

# CONFERENCE REPORT

## Reflections on the Safer and Sustainable Communities 2003 Disaster Conference

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### Introduction

The Safer Sustainable Communities 2003 Australian Disaster Conference provided an opportunity to take stock of the current state of emergency management in Australia and to consider issues facing the emergency management sector into the future. This article sets out to bring together the threads of speakers' presentations and participants' comments with some personal reflections and sketch where Australian emergency management stands at present and what some of the issues will be in the future. References can be found at the Conference website ([www.ema.gov.au/disasterconference](http://www.ema.gov.au/disasterconference)).

An analysis of this type is naturally skewed by the Conference Steering Committee's selection of speakers for the Conference. Our plan was to invite speakers who would present on contemporary and futuristic issues and who also reflected the diverse nature of the sector. Even the choice of the title of the Conference with a focus on Safer, Sustainable Communities and naming of the various streams gave some indication of our pre-conference appreciation of the current state and future direction of the sector. Judging by the response to the Conference which resulted in some 700 delegates, an unprecedented number for an Australian disaster conference, and their subsequent feedback, participants were very satisfied with the quality and range of presentations from over 150 speakers. The Conference closing session also gave participants the opportunity to reflect on their experience at the Conference and to express their views on those issues which had not been addressed as fully as they would have liked.



*Mr Jonathan Abrahams*

### From 1999 to 2003 and beyond

The phrase as "may you live in interesting times" is apt for people working in emergency management. Just as the last Conference held in 1999 was set in interesting times, the 2003 Disaster Conference was conducted at an interesting time for the emergency management sector. Times might always appear interesting for the sector, in part because we are uncertain of the future and don't know what disaster awaits us around the corner (will it be a flu pandemic many times worse than SARS, a heatwave of unprecedented proportions, a host of other more predictable flood and fire events, or what?), and also because there is so much more to know and achieve in our fertile field. This is why forums such as the 2003 Disaster Conference is important—to meet our national and international colleagues, share knowledge, build partnerships, and re-energise to face the challenges in community safety and sustainability.

The Conference demonstrated that between 1999 and 2003 the field of community safety has continued to



*Participants at the Safer Sustainable Communities 2003 Australian Disaster Conference taking the opportunity to take stock of the current state of emergency management in Australia*

evolve. Efforts to understand the issues of today and how they have changed since 1999 will assist the sector to deal with the future. We should seek to describe what is truly new (for example, coming together of crisis and consequence management arrangements for counter-terrorism, articulation of a knowledge management philosophy, and appreciation of climate change as an emergency management issue), what is a continuation of an existing trend (which applies to most issues discussed at the Conference, including the strengthening of partnerships across the sector and developments in the application of information management), and what has been lost, for better or for worse (eg. aspects of volunteerism and risk reduction opportunities not taken before disasters occur).

### **The influence of worldviews on the emergency management sector**

To understand the fundamental nature of change in the sector we need to look beyond the specific subject area of emergency management to the worldviews which prevail in Australia at this time, such as the emphasis on economic prosperity and individualism. (Eckersley) The focus on economic growth is evident in the Australian Government's priority for building a strong economy controlling expenditure and reducing the national debt, and, it has been argued, the decision not to sign the Kyoto protocols on greenhouse gas emissions, ostensibly on economic or related grounds.

The effects of individualism can be significant for traditionally community-oriented activities, such as emergency management. Volunteering which might have been seen primarily as a community service and a shared responsibility might now and in the future be increasingly populated by individuals who expect to gain valuable skill sets for their paid careers. The issues of individualism, economic growth and community safety interact when decisions are made, on the one hand, to enhance a community's economic development and the right to trade of business and land developers, while increasing the risk to the safety of householders and the community, for example building new houses in fire- or flood-prone land. What is the trade-off here?

Combined with the influences of demographic and cultural change in Australian society, these worldviews define the way Australians perceive our world, society and ourselves, thus driving government policy and community attitudes and behaviours. (Salt, Eckersley) These in turn shape the risk profile of communities and the capability of the emergency management system to manage risks, for example, the allocation of resources, the value placed on knowledge and the preparedness of communities to help themselves.

Worldviews are heavily influenced by current or emerging threats and recent disasters which come to dominate our political and social consciousness. These have served to change the community



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expectations of government including the emergency services. For example, it is understandable that security matters have become a prominent part of the Australian worldview, given the increased threat of terrorism in the region (requiring our intelligence community to analyse and understand this expression of the terrorists' worldview), realisation of this threat in the tragedies of the World Trade Center attack and the Bali Bombings, and preparations for Australia-centred international events such as the 2000 Sydney Olympics and Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Queensland in 2002.

Other disasters in Australia and overseas have also influenced priorities for the sector, such as SARS coming from Asia, Foot and Mouth Disease in the United Kingdom, and the summer 2002/03 drought and bushfires in Australia. The ensuing reviews and inquiries provide opportunities for improving our knowledge of bushfires and building capability for managing the risk of bushfires. However, we also know that a focus on recent events is not a rational basis for managing Australia's future risks. Who and what will be next?

### Key Conference Themes

A multitude of factors affect the nature of risk in Australia and our capability to manage that risk. How well do we understand these factors and the implications for emergency management? The following themes emerged during the Conference.

#### Demographic and cultural change in Australia

At a fundamental level, demographic and cultural influences are changing Australian society. (Salt) Information and technology is also changing the way Australians lead their lives. (Spender) Is the emergency management sector keeping pace with change and

moreover developing strategies to anticipate and address probable futures?

So what will our communities look like in the future and where will people live and work? What impact will these changes have on community safety, in terms of community risk profiles and our capacity to manage the risk? Key demographic changes include people moving from the country into the cities, to the north and along the coast. (Salt) The movement is dominated by young people seeking opportunities in the cities and by economically mobile retired people moving to the coast and to boutique communities or golf estates. If we add the growth in population in the rural-urban interface, it could be said that Australia's population growth and migration is generally taking place in higher risk areas. This migration also severely impacts on services and population in rural communities, where it is felt strongly among volunteers who provide emergency services for these communities, particularly where there are no paid staff. There may not be enough people where they are most needed. Conversely, retired people with skills and resources in other parts of the country are expected to be prepared to volunteer as they see giving back to the community as a critical part of their portfolio of retirement activities (Salt). What type of volunteering will they be interested in? Will the dirty, dangerous and energetic work associated with aspects of volunteering be done? (Emergency Management in 2023 workshop)

A more recent trend in Australian society is the establishment of large numbers of city apartments, favoured by young professionals influenced and reflected by television programs such as *The Secret Life of Us* and *Sex in the City*, contrasted with the suburbia of *Neighbours* and *Home and Away*. (Salt) What are the community safety risks associated with high density high-rise living and how do they compare with 1970s-style housing estates? Unlike men whose marrying age has remained more or less constant, women are marrying much later in life than their mothers (by 8 years) at the average age of 29, as they are looking for more life and career experiences and economic independence before "settling down". (Salt) Would they consider emergency management as a choice of career? Could they be recruited as volunteers?

Ethnic diversity is a force in Australian communities. How does that impact on community safety, for example, with respect to house fires, counter-terrorism, marine safety? As far as community education is concerned, it means that safety messages need to use multi-media resources in appropriate languages together with demonstrations and training. (Watt) While core recovery needs are similar between and within communities, different cultural hues can seriously affect the success or failure of our programs. (Gordon, Sullivan) The demographic profiles of Australia's emergency management organisations do not reflect the

cultural and linguistic diversity in Australia. How does this affect our ability to engage with communities, conduct community education programs, issue alerts and warning, manage evacuations and address recovery needs?

### Security and counter-terrorism

The focus on improving Australia's arrangements to manage threats to national security has led to greater collaboration between the elements that manage the crisis (intelligence and specialist counter-terrorist groups) and consequence management (emergency management system). (Hon D. Williams, Templeman, Tyrie) Before the World Trade Center attack on 11 September 2001, crisis and consequence management were organised and governed by different arrangements, with exercises conducted separately. Now there is no distinction between emergency management and counter-terrorism. (Murray) The integration of crisis and consequence arrangements is consistent with an "all hazards approach" which enables procedures and capabilities for addressing one hazard or risk to be applied to address other risks. While keeping one eye on the issue of security, the sector must also consider the bigger picture of the wide range of risks which we face. A case in point was the call for greater commitment to building Australia's Urban Search and Rescue capability to respond to a building collapse which might be caused by a bomb, but could have numerous credible causes. (Mullins) A similar argument can be mounted for the continuing enhancement of Australia's chemical, biological and radiological capabilities which has strengthened Australia's capability for managing hazardous incidents and our overall capability for managing risks. (Patterson)

Conference speakers approached the issue of critical infrastructure protection from a government, industry and technological perspective, emphasising the importance of partnerships to address issues effectively. The protection of critical infrastructure has become an increasingly important issue in the context of counter-terrorism. (Thompson, Rothery) The reality is that infrastructure systems failure or disruption has always been a critical issue for the emergency management sector as the consequences for modern societies are significant, witness the Longford gas shortage, numerous examples of power blackouts around the world, and contamination of water supplies in developed and developing countries. From a social and emergency management perspective, critical infrastructure protection is essentially about maintaining services and acting on the social impact of disruption (Handmer).

The issue of critical infrastructure protection provides a useful focal point for building partnerships between business, utilities, crisis management and the emergency management sector. It requires much more cross-sector planning and partnerships at all levels of government and with industry because up to 90 per cent of critical infrastructure is now privately owned. (Yates) Integration of risk management, asset management and emergency management to protect critical infrastructure will provide protection against acts of terrorism, and will also make our infrastructure more resilient to other sources of risk. In Australia, utilities have undertaken significant steps to improve their risk management, emergency management and business continuity planning. (Parsons, Love, B. Davey) New Zealand have taken a few steps further, including the recent passage of the *Civil Defence and Emergency Management Act*, which



*Dr Don Gunasekera, Dr Linda Anderson-Berry and Mr Loti Yates*

gives New Zealand utilities statutory responsibilities to prepare for emergencies and obligations to participate in cross-sector planning. (P. Davey, Brounts)

### Working with communities

Many speakers continued to emphasise a community-centred approach to emergency management, which was also a strong theme at the 1999 Conference. From civil war in Sierra Leone to recovery from the Bali bombings to the Canberra bushfires, community participation and strategies which encourage local empowerment are critical. (Marsh, King) A community-centred approach provides the most direct link to effective community safety outcomes. While there were some very good examples of progress being made, broad-based results across Australian communities have proven to be more elusive. Key factors in successful projects included well-resourced and skilled facilitators; support and commitment from local government, particularly at the executive level; well-informed and educated stakeholders; and dedication to follow through on extensive and often demanding consultative processes. (Dutton, McKeachnie, Free)

The key would appear to be to improve the sector's understanding of communities and in particular the factors which determine resilience and vulnerability. Are these factors and lessons transferable to other communities? (Pooley)

### Knowledge management

Emergency management is differentiated from other sectors by the knowledge required to perform effectively in the sector. In future, the role of emergency services will be primarily to share their specialist knowledge with others, as they will be knowledge workers. (Spender) This is an interesting proposition for the sector as one of the major challenges in emergency management identified by speakers at the Conference is the inadequate, albeit growing, knowledge necessary for effective community safety. These include factors affecting community vulnerability and resilience such as community attitudes and behaviours, and the fledgling application of tools to assist the management of risks, such as application of GIS, satellite imagery, loss assessment methodologies and a range of required, but as yet, incomplete datasets.

Emergency management agencies are yet to capitalise on knowledge management. (Lee) Knowledge will be a key driver for the future of a better informed and analytical emergency management sector. Experts need to be engaged in the dialogue with community and government to assist decision making in relation to the management of risk. (Bouilly) Other sectors may be able to provide some pointers for the emergency management sector, such as health and environmental management, which like emergency management, is a relatively young discipline. In the past twenty years or so, the development and sharing of knowledge has been the key factor in the development of environmental



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management. (Thom) Is the emergency management sector on the same journey?

Speakers pointed to a number of actions which could be taken to improve knowledge in the sector. There is a need to develop a culture of valuing research in emergency management and allied agencies, and to build networks and broker outcomes-focused relationships between universities and functional agencies. (Research workshop) Another message was that the sector needs to take evaluation far more seriously than in the past so that we can build our knowledge base of what works and what doesn't. (Community education workshop) Innovative projects such as Safe Communities, which is supported by New South Wales Fire Brigades and many other partners in Australia and overseas, should be encouraged, evaluated and monitored, to see whether this type of initiative could be adopted by more communities around Australia. (Donnelly)

On a general level, there has been an explosion in the availability of information, necessitating changes in our systems to manage them. (Spender) The Conference reinforced that information and knowledge in emergency management across Australia and around the world is growing. Conference participants and speakers called for further development to enable them to do their jobs more effectively. As knowledge expands in the emergency management sector, it is essential that opportunities for people to build networks, aided by technological mechanisms as appropriate, are provided for the exchange, sharing and further development of this knowledge. The 2003 Disaster Conference provided one such opportunity as does the embryonic Australian Disaster Information Network (AusDIN). Recently Western Australia and Victoria have conducted conferences and we might see other states holding forums of this nature in the future. (Brunner)

The translation of knowledge into practice through appropriate training is vital. (Webster) This requires partnerships between educators and the emergency management industry. Educators must focus on the needs of learners (Smith), which provides another example of the importance of knowing your audience. Educators also need to establish their credibility which can be enhanced by gaining relevant industry experience. (Chambers)

### **Emergency management volunteers**

As indicated above, emergency management volunteerism has become an increasingly important issue for the sector. In addition to the demographic and cultural trends in Australian society, the volunteer sector has been impacted by changes to the taxation system, increased focus on occupational health and safety, application of the national training and competency frameworks, and significant changes in the legal context

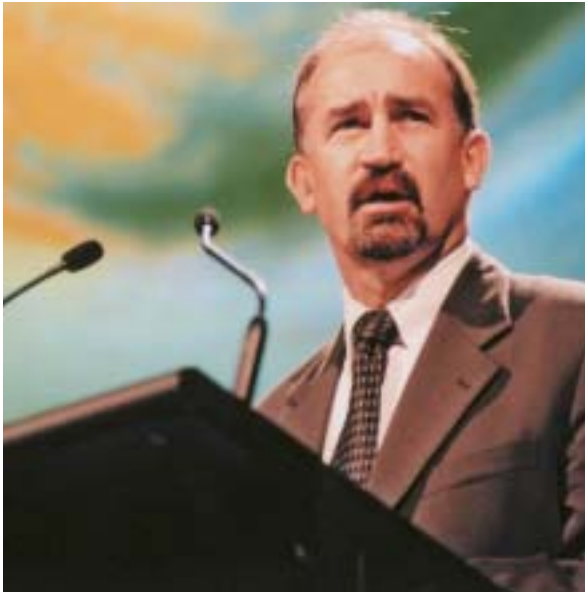


*Dr Dale Spender AM, Principal Director, Digital Style*

in which emergency management organisations operate. (Howard, Dunlop, Fahey) These factors are changing the nature, face and numbers of volunteers in the sector and the effects are being felt by agencies in different ways across the country. In parts of northern Western Australia the various volunteer emergency services have amalgamated into one volunteer unit. (Harrison-Ward) Demographic and cultural change in Australia presents both opportunities and challenges for the sector to maintain and regenerate volunteer units, for example among young people, culturally and linguistic diverse groups and retired "baby-boomers". (Salt) We cannot assume that the motivation for volunteering for the next generation will be the same as the historical tradition of volunteering, characterised in part by long-term service to the community. If the future young volunteer is likely to want short-term opportunities to develop their personal skill sets, how will the emergency management sector position itself to attract and meet the needs of this type of person?

### **Community education**

Community education is an essential element of emergency management and everybody in the emergency services should regard it as an essential element of their responsibilities (Howard). Community education and the building of self-reliance will require most attention if a safe community is to be achieved. Community education is not however as well appreciated nor well-funded as other measures, such as equipment purchases and structural measures. (Howard) One explanation is the relatively poor understanding of the effectiveness of various community education programs. There have been some successful initiatives in community education, but they are rarely evaluated and there is a need for an overall strategy. (Community education workshop)



*Mr Alan March, Assistant Director General, Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID)*

Several key points emerged in the presentations about community education. There is a need for a deeper understanding of how people understand risk (Tarrant), including the influence of cultural changes on perceptions and attitudes of Australians towards their safety. This is a pre-requisite for development of effective community education programs which need to draw upon this understanding to move people to the point of clear intention to prepare in order for them to translate awareness into action. (Paton)

In acknowledging the diversity of our communities, multi-faceted communication techniques are required (O'Neill), and we need to understand the pros and cons of the media and technology being used. For example, graphics generated by Geographic Information Systems (GIS) offer new tools for representing risk for communities to assist in their awareness. (Free, Buckleton) In the Blue Mountains, the humble home videos of fire experiences were found to more effective for community education than other more sophisticated forms of media. (Harper)

Speakers also reflected that people charged with the responsibility for community education programs across different types of hazards faced common problems. They could all benefit from collaboration on social research and the evaluation of the effectiveness of different approaches to community education. (Rhodes, O'Neill, Paton)

Young people should become the focus on the sector's community education programs, as it is predicted that in the future information in our community will be channelled through the younger generation, ie. from children to their parents and people around them. (Spender) Young people are becoming increasingly

empowered in today's society as they are in position to adapt to the pace of change more rapidly, particularly with respect to their embracing of technology which provides the highway for communication of information. This has significant implications for community education in the emergency management sector. How well do we understand the culture of young people such that messages are conveyed using their preferred media, such as gaming and animation, and their idiom rather than traditional methods which bear limited relevance? (Cameron)

Given the sector's focus on the importance of working with communities and community education, it behoves the emergency management sector "to tune in" with our communities, rather than expecting or demanding that they will willingly sing our tune.

### **International engagement**

Speakers and the welcome presence of international participants reinforced the global dimensions of community safety and the importance of Australia's role as a regional and global partner in community safety, security and sustainable development. Australia is well-positioned to offer our understanding and knowledge of disasters to advancement of these fields and to learn from developments taking place in other parts of the world to assist us with our development. An example is the Community Hazard and Risk Management program facilitated by SOPAC in the Pacific based on the risk management work developed in Australia. (Mearns)

The 2003 Disaster Conference enabled participants to learn from each other's international experiences and appreciate that many of the issues which we face are common to people working in community safety all over the world. A large contingent from New Zealand gave cause to consider the value of knowledge sharing across the Tasman. In some areas such as critical infrastructure protection, New Zealand has made significant progress, based on earlier work on Lifelines, from which Australia could learn, and vice versa. At the same time techniques and lessons learnt from other countries need to put into the Australian context as risks and factors affecting the vulnerability and resilience of our communities are likely to differ from those in other countries.

Disaster vulnerability and the development and availability of resources in communities and countries are related. Sixty percent of countries which are the recipients of aid are vulnerable to disasters. (March) The basic resources for disaster management, such as power and telephones, are not always available for national disaster management offices in some Pacific Island Countries. (Yates) While physical resources are poor, Australian participants commented that these offices are often powered by very capable and resourceful disaster management officers. (Anderson-Berry, Miller) This is

a particularly important issue for Australia as many countries in our region receive Australian aid and are exposed to disasters, where Australian physical and financial assistance is usually provided. This underscores the importance of Australia's partnerships with national governments in developing regional and national disaster management capabilities. Australia has developed a range of mechanisms involving government and non-government resources for Australia to deliver aid in an appropriate and timely manner when requested by countries in the region. (March)

Recent events such as Cyclone Zoë demonstrated not only the partnership between Australia and the Solomon Islands, but also the resilience of the people affected by the event. Given the destructive winds, there were grave fears for significant loss of life. These fears were unfounded as the people of Tikopia and Anuta adopted their traditional means of taking shelter for protection which has enabled these communities to survive similar events in the past. There are nevertheless significant long term effects for these communities, particularly with housing and agriculture, from which it will take many years to recover. (Yates, Anderson-Berry) Against the background of this example, disaster managers in the region are seeing lifestyle and technology changes reducing the effectiveness of traditional approaches to emergency management in Pacific Island Countries which should not be lost. (Mearns)

### Environmental issues

The relationship between disaster management, environmental management and sustainable development is becoming clearer. It is evident at the international level where disaster management has been recognised in the plan of implementation arising from the World Summit on Sustainable Development.



*Ms Jo Harrison-Ward, Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA)*



*Ms Fiona McKersie, Executive Director, Strategic and Executive Services, Queensland Department of Emergency Services*

(Hyman) At the national and state level, there is a need to improve institutional arrangements which integrate emergency management and environmental priorities, such as we are seeing in debates over bushfire risk management. (Dovers) A strengthening of emergency management—environmental management partnership could prove fruitful for the exchange of knowledge and experience between the sectors, as short- and long-term issues such as risk assessment, protection of valuable assets, community education, impact assessment, response and recovery, land use planning, and climate change are shared by the sectors.

Climate change is another area where both the environmental scientists and the emergency management sector are beginning to recognise the value of their partnership. Climate change models predict a general increase in bushfires and droughts in south-eastern and south-western Australia, and increased numbers and severity of rainfall and cyclone events in northern Australia. (Hennessy) Small changes in climate can dramatically increase damage from weather-related disasters. (Woods) This places a greater emphasis on communities' need to adapt to these potential effects and reduce community risk, which is where the emergency management sector has a lot of knowledge and experience to offer the global community. (Briceño)

### Risk reduction

Progress is being made on risk reduction in Australia and around the world, yet many challenges remain in shifting from a culture of reaction to a culture of prevention (Briceño). There is a need for better understanding of the complexities of risk and risk reduction relationships, which results in many interests influencing decisions affecting community safety.



(Witherby) Global partnerships, such as the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction, provide a forum for developing and sharing knowledge and experiences in risk reduction. This is critical to more effective disaster reduction and Australia is well-placed to contribute our knowledge to these international efforts.

Harking back to the importance of the economy as a major influence on the emergency sector, the increasing cost of disasters has caused governments to examine the causes of disaster and consider the level of investment in disaster reduction measures to address these causes. (McKersie) To assist this process, loss assessment methodology has been developed to assist with costing disasters and cost-benefit analysis of proposals for disaster mitigation projects. (Handmer) It is important to consider not only the direct costs, but also the significant ongoing human and emotional costs associated with disasters. (ACT Bushfires Case Study)

Queensland's focus on mitigation has resulted in the establishment of a State Disaster Mitigation Committee, consideration of disaster risk implications in major State infrastructure development decisions, and the development of a State Planning Policy to support councils and increase consistency of practices in Queensland. (McKersie, Corner)

### **Leadership**

There were many presentations which identified leadership as an important commodity in the emergency management sector, and it needs to be encouraged at all levels within an organisation. Technical skills and knowledge are necessary, but leadership is a key factor when facing adversity, as is often the case in emergency management. (Cosgrove) The fundamental qualities of leaders are integrity, courage (physical and moral), humility and compassion, motivation and communication skills. Temperament is also an important attribute—the more difficult the circumstances, the calmer a leader must become, and above all when something goes wrong, the leader must be present with the team. (Cosgrove) Leadership is also about looking after our people. This has proven critical in leading and managing change, such as the formation of the Fire and Emergency Services Authority in Western Australia. (Harrison-Ward) It is also evident in the greater emphasis now being placed on occupational health and safety in the emergency management sector. (Dunlop, Watt)

Communities look to the emergency management sector to provide leadership at all times, but particularly in times of emergency. This emphasises the importance of the role of leaders in working with the media who carry community safety messages to the community. Leaders and media advisors need to be on the front-foot to initiate and sustain positive relationships with the media

to build trust and credibility. This is particularly important because journalists are always looking for conflict to sell their stories. (Green) Disasters are newsworthy because of the tragedy arising from terrorism or humanity in conflict with nature or technology. The news stories often describe the tragedies or the triumph of people over adversity. During the event and in the aftermath, journalists will also seek out conflict between people, between organisations and between Governments. Regular and proactive interaction with the media will enable emergency service organisations to convey community safety messages to the public and to manage the relationship with the media effectively. (Media workshop)

### **Information management**

In all aspects of emergency management, accurate, timely information is critical to achieving effective outcomes. It is regularly cited as a key issue in reviews and debriefings. (Gates) Practitioners maintain that they still don't have complete data to do their jobs effectively and those who need it are not well-linked to the data. It is the business of the emergency management sector in partnership with the spatial information industry to achieve this. (N. Williams, Blanks, Biddington). The partnership between the Australian Emergency Management Committee and the Australian and New Zealand Land Information Council is a positive step toward the development of unified approach to national emergency management information capability. (Bradley)

Web technology is unlocking the potential utilisation of data by the emergency management sector and industry is capitalising on these advances. Further uptake and exploitation of spatial data in the emergency management sector is required to improve risk assessment, disaster prevention, response and recovery. (N. Williams) A major challenge is to incorporate vulnerability data so that risk can be better modelled with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) and other applications. (Schneider)

GIS technologies, often accompanied by remote sensing imagery from satellites and other sources, have been applied effectively in numerous aspects of community safety, such as risk assessment and scenario-planning for counter-terrorism and critical infrastructure protection (Scott), animal health planning (Cooper), flood response (Worsley), bushfire risk management and response (Held), and in planning, modelling and deploying resources for the management of oil spills (Mason). It has also proven useful to illustrate risk as part of community education programs. The visual representation has enabled communities to better understand risks, consequences and recommended action, such as safe evacuation routes. (Buckleton, Free)



*Former Attorney-General Hon Daryl Williams AM QC MP responding to the national media attention generated by the Conference*

The collaborative and multi-jurisdictional nature of emergency management necessitates a focus on interoperability and systems integration for progressing the development of national applications and systems for the sector. There was a common call for a national approach to provide the necessary architecture to achieve compatibility across jurisdictions (Gates). Recent initiatives include AusDIN aimed at providing a forum for knowledge networking and a vehicle for improving access to data and knowledge for disaster management, and the Trusted Information Sharing Network for critical infrastructure protection. (Bradley, Rothery)

### **Partnerships**

Many “co” words describe the business of emergency management—coordination, cooperation, collaboration and community. (Norton) Primarily emergency management is about working with other people and together we make a difference. The Bali bombings, bushfires and the SARS epidemic have demonstrated that wide-ranging and significant socio-economic and environmental effects require a whole-of-government response. This is also evident in the development of arrangements for Foot and Mouth Disease and communicable disease outbreaks, which involve a wide range of policy areas such as legal indemnity, quarantine, passport control, logistics and transportation, communication, media, trade, and command and control of operations. (Cooper, Mathews)

The importance of partnerships was evident at the Conference as there were many people from different parts of Australia, other countries and a wide range of

sectors and disciplines who came together to discuss community safety. A broad base of participation was achieved, and it was gratifying that all participants saw themselves as a part of this community.

Participants stated that further broadening of the Conference attendance would be a step forward as some sectors were underrepresented at the Conference. In keeping with a key theme mentioned above, the limited participation of young people, who are the future of community safety and emergency management organisations, was noted. There were comments also to the effect that the emergency management sector needed to continue to improve the quality and reach of partnerships, particularly with business, local government, non-government organisations and professional bodies, such as engineers and planners. Often partners can provide the most effective advocacy. The insurance industry can add value through their environmental, crime and safety research and then influence governments and industry to contribute to risk reduction. (Hawker)

The Conference reinforced the role of Local Government as leaders of communities and leaders in emergency management. It was evident in a number of case studies, that the commitment and support of Local Government was a critical factor in achieving effective community outcomes. (McKechnie, Dutton, Free) Taking this lead, more assistance for local government could be considered, such as training for elected officials and council staff, and specialist equipment for mass emergencies. (Montgomery)



*Mr Mike Castle, Mr David Templeman and General Peter Cosgrove AC MC*

## Conclusion

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to the numerous speakers, poster presenters, exhibitors and helpers who made the Conference a great success. Participants seemed to enjoy the spirit and strong sense of camaraderie at the Conference, and were informed and challenged by speakers in all the forums. Given the diverse range of speakers and participants, the Conference theme that “community safety is everyone’s business” was reinforced time and again

Conference papers and presentations are now available on the Conference website.

As EMA will be giving consideration to conducting another Conference in three or four years time feedback on this or on the 2003 Conference is welcome at any time (please send to: [ema@ema.gov.au](mailto:ema@ema.gov.au)). Also, we invite you to provide any suggestions and ideas for any future event organised by EMA.

To all of you who attended the Conference thank you for participating. I trust you will have good memories of the Conference and that you have picked up some information and contacts which will help you in building safer, more sustainable communities