



Australian Government

Attorney-General's Department
National Security
Capability Development Division

NATIONAL SECURITY UPDATES

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National Security Capability Development News

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

17 AUGUST 2009

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION INTERIM REPORT

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, and Parliamentary Secretary for Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction, Bill Shorten, welcomed the release of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Interim Report.

The Commission is to be commended for the important work it has undertaken to date.

The Rudd Government has already begun a detailed analysis of the recommendations and will respond in accordance with the timetable set out by the Royal Commission.

The Report's recommendations will also inform the further development of emergency response policy and practice.

One important initiative referred to by the Royal Commission is the development of a telephone based emergency warning system.

The Commonwealth is already assisting the States and Territories to develop a national telephone-based emergency warning system and to conduct research to improve the technology.

The Rudd Government has invested \$15 million to assist the States and Territories to establish a National Emergency Warning System (NEWS) to deliver emergency warnings to landline and mobile telephones.

The national emergency warning system is being developed to be operational by the next bushfire season, in line with the Interim Report's recommendations.

In addition, the Commonwealth has invested \$11.3 million to:

- create a Location-Based Number Store (LBNS) to provide secure access for State and Territory warning systems to telephone numbers based on their billing address; and
- fund collaborative research between the Commonwealth, States and Territories with industry on ways to deliver warning messages to mobile phones based on a handset's physical location, rather than the owners billing address, consistent with the Commission's recommendations.

Other recommendations focus on the potential for Commonwealth agencies to more effectively cooperate with the States and Territories in sharing information and resources to assess fire danger and detect, track and suppress bushfires.

Relevant Commonwealth agencies, including Emergency Management Australia (EMA), will explore ways to ensure that this cooperation is made possible.

The report also recommends the promotion of more effective emergency call service arrangements throughout Australia through the COAG framework.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission will deliver its Final Report on 31 July 2010.

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

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19 AUGUST 2009

PROTECTION FOR FOREIGN EMERGENCY SERVICE PERSONNEL

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, today introduced into the House of Representatives the Foreign States Immunities Amendment Bill 2009.

The Bill will enable civil immunity in Australian courts to be conferred on United States fire fighters helping authorities in Australia prepare for, manage and respond to bushfires.

“This Bill is one way the Australian Government can assist the States and Territories with bushfire prevention and management to enhance the safety and security of all Australians,” said Mr McClelland.

The passage of the Bill will facilitate the conclusion of a fire fighter exchange agreement with the United States currently being negotiated by the Victorian Government on behalf of all Australian States and Territories.

The agreement will also provide for Australian fire fighters to enjoy similar protection when operating in the United States.

The immunity would only apply to acts or omissions of foreign personnel in the course of their duties, and would not apply in criminal proceedings.

United States authorities continue to provide critical assistance to Australia in the lead up to and during the annual bushfire season. Since 2003, over 170 fire fighters have been deployed to Australia, including for the horrific Victorian Black Saturday fires in February 2009.

“The Bill also provides a legislative framework for immunity to be conferred on other foreign emergency service personnel where required to help Australian authorities respond to disasters and emergencies.”

The protections provided by the proposed amendments will allow both Australia and the United States to be confident in the overseas deployment of their emergency service personnel.

31 AUGUST 2009

VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES ROYAL COMMISSION INTERIM REPORT

The Commonwealth today provided its response to the Interim Report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission.

The response addresses recommendations of primary relevance to the Commonwealth, with implementation plans for each recommendation as requested by the Commission.

It also outlines actions by the Commonwealth in support of a number of recommendations directed to Victorian Government responsibilities.

The Commission is to be commended for the release of its Interim Report, with a focus on the protection of human life and actions that can be undertaken prior to the next bushfire season.

The Commonwealth will continue to assist Victoria in the provision of a Delivery Report, detailing progress on each recommendation relevant to Commonwealth areas of responsibility and, where appropriate, the outcomes and effectiveness of the response. The Delivery Report is due by 31 March 2010.

The Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission will deliver its Final Report on 31 July 2010.

The Commonwealth will continue to provide all necessary assistance to the Commission in its further deliberations.

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9 OCTOBER 2009

RELEASE OF FLOOD MANAGEMENT MANUALS

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland and Federal Member for Page, Janelle Saffin released key emergency management manuals to improve flood preparedness, warnings and emergency response.

"The manuals will assist Australian communities to build their resilience to flooding by providing information and expert advice to a range of relevant agencies and organisations," Mr McClelland said.

The manuals have been developed in conjunction with the Australian Council of State Emergency Services and are part of the Australian Emergency Manual series which are developed to provide information on nationally consistent best practice in emergency management.

The manuals were launched in the Northern New South Wales city of Lismore, which was hit by major floods in May.

"Local residents are unfortunately all too familiar with the tragic consequences of severe flooding. These manuals provide the community with valuable guidance on all stages of flood preparation and response," Ms Saffin said.

Further information can be found on www.ema.gov.au/publications

14 OCTOBER 2009

AUSTRALIA PARTICIPATES IN REGIONAL TSUNAMI EXERCISE

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, welcomed Australia's participation in an international exercise to test response arrangements for tsunami activity in the Indian Ocean.

"The importance of such an exercise is highlighted by the tragic devastation and loss of life experienced in both Sumatra and Samoa in recent weeks," said Mr McClelland.

The exercise, Indian Ocean Wave, was led today by Indonesia and tested the ability to communicate urgent information including the size, intensity and likely land inundation of a simulated tsunami.

The exercise involved emergency services from Western Australia as well as Commonwealth agencies including Emergency Management Australia (EMA), Geoscience Australia and the Bureau of Meteorology who are involved in the Australian Tsunami Warning System (ATWS).

The ATWS is provided through the Joint Australian Tsunami Warning Centre which operates 24-hours a day, seven days a week to detect and verify tsunami threats to Australia as a result of earthquakes.

The ATWS provides a comprehensive warning system capable of delivering timely and effective tsunami warnings to affected populations. It also supports international efforts to establish an Indian Ocean tsunami warning system, and contributes to the facilitation of tsunami warnings for the South-West Pacific.

Indian Ocean Wave coincides with the United Nations International Disaster Reduction Day and follows a similar exercise conducted in June that successfully tested tsunami warning and communication arrangements for countries in the Pacific Ocean.

Eighteen nations participated in the Indian Ocean Wave exercise, including Indonesia, Bangladesh, India, Kenya, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Mauritius, Mozambique, Myanmar, Oman, Pakistan, Seychelles, Singapore, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Timor Leste and Australia.

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20 OCTOBER 2009

COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE FOR QUEENSLAND BUSHFIRE VICTIMS

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, today announced that the Commonwealth Government will provide financial assistance to communities affected by recent bushfires in Queensland.

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

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

- Emergency Assistance Payments of \$170 per person and up to \$780 per family;
- Essential Household Contents Grants of \$1,660 per individual and up to \$4,980 per couple or family;
- Essential Repairs to Housing Grants of up to \$10,250 per individual and up to \$13,800 per couple or family;
- Concessional loans of up to \$250,000 to eligible primary producers that have suffered physical loss as a result of the bushfires; and
- Freight subsidies of up to \$5,000 to assist with the cost of transporting livestock, fodder or water and building or fencing equipment or machinery.

Inquiries in relation to personal hardship and distress assistance should be made to the Queensland Department of Communities on 1800 173 349. Further information can also be found at www.communities.qld.gov.au

Inquires in relation to the freight subsidies should be made to the Queensland Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries on 132 523 or by visiting www.dpi.qld.gov.au

Inquiries in relation to the concessional interest rate loans should be made to the Queensland Rural Adjustment Authority on 1800 623 946. Further information can also be found at www.qraa.qld.gov.au

The Commonwealth, through Emergency Management Australia (EMA), will continue to work closely with Queensland authorities, local government and community organisations to ensure that affected communities have all the support they need during this difficult period.

23 OCTOBER 2009

DISASTER MITIGATION FUNDING FOR TASMANIA

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, and Tasmanian Minister for Police and Emergency Management, Jim Cox, announced that the Commonwealth will invest over \$150,000 to help Tasmania prepare for extreme storm and weather events.

"This is another example of how cooperation between the Commonwealth and the States can improve the resilience of our communities to natural disasters and emergencies," Mr McClelland said.

The project will be led by the Antarctic Climate and Ecosystems Co-operative Research Centre (CRC) and will model storm surges in coastal areas and extreme rain and wind events.

Commonwealth funding will be provided to the Tasmanian State Emergency Service and will complement investments by the Tasmanian Government and the CRC.

"The project will provide fundamental climate data that will inform effective mitigation strategies and measures such as land use planning, building codes, development policies and communication and awareness programs," Mr Cox said.

Commonwealth funding is being provided under the Rudd Government's new Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP) announced in this years Budget.

The NDRP integrates a number of existing emergency management programs in order to improve efficiency and allow States and Territories to focus on high priority risks including disaster mitigation works, supporting volunteers and building effective community partnerships.

Further information on the Natural Disaster Resilience Program can be found at www.ema.gov.au

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25 OCTOBER 2009

PRIME MINISTER MEDIA RELEASE

The Australian Government will provide \$52 million to enable the rapid deployment of Australian civilians into overseas disaster or conflict zones.

This will enable the Government to send civilians with expert knowledge and abilities into disaster-struck regions or conflict zones with the urgency required in these terrible situations.

This new initiative is expected to have an interim capability by mid-2010, and is expected to be fully operational by early 2011.

The civilian specialists will be deployed across a wide range of roles. For example, they could be used to help:

- * restore the delivery of essential services like health services infrastructure;
- * restore essential infrastructure like utilities services, for example electricity and water; and
- * rebuild core government institutions to deliver good governance in order to support economic and social stability.

The civilian specialists will be deployed to assist in early recovery and reconstruction efforts after initial emergency response operations have concluded.

The Government will create a register of up to 500 Australian specialists who can be deployed overseas at short notice.

These specialists will be chosen for their technical expertise and their ability to work in challenging environments overseas.

They will be drawn from both the public and private sectors.

These civilian specialists will complement rather than replace existing humanitarian response mechanisms and longer-term development assistance.

Deployed civilians may work alongside the Australian military and police where present or in a stand-alone capability. They may work alongside foreign military, United Nations peacekeepers, police and civilian experts from other countries.

Assignments will range from immediate stabilisation and recovery work to longer-term capacity building roles, recognising that the consequences of disasters can be felt for many years after their immediate impact.

A new Office of the Deployable Civilian Capability will be established within the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) to implement the initiative. The Office of the Deployable Civilian Capability will also build strategic partnerships with equivalent civilian organisations overseas, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Canada.

Deployed specialists will undertake advisory and capacity building roles at the national, provincial and district levels in countries which require assistance across six key stabilisation and reconstruction sectors:

- * Security, justice & reconciliation;
- * Machinery of Government;
- * Essential Services;
- * Economic Stability;
- * Community and Social Capacity Building; and
- * Operational management.

As we have seen in recent weeks with the disasters in Samoa and Tonga, and in East Asia Summit member nations including Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines, countries affected by crises require significant assistance to alleviate human suffering and to begin the process of recovery.

Often this assistance is needed urgently, and requires specialised knowledge and skills. By providing skilled professionals through the DCC, Australia can play a greater role in this process.

For those who would like further information or to register their interest in this initiative, AusAID will provide more details in the near future.

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30 OCTOBER 2009

COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE FOR NORTHERN NEW SOUTH WALES FLOOD VICTIMS

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, announced that the Commonwealth Government will provide financial assistance to communities affected by recent flooding in parts of the New South Wales mid-north coast.

Commonwealth assistance is being provided to the New South Wales Government through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) and will apply to natural disaster declared areas, including Bellingen and Nambucca Shires.

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

- personal hardship and distress (PHD) grants to low-income earners whose principal residence has been damaged. Enquiries should be directed to the NSW Department of Community Services on 1800 018 444;
- concessional loans of up to \$25,000 for voluntary, non-profit organisations. Enquires should be directed to NSW Treasury on (02) 9228 5198;
- concessional loans of up to \$130,000 for small businesses and primary producers. Enquiries should be directed to the NSW Department of Primary Industries on 1800 678 593;
- road and rail freight subsidies of up to \$15,000 to assist primary producers for the carriage of livestock and fodder. Enquiries should be directed to the NSW Department of Primary Industries office on 1800 814 647.

The Commonwealth, through Emergency Management Australia, will continue to work closely with New South Wales authorities, local government and community organisations to ensure that affected communities have all the support they need during this difficult period.

8 NOVEMBER 2009

COMMONWEALTH ASSISTANCE FOR NEW SOUTH WALES FLOOD VICTIMS

Attorney-General, Robert McClelland, announced that the Commonwealth Government will provide financial assistance to communities affected by recent flooding in parts of the New South Wales mid-north coast.

Commonwealth assistance is being provided to the New South Wales Government through the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) and will apply to the natural disaster declared areas of Coffs Harbour, Bellingen, Kempsey and Nambucca regions. This assistance may be extended to other local government areas following a more detailed assessment.

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

- personal hardship and distress (PHD) grants to low-income earners whose principal residence has been damaged. Enquiries should be directed to the NSW Department of Community Services on 1800 018 444;
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