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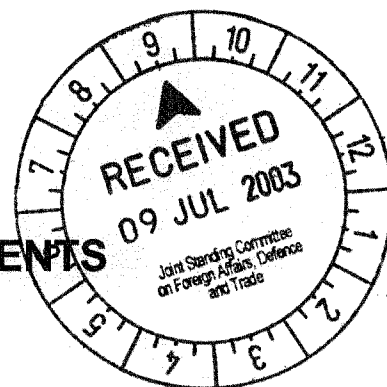
Watching Brief on the War on Terrorism

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NORTHERN TERRITORY COUNTER DISASTER ARRANGEMENTS



Legislation

The Northern Territory Government recognises the inevitable nature of emergencies and disasters and their social, economic and environmental consequences in all areas of the Northern Territory. Accordingly, it has provided for the establishment of the Northern Territory Counter Disaster Organisation and appropriate procedures under the provisions of the Northern Territory *Disasters Act* of 1982 and its amendments.

The *Disasters Act* prescribes a three tiered approach to counter disaster planning, operational control and support coordination, and provides special powers through the declaration of a State of Emergency or State of Disaster.

Whilst the *Disasters Act* makes provision for special powers to be exercised when required, the effectiveness of the counter disaster arrangements is achieved through the development of local, regional and special counter disaster planning committees and the application of counter disaster plans at these levels.

Scope

The Counter Disaster Organisation provides for the establishment of effective emergency management arrangements that focus primarily on emergency preparedness, response and recovery. However, all participants in the counter disaster organisation understand and respond to the following aspects of what is nationally recognised as comprehensive disaster management practice:

- a. **Prevention.** Major prevention (mitigation) measures are generally determined and controlled at Territory Government level with opportunity for input by regional bodies through a wide range of public consultative processes; for example environmental impact studies, public meetings and specific interest group consultations.
- b. **Preparation and Planning (Preparedness).** This requires maximum input from all agencies within the community to identify improvements to levels of safety capable of being implemented at all levels and ensuring that adequate awareness, understanding and participation (including training and exercising) is achieved.
- c. **Response.** The focus of response operations is the saving of life, protection of property and re-establishing an acceptable level of safety in the area affected.
- d. **Recovery.** The aim of recovery operations is to return an affected community to normal by satisfying personal and community needs, and to restore services to a level where recognised government processes can resume responsibility for their ongoing management.

Principles

The counter disaster arrangements in the Northern Territory are based on the application of the following well established and proven principles:

- a. Prevention measures remain the responsibility of the authority charged by statute with the responsibility.
- b. Responsibility for preparedness, response and recovery rests initially at local community level. If local resources cannot cope they are augmented by support mobilised at regional level. Finally, the resources of the whole of the Northern Territory and, if required, those of the Commonwealth and other states are mobilised.
- c. Control and coordination of emergency operations is conducted at the lowest effective level.
- d. Emergency preparedness, response and recovery operations should be conducted with all agencies carrying out their normal functions wherever possible. This concept is generally expressed as "normal people" carrying out their "normal functions" under "abnormal circumstances".

TERRITORY DISASTER ORGANISATION

The Northern Territory Counter Disaster arrangements are aimed at ensuring that the system of committees established under the *Disasters Act*, and supported by the Northern Territory Emergency Service (NTES), provide planning, response and recovery requirements for major emergencies or disasters.

The purpose of the Territory Disaster Organisation is to mitigate the effects of disasters and major emergencies on the community by:

- a. minimising the immediate loss of life and injury and damage to property, and
- b. reducing the long term effects on the community's welfare and the Territory's economy.

Control of counter disaster arrangements is achieved through a three tiered system of Counter Disaster Controllers and Counter Disaster Committees. Controllers and Committees are established at Territory, Regional and Local levels.

Hierarchy of Plans

Counter disaster planning in the Northern Territory is based on a hierarchal system, originating with a Northern Territory plan which provides the basis for subsequent regional, local and special counter disaster plans relating to specific threats. Although the planning system is hierarchal, all plans are required to stand alone and in the event of an emergency or disaster only one plan should be required to be activated.

Territory Level

Overall control of counter disaster operations throughout the Northern Territory rests with the Territory Counter Disaster Controller. Under the *Disaster Act*, the Commissioner of Police is the Territory Counter Disaster Controller. The main function of the Territory Counter Disaster Controller is to exercise control and direction of counter disaster operations.

The Territory Counter Disaster Council is the senior body established within the Territory Disaster Organisation and consists of:

- a. the Territory Counter Disaster Controller who is the Chairman;
- b. the Director, Northern Territory Emergency Service who is the Executive Officer of the Council; and
- c. at least three other members appointed by the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

Organisations and agencies invited to participate on the Council may vary according to the subject matter under consideration.

The Council is responsible to the Minister for the administration of the *Disasters Act*, and subject to the directions of the Minister is to:

- a. advise, assist and, where it considers necessary, give directions to the Director, Northern Territory Emergency Service in respect to counter disaster planning;
- b. examine and approve Territory, regional, local and special counter disaster plans;
- c. determine the needs, whether financial or otherwise, of the Territory in the event of a counter disaster operation and advise the Minister accordingly; and
- d. in respect to the conduct of counter disaster operations, to advise and, where necessary, give directions to the Territory Counter Disaster Controller.

Advisory Committees

A number of advisory committees have the responsibility of providing specialist advice and assistance to the Territory Counter Disaster Controller. These committees are:

- a. Counter Disaster Animal Welfare Advisory Committee, and
- b. Fuel Emergency Advisory Committee.

Functional Groups

Functional Groups have been established, and other supporting organisations identified, to ensure the provision of effective response measures during counter disaster operations. These groups and organisations are offered advice and guidance by the Counter Disaster Council during emergency operations.

Functional Groups consist of Government Departments, Statutory Authorities and other agencies that participate in emergency management response and recovery operations under the guidance of the Territory Counter Disaster Controller. Existing Functional Groups are:

- a. Medical Group,
- b. Public Health Group,
- c. Public Utilities Group,
- d. Engineering Group,
- e. Transport and Stores Group,
- f. Emergency Cyclone Shelter Group,
- g. Survey and Rescue Group,
- h. Welfare Group,
- i. Communications Group,
- j. Food Group, and
- k. Media Group.

Regional Level

Regional Local Counter Disaster Planning Committees are responsible for the development of effective counter disaster preparedness, response and recovery arrangements to deal with identified emergency/disaster threats affecting their region and the production and amendment of Counter Disaster Plans.

Members of Regional Counter Disaster Planning Committees are the Regional Counter Disaster Controller (the Regional Police Commander) who is Chairperson, a permanent officer of the Northern Territory Emergency Service, who is the Executive Officer and additional members representing key participating organisations with the region. Organisations which provide members could include Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Environment, PowerWater, Department of Health and Community Services and Defence. Organisations and agencies invited to participate on the Committee may vary according to the subject matter under consideration.

Local Level

Local Counter Disaster Planning Committees are responsible for the development of effective counter disaster preparedness, response and recovery arrangements to deal with identified emergency/disaster threats affecting their local area and the production and amendment of Local Counter Disaster Plans.

The Local Counter Disaster Controller (the officer in charge of the local Police Station) is the Chairman of the Local Counter Disaster Planning Committee and a permanent officer of the Northern Territory Emergency Service is the Executive Officer. Additional members representing the key organisations within the district are represented on the committee.

Operations Centres

To effect operational control and coordination, a system of emergency operations centres (EOC) is established at Territory, regional and local levels. EOC are the locations at which information is received, collated, analysed and disseminated, and the provision of resources is coordinated. The appropriate Counter Disaster Controller will usually direct EOC. In addition to EOCs established by specific counter disaster organisations, functional groups also establish their own operations centres during counter disaster operations.

Liaison with Commonwealth and the States

During disaster operations, the interface with Commonwealth and other States is conducted through the Territory EOC. All requests for Commonwealth assistance and interstate support during time of disaster are directed through the Territory EOC. This should not be confused with normal cross border assistance provided between agencies of different states and the Territory as a component of day to day incident management