



Submission to Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications Climate Risk Assessment Inquiry

10 September 2025

Executive summary

- **Beyond the Australian Government’s climate risk assessment, multiple government agencies conduct various forms of ‘risk assessment’, including for domestic security, critical infrastructure, and natural disasters.** However, the Government does not effectively coordinate these various risk assessment efforts.
- **At a time when global threats and hazards are increasingly interconnected – especially climate change – it is unwise to conduct siloed risk assessment efforts.** This approach inevitably leads to strategic surprises, like the Global Financial Crisis, the Black Summer bushfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The economic and health burden of these shocks often lands on the most vulnerable Australians.
- **Australia remains an outlier among OECD countries in not conducting such an all-hazards national risk assessment.** The Netherlands, United Kingdom, Switzerland, Canada and New Zealand, among others, all have fully developed national risk assessment processes. In the absence of a national approach, Australia’s States and Territories have developed their own public risk registers with varying levels of quality and consistency.
- **Furthermore, the Australian Government is not sufficiently transparent with Parliament and the public about the complex and increasingly catastrophic global risk environment.** Risk assessments conducted by multilateral organizations, civil society groups, and other countries consistently point to a world that is becoming more insecure, unstable, disruptive, and challenging.
- **The lack of upfront communication puts Australian citizens and communities at risk of grave harm.** It also means that civil society, industry, and State and Territory governments cannot prepare adequately or properly invest in resilience. Without clear public discussion of systemic and global risk, Australia will be locked in a costly cycle of “respond and recover” rather than “anticipate and prepare.”

Global Shield Australia’s recommendations

1. The Australian Government, through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, should conduct an all-hazards national risk assessment.
2. The Australian Government should develop a public communication strategy for engaging the Australian public on the gravest and most important threats facing the nation.



[Global Shield Australia](https://globalshieldpolicy.org) is an independent, non-profit policy advocacy organisation dedicated to reducing global catastrophic risk. We take an all-hazards approach to global catastrophic risk management, supporting governments to enact and effectively implement policies that prevent and prepare for all forms of risk. We are the Australian office of a growing global non-profit organisation, Global Shield, which is headquartered in Washington, DC. For more information on this submission please contact australia@globalshieldpolicy.org.

The need for a comprehensive and public assessment of national risk

Across the Australian Government, many agencies conduct various forms of ‘risk assessment.’ Beyond the climate risk assessment by the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, this includes: the Office of National Intelligence’s classified climate security risk assessment; the National Emergency Management Agency’s (NEMA) assessments of disaster risk; the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) assessments of domestic security risk, with an annual presentation by Director-General (DG) ASIO dubbed the “Annual Threat Assessment”; and the Cyber and Infrastructure Security Centre’s (CISC) in the Department of Home Affairs assessment of threats and hazards to critical infrastructure. These examples show two fundamental problems with Australia’s current approach to risk assessment, which are particularly harmful for dealing with climate risk, among other major threats to the nation.

First, the Australian Government does not effectively coordinate its various risk assessment efforts. At a time when global threats and hazards are increasingly interconnected, it is unwise to conduct siloed risk assessment efforts. For example, climate change cannot be treated separately from many of the other threats and hazards faced by Australia, including in relation to national security, food and water security, energy transition and supply, social cohesion, people movement, and critical infrastructure resilience. As a result, the Government and broader community are not being provided a current and comprehensive picture of the global risk landscape. It inevitably leads to strategic surprises – such as we faced on 9/11, and with the Global Financial Crisis, the Black Summer bushfires, and the COVID-19 pandemic – with the economic and health burden often landing on the most vulnerable Australians.

Second, the Australian Government is not sufficiently transparent with Parliament and the public about the increasingly complex and catastrophic global risk environment. Risk assessments provided by multilateral organizations, civil society groups, and other countries consistently point to a world that is becoming more insecure, unstable and disruptive.¹ The Government might be concerned that making the public aware of the various climate, security, and non-traditional threats might raise public anxiety, especially during a period of deep economic

¹ See for example, World Economic Forum (2025) [The Global Risks Report 2025](#) (20th ed.); and United Nations (2025) [Global Risk Report 2025](#).

uncertainty for many Australians. Although these concerns might have some validity, Australians deserve to be treated maturely and to be informed of the gravest threats to the nation.

Governments can also be reticent to highlight threats or hazards for which they do not have clear solutions. However, the lack of upfront communication puts Australian citizens and communities in danger. It also means that civil society, industry, and State and Territory governments cannot prepare adequately or properly invest in resilience.

We acknowledge the Committee's efforts to identify reasons why the climate change assessment has been withheld. We encourage the Committee to take this opportunity to make it clear to the Government that Australia ultimately needs an all-hazards, comprehensive national risk assessment – one which puts the assessment of climate change in the broader context – supported by a public communications strategy. This assessment would inform a whole-of-government approach to managing the gravest threats to the nation, and inform the Australian public in a clear, sober and honest manner.

Recommendation 1: The Australian Government, through the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, should conduct an all-hazards national risk assessment

Australia lacks a whole-of-government process to identify, assess, and prioritise its nationally significant threats and hazards – an 'all-hazards national risk assessment'. This is a critical first step for governments and societies to manage risk of national significance. When conducted holistically and systematically, a national risk assessment helps capture the types of risk that require whole-of-society attention – and becomes a call for action.

Remaining partially blind to global and national risk will mean that Australia will continue to suffer economic, social and security costs. Policymakers will continue to make insufficient or ineffective decisions about where government resources are allocated to limit damage and increase resilience. Without a clear risk assessment, Australia will remain in the cycle of response and recovery. Australia will be at risk of being surprised by global shocks.

Australia remains an outlier among OECD countries in not conducting such an assessment. The Netherlands², United Kingdom (UK)³, Switzerland⁴, Canada⁵ and New Zealand⁶, among others,

² National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (2022) [National Risk Assessment of the Kingdom of the Netherlands 2022](#).

³ UK Cabinet Office (2025) [National Risk Register 2025](#).

⁴ Federal Office for Civil Protection (n.d.) [The National Risk Analysis of Disasters and Emergencies in Switzerland](#).

⁵ Public Safety Canada (2023) [National Risk Profile 2023](#).

⁶ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (n.d.) [New Zealand's National Risks](#).



have fully developed national risk assessment processes. The United States is also currently developing its own national risk register.⁷

In the absence of a national approach, Australia's States and Territories have developed their own public risk registers.⁸ Their approaches, and the registers themselves, are not consistent, holistic or up to date. For example, of the total 33 hazards identified across all the states and territories, only five are shared (bushfire, earthquake, flood, heatwave and storm). Three registers have not been updated since 2017. Terrorism and cyber-attack appear in only three. Other security threats (such as foreign interference, politically-motivated violence, and the prospect of conflict), economic risk (such as supply chain disruption, energy security issues and financial collapse) and societal risk (such as social cohesion breakdown and irregular migration) are not captured at all.

The overarching objective of the national risk assessment would be to strengthen Australia's ability to monitor, prepare for, and respond to potential major shocks. In particular, it would:

- provide a consistent basis for future climate risk assessments;
- support communication and coordination across government and between federal, state, and local levels;
- help inform capability and mobilisation planning, including for NEMA and the Department of Defence;
- support national resilience strategies and programs;
- encourage public risk awareness and enable industry engagement;
- foster a whole-of-society approach to national resilience; and
- enable better understanding of systemic drivers of risk, such as climate change.

Global Shield recommends that the Australian Government conduct an all-hazards national risk assessment. We recommend that the national risk assessment be a whole-of-government effort led by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

PM&C would coordinate across all relevant governmental departments, as well as with States and Territories, to identify and assess risk against common criteria. PM&C has the relevant institutional knowledge – having led the National Security Risk Assessment in 2011-12 – and is best placed to receive the remit and resources to gather information from across the government.

⁷ The White House (March, 2025) [Achieving Efficiency Through State and Local Preparedness](#) [Presidential action].

⁸ New South Wales Government (2017) *State Level Emergency Risk Assessment* [not publicly accessible]; Emergency Management Victoria (2023) [Emergency Risks in Victoria](#); Queensland Government (2023) [State Disaster Risk Report](#); Government of South Australia (2020) [Key Hazards and Risks Summary](#); Government of Western Australia (2017) [Western Australia's Natural Hazards Risk Profile](#); Tasmania State Emergency Service (2022) [Tasmanian State Natural Disaster Risk Assessment](#); Australian Capital Territory Government (2017) [Territory Wide Risk Assessment](#); and Northern Territory Government (2024) [Territory Emergency Plan](#).



We also recommend that Parliament consider legislating the need for a regular national risk assessment, much like is required in the UK under its *Civil Contingencies Act 2004* or in the US under the *Global Catastrophic Risk Management Act*.⁹ New legislation would ensure the process is delivered with consistency, authority, and credibility across electoral cycles and commit future governments to fulfilling their obligations. It would also enable Parliamentary oversight of the process and the findings.

Recommendation 2: The Australian Government should develop a public communication strategy for engaging the Australian public on the gravest and most important threats facing the nation

The Australian Government does not communicate holistically, effectively or consistently enough with the country about risk to the nation and the broader global outlook. This lack of transparency and openness with the public undermines public safety and preparedness, reduces trust in government, and imposes additional economic and financial costs on everyday Australians.

Citizens and communities that are not aware of threats will underprepare, leading to higher casualties, property loss, and economic disruption when crises do occur. Perceived secrecy or lack of clarity from the government erodes public confidence in its competence, fueling misinformation and mistrust during crises, precisely when reliable information is most urgent and critical. Businesses, insurers, investors and infrastructure operators need clarity about risk to support their investment decisions and resilience efforts. Without clear public discussion of systemic and global risk, Australia will be locked in a costly cycle of “respond and recover” rather than “anticipate and prepare.”

The Government needs to improve its communication across at least three areas: situational awareness, resilience and preparedness, and crisis response.

Without a national risk assessment or register, Australians lack sufficient situational awareness about the gravest threats to the nation. Some government outputs, such as the 2024 National Defence Strategy or the Annual Threat Assessment by DG ASIO, provide the public with some indication about the government’s outlook on the strategic landscape.¹⁰ But the format and subject matter provide a narrow view and only for those paying close attention. Even those countries without a public national risk register, like the US, frequently release government threat assessments, like those from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Better public communication ahead of Black Summer and COVID-19 on the risk posed by bushfires and pandemics might have ensured a more informed populace.

⁹ US Congress (2022) Global Catastrophic Risk Management Act ([6 U.S.C. §821 et seq.](#)).

¹⁰ Department of Defence (2024) [National Defence Strategy 2024](#); Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (2025) [ASIO Annual Threat Assessment 2025](#).

Second, the Australian Government could provide improved and more holistic guidance on resilience and preparedness. The Royal Commission into Natural Disaster Arrangements highlighted that “Governments, emergency service agencies and non-government organisations must continue to extend and use [community education and engagement] programs to encourage disaster resilience within their communities and to provide accessible, accurate and authoritative information”.¹¹ This is needed beyond just natural disasters. Many other countries, for example, provide detailed advice directly to households, across a range of scenarios, up to and including military conflict.¹²

Third, the Australian Government needs to ensure that, during a crisis, communications are clear, consistent and accessible. In an extreme or catastrophic crisis, the public might not be able to access timely and accurate information. This was most clearly demonstrated during COVID-19, where a fast-moving crisis led to potentially confusing or unclear messages. Indeed, the COVID-19 Response Inquiry recommended that the Australian Government “Develop a communication strategy for use in national health emergencies that ensures Australians, including those in priority populations, families and industries, have the information they need to manage their social, work and family lives.”¹³

Global Shield recommends that the Australian Government develop a public communication strategy for engaging the Australian public on the gravest and most important threats facing the nation. The strategy should provide a clear national approach to building Australian citizens’ situational awareness, preparedness and resilience, and crisis response. It would provide the framework for agency-led public communications efforts, including from NEMA, public health agencies, and security agencies, such as ASIO and the Department of Home Affairs.

The strategy must consider a range of aspects: category of audiences (citizens, communities, civil society, industry, critical infrastructure owners and operators, and State and Territory Governments); channels of communication (official government platforms, digital and social media, community networks, direct messaging, physical media); and communication challenges (language barriers; government skepticism; physical or technological barriers; attacks on communication infrastructure).

¹¹ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020) [Final Report](#).

¹² For example, Sweden’s government issued its “In case of crisis or war” pamphlet to all households in the country; Norway issued its “How You Can Contribute to Norway’s Preparedness” pamphlet; Finland issued its “Preparing for Incidents and Crises” pamphlet; and Denmark issued its “Prepared for Crises” pamphlet; and Germany has its “Guide for Emergency Preparedness and Correct Action in Emergency Situations”

¹³ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2023) [COVID-19 Response Inquiry Report](#).