

SENATE STANDING COMMITTEE ON LEGAL AND CONSTITUTIONAL AFFAIRS  
ATTORNEY-GENERAL'S DEPARTMENT

**Output 3.2**

**Question No. 53**

**Senator Humphries asked the following question at the hearing on 20 October 2008:**

Provide details on how the Commonwealth would coordinate with the States and Territories a response to a major national disaster.

**The answer to the honourable senator's question is as follows:**

State and territory governments have responsibility, within their borders, for coordinating and planning for the response to and recovery from disasters. When the total resources (government, community and commercial) of an affected state and territory cannot reasonably cope with the needs of the situation, the state and territory government can seek assistance from the Australian Government. The *Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN)* provides the framework for addressing state and territory government requests for Australian Government physical assistance arising from any type of disaster or emergency. *COMDISPLAN* complements state and territory emergency response arrangements.

The Attorney-General is designated as the Cabinet Minister with responsibility for disaster-related matters. Emergency Management Australia (EMA) is nominated as the agency responsible for planning and coordinating Australian Government physical assistance to the States and Territories under the Australian Government Emergency Management Policy Statement.

The *Australian Emergency Management Arrangements* (as approved by the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management-Emergency Management (MCPPEM-EM) in November 2008) outline the principles and structures that support national coordination of emergency management in Australia. The Arrangements take into account the nature and scale of different emergencies.

The COAG-approved *Model Arrangements for Leadership during Emergencies of National Consequence* describe how Australian heads of government would work together including in relation to policy, strategy and public messaging in support of an affected state or territory. They form an annex to the *Australian Emergency Management Arrangements*.

The Australian Government helps to facilitate the early provision of assistance to disaster affected communities through the *Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA)* administered by Emergency Management Australia. Under the *NDRRA* the Australian Government will reimburse a state or territory government half of its expenditure on eligible personal hardship and distress relief assistance to victims (such as emergency food, accommodation, clothing and replacement of essential household items); psychological and financial counselling and certain long-term recovery measures, once expenditure from an event exceeds \$240,000. Should a state or territory exceed certain other thresholds, in any one financial year, the Australian Government reimburses up to 75 per cent of eligible state or territory expenditure for all eligible state or territory natural disaster relief and recovery, including measures such as public infrastructure restoration and concessional loans for small businesses and primary producers.