

Sub 344  
"safer sustainable communities"

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EMA/297/03

Mr Ian Dundas  
Secretary, Select Committee on the Recent Australian Bushfires  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Dundas

### **EMA INFORMATION FOR THE SELECT COMMITTEE**

As arranged with the Committee Secretariat, Emergency Management Australia (EMA) considers it appropriate to inform the Committee about EMA and emergency management arrangements in Australia.

EMA is located within the Attorney-General's Department and is the lead Commonwealth Government agency dedicated to the emergency management aspects of national community safety and sustainability. The EMA 'Vision' is for "safer, sustainable communities".

As part of this submission, EMA would welcome any visit from the Committee to EMA, including the National Emergency Management Coordination Centre (NEMCC) in Canberra or the EMA education and training facility at Mount Macedon in Victoria.

Many aspects of EMA are set out in the attached booklet "*This is EMA*" and I am providing copies for distribution to the Committee.

#### ***Role of Emergency Management Australia***

The EMA Mission is to provide national leadership in the development of measures to reduce risk to communities and manage the consequences of emergencies and disasters. EMA works closely with all State and Territory emergency management agencies and sector leaders.

The organisation promotes a national and coordinated approach to emergency management in Australia through comprehensive measures which embrace risk assessment, risk treatment, coordination of disaster response and community recovery activities. To achieve this, EMA activities include conducting national education and training programs, facilitating workshops, networks and forums, addressing knowledge management strategies, and conducting community awareness programs.

EMA works closely with Government agencies at all levels, academics, researchers and industry bodies in order to achieve its mission. EMA also maintains close links with similar agencies throughout the world, in order to keep abreast of international best practice, and has a significant relationship with Papua New Guinea and countries of the South Pacific Region to provide emergency management assistance and advice.

On 26 November 2001, EMA was relocated from Defence to the Attorney-General's Portfolio. The Commonwealth Attorney-General has the authority to approve Commonwealth physical assistance in the event of a disaster and EMA is responsible for coordinating the day-to-day administration of that function.

I am enclosing a paper "*Australian Emergency Management Arrangements*" which outlines the arrangements, including requests for assistance to the Commonwealth.

### ***Tasks Undertaken in the Summer 2002-2003 Bushfires***

During the past 'bushfire season', EMA has had an active role in providing national coordination and the provision of Commonwealth assistance to the States and Territories. The attached list formally logs the specific requests received at the National Emergency Management Coordination Centre in Canberra and notes the action dates and outcomes.

During this period, EMA also provided extensive advice to the Office of the Prime Minister. In relation to the ACT Bushfires, EMA facilitated the visit by the Prime Minister to Canberra on 19 January 2003.

During the bushfire crisis, the Federal Government also provided special funding for additional aerial fire fighting support to the States and Territories, with the Director General EMA contributing advice to the proposed arrangements. A sum of \$5.5 million for the leasing of three helitankers was supplemented in January 2003 with a further \$2.1 million for the leasing (half cost with the Victorian and New South Wales Governments) of an additional two Erickson Skycranes. The Commonwealth Government also provided \$300 000 to assist Western Australia and \$250 000 for South Australia to assist in aerial fire fighting arrangements.

### ***General Remarks***

In the history of disasters in Australia and our region, the methods of response have been significantly improved and there have been changes of emphasis in recent years.

For example, the previous Australian Natural Disaster Organisation (NDO) became Emergency Management Australia (EMA) in 1993 in order to broaden the range of emergencies that are addressed. The name change also signalled an update to a more comprehensive 'emergency risk management' approach to disasters, and the integration of greater community awareness initiatives.

In 2001, in the wake of the September 11 terrorist attacks in New York and Washington DC and the Government's review of counter terrorism arrangements, EMA was relocated from Defence to the Attorney-General's Portfolio in order to strengthen the links to national security and counter terrorism.

The progressive result of these changes has been to enable a clearer 'whole-of-government' approach across all Commonwealth agencies in response to all disasters and emergencies.

During this period, marked by the UN International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction 1990-2000, there has been a shift in emphasis towards prevention and mitigation, in addition to the traditional areas of response and recovery.

In relation to bushfires, this has seen greater emphasis on areas such as prevention equipment and capability, education and training, and research and development. For example, one of the matters mentioned in the Committee Terms of Reference is land use planning which has direct relevance in bushfire prevention. In this context, EMA sponsored Planning Institute of Australia (PIA) '2002 National Lecture Tour on Bushfire Prevention (Professor Ken Topping)', by publishing guidelines "Planning Safer Communities: Risk Based Land Use Planning", and by developing curriculum for Risk Based Land Use Planning Short Courses. The three-day course has been presented for senior planning and emergency management professionals at Mount Macedon since late 2002. An extension course is planned to be held in for Perth in July 2003.

The course contains case studies on prevention of floods, cyclones and bushfires through town planning design. These actions are complementary to work being undertaken by the Department of Transport and Regional Services in relation to the Planning Ministers' Group and the Senior Planning Officials' Group.

The course sits within an extensive network of training offered by EMA at Mount Macedon, including emergency management for Local Government, Evacuation Management, Recovery Management and related topics.

These matters are being further progressed in the proposed report to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) "Natural Disasters in Australia: Reforming Mitigation, Relief and Recovery Arrangements". A central plank of this report is a suggested five-year *Disaster Mitigation Package* of Commonwealth funds, with the proposal that it be matched by State and Territory (and in some cases, Local Government) funds. In the Federal Budget Speech of 13 May 2003, the Treasurer committed Commonwealth funds to the program, with an estimate of \$68 million.

A final element of particular note that should be brought to the attention of the Committee, is the progressive change in the increasing recognition of the role of volunteers. EMA provides the Secretariat for the Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum (AEMVF) – a body formed in 2001 to provide a voice and advocacy for all emergency management volunteers.

### **Conclusion**

EMA can assist the Committee with information, inspection of EMA facilities, or with linkages to other relevant agencies if required.

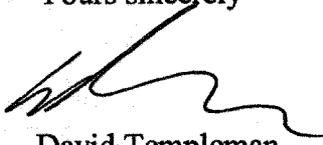
It should be stressed that a key issue not addressed in this EMA submission is the operational effectiveness, training and incident command of State and Territory response arrangements, including environmental and forest management practices.

EMA is not placed to comment on any of these matters which are appropriate for qualified persons and other authorities to address. In this context, it is important that we also observe the Coronial investigative aspects of the bushfires, the findings of which are yet to be announced.

EMA is available to be interviewed if invited by the Committee. However, comments and answers to questions would need to be related to EMA's role and the provision of Commonwealth physical assistance.

I look forward to the deliberations of the Committee.

Yours sincerely



David Templeman  
Director General

14 May 2003

Attachments:

1. Booklet "*This is EMA*"
2. Australian Emergency Management Arrangements
3. Summary of Commonwealth Assistance provided to State Governments over the 2003/2003 Bushfire period