

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

Sub Program 2.1.2

Question No. 165

Senator Barnett asked the following question at the hearing on 27 May 2009:

In relation to Sub Program 2.1.2 Emergency Management:

- a) What work is currently being undertaken in relation to a federal policy of bushfire response?
- b) Is there a national policy on bushfire response? Could you please provide this?
- c) What work is currently being undertaken in relation to emergency communications services? Please advise.
- d) What liaison takes place between the Department and the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in relation to emergency management and natural disaster response? What work have ASPI undertaken in this regard? Please provide details.

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

a) Bushfire response is the responsibility of the States and Territories. The Commonwealth provides support to the States and Territories through a \$14 million per year contribution to the National Aerial Firefighting Centre, and the Disaster Resilience Australia Program of \$23.6 million in 2009-10, and \$26.85 million from 2010-11 onwards. The Commonwealth Attorney-General also held a forum on the reduction of bushfire arson with a number of practical outcomes, such as:

- commissioning a national strategy for the prevention of bushfire arson, to be agreed at the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management (MCPPEM) in November;
- creating an online resource to share information on arson prevention between practitioners, researchers and policy makers; and
- updating current training modules to include bushfire arson crime prevention strategies and investigatory techniques.

This follows consideration by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-General in April of new offences carrying penalties of up to 25 years for bushfire arson causing death or serious harm.

b) As outlined above, the Commonwealth supports States and Territories to exercise their primary responsibility for bushfire response through a number of mechanisms.

c) The Attorney-General wrote to state and territory emergency management ministers in May 2009 regarding concerns that have been raised about the emergency 000 service. The letter indicated that this matter would be discussed at the next Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management – Emergency Management in November 2009.

The Commonwealth has committed \$26 million in funding to assist the States and Territories in the development of a telephone based emergency warning capability. This includes \$15 million for the establishment of a National Emergency Warning System (NEWS). As this is a state and territory capability, the Victorian Government on behalf of the other states and territories, will manage the process to acquire the NEWS - a system capable of sending warnings to fixed line telephones and mobiles based on billing address. Funding has also been provided for an Expression of Interest which will seek market input on the feasibility of establishing a capability to deliver warnings to mobile telephones based on the location of the handset.

The Attorney-General's Department has awarded a contract for the development, build and ongoing operation of the Commonwealth funded Location Based Number Store - a secure, central database

to hold and geographically identify Integrated Public Number Database (IPND) data. This database will interface with the NEWS and Western Australia's existing system to allow for the delivery of geographically targeted warnings.

The Attorney-General's Department is a member of the two national committees responsible for radiocommunications issues: the National Coordinating Committee for Government Radiocommunications (NCCGR) chaired by NSW with representatives from all States and Territories, and a number of relevant Commonwealth agencies; and the Law Enforcement and Security Radio Spectrum Committee (LESRSC) with representatives from all State and Territory Police and Commonwealth security and law enforcement agencies. Both the NCCGR and LESRSC are working with ACMA on the proposed harmonisation of government spectrum in the 403-520 MHz range.

d) Departmental officers have had informal discussions on emergency management and natural disaster issues with ASPI. ASPI have not undertaken any work on behalf of the Attorney-General's Department on emergency management, although they have produced policy papers which deal with emergency management issues.