

Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management

COMMUNIQUE

Canberra, 26 November 2010

The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management – Emergency Management (the Council) met in Canberra today (26 Nov, 2010). The Council is chaired by the Commonwealth Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP, and comprises Commonwealth, State, Territory and New Zealand emergency management Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association.

The Council discussed Australia's preparedness for the current bushfire season and other natural hazards such as cyclones and floods. The Council noted the Commonwealth is facilitating pre-disaster season operational briefings to all States and Territories and considered how these briefings could be enhanced in coming years. The Council also considered international best practice responses to natural disasters through discussion of the recent earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand.

The critical importance of education, for both children and adults, in preparing and responding to emergencies was discussed by the Council. Ministers agreed the Chair would write to the Commonwealth Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth asking him to request the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority add a module on dealing with emergencies and disasters to the national curriculum.

Other key issues discussed by the Council included:

- National Strategy for Disaster Resilience
- 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report
- Triple Zero Emergency Call Service
- National Strategy to Reduce Bushfire Arson in Australia
- Bushfire Detection Camera Trials

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience

The Council took an important step in building national, whole-of-government support for resilience based approaches to emergency management by endorsing the draft National Strategy for Disaster Resilience. The draft Strategy, including recommendations for

national implementation, will now proceed to COAG where it will be considered for final endorsement. The Strategy is the cornerstone of significant national reforms in emergency management which COAG agreed to in December 2009.

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission final report

The Council agreed to collaborate on, and drive the implementation of, recommendations of national significance, outlined in the Final Report of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission (VBRC).

The recommendations primarily relate to the delivery of advice about emergencies to the Australian public, arrangements for the provision of operational assistance to the States and Territories, and planning and building controls in bushfire-prone areas.

This agreement complements current work on the Commission's earlier interim reports including; the national telephone emergency warning system, national fire danger rating scale and Triple Zero emergency call service.

Triple zero

The Council agreed to prioritise specific options to improve the efficiency of the Emergency Call Service through national collaboration.

The Council also noted the Commonwealth has engaged a consultant to identify best practice technologies, operating procedures, standards, principles and protocols for potential national adoption of compatible systems in the long term.

National strategy to reduce bushfire arson in Australia

The Council noted progress on developing a National Strategy to Reduce Bushfire Arson. The aim of the Strategy is to reduce the incidence of bushfire arson in Australia through collaborative national approaches across all relevant agencies and jurisdictions.

Disaster season operational briefing

The Council had the opportunity to participate in a disaster season operational briefing which has been delivered to State and Territory Emergency Management organisations in the lead up to the 2010 disaster season. The Council also considered feedback on how future disaster season operational briefings could be improved.

The Council noted the forecast risks for the upcoming disaster season.

Bushfire detection camera trials

The Council noted the conclusion of the 2009-10 Remote Fire Detection Camera Trials, conducted by the Commonwealth in collaboration with Victoria, New South Wales, the Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) and the CSIRO.

The Bushfire CRC and CSIRO evaluated the trial and provided a report which did not support further dedicated trials at this stage. The report found that although all the camera systems tested were able to observe and locate fires during both day and night, the detection by the camera systems was slower and less reliable than by a trained human observer. The report is available on the Attorney-General's Department's website at <http://www.ag.gov.au/publications>.

The Commonwealth hosted and facilitated a national workshop at the Australian Emergency Management Institute on 4-5 November 2010 to consider outcomes of the Remote Fire Detection Camera Trials and examine the performance of camera systems to detect fires, exclude false detection, and the potential integration into existing arrangements.

Representatives from the Commonwealth, the State and Territory Governments, emergency management agencies, and key members of the scientific and research community attended the workshop.

The Council also noted that, following the conclusion of the Remote Fire Detection Camera Trials, it was a matter for individual States and Territories whether to pursue the use of this technology in addition to their existing fire detection arrangements.

Funding for national priorities

The Council noted funding of \$4 million provided by the Commonwealth for national projects to build the nation's disaster resilience by supporting measures to strengthen communities, individuals, businesses and institutions to minimise adverse effects of disasters on Australia. National projects include, for example, the:

- Bushfire Arson Investigation Course to assist the investigation of bushfire arson by police and fire-fighting authorities;
- National Tsunami Community Education Strategy to underpin the development of a comprehensive community education program in relation to tsunamis;
- Emergency Management Volunteer Leadership Training to promote effective leadership within volunteer structures;
- National Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Program to strengthen the emergency management sector's capability to engage culturally and linguistically diverse communities through enhanced national collaboration and coordination.