

Notes from the Field

Establishing the Emergency Management Assistance Team

Following the 2011 Queensland floods and cyclones, Emergency Management Australia (EMA), in consultation with Emergency Management Queensland (EMQ), developed an Emergency Management Assistance Team (EMAT) concept. EMAT is comprised of experienced emergency management personnel from Australian states and territories who can rapidly deploy to support emergency management operations across all hazards events.

Background

Disasters have the potential to stretch the operational capacity of emergency management agencies and personnel during heightened times of crisis. Over the course of the 2011 Queensland floods and cyclones, EMQ carried out a sustained period of operational duties. The scope, magnitude and duration of the operation began to stretch the capacity of EMQ personnel. EMQ subsequently requested that EMA identify and deploy experienced emergency management personnel who could provide operational support to the Queensland State Disaster Coordination Centre. EMA responded and deployed highly-skilled emergency management practitioners from different states and territories to assist.

Following the event, EMA and EMQ discussed the benefits of establishing a pool of emergency management personnel who have a comprehensive understanding of emergency management arrangements across Australia. The lessons

learned from the 2011 Queensland floods and cyclones identified the need to develop capability that could enhance emergency management sector interoperability and augment operational capabilities during an event.

Establishing EMAT capability

The initial EMAT Working Group, agreed to by all states and territories, met in June 2012 in Canberra. Emergency management representatives from each state and territory participated in the meeting. Participants explored options for the development of a flexible EMAT Strategy that could address both current and emerging threats.

Discussions from the meeting informed the inaugural EMAT Capability Development Workshop held in September 2012 in Sydney. Workshop participants gained an understanding of emergency management arrangements across Australia and how to quickly assimilate into jurisdictional teams during a deployment. Working Group members also delivered presentations on their jurisdictional arrangements. Presentation material covered issues including state/territory emergency management arrangements, typical risks, likely major activations, key planning and co-ordination considerations, historical events, and possible applications for EMAT.

Emergency Management Assistance Team Capability explained

The EMAT capability consists of a network of emergency management personnel who have a high level of experience in disaster planning and



Participants in the EMAT capability workshop.



The EMAT capability workshop in progress.

co-ordination. They also have an understanding of each state and territory emergency management arrangements and understand the broad diversity of Australia’s emergency management arrangements. EMAT members provide operational support to affected states and territories and associated regions during a significant event.

The EMAT capability supports the growth of interoperability by facilitating networking opportunities. In particular, the EMAT Working Group and workshops provide a platform for collaboration between members. EMAT networking has increased operational awareness and contributed to the development of a consistent approach to emergency management arrangements across Australia. During heightened times of crisis, the EMAT can rapidly deploy emergency management personnel in order to support and sustain disaster management operations. EMAT deployments are also reviewed regularly in order to ensure the continual growth of operational capabilities.

The first EMAT deployment to Queensland

EMAT has already proven its value. In January 2013, ex-tropical Cyclone Oswald and an associated monsoon trough passed over parts of Queensland. The system was considered a severe natural disaster event and generated very heavy rain, strong winds and produced a number of tornadoes. Queensland coastal communities and low lying areas in rural, regional and city locations were significantly impacted with Mundubbera, Eidsvold, Gayndah and Bundaberg amongst the worst affected. In many places, the total rainfall for the system set new records. Due to the scale and complexity of the disaster, EMQ requested that an EMAT be deployed to assist with the operation. EMA, in consultation with EMQ, requested three planning and recovery specialists

drawn from the ACT and NSW to be deployed to the Queensland Disaster Coordination Centre to support operational activities.

EMAT capability workshop in September 2013

The second EMAT capability workshop was held in September 2013 in Adelaide. The workshop gave participants a deeper understanding of emergency management arrangements across Australia. EMAT members discussed lessons learned from the initial EMAT deployment and reflected on recent trends within the emergency management sector. Participants also discussed international trends in emergency management surge capacity and how non-operational activities could be used to encourage growth of the EMAT capability.

EMAT continues to work closely with Australia’s emergency management sector to ensure the capability remains current with the latest emergency management developments. EMAT capability workshops are planned on an annual basis to ensure information and knowledge remains current with emergency management issues.

Acknowledgements

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Children and youth in emergencies 'Paper-in-a-Day'



Professionals and practitioners in the field of emergency management came together in Melbourne for the 'paper-in-a-day' workshop.

In early August, 29 professionals and practitioners in the field of emergency management came together to discuss and write a series of papers related to selected topics in emergency management. The workshop was co-ordinated by Save the Children Australia and included a variety of organisations from academia, emergency management, non-government, state and federal government, and young people.

The papers related to seven critical topics:

- Children and youth participation in emergency management planning in the Australian context
- Child protection in emergencies
- Recovery from emergencies
- Disaster resilience
- Emergency management education
- Disaster risk reduction
- Young people's perspective on emergency management planning

Group members collectively developed a title for their paper, confirmed the style and the key areas of content. A variety of hard copy reference material was supplied

to assist with the papers, including the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* editorial policy and contributors guidelines.

'Paper-in-a-day' was a great opportunity to draw on experience, collaborate across sectors and document best-practice and key learning in the area of children and youth in emergency management.



Image: Susan Davie

Participants collaborated across their organisations to share diverse viewpoints promote discussion.

During the workshop members discussed their expertise and focused on their strengths. The allocation of tasks in writing the papers was organic as some individuals wrote sections, while others researched references or provided case studies. The workshop allowed participants to collaborate across organisations. This provided diverse viewpoints and many robust discussions.

Two secondary school students participated in the workshop to document their recent experience of engaging with local government emergency management planning. This was a new experience for the students and was an opportunity to give young people a voice in emergency management.

By the end of the day all groups had achieved a draft of a paper. They further liaised to develop their papers post workshop. Drafts were provided to the workshop co-ordinator for circulation to all participants for

comment. Some of the papers addressed similar concepts and this provided cross referencing between papers and an informal peer review. Resulting papers will be formally peer reviewed and submitted for publication in the January 2014 special *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* edition on this topic.

‘Paper-in-a-day’ was a great opportunity to draw on experience, collaborate across sectors and document best-practice and key learning in the area of children and youth in emergency management.

One of the benefits of the paper-in-a-day format was the opportunity for people with a common interest to work together, develop and refine their ideas and document this in a way that can be shared broadly with the emergency management sector. Focusing on a particular theme helped to make a significant contribution to the literature and provides a basis to further develop knowledge and share best practice. An added benefit was the opportunity to form new relationships particularly between practitioners and academics.

‘Paper-in-a-day’ originated from a concept derived by Dr Eva Alisic (Monash University), and has, more recently, been adopted as a Victorian Department of Human Services initiative. The workshop was funded by the Attorney-General’s Department National Emergency Management Projects. It highlights the need for continued discussion and action surrounding children and youth in emergencies, an area attracting increasing focus and recognition worldwide. This aspect is the theme of the January 2014 edition of the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*.

“The paper-in-a-day concept, held with like-minded colleagues in the field, was a great networking opportunity and an opportunity to start more conversations around child/youth empowerment.”
Dawn Hartog, CFA

“Paper-in-a-day was an unusual experience in writing an academic paper but also very rewarding. The groups were multi-disciplinary and writing a paper together helped us to tease out different perspectives on a topic of shared interest.” Dr Lisa Gibbs, University of Melbourne

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