazards by addressing their potential for risk, identifying mitigation actions; and establishing priorities to follow through with those actions through collaborative, analytical mitigation planning” (TXEMMPT, 2013, p. 13).

In the aftermath of Hurricane Ike, Texas Governor Rick Perry formed the Commission for Disaster Recovery and Renewal to investigate strategies for preparing for and mitigating future disasters. The Commission recommended that a 6-county (Harris, Galveston, Chambers, Brazoria, Orange and Jefferson) public corporation be established to examine regional Texas approaches to storm surge suppression. That corporation, the Gulf Coast Community Protection and Recovery District, Inc., was established on April 20, 2010. One proposed solution the Commission considered is the “Ike Dike,” a massive levee system designed to withstand ~10,000 year storms and prevent storm surges from entering the internal waters of Galveston Bay, thereby protecting the island’s important petroleum and other industrial facilities lining the coast and shipping channel (Merrell, 2014; 2015). Momentum toward building the structure declined significantly in 2012 when attention was shifted away from the Gulf as a result of the significant damages caused by Hurricane Sandy in the northeast. However, in 2013, the Bay Area Houston Economic Partnership began raising funds for a comprehensive study which they hope to use to persuade the US Congress to fund the project. Phase 1 of that study was completed in February 2015, and the final phase is estimated to be completed in mid-2016.

The lack of progress toward the development of clear strategies for preparing for and mitigating future disasters has earned Texas a ‘D-’ for Flood Control Infrastructure on the 2015 ASCE Infrastructure Report Card, with warnings that this grade will drop further if Texas continues to forego central disaster mitigation planning despite growing populations along its flood-prone rivers (TASCE, 2015). The TASCE project that flood will damages to increase state-wide as population pressures lead to more development in high-risk areas, in rural counties with no defined flood boundary maps, and increased property values (and, therefore, damage values). Furthermore, the Report Card notes that that most communities have outdates floodplain maps, making local risk assessment and flood plain management difficult.

**Galveston Hazard Mitigation Plan Details**

The City of Galveston, recognizing its high-risk profile, responded to the aforementioned governance challenges by proactively developing the City of Galveston Hazard Mitigation Plan (GHMP) to mitigate the impact of future natural hazards. The GHMP was developed through a partnership between the City’s Emergency Management Coordinator and the Department of Planning and Community Development with input from the City of Galveston Hazard Mitigation Plan Stakeholder Committee (HMPSC) (City of Galveston, 2011). To begin the GHMP planning process, the group reviewed the Texas HMP to ensure that the Galveston HMP would align with the State HMP document in the areas of hazard identification, risk assessment and mitigation strategy. In addition, the group identified the steps necessary to ensure that the GHMP was developed in compliance with the requirements of the DMA 2000 and FEMA IFR.

The City conducted an assessment of the City’s vulnerability to natural hazards as well as a comprehensive hazard risk assessment. This analysis was then used to form the basis for prioritizing mitigation efforts in the GHMP. The purpose of the risk assessment was to identify and quantify potential future losses from hazards, and to use this information to select the most appropriate actions to take to reduce those damages.

Of the 28 hazards included in a comprehensive hazard risk assessment, fourteen hazards were identified that posed the highest risk to local residents and built environment. The fourteen risks were further evaluated using a qualitative risk assessment of past occurrence and likelihood of future occurrence was conducted using a combination of GIS analysis, exposure of assets assessments, loss estimates, and historical data to assess the likelihood of future occurrence and to determine the significance of risk. Ranking highest in probability of occurrence and potential impact to people, buildings and infrastructure in the qualitative risk assessment were flooding and extreme wind (City of Galveston, 2011, Tables 7.2-1, 7.3-2, 7.3-3).

This analysis revealed five hazards to be significant enough for a quantitative risk assessment of potential future losses to be conducted, these included: coastal erosion, extreme wind, flooding, wildfire/urban fire, and hazardous materials. The City identified flooding as the hazard to which it is the most exposed, with extreme wind and wildfire/urban fire also identified as significant hazard risks (City of Galveston, 2011). The risk assessment notes that no large-scale measures would be able to reduce risks to all properties, so consideration of site-specific mitigation interventions should be considered in the HMP in addition to large-scale City-wide actions. Furthermore, like King County, the assessment notes that other issues (e.g. geography) and issues related to climate change (e.g. sea level rise and the predicted increased intensity of severe weather-events in the future) also have the potential to intensify disasters.

Exceeding the requirements of the DMA 2000, The City of Galveston HMPSC used the risk assessment to first develop a series of goals and objectives for the City and then conduct a capability assessment to determine the City’s capacity to implement hazard mitigation projects. The assessment concluded that capability is an area in need of immediate attention because, although there is a recognition that mitigation is essential for the long-term survival of the City, there is little to no local staffing for hazard mitigation activities (City of Galveston, 2011).

Chapter 9 of the GHMP outlines the four broad goals of the Mitigation Action Plan, and details the specific objectives with associated proposed mitigation action(s), the hazard(s) addressed by each action, the estimated cost and potential funding source for each action item, the responsible department, and its priority (Table 9.3.3-1). Table G.1-1 lists all identified mitigation actions developed and prioritized during the planning process by hazard to be mitigated. The Hazard Mitigation Plan Stakeholder Committee (HMPSC) considered a range of mitigation actions to address the City’s hazard vulnerabilities, the following seven categories of actions are included in the GHMP:

1. Public Education and Outreach
2. NFIP, Flood Management and Building Codes
3. Flood Mitigation Actions
4. Wind Retrofitting Mitigation Actions
5. Early Warning Systems
6. Coastal Erosion
7. Wildfire/Urban Fire

Priorities were initially qualitatively determined based on feasibility, anticipated effectiveness of reducing risk and a consideration of each action’s general cost effectiveness. To assess the implementation priority of potential mitigation actions in a systematic manner, the HMPSC utilized the *Social, Technical, Administrative, Political, Legal, Economic, and Environmental* (STAPLEE)[[5]](#footnote-5) method (City of Galveston, 2011, Table 9.4-1). This methodology was also used by the State in developing the SHMP, and ensured that the process used by the HMPSC to weigh the pros, cons, cost, and benefits is consistent with the State’s process. For each mitigation action, a value of 1 (Low), 2 (Moderate) or 3 (High) was assigned to each of the STAPLEE criteria. Higher priority mitigation actions were deemed to be most cost effective and most compatible with the social and cultural values of the community. In addition, implementation of each mitigation action item was considered in terms of available staffing and funding resources, as this was identified as a potential limitation of the City’s capability (City of Galveston, 2011). Mitigation projects with a STAPLEE score less than seven were given an overall ranking of Low priority, while those with a STAPLEE score over 16 were deemed to be of High priority. Mitigation projects with STAPLEE scores ranging from 8 to 15 were ranked as Moderate priority.

For compliance with the requirements set forth by FEMA in the *Interim Final Rule,* benefit-cost analysis (BCA) is required for mitigation projects to be eligible for FEMA funding. The GHMP included a general cost analysis for all mitigation actions at a general level, and the HMPSC determined that the City will undertake a more extensive BCA for specific projects as funding sources and opportunities arise. This ensures that limited resources are not wasted on extensive data gathering and BCA for projects that may never be authorized.

Interestingly, all action items, regardless of priority, are listed in Table 9.3.3-1 with scheduled implementation between 2011 to 2016. Since the writing of the GHMP, Galveston has joined the NFIP Community Rating System (CRS), in May 2014, and achieved a Class 7 rating resulting in a 15% reduction in premiums for local flood insurance policy holders. To address the CRS annual outreach requirement, the City proposes to pursue an annual *Repetitive Loss Outreach Program* which would advise homeowners if they live in a repetitive loss area and could be subject to flooding, offer homeowners property protection measure guidelines, and offer homeowners basic information about flood insurance. The City has also adopted the 2009 International Building Code (IBC) and meets the CRS requirement of having both a trained construction code official and municipal floodplain manager. Flood mitigation actions in progress focus on retrofitting structures prone to periodic flooding; key strategies include: increasing structural elevation, dry flood-proofing, wet flood-proofing, improved drainage, installing generators and acquisition of structures at fair-market value for removal/demolition.

**CONCLUSIONS: RELEVANCE FOR AUSTRALIA**

There are a number of reasons why these plans work. The King County plan is strongly supported by state legislation and although that is less so in Texas, there is legislation in place supporting the development and implementation of such plans. Both leverage federal monetary incentives to fund projects and shared governance from public and private stakeholders motivates the implementation of the plans. The plans are thorough with goals that support stated objectives and that do not deviate from the ultimate mission of disaster preparedness. In addition, both plans view disaster planning and mitigation as part of a comprehensive hazard mitigation approach, identifying related issues and prioritising projects based on feasibility and anticipated impact. Furthermore, both plans are based on a realistic cost-benefit analysis that considers funding sources and availability and leverages current resources to achieve the most cost-effective, immediate and widespread impacts.

There are several of key lessons that Australian policymakers and planners can take away from the King County and Galveston experiences. Firstly, flood preparedness is not one-dimensional. It should be considered as part of a comprehensive disaster mitigation strategy that looks at the compound effects of a range of disasters. Plans should link floods and related events with the likelihood of occurrence as well as the extent of impact on people, property and the environment. Plans need to be thorough and comprehensive in this respect and also account for the cost and benefits of mitigation and preparedness activities. Finally, policies, mandates and projects should be coordinated at all levels, including public and private stakeholders in proactive decision-making that helps preserve property, protect people and minimise damage.

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2. kimberly.winson@unimelb.edu.au [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. A Special Flood Hazard Area (SFHA) is the portion of the floodplain subject to inundation by the base flood and/or flood-related erosion hazards. The base flood means the flood having a 1% chance of being equalled or exceeded in any given year (also called “100-year floodplain”). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.fema.gov/national-flood-insurance-program [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Table 9.4-1 describes the basic steps in the STAPLEE methodology. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)