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Attorney-General's Department



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AUSTRALIA

NATIONAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER ACTION PLAN, 2012

REVISED *NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE ATTRACTION, SUPPORT AND
RETENTION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS (NEMVAP, 2009)*

April 2012



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INTRODUCTION

In Australia today, there are approximately 500,000 volunteers who willingly provide their time and services to the emergency management sector. 'Australia's capacity to respond to natural disasters has been based largely on a range of specialised volunteer-based organisations, each of which relies on a small cadre of paid (or career) staff and a much larger workforce of (unpaid) volunteers who are mobilised and deployed on the basis of need in response to a particular disaster or emergency incident.'¹

Emergency management volunteers not only provide emergency response services but are active within their local communities delivering prevention, preparedness and recovery programs, cadet schemes and community education programs. The input by emergency management volunteers is particularly important in rural and remote areas where they may provide the only emergency management activity.

Work-life patterns, lifestyle expectations, demographic changes, domestic migration, an ageing population and community fragmentation all provide a significant challenge for the recruitment and retention of emergency management volunteers. This is an issue of national importance that impacts on all levels of government and all Australian communities.

Without dedicated, well prepared, resourced and equipped volunteers the ability of Australian communities to prepare for, respond to and recover from disasters would be catastrophically reduced.

The contribution of emergency management volunteers to disaster resilience building and emergency management in Australia is immeasurable.

TERMINOLOGY

For the purposes of this document, the term 'emergency management volunteers' is used to describe those who volunteer their time and services to the emergency management sector. This encompasses all activities relevant to prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Whilst it is acknowledged that spontaneous volunteerism following a disaster is a growing phenomenon (particularly due to high levels of media coverage and social media), spontaneous volunteers are not included as a focus area in this plan. This is a subject for future consideration and research.

¹ McLennon, J, *Issues Facing Australian Volunteer-Based Emergency Services Organisations: 2008 – 2010 (2008)*

BACKGROUND

In March 2008, the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management-Emergency Management (MCPPEM-EM: the predecessor of the Standing Council on Police and Emergency Management (SCPEM)), identified that action needed to be taken to ensure the future viability of volunteers working in the areas of emergency response and recovery.

A study was commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department (AGD) to investigate the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers and to provide a report. The report was considered by the (then) Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC) — a subcommittee of MCPPEM-EM — in December 2008 and the committee agreed that an action plan should be developed, using the report and other relevant material.

The *National Action Plan for the Attraction, Support and Retention of Emergency Management Volunteers (NEMVAP, 2009)* was developed by a reference group comprising senior jurisdictional representatives nominated by AEMC members. This plan was endorsed by MCPPEM-EM in September 2009. It proposed eleven actions of national applicability and benefit to all emergency management volunteers.

In May 2011, the third National Emergency Management Volunteers Summit was held in Canberra. The slogan was 'The Future is in our Hands' and the themes explored were Partnerships, Experiences and Solutions. The event was hosted by the AGD in partnership with the peak body for emergency management volunteering in Australia, the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF) and supported by the Australian Taxation Office. Over 400 delegates attended from each state and territory, with 80 percent being volunteers.

The NEMVAP (2009) was discussed at one of the breakout sessions at the Summit and strategies were identified to raise the profile of the plan amongst emergency management volunteer organisations.

Key recommendations around the issues of time, cost, recognition, training, alliances, research, and strengthening the role of the AEMVF were developed in the Summit Report. The report is available on the Australian Emergency Management website: www.em.gov.au.

THE NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR DISASTER RESILIENCE, 2011

Subsequent to the endorsement of the NEMVAP (2009) by MCP-EM, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR)*. The NSDR represents a whole-of-nation resilience-based approach to disaster management which recognises that a national, coordinated and cooperative effort is needed to enhance Australia's capacity to withstand and recover from emergencies and disasters.

The NSDR recognises that non-government and community organisations, many of which are comprised largely of volunteers, are at the forefront of strengthening disaster resilience in Australia. It is to them that Australians often turn for support, advice or assistance in an emergency and the dedicated work of these agencies and organisations, and the volunteers who staff them, is critical to helping communities cope with, and recover from, a disaster (NSDR p V).

The strategy also recognises that ongoing support for the recruitment, retention, training, equipping and maintenance of paid and unpaid personnel in all aspects of the emergency services will strengthen our capability to respond to and recover from disasters (NSDR p 12).

An implementation plan for the NSDR is being coordinated through the National Emergency Management Committee (NEMC) of senior officials. This plan outlines key milestones and timeframes for the implementation of ministerial priorities. A priority action item is to review the NEMVAP (2009) to ensure its consistency with the NSDR and consider ways to ensure its implementation.

REVIEW OF THE *NATIONAL ACTION PLAN FOR THE ATTRACTION, SUPPORT AND RETENTION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS (NEMVAP, 2009)*

The review of the NEMVAP (2009) has been undertaken through the NEMC Community Engagement Subcommittee (CESC). Included in this review has been the compilation of a stock take of actions and achievements by jurisdictions to implement items from the NEMVAP (2009)². Consultation for the review was undertaken primarily through the AEMVF and included all relevant volunteer peak bodies and agencies.

Titled the *National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan (NEMVAP, 2012)* this document revises and updates the 2009 NEMVAP, and sets out some recommended actions to further progress implementation, consistent with the NSDR. Implementation of the NEMVAP (2012) will help ensure that emergency management volunteers will continue to be available, well prepared, appropriately trained, equipped and resourced to help their communities build disaster resilience, including disaster response and recovery capability into the future.

Indeed, successful implementation of the NSDR and the continuous building of disaster resilient communities are dependent on strong, on-going and active support from all levels of government in Australia for the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

The NEMVAP (2012) will be monitored by the NEMC CESC with an annual report to NEMC.

² Titled, *Summary of Achievements – Stock take against priority actions identified in the National Action Plan for the Attraction Support and Retention of Emergency Management Volunteers (NEMVAP,2009)*

JURISDICTIONAL FORUMS

It is important to acknowledge that under the Australian Emergency Management Arrangements individual jurisdictions have the primary responsibility for the implementation of many of the agreed actions from this plan as most of the emergency management agencies and organisations that utilise emergency management volunteers are established and managed within the individual jurisdictions.

Fundamental to the success of the NEMVAP (2012) is the need for each State and Territory to have a forum representative of all emergency volunteer organisations, including those from the not-for-profit sector, to strategically coordinate support for volunteers at a jurisdictional level. A few states have already established forums of a similar nature. Through effective linkages to peak jurisdictional emergency management committees and the AEMVF at the national level, such forums will increase the efficiency and effectiveness of volunteer support including maximising the use of Commonwealth funding under the *National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience (NPA)*.

Recommended Action 1:

Each State/Territory to establish a forum with relevant emergency management or affiliated volunteer organisations (e.g. those from the not-for-profit sector).

FOCUS AREA 1: VOLUNTEER TRAINING

TRAINING QUALIFICATIONS

The issue of the proposed training requirements from the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC), particularly around competency requirements for Vocational Education and Training (VET) trainers and assessors, is a significant challenge to the recruitment, retention and training of volunteers. The proposed changes involve upgrading the minimum requirements for trainers and assessors, including the need for Certificate IV level qualifications, and variations to supervision requirements.

It is problematic that the proposed changes, around which much confusion continues, were decided without reference to NEMC and relevant jurisdictionally based Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). To help address this, NEMC needs to assert its role as the official peak body representing the interests of emergency management volunteers with the VET training sector.

The February 2012 SCPEM resolution to 'endorse the establishment of a cross jurisdictional working party to address the issue of training qualifications for volunteers' will allow the training requirements issue to be advanced. There is still no assessment of how serious this issue is and its impact on the RTO status and cost implications for jurisdictions, volunteers and their agencies. The first task of the working party needs to be to ground truth and, if there is an issue, to identify the nature and magnitude of any implications.

Recommended Action 2:

The Co-chairs of NEMC write to the relevant authorities advising that NEMC is the peak national emergency management body which represents the interests of emergency management volunteers and their training requirements and seeks formal consultation on future changes to VET competency training arrangements.

Recommended Action 3:

The cross jurisdictional working party endorsed by SCPEM to give priority to the identification of issues arising from the NSSC Determination for Trainers and Assessors and report as a matter of urgency on the nature and significance of these changes for emergency management volunteer training arrangements.

COMPETENCY REQUIREMENTS FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS

The issue of national consistency, the appropriateness and national recognition of the training/competency requirements for emergency services volunteers across the nation warrants serious consideration.

Philosophically (and practically) volunteers who are trained under the same national competency package (the Public Safety Training Package) ought to be able to transfer across jurisdictions and volunteer service organisations and have their formal training, completed competency units and experience recognised.

When joining another volunteer organisation, it would be necessary to complete competency units which are required for that service. When transferring across jurisdictional lines or joining other jurisdictions, it may be necessary to complete a unit/units which establishes context for their activities.

Each service and jurisdiction designs the content for the competency units under the same Public Safety Training Package. This raises the efficiency and efficacy of everyone doing their own curricula, particularly in an era of significant budgetary constraints.

It is not currently possible to have an informed debate on these issues because no one organisation is able to provide any comparative data in relation to the training modules and unit requirements and content across the two service areas. Baseline information is required before these issues can be discussed and advanced.

Recommended Action 4:

NEMC to endorse a project which will examine barriers to portability of qualifications (including training and assessment, methodologies and practice) and identify a way forward.

FOCUS AREA 2: LEADERSHIP TRAINING TO SUPPORT EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

Significant achievements have occurred in this area. All jurisdictions agree that leadership of volunteers is a critical success factor in the effective deployment of volunteers and support the need for leadership training. The Australian Government's *National Volunteering Strategy, 2011*, states that 'good volunteer management and training are central to attracting and engaging volunteers' (p.24).

The Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI) has developed a three and a half day intensive residential volunteer leadership program delivered at AEMI in Mt Macedon, Victoria. All jurisdictions support this program. The leadership program is well regarded by participating volunteers however; places are limited with two residential programs offered each financial year. Demand exceeds available places. To address this shortage, the Commonwealth has funded the development of a Regional and Remote Volunteer Leadership Development program which is based on the AEMI program and developed for delivery off-campus around Australia. Several jurisdictions have also developed their own leadership and management programs for emergency management volunteers to address the shortage of places in the AEMI program.

Continued commitment to the on-going funding, development and delivery of leadership training is required.

Recommended Action 5:

NEMC to recognise the importance of and value placed on volunteer leadership programs by the AEMVF, jurisdictions and the volunteers themselves.

Recommended Action 6:

AEMI to work with the AEMVF and the jurisdictions to ensure that existing AEMI emergency management volunteer leadership programs are complemented by programs offered in the jurisdictions of similar content and compatibility.

Recommended Action 7:

NEMC to establish a working party to examine options for a long term funding model for leadership training of emergency management volunteers and develop recommendations for consideration.

FOCUS AREA 3: ALTERNATIVE LEARNING APPROACHES FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS

The nature and location of emergency management volunteers calls for access to a range of approaches to training and learning opportunities, including access to modules that can be delivered over a range of electronic media including eLearning, social media and interactive distance education through media such as Skype.

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

Several jurisdictions have introduced significant initiatives which provide access for emergency management volunteers to a range of information, support, resources and/or training and development packages online. Several jurisdictions report increased and innovative use of social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) to provide information to volunteers, potential volunteers and community members, particularly in emergencies. These resources should be shared, subject to IP permissions, across the jurisdictions with AEMI potentially acting as a central clearing house.

Initiatives in this area complement the Regional and Remote Volunteer Leadership program being conducted by AEMI which is designed to be delivered 'off-campus'.

The *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report* found that respondents thought access to a comprehensive online portal and use of new forms of information technology, including social networking, could improve awareness in the community of volunteering opportunities and provide mechanisms for providing information to volunteers and potential volunteers and promoting volunteering generally (Section 3.1).

The same report indicated that suggestions for making training more accessible and affordable for volunteers included more online training opportunities to eliminate the need for travel and the creation of interactive avenues for skills enhancement and learning (Section 3.2).

Recommended Action 8:

Jurisdictions continue to develop their alternative training methods for emergency management volunteers in collaboration with AEMI and the AEMVF, and to share best practice in training delivery arrangements.

FOCUS AREA 4: SUPPORT FOR EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERING

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

All jurisdictions support the principle of recognition and reward for employers of emergency management volunteers. The Australian Government has developed an emergency management employer recognition program for use by Australian states, territories and emergency management agencies to encourage and foster the support of employers and self-employed volunteers. The program provides tools for agencies and organisations to implement and support a Volunteer Employer Recognition Scheme (VERS). Several jurisdictions have significant initiatives in place to formally recognise and reward the support of employers. Other jurisdictions also support and recognise the contribution of employers through processes that include certificates and/or letters of appreciation.

Whilst all jurisdictions support the principle of recognition and reward for employers of emergency management volunteers (including self-employed volunteers), several jurisdictions noted that recognition and reward schemes for employers may be more meaningful for the employers at the local level rather than at a national level.

The *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report* found that a growing number of people are choosing to volunteer through work-based volunteer programs and an increasing number of organisations are adopting such programs. Nearly one-third of respondents stated that they would like to combine volunteering and work in the future (Section 3.3).

Whilst corporate volunteering could add considerable value to emergency management volunteering and could be a source of potential on-going volunteers, the roles that corporate volunteers could realistically fill (because of the nature of emergency management volunteering) may be limited.

Recommended Action 9:

Jurisdictions with support of the AEMVF continue to develop, implement, maintain and promote formal recognition and reward frameworks for employers of emergency management volunteers (including self-employed emergency management volunteers).

Recommended Action 10:

The Commonwealth, State and Territory coordinators of the Resilient Australia Awards recommend to NEMC how the awards can better promote and recognise the support of employers (including self-employed emergency management volunteers).

Recommended Action 11:

Recognition of employers of emergency management volunteers to be prioritised in the NSDR communications plan implementation.

FOCUS AREA 5: COMMUNITY AWARENESS OF THE ROLE AND VALUE OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

In 2009-10, a national communications strategy, including a national marketing campaign, was implemented to raise community awareness about the role and value of emergency management volunteers. The project was undertaken by the AGD in consultation with a working group made up of AEMVF members and jurisdictional representatives.

This project included:

- a 2010 National Emergency Management Volunteers Photographic Competition
- a travelling photographic exhibition, showcasing the capability and commitment of emergency management volunteers in Australia, which commenced at the High Court of Australia in May 2010, and
- a personal thank you message, information flyer and poster from the former Australian Attorney-General, the Hon Robert McClelland MP, to volunteers, their employers and self-employed volunteers.

Materials produced during this project are freely available from the Australian Emergency Management website.

The SCPEM endorsed the *Communications Strategy for the NSDR (2011-2021)* and underpinning six key messages in November 2011. The associated communications plan details a variety of channels to provide information to the Australian community about the NSDR and the key players in the emergency management community including the role and value of emergency management volunteers. Most jurisdictions have communication and/or marketing processes in place to raise community awareness of the role and value of emergency management volunteers.

The *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report* found that a lack of community awareness about volunteering was raised as a significant impediment to engaging new volunteers. Respondents thought that both government and community need to better promote volunteering. Respondents also identified a need to raise the profile of volunteering on a national basis and across all sectors of the community (Section 3.1).

Some jurisdictions note that community awareness-raising about the role and value of emergency management volunteers may be best achieved at the local level – by local emergency management organisations and local volunteers.

In October, 2011 Her Majesty The Queen approved the establishment of the *National Emergency Medal*. This medal is designed to recognise the unique contribution and significant commitment of persons who have provided service in response to a nationally-significant emergency. Promotion of the Medal will be a key opportunity to raise awareness about the role and value of emergency management volunteers in this area.

Recommended Action 12:

Community awareness about the role and value of emergency management volunteers to be prioritised in the NSDR communications plan implementation.

Recommended Action 13:

The Co-chairs of NEMC to write to the National Emergency Medal Administrators requesting that the AEMVF be represented on the National Emergency Medal Committee to ensure that the contribution of all emergency management volunteers is recognised and considered.

FOCUS AREA 6: YOUTH AND CULTURALLY AND LINGUISTICALLY DIVERSE PARTICIPATION IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERING

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

It is important that all sectors of the community, including people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, are represented among emergency management volunteers, now and into the future. Strategies to promote recruitment of emergency management volunteers need to include strategies that target culturally and linguistically diverse people.

Australia's population is ageing. Jurisdictions report that young people are underrepresented in emergency management volunteering. Jurisdictions also acknowledge that new ways of attracting and retaining young people are necessary and need to be explored further. For example, several jurisdictions report that school-based emergency management cadet programs are creating pathways for young people into adult volunteering.

The AGD hosted a Youth Development Program National Workshop in March 2010. An outcomes report was developed and can be downloaded from the Emergency Management in Australia website.

Workshop participants identified the following areas in youth development and emergency management that could be improved:

- collaboration between agencies and organisations
- understanding what other organisations are doing in emergency management and capability development
- identifying synergies and frameworks already in place and making linkages (for example with schools, other youth organisations and young people teaching, inspiring and motivating each other)
- identifying strengths/gaps in the sector
- communication networks (for example, sharing inspiring stories/examples)
- barriers (for example, a police check covering all volunteer organisations)
- streamlined training (for example, one First Aid qualification, interactive training)

The *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report* found that respondents felt that there was a need to promote volunteering to emerging sectors of the community, most prominently young people and those from CALD backgrounds through activities that targeted to specific community groups and new forms of technology (e.g. social networking) (Section 3.1). The *National Volunteering Strategy* states that attracting young people to volunteering is vital for volunteering in the future. Efforts to engage young people must reflect the different reasons and different ways that young people want to volunteer (p.12). The Strategy also states that engaging volunteers with a diverse range of experiences and backgrounds enables organisations to build stronger links to their local communities (p15).

Most jurisdictions are currently undertaking research into this area and/or have strategies or programs in place or are being developed to encourage young people and those from CALD backgrounds in emergency management volunteering.

Recommended Action 14:

Jurisdictions, with input from the AEMVF, to report annually to NEMC with evidence of strategies that attract, support and retain young people and those from CALD backgrounds in emergency management volunteer roles.

FOCUS AREA 7: SUPPORT TO STRENGTHEN FOCUS ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER ATTRACTION, SUPPORT AND RETENTION

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

Funds to attract, support and retain emergency management volunteers are available through the grants-based *National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience (NPA)* which is designed to assist with natural disaster resilience. The NPA combines the previous *Natural Disaster Mitigation Program*, *Bushfire Mitigation Program* and the *National Emergency Volunteer Support Fund* to create the *Natural Disaster Resilience Program (NDRP)*.

The NPA provides an opportunity for strategic initiatives within all jurisdictions, including support for their emergency management volunteer sector. Some jurisdictions 'quarantine' a portion of these funds specifically for projects that support volunteers. Additionally, some jurisdictions make available other funding sources which volunteer organisations may be able access to assist with volunteer attraction, support and retention. The AEMVF and several jurisdictions report that the current arrangements with the NPA have resulted in less clear and certain access for volunteer organisations for funding for activities that focus on volunteer attraction, support and retention. It appears that no action has been undertaken to develop a strategy to increase the focus on volunteer attraction, support and retention within the relevant grants program.

The NPA is currently being reviewed by AGD to inform the next NPA negotiations and presents an opportunity to address this matter. The current NPA is due to expire 30 June 2013.

Recommended Action 15:

Jurisdictions should review their NDRP arrangements to ensure equitable access to funds administered under these arrangements for volunteer organisations.

Recommended Action 16:

AGD to consult with AEMVF in the course of the NPA review and work with jurisdictions to maximise support for emergency management volunteers within the NPA framework.

TIME

The increasing time required for training and non-operational tasks, particularly unit administration, along with inflexible membership requirements are considered major barriers to emergency management volunteering. The first two recommendations from the 2011 National Emergency Management Volunteers Summit highlight this issue:

‘Recommendation 1 - That emergency management volunteer organisations minimise the amount of time operational volunteers are required to devote to non-operational tasks, including administrative functions’, and

‘Recommendation 2 – That emergency management volunteer organisations review volunteer membership policies to ensure attendance requirements are flexible, other than for operations and essential training.’

Recommended Action 17:

Jurisdictions and the AEMVF encourage volunteer emergency management organisations to minimise the amount of non-operational and administrative work being imposed on local level volunteers and review their membership criteria to ensure greater flexibility without compromising standards.

COSTS

All jurisdictions, using a variety of funding mechanisms and funding sources, provide funds to subsidise training, activities and equipment for emergency management volunteers. However it appears that no discrete work has been undertaken to develop a national position regarding such subsidisation.

Ideally, volunteers should not be out of pocket for participating in extraordinary training or travelling outside their unit area for training.

The *National Volunteering Strategy* states that while volunteers give freely of their time, some incur significant personal expenses to support their volunteering such as costs of transport and training. Similarly, the *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report* found that 62.1 percent of respondents thought that the costs involved in training and developing volunteers was one of the main issues facing emergency service organisations in attracting and supporting volunteers.³

The same report found that 32.7 percent of emergency service respondents thought that the costs involved in volunteering (e.g. petrol, bus fares, training courses etc) are among the main reasons why people do not volunteer for emergency services.

³ It is acknowledged that the *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report, 2011* presents the findings of a consultation primarily with volunteers and that results cannot be extrapolated to barriers to non-volunteers.

Recommended Action 18:

NEMC to endorse the principle that: 'The provision of protective clothing, essential equipment and training, for emergency management volunteers is the responsibility of the relevant volunteer organisation'.

Recommended Action 19:

Jurisdictions work with the AEMVF and jurisdictionally based emergency management organisations to identify areas/examples where emergency management volunteers are 'out of pocket' and develop strategies to address these situations.

FOCUS AREA 8: LEGAL ISSUES THAT MAY INHIBIT THE ATTRACTION AND RETENTION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

The *National Volunteering Strategy* states that ‘managing risk and legal liability is important for all not-for-profit organisations, but it can be complex and expensive’ (p21). The *National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Report* found the need to protect volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations from liability, emerged as a significant issue. Over 40 percent of respondents identified liability issues as a barrier to volunteer-based organisations engaging more volunteers. Another message to emerge from the consultations was the need to reduce the cost and complexity of volunteer insurance. One comment included in the report indicates that there is a need for inclusion and coverage of volunteers and volunteer organisations in legislation such as industrial relations, occupational health and safety, workers’ compensation and standard insurance coverage (Section 3.2).

New work health and safety laws commenced in New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, the Commonwealth and the Northern Territory on 1 January 2012. The other states are due to introduce the laws later in 2012.

Under the new work health safety laws, the term ‘volunteer’ is defined to mean a person who acts on a voluntary basis, irrespective of whether they receive out-of-pocket expenses. A volunteer is a worker if they carry out work for a ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’. All ‘workers’ including volunteer workers, are afforded the same protection under the new WHS laws.

Safe Work Australia has set up a Volunteer Assistance Line on (02) 6240 4990 for people to receive expert advice on how the new laws affect volunteers and their activities.⁴

Recommended Action 20:

NEMC, in consultation with the jurisdictions, AEMVF and other relevant organisations, undertake a national review to identify any legal issues that may inhibit the attraction and retention of emergency management volunteers and develop a strategy to address those issues including a communications strategy.

⁴ Information provided by Homeland and Border Security Division, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet 14 February 2012.

FOCUS AREA 9: COLLECTION, ANALYSIS AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH AND INFORMATION ON EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER ISSUES

SUMMARY OF PROGRESS:

The Emergency Management Volunteer Research and Information database aims to provide a single online repository for research on volunteering and volunteer issues. The database was funded through a National Emergency Management Project in 2010 – 11. When uploaded the database will:

- allow access to local, organisational, state and national research from a single location
- inform policy development and best practice approaches to emergency volunteer management
- assist with the attraction and retention of emergency management volunteers, and
- provide information and build the capacity of emergency management organisations to attract, support and retain volunteers.

In addition, the National Emergency Management Knowledge Hub is in its implementation stage and is expected to be completed in 2012. The Knowledge Hub will:

- provide improved access to information and evidence for research and decision making
- better inform future strategic directions of emergency management programs and projects
- enhance access to evidence-based research leading to improved policy development and best practice approaches to the emergency management sector
- provide a basis for sector engagement by governments
- identify gaps in emergency management research, and
- leverage off learning from experience to improve disaster resilience.

In developing the National Emergency Management Knowledge Hub and the Emergency Management Volunteer Research and information database it is important that AGD work with other key research and emergency management organisations to ensure all related volunteer research will be linked to, or incorporated into, these resources.

The Queensland Department of Community Safety has developed the Volunteer Portal which is available to all its registered volunteers and provides access to latest information, training materials and other resources. The portal has become the first platform to release information to volunteers and enables almost immediate updates to publications such as Standing Orders and Safety Bulletins. Other jurisdictions also have actions proposed or in place to address this Action item.

It is most important that emergency management volunteers are aware of these technological resources.

The *National Volunteer Strategy Consultation Report* found that respondents thought access to a comprehensive online portal and use of new forms of information technology, including social networking, could improve awareness in the community of volunteering opportunities and provide mechanisms for providing information to volunteers and potential volunteers and promoting volunteering generally (Section 3.1).

Recommended Action 21:

NEMC to note that the National Emergency Management Knowledge Hub, together with the Emergency Management Volunteer Research and Information database will provide for more accurate and reliable information relevant to emergency management volunteer issues and facilitate improved collaboration in, and access to, this information.

Recommended Action 22:

AGD to encourage the AEMVF (and the constituent volunteer organisations) to promote the availability of this data and information to their members.

REFERENCES

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