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# Tourism destination recovery after the 2003 Canberra fires

*Thesis submitted for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy (Management)*



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Cover photograph - Evidence of natural recovery from bushfire is often symbolised by the vigorous resprouting of Eucalyptus trees. Photographer: E. K. Armstrong

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## Abstract

The tourism industry is vulnerable to crises and disasters and increasingly government and industry stakeholders are turning their attention to how to prevent, manage and recover from shock events. In the last decade there has been increasing interest in tourism research on crises and disasters, prompted in part by recognition of the tourism industry's vulnerabilities and what appear to be more frequent shock events. The beginning of this century has been marked by a series of crises and disasters including the 2001 Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in the United Kingdom, the 2001 terrorist hijackings in the USA, the 2002 and 2005 Bali bombings, the 2003 SARS epidemic in southeast Asia and Canada, the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami and Hurricane Katrina in the southern USA in 2005 (Henderson, 2007). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2007a) has also predicted that the extreme weather events associated with climate change will lead to more natural disasters. Crises and disaster have local, regional and global repercussions on the tourism industry at business/corporate, industry and destination levels and the need for more attention to preparation, response and recovery is acknowledged.

Much of the initial tourism research in this field focused on descriptions of crises and disasters and their impacts on tourism with some reflection on their management. This foundation and the comprehensive crisis and disaster literature from disciplines such as psychology, sociology, economics, geography and environmental science led to development of crisis and disaster management frameworks specifically designed for the tourism industry. These frameworks have achieved varying degrees of acceptance amongst tourism researchers with Faulkner and Vikulov's (2001) Tourism Disaster Management Framework (TDMF) being the most well known and often cited. The more recent Crisis and Disaster Management Framework (CDMF) developed by Ritchie (2004) is a useful destination-level framework based on a strategic management approach.

Despite the development of these frameworks, relatively little tourism research effort has focused on destination recovery and very little on medium and long term recovery. In addition, there is little research on wildfires as a type of natural disaster. The extensive bushfires in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in 2003 (often referred to as the Canberra fires) provided an opportunity to investigate in a longitudinal study the short, medium *and* long term actions undertaken by the government and tourism industry to assist destination recovery and then compare them with Ritchie's prescriptive CDMF. Being longer term research this study is able to consider almost the entire recovery stage whereas other research has focused on short or medium term recovery (for example Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001).

This research centred on a case study which is defined by Yin (1989 quoted in Wimmer & Dominick, 1997, p. 102) as an 'empirical inquiry that uses multiple sources of evidence to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context'. This case study used interviewing, the documentary method and participant observation as the key methods. Representatives of government and the tourism industry were interviewed in-depth about the actions taken by their organisations or businesses. The interviews were semi-structured with mostly open-ended questions and some participants undertook multiple interviews over a three year period. Extensive secondary data and documentation about the bushfire and subsequent response and recovery was generated by the ACT government, industry and community and publicly available sources included reports and reviews, media releases, newspaper articles, newsletters, brochures, websites and legal and coronial enquiries. These were critical for gaining a comprehensive understanding of recovery. Participant observation was also important and, as a resident of the ACT, the author participated in relevant events and observed the public face of community recovery.

The three methods resulted in a large data set that was distilled into a 'response and recovery story' structured according to Ritchie's CDMF. Upon comparing the findings with the framework, it was found that many elements were evident in the 'real life' case study including crisis communication, resource management, stakeholder communication, destination restoration and disasters as agents for change. There were also new findings that could be

integrated into a redeveloped framework including the establishment of a recovery team, training for crisis and disaster management, tourist/visitor management, recovery planning, human resource management issues, business recovery tools, partnerships and memorialisation and commemoration. The resulting Tourism Industry Crisis and Disaster Management Framework (TICDMF) is a practical and comprehensive tool for Destination Management Organisations (DMOs) that both describes what occurred in a real life case study but also prescribes recommended management actions.

In addition to specific recommendations for the ACT tourism industry, this research also resulted in general recommendations to the tourism industry, government and educators. These focused on (i) the importance of crisis and disaster management planning, (ii) the need to evaluate and document response and recovery and devote adequate resources to organisational learning, (iii) potential use of tools like the TICDMF and the plethora of resources to manage crises and disasters, (iv) educating staff, academics and tertiary tourism and hospitality students about crisis and disaster management and (v) accepting the chaos of recovery and devoting adequate resources to address the resulting complexity.

The tourism industry is vulnerable to external shocks whether they be local crises or national disasters. The preparedness of the industry and its ability to effectively respond and recover is of critical importance for destinations and the community in which they function. Case studies of crises and disaster and development of a body of theoretical and practical knowledge will ensure that government and industry continue to play an important role in caring for the safety and security of tourists while maintaining a viable and sustainable industry for all stakeholders.

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## Abbreviations

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ACTF	ACT Forests
ACTourism	Australian Capital Tourism (was Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation until mid-2003 and Australian Capital Tourism Corporation until 2006)
ANU	Australian National University
BRT	Bushfire Recovery Taskforce
BTA	British Tourist Authority
CAA	Canberra Accommodation Association
CCI	ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce and Industry
CDMF	Crisis and Disaster Management Framework (B. W. Ritchie, 2004)
CERG	Community and Expert Reference Group
CRTOA	Canberra and Region Tourism Operators Association
CRVC	Canberra and Region Visitors Centre
DMO	Destination Management Organisation
EACT	Environment ACT
EMA	Emergency Management Australia
ESB	Emergency Services Bureau
FMD	Foot and Mouth Disease
IAG	International Arboretum and Gardens
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
MRC	Murrumbidgee River Corridor
MSO	Mount Stromlo Observatory
NCAA	National Capital Attractions Association
NCETP	National Capital Educational Tourism Project
NNP	Namadgi National Park
NSW	New South Wales
NUS	Non-Urban Study
PATA	Pacific Asia Travel Association
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SFP	Stromlo Forest Park
STCRC	Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre
TDMF	Tourism Disaster Management Framework (Faulkner & Vikulov, 2001)
TIC	Tourism Industry Council (ACT and Region) Ltd
TICDMF	Tourism Industry Crisis and Disaster Management Framework
TNR	Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve
TRRT	Tourism Response and Recovery Team

## Dedication

This research is dedicated to everyone involved in the recovery of the ACT tourism industry following the devastating 2003 fires. Your hard work and perseverance in the face of such odds was and continues to be inspiring.

