

## Newsletter November 2013

### Background

A fundamental assumption of Emergency Management is that response starts at the most immediate level, and is scaled up as required. It is clear that across the spectrum of Emergency Management - Planning, Prevention, Preparation, Response, Recovery (PPRR) - Local Councils, as the tier of Government closest to the community, can contribute in many ways to PPRR.

An engaged and responsive Council will provide both a safer community, in terms of natural hazards (flood, fire, storm, coastal erosion, heat waves), and a more sustainable environment to support their communities.

The Health Check is conceived as a process for councils to evaluate their roles in emergency management, which will:

- provide a platform for a holistic approach to Emergency Management
- enhance engagement with partners and stakeholders
- improve Local Government resilience, both organisationally and through their communities improve the overall planning for emergency management
- facilitate efficient utilisation of resources
- clarify the role of Local Government in relation to other organisations and communities
- facilitate communication and integration with other Emergency Management agencies.

The tool allows a Council to assess their own performance in Emergency Management and to identify opportunities for improved outcomes, with a simple reporting format for ease of communication with the Council and the community.

The format and indicators will be designed to facilitate inclusion in the Integrated Planning and Reporting Framework for Local Government.

### Activities June – November 2013

#### What does Local Government have to say?

As a first step in developing the Health Check the project team interviewed Local Government staff engaged in Emergency Management from metropolitan and regional councils. The interviews were mostly with staff members acting as Local Emergency Management Officers, and/or Chairs of the Local Emergency Management Committee. Where possible other staff were also included. The interviews were based on a structured format but to capture the diversity of experience across the State conversations were not constrained by a fixed format.

Issues of concern for improving Emergency Management across Local Government included:

- A greater need for prioritisation and integration of Emergency Management across Council functions, with an opportunity to improve co-ordination between Councils and the Local Emergency Management Committees
- The importance of continuity and experience in a context of no formal requirements for Local Government Officers in Emergency Management and the lack of resources
- The need for improved data availability and sharing of information to inform risk assessments and improve planning
- Better engagement with the community to develop an understanding of risk and a shared responsibility for preparation, response and recovery.



Engaging Local Government in a more holistic approach to Emergency Management can inform discussions about broader emergency management issues within the context of the priorities of each council.

## What does the literature offer?

A desktop Literature Review of materials published online, and broader Internet data bases evaluated international contributions to Emergency Management for relevance to the project. The search revealed five studies, from different international jurisdictions, that explored similar issues and approaches as the Health Check.

These case studies were compared to provide a consistent set of interests that relate to good practice Emergency Management. For any tool to maintain relevance it needs to be based on fundamental aspects of the work, not on contextual issues that can change.

The two practise -based examples, from the UK and NZ, were backed up with semi-structured email interviews with involved personnel. The focus was on the lessons learnt from the implementing organisations.

The conclusions from the literature review are also consistent with the outcomes from preliminary interviews and discussions with council members.

The current strategy is consistent with, and can be informed by, the other studies. Further design will ensure that the Health Check will fit practically and effectively into the context of environment management by Local Government in NSW.

## What do the statutes have to say?

### **Local Government Act 1993 (NSW)**

The *Local Government Act 1993* (NSW) makes no specific mention of emergency management. However the Act does say that 'A council has the functions conferred or imposed on it by or under any other Act or law'. The table to s 22 lists some Acts that confer functions on local governments. The list includes obligations to "prepare for emergencies" (*State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*), and to support combat agencies, and, as well as functions under the *Environmental Planning and Assessment Act 1979*, and the *Coastal Protection Act 1979*.

### **State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989**

(NSW) does not specifically direct roles to Local Government in an emergency. In preparing for an emergency, Local Government is to Chair, and to provide executive support for, the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC).

The General Manager of the local Council is to chair the LEMC and is also a member of the Regional Emergency

Management Committee, which is chaired by the Regional Emergency Operations Controller (REOCON).

The LEMC is not a committee of council. It is established by the Act to develop the Local Emergency Management Plan (LEMP) and to assist the Local Emergency Operations Controller (LEOCON) in the performance of his or her duties. It is the LEOCON, not Council, who is "responsible for controlling ... the response to an emergency that affects only that [Local Government] area" unless the State Emergency Management Plan identifies a specific combat agency to lead the response to a particular hazard (s 31).

In developing the LEMP, the LEMC must give effect to policy directives from the State Emergency Management Committee and it is accountable to the Regional Emergency Management Committee (s 29).

Outside the functions listed above, Local Government has roles directed by the State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) and State Sub-Plans and Supporting-Plans.

The Health Check provides a means for Local Government to understand, and promote the roles that contribute to Emergency Management. Council needs to continue to provide services that support the community during an emergency and afterwards. Local Government, in understanding and preparing for these events, provides an essential contribution to Emergency Management.

## What's next?

The SCCG is running a Forum on the 11<sup>th</sup> December, in Sydney, to engage Local Government staff in designing the Health Check so that it can be an effective and efficient tool for Local Government.

The SCCG is seeking a wide representation of Local Government roles will be able to contribute to the design of the Health Check.

The basic design will ask for responses to questions related to Emergency Management roles in Local Government. These questions address all aspects of PPRR as well as "higher level" questions related to organisational capacity and capability.

## Timetable for the Project

Forum	11 December 2013
Forum Report	18 December 2013
Draft Health Check	23 January 2014
Consultation Draft	30 January 2014
Consultation close	28 February 2014
Final Draft and Report	23 March 2014
Final Deliverables	28 March 2014
Grant Acquittal	28 March 2014

For more information contact:

Dr. Ian Armstrong  
Project Officer – Special Projects  
Sydney Coastal Councils Group  
02 9288.5802  
[ian@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au](mailto:ian@sydneycoastalcouncils.com.au)