

In Australia alone, governments of all persuasions, non-government organisations, and the business community, are now considering emergency preparedness, disaster management, and business continuity as a matter of course for future sustainability.

Demographic and cultural influences are changing Australian society, while burgeoning information and other new technologies are changing the way Australians lead their lives. These changes provide both opportunities and challenges for the emergency management sector to identify and anticipate as contributors to future risks that could affect community safety and to develop targeted strategies to manage them effectively.

A new paradigm is also emerging on how social cohesion and the economic structure of a community will be influenced by disasters—either natural or human-caused:

- Can communities take responsibility for themselves?
- Are they sufficiently self-reliant to cope, when emergency services are stretched and deployed elsewhere?
- Do we understand community resilience sufficiently?
- What constitutes a catastrophic disaster?

A key role for EMA in planning the conference is to bring organisations and people together with the objective to seriously consider a number of priorities:

- the way that emergency response will develop over the next decade
- the protection of public health and safety
- the restoration of essential government services—at the three levels of government in Australia, and
- recovery in the face of competing challenges and demands.

EMA's Director General, Tony Pearce, is a firm believer in cooperative preparation for the management of emergencies:

"EMA's role in coordinating the Australian Government's support to State and Territory emergency operations, along with leading the national oversight of community safety issues, is to continue to work to build Australia's capability into the future.

"We face the need to develop greater capacity to deal with the risks inherent in major disaster events and to advance understanding of the factors that define and influence emergency management for the decades ahead," he says.

"Emergency Management is a shared responsibility," says Tony Pearce. "In order to meet current and new challenges, emergency managers and key stakeholders at the local, state and national level, volunteers, businesses and communities need to work in partnership to mitigate the impact of emergency and disaster events."

"This conference will provide a significant focal point for the emergency sector in Australia to concentrate on Surviving Future Risks."

The conference will also provide an excellent networking opportunity for those involved in the emergency sector.

For further information on the Australian Disasters Conference 2008, see EMA's website at www.ema.gov.au or contact Tonya Evans on 02 6256 4614.