

Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management - Emergency Management

COMMUNIQUE Canberra, 11 February 2011

An extraordinary meeting of the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management – Emergency Management (MCPPEM-EM) was convened in Canberra today. The Commonwealth Attorney-General, and State, Territory and New Zealand emergency management Ministers, along with the Australian Local Government Association, discussed the priorities for building the nation's resilience, in light of the unprecedented number, severity and scale of natural disaster events over summer.

In 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to adopt a whole-of-nation resilience-based approach to disaster management, which recognises that a national, coordinated and cooperative effort is needed to enhance Australia's capacity to prepare for, withstand and recover from disasters. The Emergency Management Council has endorsed the draft National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, which will be considered by COAG on Sunday, 13 February 2011.

The Emergency Management Council agreed that this disaster season confirms and reinforces the need for such an approach. The Council noted that it will be leading implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience on behalf of all Australian governments. The Council discussed those parts of the Strategy which have particular resonance at this time and agreed on a number of priority actions.

The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management – Emergency Management **agreed** that it is fully committed to leading governments toward a national, integrated approach to building disaster resilience and the delivery of sustained behavioural change and enduring partnerships across Australia.

In delivering on this commitment, MCPPEM-EM agreed to task the National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC), as a priority, to:

1. review and report on the effectiveness of arrangements between all Australian jurisdictions for communication, situational awareness, liaison and response to natural disasters
2. examine and report on the effectiveness of Commonwealth and state/territory relief and recovery payments
3. convene a forum to consider new and emerging technologies that could be harnessed to assist with preparedness, response and recovery to natural disasters, with an initial focus on floods
4. work with Treasuries on issues relating to arrangements for the insurance of the assets of:
 - a. Australian individuals and businesses for damage and loss associated with flood and other natural disasters, and
 - b. Australian governments for damage and loss associated with flood and other natural disasters, with a view to removing disincentives to take-up of private insurance and encouraging equity and best practice in maximising community and government self-reliance
5. work, in consultation with Geoscience Australia, to scope a potential work program to map areas of risk relating to riverine flooding, flash floods, storm surge and coastal inundation. That work should take into account existing knowledge and initiatives, currency of information and identified information gaps, and the need for consistent and robust methodologies
6. develop an Action Plan to work in partnership with the Australian Building Codes Board, Standards Australia, planning officials at all levels of government, and across other relevant public and private organisations to influence and effect land-use planning and building

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7. identify an evidence base to highlight the efficacy of essential public infrastructure improvement and mitigation, with a view to program changes that encourage betterment of infrastructure that is regularly damaged by natural disasters
8. review existing programs and prepare a draft strategy for MCPPEM-EM's consideration for the efficient and effective coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate clean up stage post-disaster
9. develop and research examples of individual and community resilience initiatives which have mitigated damage and / or losses from natural disasters
10. work with Treasuries to review and report on Australia's legal structures regarding charities with particular reference to the application of taxation laws and to the principle of "charitable purposes" in the context of natural disasters, and
11. give particular attention to the emerging role of social media, as part of the work on communicating with, and educating people about risks, under the COAG National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

Noting the value of the telephone-based warning systems, Emergency Alert and State Alert, and the work that is being undertaken on the location-based warning capability, the Emergency Management Council emphasised that these technologies can only supplement emergency warning and information that is delivered primarily through radio and television, and also through a number of other mechanisms.

The Emergency Management Council members noted the importance of achieving COAG's high level objectives following COAG's consideration of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. The Emergency Management Council reiterated its full commitment to a national, integrated approach to building disaster resilience and the delivery of sustained behavioural change and enduring partnerships across Australia.

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 30th meeting in Canberra today. The Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association attended the meeting.

Recent natural disasters have had a profound effect on the Australian community. All Australians have been affected by the tragic loss of life and widespread devastation experienced in many communities.

COAG acknowledged the tremendous efforts of volunteers, emergency services personnel and the Australian Defence Force in responding to the disasters, with many crossing borders to help out.

COAG recognised the challenges facing many communities in the rebuilding process that lies ahead and welcomed the generous package of assistance the Commonwealth and affected States and Territories have provided for individuals, businesses, local government and the restoration of infrastructure following recent natural disasters. COAG noted the establishment of the Australian Government Reconstruction Inspectorate, which, together with State arrangements, will strengthen accountability and rigour in the use of substantial public funding to be committed to rebuilding.

To improve Australia's ability to withstand and recover from future disasters, COAG adopted the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience and agreed to take immediate steps to implement it.

The Strategy focuses on the shared responsibility of governments, business and communities in preparing for, and responding to, disasters. It sets out concrete steps governments at all levels can take to reduce risks posed by natural disasters and better support communities to recover from disasters. Other actions will include steps to support improved risk-based planning decisions, the take-up of insurance and the provision and construction of resilient infrastructure.

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience can be found on the Council of Australian Government website at www.coag.gov.au.