

National Security Update

The following are extracts / summaries of news items and media releases that may be of interest to the emergency management sector.

NEW DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF SECURITY – 25 February 2009

Attorney-General Robert McClelland announced the appointment of Mr David Irvine AO as the next Director-General of Security.

“It is with great pleasure that I announce the appointment of Mr David Irvine AO, currently Director-General of the Australian Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS), to head the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO),” Mr McClelland said.

Mr Irvine will take up the position from the end of March 2009.

For more information, please visit www.attorneygeneral.gov.au

COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE FOR FLOOD VICTIMS ON NEW SOUTH WALES MID-NORTH COAST – 3 April 2009

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland announced that the Commonwealth Government will provide financial assistance for recovery efforts following the recent flooding of communities on the New South Wales mid-north coast.

This assistance will apply to natural disaster declared areas, including Bellingen, Coffs Harbour, Nambucca and Clarence Valley.

Funding will be provided in cooperation with the New South Wales Government through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

For more information, please visit www.attorneygeneral.gov.au

COMMONWEALTH PROVIDES OVER \$18 MILLION IN DISASTER MITIGATION FUNDING TO STATES AND TERRITORIES – 7 April 2009

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, announced that more than \$18 million will be provided to the States and Territories this financial year under the Natural Disaster Mitigation Program (NDMP).

The NDMP is a national program, administered by Emergency Management Australia (EMA), which aims to assist communities better withstand the effects of natural disasters and reduce the risk, damage and losses caused by events such as floods, bushfires and tropical cyclones.

Funding will go toward measures such as structural works including flood levees and fire breaks, investment in disaster resilient infrastructure and development of emergency management plans.

Allocations for this financial year, based on submissions received from State and Territory Governments, will be:

- New South Wales: \$6.045 million
- Queensland: \$5.348 million
- Western Australia: \$2.185 million
- South Australia: \$1.442 million
- Victoria: \$1.426 million
- Tasmania: \$0.883 million
- Northern Territory: \$0.697 million
- Australian Capital Territory: \$0.605 million

Natural disasters cause more than \$1 billion damage each year to homes, businesses and the nation's infrastructure, along with serious disruption to communities.

More information on the NDMP and successful 2008-09 projects can be found on the Emergency Management Australia website at: www.ema.gov.au

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COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE FOR FLOOD VICTIMS IN SOUTH-EAST QUEENSLAND – 8 April 2009

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland announced that the Commonwealth Government will provide financial assistance to communities recently affected by heavy rainfall and flooding in the Sunshine Coast and Gympie regions of South-East Queensland.

Commonwealth assistance is being provided to the Queensland Government through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA).

"The Commonwealth Government will continue to work with the Queensland Government, Local Government and community organisations to support those that have been affected," Mr McClelland said.

Funding will include assistance for the restoration of essential public infrastructure and relief operations, as well as personal hardship and distress assistance.

Inquiries in relation to this assistance should be made to the Queensland Department of Communities on (07) 5459 8600

ARSON PENALTIES TO BE STRENGTHENED. – 17 April 2009

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, and State and Territory Attorneys-General agreed on the necessity for strong bushfire and arson offences across Australia.

The Attorney-General presented proposals for new offences carrying penalties of up to 25 years for bushfire arson causing death or serious harm.

State and Territory Attorneys-General have commissioned a report for the next SCAG meeting on incorporating the offences into the Model Criminal Code.

Jurisdictions which have not yet done so will also examine the implementation of existing model bushfire and arson offences that attract up to 15 years imprisonment.

"Given the incredible damage to property and loss of life that can be caused by bushfires, it is critical that offences across Australia are consistent and effective, and those sentences reflect the seriousness of this crime," Mr McClelland said.

While each State and Territory currently has its own laws covering arson and bushfires, there is considerable variation in the scope of those offences and the penalties that apply.

"I am hopeful that the agreed program of work will make it easier to prosecute a person who lights a fire that results in death or causes serious harm to a person," Mr McClelland said.

"People who deliberately light fires must face tougher penalties, particularly when those fires result in loss of life as occurred recently in the Victorian bushfires."

Attorneys-General also agreed to consider enabling courts to order a person convicted of arson to pay compensation for the damage caused by their offence.

For more information, please visit www.attorneygeneral.gov.au

NATIONAL EMERGENCY VOLUNTEER LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME – 20 April

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, attended the inaugural National Emergency Volunteer Leadership Programme in Mount Macedon, Victoria.

"The events of this summer, including the tragic Victorian bushfires as well as fires in other States, severe storms, cyclones and flooding in Queensland, New South Wales and Western Australia highlight that Australia would not be able to cope with events of this magnitude without volunteers" Mr McClelland said.

"To bring together some of Australia's leading volunteer organisations for a coordinated training programme is a tremendous step forward."

The four day Programme includes representatives from the Red Cross, St John Ambulance, Anglicare, St Vincent de Paul, the Australian Council of State Emergency Services, The SES Volunteers Association, the Australasian Fire Authorities Council, Surf Lifesaving Australia, the Australian Volunteer Coastguard, the Royal Volunteer Coastguard and the Adventist Development and Relief Agency.

"The Programme develops participant skills in areas such as self management, dealing with culturally and linguistically diverse communities, leading and advocating change in the volunteer sector, and media liaison" Mr McClelland said.

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“All of these skills are vital to the operation of a modern, effective volunteer organisation.”

The National Emergency Volunteer Leadership Programme is organised on behalf of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum.

The Programme commenced on Friday 17 April and concluded on Monday 20 April.

For more information, please visit www.attorneygeneral.gov.au

IMPROVING DISASTER RESILIENCE – 12 May

The Rudd Government will invest \$79.3 million to strengthen efforts to prepare for and combat major natural disasters.

A comprehensive ‘Disaster Resilience Australia Package’ will integrate a number of existing emergency management grant programs, providing the flexibility to effectively meet the requirements of local communities threatened by disaster. The additional funding will be part of this new package.

“This represents a significant reform of Australia’s disaster resilience arrangements,” Mr McClelland said.

The package will integrate the current Bushfire Mitigation Program (BMP), Natural Disaster Mitigation Program (NDMP), and the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund (NEVSF). The funding will:

- support disaster mitigation works including flood levees and fire breaks;
- assist Local Government meet its emergency management responsibilities;
- support the work of volunteers in emergency management; and
- build partnerships with business and community groups to improve their ability to respond to emergencies;

“The Government is not only providing additional funding, but we are also streamlining the administration of various programs to release even more funds for grass roots disaster resilience projects,” Mr McClelland said.

In addition, the Commonwealth will also provide more than \$12.8 million over the next four years to assist States and Territories lease additional fire fighting aircraft for longer periods during bushfire seasons.

Aircraft will be leased through the cooperative National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements (NAFA) and will help individual States and Territories access a range of specialised aircraft that would otherwise be out of reach.

“Aerial firefighting has emerged as a valuable tool in the fight against bushfires and the national arrangements have proven to be an efficient, collaborative approach that shares the cost of these specialised assets,” Mr McClelland said.

This additional funding brings the Government’s total contribution to the National Aerial Firefighting Arrangements to \$14 million per year from 2009-2010.

Following recommendations of the 2008 Homeland and Border Security Review, the Government will also establish new briefing facilities and establish an enhanced Government Coordination Centre to support decision-making in the event of a national crisis or major natural disaster.

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AUSTRALIA AND NEW ZEALAND ENHANCE DISASTER RESILIENCE LINKS – 21 May

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, welcomed the signing of a cooperation arrangement between the national emergency management organisations of New Zealand and Australia.

“This agreement will enhance cooperation in emergency management by improving information and knowledge sharing between Australia and New Zealand,” Mr McClelland said.

“The partnership will produce practical outcomes by building the preparedness and capability of both nations to manage the impact and consequences of disasters.”

Australia and New Zealand have a history of working collaboratively in emergency management, providing assistance on a number of occasions during natural disasters in several Pacific nations.

This close relationship was most recently exemplified during the Victorian bushfire disaster, with New Zealand providing significant resources to assist with response efforts.

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