

**Senate Standing Committee on Environment and Communications
Legislation Committee**

Answers to questions on notice

**Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities portfolio
Inquiry into the capacity of communication networks and emergency warning systems
to deal with emergencies and natural disasters**

Program: Division or Agency: 1: BOM

Question No:

Topic: Information Dissemination

**Proof Hansard Page and Date
or Written Question:**

Senator Fisher asked:

Does BOM find that the current methods of information dissemination are effective? Are BOM checklists being utilised? Are such checklists (e.g. preparing for a cyclone) being routinely distributed and or advertised in the relevant communities?

Answer:

This question will be answered in three parts.

1a. Does BOM find that the current methods of information dissemination are effective?

The Bureau disseminates its forecasts and warnings through several channels which together, the Bureau finds highly effective. The Bureau works with the mass media to transmit forecasts and warnings as quickly as possible, to the widest possible audience. The Bureau also uses its widely used website to transmit emergency information to the community and works in a cooperative manner with many private sector organisations that provide meteorological information and warnings on their own websites. In addition, the Bureau provides information directly to emergency service organisations and key government stakeholders during emergency situations to ensure that the key messages are received and understood. The Bureau also maintains a weather warning service that is available by telephone for a low cost call. Finally, the Bureau also provides High Frequency (HF) and supports Very High Frequency (VHF) radio broadcast services, principally for marine users. These radio services may be accessed by anyone with the appropriate radio equipment and also provide near real time broadcasts of weather warnings and threats to those in the maritime areas around Australia, or near the coast. All these services are used to communicate warning information widely to the Australian community and provide the greatest possible lead time for a severe weather event. Public user surveys, which are conducted on a regular basis, indicate that around 96% of users agree with the premise that the Bureau's information is available in time.

1b. Are BOM checklists being utilised?

The Bureau uses internal checklists and directives as part of its technical procedures for issuing forecasts and warnings. These checklists are not published. However, the Bureau also

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has input into checklists and procedures that have been developed to advise on preparations ahead of severe weather seasons.

The Bureau works closely with State and Territory SES and emergency management groups in developing public education material relating to major weather related hazards such as thunderstorms, fire, flood and tropical cyclones. Emergency management agencies develop information for community actions to prepare for severe weather and respond to warnings. Some of this material and particularly that for tropical cyclones, include checklists. Links can be found on the Bureau's website to those of a number of emergency management authorities. Pamphlets relating to severe weather hazards are also produced in conjunction with the State and Territory authorities and are distributed to communities considered to be in areas at high risk from particular types of threats during annual pre-season public educational tours and events. In addition, action statements provided by emergency agencies to assist the community in mitigating the hazards associated with high impact weather events are included in many of the Bureau's warnings.

1c. Are such checklists (e.g. preparing for a cyclone) being routinely distributed and or advertised in the relevant communities?

As part of the preseason public education campaigns conducted on an annual basis in conjunction with the State and Territory emergency management authorities, educational material containing checklists for cyclones are routinely distributed to and advertised in communities considered to be in areas at high risk of experiencing a cyclone. In addition, public education campaigns are often held by emergency management authorities during spring to highlight the issues surrounding other high impact weather events such as fires, floods or severe thunderstorms. These campaigns are supported by the Bureau.

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Senator Boyce asked:

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Senator BOYCE: ...The other thing is that there has been a lot of talk about interoperability of emergency services communications. Have you any concerns or any involvement in that area—that they would all, presumably, be able to flip into each other's spectrums or bandwidth or services or whatever you want to call them?

Answer:

The Bureau does not use radio to communicate with emergency response agencies. We therefore don't have any direct concerns or involvement in this specific issue.

We recognise the value of the seamless exchange of information, and are working towards increased delivery of spatially enabled forecast and warning information, with temporal information. This will be a gradual process supported in part by the Next Generation Forecast and Warning System.

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Senator Boyce asked:

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Senator BOYCE: I might just follow up on the questions around wind farms. Have you communicated this to the wind farm organisations or to the planning authorities such as the local government authorities?

Answer:

The "Draft National Wind Farm Development Guidelines - July 2010" (<http://www.ephc.gov.au/node/449>) developed by the Environmental Protection and Heritage Council (EPHC), identify the Bureau as one of the stakeholders that should be consulted during the early stages of wind farm planning. The Bureau's requirements and contact details are provided in this document. As a key stakeholder, the Bureau has provided input to the current draft and will continue to work with the EPHC to address the Bureau's requirement in future releases of this document.

The Bureau also plans to release information in late September 2011 on its external web site, to inform wind farm proponents and the public about the issue of interference to Bureau radars from wind farm turbines.