

Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management

COMMUNIQUE

Perth, 20 November 2009

Emergency Management Meeting

The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management (the Council) met in Perth today in advance of the main bushfire, cyclone and flood season in Australia. The Council comprises emergency management Ministers from the Commonwealth, the states and territories, New Zealand and the President of the Australian Local Government Association. The Council is chaired by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP. Members present at this meeting were:

- Commonwealth: the Hon Robert McClelland MP, Attorney-General
- New South Wales: the Hon Steve Whan MP, Minister for Emergency Services, Small Business and Rural Affairs
- Northern Territory: the Hon Paul Henderson MLA, Chief Minister, Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services
- Queensland: the Hon Neil Roberts MP, Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Emergency Services
- Tasmania: the Hon Jim Cox MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services
- Victoria: the Hon Bob Cameron MP, Minister for Police and Emergency Services
- Western Australia: the Hon Robert Johnson MP, Minister for Police, Emergency Services and Road Safety
- Australian Local Government Association: Mr Bob Abbott, Vice President of Local Government Association of Queensland

The Council considered Australia's preparedness for the current bushfire season and discussed other natural hazards such as cyclones and floods.

The Council made significant progress on its work agenda to create a more disaster resilient Australia, as agreed at its 2008 meeting.

National disaster resilience framework

The Council endorsed a National Disaster Resilience Framework, which sets clear principles to guide the efforts of the emergency management community in fostering disaster resilience in Australia.

National work plan to reduce bushfire arson

The Council agreed to a National Work Plan to Reduce Bushfire Arson in Australia including the development of a whole-of-government national strategy on best practices to reduce bushfire arson. The strategy will use the National Work Plan as a basis for its development. An interim report on the strategy will be available to the Ministerial Council by the end of April 2010.

The Council supported in-principle the development of proposed new offences and penalties for bushfire arson, and arson causing death or serious harm, in consultation with the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General.

Climate change adaptation action plan

The Council endorsed the Climate Change Adaptation Action Plan. The climate change adaptation strategies outlined in the Plan will be a key part of emergency management planning and processes in Australia.

National catastrophic natural disaster plan

The Council endorsed the National Catastrophic Natural Disaster Plan which describes the national coordination arrangements for supporting States and Territories and the Commonwealth Government in responding to and recovering from catastrophic natural disasters in Australia. The Council noted that States and Territories retain overall responsibility for executive decision making and State legislation remains in place at all times. Further, any support action will be at the request of and in support of the legitimate Commonwealth, State or Territory authority. The Council agreed the

Plan should be submitted to the Council of Australian Governments for endorsement.

National telephony-based emergency warning system (NEWS)

The Council noted that the first stage of a telephone based emergency warning system capable of delivering warnings to fixed-line telephones based on service address, and mobile telephones based on billing/service address has been established.

The Council noted comprehensive testing would take place through the rest of November with the system available from the end of the month for the current bushfire season.

Triple zero and emergency information line capacity in extreme events

The Council noted, following its 25 September 2009 meeting, jurisdictions have provided information on their capacity to deal with surges of Triple Zero calls during an emergency. The Council has also investigated the status and feasibility of balancing calls between agency call centres and/or between jurisdictions. The investigation found that the states and territories have different systems and procedures for handling Triple Zero calls and dispatching emergency services. Consequently, there is currently limited ability to share staff and/or link call centres across jurisdictions during an emergency. The Council noted ongoing discussions to enhance national emergency surge capacity arrangements amongst the Commonwealth, States and Territories.

In light of this, the Council agreed to pursue a number of measures in 2010 to ensure the provision of robust Triple Zero and Emergency Information Line services in extreme events. These measures include the preparation of a report on those issues that would benefit from national collaboration including training and support to assist surge capacity staff.

The Council also agreed to finalise the development of a national protocol on the use of a tailored Recorded Voice Announcements (RVAs) for callers to the Triple Zero service during emergencies, which would alert callers to the availability of information sources that could be used by callers not requiring emergency assistance. This will complement work by jurisdictions on their own RVAs.

COAG reports on *Natural Disasters in Australia (2002)* and *National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management (2005)*

The Council acknowledged the significant role that these reports have played in shaping the reform of Australia's emergency management arrangements over recent years. The Council has conducted an audit of the implementation of these recommendations, which found that most recommendations have been addressed.

The Council agreed that further work in regard to risk assessment and modification, land use planning, development and building control regimes will now be undertaken as part of the national disaster resilience agenda.

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