

FOREWORD

Valuing our Volunteers

by Major-General Brian (Hori) Howard AO MC ESM (Retd), Chair of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum

The Council of Australian Government (COAG) Report *Natural Disasters in Australia: Reforming mitigation, relief and recovery arrangements* noted that it is in the interests of all levels of government to provide recognition, protection, incentives and funding for volunteers and volunteer organisations as volunteer effort underpins Australia's emergency management effort. Similarly, the recent COAG Bushfire Inquiry Report concluded that Governments at every level must do all they can to recognise, foster and encourage emergency volunteering. The contribution of employers of volunteers must also be considered as crucial for volunteers to provide their services in response to an emergency and to participate in training.

The COAG findings reinforce the conclusions reached at the inaugural *Emergency Management Volunteers Summit* conducted by Emergency Management Australia (EMA) in 2001. The Summit identified four key priority areas for reform which were legal protection; funding; recognition; and training. These issues have become increasingly important in the retention of volunteers in light of the significant pressures facing emergency services resulting from increasing competition for volunteers' time, issues brought about through rural decline, and changing demographics in rural and regional areas. The main tangible outcome of the first Summit was the formation of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF), which had its first meeting in April 2002. The creation of the AEMVF was a real step towards the formation of a volunteer emergency management sector.

The 2005 *Emergency Management Volunteers Summit* held in April has given the AEMVF clear guidance on what we should concentrate on over the next couple of years. The 2005 *Summit Report* provides an outline of the Summit's proceedings that include issues of concern to the volunteers. Through its recommendations, it identifies actions required to ensure that volunteerism within the sector thrives. The Executive Summary of the Report appears later in this edition (page 30).

The Forum's top priority for 2005 is to establish a professional website. The new website is due to launch in December 2005 and will contain useful information

for emergency management volunteers, especially in the areas of training, legal protection, funding and recognition. There will also be links to the Forum's member websites as well as best practice literature and research.

Currently the AEMVF is involved in a research project funded by EMA. This survey is designed to establish the costs to volunteers – financial and in kind – which result from their volunteering activities. The results will be used by the AEMVF to advocate for greater financial support for volunteers involved in emergency services. The AEMVF will apply for grants from the recently established National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund, to sponsor further research projects on volunteer related topics in the future. We ask all organisations from within the sector to support these research projects.

I wish to congratulate EMA for allocating much of this edition of the AJEM to aspects of volunteerism, and for their ongoing support for the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum.



Quentin Turner, Volunteer Fire Brigades, Vic; Ron Carrick, SES Weipa, QLD; Hori Howard, Chair of the AEMVF; Sally Hasler, St John Ambulance; Doug Philpott, Anglicare; and Patricia Gillett, Australian Volunteer Coast Guard Association at the 2005 Emergency Management Volunteers Summit.