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Performance Audit

Emergency Management Australia

Attorney-General's Department

Australian National Audit Office

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Canberra ACT
16 April 2008

Dear Mr President
Dear Mr Speaker

The Australian National Audit Office has undertaken a performance audit in the Attorney-General's Department in accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit and the accompanying brochure. The report is titled *Emergency Management Australia*.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's Homepage—<http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Ian McPhee', is positioned above the printed name.

Ian McPhee
Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

The Auditor-General is head of the Australian National Audit Office. The ANAO assists the Auditor-General to carry out his duties under the *Auditor-General Act 1997* to undertake performance audits and financial statement audits of Commonwealth public sector bodies and to provide independent reports and advice for the Parliament, the Government and the community. The aim is to improve Commonwealth public sector administration and accountability.

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Abbreviations

ACSES	Australian Council of State Emergency Services
ADF	Australian Defence Forces
AEM	Australian Emergency Manuals Series
AEMC	Australian Emergency Management Committee
AGD	Attorney-General's Department
AGDCC	AGD Coordination Centre
AGEMPF	Australian Government Emergency Management Policy Forum
AJEM	Australian Journal of Emergency Management
ALGA	Australian Local Government Association
ANAO	Australian National Audit Office
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CBRN	Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DGEMA	Director-General Emergency Management Australia
EMA	Emergency Management Australia
EMAI	Emergency Management Australia Institute
EMLO	Emergency Management Liaison Officers
EMRDRG	Emergency Management Research and Development Research Group

EMSWG	Emergency Management Sector Working Group
GSA	Government Skills Australia
IMF	Incident Management Facility
INSARAG	International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (of the United Nations)
MCPEM	Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management
NCSWG	National Community Safety Working Group
NEMC	National Emergency Management Committee
NEMCC	National Emergency Management Coordination Centre
NETC	National Education and Training Committee (of ACSES)
PSCC	Protective Security Coordination Centre
PSIAC	Public Safety Industry Advisory Committee
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SAG	Strategic Advisory Group (of the AEMC)
WONSH	Watch Office/National Security Hotline (of the PSCC)

Glossary

AEMA	Australian Emergency Management Arrangements. This is a high level strategic document, for public release, outlining the principles, structures and arrangements that support the national coordination of effort for emergency management in Australia including for catastrophic disasters. The draft AEMA has been prepared and is subject to MCPPEM agreement, with a view to having it signed off through COAG.
AEP	Australian Emergency Plan. A proposed national emergency plan, detailing the existing national emergency management framework, arrangements and plans and identifies the specific arrangements in the event of a catastrophic disaster. The AEP has been superseded by the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements.
COMDISPLAN	The Australian Government's disaster response plan. EMA has primary responsibility for maintaining and arranging activation of COMDISPLAN.
LGS	Local Government Scheme. A component of WTTME (see below) aimed at enhancing the ability of communities to prepare for, react to and recover from disasters of all types.
NEP	National Emergency Protocol. This provides the communication arrangements between the Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the ALGA during a national emergency and complements existing emergency management plans and arrangements.
NEVSF	National Emergency Volunteers Support Fund. A component of WTTME (see below) aimed at boosting the recruitment and skills base of volunteer organisations at the frontline of emergency management.

PPRR	The four elements that comprise current emergency management thinking: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
SCA	Australian Safer Communities Awards. These are designed to recognise and encourage best practice and innovation across the emergency management sector, business, local government and community organisations.
USAR	Urban Search and Rescue. An emergency response ability to respond incidents involving structural collapse.
WTTME	Working Together To Manage Emergencies. A grants program administered by EMA aimed at developing self-reliance in communities and local government in order to enhance community safety.

Summary and Recommendations

Summary

Introduction

1. Emergency management incorporates a wide range of measures to manage risks to communities and the environment. It comprises four elements, prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.
2. The philosophy of, and approach to, emergency management has evolved over time. Initially, emergency management largely was reactive, concentrating on civil defence (civil response to external attack during armed conflict). Since the 1970s, the focus has broadened to encompass natural disaster relief and, more recently, threats arising from potential acts of terrorism. Emergency management now encompasses an 'all hazards' philosophy; that is, promoting a professional approach that responds effectively irrespective of whether the situation is natural or human caused. With such an approach the objective is to have in place plans, strategies and mechanisms that can respond in an appropriate manner irrespective of the actual cause of the emergency.
3. Australia operates under a federal system, which shares power and responsibility between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. State and territory governments determine the powers and responsibilities for local government. Each of the three levels of government has a role in emergency management because there is a shared responsibility for the overall objective of ensuring community safety.
4. In the first instance states and territories are expected to respond to emergencies within their jurisdictions using state, territory, local government and private sector resources. Nevertheless, the Australian Government acknowledges that in times of major emergencies, jurisdictional and private resources might be insufficient, inappropriate or exhausted and so, on request from a state or territory, will coordinate physical assistance. The Australian Government also supports states and territories through involvement in education, training, research, public awareness, information collection and dissemination activities, and by providing direct and indirect financial assistance.
5. In addition, through the Australian Government Counter Disaster Task Force and various agencies, the Australian Government supports measures to assist communities to recover from the effects of emergencies.

6. At an international level, the Australian Government provides physical and financial assistance to other countries when major disasters occur.

Emergency Management Australia

7. The primary Australian Government agency tasked with emergency management is Emergency Management Australia (EMA). EMA is a Division within the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). Until late 2001 EMA was part of the Department of Defence, having evolved from the former civil defence function.

8. EMA is not an emergency response agency but rather is the coordinator of the Australian Government's response when a request for assistance comes from a state or territory. EMA has primary responsibility for maintaining and arranging activation of the Australian Government's overall disaster response plan, COMDISPLAN.

9. EMA is led by the Director-General, supported by three Branch Heads (Assistant Secretaries) and a staff of approximately 140 people. For 2007–08, EMA's departmental appropriation for salaries and ongoing operations is just under \$23.5 million, and it administers funds of some \$30 million for assistance to the states and territories, and grants to local government and volunteer emergency organisations.

Audit objective

10. The objective of the audit was to assess how well EMA is meeting its objective of providing national leadership in the development of measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters.

Conclusion

11. The mission of the Australian Government's primary emergency management agency, EMA, is to provide 'national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce the risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters.'¹ In an environment where responsibilities relating to emergency management are shared between the Australian Government and the states and territories, EMA's ability to provide leadership relies heavily on effective consultation and agreement with the states and territories, and with other Australian Government agencies. At

¹ Emergency Management Australia, *This is EMA*, 2007, p. 5.

an operational level, EMA has greater ability to influence key stakeholders when its strategies and initiatives are backed by dedicated Australian Government resources.

12. EMA's planning and reporting arrangements largely focus on its operational-level projects and activities. However, the alignment of these activities to EMA's strategic directions, and their contribution to overall intended outcomes, often is unclear. There would be benefit in EMA undertaking further work to define its roles and responsibilities, review critically its activities and align these with strategic directions, and develop and report measures to allow a better assessment of the impact of its activities. EMA has commenced a process to address these issues, including the preparation of a paper that identifies long term strategic directions for emergency management in Australia.

13. One of EMA's key roles is to coordinate the Australian Government response to requests for assistance during emergency situations. EMA's domestic and international response activities have been timely and responsive to requests by jurisdictions and relevant authorities.

14. EMA assists in the education and training for those with emergency management responsibilities and contributes to community education activities. EMA also undertakes other initiatives to further support the emergency management sector, including maintaining an Internet presence. All these activities have, broadly, been managed well by EMA, and have been responsive to the needs of the emergency management sector. However, EMA has not had a process to review periodically its approach to delivering individual training courses, to ensure the most appropriate delivery mechanism is used commensurate with training objectives. Also, improvements to the structure and content of the EMA website would enhance its usefulness to the emergency management sector.

15. EMA helps build the physical infrastructure and equipment used by response agencies and volunteers during emergencies, through the provision of specific-purpose resources and grants schemes. A primary avenue for building these resources is the Working Together To Manage Emergencies (WTTME) grants program. WTTME generally has been managed well by EMA. However, EMA's follow-up of non-compliant projects has not been timely and the linkage between the program and its overall objective of enhancing emergency management physical preparedness could be made clearer.

Key findings by chapter

Strategic Planning and Relationships (Chapter 2)

16. Since it moved from Defence in late 2001 EMA has lifted its profile, and that of the emergency management function, within government and with stakeholders in states and territories. However, the opportunity to define EMA's role provided by the move was not taken, nor was a comprehensive emergency management strategic plan developed. The situation has only recently begun to be remedied.

17. EMA has developed a Business Plan that aligns with the AGD objective of 'providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters'. However, the ANAO found that current plans are largely a consolidation of existing projects and activities. While not necessarily inappropriate, the plans would be stronger if they were based on an objective assessment by individual sections within EMA of their contribution to a detailed statement of EMA's objectives. Currently the linkage from EMA's vision and mission statements to planning activities and outputs is not clear.

18. EMA has commenced developing a Strategic Plan to cover a three to five year period. The Strategic Plan is being developed from a paper prepared for the EMA Executive assessing the emergency management environment in the next ten years and outlining the strategic directions that EMA should pursue over that timeframe. The task in going forward will be to implement sound linkages from vision and mission statements to planning activities and outputs.

19. EMA's performance measures largely target activity, with little context against which the reader can compare performance. Further, although the AGD, of which EMA is a part, has a costing model developed to enable cost recovery, that the model does not enable any diagnostic activities on business performance. Attempts by EMA since 2000 to develop an activity-based costing system and improved financial information have stalled. Given the increasing demands being placed upon EMA, the ANAO considers that EMA's monitoring of performance would be strengthened by a capacity to estimate the cost of its key emergency management activities and outcomes.

20. EMA's current efforts to improve its strategic planning through the Strategic Directions initiative provide opportunities to enhance performance

measures for major emergency management activities, to encompass outcomes, quality of outputs, and the cost of activities.

Building Knowledge and Skills (Chapter 3)

21. EMA undertakes various activities to build knowledge and skills amongst the emergency management sector and communities, through its involvement in education and training activities, maintaining or producing emergency management-focussed resources and by promoting better understanding of risks and their management, through public education for the general public and in schools. The objective of these activities is to develop a better equipped emergency management sector, and informed and better prepared communities.

22. Efforts by EMA, and the sector, to implement programs of competency-based training have raised the profile of emergency management in Australia. EMA's efforts have been responsive to the needs of stakeholders. However, EMA has not had a process to review periodically its approach to delivering individual training courses, to ensure the most appropriate delivery mechanism is used commensurate with training objectives. Such review is important as the administrative load in delivering training under the formal competency-based framework can be substantial. Further, in implementing the EMA's review of its environment and strategic direction at an activity/operational level, it would be of benefit for EMA to identify the specific areas where it is best suited to contribute to emergency management capability in Australia and review current practices to align these with clear strategic objectives.

23. EMA supports the emergency management sector through maintaining a dedicated, emergency management-focussed library, publishing a quarterly journal and producing a suite of guidance publications. These initiatives are well managed by EMA and well received by the sector.

24. EMA also maintains an Internet presence, which provides various emergency management-related materials. However, the current EMA website has substantial shortcomings. It is poorly structured, and in some instances confusing, making it difficult to find relevant information, and some material is dated. EMA recently reviewed material and removed obviously redundant items but progress has been limited.

Building Physical Preparedness (Chapter 4)

25. EMA seeks to build physical preparedness by providing specific-purpose resources, administering discretionary grants schemes and recognising emergency management excellence through an awards program. A primary objective of EMA's involvement in this process is to facilitate national approaches to addressing physical preparedness gaps.

26. With the states and territories, EMA is involved in identifying specific gaps in Australia's capabilities and then addressing those gaps through directed assistance. The ANAO found that EMA's efforts to build the physical infrastructure and equipment in the emergency management sector are generally well managed. For example, for the National Urban Search and Rescue Capacity Development Project, the ANAO found that a robust assessment of need had occurred and the response to identified gaps was well targeted. EMA has in place satisfactory controls and management practices to ensure that directed physical preparedness projects are well managed.

27. With the National Urban Search and Rescue Capacity Development Project, EMA took a pragmatic approach in managing equipment procurement to achieve efficiently and effectively project objectives. This approach provided the benefits of cheaper purchasing and, at the same time, reduced the administrative requirements on EMA in maintaining the Project. The approach used by EMA provides a useful model for consideration in future national physical preparedness enhancement initiatives.

28. EMA also assists to build physical infrastructure and equipment by way of discretionary assistance, where the Australian Government is not involved directly in identifying gaps and undertaking procurement. For these initiatives organisations are invited to apply for various grants to purchase emergency management-related equipment and infrastructure, undertake mitigation activities and deliver training. Projects will vie against those in other organisations, and across jurisdictions, in a competitive selection process.

29. EMA facilitates discretionary physical preparedness building primarily through its administration the WTTME initiative. WTTME generally has been managed well by EMA. However, EMA's follow-up of non-compliant projects has not been timely. Proactive monitoring of the progress of projects and follow up of those that might be behind schedule, or not be fulfilling all funding agreement requirements, are important controls.

30. The linkage between programs such as WTTME, and the Safer Communities Awards, and their overall objective of enhanced emergency management physical preparedness could be made clearer.² Enhanced linkages would provide EMA with assurance that discretionary activities achieve their objective of building physical preparedness within the emergency management sector.

Coordination in Emergencies (Chapter 5)

31. The Attorney-General is the responsible Minister for committing Australian Government resources in response to an emergency. Provision of Australian Government resources does not occur until a formal request is received from a state or territory, as a result of the jurisdiction's resources being inadequate, inappropriate or unavailable to meet the situation. Following approval by the Attorney-General of a request for assistance, EMA can call upon the resources of the Australian Government to arrange for the request to be satisfied.

32. The ANAO found that EMA's domestic response activities are timely and responsive to requests by jurisdictions and that EMA actions specific requests in an appropriate manner.

33. In recent times EMA has become involved increasingly in coordinating an Australian response to overseas incidents, as the region of Australia's interests, identified by the Government, has expanded. Examples include Australia's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami and the Yogyakarta earthquake and its offer of assistance during the 2007 Greek forest fires.

34. When EMA is involved in overseas operations it is as an agent acting on behalf of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and/or the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID). As such, EMA seeks reimbursement for the costs incurred during its involvement in overseas emergency situations.

35. The ANAO found that EMA's overseas response was timely and responsive to the situation's requirements. However, in recent times there has been some disagreement between AusAID and EMA over arrangements for overseas involvements. For the response to the Yogyakarta earthquake,

² Since 2000 EMA, in conjunction with the states and territories, has sponsored the Australian Safer Communities Awards. The awards are designed to recognise and encourage best practice and innovation across the emergency management sector, business, local government and community organisations.

AusAID was critical of some aspects of the response arrangements made by EMA, for example, in sourcing some supplies from Australia rather than buying these locally at significantly less cost.

36. This issue arises primarily because of the difference of focus between activities undertaken by EMA and AusAID and the resultant differences in performance expectations. Development of an agreement between EMA and relevant stakeholders specifying the broad principles, responsibilities and performance expectations to apply when EMA is involved in overseas operations would assist in this regard.

37. The ANAO has made five recommendations focussed on assisting EMA achieve its strategic vision of providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce the risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters.

Summary of agency response

38. EMA was fully consulted in the development of this report, agrees with its recommendations, and has commenced acting upon them.

39. Emergency management in Australia has evolved over the last decades into a structured discipline that addresses emergency risk to the Australian society, economy and environment. This evolution continues and EMA, in partnership with state and territory governments, non-government organisations and the private sector, will continue to further enhance the national emergency preparedness and resilience of communities and organisations. Matters for resolution in the coming years include: achieving the right resourcing balance between mitigation and preparedness on the one hand, and response and recovery on the other; ensuring that a heavy reliance on volunteers does not leave Australia vulnerable in its ability to deal with risk and emergencies; and developing a national program of continuous improvement in emergency management.

40. This report provides a critical review of EMA processes and activities, and will assist EMA in materially improving its ability to provide national leadership in emergency management and assist Australian communities.

Recommendations

Set out below are the ANAO's recommendations, which aim to assist EMA achieve its strategic vision of providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce the risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters. Report paragraph references and responses from AGD are included.

Recommendation No. 1
Para 2.61

The ANAO recommends that, in order to assist management decision making and to inform Parliament about performance, EMA develop and report appropriate measures for its key emergency management activities and outcomes.

AGD response: Agreed.

Recommendation No. 2
Para 3.42

The ANAO recommends that, in order to maximise the benefit of emergency management training activities, EMA review periodically its approach to delivering individual training courses, to ensure the most appropriate delivery mechanism is used commensurate with training objectives.

AGD response: Agreed.

Recommendation No. 3
Para 3.57

The ANAO recommends that EMA maintain the Internet site to ensure that material is appropriate, current and readily accessible for users.

AGD response: Agreed.

Recommendation No. 4
Para 4.30

The ANAO recommends that, to ensure that grant conditions are satisfied, EMA enhance procedures to monitor the progress of projects and follow up those behind schedule or not fulfilling funding agreement requirements.

AGD response: Agreed.

**Recommendation
No. 5**

Para 5.31

The ANAO recommends that, to facilitate EMA's response to requests for assistance in overseas emergency management situations, a statement of the broad principles, responsibilities and performance expectations to apply when EMA is involved in overseas operations be developed and agreed between EMA, DFAT, AusAID and other relevant stakeholders.

AGD response: Agreed.

Audit Findings and Conclusions

1. Background and Context

This chapter explains what ‘emergency management’ is, outlines emergency management arrangements in Australia, and provides information on the audit.

Introduction

1.1 Emergency situations might arise at any time and any place. They can be natural occurrences, such as cyclones, bushfires and earthquakes, or result from human activities; unintentionally, in the case of transport accidents or chemical spills, or intentionally, through terrorist action or as a result of other criminal activity. The impact of emergencies can be local, affecting only a small area or community, or can involve whole states and territories, or countries. Often emergency situations arise with little or no warning, but the effects that result might be felt for many years after the event. By their (often) unpredictability and erratic nature, emergency situations present difficulties for contingency planning by governments and communities.

1.2 The economic and human cost of disasters can be significant. For example, the insured loss from Cyclone Tracy (1974) is estimated at \$837 million, for the Newcastle earthquake (1989) \$1.12 billion and for the Sydney hailstorm (1999) \$1.7 billion. In human terms, loss of life, injuries and disruption from disasters can be considerable. For example, the Granville rail disaster (1977) incurred 83 killed and 213 injured; the Longford gas plant explosion (1998) affected an estimated four million people.³

Emergency management

1.3 In times of emergencies, such as those mentioned above, the public face of governments’ and organisations’ response is in the form of *emergency response agencies* (metropolitan and rural fire brigades, state emergency services, ambulance and police). However, the immediate, operational, response to an emergency is only one element of a broader activity known as ‘emergency management’.

1.4 Emergency management is defined as a function incorporating a wide range of measures to manage risks to communities and the environment. Emergency management addresses the potential occurrences of major

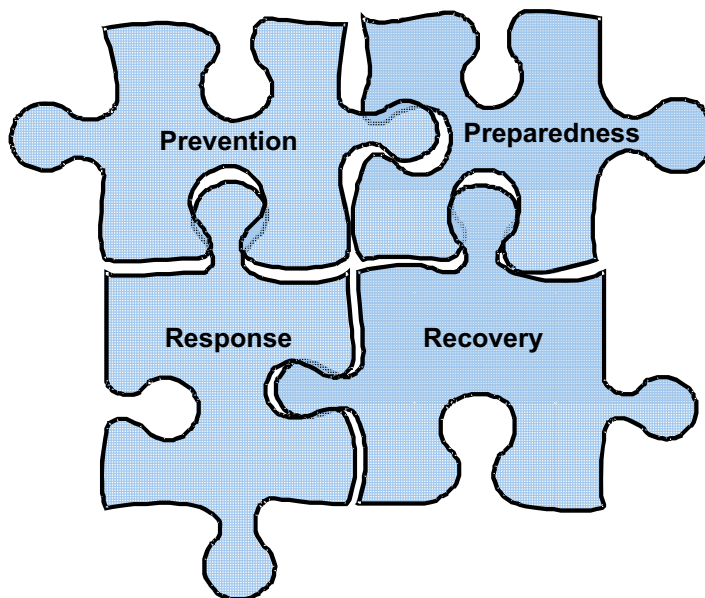
³ Information obtained from the *Emergency Management Australia Disasters Database* available at <<http://www.ema.gov.au/ema/emaDisasters.nsf>> [accessed August 2007].

emergency situations requiring a whole-of-government approach, such as floods, bushfires and cyclones. These situations are usually characterised by the scope of their impact being community wide, with medium- to long-term effects.

1.5 Emergency management comprises four elements: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery (see Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1

Elements of emergency management



Source: ANAO.

1.6 Emergency management aims to strengthen communities; to make them safe, sustainable and resilient.⁴ The philosophy of, and approach to, emergency management has evolved over time. Initially emergency management largely was reactive, concentrating on civil defence (civil response to external attack during armed conflict). Since the 1970s, the focus has broadened to encompass natural disaster relief and, more recently, threats arising from potential acts of terrorism. Emergency management now encompasses an 'all hazards' philosophy; that is, promoting a professional

⁴ Emergency Management Australia, *Emergency Risk Management Applications Guide (Manual 5)*, 2004, p. 1.

approach that responds effectively irrespective of whether the situation is natural or human caused. With such an approach the objective is to have in place plans, strategies and mechanisms that can respond in an appropriate manner irrespective of the actual cause of the emergency.

1.7 There has also been a move from a largely reactive approach—responding after an event has occurred—to a strategic approach of identifying and managing the risks of emergencies, including mitigation activities to reduce the effects of emergencies if and when they occur. There has been an increased focus on actively involving communities in activities and encouraging communities to take responsibility for their own protection.

Australia's emergency management arrangements

1.8 Australia operates under a federal system, which shares power and responsibility between the Commonwealth and the states and territories. State and territory governments determine the powers and responsibilities for local government.

1.9 Each of these levels of government has a role in emergency management and there is a shared responsibility for the overall objective of ensuring community safety. In the first instance states and territories are expected to respond to emergencies within their jurisdictions using state, territory, local government and private sector resources. Underpinning a jurisdiction's ability to meet these responsibilities will be various levels of emergency planning ranging from high-level, strategically-focussed, state emergency plans to local operational plans.

1.10 In times of major emergencies, jurisdictional and private resources might be insufficient, inappropriate or exhausted. In these times, the Australian Government will, on request from a state or territory, coordinate additional assistance, including Australian Defence Forces (ADF) assistance, where necessary.

1.11 As discussed in paragraph 1.5, emergency management also includes activities beyond the immediate operational response to emergencies, such as prevention, preparedness and recovery. To assist these activities, the Australian Government supports states and territories through its involvement in education, training, research, public awareness, information collection and dissemination activities, and by providing direct and indirect financial assistance.

1.12 Also, through the Australian Government Counter Disaster Task Force, and various agencies, the Australian Government supports measures to assist communities to recover from the effects of emergencies.

1.13 The Australian Government provides physical and financial assistance to other countries when major disasters occur; it also assists in developing local emergency management capabilities so that countries are more able to cope with disasters themselves.

Emergency Management Australia

1.14 The primary Australian Government agency tasked with emergency management is Emergency Management Australia (EMA). EMA is a Division within the Attorney-General's Department (AGD). Until late 2001 EMA was part of the Department of Defence, having evolved from the former civil defence function.

1.15 EMA is not an emergency response agency but rather is the coordinator of the Australian Government's response when a request for assistance comes from a state or territory. EMA has primary responsibility for maintaining and arranging activation of the Australian Government's overall disaster plan, COMDISPLAN.

1.16 The Attorney-General is the responsible Minister for committing Australian Government resources in response to an emergency. On receipt of a request for assistance from a responsible authority, EMA will seek the Attorney-General's approval before arranging the appropriate resources to meet the request.⁵ EMA also plays a key role in liaison and coordination with other Australian Government agencies with involvement in responding to, or assisting communities recover from, emergencies (Appendix 1 sets out the roles performed by the other main Australian Government agencies).

1.17 In addition, EMA provides national leadership and strategic planning, undertakes public awareness/education activities and, through the Emergency Management Australia Institute (EMAI) situated at Mount Macedon in Victoria, develops and presents accredited vocational training courses on various emergency management-related topics.

1.18 EMA is led by the Director-General (DGEMA), supported by three Branch Heads (Assistant Secretaries) and a staff of approximately 140 people.

⁵ The responsible authority is the state or territory authorised officer (for domestic requests), or, usually, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (in the case of international assistance requests).

In August 2007 approval was given for the creation of a third Branch (from the then existing two Branch structure) to better align the organisation to its leadership and policy focus and enhance its ability to meet the Government's increased interest in Australia's ability to manage emergencies, both within Australia and the region. Functions within EMA are now split amongst Branches responsible for policy and partnerships/liaison, community and sector development/investment, and capability development, planning and Australian Government assistance coordination. For 2007–08, EMA's departmental appropriation for salaries and ongoing operations is just under \$23.5 million, and it administers funds of some \$30 million for assistance to the states and territories, and grants to local government and volunteer emergency organisations.

Previous reviews of Australian emergency management

1.19 The Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) undertook an audit of the emergency management function in 1999.⁶ The audit assessed the adequacy of such arrangements, with a strong focus on examining strategic and coordination issues. The report also took a selective approach, giving special attention to education and training aspects due to the high level of resourcing given to this activity.

1.20 Overall, the earlier audit found that there was no whole-of-government approach to Commonwealth emergency management but nevertheless Commonwealth agencies were considered to be meeting the needs of the community; coordination of emergency management could be more effective if interdepartmental coordination arrangements were made more transparent and better directed; and, in addition, the ANAO identified the need for a comprehensive Commonwealth Emergency Management Strategic Plan to be agreed amongst all major Commonwealth operating agencies.

1.21 The ANAO made 15 recommendations in the earlier audit, all of which were agreed by the relevant agencies.

Reviews of natural disasters and their consequences

1.22 Various reviews have been conducted into Australia's ability to respond to emergency situations since the earlier audit was undertaken. These reviews covered a range of subjects including: the cost of natural disasters; bushfires; Australia's ability to address catastrophic disasters; and the cost of

⁶ ANAO Audit Report No.41 1999–2000, *Commonwealth Emergency Management Arrangements*.

volunteering. The stimulus for these reviews came from events like the terrorist attacks of September 2001 in the United States of America and the disastrous bushfires that occurred in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory in the early 2000s.

1.23 Two reports under the aegis of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) are of particular significance. These are: *Natural Disasters in Australia: Reforming Mitigation, Relief and Recovery Arrangements* (2002)[*Natural Disasters*] and *National Inquiry on Bushfire Mitigation and Management* (2004)[*Bushfire Mitigation*]. Together with the more recent review of Australia's ability to respond to and recover from a catastrophic disaster, these reports and the recommendations that they contain have set much of the agenda for change in emergency management over the past few years.⁷ Amongst other things, there has been increased efforts put into building relationships and raising interoperability amongst jurisdictions, an enhanced focus on public awareness and community education, and identification of the need for more research and analysis into the cause and effects of natural disasters and what can be done to mitigate these. The Australian Government, states and territories are in the process of implementing these initiatives, with many of the recommendations coming from these reports under the aegis of the COAG now completed.

The audit

1.24 The objective of the audit was to assess how well EMA is meeting its objective of providing national leadership in the development of measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters.

1.25 Emergency management arrangements in Australia and administrative/portfolio responsibility for EMA have changed since the previous audit. Consequently, the present audit is not a follow-up of the earlier one. Nevertheless, where relevant, the current audit considered the recommendations from the earlier audit, having regard at the same time for changed circumstances and new administrative issues affecting their implementation.

⁷ A catastrophic disaster is defined as one beyond any one government's ability to cope in terms of response and recovery arrangements. This review commenced in 2004 following a recommendation from the COAG *Natural Disasters* report and was then expanded after Boxing Day 2004 to include reference to tsunami issues. At a special meeting in April 2006 the Augmented Australasian Police Ministers' Council considered the recommendations from a national working group. The Ministers requested an early finalisation of a National Emergency Management Plan that would include consideration of the rapid provision of fundamental necessities, such as food, shelter, medical and financial services, in the event of a catastrophic disaster.

1.26 In undertaking the audit, the ANAO interviewed EMA staff in each functional area at the EMA facilities in Canberra and Mount Macedon. We examined records—both electronic and printed files—to gather evidence on how EMA undertakes its activities.

1.27 The audit was undertaken in conformance with ANAO auditing standards and cost approximately \$272 000.

Report structure

1.28 There are four other chapters in this report:

- Chapter 2—**Strategic Relationships and Planning**, discusses the various strategic relationships and considerations that affect the emergency management function in Australia and EMA's involvement in providing leadership in identifying, promoting and measuring the function;
- Chapter 3—**Building Knowledge and Skills**, considers how EMA contributes to building knowledge and skills for people with emergency management responsibilities in government agencies, business and volunteer organisations, and in the general community;
- Chapter 4—**Building Physical Preparedness**, reviews EMA's involvement in building physical preparedness, through the provision of specific-purpose resources, various grants schemes and the acknowledgement of emergency management excellence through an awards program; and
- Chapter 5—**Coordination in Emergencies**, deals with EMA's role in coordinating the Australian Government response when requested during emergencies.

2. Strategic Relationships and Planning

This chapter discusses the various strategic relationships and considerations that affect emergency management in Australia and EMA's involvement in this process.

Introduction

2.1 As discussed in Chapter 1, emergency management is more than just responding when an emergency situation occurs. Much of the effort of emergency management is in undertaking activities to identify, analyse and assess the need for action to protect communities from risks before any emergency occurs. The importance of analysis, planning and preparation, within a framework comprising inter-governmental, inter-agency and community arrangements, is crucial to effective response and recovery actions when disasters do occur.

2.2 EMA has a significant role in the development of strategically-focussed emergency management activities in Australia. To fulfil this role EMA needs to be able to work effectively with stakeholders and other government agencies, and have a well developed strategic planning and performance measurement framework. The ANAO assessed:

- the relationships amongst governments, agencies and emergency management stakeholders;
- the development and maintenance of an emergency management-related strategic agenda and planning process for both the sector and corporately for EMA; and
- the measurement of performance for the sector, and by EMA of its own activities.

Building effective working relationships

EMA's role in emergency management arrangements

2.3 EMA has the role of being the Australian Government's primary emergency management agency. It defines its vision as 'safer, sustainable communities' and its mission as 'providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce the risk to

communities and manage the consequences of disasters.’⁸ However, operational responsibility for emergency management lies with the states and territories and, as such, EMA (and more broadly, the Australian Government) is limited in what it can do at an operational level, without impinging on state/territory responsibilities. In this environment EMA’s ability to provide leadership relies heavily on effective consultation and agreement with the states and territories, and with other Australian Government agencies.

2.4 EMA has sought to address these limitations through cooperative involvement with other organisations and jurisdictions in identifying opportunities to improve emergency management in Australia and working to influence and effect change wherever possible.

2.5 For example, EMA can influence the sector through acting as an impartial source of expertise and definitive, comprehensive and reliable information on the emergency management function for stakeholders and through administering direct funding initiatives by the Australian Government. At an operational level, EMA has greater ability to influence key stakeholders when strategies and initiatives are back by dedicated Australian Government resources.

Managing relationships amongst government agencies

2.6 EMA works closely with Australian Government and state and territory agencies in order to fulfil its functions, particularly through various management committees.

2.7 The ANAO’s previous audit found that meetings and committees were formed *ad hoc* to consider specific disasters but, unlike most other functional areas of Commonwealth/state activity, there was no standing ministerial council or committee for emergency management. Further, although a peak consultative forum for emergency management existed, in the form of the National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC), that body did not focus on strategic issues. This situation has since been addressed by the formation of the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management and the reconstitution of the NEMC into the Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC).

⁸ Emergency Management Australia, *This is EMA*, 2007, p. 5.

Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management (MCPEM)

2.8 The MCPEM comprises those Police Ministers with responsibility for emergency services and Emergency Services Ministers, with the Attorney-General being the Australian Government member and permanent chair. The President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is also a member. The MCPEM meets at least once each calendar year and has the following objectives:

- oversee the implementation of the Natural Disaster Reform Package;
- provide national leadership and strategic direction on emergency management (all hazards), including national policies and priorities; and
- encourage best practice in emergency management among jurisdictions.

Australian Emergency Management Committee

2.9 Supporting the MCPEM is the AEMC. The AEMC subsumed the former NEMC, and further changes occurred as a result of recommendations from the *Natural Disasters* report. The reconstituted AEMC held its first meeting under its new charter in March 2004.

2.10 The AEMC's permanent members include, for the Australian Government, the Secretary AGD and the DGEMA, for the states and territories, a senior officer from departments with emergency management responsibility, and a senior representative from the ALGA. AEMC members must have authority to make decisions on behalf of their agency/jurisdiction. The role of the AEMC is similar to the strategic and consultative objectives stated for the MCPEM, with the addition of the following main responsibilities:

- promote emergency management as a mainstream critical public safety issue on the national strategic policy agenda;
- as a matter of priority, oversee the implementation of *Natural Disasters* and the COAG National Bushfire Inquiry recommendations;
- ensure emergency management and mitigation implications are considered by the Australian Government, state, territory and local governments in the formulation of relevant future policy and programs; and
- identify strategic national emergency management issues and provide advice to government on these.

2.11 The AEMC is assisted in its task by various working groups including the AEMC Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)⁹, the AEMC Tsunami Working Group; the National Chemical Biological and Radiological Working Group, National Community Safety Working Group, and the Remote Indigenous Communities Advisory Committee. In addition, the AEMC has an interest in the work being undertaken by groups in areas such as catastrophic disaster emergency management capability, rapid damage assessment capability, the cost of volunteering, mass casualty transport, national mortuary arrangements and standard emergency warning signals.

2.12 The AEMC has been evolving from the operationally-focussed approach under its former charter towards identifying and promoting a strategic approach to emergency management. At a Strategic Forum held in April 2007, the AEMC identified the need for a strategic focus on outcomes. Further, it acknowledged that it appeared to be concerned overly with tactical issues and might be trying to do too many activities at the one time. The AEMC identified several strategies to address these issues and has commenced implementing change, including developing strategic links with other advisory councils, and reviewing its Strategic Works Plan and management to better focus the activities of its working groups.

The role of EMA in committees and working groups

2.13 EMA has a significant role in the AEMC and the committees and working groups mentioned in paragraph 2.11. Firstly, through the involvement of the DGEMA and other senior officers, EMA is a full member of the AEMC and working groups and can influence the direction of emergency management policy. EMA also has a role in promoting a national approach, and in articulating the Australian Government's views, at such fora.

2.14 Secondly, for most committees and working groups, EMA provides secretarial services, arranging meetings, developing draft agenda, coordinating and disseminating information and preparing minutes and outcomes from meetings. The Emergency Management Liaison Section has specific responsibility for providing these services to the MCPPEM and AEMC but any section within EMA might prepare information for consideration by committees and working groups and provide secretariat services.

2.15 The substantial involvement of EMA in these fora is evidenced by the number of items for which the EMA acts as sponsor or manager. The ANAO's

⁹ The SAG recently changed its name to the Strategic Management Group.

analysis indicated that the advice provided by EMA was timely and regarded highly by other agencies. There was clear evidence of EMA actively and effectively engaging emergency management stakeholders.

2.16 However, the commitments required for representation on national committees can be onerous with resulting strain on resources for EMA, and also states and territories, particularly the smaller jurisdictions. This issue was identified by the SAG in April 2007. The number of working groups that had evolved in recent times and the need for groups to focus on, and finalise, their specific tasks was highlighted. Some duplication of efforts was identified, as was the need for rationalisation of existing working groups. The AEMC at its August 2007 meeting agreed that all working groups should report to the AEMC through the SAG, which would effectively take management of, and set a strategic direction for, all working groups.

2.17 The ANAO assessed the time taken to progress initiatives within the existing committee/working group system. Several projects have taken many years to come to fruition and the ANAO found that this is in part the result of the need for jurisdictional agreement and in part due to resourcing issues.¹⁰ EMA advised that the AEMC agreed to develop a prioritised four-year work plan to inform budget requirements. Once completed, the AEMC will take the funding issue to the MCPEM for consideration.

2.18 The emergency management sector has developed good working relationships across all jurisdictions and relevant agencies. Gaps in high level relationships, identified in the ANAO's previous audit, have been addressed by the formation of the MCPEM and the AEMC. EMA has been an effective contributor to achieving these outcomes and continues to take an active role in facilitating and promoting relationships amongst stakeholders.

2.19 Although mechanisms are in place to facilitate good working relationships, there are further opportunities for committees and working groups to increase their focus on strategic, rather than operational, issues. A more strategic focus could reduce the sometimes onerous commitments on stakeholders required by the present arrangements. Initiatives commenced by the AEMC aim to address this issue.

¹⁰ Unlike the National Counter-Terrorism Committee, which receives a dedicated annual budget including a research component, the AEMC has no budget or dedicated funds to undertake strategic research. Therefore, each activity identified in the emergency management sector needs to go through the process of developing and agreeing a funding regime or allocation of resources in kind.

Developing an emergency management strategic agenda

2.20 The development and maintenance of a strategic agenda for emergency management requires sound strategic planning based on analysis of relevant risk factors (existing and emerging risk factors). The ANAO assessed the strategic planning undertaken by EMA and its involvement in the high-level planning for the emergency management sector as a whole.

Emergency management sector planning

2.21 Australia's emergency management planning process is multi-levelled, with national, state/territory and local government/community plans. Within jurisdictions individual agencies and organisations, both government and private, have operational plans specific to their particular roles and responsibilities.

2.22 The primary Australian Government Disaster Response Plan is COMDISPLAN, which is maintained by EMA, and was reviewed in 2002 and again in 2005. The objective of COMDISPLAN, as stated in the Plan, is 'to provide the framework for addressing state requests for Australian Government physical assistance arising from any type of disaster or emergency.'

2.23 Supporting COMDISPLAN are subsidiary plans addressing specific types of emergencies; these plans by their nature are more detailed, and possibly more operational, than COMDISPLAN. Subsidiary Australian Government plans are maintained by the relevant agency, for example, the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza is maintained by the Department of Health and Ageing. EMA does not have direct responsibility for subsidiary plans but, through its involvement in the AEMC, can provide input to the development and maintenance of subsidiary plans.

2.24 Complementing and interlocking with Australian Government plans are state and territory disaster plans. These plans are accompanied by various state agency and local government plans, for specific activities, risks or localities.

2.25 The focus of emergency plans varies from the strategic, through primarily defining relationships, to being largely operationally focussed in the case of agency and local plans. In recent times efforts have been made to formalise arrangements at the highest level, to provide a national link to draw together plans and arrangements at all levels into truly national approaches.

This has led to the development of the National Emergency Protocol and the Australian Emergency Plan.

National Emergency Protocol

2.26 In September 2005, COAG members recognised the importance of a process to ensure consistent and coordinated response by governments to any national emergency. From that recognition came the development of the National Emergency Protocol (NEP), which was endorsed by COAG on 10 February 2006. The NEP provides the communication arrangements between the Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the ALGA during a national emergency. The NEP does not replace any aspects of existing emergency management plans, or prevent or affect the exercise of functions under other plans, arrangements or legislation; rather, the NEP complements existing emergency management plans and arrangements. These arrangements are shown in Figure 1.

Australian Emergency Plan

2.27 At the same time COAG members were considering the development of the NEP, the Augmented Australasian Police Ministers' Council¹¹ decided that development of a national emergency plan was required. Such a plan aimed to fill a gap between the high-level arrangements (the NEP and specific emergency management policy and legislation) and the next level in the process, the emergency plans of the Australian Government, states, territories and local government.

¹¹ Now known as the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management (MCPem).

Figure 1.**National emergency relationships and arrangements**

Source: Annexure A to the National Emergency Protocol.

2.28 The Australian Emergency Plan (AEP) was being developed (by the AEMC AEP Working Group, with EMA acting as secretariat) as that national emergency plan. The aim of the AEP was to set out the Australian emergency management framework, articulate existing disaster arrangements and plans and identify the specific arrangements in the event of a catastrophic disaster. It followed the accepted emergency management principles of prepared communities, the 'all hazard' and whole of government approaches and addresses the four emergency management elements.

2.29 The AEP Working Group, comprising representatives from each state and territory, the ALGA and EMA, presented the draft AEP to the AEMC on 30 August 2007. The AEMC approved the draft AEP for wider consultation within jurisdictions, Australian Government agencies and the National Counter-Terrorism Committee but the 2007 Federal Election delayed finalisation of the approval process.

2.30 Since that time, and following consultation (through the AEMC) with the states and territories, Australian Government agencies and the National Counter Terrorism Committee, the AEP was significantly revised to address

the variety of views expressed nationally. The AEP has been retitled to the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements (AEMA) to more appropriately reflect its content and purpose as a high level strategic public statement of the current arrangements for managing emergencies in Australia and its territories.

2.31 Efforts over recent years by the Australian Government, states and territories have aligned, expanded and improved consultative mechanisms, aligned various levels of plans and address gaps by implementing the NEP and developing the AEP/AEMA. As a result, high-level planning in the emergency management sector is soundly based to meet the challenges of most potential scenarios.

2.32 Nevertheless, the emergency management sector (for example, the AEMC and its various working groups) identifies that there is much work to do in defining what emergency management is and having the function, however defined, adopted as a core responsibility in all areas of Australian society, whether governments, public sector departments and agencies, the private sector or the general community. Research and empirical data deficiencies are other areas identified as needing work. Continuing work in areas such as catastrophic disaster planning and building specific capabilities (discussed in Chapter 4), aims to address identified gaps and/or enhance current abilities.

EMA's strategic and business planning

2.33 In 1999 the ANAO identified the need for a comprehensive Commonwealth Emergency Management Strategic Plan to be agreed amongst all major Commonwealth operating agencies.

2.34 EMA has lifted its profile, and that of the emergency management function, within government and with stakeholders in states and territories since it moved from Defence in late 2001. However, the opportunity to define EMA's role provided by the move was not taken, nor was a comprehensive emergency management strategic plan developed. Although this was the time that such strategic planning efforts were most needed, the situation has only recently begun to be remedied.

2.35 EMA advised the ANAO that its environment was rapidly changing in the time since 2001 and it was unable to undertake the strategic planning recommended by the ANAO. EMA's environment changed rapidly as a result of the focus of efforts on counter-terrorism and its increasing involvement

overseas. EMA grew from 60 staff to 120 over this period. EMA (along with others) was a new organisation within AGD, an agency that, for most of its existence, had been focussed solely on law identification and preparation. The ANAO considers that a more proactive approach by EMA in defining its own agenda would have enabled more timely AGD support for that position.

2.36 At the time of the current audit, EMA commenced developing a Strategic Plan, covering three to five years. The Strategic Plan is being developed from a paper prepared for the EMA Executive assessing the emergency management environment in the next ten years and drawing together a range of Strategic Directions that EMA should pursue over that timeframe.

2.37 The Strategic Plan is intended to be completed early in 2008 and will inform the development of the 2008–09 EMA Business Plan. EMA intends to review its Strategic Directions every two/three years, with the Strategic Plan updated as required. The revised Strategic Plan will be the base for each year's Business Plan.

2.38 EMA has developed a current Business Plan that was intended to align with the AGD objective for the Division of 'providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters'.¹² The Business Plan is supported by Section Plans that articulate the specific activities that each section is to undertake.

2.39 Current plans are largely a consolidation of existing projects and activities. While not necessarily inappropriate, the plans would be stronger if they were based on an objective assessment by individual sections within EMA of their contribution to a detailed statement of EMA's objectives. Currently the linkage from EMA's vision and mission statements to planning activities and outputs is not clear.

2.40 The EMA Strategic Directions paper aimed to address these issues by identifying the long term strategic directions for emergency management in Australia. The Paper identified four broad strategic themes, each of which constitutes a direction for EMA's work and purpose for the future. These themes are:

- A National Approach to Emergency Management;

¹² Outcome 2.4 in the AGD's Portfolio Budget Statements.

- The Risk Environment;
- Knowledge Management, Research and Technology; and
- The Emergency Management International Environment.

2.41 For each of these themes, EMA is articulating the policy issues involved (for example, the role of the Australian Government in the theme), identifying the potential capability and capacity requirements and defining what EMA's role is in assisting to achieve desired outputs. The task in going forward will be to implement sound linkages from vision and mission statements to planning activities and outputs.

Measuring performance

2.42 Generally there is a strong relationship between the strategic planning process and the reporting of achievements through performance measurement and targets. An effective strategic planning process should aim to focus an organisation on achieving specific outcomes. In turn performance information will provide a tool that allows opinions to be formed and informed decisions made by both management and external stakeholders.

EMA's performance measures and reporting

2.43 Currently, performance measures identified for the overall emergency sector, and promulgated by the Productivity Commission, focus on 'emergency response', such as response times and customer satisfaction (with the response).¹³ These indicators are relevant and appropriate for measuring emergency response. However, the measures do not address the prevention, preparedness or recovery aspects that comprise most of EMA's activities.¹⁴

2.44 The ANAO analysed EMA's current performance measures presented in the AGD Portfolio Budget Statements and reported in the Annual Report. The ANAO assessed the appropriateness of EMA's own performance measures and reporting including the quality, quantity and price indicators for

¹³ Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, *Report on Government Services 2007*, January 2007.

¹⁴ The majority of EMA's day-to-day activities are not response-related but rather planning, preparation and building capacity and capability to address the risks of emergency situations that might occur. As such, adequate and reliable management information is required to enable informed decision making of often competing strategies and/or priorities. The ANAO noted that the only indicator that might be classed as other than response is the fire-related indicator, 'Households with an operational smoke alarm installed'. *ibid.*, p. 8.23.

outputs and the reporting of performance against intended program outcomes.¹⁵

Outputs and outcomes

2.45 Current performance measures largely target activity with little context against which the reader can compare performance quality. For example, the measure that ‘600 attendees achieve competency in emergency management’ by itself tells the reader little about the general level of proficiency of emergency management practitioners, the effectiveness of EMAI courses in building skills amongst practitioners and whether this knowledge leads to ‘safer, sustainable communities’. Nor does it inform stakeholders of the general proficiency of the emergency management sector, or its ability to respond adequately to likely demands.

2.46 Performance indicators, as the term suggests, are not an exact measure of achievement but rather provide an indication of performance. Enhanced performance indicators and appropriate contextual information, which links performance targets, the indicator measures and results to strategies and desired outcomes, would better inform assessments of the organisation.

Costs/prices

2.47 To enable the EMA to identify, plan, prioritise and report competing activities there is a need for accurate, complete and reliable information on the full cost of activities being undertaken. However, such information is gathered at a cost and there also needs to be a balance between the benefit of the measurement and the cost of administration.

2.48 The ANAO found that the AGD, of which EMA is a part, has a costing model developed to enable cost recovery. However, that the model does not enable any diagnostic activities on business performance and potential cost shifting.

2.49 In addition, since 2000 EMA has attempted to develop an activity-based costing system. However, EMA’s development of improved financial information has stalled. Consequently, at present, salary costs are not being allocated, even nominally, against specific activities; only direct costs (materials, travel, and so forth) are so allocated.

¹⁵ ANAO *Better Practice Guide—Performance Information in Portfolio Budget Statements*, 2002, Canberra, pp.33–39.

2.50 The ANAO accepts the need for balance, as mentioned in paragraph 2.47, to assist management and inform stakeholders. Nevertheless, given the increasing demands being placed upon EMA, the ANAO considers that EMA's monitoring of performance would be strengthened by a capacity to estimate the cost of its key emergency management activities and outcomes.

2.51 EMA's current efforts to improve its strategic planning through the Strategic Directions initiative provide opportunities to enhance performance measures for major emergency management activities to encompass outcomes, quality of outputs, and costs of activities.

Conclusion

2.52 EMA defines its vision as 'safer, sustainable communities' and its mission as 'providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce the risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters.' However, as operational responsibility for emergency management lies with the states and territories, EMA's ability to provide leadership relies heavily on consultation and agreement with the states and territories, and with other Australian Government agencies.

2.53 The emergency management sector has developed good working relationships across all jurisdictions and relevant agencies. Gaps in high level relationships, identified in the ANAO's previous audit, have been addressed by the formation of the MCPEM and the AEMC. EMA has been an effective contributor to achieving these outcomes and continues to take an active role in facilitating and promoting relationships amongst stakeholders.

2.54 Although mechanisms are in place to facilitate good working relationships, there are further opportunities for committees and working groups to increase their focus on strategic, rather than operational, issues. A more strategic focus could reduce the sometimes onerous commitments on stakeholders required by the present arrangements. Initiatives commenced by the AEMC aim to address this issue.

2.55 Efforts over recent years by the Australian Government, states and territories have aligned, expanded and improved consultative mechanisms, aligned various levels of plans and addressed gaps by implementing the NEP and developing the AEP/AEMA. As a result high-level planning in the emergency management sector is soundly based to meet the challenges of most potential scenarios. Continuing work in areas like catastrophic disaster

planning and building specific capabilities, aims to address identified gaps and/or enhance current abilities.

2.56 EMA has developed a current Business Plan to align with the AGD objective for the Division of 'providing national leadership in the development of emergency management measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters'. The Business Plan is supported by Section Plans that articulate the specific activities that each section is to undertake.

2.57 The ANAO found that current plans are largely a consolidation of existing projects and activities. While not necessarily inappropriate, the plans would be stronger if they were based on an objective assessment by individual sections within EMA of their contribution to a detailed statement of EMA's objectives. Currently the linkage from EMA's vision and mission statements to planning activities and outputs is not clear.

2.58 The EMA Strategic Directions paper aimed to address these issues by identifying the long term strategic directions for emergency management in Australia. The task in going forward will be to implement sound linkages from vision and mission statements to planning activities and outputs.

2.59 EMA's performance measures largely target activity with little context against which the reader can compare performance. Further, although the AGD, of which EMA is a part, has a costing model developed to enable cost recovery, that the model does not enable any diagnostic activities on business performance. Attempts by EMA since 2000 to develop an activity-based costing system and improved financial information have stalled. Given the increasing demands being placed upon EMA, the ANAO considers that EMA's monitoring of performance would be strengthened by a capacity to estimate the cost of its key emergency management activities and outcomes.

2.60 EMA's current efforts to improve its strategic planning through the Strategic Directions initiative provide opportunities to enhance performance measures for major emergency management activities to encompass outcomes, quality of outputs, and costs to allow a better assessment of the impact of its activities.

Recommendation No.1

2.61 The ANAO recommends that, in order to assist management decision making and to inform Parliament about performance, EMA develop and report appropriate measures for its key emergency management activities and outcomes.

Agency's response

2.62 EMA advised that it supports this recommendation and has revised its performance measures to clearly demonstrate its key activities and outcomes for inclusion in the 2008–09 AGD Portfolio Budget Statements and the 2008–09 AGD Annual Report.

3. Building Knowledge and Skills

This chapter assesses the effectiveness of EMA's education and training activities in building knowledge and skills for people with emergency management responsibilities in government agencies, business and volunteer organisations, and in the general community.

Introduction

3.1 EMA in its leadership role undertakes various activities to build knowledge and skills amongst the emergency management sector and communities. These activities include:

- developing and delivering courses that offer competency-based training to those with emergency management responsibilities, and supporting a small research program;
- maintaining and/or producing emergency management-focussed resources, including a library, a quarterly journal and reference manuals; and
- promoting better understanding of risks and their management through public education for the general public and in schools.

3.2 The objective of these activities is to develop a better equipped emergency management sector, and informed and better prepared communities.

3.3 The audit assessed each of these areas to determine whether EMA publications and training courses were responsive to the needs of users and effective in building emergency management knowledge and skills.

Emergency management training

Development of competency-based training

3.4 EMA training activities have evolved from being largely based on building practical skills in emergency response to those designed to build skills in risk management and treatment, planning, decision-making and relationships.

3.5 Through the efforts of the Australian Government and state and territory governments over the past decade nationally agreed arrangements have been implemented that aim to ensure that high quality vocational

education and training services are delivered in Australia. These arrangements involve forming Industry Skills Councils, to obtain information on the types of skills Australian industry needs in its workforce, and the development of Training Packages containing the specific competencies required to meet the skills needs of industries.

3.6 The emergency management sector has implemented the national vocational training arrangements. An Industry Skills Council, Government Skills Australia (GSA), takes responsibility for developing Training Packages relevant to the needs of the government sector, including the Public Safety Training Package.¹⁶ GSA is assisted in its task by the Public Safety Industry Advisory Committee (PSIAC), comprised of members nominated by peak agencies, national bodies, unions and industry training organisations.

3.7 EMA is an active participant in this process, staff having served as a Director of GSA and a member of the PSIAC, and through its involvement with the Emergency Management Sector Working Group (EMSWG).¹⁷ Through these efforts a nationally recognised qualification, the Advanced Diploma of Public Safety (Emergency Management), has been implemented.

3.8 In addition, EMA responds to other training needs identified within the sector and by Australian Government agencies. This has resulted in several accredited short courses, including recovery management, Business Continuity Management and Risk-based Land Use Planning. For those employed in the emergency management sector and wishing higher qualifications, EMA has developed the Graduate Certificate in Emergency Management.

EMA delivery of courses

3.9 EMA's Education and Training Directorate, located at Mount Macedon, is responsible for the development and delivery of EMA's training courses, for running workshops, funding and facilitating the research program, identifying better practice activities and developing support material for the emergency management sector.

3.10 The EMAI is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) with the Victorian Office of Training and Tertiary Education. As such, the EMAI is required to comply with the Australian Quality Training Framework *Standards*

¹⁶ GSA represents the interests of a wide variety of government professional sectors, including defence, fire fighting, police and state emergency services, in addition to general government administration. The Public Safety Training Package is one of several government-related Training Packages GSA maintains.

¹⁷ The EMSWG is tasked specifically with providing advice on the development and implementation of emergency management competency standards and related qualifications in the Training Package.

for *Registered Training Organisations* for all training included on the scope of its registration¹⁸ and, to ensure ongoing compliance, is subject to periodic audit by a suitably qualified, independent auditor. The independent auditors' reports on the EMAI generally are satisfactory, with only minor issues being identified; these have been addressed by EMA to the satisfaction of the registering authority.

3.11 EMA delivers training courses through a mixture of residential programs at the EMAI (usually involving attendance for two to four days) and extension courses, which are delivered by EMA trainers, or EMA-engaged contractors, in the states and territories. The method of delivery is determined through negotiation with each state and territory. The costs of residential courses, include transport and accommodation at EMAI, are met by the Australian Government. Extensions incur only the direct costs for the EMA training person (transport and accommodation) at the state or territory venue.

3.12 EMA determines the number of available places for its residential courses, and allocates places to each jurisdiction, by agreement with EMSWG and based loosely on each jurisdiction's population. However, the selection of students to attend courses is left to the nominating authority within each state and territory—EMA's role in the selection process usually is limited to determining that nominees meet any entry requirements including the necessary prerequisites.

3.13 EMA allocates any shortfall in jurisdictions taking up their allocation of courses amongst the other states and territories. Staff from Australian Government agencies may nominate to attend EMAI courses, but only if states and territories do not take up all places.

Attendance and completion

3.14 There is a significant level of non-attendance by nominees and failure of students to complete all coursework. Through the EMSWG, EMA has expressed concerns to the states and territories about an ongoing problem with some course nominees failing to turn up as arranged, despite the majority of the costs of attending the EMAI being met by the Australian Government. EMA offers spare places to other jurisdictions but, with sometimes very short notice, states and territories are not always able to avail themselves of these opportunities.

¹⁸ Registration includes a scope of registration that details which competencies from the relevant Training Package the RTO is authorised to offer in the marketplace.

3.15 The EMAI Handbook states that the role of the EMAI is to conduct ‘a range of Australian Government funded activities designed to improve Australia’s capability to cope with disasters’ and that ‘scheduled programs are aimed at building emergency management knowledge and skills in Australian states and territories’.¹⁹ The Handbook further states that ‘all EMA programs have an assessment component. It is a requirement that participants undertake the assessment’.²⁰

3.16 Despite the Handbook’s stated requirement for course completion, statistics at Table 3.1 show that only around 60 per cent of participants complete all the requirements of courses and obtain their certificate of competency. Although this summary figure includes all activities run by EMA, including workshops that might not have any assessment component, there are many examples of ‘assessable’ courses where more than half of the attendees had failed to complete all requirements.

3.17 These results suggest that greater focus might be given to ensuring that people attending EMA training are those with a genuine need and personal commitment to build emergency management capability and a willingness to complete all course requirements.

3.18 EMA advised that this area is one where it has little influence. The states and territories are responsible for identifying those that will meet their jurisdictional needs when selecting course participants. Whilst EMA can and does remind jurisdictions about ensuring that they select appropriate participants, it would be difficult for EMA to be any more forceful on this matter. Nevertheless, as the Australian Government is meeting the majority of the costs involved in providing competency-based training to the emergency management sector, there would be benefit in EMA consulting further with state and territory authorities to ensure that course attendees complete all the requirements of their courses.

¹⁹ Emergency Management Australia, *Emergency Management Australia Institute Handbook 2007*, pp. 6, 8.

²⁰ *ibid.*, p. 8.

Table 3.1**Completion rates for a sample of 2005–06 EMAI courses**

Course name	No. of courses offered	Total participants	Competent	Not yet competent	Percent not yet competent
Lead Manage and Develop Teams	1	24	14	10	42%
Undertake Emergency Planning	6	108	68	40	37%
Contribute to an Emergency Risk Management Process	3	74	68	6	8%
Evacuation and recovery services	7	163	46	117	72%
Business Continuity Management	2	39	32	7	18%
Total for all 2005-06	82	1 641	999	642	39%

Source: EMA. Data are as at 7 August 2007. The ANAO chose 2005–06 courses to allow students adequate time to complete all course requirements. Courses in **bold** are units of the Advanced Diploma of Public Safety (Emergency Management) and so it is reasonable to expect that all students would complete the course requirements.

Effectiveness of EMA training activities

3.19 The formal training provided by EMA aims to be responsive to the needs of the emergency management sector. Through its efforts to align emergency management training to the national competency-based vocational training framework, to seek and maintain the EMAI's status as an RTO, and its efforts to enhance consultative mechanisms with stakeholders, EMA largely addresses the training-related issues raised by the previous audit.

3.20 As part of its assessment of the responsiveness of EMA training activities to the sector's needs, the ANAO reviewed three aspects of the current training program:

- whether all current EMA-delivered courses need to be part of the formal competency-based framework;
- whether EMA could encourage states and territories to deliver more competency-based training and focus its efforts more strategically; and
- whether evaluation procedures exist to measure the capability built in the emergency management sector as a result of EMA training activities and how well skills learnt are applied in real operational situations.

Ensuring the appropriateness of competency-based training

3.21 Efforts by EMA and the sector to implement programs of competency-based training have raised the profile for emergency management in Australia. However, EMA has not had a process to review periodically its approach to delivering individual training courses, to ensure the most appropriate delivery mixture is used commensurate with training objectives. Such review is important as the administrative load²¹ in delivering training under the formal competency-based framework can be substantial.

3.22 For example, for the 2005–06 training year only around five percent of students complete all the requirements of the Risk-based Land Use Planning course. EMA advised that this is because most attendees are already experienced land use planners and do not require further formal qualification; they attend to gain an insight into how emergency risk management can be incorporated into their day-to-day activities. As such, there appears little benefit to course attendees, or to EMA, in having this particular course included in the national framework arrangements.

3.23 Regular review of training activities by EMA would have highlighted areas of the current curriculum having low completion rates. This would enable EMA to revise its approach in a timely fashion to adapt to better meet the needs of training attendees.

State and territory involvement in delivering competency-based courses

3.24 The previous ANAO audit addressed the issue of the EMAI encouraging states and territories to use (then) existing professional development course packages to train their own people.²² The ANAO supported the devolution of professional development courses to states and considered that the EMAI should continue to place emphasis on the conduct of extension courses. This would allow the EMA to concentrate on value-adding high-level initiatives, such as the research and workshop programs, discussed later in this chapter.

3.25 Since that time little progress has been made in devolving more of the responsibility for delivering competency-based training to the states and territories. The ANAO noted that some state agencies are RTOs and deliver

²¹ Inclusion of material in the formal national framework requires EMA to develop a program of competencies for the activity, have these approved by the state registration authority, seek extension of its scope of registration as an RTO to deliver the competencies, develop a course delivery package from the competencies and be subjected to audit for compliance with the standards.

²² ANAO Audit Report No.41 1999–2000, p. 167.

segments of the Public Sector Training Package (but not the emergency management-related units currently delivered by the EMAI).

3.26 Further, the ANAO notes the subjects being identified as requiring emergency management-related courses are increasing in complexity and diversity. At the same time EMA is being called upon to deliver training involving specialisation outside 'traditional' emergency management training. EMA already engages experts in the field to deliver some courses, such as Business Continuity Management and Risk-based Land Use Planning.

3.27 The ANAO considers that in articulating further EMA's strategic role of providing leadership to the emergency management sector, the responsibilities for delivering both operational and strategically-focussed training should be explored. For example, increased delivery of operational training by operational organisations would enable EMA to focus on the delivery of strategically-focussed activities, such as workshops and research (discussed at paragraph 3.29).

3.28 EMA advised that it was investigating developing delivery packages for each competency module to allow more local delivery of courses and recently sought quotes from the market to undertake the work. However, the ANAO notes EMA's ability to explore more flexible learning options, for example through Internet-based distance learning, currently are limited by AGD information technology security arrangements.

Workshops and research

3.29 In addition to developing emergency management-related training courses (but not necessarily delivering those courses in the current manner), an important role also for EMA is in promoting further a strategic-focussed environment and capability within the emergency management sector. EMA does this through sponsoring workshops to bring together representatives from government, academia and the private sector to identify and discuss emerging issues, and by fostering research activities to broaden the conceptual and empirical base for emergency management.

3.30 Examples of workshops facilitated by EMA include:

- the Senior Executives Program, offered twice yearly with participation by invitation, which aims to exercise the crisis decision making and strategic coordination skills of higher level government managers in a catastrophic disaster scenario. The program also aims to encourage

participants to explore alternative approaches to crisis policy development;

- emergency risk management, which identified the need for assistance for those with responsibilities in managing critical infrastructure. From this activity resulted the *Critical Infrastructure Emergency Risk Management and Assurance Handbook*; and
- lessons from the London bombings. In August 2005, St John Ambulance approached EMA to co-host this workshop, the objectives being to appreciate the nature of such emergencies and to consider Australia's arrangements and capability for dealing with events causing mass casualties. From the workshop EMA and St John Ambulance published a lessons learnt guide for Australian emergency response agencies.

3.31 Other workshops resulted in EMA developing accredited training courses in Risk-based Land Use Planning and Business Continuity Management.

3.32 In addition to its workshop program, EMA supports a small research program that aims to facilitate the capture and transfer of innovative practice and disaster research outcomes across the emergency management sector. For the 2006–07 round proposals were invited at two levels:

- scoping—a small grant to test an idea or concept for future project funding (up to approximately \$10 000); and
- major projects (funded up to \$100 000).

3.33 EMA sets priority areas when inviting applications for research funding; for 2006–07 these were:

- building individual and community resilience;
- risk perception, including warnings and community action;
- innovations in disaster mitigation; and
- methods for assessing disaster impacts, including long term, social and economic effects.

3.34 EMA implemented a robust consultative and selection process for its research program. States and territories are consulted during the vetting process, with each application being reviewed by practitioner experts from the jurisdictions, one national 'research' expert and one internal (EMA) reviewer

with expertise in the given area. A selection panel comprised of EMA middle managers consider applications and comments from the reviewers and make recommendations for funding. For the 2006–07 round, 43 applications were received, of which two were selected for total funding of \$151 432. A further \$148 547 was held for allocation to support a tendered research project in an identified area of need.

3.35 The ANAO considers that both workshops and the research program sit well with EMA’s strategic goal of showing leadership and identifying emerging issues. However, both activities have limited impact because of the limited resourcing allocated to the activities, for example, a total EMA research budget of around \$300 000 means that few projects can be funded at any given time. Nevertheless the benefits that might accrue from such activities can be significant and address identified gaps in Australia’s emergency management capability.

3.36 EMA acknowledges the small research base emergency management has in Australia and the need for important research issues to be addressed and research outputs transferred into practice. As a result, EMA has reorganised its research and development program and has formed an Emergency Management Research and Development Research Group (EMRDRG) with the aim of ‘building on emergency management capability through improved integration of research and practice’.²³

3.37 The EMRDRG comprises representatives from EMA (one), the emergency management sector (five), local government (one), other Australian Government agencies (two) and academia (three) and held its first meeting in June 2007. The ANAO notes that this meeting discussed the need to maximise the return for the small research budget and the benefits of undertaking relevant workshops.

Evaluation of training achievements

3.38 After each course students are asked to complete a course evaluation form, to provide feedback to EMA and allow assessment of how effective attendees’ thought the course was in meeting training objectives. Generally students are positive about the benefits of EMA courses, with the majority showing an increased level of awareness and understanding of subject matter after attendance.

²³ EMRDRG draft Terms of Reference.

3.39 However, the ANAO found that current course evaluation assessment requirements and evaluations do not adequately measure the effectiveness of EMA training activities. Current evaluation procedures cannot determine whether the provision of training has built capability amongst emergency management practitioners and how well skills learnt through EMAI coursework have been applied in real operational situations.

3.40 The ANAO acknowledges the difficulties in attempting to undertake such causal evaluations but notes from discussions with EMA staff that some consideration has been given to contacting course participants' employers some time later and investigating where any perceptible increase in skills is present. EMA advised that it has undertaken two pilots on impact evaluation but the ANAO notes that these were done in 2002 and 2003. There would be merit in the EMA undertaking such evaluations more regularly.

3.41 In regards to competency-based training, the ANAO concluded that, in implementing the EMA's review of its environment and strategic direction at an activity/operational level, it would be of benefit for EMA to identify the specific areas where it is best suited to contribute to emergency management capability in Australia and review current practices to align these with clear strategic objectives.

Recommendation No.2

3.42 The ANAO recommends that, in order to maximise the benefit of emergency management training activities, EMA review periodically its approach to delivering individual training courses, to ensure the most appropriate delivery mechanism is used commensurate with training objectives.

Agency's response

3.43 EMA supports this recommendation. EMA advised that the Education and Training Section is currently undertaking a restructure of its teaching program and has identified the need to develop a process of continuous improvement based on systematic internal and external evaluation to support curriculum design, development and delivery. This function will be managed by a staff element within the Section.

Support for the emergency management sector

3.44 In addition to building knowledge and skills through providing formal training opportunities, EMA further supports the emergency management sector and other interested stakeholders through such activities as:

- maintaining the Library and Resource Centre at Mount Macedon, the only emergency management-focussed collection in Australia and one of only a few such specialised libraries in the world;²⁴ and
- facilitating a forum for discussion and dissemination of research and information, through the quarterly Australian Journal of Emergency Management (AJEM), which it has published since March 1986.

3.45 These initiatives are well managed by EMA and well received by the sector, as evidenced by usage figures and the extent to which AJEM articles, for example, are cited in academic and other learned literature and reference services.

Australian Emergency Manuals Series

3.46 EMA also seeks to provide a conceptual framework to support the emergency management function, through the Australian Emergency Manuals (AEM) Series. The AEMs are a suite of guidance publications developed to assist emergency management practitioners in the management and delivery of support services in a disaster. It comprises principles, strategies and actions compiled by practitioners with experience in a range of disaster events.

3.47 The AEMs comprise two separate series—the *Principles and Reference Series*, which provides a conceptual basis for the emergency management function, and an *Emergency Sector Skills Series*, which addresses the particular practical skills that emergency response workers require to undertake tasks such as flood boat rescue procedures and map reading.²⁵

3.48 Since 2002, through the Australian Council of State Emergency Services (ACSES) National Education and Training Committee (NETC), states and territories have been responsible for periodically reviewing and keeping current the Skills Series. EMA provides some ongoing support for the review

²⁴ Similar libraries overseas include the Library and Information Centre of the Emergency Planning College in the United Kingdom, the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Information Resource Library in the United States of America and the Asian Disaster Preparedness Center Information Center in Thailand.

²⁵ Emergency Management Australia, *Skills for Emergency Services Personnel – Flood Rescue Boat Operations* (Manual 39); *Map Reading and Navigation* (Manual 36).

process. It also prepares the content from the NETC reviews for publication, arranges printing and distributes the printed material as required.

3.49 EMA has approached the Chair of ACSES outlining a process to devolve entirely responsibility for the Skills Series to the states and territories. Negotiations are continuing on this issue.

Community education and information

3.50 EMA undertakes public education activities including producing brochures, pamphlets, resources for schools, and maintaining a dedicated EMA website. The objective of these activities is to raise the awareness of emergency management issues and the practical measures that communities can undertake to mitigate risks and prepare for emergency situations. In undertaking these activities EMA seeks to provide a consistent national approach in the information being disseminated.

Publications

3.51 EMA-produced publications vary from generic material such as *This is EMA*, which is an overview of the organisation and what it does, to specific brochures on what individuals and communities should do in specific circumstances such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes and bushfires. These publications often are produced in partnership with subject matter experts from agencies such as the Bureau of Meteorology and Geoscience Australia. EMA consults with state and territory peak bodies, including the Australasian Fire Authorities Council and the ACSES Public Communications Group, to avoid duplication of effort with state and territory activities and to ensure a consistent, national, message is promulgated.

3.52 Several of EMA's current publications were produced originally to fill identified gaps in jurisdictional activities. In recent years the quantity and quality of material produced by states and territories on various subjects has increased but EMA has not reviewed adequately its own material to determine whether it is still required. As a result some material is dated in content and presentation; other publications are 'operational' in focus and do not sit well within EMA's current strategic approach to emergency management. EMA advised that it intends reviewing its public education program in the 2007–08 financial year.

3.53 In addition, under the aegis of the National Community Safety Working Group (NCSWG),²⁶ a national review of community education, awareness and engagement programs is occurring. The outputs from this review will inform the development of community safety program guidelines for use by all jurisdictions in the development of future initiatives. The contracted research will be completed in December 2008, following which the NCSWG will identify appropriate means of disseminating principles and creating capacity within state and territory emergency services agencies to implement the outcomes.²⁷

3.54 Both of these review initiatives are timely and will provide evidence for EMA and sector stakeholders on whether current emergency management publications are responsive to the needs of users.

Website

3.55 Although a Division within the AGD, EMA has continued to maintain an Internet presence through its dedicated website at <www.ema.gov.au>. This website provides various emergency management-related materials including general information on EMA and Australian emergency management arrangements, access to EMA publications including the AJEM and AEMs, information on EMA education and training activities and information for the general community on natural disasters, their cost and effects on communities and practical mitigation and/or preparedness suggestions for individuals.

3.56 The ANAO found that, when compared to websites for similar organisations overseas, the current EMA website has substantial shortcomings. For example, it is poorly structured, and in some instances confusing, making it difficult to find relevant information. Some material is dated, which might confuse readers about whether the material is, in fact, the most recent available or whether the website simply had not been updated recently. EMA recently reviewed material and removed obviously redundant items but has advised that progress has been limited.

²⁶ The NCSWG was established in 2004 to provide advice and support to the AEMC in relation to community safety in emergency management. This forum, comprising members from state and territory agencies or departments and the EMA, is tasked with coordinating all community safety activities (research, community engagement, public education, community awareness and early warning systems) to ensure the sharing of knowledge, techniques, results and information.

²⁷ RMIT University Circle is providing consultation services for this project. The Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia undertook the tendering process and is managing the project on behalf of the NCSWG.

Recommendation No.3

3.57 The ANAO recommends that EMA maintain the Internet site to ensure that material is appropriate, current and readily accessible for users.

Agency's response

3.58 EMA supports this recommendation. EMA has established a version control mechanism to ensure material is appropriate and remains current. EMA, with the AGD Information and Knowledge Services Group, has also commenced a review of the site technology to ensure ease of access and use by all Australians.

Conclusion

3.59 EMA's efforts to build knowledge and skills amongst the emergency management sector and communities through development and delivery of competency-based training have been responsive to the needs of these groups.

3.60 Efforts by EMA and the sector to implement programs of competency-based training have raised the profile of emergency management in Australia. However, EMA has not had a process to review periodically its approach to delivering individual training courses, to ensure the most appropriate delivery mixture is used commensurate with training objectives. Such review is important as the administrative load in delivering training under the formal competency-based framework can be substantial.

3.61 Regular review of training activities by EMA would have highlighted areas of the current curriculum having low completion rates. This would enable EMA to revise its approach in a timely fashion to adapt to better meet the needs of training attendees.

3.62 Little progress has been made in devolving more of the responsibility for delivering competency-based training to the states and territories. This is despite some state agencies being RTOs and delivering segments of the Public Sector Training Package (but not the emergency management-related units currently delivered by the EMAI).

3.63 The ANAO considers that in articulating further EMA's strategic role of providing leadership to the emergency management sector, the responsibilities for delivering both operational and strategically-focussed training should be explored. For example, increased delivery of operational training by operational organisations would enable EMA to focus on the delivery of

strategically-focussed activities, such as workshops and research. In implementing the EMA's review of its environment and strategic direction at an activity/operational level, it would be of benefit for EMA to identify the specific areas where it is best suited to contribute to emergency management capability in Australia and review current practices to align these with clear strategic objectives.

3.64 EMA supports the emergency management sector through such activities as maintaining a library, and publishing a quarterly journal and a suite of guidance publications. These initiatives are well managed by EMA and well received by the sector.

3.65 EMA produces various publications ranging from generic material to specific brochures on what individuals and communities should do in specific circumstances. These publications often are produced in partnership with subject matter experts, and EMA consults with state and territory agencies to avoid duplication of effort and to ensure a consistent, national, message is promulgated.

3.66 Although in recent years the quantity and quality of material produced by states and territories on various subjects has increased, EMA has not reviewed adequately its own material to determine whether it is still required. A planned review of its publications by EMA and, in cooperation with the states and territories, a national review of community education, awareness and engagement programs, will provide evidence for EMA and sector stakeholders on whether current emergency management publications are responsive to the needs of users.

3.67 EMA also maintains an Internet presence, which provides various emergency management-related materials. However, the current EMA website has substantial shortcomings. It is poorly structured, and in some instances confusing, making it difficult to find relevant information, and some material is dated. EMA recently reviewed material and remove obviously redundant items but progress has been limited.

4. Building Physical Preparedness

This chapter discusses the building of physical preparedness, through the provision of specific-purpose resources, grants schemes and the acknowledgement of emergency management excellence by way of an awards program.

Introduction

4.1 EMA helps build the physical infrastructure and equipment used by response agencies and volunteers during emergencies. With the states and territories, EMA is involved in identifying specific gaps in Australia's capabilities and then addressing those gaps through directed assistance. EMA also provides discretionary assistance through the administration of a grants scheme. To recognise organisations and individuals undertaking innovative activities in emergency management, and to foster dissemination of better practice within the sector, EMA sponsors an annual awards program. The ANAO assessed each of these in turn.

Directed physical preparedness building activities

4.2 EMA is involved in the following major physical preparedness building projects:

- the Australian Tsunami Warning System;
- the National Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Research Initiative;
- the National Forum on Emergency Warnings to the Community; and
- the National Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Capacity Development Project.

4.3 EMA's involvement in these areas can include both policy and liaison activities, for example chairing and providing secretariat support to the National CBRN Working Group and the National USAR Working Group, as well as providing funding and/or physical resources to states and territories. A primary objective of EMA's involvement in this process is to facilitate national approaches to addressing physical preparedness gaps.

4.4 To determine the robustness of the analysis done to identify gaps in physical preparedness, and whether EMA's response to address identified

gaps is well targeted and efficiently and effectively undertaken, the ANAO reviewed the National USAR Capacity Development Project.

Urban Search and Rescue

4.5 Urban Search and Rescue relates to the ability of response agencies to react to structural collapse incidents, such as the Thredbo landslide (1997). A structural collapse might result from wilful and intentional acts, such as terrorism, or through natural events or human-caused accidents. USAR capacity requires highly trained personnel with specialised equipment, able to operate in difficult and unsafe conditions. Rapid response is required, to locate, sustain and extract victims, and, generally, USAR teams must be able to operate, independently of external resources, on a continuous basis for the first 36 hours after arrival on site.

4.6 The importance of USAR capacities is acknowledged by the United Nations. Under the umbrella of the United Nations' Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group (INSARAG) was formed in 1991 as a global network of more than 80 countries and disaster response organisations. INSARAG aims at establishing standards for international USAR teams and methodologies for international coordination in earthquake response. In practical terms INSARAG has developed standards comprising the INSARAG Guidelines, which provide guidance to countries in establishing USAR capacity, and checklists for the minimum requirements of USAR teams envisaged to deploying in international response operations.²⁸

4.7 As with other areas of emergency response in Australia, the primary responsibility for USAR rests with the states and territories. Several Australian Government agencies might also provide assistance to states and territories during structural collapse incidents, with the ADF, through the Australian Army's Incident Response Regiment, having some capability to augment jurisdictional resources when required.

4.8 In 1995 the (then) NEMC endorsed a proposal that Australia should develop a multi-agency USAR capability such as that then existing in the United States of America and the United Kingdom. Over the years, states and territories have built varying USAR capabilities, with the larger states of New

²⁸ Information from the INSARAG Internet pages at <http://ochaonline.un.org/Coordination/FieldCoordinationSupportSection/INSARAG/tabid/1436/Default.aspx> [accessed date 15 October 2007].

South Wales and Queensland establishing International USAR Taskforces. However, smaller jurisdictions had developed only limited USAR capacity and the ability of agencies to transfer equipment in times of need from states with capability to those without was hampered by distance and logistical problems.

National USAR Capacity Development Project

4.9 In May 2004 the Prime Minister wrote to Premiers and Chief Ministers stating the Australian Government's commitment to assisting states and territories to develop their emergency management capacities, particularly for USAR, on a cost-share basis. In June 2004, the Attorney-General wrote to state and territory Emergency Services Ministers seeking in principle agreement from all jurisdictions to contribute to a proposed \$30 million USAR development package. The Australian Government proposed to fund up to \$15 million of the package with the rest coming from states and territories. All jurisdictions provided in-principle agreement to the proposal by October 2004.

4.10 The Australian Government's contribution to the National USAR Capacity Development Project is in three areas: provision of equipment, USAR training for senior managers and national arrangements for the provision of USAR capabilities in the event of a disaster, with the main focus of involvement, both in terms of resources and effort, in providing equipment. State and territory contributions are mainly through in-kind training of emergency response personnel to USAR-standard competency. The Project is to be delivered over four years with completion by June 2009.

4.11 EMA's role in the National USAR Capacity Development Project is overall coordination of the Project and procuring and distributing the jurisdictional USAR equipment caches.²⁹ To assist EMA in its task a Project Board, led by EMA and comprising experts from the jurisdictions, was implemented to oversee the development of a minimum national USAR capability standard from the INSARAG Guidelines. From this standard the specific needs of individual states and territories were identified and purchasing arrangements commenced, comprising direct purchasing for items available only from a single supplier and a competitive Request for Tender process for multi-sourced items.

²⁹ These are dedicated caches of appropriate equipment to undertake USAR activities. To enable rapid deployment, caches are to be positioned in each capital city.

4.12 Although the direct purchasing of single-source equipment was completed satisfactorily by mid-2006, during the tender evaluation process for the remaining items concerns emerged in four areas:

- the tendered prices were generally higher than those available to states and territories under their existing procurement arrangements;
- lead times for delivery of some equipment was greater than that through state and territory procurement arrangements;
- in undertaking the tender process, some compromises were necessary to ensure a uniform approach to the marketplace. This resulted in some sub-optimal equipment being selected that did not assist in increasing national interoperability and standardisation; and
- the administration burden to EMA of managing the purchase and delivery of tendered equipment (including contract negotiations) was high.

4.13 As a result of these concerns, EMA identified an alternative arrangement whereby the balance of equipment procurement under the Project would occur through one-off, tied grants to states and territories. Suitable arrangements under which these tied grants would be made were developed and the Prime Minister agreed to these arrangements in August 2007. EMA included appropriate monitoring standards in the funding agreements with the states and territories to ensure that:

- purchases under the grant scheme will meet the nationally agreed USAR equipment list, with any variation from that list being approved beforehand by the Australian Government; and
- equipment purchased will meet interoperability requirements (both within the given state or territory and with other jurisdictions).

4.14 To further ensure accountability for the funds expended, grant agreements contain specific milestones to ensure that the Project's objectives are met by 30 June 2009. States and territories must provide Equipment Purchase Progress Reports against milestones and a Final Report, including evidence of purchases and acquittal of grant monies, on completion of equipment procurement.

4.15 The ANAO considers that the National USAR Capacity Development Project has been well managed by the EMA and that a pragmatic approach was taken, by moving from an Australian Government equipment

procurement program to one of tied grants, when it became apparent that this would be more efficient and effective in achieving the Project's objectives. This approach provided the benefits of cheaper purchasing and, at the same time, reduced the administrative requirements on EMA in maintaining the Project. It provides a useful model for consideration in future national physical preparedness enhancement initiatives.

Discretionary physical preparedness building programs

4.16 Discretionary physical preparedness building programs relate to those activities where the Australian Government provides funding to organisations to purchase emergency management-related equipment and infrastructure, undertake mitigation activities and deliver training. These activities are discretionary as the Australian Government is not involved directly in identifying gaps and undertaking procurement, but invites organisations to apply for various grants. Projects will vie against those in other organisations and across jurisdictions in a competitive selection process.

4.17 Until recently the former Department of Transport and Regional Services provided Australian Government funding for discretionary physical preparedness building under:³⁰

- the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements and in accordance with the terms and conditions determined by the (then) Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads;
- the Natural Disaster Mitigation Programme—a national program aimed at identifying and addressing natural disaster risk priorities across the nation. Since 2007 this program has included the formerly separate Regional Flood Mitigation Programme that was designed to assist state and territory governments and local agencies reduce the cost of flooding in rural, regional and outer metropolitan Australia; and
- the Bushfire Mitigation Programme—a national program aimed at identifying and addressing bushfire mitigation risk priorities across the country.

³⁰ Under the Administrative Arrangements Order of 3 December 2007 the natural disaster relief and mitigation in the form of financial assistance to the states and territories undertaken by the former Department of Transport and Regional Services (now the Department of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Local Government) became the responsibility of AGD.

4.18 Emergency management mitigation activities undertaken by the former Department of Transport and Regional Services were outside the audit scope and were not reviewed by the ANAO.

Working Together to Manage Emergencies

4.19 EMA facilitates discretionary physical preparedness building through its administration of the Working Together To Manage Emergencies (WTTME) initiative. WTTME, which aims to develop self-reliance at both the community and local government level in order to enhance community safety, comprises:

- a \$33 million (over four years from 2004-05) Local Government Scheme (LGS), to enhance the ability of communities to prepare for, react to and recover from disasters of all types; and
- a \$16 million (over four years) National Emergency Volunteers Support Fund (NEVSF) to boost the recruitment and skills base of volunteer organisations at the frontline of emergency management.

4.20 In August 2007 the Government decided to roll the NEVSF into ongoing AGD funding; the LGS will cease after the 2007-08 funding round.

4.21 Individual grants are limited generally to a maximum of \$50 000 (plus GST) but can exceed this cap in the case of proposals considered nationally significant or where the community benefit of the proposal is considered to justify additional funding. EMA allocates funding across states and territories using a pre-existing emergency management funding formula.³¹

4.22 All applications received are ranked by state and territory Selection Committees (one for each of the LGS and NEVSF in each jurisdiction, and comprising relevant state/territory agencies, volunteer organisations and EMA), and funding recommendations to the Attorney-General proceed down the order of merit until the allocation for each state/territory is exhausted. Nationally significant proposals are ranked by EMA, with state and territory input, and those projects supported by the majority of jurisdictions are funded.

4.23 For 2007-08, EMA received 1 011 applications (491 for the LGS and 520 for the NEVSF); 424 applications were selected to share in funding of

³¹ Under these arrangements funding is allocated in the following proportions: New South Wales (24.2 per cent); Queensland (22.55 per cent); Victoria (17.45 per cent); Western Australia (15.2 per cent); South Australia (10.97 per cent); Tasmania (5.35 per cent); the Northern Territory (4 per cent) and the Australian Capital Territory (0.28 per cent). The states and the Northern Territory agreed to top up the allocation to the Australian Capital Territory to provide a more meaningful funding percentage.

\$13.82 million (exclusive of GST). The number of applications received and funded over the four years of the Scheme appears in the following table.

Table 4.1

WTTME applications and projects funded 2004–05 to 2007–08

Year	Applications received	Amount applied for	Applications funded	Amount funded	Proportion of applications funded
2004-05	7	\$1.1 m.	7	\$1.1 m.	100%
2005-06	715	\$26.0 m.	463	\$14.1 m.	64.8%
2006-07	777	\$29.0 m.	365	\$13.1 m.	47.0%
2007-08	1011	\$38.0 m.	423	\$13.9 m.	41.8%
Total	2510	\$94.1 m.	1258	\$42.2 m.	50.1%

Source: EMA. The proportion of applications funded is the number of applications not the amount requested.

Administration of WTTME grants

4.24 A grants program aimed at funding ‘grass roots’ groups, often staffed by volunteers with limited financial and managerial skills and not necessarily familiar with government accountability requirements, might have increased risks of funding requirements not being fulfilled.

4.25 EMA advised that WTTME procedures and guidelines were developed from the ANAO’s *Administration of Grants* Better Practice Guide and include:

- specific Program Guidelines (one each for the LGS and NEVSF), which are reviewed, revised and approved by the Attorney General annually;
- Standard Operating Procedures, such as receiving applications, development of grant agreements and payment of Administered Funds to grant recipients, to assist staff in administering the requirements of WTTME; and
- the development (in house, by the AGD) and use of an electronic Grants Management Scheme. Project milestones are recorded in this system and so it can be an effective monitoring tool to ensure grant recipients meet WTTME requirements and reporting arrangements.

4.26 Effective grants management requires timely follow-up if and when grant recipients might be in breach of program requirements.³² Failure by EMA to follow-up non-compliant projects in a timely manner was the main area of concern identified by the ANAO in EMA's administration of WTTME.

4.27 At the start of June 2007 EMA sent letters to approximately 300 grant recipients for 2005–06, across the whole range of projects funded, both small and large, volunteer organisations, local government and state/territory agencies, querying the status of their projects. EMA also followed-up projects through face-to-face visits by the grants manager and relevant Assistant Secretary, but such visits are a viable strategy only for larger grants.

4.28 EMA advised that it has identified that some applicants face difficulties under the existing program in completing projects within a financial year—especially those involving infrastructure³³—and for 2007–08 is seeking assurance from applicants that projects can be completed within a single financial year.

4.29 The ANAO considers that EMA's follow-up of non-compliant projects has not been timely. Given the risks mentioned in paragraph 4.24, proactive monitoring of the progress of projects and follow up of those that might be behind schedule, or not be fulfilling all funding agreement requirements, are important controls. Follow-up action should occur earlier in the process, when it becomes clear that advised project milestones are not met, and not in the last month of the financial (and grant) year, as occurred in June 2007.

Recommendation No.4

4.30 The ANAO recommends that, to ensure that grant conditions are satisfied, EMA enhance procedures to monitor the progress of projects and follow up those behind schedule or not fulfilling funding agreement requirements.

³² For example, both the LGS and NEVSF require applicants to provide budget breakdowns and a work plan including key milestones to achieve the project's output. At the project's completion, grant recipients must complete a Final Report Package, including (amongst other things) a project summary (of how the project was undertaken and its success in achieving its purpose), a Compliance Certificate (that all WTTME terms and conditions were fulfilled) and a project financial statement/reconciliation.

³³ For example, applicants cannot start projects until funding under WTTME is approved. In the case of a project involving council approval beforehand, such as the erection of a bushfire brigade shed, once approved the applicant faces further delays in obtaining the necessary planning permits, which could lead to difficulties in completing the project in the required time.

Agency's response

4.31 EMA supports this recommendation. From 2007–08, it has been a requirement that all project managers provide a summary of progress as at mid-January. This report enables EMA to monitor progress on projects and to work with recipients to take appropriate remedial action to ensure satisfactory completion. A regular review process has also been implemented to monitor the progress of Projects funded in earlier years, and state and territory WTTME Contact Officers have been asked to assist in following-up projects where progress has slowed. Mandatory mid-year reporting will be a requirement for all future grants.

Ministerial involvement in the WTTME grants process

4.32 The administration of grant funding by Ministers has traditionally been a sensitive area of public administration, requiring care on the part of Ministers to ensure programs are administered in accordance with any legislative provisions and the program parameters determined and announced by the government of the day.

4.33 In the case of the WTTME program, Ministerial involvement included annual approval of procedures (guidelines and promotional activities), the composition of state and territory Selection Committees (in regards to agencies/positions, not specific persons) and the projects recommended for funding through the Selection Committee process. In these areas the ANAO found that the suggestions made by the Attorney-General were minor and did not affect the probity and propriety of WTTME grant administration.

4.34 There was only one instance where the Attorney-General rejected a Selection Committee's funding recommendation. In that instance the Minister made no suggestion on a replacement application and the funding that would otherwise have been committed was carried over to the next year's WTTME round. Although there is no requirement under the *Financial Management and Accountability Regulations 1997* for a Minister to justify the reason for his/her decision, written advice from the Attorney-General relating to his decision was present on the relevant file.

Outcomes achieved

4.35 The ANAO also sought to identify the outcomes being achieved through WTTME and whether the initiative was enhancing Australia's emergency management physical preparedness.

4.36 The stated objectives of WTTME are ‘to support communities, local governments and volunteer organisations in the development of strategies to improve community safety and to improve training for volunteers involved in emergency management.’³⁴ Further, the LGS and NEVSF Program Guidelines both state certain guiding principles aimed at building emergency management physical preparedness. For example, the NEVSF Program Guidelines state that decisions regarding funding provided through the Program will be primarily based on:

- the ability of the proposal to address recruitment and retention issues;
- the scope of the proposal to provide appropriate additional skills training for volunteers; and
- enhancing capital equipment and infrastructure. **While applications for equipment and infrastructure will be accepted, they will be considered a lower priority than applications for recruitment and training initiatives.**³⁵ (ANAO emphasis.)

4.37 In the light of these Guidelines, the proportion of successful NEVSF projects (73.6 per cent) and grants funding (61.9 per cent) made to equipment or infrastructure projects in the 2005–06 round, as shown in the Table 4.2, is high. Further, although such projects are eligible under the Guidelines, many examples of emergency management equipment and other physical resources being funded by LGS would ordinarily be encompassed within the responsibility of state/territory emergency response agencies to provide.

³⁴ Emergency Management Australia, *Local Government Scheme Program Guidelines 2007/08*, p. 5 and *National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund Program Guidelines 2007/08*, p. 5.

³⁵ *NEVSF Guidelines*, p. 6.

Table 4.2**Types of projects successful in the 2005–06 WTTME round**

Type of project	Local Grants Scheme		NEVSF	
	Grants (per cent of total)	Projects (per cent of total)	Grants (per cent of total)	Projects (per cent of total)
Planning	\$3.057 m. (34.5%)	63 (29.0%)	\$0.110 m. (2.9%)	3 (2.1%)
Infrastructure	\$3.562 m. (40.2%)	93 (42.9%)	\$0.970 m. (25.7%)	29 (20.1%)
Equipment	\$0.387 m. (4.4%)	18 (8.3%)	\$1.369 m. (36.2%)	77 (53.5%)
Information	\$1.078 m. (12.2%)	32 (14.7%)	-	-
Training	\$0.402 m. (4.5%)	9 (4.1%)	\$0.815 m. (21.5%)	19 (13.2%)
Recruitment	-	-	\$0.257 m. (6.8%)	10 (6.9%)
Other	\$0.363 m. (4.1%)	2 (0.9%)	\$0.260 m. (6.9%)	6 (4.2%)
Total	\$8.849 m. (100.0%)	217 (100.0%)	\$3.782 m. (100.0%)	144 (100.0%)

Source: ANAO developed from information supplied by EMA. Nationally significant projects are not included. Differences in totals are due to rounding.

4.38 EMA advised that, through WTTME, the Australian Government aimed to differentiate from a number of similar programs operating, both at Commonwealth and state/territory level. To ensure that WTTME did not simply fund work to achieve the same objectives as other programs, it was recognised that funding needed to be provided at the ‘grass roots’ level to complete projects at a truly local level for which the recipient would otherwise struggle to find funding. On that basis, EMA suggested, it could be argued that a (funded) project is successful if it completes satisfactorily.

4.39 Notwithstanding these comments, in its brief to the Attorney-General for the 2007–08 funding round, EMA advised of a discernable decline in the standard of the applications received, with a significant number being assessed as either marginally supported (by Selection Committees) or not supported. EMA further noted the high number of equipment acquisition project applications, despite there being ‘considerable work to do . . . in terms of Emergency Risk Management studies and in emergency services agencies to improve volunteer recruitment, retention and training’.

4.40 Generally, Australian Government funding is provided for a purpose that contributes to an outcome. There is a clear stated objective for WTTME of enhancing emergency management capabilities but the program has not been evaluated to assess its effectiveness and its achievement of this objective. It would be timely for such an evaluation to occur.

Safer Communities Awards

4.41 Since 2000 EMA, in conjunction with the states and territories, has sponsored the Australian Safer Communities Awards (SCA). The awards are designed to recognise and encourage best practice and innovation across the emergency management sector, business, local government and community organisations. Nominations are invited within seven streams based broadly on the type of organisation (government agency, local government, volunteer organisation and business) and two categories, pre-disaster and post-disaster.

4.42 The SCA involves a two-stage process with states and territories undertake local rounds of awards. The winners from amongst the state and territory level awards are nominated for judging at the national level by a panel comprising senior EMA officers and representatives selected from the emergency management sector and academia. National winners and highly commended entries receive a trophy and have their activities promoted on the EMA website and in an annual EMA publication on the Award results.

4.43 Promotion of the awards varies amongst jurisdictions and the number of entries nominated annually is small in comparison to the amount of emergency management activities being planned and/or undertaken by agencies, organisations and the community, and the quality of applications has been variable. At least part of this is attributed to the lack of a satisfactory definition of what is meant by 'safer communities' in an emergency management context. Apart from producing an annual publication providing information on state/territory and national award recipients, there is little being done to promote wider adoption of meritorious activities within jurisdictions and communities.

4.44 EMA planned for 2007 a first principles review of the SCA, to test their ongoing validity, but this has now been deferred until 2008. To address the issues mentioned above, the ANAO encourages EMA to undertake a robust review of the SCA activity, including determining whether the Award is achieving its objective and the extent to which innovative measures identified through the SCA are adopted by similar communities and/or organisations.

Conclusion

4.45 EMA helps build the physical infrastructure and equipment used by response agencies and volunteers during emergencies. The National USAR Capacity Development Project, which aims to build states' and territories'

ability to respond to structural collapse incidents, is illustrative of EMA's directed physical preparedness building activities.

4.46 The ANAO considers that the National USAR Capacity Development Project has been managed well by EMA and that a pragmatic approach was taken, in moving from an Australian Government equipment procurement program to one of tied grants, when it became apparent that this would be more efficient and effective in achieving the Project's objectives. This approach provided the benefits of cheaper purchasing and, at the same time, reduced the administrative requirements, on EMA in maintaining the Project. It provides a useful model for consideration in future national physical preparedness enhancement initiatives.

4.47 EMA facilitates discretionary physical preparedness building through its administration of the WTTME grants initiative, which aims to develop self-reliance in communities and local government in order to enhance community safety. WTTME generally has been managed well by EMA. However, EMA's follow-up of non-compliant projects could have been more timely. Proactive monitoring of the progress of projects and follow up of those that might be behind schedule, or not be fulfilling all funding agreement requirements are important controls.

4.48 The linkage between programs, such as WTTME and SCA, and their overall objective of enhancing enhanced emergency management physical preparedness could be made clearer. Enhanced linkages would provide EMA with assurance that discretionary activities achieve their objective of building physical preparedness within the emergency management sector.

5. Coordination in Emergencies

This chapter reviews EMA's effectiveness in coordinating a response to requests for assistance during emergency situations.

Introduction

5.1 The Australian Government's response to an emergency situation, whether that situation is within Australia or overseas, generally receives more public and media interest than any other aspect of the emergency management function.

5.2 Although many Australian Government agencies might be involved in responding to an emergency situation, the primary organisation for *coordinating* an Australian Government response is EMA. However, EMA is not necessarily involved in every emergency situation, only those where Australian Government assistance is requested by a jurisdiction or, in the case of overseas events, when called upon by the relevant authority, usually the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT).

5.3 Administratively, the Attorney-General is the responsible Minister for committing Australian Government resources in response to an emergency. Following approval of a request for assistance by the Attorney-General, EMA can call upon the resources of the Australian Government to satisfy that request. Small amounts of ADF assistance can be provided directly to local civilian authorities through the Defence Assistance to Civil Communities.³⁶ However, if the request for Defence assistance is likely to be for more than 24 hours, then the activation of COMDISPLAN is required.

Domestic operations

Procedures for dealing with requests for assistance

5.4 Provision of Australian Government resources does not occur until a formal request is received from a state or territory, as a result of the jurisdiction's resources being inadequate, inappropriate or unavailable to meet the situation.

5.5 For some situations, such as cyclones, there is early warning of a potential emergency situation and agencies can prepare for possible

³⁶ Review of Defence involvement in emergency situations was outside the scope of the audit.

involvement beforehand, and be ready to respond if and when a request is received. At the same time EMA, or other relevant authorities, might also activate particular emergency plans; for example, as a situation deteriorates EMA might raise the status of COMDISPLAN in preparation for possible requests for assistance from a state or territory.

5.6 Each jurisdiction has an authorised officer empowered to request assistance on behalf of the state or territory. Requests for assistance from the authorised officer are made to the DGEMA who will seek the approval of the Attorney-General to commit the relevant Australian Government resources. All requests from states and territories are for specific assistance—access to a particular piece of equipment or that an explicit task be performed—not open-ended, non-specific requests. Once the Attorney-General approves a request, EMA will liaise with the appropriate Australian Government agency to arrange for the request to be satisfied.

5.7 Operationally, Australian Government agencies likely to be called upon to assist in emergency situation appoint Emergency Management Liaison Officers (EMLOs) to assist the agency to meet any request that might arise. Agencies might base EMLOs in the disaster area and EMLOs might be formed into committees, as required, to better coordinate the necessary response. Depending on the nature, duration and severity of the emergency, EMA might appoint an EMLO at location to liaise with other agencies and to provide intelligence on the situation.

5.8 EMLOs will act as the specific point of contact for EMA within the agency, and undertake various roles during an emergency including:

- the provision of advice to state/territory agencies on Australian Government response capabilities;
- the collection of additional information on the disaster and forwarding of this to the EMA Incident Management Facility (IMF) by the most suitable means;
- the gathering of information and contact details that will assist the Australian Government to respond to requests for assistance in the most appropriate and effective manner;
- the provision of advice to the EMA IMF regarding the changing situation and possible future requirements;
- representing EMA at meetings;

- on request, assisting in the state/territory emergency operations/coordination centre; and
- liaising with other Australian Government EMLOs.

EMA coordination centre

5.9 Until recently, EMA coordination activities were managed from the National Emergency Management Coordination Centre (NEMCC) in Canberra. The NEMCC would be activated in response to incidents and would monitor situations and maintain communications with the relevant agencies.

5.10 Early in 2007 the AGD undertook an internal review of current business practices related to coordinating Australian Government responsibilities for national security and emergency management incidents and events. The purpose of the review was to examine procedures within the Protective Security Coordination Centre (PSCC) Watch Office/National Security Hotline (WONSH) and the NEMCC. It was identified that there was considerable similarity of actions at the initial stages of both a security event and an emergency management event. AGD further determined that EMA could provide a more effective service to its traditional stakeholder community by using the WONSH operations.

5.11 As a result of the AGD review, a combined centre for the initial contact and reporting element of an emergency, the AGD Coordination Centre (AGDCC), commenced operations on 1 July 2007. The AGDCC provides the benefit of continuous situational awareness on all hazards and has the ability to provide very quickly more comprehensive situation reports and allow better coordination of media management.

5.12 From an EMA operational perspective, the AGDCC has assumed the 'first point of contact' responsibilities of EMA, including the duty officer function (for which EMA transferred two officers to the AGDCC). EMA continues to manage its core business as before and retains responsibility for coordinating a response for emergency management incidents. This is done through the NEMCC, now renamed the EMA IMF.

ANAO review of domestic requests for assistance

5.13 Timely and effective response to emergency situations aims to ensure that the impacts of such situations on communities are minimised. The ANAO reviewed the domestic coordination activities undertaken by EMA to ascertain whether Australian Government assistance (as coordinated by EMA) is timely

and responsive to the requests by the jurisdiction and appropriate to the particular situation.

5.14 EMA has developed comprehensive standard operating procedures to assist effective operation of the IMF and appropriate response to requests for assistance. As part of its normal business processes, EMA periodically reviews and updates standard operating procedures to reflect operational experience.

5.15 In addition, the AGDCC has developed its own standard operating procedures related to the emergency management function. The EMA IMF reviewed these standard operating procedures before the AGDCC commenced and is reviewing its existing standard operating procedures to ensure that these take into account the new arrangements with the AGDCC and involvement with the EMA IMF.

5.16 EMA also has in place procedures that require lessons learnt workshops/debriefs to be held within four weeks of an event requiring active EMA involvement. This process further requires that a report be supplied to the DGEMA within four weeks of completing the debrief or workshop.

5.17 EMA logs and updates each incident into its Incident Management System, which allows staff to extract information on an ad hoc basis, for example, for reporting against the PBS targets in AGD annual reports.

5.18 In relation to the coordination of requests for assistance and the standing up of NEMCC, the AGD Portfolio Budget Statements sets the following targets:

- approvals for Australian Government assistance have been sought within two hours of receiving request; and
- National Emergency Management Coordination Centre (now the IMF) is operational within one hour of event advice.

5.19 The ANAO found no formal mechanism existed for management to monitor performance against these indicators on a regular basis.

5.20 Nevertheless, from its review of a sample of incidents, the ANAO found that EMA's domestic response activities are timely and responsive to the requests by the jurisdiction and that EMA actions individual requests in an appropriate manner.

Overseas operations

5.21 In recent times, EMA has become involved increasingly in coordinating the Australian response to overseas incidents, as the region of Australia's interests identified by the Government has expanded. Examples include Australia's response to the Indian Ocean Tsunami, Yogyakarta earthquake and offer of assistance in the 2007 Greek forest fires.

5.22 EMA does not receive requests for assistance directly from foreign emergency response agencies. Rather, protocol envisages local authorities making requests through the relevant Australian Head of Mission. DFAT will usually be the lead agency to coordinate the overall Australian response through appropriate plans such as AUSASSISTPLAN. DFAT (or AusAID) might then request EMA to undertake a particular task, as these organisations deem appropriate. As with domestic situations, EMA is not necessarily involved in all Australian overseas responses.

5.23 When EMA is involved in overseas operations, it is to the extent of undertaking a particular task as agent on behalf of DFAT and/or AusAID. As such, EMA is authorised to undertake a particular activity but is left to determine the operational aspects required and make the necessary arrangements (usually up to a pre-defined monetary limit). The audit sought to ascertain the adequacy and appropriateness of EMA's involvement in overseas emergency situations.

5.24 As EMA acts as an agent to undertake a specific task, it seeks reimbursement for the costs incurred during its involvement in overseas emergency situations. In recent times there has been some disagreement between AusAID and EMA over arrangements for overseas involvements. For the response to the Yogyakarta earthquake, AusAID was critical of some aspects of the response arrangements made by EMA, such as sourcing some supplies from Australia rather than buying these locally at significantly less cost.

5.25 For its part, EMA advised that it arranged its response (at the request of AusAID) on the information provided from AusAID. By the time more reliable intelligence on the situation was available, the initial response was assembled and on its way. On the basis of an 'inappropriate' response, AusAID has not reimbursed EMA for the outlays incurred. This issue remained unresolved at the time of the audit.

5.26 The ANAO considers that this issue arises primarily because of the difference of focus between activities undertaken by EMA and AusAID. Emergency management (the type of activity that might warrant EMA involvement) usually require quick response, often in situations where immediate action is needed to save lives, and reliable situation information is lacking or of poor quality. As a result, there might be difficulties in matching resources to the situation with any certainty, and with a high risk of an under, over or inappropriate response occurring.

5.27 AusAID has a clear role and substantial experience in leading and facilitating the delivery of the Australian Government's emergency responses in developing countries, including the procurement of appropriate services and resources. However, overseas aid usually occurs over a longer timeframe, allowing more detailed analysis of need, better planning and the procurement of appropriate resources and activities. Currently this difference in emphasis might not always be fully appreciated by all stakeholders.

5.28 A potential solution to the uncertainty of the current situation would be to develop some form of agreement on the terms under which EMA undertakes overseas emergency response operations amongst the relevant Australian Government stakeholders. For example, EMA has had 'Records of Understanding' with AusAID to undertake specific tasks, such as providing disaster management services under the Australia Indonesia Partnership for Reconstruction and Development. The purpose of this Record is to 'set out the operational arrangements that will guide cooperation between AusAID and EMA in strengthening disaster management in Indonesia'.³⁷

5.29 The agencies so far have been unsuccessful in resolving the issue of reimbursement for EMA's outgoings during its response to the Yogyakarta earthquake. It is obviously important for both EMA and AusAID to agree on an appropriate Record of Understanding that allows for a streamlined response to any emergency response situation (as distinct from involvement in aid projects) overseas.

5.30 The ANAO concluded that EMA's overseas response was timely and responsive to the situation's requirements. However, because of differences in performance expectations between EMA and AusAID, during emergency management incidents EMA is not always meeting fully the requirements of

³⁷ Amongst other things, the Record requires the parties to acknowledge that there will be risks to successful achievement of the (specific) objectives and that a risk management approach will be implemented, including monitoring reporting and managing the risks the responsibility of the parties.

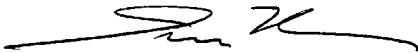
this stakeholder. Development of an agreement between EMA and relevant stakeholders specifying the broad principles, responsibilities and performance expectations to apply when EMA is involved in overseas operations would assist in this regard.

Recommendation No.5

5.31 The ANAO recommends that, to facilitate EMA's response to requests for assistance in overseas emergency management situations, a statement of the broad principles, responsibilities and performance expectations to apply when EMA is involved in overseas operations be developed and agreed between EMA, DFAT, AusAID and other relevant stakeholders.

Agencies' response

5.32 EMA supports this recommendation. EMA has begun discussions with DFAT, AusAID and other relevant stakeholders to address this issue. AusAID also indicated its support for further clarity in the principles, responsibilities and performance expectations for EMA's involvement in Australian Government emergency response efforts overseas.



Ian McPhee
Auditor-General

Canberra ACT
16 April 2008

Appendices

Appendix 1: Other Australian Government Agencies Involved in Emergency Management

Australian Government participation in emergency management involves both policy and service agencies as appropriate, including:

- the Department of Health and Ageing (DHA), the agency responsible for communicable disease outbreaks;
- the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry (DAFF), the lead agency for animal, crop and aquaculture disease emergencies;
- the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Centrelink, which provide disaster relief payments, special benefits and other personal services for those affected by disasters;
- Geoscience Australia, which provides information on local and regional earthquakes;
- the Bureau of Meteorology, which provides information on the weather, especially early warning on major events such as cyclones, severe storms and extreme fire risk; and
- the (former) Department of Transport and Regional Services, which provided support to states and territories through the Natural Disasters Relief Arrangements and by funding various mitigation programs.³⁸

In times of emergencies, these agencies work with each other and in conjunction with central agencies, such as the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, to formulate a whole-of-government Australian Government response. Individually these agencies might also have primary carriage as lead agency in particular types of emergencies. For example, the DHA would be the lead agency for a government response to pandemic influenza under the Australian Health Management Plan for Pandemic Influenza; the DAFF has primary responsibility for the Australian Veterinary Plan; and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has responsibility for AUSASSISTPLAN³⁹ and OSSMASSCASPLAN.⁴⁰

³⁸ Under the Administrative Arrangements Order of 3 December 2007 the natural disaster relief and mitigation in the form of financial assistance to the states and territories undertaken by the former Department of Transport and Regional Services (now called the Department of Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development and Local Government) became the responsibility of AGD.

³⁹ Australian Government Overseas Disaster Assistance Plan.

⁴⁰ National Response Plan for Mass Casualty Incidents Involving Australians Overseas.

Appendix 2: Agency Response

Emergency Management Australia was fully consulted in the development of this report, agrees with its recommendations, and has commenced acting upon them.

Emergency management in Australia has evolved over the last decades into a structured discipline that addresses emergency risk to the Australian society, economy and environment. This evolution continues and Emergency Management Australia, in partnership with state and territory governments, non-government organisations and the private sector, will continue to further enhance the national emergency preparedness and resilience of communities and organisations. A considerable effort by EMA, in partnership with the states and territories, has already been put into the development of Australian Emergency Management Arrangements which will establish the framework through which future whole-of-government approaches will be guided.

Other matters for resolution in the coming years include: achieving the right resourcing balance between mitigation and preparedness on the one hand, and response and recovery on the other; ensuring that a heavy reliance on volunteers does not leave Australia vulnerable in its ability to deal with risk and emergencies; and developing a national program of continuous improvement in emergency management.

More specifically, during the development of this report several areas requiring immediate attention were identified and are reflected in the report recommendations. EMA has already begun working on these recommendations and has revised its performance measures to provide greater clarity in reporting to Parliament, has begun consulting with stakeholders in revising its education program, has assigned the responsibility for internet management to ensure a whole-of-division focus is maintained on this key resource, has implemented processes to guarantee grant conditions are satisfied and has held initial discussions with AusAID to begin clarifying EMA's role in overseas emergency situations.

This report provides a critical review of EMA processes and activities, and will assist EMA in materially improving its ability to provide national leadership in emergency management and assist Australian communities.

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