



World Tsunami Awareness Day: highlighting the ever-present tsunami threat to Australia

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While tsunami is a real and constant threat, Australia has well-developed systems in place to help protect the community.

Today is World Tsunami Awareness Day, which recognises the power of this natural phenomenon, reflects on the impact of past tsunami and recommits to efforts here and around the world to prepare for future events.

November 5 was chosen by the United Nations to honour the story of heroic Japanese farmer, Hamaguchi Goryo who in 1854 set fire to his entire rice harvest to warn villagers of an impending tsunami when he noticed the tide receding quickly. His actions saved many lives.

Since 2007 the Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre (JATWC) has led the way in this part of the world, using the combined resources and expertise of Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology.

It was established as part of the international response to the devastating Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, which killed 230,000 people in 14 countries.

Co-director of the JATWC and Director of Geoscience Australia's National Earthquake Alerts Centre, Adrienne Moseley, said there has been on average 45 potentially tsunami-causing earthquakes worldwide each year.

"Most people don't realise that Australia is surrounded by active tectonic plate boundaries capable of generating tsunami with potential to impact Australia and the region," Ms Moseley said.

"We are working to help communities along Australia's coastline prepare for potential events. We cannot stop tsunami, but good preparation can reduce the devastating impact they have on communities, including loss of life, property damage and social and economic disruption."

Geoscience Australia detects earthquakes and the Bureau of Meteorology warns Australia of any tsunami threat.

BOM Manager of Tsunami and Storm Surge, Dr Yuelong Miao, says the ability to provide early warnings can make the difference between life and death for people in the path of a tsunami.

"Within 30 minutes of an earthquake occurring, the JATWC provides a tsunami advice of either no threat or potential threat to Australia," Dr Miao said.

"We also identify the key difference between marine threat – which mainly affects people and infrastructure close to the water's edge – and land threat, which can involve inundation of low-lying areas and the type of destruction seen recently in the tragic Sulawesi tsunami."

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"A major key to an effective response is timely communication and coordination with emergency responders, and that's why we conduct regular exercises with all our key partners," he said.

"It is also very important for all coastal communities – residents and visitors, alike - to be able to recognise the natural warning signs, and be prepared to move to safety, if necessary," Ms Moseley said.

"It is this message of awareness that is at the heart of the World Tsunami Awareness Day."

JATWC also provides important tsunami information services internationally. It is one of the three Tsunami Service Providers for the [Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning & Mitigation System](#) (IOTWMS), which shows all current earthquake and tsunami threats throughout the Indian Ocean region.

You can find more about World Tsunami Awareness Day at [the JATWC website](#) or at <http://www.un.org/en/events/tsunamiday/>