

National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous Communities

Moya Newman reports on the Remote Indigenous Communities Advisory Committee

The Remote Indigenous Communities Advisory Committee (RICAC) was established as a working Group of the Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC) in 2003, by Emergency Management Australia (EMA). It was established to address, at a national level, emergency management arrangements within remote Indigenous communities. The committee is supported by EMA and made up of two representatives from Western Australia, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and the Northern Territory. The Committee is chaired by the Director General, Queensland Department of Emergency Services.

A key initiative for the RICAC in 2005 was to develop the *National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous Communities*. It was agreed that for the strategy to

be successful there was a need for extensive consultation throughout Australia with Indigenous people, as well as government and community-based service providers. The Committee employed Isabella Adams, an Indigenous Consultant from Vision Networks, assisted by Mara West, from Western Australia to undertake the consultation process.

The Attorney-General's Department allocated \$120 000 from the *Working Together to Manage Emergencies Program*. These funds supported the focus group meetings held in each of the States and Territories throughout Australia (two in WA, SA, NT, NSW and QLD). The States' emergency service agencies also contributed by conducting extra meetings at their own cost to ensure a comprehensive consultation process was undertaken.



Doolan and Walter Eattes, Indigenous elders, welcome participants to 'country'.

The development of the *National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous Communities* was endorsed by the Augmented Australasian Police Ministers' Council in March 2005. This followed increased recognition by government since 2000 that the issues relating to emergency management in remote Indigenous communities need to be addressed.



Phillip Bartlett, Gordon Hall, Tony Wally and Tim Muirhead discuss aspects of the National Emergency Management Strategy for Remote Indigenous Communities.



Collaborating on ideas for the national strategy.

The objectives of the strategy are to:

- develop the knowledge and skills of Indigenous people and organisations for emergency management in remote communities;
- improve the level and appropriateness of services relating to emergency management provided by relevant agencies in remote Indigenous communities;
- build the capacity of remote Indigenous communities to improve sustainable community safety;
- increase government commitment and accountability to address issues impacting on effective emergency management in remote Indigenous communities; and
- promote effective partnership between emergency management agencies, Indigenous organisations, government and other agencies to improve community safety outcomes for remote Indigenous communities.

After the consultation process the consultants met with the RICAC in Brisbane during September 2005 to establish the outcome of the national focus group meetings throughout Australia. The information based on the consultation process was reported to the RICAC by the consultant and

analysed to identify the common threads arising for progression to the next phase of the strategy.

Some of the key themes relating to emergency management in remote Indigenous communities were highlighted and incorporated into the strategy. They were:

- commitment and accountability;
- communication;
- consultation;
- co-ordination;
- decision-making;
- diversity;
- education;
- employment;
- funding;
- governance;
- provision of services;
- partnerships and agreements; and
- training.

It has been recognised by the committee that all of these key points be considered and implemented when developing the strategy.

The consultant compiled a working draft for the writing team who met in Melbourne during November to commence writing the strategy. The members of the writing team were Isabella Adams, Consultant Vision Networks, Martin

Plumb, Northern Territory, Ken Wyatt, NSW, Christine Johnson, Queensland and Moya Newman, Western Australia. The writing team worked tirelessly to develop and write a unique strategy, reflective of the consultation process and emphasising the common threads. The writing team agreed the strategy needed to be written in a way that was user-friendly and a comprehensive guide.

A meeting was held on 8 December 2005, in Brisbane to finalise and endorse the strategy prior to forwarding it on to all relevant stakeholders. At the meeting the strategy was workshopped with a few minor adjustments to be addressed and once completed the committee will meet again to decide when and where the launch will take place.

The RICAC members were extremely happy with the outcome of the strategy which has been developed based on the outcome of the focus group meetings.

Other AJEM articles by Moya Newman

Integration of emergency risk management into West Australian indigenous communities, Vol. 19 No. 1, March 2004, pp. 10-15