

Editorial

In the Summer edition of *The Australian Journal of Emergency Management*, Rod McKinnon wrote of the consequences for emergency management agencies and the Australian Defence Force of the terrorist attacks in the United States in September 2001. The effects of those attacks on government planning continue to be felt in Australia, and since Rod's editorial, there have been a number of changes at the Commonwealth level. I thought those effects were worthy of further discussion for the benefit of Journal readers.

From the Emergency Management Australia (EMA) perspective, the most significant was on 23 November 2001 when, while announcing his third Ministry, the Prime Minister also announced that EMA would be transferred to the Attorney-General's portfolio. While there had been some discussion earlier about where EMA might best fit in a Governmental sense, the announcement had its genesis from 11 September.

The relocation of EMA to the Attorney-General's portfolio ended a 27 year association with the Department of Defence. The legislative basis for that arrangement was the Administrative Arrangements Order which specified that, in addition to other specific defence-related activities, the Minister for Defence was responsible for 'Commonwealth emergency management, including civil defence'. Under Government policy, the Minister for Defence was able to call on the resources of all Commonwealth agencies in responding to emergencies.

By moving EMA to the Attorney-General's portfolio, the Government has grouped all federal agencies with a role in crisis and consequence management under the one portfolio. This move had obvious benefits in terms of the ability of those agencies to communicate effectively and to coordinate a response to any event in Australia. The Administrative Arrangements Order was duly amended to assign responsibility for Commonwealth emergency management to the Attorney General. EMA now operates as a Division within the Attorney General's Department, falling under the wider Criminal Justice and Security Group, headed by Mr Ian Carnell, the General Manager.

There has been no change in the Commonwealth's commitment in assisting States and Territories experiencing emergency situations and it is important to emphasise that the role and functions of EMA are unchanged from those performed when the organisation was attached to the Department of Defence. While the primary motivation for the move was in terms of the consequence management aspects of the organisation, all other functions continue to operate unchanged.

Similarly, the role performed by the Attorney General is the same as that provided earlier by the Minister for Defence. The Attorney now has the authority to coordinate Commonwealth responsibilities in the event of a disaster, including the seeking of Australian Defence Force (ADF) assistance. EMA's close relationship with the ADF continues unchanged, and a series of working arrangements have been established to ensure that requests for ADF assistance received from States and Territories continue to be met effectively.

The move of EMA to the Attorney-General's portfolio has, however, coincided with a period of overall refocusing of future directions within the emergency management sector in Australia and there are a number of ongoing reviews into the ways in which emergency management is currently conducted. These include:

- Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Review of Natural Disaster Relief and Mitigation Arrangements, which is examining arrangements for natural disaster relief and community recovery, disaster mitigation programs and Australia's capacity to respond to such emergencies. All jurisdictions and representatives from local government are taking part in the review, which is being chaired by the Department of Transport and Regional Services
- COAG Review on Foot and Mouth Disease, which is developing whole of government plans to manage the consequences of a Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in Australia and the conduct of a national exercise to test response mechanisms
- review of Aerial Firefighting Capability to assess the usefulness of aircraft in a

firefighting role following the successful use of large helitankers during the recent NSW bushfires

- consideration of a number of recommendations for emergency services volunteers made at the Volunteers summit conducted by EMA in October 2001.

The Review of Natural Disaster Relief and Mitigation Arrangements, in particular, is likely to have far reaching effects on the way in which disasters are managed in Australia. Clients and stakeholders will continue to be consulted in that process to ensure a reinforcement of the Commonwealth's commitment to assisting States and Territories in an emergency.

The evolving nature of emergency management in Australia is reflected in the recent amendment of EMA's vision to read 'Safer Sustainable Communities'. This change recognises our changing role in the emergency management sector and reflects EMA's mission to provide national leadership in the development of measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of disasters.

In conclusion, while there have been significant changes to the structure of Commonwealth emergency management responsibilities in response to the terrorist attacks in the United States, the Commonwealth's commitment to support States and Territories has not changed. There is likely to be further refinement of the roles of individual agencies as the current reviews continue, however there will not be a decline in the standard of service and support provided by the Commonwealth when requested by the States and Territories. While there is often a perception in a time of heightened terrorist threat that energies are expended on management of responses to consequences of terrorist acts, EMA is continuing to focus on the broader issues which reduce the risk to communities of all natural, technological and human caused disasters and will continue to do so into the future.

*Mr David Templeman
Director General
Emergency Management Australia*