

TSUNAMI PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ITS ROLE IN RISK EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

The 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami has demonstrated that large magnitude, destructive tsunami occur in areas close to Australia. The commitment by the Australian Federal Government to the development and installation of an Australian Tsunami Warning System is a vital element in helping to keep Australian coastal communities and public and private infrastructure and assets safe from tsunami. However, the physical components of the warning system are only one element of making Australia safe. The other, perhaps more important element, is preparedness and response. Emergency Management Australia and the State Emergency Services are the agencies tasked with the responsibility of evacuating coastal communities if required. The success or otherwise of public response to tsunami warnings will be dependent on their understanding of tsunami hazard and risk. We provide selected results from a pilot investigation into public awareness of tsunami risk in the Sydney region – a fundamental necessity for developing appropriate risk mitigation strategies. Our questionnaire survey of members of the general public and coastal council professional officers indicates that little has been learned since the December 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami disaster. This presentation provides a summary of what the public knows and importantly, does not know with respect to tsunami. We make a series of recommendations to assist responsible organisations in thinking about risk mitigation.