

MEDIA STATEMENT



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AUDITOR GENERAL FINDS GAPS THAT COULD AFFECT WA'S RESPONSE TO EMERGENCIES

Findings from a study by the Auditor General, tabled in Parliament today, reveal gaps in the state's emergency management framework that could affect WA's ability to respond to emergencies.

"Making sure these gaps are fixed and the framework is working requires clear direction and leadership, and cooperation and coordination amongst the numerous agencies that are part of the state's emergency response capacity," said Auditor General Colin Murphy.

In examining the state's preparedness for emergencies, Mr Murphy's office looked at whether WA has an emergency management framework and plans in place to manage emergencies, particularly those on a large scale.

The audit looked at whether the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC – chaired by the Commissioner of Police with executive support from FESA), and emergency management agencies, have assessed their capability to respond and know how well prepared they are for emergencies.

Responding to the report, emergency management agencies consider that they have substantial operational experience, capability and capacity to respond to major emergencies.

The detailed study found that:

- There is no formal process for regularly reviewing and deciding for which hazards the state should prepare, so WA may not be preparing for the right hazards.
- Twenty-four state emergency management plans are in place but thirteen are overdue for review, with ten being overdue by five years.
- Gaps in emergency management regulations could potentially affect agencies' capacity to respond to emergencies include:
 - ❑ Six hazards identified by SEMC including bushfires have no prescribed hazard management agency.
 - ❑ There is no provision to allow agencies to share personal information about people affected by emergencies.

- The SEMC has not assessed how well prepared the state is overall for large-scale emergencies.
- Individual agencies have not assessed their preparations against potentially large-scale incidents. They have limited systems to record and disseminate lessons and there is no shared crisis information system or common approach to managing incidents.
- The SEMC lacks sufficient detail about how well prepared local government is for emergencies .

Mr Murphy has recommended that the State Emergency Management Committee and Emergency Management WA, should:

- formally and regularly assess for which hazards the state should prepare
- assess the state's level of preparedness at least annually, identifying gaps and significant risks
- review procedures for plan preparation and approval so that agencies can prepare their plans in a more timely way
- define key roles within the emergency management framework
- ensure that agencies have a common or compatible crisis information management system in place, that they can access other agencies' operations centres when needed and ensure agencies document all procedures.

Mr Murphy also made a number of recommendations relating to emergency management agencies focussed on ensuring plans and capability are regularly reviewed, and staff are adequately trained.

"While these challenges are serious, I am satisfied that the gaps identified in the report are recognised and understood, and that action will be taken to address them," said Mr Murphy.

The Chair of the SEMC has responded to the report and agrees that there are areas for improvement, which would enhance the state's framework and arrangements. The response states that the SEMC will consider the Auditor General's recommendations while continuing to strive to improve the capacity and capability of the state to identify emerging threats, preparing for and responding to major emergencies.

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