



WESTERN SYDNEY
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Institute for Culture
and Society

Natural Hazard Science and its Social Life: Diversity, Uncertainty and Risk

The project

Institute for Culture and Society researchers Dr Jessica Weir and Dr Liz Clarke, together with their research team, are investigating the use of scientific knowledge by the emergency services to mitigate Australia's flood and fire risk.

Scientific research has provided significant insights into our predictions of and preparations for natural hazard events, whose behaviours and occurrence are both highly consequential and highly uncertain. As such, it is unsurprising that government agencies often emphasise their commitment to having 'science-led' or 'evidence based' policies. However, science itself is inherently uncertain, encompasses diverse disciplinary approaches, and is always used in conjunction with other sources of knowledge.

This research project asks how do those engaged in risk mitigation manage scientific uncertainties in their decision-making? How do they evaluate scientific knowledge in relation to professional knowledge, local knowledge and intuition? What does this mean for risk mitigation practice in the context of potentially catastrophic natural hazard events?

These questions are explored in collaboration with flood and fire risk mitigation practitioners in southwest Victoria, western Sydney and peri-urban Darwin. Initial research results have revealed how practitioners navigate the insights and limitations of the natural sciences, whilst also working with and through political and institutional constraints, to mitigate risk in its various guises - including the risks of the event itself, and the professional risks that arise out of the cycles of blame and inquiry that follow large events.

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It champions collaborative engaged research in the humanities and social sciences for a globalising digital age, and is the largest dedicated research concentration of its kind in Australia.

The Institute encourages collaboration from Australian and international institutions, and students interested in postgraduate studies.