

# FOREWORD

*by the Hon Philip Ruddock MP, Attorney-General, Attorney-General's Department*

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Disasters and emergencies in Australia are a part of life. They epitomise the resilience, the mateship and the prevailing principle of people helping each other in their time of need for which Australians are renowned. In many respects, the way in which our community responds in the face of adversity defines us and binds us together as a nation.

The estimated annual cost of disasters in this country, including the physical, economic and social impact, is at least \$3 billion. The reality is disasters, whether natural or human-caused, will continue to occur. As Australians, we need to continue to learn from these events in order to be better prepared and to make our communities safer and more secure.

In recent times, we have witnessed unimaginable scenes of devastation and human misery associated with the Northern Sumatran earthquake and tsunami, *Hurricane Katrina* and the earthquake in Pakistan. These high-profile emergencies are poignant reminders of the impact of natural disasters but we cannot forget the smaller emergencies that affect communities across the globe, almost on a daily basis.

As the emergency management environment and nature of risks change, so, too, do the challenges that confront us. As leaders, policy makers, decision makers, frontline personnel and volunteers, we must meet those challenges through a collective commitment to the mitigation of disaster impact, the promotion of community safety and an investment in community resilience.

Integral to achieving this is our ability to communicate effectively and share ideas. The *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* (AJEM) has been facilitating robust discussion and scholarly debate for 20 years. Since 1985, its pages have featured extensive analysis, considered views, lessons learnt and insights to current and future issues, as well as stimulating and advancing discussion of innovative emergency management practices. Put simply, there is nothing else like it on the emergency management landscape.

In these past two decades, the Australian Government's scope of activity, primarily through Emergency Management Australia (EMA), has extended beyond just natural disasters and now must encompass technological and human-caused disasters. This evolution began in the late 1990s to address issues such as Y2K and the return to earth of the MIR space station.

Emergency management became a whole-of-government priority focussing on critical infrastructure, working with and engaging the private sector, the interdependency of jurisdictions, consideration of health and wellbeing

issues as well as forging genuine partnerships with our regional neighbours.

Community vulnerability and risk management have become well understood concepts, far beyond what could ever have been envisaged when the original Natural Disasters Organisation was established in 1974. Environmental shifts towards greater urban development, economic globalisation, increased technology and climate change also have contributed to the changing nature of risks posed to communities.

Terrorist attacks such as those in the United States, Bali, Madrid and London have added another dimension to emergency management. Protecting our people and places is the Australian Government's highest priority. Emergency management is critical in this approach. Through strategic partnerships and an "all hazards", multi-agency, whole-of-government approach, the Australian Government has established a national framework based on the principles of maximum preparedness, comprehensive prevention, effective response and speedy recovery.

AJEM has been instrumental in documenting and tracking trends in emergency management and it remains committed to providing access to information and knowledge for the research community and practitioners. The effective transfer and update of innovative practice, backed-up where necessary with carefully targeted research is critically important. EMA plays a key role in capturing and transferring research and innovation aimed at reducing emergency-related loss of life, property damage and economic and social disruption caused by disasters.

The strength of this journal is in its objectivity, with the variety of the published material effectively reflecting this ethos.

I congratulate AJEM and EMA on twenty years of publication. As risks evolve, and governments and communities change, the sound body of knowledge and expertise presented will continue to help make our communities safer and more secure.

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