

Centre of excellence: The new way forward for the Australian Emergency Management Institute

The Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI) Victoria has been playing an important role in the national emergency management landscape for over five decades. The AEMI has deserved its time-honoured reputation as Australia's premier emergency management education and knowledge facility.

When the Institute commenced in 1956 as the Australian Civil Defence School, its role was to provide training that offered maximum protection from the effects of hostilities on Australian soil. Under a new name, the Australian Counter Disaster College, the mid 60s saw the role of the Institute also change to reflect the evolving need to provide education that helped mitigate, minimise or alleviate human suffering in the event of a natural disaster. In the late 90s the philosophy of the organisation was extended beyond just natural disasters and began to encompass technological and human-caused disasters—addressing issues such as Y2K and the return to earth of the MIR space station. To reflect a transfer of departmental ownership, the Institute again changed its name to the Emergency Management Australia Institute, also bringing about a change in philosophy—to develop preparedness, prevention, effective response and speedy recovery from emergencies and subsequently, the more embracing creating safer, sustainable communities. These days, to reflect a more integrated national security approach, the Institute has adopted a name that not only announces a new era but also heralds its transformation into a centre of excellence for knowledge and skills development for the emergency management sector, supporting broader national security capability.

All organisations must undergo changes to ensure they remain forward-looking, innovative and connected. To this end the Attorney-General's Department has developed a new strategic vision for AEMI (the Way Forward). The vision sets out a challenge for the Institute to become a centre of excellence by focusing on delivery of products which are:

- Forward looking, innovative, connected and strategically aligned with national policy and capability development needs of government and key stakeholders;
- Efficient and focused on continuous improvement

- Operating a fee for service regime consistent with government's competitive neutrality and cost recovery policies;
- Client focused and performance monitored to ensure value to government and the national security environment.

As part of the overarching Attorney-General's Department strategy for achieving a secure society, the Way Forward aims to ensure AEMI provides strategically-aligned research, training, education and development activities that will assist in building the capabilities of its key stakeholders in preparing for, preventing, responding to, and recovering from significant disaster events.

The new AEMI will focus on continuous improvement and client orientated performance to ensure value to Government and the national security arrangements.

The vision

Continuing its operations from Mt Macedon, the organisation's focal point will of course remain education & training and community awareness. However, the vision for AEMI is that the organisation will take on a much deeper and more strategic role in national security. The Institute will develop into a comprehensive centre of excellence for knowledge and skills development for the sector.

AEMI will deliver national knowledge and skills development activities that build:

- a heightened strategic consideration of emerging emergency management capability issues of national importance to inform policy and practitioner debate and action;
- an emergency management body of knowledge through better practice manuals, lessons learned and applied research;
- community and emergency management sector understanding, capability, awareness and resilience to disaster; and
- professional and volunteer leadership and practitioner competency in high-end emergency management skills to a consistent level across Australia.

The goals

The four corporate goals in the Way Forward strategy are that AEMI will:

1. provide education and training for members of public safety agencies and others involved in emergency management including i) professional development programs; ii) competency-based training and nationally accredited courses; iii) leadership courses; and iv) exercise management;
2. undertake applied research into contemporary issues in emergency management to ensure educational activities reflect contemporary understanding; inform the development of policy and provide leadership in the development of an emergency management body of knowledge;
3. conduct strategic activities to enhance emergency management community insight into emerging issues, challenges and good practice and to stimulate debate on issues of national importance. These activities will include strategic think-tanks, workshops, forums examining contemporary issues and it will develop collaborative knowledge networks, communities of interest and strategic partnerships and alliances; and
4. promote community awareness and resilience through school education activities, engagement with disadvantaged communities, working with the volunteer sector to stimulate community understanding and recruitment and retention of volunteers and supporting Australian Government efforts to build resilience within the region.

Organisational changes

To achieve these goals, a restructure and alignment of resources has occurred.

The new structure will foster a close working relationship between AEMI and other business units within the Attorney-General's Department including the National Security Resilience Policy Division (NSRPD) and Emergency Management Australia Division (EMA); and Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C).

The AEMI Board

A newly-established AEMI Board will ensure, among other things, that the activities of AEMI are aligned with and complement current national security policy capability and operations directions. The Board is comprised of:

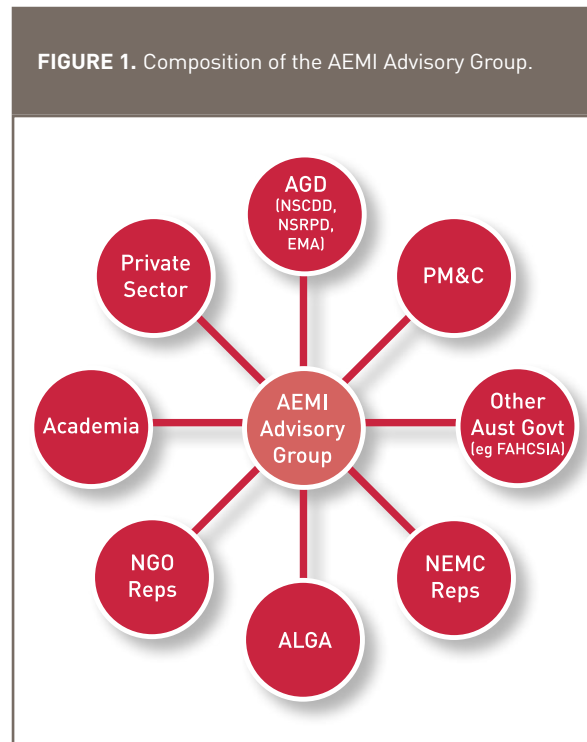
- the Deputy Secretary AGD, National Security and Criminal Justice Group (Chair),
- Deputy National Security Adviser (PM&C),
- First Assistant Secretary, National Security Capability Development Division, AGD,
- Assistant Secretary, Emergency Management Australia, AGD, and
- Assistant Secretary, Emergency Management Policy, National Security Resilience Policy Division, AGD



Aerial photo of the Australian Emergency Management Institute at Mount Macedon, Victoria.

The Advisory Group

Chaired by a Board member (the First Assistant Secretary, National Security Capability Development Division), an AEMI Advisory Group (AAG) comprising representatives from a wide range of key stakeholders, including representatives from states and territories, has been convened. This group will meet every six months and provide an important consultative mechanism for the Board deliberations, in particular identification and endorsement of key AEMI activities and deliverables and the monitoring of performance.



The operational model

A Strategy and Research Unit will play a pivotal lead role in the operational model for AEMI. This business unit will engage with a wide array of interested parties to identify and canvass significant issues for knowledge and skills development within the emergency management environment. It will also drive the development and implementation of a research agenda (in partnership with other Government agencies, academic partners, jurisdictions, NGOs and the private sector). The Unit will also be responsible for establishing an effective 'lessons learned' function—in partnership with the Counter-Terrorism Capability Development Branch of the Attorney-General's Department.

The research agenda will be important to informing engagement on forward-looking capability and resilience policy matters; the design of strategic workshops and forums to generate insight and actions on significant matters which impact resilience and capability and the development of emergency management.

The research and thinking of the AEMI will be focused on the practical application to emergency management skills,

capability development and community resilience. It will include an emphasis on servicing the needs of emergency management volunteers.

The Strategy and Research Unit will also identify suitable secondment opportunities between AEMI and other key stakeholders—including fellowship opportunities from within the tertiary sector.

Strategic insight emanating from each unit will inform the development of training and education products that can effectively address significant emerging issues or gaps and the design of community engagement activities. This will help build national disaster resilience and support the volunteer effort in an ageing Australian population (recruitment, retention and opportunities for development).

Proposals for training and education to be provided under a fee-for-service arrangement and charging regime, are also under consideration. The fee structure and charging regime proposals will be consistent with Government's competitive neutrality and cost recovery policies and will reflect the Attorney-General's Department's acceptance of certain 'community service level' obligations for particular stakeholder groups, including volunteers.

The business units

Four business units have been established to manage the responsibilities of AEMI:

- Strategy and research
- Training and education delivery
- Community awareness
- Education and business support

These units will be directed by the First Assistant Secretary of the AGD National Security Capability Development Division and the Executive Director of the AEMI.



Conclusion

The past half century has seen an exponential growth in the challenges faced to develop a disaster resilient Australia and therefore the services offered through AEMI. Its continuing work to research future directions in emergency management and to position emergency managers to deal with yet unseen challenges will assist the sector to continue to meet its responsibilities and to assure the safety of all communities in Australia.

Further information about the Institute and its current activities is located at the Emergency Management in Australia website at www.em.gov.au/aemi.

Table 1. Roles and responsibilities of each new Business Unit

Business Unit	Areas of Responsibility
Strategy & Research	<p>Strategic activities to further the debate to inform direction on emerging issues of national importance through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic think-tanks/workshops/forums examining contemporary issues of national significance • Conducting ‘lessons learned’ program • Identifying, developing and managing collaborative knowledge networks, communities of interest and strategic partnerships and alliances. <p>Managing a Research Agenda focused on contemporary issues in emergency management which will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and disseminate thinking from research and strategic activities • Inform the development of policy and practitioner debate and action • Inform the delivery of educational activities to reflect contemporary challenges and practice • Provide leadership in the development of emergency management doctrine.
Training & Education Delivery	<p>Design and delivery of professional and volunteer focused training and education products which meet the highest needs of stakeholders. Products will take the form of Mt Macedon based, off-site and on-line delivery of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional development programs • Competency based training under Advanced Diploma in Public Safety • Leadership courses • Exercise management. <p>Exploitation of ICT opportunities in the effective delivery of training, education and delivery.</p>
Community Awareness and Education	<p>Community Engagement and EM library services to build understanding, awareness and resilience, with a focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools and Youth projects • At risk communities and disadvantaged communities (physical/mental disabilities, language) • Asia-Pacific regional opportunities • Publication of EM Journal and update and publication of EM Manuals <p>Supporting the volunteer sector by stimulating community understanding of volunteering and recruitment and retention of volunteers – including in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities</p> <p>Exploitation of ICT opportunities in the delivery of community awareness activities.</p>
Business Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Operational facilitation and support for the other three business units • Performance monitoring and quality assurance activities.