

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

**Output 2.4**

**Question No. 70**

**Senator Humphries asked the following question at the hearing on 20 October 2008:**

We have seen many significant disasters worldwide over the past two years.

- (a) What document or documents describe Australia's national plan to deal with a disaster on the scale of, say, the recent Burma cyclone?
- (b) Is there a nationally agreed plan which:
  - i. provides for clear lines of authority,
  - ii. outlines accountability mechanisms, and
  - iii. sets out the legislative underpinning for such a plan?
- (c) Can a copy of this plan be made available to the Committee?
- (d) What assurance can you give to the committee that Australia is well placed and resourced to respond to and recover from such a disaster?
- (e) In the event of such a disaster, which senior Commonwealth officer would head the Federal Government's role in disaster management/recovery? Can the Committee be provided with a copy of the instrument of Commonwealth appointment or delegation of this officer?
- (f) Can the Committee be provided with copies of all approved plans in relation to emergency/disaster management for each Commonwealth department/agency including those endorsed by all governments?

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

- (a) States and territories have primary responsibility for the protection of life and property. There are a range of national hazard specific emergency management plans managed by various Commonwealth departments and agencies. These include the *Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN)* and the *Model Arrangements for Leadership during Emergencies of National Consequence*. These documents dovetail into the State Emergency Management Plans and combined would provide the planning basis upon which a response to an emergency of any scale would be facilitated.
- (b) Each state and territory has its own emergency management legislation, structures, plans and procedures that can be used to respond to an impending or actual emergency. As indicated in the above answer, there are a number of national hazard specific emergency management plans which cover authority up to the Ministerial level. The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management – Emergency Management (MCPPEM-EM) resolved at their most recent meeting on 6 November 2008 to undertake further development of a National Catastrophic Disaster Plan.
- (c) A copy of the plans mentioned in the response to question (a) and (b) above can be made available.

- (d) Australia's emergency management arrangements are benchmarked against most other like nations on an ongoing basis and have been found to be extremely robust. National planning arrangements are well tested with plans being revised by Emergency Management Australia as part of a national consultation process on an on-going basis. With regards to resources, the Australian Government has contributed to a number of capability enhancement projects in recent times that are designed to ensure that we are well placed to respond to disasters. These include \$15m over four years to develop a national Urban Search and Rescue capability, \$68.9m over four years to develop the Australian Tsunami Warning System, \$30m over four years to develop local government capacity, \$16m over 4 years to assist with emergency volunteer attraction, recruitment and retention strategies, and \$17.8m over 4 years to develop a national capability to respond to chemical, biological, radiological emergencies.
- (e) The previously mentioned *Model Arrangements for Leadership during Emergencies of National Consequence* provide for the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to come together to lead a national response to a large scale disaster or emergency. Were these arrangements to be invoked the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet would facilitate national coordination in the event of an emergency or disaster of national significance. The Australian Government Disaster Response Plan identifies the Federal Attorney-General as the Cabinet Minister responsible for disaster related matters. Upon request by an affected state or territory for Commonwealth assistance during an emergency the Attorney-General will authorise the Director General Emergency Management Australia to activate the plan. From that time on, the Director General Emergency Management Australia coordinates the Australian Government response to assisting the affected state or territory.
- (f) The Attorney-General's Department is responsible for the following approved plans:
- *Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN)*
  - *Commonwealth Government Plan for the reception of Australian citizens and other Approved Persons evacuated to Australia from overseas (COMRECEPLAN)*
  - *National Response Plan for Mass Casualty Incidents involving Australians Overseas (OSMASSCASPLAN)*
  - *Australian Contingency Plan for Space Re-entry Debris (AUSCONPLAN SPRED)*
  - *Commonwealth Government Maritime Radiological Response Plan (COMARRPLAN)*
  - *Commonwealth Government Aviation Disaster Response Plan (CAVDISPLAN)*

There are many other hazard specific emergency management plans managed by various Commonwealth departments and agencies. Emergency Management Australia can provide contact details for Liaison Officers within these departments and agencies for copies of the plans.