

Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response Discussion Paper

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Defence Strategic Review

1. The Defence Strategic Review (DSR) outlined the geostrategic risks that the nation faces and the need for the Australian Defence Force (ADF) to focus its resources, force preparedness, readiness, and combat effectiveness on its primary objective of defending Australia. It is critical that the ADF be in a position to respond to regional contingencies.
2. The DSR highlighted the reliance by State, Territory and local governments in recent years that has required Defence to be called upon to frequently make larger contributions to domestic disaster relief efforts as well as support to the community, such as during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, Defence is not structured or appropriately equipped to act as a domestic disaster recovery agency concurrently with its core function, in any sustainable way. The DSR recommends that Defence should only be used as a last resort.
3. Defence supports the Australian community through a range of programs and initiatives. At the heart lies the Defence Assistance to the Civil Community (DACC) initiative. DACC provides the means through which Defence can assist State and Territory Governments, non-Defence organisations or agencies to deliver emergency or non-emergency support in times of need.
4. It is the aspects of DACC support that both the ADF's DSR and the Department of Home Affairs subject discussion paper aims to address with respect to the challenges and opportunities to manage national domestic crises into the future.

Defining the National Crises

5. On the surface it appears that both review documents have an emphasis on climate change related events as the primary focus for development of strategies in support of national crisis responses and recovery capabilities.
6. However, National & Defence Strategies also recognise the non-geographic security threats, including cyber, space and long-range missile capabilities. The threat of a foreign military force using long-range precision strike weapons is now considered to be a realisation required to be addressed as a matter of urgency and priority.
7. The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) and Australian Emergency Management Arrangements (AEMA) handbook outlines the Australian Government's approach to preparing for, responding to and recovering from crises. Although the AGCMF defines **human-induced** events to include but not limited to cyberattacks, space junk, malicious critical infrastructure sabotage or kinetic terrorism or bio-terrorism, and non-naturally occurring radiological or other wide area environment contamination events. The definition is not specific from a Domestic perspective in its context to acts of war against the Nation's combatants, non-combatants and infrastructure.
8. Kinetic attacks on infrastructure will see heavy reliance on Emergency Services first responders. In effect, the Australian Civil Community will be relied on to provide domestic emergency response in support of both National and Defence crises management activities. The Commonwealth, State and Territory emergency service management authorities will

need to respond to crises events (whether natural and/or human-induced) under challenging conditions including being able to operate in Restricted or Prohibited airspace.

9. By example, the Ukraine emergency service respond to emergencies daily, which unfortunately includes missile strikes on many civilian structures as well as huge industrial facilities. The approximately 60,000 responders across the country work under unimaginable conditions. They battle fires, dig through the rubble of ruined buildings in search of survivors, clear land mines, and recover the dead—all while being shot at and shelled by Russian forces.

10. **Recommendation 1:** *The developed Commonwealth alternative capabilities for crises response should also consider specific human-induced events as outlined in the DSR. These human-induced events may be either in isolation or compounding to natural disasters along with its cascading impacts. This will ensure the strategy provides an integrated approach with Government, non-government organisations, businesses, communities and individuals playing a critical role in delivering coordinated resilience and response activities to confront all hazards.*

11. **Recommendation 2:** *Consideration should be given to engage the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) to arrange an invitation for Senior Ukraine State Emergency representatives to provide a briefing to Australian Emergency Services Management agencies/authorities on their first-hand experience and lessons learnt from their current crises. The 2024 Australian Disaster Resilience Conference may be an appropriate forum for an invitation to present and facilitate these discussions. The subject briefing would also assist with determining crucial spatial data sets essential for development and incorporation into the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) National Joint Common Operating Picture (NJCOP).*

What models could the Commonwealth explore to replace or supplement support currently provided by the ADF during domestic crisis?

National Emergency Service Reserve

12. In light of the DSR recommendations, the ADF is considering the re-introduction of a Ready Reserve scheme. Given the previous scheme was somewhat problematic from a budgetary and return on investment perspective, any new scheme will have to be structured to overcome these challenges. The Ready Reserve scheme is intended to contribute to the recruitment of ADF's required permanent and Reserve overall uniformed workforce to meet its future potential threats and capabilities.

13. Similar to an ADF Reserve scheme, consideration should be given to the establishment of a National Emergency Service (NES) Reserve scheme. This would provide voluntary options for members of the public to contribute and support National crises incidents.

14. The NES Reserve would also need to offer diverse roles, opportunities pay and conditions of service commensurate to that of the ADF Reserve in order to attract recruitment. The Employer Support Payment Scheme (ESPS) could be extended to provide financial assistance to employers of NES Reserve members and self-employed NES Reserve members, when the Reserve member is away from their workplace during eligible periods of service.

15. **Recommendation 3:** *Consideration should be given to the establishment of a National Emergency Service (NES) Reserve. Establishing caps on annual recruitment*

numbers phased in to achieve final total numbers over a number of years may assist with any Government fiscal constraints.