

ATTACHMENT H

NATIONAL EMERGENCY PROTOCOL

1 Introduction

- 1.1 At the Special Meeting of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) on 27 September 2005, the Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) noted that national emergency arrangements are well developed and are coordinated across Australia through a range of inter-governmental fora.
- 1.2 COAG also noted the importance of a consistent and coordinated response by Australian, State, Territory and Local Governments at the onset of any national emergency. Leaders noted that the current arrangements have the capacity to manage any substantial emergencies. Leaders agreed to develop a protocol to ensure effective coordination and communication in the unlikely event of an emergency of greater magnitude.
- 1.3 The National Emergency Protocol (NEP) describes the communication arrangements between the Prime Minister, Premiers, Chief Ministers and the President of the ALGA during a national emergency.

2 Purpose

- 2.1 The NEP implements the decision of COAG on 27 September 2005 to develop a Protocol to ensure that in the event of an emergency agreed to be of national significance (national emergency):
 - Australia's national, State, Territory and Local Government leaders can be contacted and are able to confer at all times; and
 - that leaders agree to coordinate key messages to the public.

3 Principles

- 3.1 The NEP is an "all hazards" overarching document which provides for the coordination of communications both between the leaders and with the public during an imminent or actual emergency of national significance. It complements a range of emergency management plans and arrangements, nationally, as depicted in Annexure 'A'.
- 3.2 It is not intended for the NEP to replace any aspects of those plans, or to prevent or impact on the exercise of functions under other plans, arrangements or legislation.
- 3.3 States and Territories have primary responsibility for the management of emergencies within their jurisdictions. The role of Local Governments and emergency controllers/coordinators (or equivalent positions) within jurisdictions during a national emergency is recognised and unchanged.

4 Process for Agreement

- 4.1 The Prime Minister and the First Minister(s) of an affected State or Territory (the relevant First Minister(s)) may agree that a national emergency exists when an actual or potential emergency situation occurs. This may include responding to natural or human-caused threats such as a disease outbreak, severe weather or environmental emergency. In deciding whether a national emergency exists, factors which may be considered include:
- the size, severity or nature of the emergency;
 - the threat or perceived threat to public safety and/or security;
 - the contribution of multiple jurisdictions to managing the emergency;
 - the impact on multiple jurisdictions; and
 - the impact on industry of national importance.
- 4.2 Either the Prime Minister or a relevant First Minister may initiate communication to determine the need to agree on a national emergency.
- 4.3 In deciding whether to agree that a national emergency exists, all other First Ministers and the President of the ALGA will be consulted, where practicable, before agreement is reached to categorise an event as a national emergency.
- 4.4 On agreement being reached between the Prime Minister and the relevant First Minister(s), all other First Ministers and the President of the ALGA will be informed that a national emergency has been agreed and that the arrangements under this NEP are activated.
- 4.5 A national emergency will cease by agreement between the Prime Minister and relevant First Minister(s). All other First Ministers and the President of the ALGA will be informed when the agreement ceases.

5 Communications between Australian, State and Territory and Local Government Leaders

- 5.1 States and Territories will provide to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (through the Protective Security Coordination Centre) and update as necessary, a list of contact numbers to enable communications between the Prime Minister, First Ministers, the President of the ALGA, their senior officials and offices.
- 5.2 State and Territory Governments will communicate with relevant Local Governments during a national emergency through existing arrangements. The Commonwealth Government will communicate with the ALGA during a national emergency.

6 Public Communications

- 6.1 Communication between government and the public during an emergency is an essential element of emergency management. In a national emergency it will be critical that these communications:

- provide appropriate and nationally-consistent advice for public information and safety;
- ensure accurate and timely information is provided to the public; and
- build and maintain public confidence in the ability of authorities to cooperate to prevent and/or manage the emergency.

6.2 Under the NEP, the Prime Minister, First Ministers and the President of the ALGA will consult on the key leadership messages to be conveyed to the public immediately following an agreement on a national emergency. This will include consultation on who should deliver those messages.

6.3 Communications with the public will adhere to the following core principles:

- public safety is the highest priority;
- communications should be regular and immediate;
- information must be accurate, with statements supported by established facts; and
- information provided should not compromise any subsequent investigation(s).

7 National Emergency Call-Centre Facilities

7.1 The Commonwealth Government will establish a National Emergency Call-Centre facility that can be activated in one hour from notice of a national emergency. This National Emergency Call-Centre is intended to serve as a first point of contact for the public in a national emergency and will complement existing call-centre arrangements.

8 Supporting Documents

8.1 All jurisdictions will be consulted and will agree on the development of supporting documents to enable effective operation of the NEP.

9 Review of NEP Arrangements

9.1 The NEP will be reviewed by the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments, in consultation with the ALGA, after two years, or earlier as agreed.

9.2 The NEP may be amended by agreement in writing between the parties at any time.

