

FOREWORD

Success of the Working Together to Manage Emergencies initiative managed by EMA
By Tony Pearce



There is general acceptance that the threat of terrorism and the likely effects of climatic variation can be considered as enduring features of Australia's 21st century hazardscape. Effects may include an increase in frequency and severity of drought, severe storms, floods, tropical cyclones and indirectly, serious bush fire.

Not only do these events have political and economic consequences but, most importantly, they also have the potential to adversely impact vulnerable communities.

This changing hazards profile has highlighted the importance of ensuring that all levels of government and the community work cooperatively in the shared responsibility of reducing vulnerability and managing the impacts of these events in the most effective way possible. We are all in this together.

Local government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, is a critical component and has a key role in the prevention of, response to and recovery from emergencies and disasters, both natural and human caused, including terrorism. It is at the frontline of emergency management and is often best placed to determine and respond to local needs and priorities. Local government remains to pick up the pieces long after the initial response operation has been completed.

Of increasing and vital importance is our national pool of emergency management volunteers who represent another critical element of emergency management and who play a significant role in assisting communities in response and recovery from the impact of hazards. Some 500,000 people in Australia volunteer their services in some emergency management capacity, and 350,000 of those are directly involved in emergency first response, principally through the various rural fire services and State Emergency Services. It is critical that these volunteer agencies maintain their current staffing level and attracting new volunteers in the current sociological environment is a significant challenge.

In recognition of the importance of the roles of local government and the national emergency volunteer pool the Australian Government, in the context of the 2004 election, announced its policy initiative "Working Together to Manage Emergencies". It committed \$49 million to establish a *Local Grants Scheme* to institute a local government security partnership program to enhance the capability of communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters of all types including terrorist attacks and to create a *National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund* to assist in recruiting, retention and training of emergency management volunteers over a broad range of agencies.

The initiative has been strongly supported and has proved to be very successful in meeting its objectives. It has provided grants that have encouraged innovative ideas from local communities aimed at reducing their vulnerability and developing their self-reliance and resilience.

To date, more than \$28 million has funded nearly 850 projects through the Local Grants Scheme and the National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund. The final year of this four year initiative is 2007-08.

Local Grants Scheme projects have included emergency risk management studies and development of plans and implementation of measures to address identified risks. National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund projects have focussed on development of public education programs, volunteer recruitment campaigns, establishment and upgrade of facilities and introduction of specialised training and equipment for volunteers. Collectively, the range of projects represents a significant addition to the capability of local government and volunteer agencies.

The initiative represents a successful partnership between all levels of government and the community working together to manage emergencies. Based on the successful outcomes to date there has been unequivocal support from stakeholders for its continuation.

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