



Australia ICOMOS Secretariat
 Ph: +61 3 9251 7131
 austicomos@deakin.edu.au
 www.icomos.org/australia

CONFERENCE PAPER ABSTRACT

NAME OF PRESENTER:	Robyn Riddett
TITLE OF PAPER:	Role of Indigenous Knowledge in Contemporary Risk Preparedness for Natural Disasters
THEME:	<i>Theme 1: Heritage at Risk – Climate Change and Disasters</i>
PAPER ABSTRACT:	
<p>The culture report in the post-Cyclone Pam Post Disaster Needs Assessment included the following statement: “Traditional knowledge, skills, practices; and their tangible and intangible cultural heritage underpin their [the people of Vanuatu] ability to live and thrive.”</p> <p>Indigenous knowledge can be a simple but powerful tool for resilience and capacity-building in relation to risk preparedness for natural disasters.</p> <p>Orally or by way of documentation people recorded, what they knew and saw and what was real to them, but as our world perspective is different we often do not recognize the factual component of myth when it comes to natural disasters.</p> <p>Aboriginal tribes have lived on the Andaman Islands for 30,000 – 50,000 years. The Onge tribe’s folklore refers to a “huge shaking of ground followed by high wall of water” and when alerted by the earthquake before the 2004 tsunami they headed for high ground and remained safe. In Sumatra locals and tourists went to the beach to watch the unusual wave with the obvious consequences.</p> <p>In Fiji is the legend of an ancient chief, Tanovo, of the island of Ono, and his main rival, the chief of the volcano Nabukelevu. The ensuing mythical battle between them became a metaphor for the eruption of a volcano, proved scientifically, 2,000 -3,000 years ago and before the recording of Fijian history.</p> <p>On Tanna (the most traditional island in Vanuatu) there is evidence in the construction of the rib-vaulted huts (<i>nakamals</i>) of traditional flexible construction techniques intended to withstand cyclones.</p> <p>This paper will explore ways to interpret oral history and traditional knowledge and practices so that they remain known and understood by contemporary society and as a way of mitigating disasters and as being part of National Natural Disaster Management Plans.</p>	
BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE PRESENTER:	
<p>Australia ICOMOS, Inaugural Convenor and past Chair of Blue Shield Australia; past Secretary and current Treasurer of ICORP, past Board member of The Blue Shield.</p> <p>Architectural historian, heritage consultant, expert witness in heritage (VCAT, Heritage Victoria and Planning Panels Victoria) and interior designer. Noted authority on 19th century interiors and decorative schemes.</p>	