

NATIONAL SECURITY UPDATES

States and Territories welcome Commonwealth operational briefing prior to bushfire season



The Hon. Steve Whan, MP NSW Minister for Emergency Services, NSW Minister for Small Business, and NSW Minister for Rural Affairs, Director General Emergency Management Australia (Attorney-General's Department, Mr Tony Pearce and The Hon. Bob Cameron, MP Victorian Minister for Police and Emergency Services, and the Victorian Minister for Corrections.

In accord with the Commonwealth response to the recommendations of the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission Interim Report, specifically in relation to Recommendations 11.1 and 11.2 Emergency Management Australia (EMA), a division of the Federal Attorney-General's Department, facilitated an operational pre-season briefing for State and Territory emergency management agencies on the 25th September 2009.

For information References 11.1 and 11.2 are as follows:

Recommendation 11.1 The Commonwealth facilitate discussions between relevant Commonwealth agencies (including Emergency Management Australia, Defence, Defence Imagery Geospatial Organisation and Geoscience Australia) and state and territory fire services to identify ways in which Commonwealth resources might be applied more rapidly and effectively during extremely dangerous bushfires, including investigating the potential for these resources to be used for detecting, tracking and suppressing bushfires.

Recommendation 11.2: The Commonwealth, through Emergency Management Australia, provide briefings at least once a year to state and territory agencies regarding arrangements available (including through Defence) to support jurisdictions during disasters and emergencies, including bushfires. State and territory representatives should advise relevant Ministers and the Chief Officers of emergency services (including fire services) of the outcomes of these briefings.

The aim of this briefing was to facilitate pre-season bushfire and seasonal hazard preparedness and planning discussions between the Commonwealth and States and Territories.

Preparedness discussions focussed on:

- Awareness of Commonwealth support arrangements to jurisdictions and advice for efficient processing of requests for assistance under the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (Comdisplan) and Defence Aid to Civil Community (DACC) in a timely way that is not encumbered by undue process
- Provision of a comprehensive seasonal outlook in relation to severe fire weather and cyclone activity.
- Australian Government agencies will provide a comprehensive overview of the support and services available to jurisdictions during disasters and emergencies, including bushfires.
- Response arrangements and plans will be reviewed to ensure that they can be immediately activated in the most timely way where required.
- Discussion and reaching agreement on how Australian Government Liaison Officers (from any relevant Commonwealth agency) would/should be embedded into a significantly affected jurisdiction, their roles and responsibilities, trigger mechanisms for their deployment, etc.

The briefing was opened by the Attorney-General and chaired by the Director General EMA.

The briefing included the following presentations:

- Emergency Management Australia - National coordination arrangements and national plans including COMDISPLAN, DACC and the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements
- Bureau of Meteorology – seasonal weather outlook and support available to jurisdictions
- Geoscience Australia – geospatial and other support available to jurisdictions
- Australian Defence Force – provision of Defence support through the DACC arrangements, requests and tasking arrangements, including a presentation on the capabilities of the Defence Imagery and Geospatial Organisation.
- Centre Link and FaHCSIA will also be in attendance to provide advice on their capabilities.