

## Post-crisis recovery and policy implementation: public asset restoration in Queensland local government

The natural disasters that affected Queensland in 2010/2011 have been extensively studied, yet little attention has been paid to the financial arrangements used to support local government reconstruction. Queensland's recovery required billions of dollars that was channelled through central, state and local governments via the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA). This thesis examines the implementation of the NDRRA in Queensland after the natural disasters of 2010/2011 to better understand and improve intergovernmental relations and policy implementation in the context of disaster recovery.

To explore the NDRRA's operation at the local level, the thesis utilises Richard Matland's "conflict-ambiguity model" as an analytical framework. The framework is operationalised qualitatively via interviews with federal, state and (predominantly) local government officials from across Queensland. The research design is derived from three research questions:

- RQ1. How might we characterise the nature of the NDRRA's implementation after the 2010/2011 disasters?
- RQ2. How effective was that implementation?
- RQ3. How can we improve the future implementation of the NDRRA?

The analysis reveals how the NDRRA has been continuously redesigned and reinterpreted since 2011 within a context which Matland's model defines as "political implementation". In this context, top-down power, coercion and ambiguity are the norms for policymaking, and central and local policy actors often operate at cross-purposes. For the NDRRA's implementation, this has meant that attempts have been made at the central level to reassert top-down control of the NDRRA through several forms of bureaucratic coercion. These efforts have been the main feature of the policy's redesign since 2011. In response, local actors, who are often operating in highly uncertain, ambiguous and resource-constrained post-crisis contexts, have had to interpret a range of new policy instruments and institutions in ways that are sensitive to their street-level environment.

Because of these dynamics, the implementation of the NDRRA has suffered from several problems that have undermined the attempts to develop a longer-term form of resilience in Queensland. These problems are examined in the thesis in a series of empirical chapters that use Matland's model to explore the policy's historical development and its key contemporary features, especially compliance monitoring, betterment in public asset restoration and local government day labour eligibility.

The thesis concludes with some prescriptions regarding how to improve the design of the NDRRA and the effectiveness of its implementation at the local level. In this respect, it is argued that the monitoring programme that is now in place in Queensland at the state level is appropriate as a model for other states to emulate. However, central-level coercion needs to be reduced because it has unintended consequences at the local level that adversely influence implementation time frames and costs. In addition, it is suggested that a central-level policy shift is required so that more funding can be allocated for mitigation and the betterment of public assets.

**Matthew Weatherby**  
*School of Political Science and International Studies,  
University of Queensland, St Lucia, Australia*

