

## NOTES FROM THE FIELD

# Conference demystified emergency management practice and challenges

*By Scott-Andrew Smith*

The 2003 West Australian Emergency Management Conference from 27–28 March this year fulfilled its aim to demystify issues surrounding emergency management and to spotlight major emergencies such as Bellevue and the lessons that Western Australia has learned from it. In her welcoming address, the Minister for Emergency Services, Michelle Roberts MLA said, “local government and communities must take action to reduce the impact of emergencies by understanding the risks in their community.”

West Australia is faced with a broad range of emergencies ranging from cyclones and bush fires to transport and industrial accidents. The conference provided an opportunity for international and local speakers and delegates to focus what is happening in Western Australia and what external influences at the national and international level are impacting the State. The overarching theme of the conference was to have a ‘warts and all’ look at Western Australia’s emergency management capability. More than 150 emergency management professionals attending the conference participated in all areas of the conference program. Their

positive feedback indicated that a conference helped them to understand contemporary issues in emergency management as well as to demystify recurring challenges.

### Key Issues

- Networking and professional development opportunities for emergency management practitioners are valued and supported by sponsors, government, and non-government organisations.
- Organisations and individuals must be given opportunities to show case best practice in emergency management that demonstrate a Whole of Government approach towards safer communities.
- It is important that achievements and initiatives that support community-centred emergency management must be promoted to the wider emergency management community.

### Highlights

The program included keynote presentations by 15 speakers across a diverse range of emergency management topics—all central to the theme of demystifying emergency management. A series of six workshops were facilitated by emergency management practitioners providing delegates with opportunities to engage in a diverse range of issues that affect emergency management practice. A conference dinner was hosted by Emergency Management Australia and was well attended by 130 delegates and partners.

### Keynote Speakers

*Mervin Harrower* (Director, Provincial Emergency Management Programs, Ministry Public Safety and Solicitor General, British Columbia, Canada) was the international speaker at the 2003 conference. Mr Harrower’s comparative presentation highlighting key achievements including best practice approaches and lessons learned from the provincial perspective including the delivery of response and recovery emergency services to First Nations in British Columbia. Primary responsibility for emergency management in the Canadian Government structure rests with local and provincial governments.

*David Templeman* (Director-General, Emergency Management Australia) delivered a passionate presentation that focused on the national emergency management scene and identified contemporary issues and future challenges to those working in the emergency management sector. Central to Mr Templeman’s presentation was the underlying theme that the environment that emergency management works within has changed significantly in recent years.

*Larry Graham JP MLA* (Member for Pilbara and Deputy Chair of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee) presented the Committee’s findings and recommendation that an Emergency Management Act should be introduced into West Australian Parliament as soon as possible. Mr Graham stated that the Committee’s report on Emergency Services Legislation believe than an Emergency Management Act will

make emergency management in Western Australia more effective.

*Russell Stevens* (AFESA Director Fire Services Metropolitan), *Lindsay Gillam* (Manager Pesticide Safety Section, Department of Health), and *Ken Raine* (Manager Pollution Management, Department of Environmental Protection) highlighted the major emergency management issues and lessons learnt from an operational perspective from the Bellevue Fire. The Bellevue Fire had a major impact on the people of Western Australia, State Government agencies and local government.

*Sharna McKechnie* (FESA Community Development Officer and coordinator of the All West Australians Reducing Emergencies 'AWARE' program) teamed with six AWARE Scholarship holders:

John Balcombe	Shire of Northam
Sebastian Camillo	City of South Perth
John Edwards	Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup
Fran McAllen	Shire of Irwin
Glenn Sargeson	City of Bayswater
Mike Scott	Shire of York

and provided delegates with an update on the progress of the AWARE Emergency Risk Management program including a showcase of the current emergency risk management projects being undertaken by local governments. The EMA-FESA funded the AWARE emergency risk management program was launched in 2002 and has created considerable interest within West Australian local governments.

*Bruce Brennan* (Deputy Commissioner—Operations, WA Police Service and Chair of the West Australian Critical Infrastructure Project Committee) demystified the key elements of the

West Australian Critical Infrastructure Project and outlined the initial assessments completed by the Committee. The project includes a review of the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery aspects of critical infrastructure risk within Western Australia and was tasked by the State Emergency Management Committee.

*Kevin Cuneo* (FESA Director Capability Development) made a presentation that demystified the consequence management arrangements and the interface with crisis management arrangements for chemical, biological and radiological (CBR) emergencies within Western Australia. CBR emergencies arise through the deliberate use of a CBR agent to cause harm or disruption to the community. The Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA) is responsible for the consequence management arrangements for a CBR event within Western Australia.

*David Templeman* MLA (Member for Mandurah and Chair of the Community Development and Justice Standing Committee) noted in the closing address the importance of the 2003 West Australian Emergency Management Conference though the attendance of the Minister for Emergency Services to open the conference and the diverse background of delegates. In addition to thanking all keynote speakers, sponsors and the conference management team, Mr Templeman encouraged delegates to make the most of the remaining networking and learning opportunities at the conference dinner and workshops.

## Workshops

The second day of the conference featured a series of workshops aligned to strategic areas for West Australian emergency management stemming from the State Emergency Management Committee and other government committees. The format

and content of each workshop differed were facilitated by Emergency Management Services staff.

*Recovery Services* provided delegates with an opportunity to demystify what happens during the recovery process in the aftermath of an emergency. The practical application of the State Recovery Emergency Management Plan was examined including the roles played by the Recovery Services Group and its member organisations. Participants were invited to share their first-hand experience with the recovery process and offered constructive suggestions for improvements to the current arrangements.

*Working with Indigenous Communities* included presentations by Noel Nannup (Manager—Heritage Centre, Department of Conversation and Land Management), Mara West (Indigenous Consultant) and Kim Bridge (Indigenous Consultant). The focus of the workshop included an indigenous perspective of the relationships and connections to the land and environment; the role of women within an indigenous community; and the 1905 Act and its impact on contemporary indigenous society. Delegates were encouraged to identify and discuss practical strategies for working with indigenous communities and gain an understanding of the diversity of such communities.

*Public Information* included four presentations that focused on (i) what is public information; (ii) how public information works now; (iii) deliverance and community expectations; and (iv) critical incidents and information management: the USA experience. The panel included Gary Foley (Regional Director, Bureau of Meteorology), Jenelle Provost (FESA Manager Media and Public Affairs), Colin James (Councillor, Shire of Mundaring), and Roger Armstrong (Senior Fire Planning Officer, Department of Conservation and Land Management).

*Mitigation Issues* had as a focus the key challenges in engaging organisations, including emergency service agencies and local governments, in strategies toward increased investment in hazard mitigation as a whole-of-government, whole-of-community responsibility. Delegates were invited to share examples where mitigation has made or could make a difference and review ways to foster mitigation in local communities and harness government support for the concept.

*Council of Australian Government (COAG) and Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA)* focused on the key issues and recommendations from the reviews by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on mitigation and Disaster Relief Arrangements in Australia and the Ministerial Taskforce on the State Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA). Participants were provided with an opportunity to discuss any issues or concerns relating to either the COAG Review and the State Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements with Ms Jo Harrison-Ward (FESA Executive Director, Emergency Management) and Mr Nick Barker (FESA Manager Policy and Planning, Emergency Management.).

*Lifelines Services* was an interactive workshop that encouraged participants to define what they thought the lifelines services involved. Delegates heard from representatives from some lifelines agencies on their respective organisational capabilities and cooperative efforts in an emergency management context. Facilitators encouraged participants to consider what the role of the various lifelines services includes when undertaking recovery in a community affected by disaster, and the importance of the lifelines being included when planning in an emergency management context.



*Demystifying emergency management*

## **Emergency Management Australia conference dinner**

Emergency Management Australia hosted the Conference Dinner that was attended by 130 delegates and their partners. Mr David Templeman, (Director-General, Emergency Management Australia) and Mr Bob Mitchell (FESA CEO) thanked the keynote speakers, workshop facilitators, sponsors and conference management team for their contribution to a very successful conference program. A Formula Ford Tuition Day donated by Fleetcare was raffled by the Minister for Emergency Services and delegates were entertained by Perth quartet *Little Black Dress*.

## **Conference sponsors**

FESA would like to thank the following organisations for their sponsorship of the 2003 West Australian Emergency Management Conference:

- *Emergency Management Australia*—sponsor for the 2003 West Australian Emergency Management Conference Dinner
- *Police and Nurses Credit Society*—sponsor of the Police and Nurses Credit Society Morning Tea Breaks
- *Fleetcare*—sponsor of the Fleetcare Afternoon Tea Break
- *QANTAS*—official airline of the 2003 West Australian Emergency Management Conference.

The sponsorship provided by these organisations enabled FESA to keep conference registration fees to a minimum thus making the conference affordable for volunteer and non-profit organisations.

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