Program 1.2

Question No. 54

Senator Humphries asked the following questions at the hearing on 14 February 2012:

1. What information can the Department provide to demonstrate that the DisasterWatch application has reduced the amount of emergency triple zero calls, other than the number of downloads?

2. What was the cost of the DisasterWatch Smartphone application?

3. What are the continued costs of operation?

4. What authoritative sources are fed to the application and how regularly is the information updated?

5. Does the application provide for emergency warnings? If not why not?

6. Will the application provide for emergency warnings in the future?

7. Does the application only reiterate information readily available on websites?

8. How many DisasterWatch application downloads were made to non-Australian smartphones or devices?

9. Is the application available on any other platform besides Android and Apple? If not why not?

10. What order of precedence are disasters given on the application?

11. Does the application offer emergency information for regions or geolocations? If not why not?

12. If the application closes after downloading information on a particular location and an internet connection is lost, will information already downloaded be available for reviewing without further download?

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

1. In the 2010-2011 financial year, Telstra as the Emergency Call Person (ECP) answered 8.49 million calls and of those, 5.35 million were connected to emergency services organisations for assistance. 37% of those calls (3.14 million) were assessed to be non-genuine calls. Non-genuine calls include those seeking information, vexatious calls and accidental dialling. In disasters, a significant amount of calls to Triple Zero are from the public seeking information and are not calls for life threatening or time critical police/fire/ambulance assistance.

   DisasterWatch, launched on 8 December 2011, has been downloaded just over 13,500 times and was created to facilitate public access to national disaster information, in particular extreme weather events, derived from other authoritative sources. Because of this the

application provides the community with an easily accessible source of accurate and timely information, without resorting to calling Triple Zero.

The Department will monitor ECP data to identify trends in non-genuine calls. It is anticipated that the availability of DisasterWatch will reduce non-genuine calls.

To ensure the Department understands the utility of the, DisasterWatch app, it is linked to a community engagement website where indicative information can be collected regarding its use. This will be important in assessing the impact it has in reducing unnecessary calls to Triple Zero.

2. The total cost of the DisasterWatch project (financial year 2011-2012) is $110,000. This development cost was funded from the National Emergency Management Program (NEMP) 2011-2012.

3. NEMP funding for the project will conclude on 30 June 2012. As existing IT capability was leveraged to host this application, day to day running costs, which are minimal, will be met from the Department's budget. The costs of any upgrades will be considered as part of the suite of education and community awareness products the Department produces in support of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

4. Authoritative sources include Government hazard agencies in all States and Territories and national organisations such as the Bureau of Meteorology and the ABC.

There are 39 feeds from 22 different organisations on the application.

The application operates on a fifteen minute refresh cycle.

5. Users of the application can access warnings that appear on the websites of the hazard agencies e.g. users can see warnings issued by the Bureau of Meteorology by accessing the Bureau's website via the application.

There are no emergency warnings provided directly to users via push alerts or any other mechanism via the application. The primary function of DisasterWatch is to provide information, rather than emergency warnings. Emergency warning capability is being progressed separately.

6. There is no plan to provide emergency warnings (alerts) to users directly from the application.

7. Generally yes. However, the application, using a mobile platform, also contains hazard information that is publicly available e.g. a series of Action Guides on topics such as cyclone, flood, lightning, storm and pets in emergencies.

8. As of 22 February 2012, 199 downloads of the Apple version were made overseas from 10,526 total downloads; 20 downloads of the Android version were made overseas from 3079 total downloads.

9. No, the application is only available on Apple and Android platforms. In order to ensure the most efficient use of available funds, these platforms were selected as the majority of smartphones in Australia use these platforms.

10. There is no precedence of disasters – the order is chronological, that is, the most recent information available from each feed is displayed.

11. The application offers information on a national, State or Territory basis only. Inclusion of regions or geolocations may be considered for future versions if/when this capability is available from the source organisations and agencies.

12. No, the information on the app is only available with internet connectivity. This ensures that the information is up to date within the 15 minute refresh period.