

Learning from pollution incidents and exercises

Purpose The purpose of these guidelines is to outline the approach taken for identifying lessons during marine pollution incidents and exercises.

Background Organisational and individual learning through marine pollution incidents and exercises is fundamental to the current and future effectiveness of the National Plan for Maritime Environmental Emergencies (the National Plan). It is only through critical evaluation of response management arrangements that the National Plan can seek to improve operational effectiveness.

The National Plan therefore views the application of lessons management processes as a core component of the national response arrangements.

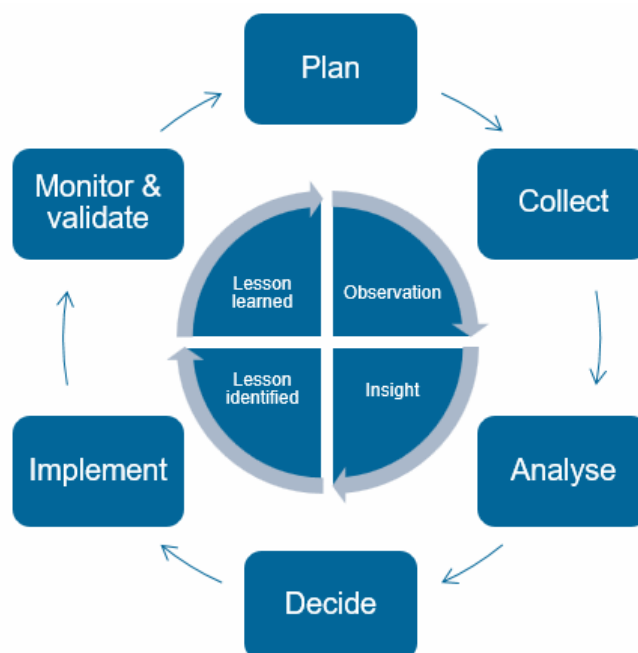
The Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience (AIDR) – [Handbook 8 – Lessons Management \(2019\)](#) is a national reference that outlines principles and guidance for the practice of managing lessons and has been adopted by emergency management agencies across Australia as the primary reference for their lessons management processes.

Lessons management processes

Lessons management should include:

- The systemic collection and analysis of information about an incident (real or simulated) to make judgements about the effectiveness, efficiency and appropriateness of the response operation; and
- The implementation and dissemination of lessons identified to improve operational effectiveness for the future.

Lessons management includes a cyclical process that includes the steps of; plan, collect, analyse, decide, implement and share and monitor and validate, as shown in the following diagram.



Lessons management processes

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Within the lessons management process, there is a secondary process, referred to as OILL (observations – insights – lessons identified – lessons learned). OILL is widely used by other emergency management agencies and private sector organisations to synthesise observations, analyse for insights and identify lessons. Each of the elements of OILL are defined as:

- **Observation** is a record of a noteworthy fact or occurrence that someone has heard, seen, noticed or experienced as an opportunity for improvement or an example of good practice.
- **Insight** is a deduction drawn from the evidence collected (observations), which needs to be further considered. An insight occurs when there are multiple observations, which are similarly themed.
- **Lesson identified** is a conclusion, based on the analysis of one or more insights, that determines a root cause and a viable course of action that can either sustain a good practice or address an area of improvement.
- **Lesson learned** only occurs once an approved change is implemented and embedded in practice within the organisation. Depending on the complexity of the change, it may take several years for the change to take effect.

To be effective, lessons management processes should be applied during and immediately following a marine pollution incident or exercise.

Learning during an incident or exercise

Ideally lessons management processes should be applied while the incident or exercise is still underway. Captured in real-time, observations can be collected as they occur and analysis commenced at the earliest opportunity. By applying a lessons management process during an incident or exercise, lessons identified can be fed back into the incident or exercise and corrective action taken to improve operational effectiveness, along with individual and organisational learning.

Learning following an incident or exercise

Historically, opportunities to learn from incidents and exercises have been left to collecting observations and reviewing reports from post incident events, such as debriefs and after action reviews. While these are valid approaches, there is a risk that some of the important lessons that could have been identified during an incident or exercise have been forgotten or overlooked.

Lessons management responsibilities

To be effective, any lessons management process will require dedicated staff to plan the lessons management process, collect observations, analyse these observations and present these for decision and implementation.

Ideally these staff are should not be directly involved in the incident, or participants in the exercise. However, collectively they should include technical expertise and have a sound understanding of the response specific issues that could arise during the incident or exercise.

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