

Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Summit 2005:

A successful opportunity for sector education, networking and development.

Australia has 500,000 volunteers that form the backbone of its emergency management and emergency services capability. In recognition of the vital contribution that the volunteers make to Australia, and that it was the UN Year of the Volunteer, an inaugural Volunteers Summit was held in October 2001. Themes discussed then were recognition, legal protection, training and funding. Arising from the 2001 Summit was the establishment of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum (AEMVF)¹. Also launched in October 2001 was the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Review into Natural Disasters. The Summit provided input into that review. The report released in late 2003 called on all levels of government to provide increased assistance to volunteer emergency management organisations.

In April 2005 The Emergency Management Volunteers Summit – ‘Value your Volunteers’ was held in Canberra, Australia. The Summit was hosted by Emergency Management Australia and supporting partners.

The Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management attended the summit, as well as sponsoring the attendance of three volunteers from the emergency management sector. MCDEM supported attendees were: Sara Williams, Volunteer Programme Coordinator, MCDEM; Sarah Holland, Nelson Tasman Emergency Response Team; Gavin Wallace, Wainuiomata Bushfire Force and Mel Day, Rotorua Civil Defence Volunteers Manager. Other New Zealand attendees included representatives from St Johns, NZ Police, NZ Fire and Rural Fire and Local Government.

The 2005 Volunteers Summit built on the aims and objectives of the inaugural Summit (2001) with the overarching goal of developing a stronger volunteer sector. It acknowledged that:

- the volunteer aspect of emergency services are a critical part of their functioning
- there is no substitute for the volunteers in this area

Key themes of the 2005 Summit were:

- To identify emerging current issues and trends within the volunteer emergency management sector.
- To develop recommendations and strategies to address the issues identified.
- To develop a Summit Report for distribution to people of influence in the community.
- To provide networking and interaction opportunities for emergency management volunteers.

The summit was organised as an open-forum event, with electronic conferencing tools being used to enable all attendees to provide input and feedback on issues facing emergency management volunteers. Results from sessions were made available on the Internet immediately following the summit, while a detailed report is being compiled by Emergency Management Australia.

The summit was a very valuable opportunity to strengthen links between NZ and Australian emergency management agencies and for all the attending agencies to be involved in developing strategies and programmes to support emergency management volunteering. It also provided an opportunity to share New Zealand best practice with the Australian emergency management-volunteering sector.

¹ See Appendix 1 for a profile of the organisation.

This report details the initial outcomes of the summit that are of relevance and interest to the CDEM sector. It has been compiled by the Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management in consultation with the sponsored attendees.

A. Background: CDEM volunteers in New Zealand

Much of the viability of civil defence organisations within New Zealand hinges on the strength and commitment of a few thousand volunteers who provide unpaid assistance to the sector in the form of time, service and skills. These volunteers are used in many areas of civil defence emergency management (CDEM) – welfare, registration, EOC roles, sector post establishment and running, rescue, and more. Although not all areas in NZ use volunteers to provide these services (instead relying on council staff, or arrangements with agencies in their communities), there are many involved across the country.

Without the support of these volunteers the ability of NZ to respond to CDEM situations, both declared and un-declared, would be greatly reduced. For those organisations who are using volunteers and who intend to keep using volunteers, either through choice or because no alternative exists, the ability to recruit and retain volunteers is one of the most critical factors in maintaining operational efficiencies because without sufficient and appropriate volunteers the ability of many CDEM organisations to function will be compromised.

In recent years there has been much anecdotal and evidential information to suggest that rapid social and economic change within the community is threatening the foundations of many volunteer-based services. For many organisations new members are scarce and the pressure on existing volunteers is increasing. Many CDEM volunteers are also involved in other voluntary areas in the community. It has become apparent that factors such as a competitive economic climate, rural and urban mobility, and fluctuating population distribution are increasing the demands for, and the complexities of, service delivery from volunteers. This is affecting not only CDEM but all other areas of volunteering - Scouts, sports coaching, swimming clubs, meals on wheels and similar care organisations are all experiencing a decline in volunteer numbers.²

The challenges to the CDEM sector within this climate are many. Not only do providers need to take into account changing demographics such as economy, rural/urban drift, ethnic and migrant groups and fluctuating population, but they also need to consider the fact that these changes are not temporary, but are fundamental and as such affect the way that CDEM will be provided in NZ in the future.

The AEMVF Summit sought to address these kinds of issues as they face emergency management volunteers across a variety of agencies.

B. Key Presentation

Volunteers and their Communities: Drivers for change. Mr Len Foster AO, CEO Australasian Fire Authorities Council.

Len Foster's speech on the drivers for change was a useful reminder to the emergency management sector that its volunteers and organisations are operating under a unique set of pressures at this time. Foster stated that an understanding of the ways to further benefit volunteers and their communities will require an understanding of some of the drivers leading to change. This kind of understanding will require a movement away from the historical model of

² Background information was taken from the CDEM Volunteering Situation Report July 2004, available at www.civildefence.govt.nz.

the emergency services as insular with a para-military attitude, which does not easily facilitate the way such agencies relate to the modern community.

Foster described the drivers for change as:

1. A very significant change in community expectations in the last decade:
 - the move to public sector accountability and scrutiny
 - a public questioning of performance and accountability
 - a changing public perception of the responsibility of the emergency services
2. A change in legality of the situation of volunteers and volunteer organisations:
 - legal actions around OSH, coronial inquiries
 - legal actions taken against emergency management volunteers
 - subsequent pressures on organisations to perform/manage risk
3. Media participation and 'angles'
 - there is an increasing need to engage media as a strategic partner
4. A trend to community empowerment
 - community now the most important strategic partner the EM services have
 - this requires an informed, involved and prepared community, as EM volunteers cannot do their job alone
5. A change in workforce roles
 - pressures on families and individuals in relation to work-life balance and changing workforce roles reduce time/flexibility that people have to volunteer
6. Economies of scale
 - larger organisations are more cost efficient to run, especially in regard to training
 - larger organisational structures can both support and enhance volunteerism by providing information sharing and joint training opportunities

Foster stated that successful volunteers have to be connected to their local community. "Volunteers are the 'glue' of the community that contributes to social capital." He added that there are several factors that facilitate the formulation of linkages;

- That volunteers have local identities, are known and trusted and know the local scene and what is needed.
- That they are seen as 'value-adding'
- That they get community support and recognition – leading to better retention, and
- That volunteers perform a valuable social function.

"While it is imperative to enhance the local community, it is equally important to develop the corporate - that is the organisational - structure to support the local units," he said. Mr Foster went on to state that 'economies of scale' allow us to do things we could not do as individuals. These can include activities from creating a business strategy to implement plans, to attracting money and resources – government and sponsorship, providing a better and more integrated service delivery, being better able to manage risks and providing a better capacity to manage and adapt to change.

C. Key Issues identified at the Summit.

Forum feedback was provided on all aspects of discussion at the Summit. Key points of relevance to the CDEM sector are presented below, under the topics that directed the particular forums discussion.

1. Areas most in need of attention.

Delegates were asked to discuss the areas they felt were most in need of attention, and to offer some reasons as to why they are so critical to the EM volunteers sector. Comments from NZ delegates in response to issues raised are included where relevant in shaded text.

Legal Issues & Protection

- There is a perceived need for up-to-date litigation training and access to legal requirement information around such issues as child protection, criminal history check requirements, privacy laws, information sharing, insurance needs and exposure.
- There is a suggestion that recruitment standards should be generic across all responding emergency services and should include cross training to a certain level.
 - ❖ This kind of standardisation is provided by NZQA and will be strengthened for the CDEM sector through the RAPID programme.

Recognition

- It is important to recognise that many volunteers perform the same role as career staff.
- Important for local government to be involved in recognition efforts. Where appropriate this might involve financial recognition to support groups in their roles.
- A need exists for more public education on the role of the emergency organisations this will also provide and raise recognition levels.
 - ❖ It is important to consider whether each organisation should be responsible for its own public education, or if a combined programme would be more effective.

Funding

- Non-government employers (esp small employers) would benefit from reimbursement for loss of productivity/profitability while volunteers are away from work.
- Taking into account the current increasing demands on volunteers (see legal above) it would be appropriate to provide paid administration and volunteer managers for many EM voluntary organisations.
 - ❖ A level of support in this area is provided by some councils in NZ, especially in relation to rural fire. It would be fantastic if all councils acknowledged and supported their CDEM volunteer teams in this way.
- Funding needs to be relevant in size to the service to be provided and its value to the community.
 - ❖ Volunteer organisations should look carefully at opportunities to share resources and funding, especially from council sources.
- Funding competition between volunteer organisations can cause issues and must be managed carefully.

Training

- National standards (and national accreditation) for all training benefit volunteers and their organisations, as well as allowing employees to better understand the value of voluntary training.
- There is a need for resource sharing across the sector to efficiently use limited resources.

- ❖ Equipment required for CDEM volunteering must have a defined purpose and the possibility of resource sharing and other organisations equipment should always be considered.
- Recognition and promotion of training qualifications to the community and business will help.
- Training needs to be flexible – such as train when volunteers are available, not the trainer.
- Training achievement can be used as a form of recognition – by giving volunteers accredited training and exercises they are able to achieve personal satisfaction. In addition gaining qualifications is particularly popular with younger volunteers as they can add qualifications to their CV.

2. Key pressures affecting volunteers and strategies for dealing with these.

Delegates discussed key pressures, both controllable and uncontrollable. Delegates were also encouraged to suggest what kind of changes in current practice would assist in dealing with those pressures. *Best practice* examples of effective management techniques and programmes were also discussed and documented.

Those identified below are relevant to the CDEM sector and other EM services in New Zealand. Many of these pressures are reflected in the drivers for change discussed above. Issues identified specifically by NZ delegates, that were not indicated by the forum in general, are detailed in shaded text.

What are the key pressures currently being experienced by volunteers?	What changes in the management of volunteers would assist in dealing with these pressures?
Legislative pressures: Complexity of legislation and pressures of compliance expectations, OSH, increased accountability; Fear of litigation	Better legal protection for volunteers Government legislation to minimise risk of litigation Creating national policies on the legal aspects of volunteering Policies and procedures to enable organisations to offer appropriate support in counselling and debriefing to all staff and volunteers
Increasing regulatory, administrative and legal requirements making it increasingly difficult to focus on core business and increases demands on already stretched resources – often leads to: Expansion of roles outside core competencies (eg. To admin, management)	Permanent administrative support at a district/regional level (remove administrative tasks from volunteers) Adequate resourcing for volunteer HR management – using appropriately skilled people for these jobs. A successful volunteer group must retain a feeling of responsibility for their own actions/administration, and not just be hired (unpaid) help. <i>Best Practice: Surf lifesaving Aust has a leadership development programme</i>
The drive to establish equity between staff and volunteers – ie. Paid and un-paid co-workers.	Better communication management – getting information to volunteers and listening to them as well. A perception exists in some NZ CDEM that

	<p>when there is an emergency, the local council staff will work 8-5pm, and then go home. It is only 'out-of hours' that they want to see volunteers. This ignores skills and experience available. This problem, where it occurs (some councils do man EOC's on all shifts with council staff), could be resolved by better communications and planning for resource use.</p> <p>The key to 'equity' is recognition of competencies, which should over-rule the issues of paid and unpaid staff.</p> <p>Volunteers need to have a significant say in the volunteer process and can't necessarily be represented by paid staff.</p> <p><i>BP: Surf Lifesaving Aust has regular two way open communications with management and volunteers</i></p> <p><i>Many organisations use regular newsletters, internet and email with a feedback forum, which are very popular with volunteers. Volunteer charters are also widely used and popular. Many peer support programmes assist.</i></p>
<p>Actualisation of the work force makes it difficult for people to commit to volunteering and predict when they will be working – less people have the job security to drop work to respond to emergencies</p>	<p>A legislative framework that compensates employers for volunteers absence (eg. Employer tax-breaks)</p> <p>Recognition and support for the employer of the volunteer</p>
<p>Higher and changing public expectations: increases the need to get our the message on who we are and what, how and why we do it</p>	<p>Better education for the public as to the role of EM volunteers</p> <p>A government officer/minister for EM volunteers. Government sponsored education programmes within schools to introduce children to EM volunteering at an early age</p> <p>Creation of a political and community recognition of volunteers as being an integral part of the EM framework</p> <p>Empowering the volunteer agency to say no when necessary</p> <p><i>BP: Tas Ambulance uses local volunteers to be the face of the organisation – keeps organisation relevant and promotes recognition</i></p> <p><i>Sports Bay of Plenty are involved with Rotorua CDEM in an annual training exercise for local secondary schools and have taken on eight members of a local high school in the EOC as part of their community service certificate.</i></p>

<p>Financial demands of volunteering –costs that are either not reimbursed or volunteers do not seek reimbursement for such as travel, time lost for work, equipments, meals bought out of home etc</p>	<p><i>BP: CFA/SES Victoria have a discount card scheme which provides volunteers discounts and membership options at various shops and services</i></p> <p><i>'Fly-buy' scheme in St John NZ offers volunteers points for attending various events (more for less popular events). These are converted to dollar vouchers.</i></p> <p><i>Wage reimbursement to employers when volunteers called out (SA Ambulance)</i></p> <p><i>Paid volunteering leave provided by some of the big corporates (eg. Safeway, Rio Tinto, Coca Cola, Major banks and accounting firms)</i></p>
<p>Increasing training requirements and expectations, obligations and commitments</p>	<p>Flexible training rosters i.e., weekends, more distance learning (helps control costs for smaller centres).</p> <p>Formal recognition of training – recognition of the professional status of volunteers</p> <p>Local business, local government and central government could provide funding for EM scholarships and training.</p> <p>A structure should be in place that provides a 'career' within the organisation, and an incentive to remain a member.</p> <p><i>BP: Nationally developed training programmes such as EMA Mt Macedon and RAPID</i></p> <p><i>More than a Band-aid VAOAT project developed strategies for training and recruitment.</i></p>
<p>Family pressures</p>	<p>Time management training for volunteers</p> <p>Support to families (eg. Childcare) while volunteers attending incidents.</p> <p>Reward families for their members. participation. BBQ's, dinners, other events. (In NZ this is assisted by NZFS Commission Grants)</p>
<p>Attracting volunteers - the key pressure for most in NZ CDEM is the inability to attract volunteers. If obtained (following an emergency or media publicity) the challenge becomes to retain them.</p>	<p>Volunteers need to be active to remain engaged.</p>

3. Volunteers improving themselves

Delegates were asked to comment on what they felt volunteers could do to improve themselves, and comment on any best practice examples of this kind of improvement that they were aware of. Issues identified specifically by NZ delegates, that were not indicated by the forum in general, are detailed in shaded text.

Techniques for improvement:	Best practice examples
<p>Take a flexible approach to sourcing time and expertise from community members. Eg: rather than expecting them to join ask them to help with a project or share their skills.</p>	<p>Source volunteers from other organisations, or reorganise volunteer groups to cover more than one area and have everyone crossed trained.</p> <p>A new volunteers information package is provided by some organisations –details all the ways that you can support the organisation.</p> <p>'Friends of the Service' in CFA – not part of a response team but do the fundraising – very effective and frees up response volunteers</p> <p>Recognise that a 2-3 year commitment is a positive contribution – don't expect people to volunteer for life anymore!</p> <p>Recruit the right person for the right job - volunteering to do something doesn't mean that you are suited to it.</p>
<p>Market and recognition of employers for supporting volunteers</p>	<p>SA SES has employer BBQ functions, plaques and letters to all employers of new volunteers.</p> <p>NZ Police and NZFA have a structured 'employer of volunteer' recognition programme, and St John Amb NZ is implementing one.</p> <p>Many employers also take advantage of the skills people acquire through voluntary training such as fire wardens and first-aid. Employers also look for volunteering work on CV's.</p>
<p>Use local media to publicise good news stories and increase community awareness</p>	<p>Identify and train media officers to handle media enquiries.</p> <p>A partnership approach to local media and local govt media units (newsletters, publications) provide information, stories and photo ops.</p>
<p>Build strong networks with business, government, community and corporate bodies.</p>	<p>Formal partnerships between local government and SES regarding responsibility for support arrangements.</p> <p>Local newsletters in communities assist with public profile – for example in NZ Rural community constables have a regular column.</p> <p>EM volunteers attend major community events as part of ongoing education eg. Street fairs and local shows. Volunteers could organise themselves into event teams, and seek financial contribution for their work.</p>
<p>Build strong networks with other voluntary organisations</p>	<p>Co-location of SES/CFA and ambulance in Victoria builds strong relationships and maximises resource use.</p> <p>Multi-lingual public education can involve other community organisations.</p>
<p>Develop and implement exit interviews</p>	<p>These should form part of an organisations SOP's.</p>

Encourage and maintain a professional image and always be positive when talking about your agency	
Increase your awareness of funding sources, engaging key people in the community to act as advocates for the organisation.	Engage with local Fire chief or Police Commander, and local councillors.
Give support to social events in the organisation – this is an important part of volunteering especially in more remote communities.	Recognition of the support provided by volunteers families in the form of gift baskets or vouchers.
Support mentoring programmes	AFAC has a leadership development programme – “Future Leaders” Encourage people who ‘retire’ from active volunteering to remain involved to provide advice, support, post-event debriefing etc...
Embrace change (if we always do what we’ve always done we’ll always get what we always got	
Support nationally accredited training programmes	Secondary students receive accreditation towards their school qualifications through their volunteer national accredited training Younger volunteers tend to want formal qualifications that can go onto a CV – this needs to be supported. Ensuring that CDEM volunteers who are operational are trained in CIMS to assist inter-agency workings. <i>BP: ACT SES and RFS use centralised recruitment and inductions to minimise cost and provide some standardisation.</i>

4. The role of local government and the community

In this session delegates discussed the role of local government and community in working to enhance volunteering outcomes both for voluntary organisations and for the communities in which they operate. A particular focus of the session was on multi-agency partnerships and programmes that would assist, or are assisting, to support positive outcomes for EM volunteers. Comments from NZ delegates in response to issues raised are included where relevant in shaded text.

Community engagement:

- Working to evaluate local community risks with the community leads to an active involvement of community in preparedness for emergency situations.
- Education and awareness of the community can be increased through open days, operational exercises, schools, letter box drops etc...
 - ❖ Many communities are not aware that they are served/protected by volunteers, and it is critical that volunteer organisations work to address this lack of understanding.
- Community information sessions are very valuable for increasing recognition.
- Visible and publicised mitigation activities such as fuel reduction burns and storm warnings, flood awareness raise public knowledge and involvement.

- ❖ A visible presence means being able to be identified as a member of CDEM and not to be confused as being a Fire Fighter or Police Officer.
- State emergency services awareness week raises profile and leads to new volunteers
- Target communications to schools eg. Protecting your pets in fire season
- Use other services to get additional monies for a project (eg Rotary, Lions). These organisations will often sponsor a computer or similar if the volunteer agency will present for them.
- Australia Day awards from local govt to volunteers raise profile

Agencies working together:

- Townsville – combined community awareness campaign/resources
- Brisbane Community Safety Project. This is a multi-agency programme where a team of people goes into target streets and offers home fire alarm checks, neighbourhood watch, CPR briefs etc.
- Community task forces which involve all agencies and allow joint input into EM preparedness
- Multi-agency management committees at state and local levels are beneficial
- Multi-agency exercises and cross-training are essential to build relationships
 - ❖ Place emphasis on the training CDEM volunteer organisations can provide under MOU's within the community. An open willingness to assist other volunteer groups will build stronger relationships, they will know what we can do to assist them in times of emergencies and we will know their capabilities.

Working with local government:

- Local government can provide recognition through awards, media and presentations
 - ❖ Local government (or central government) could coordinate on behalf of volunteer groups to help with purchasing using bulk-buying power. This could be done between ES volunteer organisations as well.
- Within local government a community officer who works to bridge gaps and supply information that affects the voluntary agency is very useful.
- Surf Lifesaving SA works with local government on providing lifeguard services during the week whilst the volunteers are at their normal place of work. This enhances the relationship between the paid and 'un-paid' professionals.
- Representation on local disaster planning committees is important for EM voluntary agencies
- Local government is in a good position to lobby central government on issues over legislation protection for volunteers.

Corporate Sponsorship and support:

- Identification and partnerships with major corporate sponsorship can assist with media planning and funding.
- Firewise is a programme between State Govt Departments and business to promote community fire safety.
- SLSA = corporate partnership with Telstra and DHL, links corporate sector at national level with organisations to provide benefits to volunteers at grassroots.
- A nationally recognised standardised discount card for all ES volunteers would be a good recognition tool.
- Agencies could form links with businesses that have synergistic interests, eg. St Johns and NRMA (AA in NZ).

Delegates were then asked to consider what they saw to be 'roadblocks' to these kinds of developments and programmes.

Roadblocks to progress:

- A need to legitimise EM and ES volunteering as an 'employee of choice'.
- Child protection programmes and youth-related OSH issues can discourage youth programmes
- Lack of acknowledgement of professional capabilities of EM volunteers
- A need to better identify and indemnify CDEM volunteers.

D. Outcomes for New Zealand CDEM Volunteering

A review of the key issues raised at the AEMVF, and their relevance in the current NZ CDEM volunteering environment, has led to the development of a range of initiatives to support and strengthen the sector. These are detailed below.

1. National level initiatives: 2006 onwards

The Ministry of CDEM will, through its volunteering programme, seek to enhance the profile of the CDEM volunteering sector and increase resource efficiency through:

- Producing a guideline to advise on the management of spontaneous volunteers.
- Establishing a bi-annual national photo competition for Emergency Management Volunteers in Action;
- Undertaking, with interested emergency service partners, a project to assess the cost of CDEM volunteering to individuals involved;
- Reviewing options for bulk purchasing of items needed by CDEM volunteers, particularly in relation to Response Team equipment
- Establishing a hosted section on the MCDEM website for CDEM volunteers to share resources and strategies

2. Multi-agency initiatives

MCDEM is committed to working with sector partners – specifically NZ Fire and Rural Fire and St Johns, to address the issues that affect all our volunteers. A multi-agency working group has been established and outcomes from the group will be communicated to the sector through the MCDEM website and other communications tools. The MCDEM contact for the group is Sara Williams (sara.williams@dia.govt.nz).

Appendix One: AEMVF Profile

An Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum was formed as a result of a recommendation emanating from the National Volunteer Summit, which was held in Canberra in October 2001, as part of the International Year of Volunteers.

The inaugural meeting was held on 11 April 2002, at which the purpose of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum was determined to be:

A national forum representative of the volunteer emergency management sector, to facilitate better communication between the organizations within it, and to provide advocacy for the sector.

The objectives of the Forum are:

- To foster communication between one another and with Government.
- To share information.
- To provide advocacy, particularly on behalf of the non-government organisations.
- To focus on the issues of Recognition, Training, Legal Protection and Funding.

The membership includes:

- St Vincent de Paul
- St John Ambulance
- Australian Red Cross
- State Emergency Services Volunteer Association
- Australian Council of State Emergency Services
- ADRACARE
- Australasian Fire Authorities Council
- Australasian Volunteer Firefighters Association
- Volunteer Ambulance Officers Association
- ANGLICARE
- Surf Lifesaving Australia
- Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol
- Australian Volunteer Coast Guard
- Volunteer Rescue Association
- The Salvation Army
- Volunteering Australia
- Emergency Management Australia (ex-officio)

Major General B W. Howard. AO, MC, ESM (Retd) is the elected Chair. He can be contacted by email at hor_i_howard@austarnet.com.au

The Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum has established a website to facilitate communication. The website address is: www.emergencyvolunteersforum.org