

Foreword



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It is a pleasure to contribute to the *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. As I write this, my thoughts are with the thousands of people in New South Wales and surrounding regions who were affected by recent flooding and weather events. As these events unfold, emergency services personnel continue to work tirelessly to provide aid to communities.

The Australian Government plays a vital role in coordinating and strengthening the support provided by the states and territories to local communities. Resources and contributions include financial assistance for relief and recovery.

On the back of Australia’s 2019–20 ‘Black Summer’ bushfire season, the Australian Government took steps to bolster its ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from crises, including natural hazards and the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department of Home Affairs has been at the forefront of these efforts. We have built capability and capacity and adapted operating models and internal structures to respond to evolving threats and challenges. The department has also progressed recommendations from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

The department has established the Emergency Management and Coordination Group and the National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) to improve the delivery of nationally coordinated emergency response and recovery activities. The NCM was established in March 2020 with an initial goal of coordinating the cross-jurisdictional response to non-health-related aspects of the COVID-19 pandemic. This work complemented the efforts of state and territory governments. The NCM has been effective in getting experts working together and has encouraged collaboration among stakeholders. This has been integral to the nationally consistent approach.

In the early days of the pandemic, the NCM identified issues for government, industry and community sectors affected by the pandemic and quickly pulled together necessary responses. The NCM quickly gathered people together to troubleshoot problems and resolve issues particularly related to the early warning of emerging issues, liaising with peak industry bodies and maintaining engagement with stakeholders. The structured communication channels employed by the NCM created a trusted environment to examine problems and work through solutions. As such, the NCM cultivated positive relationships among stakeholders, some of whom had never worked with each other before. Collaboration was achieved through extensive consultation, communication, negotiation and compromise and constantly linking the relevant parties.

In March 2021, the NCM reached its 12-month milestone and, while we would not have anticipated last year that we would still be here today, the NCM continues its work on preparing and responding to events that adversely affect life in Australia. The NCM has become a significant capability for Australia, one that can be readily adapted to different crises. The NCM currently continues to assist with the flood response and recovery efforts in New South Wales.



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