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Lost opportunity?: An evaluation of the senate's report on disaster management

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Lost Opportunity?

An Evaluation of the Senate's Report on Disaster Management

Julian Anthony Yates, BA

**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of**

Bachelor of Arts Honours (Politics and Government)

**in the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social
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Abstract

The inability of Australian federal governments to dominate the Senate has enhanced the Senate's ability to review and make recommendations on public policy issues. In 1994, the Senate Standing Committee on Industry, Science, Technology, Transport, Communications and Infrastructure reviewed and made recommendations on Australia's emergency management arrangements. Australian emergency management has developed in a complex environment where it has been heavily influenced by incremental development from its civil defence origins in the Second World War and by factors including international developments, federalism and the hazards impacting on Australia. The Senate Committee's review was a unique opportunity for a high level investigation of the adequacy of the arrangements. The review, although it produced forty five recommendations, failed to consider a range of significant issues in Australian emergency management. These omissions include federalism, the impact of economic rationalism and the need for national emergency management legislation. The inquiry conducted by the Senate Committee failed to engage key stakeholders, notably local government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The inquiry also focused on administrative as opposed to policy issues. As a consequence of these deficiencies, it failed to result in significant change to Australia's emergency management arrangements.

Declaration

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- 1. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- 2. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or
- 3. contain any defamatory material.

Signature: 

Date: *1 DEC 99*

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- 1. Analysis of Recommendations

Chapter 1: Introduction

On the 15th of October 1992, the Senate agreed to a motion by Senator Dominic Foreman that the then Senate Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure conduct an inquiry into and report on:

The capacity of public sector authorities to plan for, forecast and respond to major disasters and large-scale emergencies, fully respecting and utilising the skills and capabilities of volunteer organisations. (Foreman, 1992, p 1882)

Over the next eighteen months, the Committee inquired into Australia's arrangements to cope with the impact of disasters on the community. On 29 June 1994, the Report of the inquiry (the Childs Report) was tabled in the Senate by the Committee's chairman, Senator Childs, although by this time the Committee's title and function had become the Standing Committee on Industry, Science, Technology, Transport, Communications and Infrastructure, hereafter the Senate Committee.

During the inquiry, the Senate Committee held hearings across Australia, took evidence from numerous witnesses either in person at the hearings or from written submissions, visited facilities operated by state and federal governments and travelled to relatively remote locations such as the Bounty Gold Mine in Western Australia.

The Childs Report presented forty-five recommendations for state and federal governments to contemplate and implement, but managed to avoid making any overall comment or recommendation on the effectiveness and suitability of Australia's arrangements to manage disasters and emergencies.

Assessing the effectiveness of Australia's emergency management¹ arrangements is an important task. Australia is subject to a wide range of natural and man-made² hazards, ranging from tropical cyclones, floods, earthquakes, industrial explosions, transportation accidents, exotic animal diseases and other calamities that can cause widespread deaths, injuries and property losses to affected communities.

¹ **Emergency Management:** 'The range of measures to manage risks to communities and the environment. It involves the development and maintenance of arrangements to prevent or mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters in both peace and war.' National Emergency Management Committee (1996, p 1).

² Attempts have been made to introduce gender-neutral alternatives to man-made, such as socially induced or socially created, but to date none have achieved any level of acceptance. For the purposes of this paper, man-made is used in a gender-neutral sense. See for example Department of Defence (1992) or Hood & Jackson (1991).

Neither the community nor government ignores these hazards. Australia has in place a complex set of arrangements, systems and organisations designed, either in whole or in part, to mitigate³ their adverse effects. Emergency services, such as the police, fire brigades, state emergency services and ambulance services react to disasters and emergencies to save life and protect property. Land-use controls exist in many locations to prevent development in flood prone areas. Building codes establish standards that enable buildings to resist the impact of earthquakes, fires and extreme winds. Government and philanthropic agencies such as Departments of human services, the Red Cross, Salvation Army and others provide financial and other assistance to disaster affected persons. Government agencies use licensing, standards and training to regulate activities such as the use of hazardous materials, operating aircraft and other transport services with the aim of minimising hazards to individuals and the community.

However, Australia's arrangements are complicated by a federal system of government where responsibilities are split between levels of government and duplication, conflict and omission exist side by side. Recent trends in government across the world are adding to the complexity of the arrangements. The impact of managerialism and the public verses private enterprise debate are increasing uncertainty about the role of government during disaster. This is taking place during a period in which society's vulnerability to natural and man-made hazards is showing an upward trend. Urbanisation and rising populations put more people at risk and the demand for scarce land forces some lower socio-economic groups to live in at risk areas. Global warming and climate change may cause greater loss from meteorological phenomena while the failure of human technology such as nuclear power stations can cause tragedy on a huge scale (Chapman, 1994a).

The economic losses caused each year by disaster are significant. In 1996, the dollar losses alone caused by natural hazards in Australia was estimated to be \$1.3 billion (Hodges, 1997), and this does not include the human cost of deaths and injury. In 1995, for example, tropical cyclone Bobby caused seven deaths, caused widespread flooding and cut Western Australia's road and rail links with the Eastern States for some days, resulting in disruption to sections of the economy reliant on these links

³ **Mitigate/Disaster Mitigation:** 'Activities taken to eliminate or reduce the degree of risk to life and property from hazards, either prior to or following a disaster.' US National Fire Protection Association

(WA State Emergency Service, 1996). Reducing these costs through improved hazard management can benefit the whole community through lower insurance costs, lower demand on scarce public funds and less of the trauma (physical and mental) that results from deaths and injuries.

In addition to the direct costs incurred responding to disasters and emergencies, substantial sums of money are spent each year providing emergency services and undertaking mitigation actions to minimise the impact of hazards. In 1996-97, for example, the national cost of providing fire services was estimated at \$860 million (Steering Committee for the Review of Commonwealth/State Service Provision, 1998, p 523). These sums of money represent scarce public resources that could be redirected to other activities or not spent at all if the adverse effects of hazards could be reduced through better management.

In view of the gravity of Australian public policy for the management of emergencies and disasters, it is important that the arrangements are evaluated to ensure that the best possible outcomes are being achieved. This is both in terms of effectiveness, that is the ability to mitigate the adverse effects of hazards, and of efficiency; that is whether the funds spent are achieving the best return on investment.

The need for evaluation of public policy is articulated by Wildavsky (1979, p 213) who argues that 'Evaluation should not only lead to finding better policy programs to accomplish objectives but also to altering objectives themselves.' Wildavsky argues that it is not enough to simply assess whether a program is meeting its objectives effectively and efficiently. Good evaluation also seeks not only to find better ways of achieving the objectives, but better objectives. Too often, the objectives become the end rather than the means to a greater community good. He also pointed out the need for evaluations to be 'External, multiple, independent, and continuous to avoid self-serving behavior.' Wildavsky (1979, p 6). Obstacles to good evaluations include: uncertain program objectives, selecting an inappropriate type of evaluation, self-perpetuating policies, decentralisation, time and the obstacle of overcoming obstacles (Wildavsky, 1979, pp 215 – 220).

Palfrey, Phillips, Thomas and Edwards (1992), citing Goldberg and Connolly (1982), identify reasons why evaluations of public sector programs and activities are vital.

cited by Yates (1997, p 25).

Evaluations are an important means of providing for public accountability, enabling effectiveness and efficiency to be measured and allowing judgments to be made on the allocation of resources. Evaluation also permits new ideas to be compared against proven methods, with the aim of reducing the risk of policy failure through implementation of incomplete or inadequately constructed new initiatives. Evaluations also allow assessment of the best ways and means of delivering public services by comparing different methods and techniques across the public sector. Palfrey, et al. (1992) also discuss obstacles to evaluation. They note that faults with the evaluation itself may exist through poor or inappropriate objectives, insufficient time, inadequate consultation and unrealistic recommendations. External to the evaluation itself are obstacles such as resistance to change, political interference, and failure to sell the results of the evaluation and the evaluation being seen as irrelevant by decision-makers.

Mauch and Birch (1989) suggest that there are two approaches to the conduct of evaluations. The first approach evaluates the procedures used in a particular program to determine if the procedures are effective in enable the program to achieve its outcomes. Mauch and Birch (1989) describe this form of evaluation as formative. A formative evaluation attempts to provide answers to questions on how well managed the program under consideration is; it does not attempt to ask whether the program is itself an appropriate strategy to achieve the desired outcomes. To address this question, Mauch and Birch (1989) recommend use of the summative evaluation approach, where the outcomes achieved by the program concerned are evaluated to determine whether the program is effective. Some evaluations will attempt to undertake both formative and summative approaches.

Hamburger (1992), in discussing the ability of Australian Parliaments to conduct evaluations, noted that they were often considered as relatively ineffective. This was because of issues such as the strong party system in the Australian political system, the absence of incentives to give credit to good performance, and the ad-hoc nature of parliamentary based evaluations which are often initiated for political purposes and in the absence of a coherent review structure. He also noted that the members of Parliament themselves are often ill equipped to conduct evaluations, lacking skills, knowledge and experience of that function. Jaensch (cited in Gavin, 1994) notes that parliamentary committees may be less effective as policy review mechanisms when

the Government dominates the committee's chamber, when party political issues dominate committee deliberations or when Governments can ignore or reject committee recommendations without significant cost. Godfrey (cited in Hynd, 1996) is critical of many Parliamentary committee reports. In his view, this is because they mix policy with administrative detail, emphasise process over outcome, fail to endorse effective work by the public sector and cause public servants to concentrate on defending their actions in place of seeking service improvement.

On the other hand, many writers take a positive view of the role parliamentary committees in general, and Senate committees in particular, have in reviewing the work of Government (see for example: Marsh, 1995; Uhr, 1997; Gavin, 1994; Young, 1997; Sibraa, 1991; Galligan, 1991 and Mulgan, 1996). Official statements in the Parliamentary Briefing paper on the operation of Senate committees are clear: 'The Senate's comprehensive committee system allows the Senate more effectively to perform its role as a house of review and in keeping the Government more accountable for its actions.' (Parliament of Australia, 1998, p 9).

The Senate receives particular attention because of its frequent ability to be able to act independently of the government of the day. The Senate may be viewed as having two principle roles – that of the 'States' house where the interests of the states are represented, and that of being the house of review of government operations. Turner (1993) and Mulgan (1996) discuss the first role, noting that in practice the Senate's effectiveness as the champion of the states has been very limited. The discipline of the party system has usually prevented individual senators from going against the party line when a policy detrimental to their state comes to the vote.

Uhr (1997), Mulgan (1996) and Marsh (1995) note that the ability of the Senate to undertake the second role of reviewing government policy has waxed and waned dependent on the capability of the government of the day to dominate it. Where the government of the day held a majority in the Senate, the Senate has usually been relatively ineffective in reviewing government operations – party discipline ensures that government senators support the government's position. Marsh (1995) noted that the period between 1901 and 1909 was characterised by Senate independence and conflict with the government of the day. The ability of strong parties after 1909 able to command majorities in the Senate when in government, reduced the Senate's effectiveness as a house of review. This condition persisted until the rise of the

minority parties, in particular the Australian Democrats, following the defeat of the Fraser Government in 1983 (Marsh, 1995). Subsequent governments have been unable to achieve control of the Senate, being forced to negotiate support on specific issues with the minor parties (Marsh, 1995; Mulgan, 1996; Uhr, 1997). This has enabled Senate committees to become effective mechanisms for the review of government operations (Marsh, 1995; Uhr, 1997).

The ability of the Senate to oppose the will of the government of the day has resulted in occasional outbursts of venom by frustrated Prime Ministers – Paul Keating’s infamous gibe that the members of the Senate were ‘unrepresentative swill’ being one of the better known comments. More recently, in 1999, senior members of the Howard government proposed changing the Senate’s electoral system to remove its ability to block government sponsored legislation (Lees, 1999). Such charges and proposals for change are likely to continue for as long as governments of the day are unable to dominate the Senate.

Coupled with the recent increased relevance of the Senate and its committees as review mechanisms has been increased academic interest in examining the workings and effectiveness of the committees. Although Hynd (1996) and Young (1997) both comment on the comparative absence of studies of committees, their work forms part of a growing corpus of knowledge on the subject. Sibraa (1991), Hayden (1991) and Galligan (1991) argue favourably on the ability of Senate committees to contribute effectively to good governance. Lucy (1993), cited in Gavin (1994, p 71), saw that ‘parliamentary committees are the most important sources of information A strong committee system ... makes life difficult for the executive.’ Jaensch (1992), also cited in Gavin (1994), was less favourable, identifying limitations in the effectiveness of committees because of their inability to coerce the executive and the influence of party politics because members were normally more aligned to their party than the committee or its subject. Gavin (1994) noted that the committee system in the ACT Legislature was more effective than the Federal Parliament’s system because the ACT Legislature was obliged to heed committee findings and recommendations, whereas the Federal Parliament was not.

Marsh (1995) foresees an increasingly important role for Senate committees in the future based on his argument that governments of the day are unlikely to be able to dominate the Senate. He argues that the minor parties and independents in the Senate

will, through the committee system, be able to force a more inclusive and accessible approach to the development of public policy, removing it from the preserve of the major parties.

Hynd (1996) examined whether Senate committee focused more on matters of process or on matters of policy, tentatively concluding that there was a tendency to towards a process orientation, but that each committee and indeed report was different and that the committees themselves varied across time and issues. Mulgan (1996), in his extensive discussion of the Senate, viewed favourably the ability of the Senate and its committees to hold the government of the day accountable for policy decisions.

Gavin (1994, p 72) evaluated the effectiveness of the committee system in the Australian Capital Territory's Legislative Assembly. Building from a range of sources, including other writers and political parties, she developed a set of five criteria that can be used to evaluate committee performance. These include the scope and significance of inquiry topics, the conduct of the inquiries, the findings and whether party affiliations influenced them, the impact of the inquiry, and whether the committee system tended to supplant the legislative chamber.

In light of recent conflicting assessments of the significance of the Senate in reviewing government policy, the purpose of this study is to evaluate the effectiveness of the Senate Committee's inquiry into Australia's emergency management arrangements. The evaluation is a case study of a specific inquiry by a Senate committee. Within the growing literature covering the performance of Senate and other parliamentary committees there is relatively little attention given to specific inquiries or indeed to the work of specific committees. This study provides an insight into how a Senate committee inquires into an issue and its ability to produce outcomes of value to the Australian community.

The research for this study was conducted within a multi-faceted theoretical framework that includes theories on societal response to disaster, the role of government in disaster and theories on the role of the Senate as a house of review in the Australian political system.

The research strategy was founded on a content analysis of the Childs Report, supported by a content analysis of the transcripts of the public hearings held by the

Senate committee during the course of the inquiry in Melbourne, Adelaide, Darwin, Port Hedland, Sydney, Canberra, Wudinna and Perth. The purpose of the content analysis was to tease out the evidence needed to allow evaluation of the Committee's inquiry. Consideration was given to approaching participants in the preparation of the Childs Report to provide qualitative data on the effectiveness of the processes used by the Senate Committee to prepare the report. Given the passage of time since 1994, this research alternative was not pursued. Participants may be impossible to locate, may not be willing to assist and their memories may have dimmed. One, at least, is deceased (Senator Panizza).

The second chapter of the study provides an account of Australia's arrangements for managing disasters and emergencies. This is important because Australian emergency management is a complex policy area characterised by significant technical aspects. Expertise in the area is not widespread and is limited to specialists within a small range of government agencies plus a small number of academic researchers. This chapter provides an understanding of the subject and the issues affecting to assist comprehension of the evaluation of the Senate Committee's inquiry.

The third chapter discusses the conduct and findings of the Senate inquiry itself. The discussion includes consideration of the Government's response to the inquiry and examines the degree to which the Government accepted the inquiry's findings.

The fourth chapter assesses the Senate inquiry to enable an evaluation to be made of whether it was an appropriate and effective method of reviewing and making recommendations on Australia's emergency management arrangements. Issues considered include whether the Senate Committee adequately considered the impact of economic rationalism, its use of recognised international expertise and benchmarks, depth and breadth of consultation and the low salience of emergency management in the community and to decision-makers generally.

The concluding chapter completes the evaluation of the Senate Committee's inquiry into Australian emergency management arrangements. The evaluation indicates that the inquiry, overall, was not a success. The conduct of the inquiry was found to be deficient in a number of aspects, particularly the failure to consider or recommend a national statutory framework or to use independent expert knowledge, the failure to address important issues impacting on Australian emergency management and the

failure to adequately engage local government in the inquiry process. The tendency of the Senate Committee to focus on issues of the moment is also identified as a problem, because the focus on issues then in the media resulted in issues of equal or greater importance being ignored by the committee. The findings presented in the Childs Report are also found to be deficient, particularly in terms of the absence of any findings considering the Australian emergency management system as a whole. The impact of the inquiry is also found to be distinctly lacking – the Government response indicates rejection of most of the important findings and recommendations, although most of the lesser ones are accepted.

Chapter 2: Emergency Management in Australia

A diverse and complex range of issues confronted members of the Senate Committee when they commenced their review of Australia's emergency management arrangements. Australia's system of emergency management has undergone considerable change over the decades since the Second World War and these changes coupled with the demands of federalism, economic rationalism and new managerialism made the field highly suitable for constructive review.

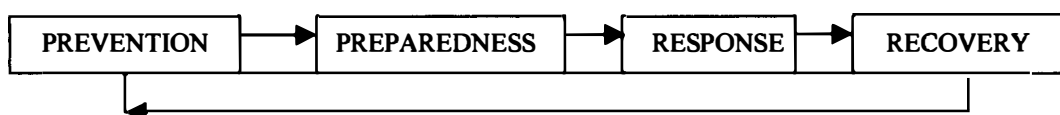
This chapter discusses Australia's emergency management arrangements through examination of the development of the arrangements over time and review of the current situation. It examines the influence of Australia's constitutional arrangements and federalism, the influence of civil defence during and after the Second World War and developments that resulted in an increased focus on natural hazards in the 1970's. The major role of United States theorists in guiding Australian policy is examined together with a discussion of the role of government in managing emergencies. The historical aspect is important as it enables understanding of why the Commonwealth is involved in a function that is constitutionally the preserve of the states.

Emergency management has been defined in Australia as:

The range of measures to manage risks to communities and environment. It involves the development and maintenance of arrangements to prevent or mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters in both peace and war.' (National Emergency Management Committee, 1996, p 1).

This definition is holistic and envisages comprehensive activities that apply a systems approach to the management of emergencies and disasters. The definition incorporates efforts to prevent the hazard agent causing an adverse impact, as well as the more conventional amelioration of the direct and indirect effects of the hazard agent should prevention fail. It also recognises that should a disaster or emergency occur it is not enough to provide just an emergency response – the community must also be assisted to recover from the effects. Figure 1 shows the model proposed by the definition as a simple system.

Figure 1.



The primary forces influencing the development of the arrangements have been Australia's Constitution and the consequential effects of federalism, international developments in the theory and practice of emergency management, the nature of the hazard agents that threaten Australia and the physical and human geography of Australia itself. More recently, as with most spheres of public sector activity, the forces of managerialism and/or economic rationalism are having an impact on the nation's emergency management capability. A final influence, and one that is often associated with economic rationalism, is the decline in voluntarism in Australia.

Yates (1997), in a discussion of the impact of federalism on disaster mitigation in remote Aboriginal communities, noted that the Constitution granted specific powers to the Federal Government primarily in the fields of communications, defence, trade, foreign affairs and currency. The states are left with unspecified residual powers that are taken to include responsibility for most emergency management functions including health, land management, police and emergency services. Local government is established by state law and not by the Commonwealth Constitution.

A literal interpretation of the Australian Constitution would not find much opportunity for Federal involvement in emergency management. In the years before the Second World War, disasters and emergencies were a local responsibility (Wettenhall, 1980). The Mayor, Police officer-in-charge and other sundry local officials would manage the response, seeking financial aid and some technical expertise from the State Government. The Federal Government's role was limited to restoring any of its own facilities that may have been damaged and providing additional financial aid to the State if required.

The increasing tensions between the western democracies and the totalitarian regimes in Europe and concern over Japan's intentions in the late 1930's saw a rising Australian awareness of the risk of war. This led to the establishment of Australian civil defence organisations, modelled on the British system (Britton, 1986), consequent to a 1936 Commonwealth/State Ministerial meeting (Wettenhall, 1975; Department of Defence, 1992). The civil defence organisations, intended to respond to air raids, were a state responsibility (Britton, 1984), although the Department of Defence (1992) notes that the 1936 meeting marks the start of Commonwealth involvement in emergency management. After the War, the tensions of the Cold War prompted the Commonwealth to provide greater leadership through creation of a

Directorate of Civil Defence that encouraged the states to maintain their own civil defence capabilities through small professional public service bureaus (Britton, 1984). The role of the Commonwealth was to provide training, equipment and policy guidance to the States (Britton, 1984; Wettenhall, 1980; Department of Defence, 1992). The States continued to provide the conventional police, fire and ambulance services.

As time passed, the civil defence requirement waned but the need to keep responding to disasters and emergencies did not. By 1975, the transformation from a civil defence stance to a natural disasters orientation was almost complete - the Commonwealth Civil Defence Directorate had become the Natural Disasters Organisation (remaining in the Defence Department) and the state based civil defence offices had become State (or Territory) Emergency Services (Britton, 1984). Wettenhall (1975) notes that the Australian experience closely parallels the US experience.

The Childs Report (1994, p 2) noted:

Despite the fact that disaster management is primarily a state or territory responsibility, the Commonwealth Government has assumed or been given responsibility in many areas. The Commonwealth has a very large role in preparedness, through coordinating mitigation activities, forecasting, monitoring, research, training, and information transfer. Then at the time of disaster, it plays an essential role in providing assistance to the states or territories through ... Emergency Management Australia. Finally, after the event, the Commonwealth can assist with relief and funding arrangements to compensate individuals and the state or territory for losses, as well as assisting with other recovery arrangements.

Some minor changes at the Commonwealth level took place following the 1992 review by the Department of Defence into the Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO). The review recommended that NDO be retitled Emergency Management Australia (EMU), that it be civilianised and relocated into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (Department of Defence, 1992). While the change of title did take place, for reasons unknown the relocation did not. Furthermore, although the staff positions in EMA are now civilianised, the Director General and a significant proportion of senior appointments are retired military officers.

Having reviewed the origins of Australia's emergency management arrangements, it is appropriate to provide an overview of the arrangements as they now apply. It is

necessary to consider each level of government in turn, starting with the Commonwealth, then state government and finally local government. Each level must be considered separately because each has a different role.

The Commonwealth does not have direct responsibility for emergency management, other than in directly administered territories. It nevertheless continues to provide leadership at the national level and retains a considerable capability to assist the states. As in 1994, there is no Commonwealth emergency management legislation, nor is there any evidence of any intent to enact such legislation.

This is in stark contrast to the United States where national emergency management legislation has been in place since 1950 (Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA], undated). The US legislation establishes a framework where emergency management is a partnership between the three levels of government. It clearly states that 'It is the policy and intent of Congress to provide a system of civil defence for the protection of life and property in the United States from attack and from natural disasters.' (FEMA, undated, p 1). State emergency management legislation must be consistent with the federal law, and state law in turn authorises local government's emergency management activity. Local government is seen as the primary service delivery arm, controlling the emergency services, with the state and federal governments providing financial, resource and technical support. Emergency management in the United States at least starts from a position of having a strong legislative base, even if it remains an issue of low salience to decision-makers (see Rossi, Wright and Weber-Burdin, 1982; Turner, Nigg and Heller Paz, 1986; Schneider, 1994). An indication of one of the differences can be found by comparing the annual budgets of FEMA, at \$US3.2 billion, and EMA, at \$A11 million in 1997/98 (FEMA, 1997; Department of Defence, 1998). EMA's budget is 0.21% of FEMA's, a tiny fraction of what is spent in the United States.

As in 1994, Emergency Management Australia is the Commonwealth agency responsible for emergency management at the national level. It remains a part of the Department of Defence, notwithstanding at least two recommendations to remove it – in 1992 following a review by Defence and in the subsequent Childs Report in 1994. EMA's main roles are developing national emergency management arrangements, providing national emergency management education and training, coordinating Commonwealth support to the states and territories during disasters and maintaining a

basic civil defence capability (EMA, 1998a). The Commonwealth also has substantial physical and financial assets available to assist the states respond to emergencies, although they are only generally available when state assets are either expended or lack the required capacity (EMA, 1998b).

The states⁴ are the primary providers of emergency management in Australia. As previously discussed the Australian Constitution gives the responsibility for the protection of life and property to the states as a residual power. It also gives the states the ability to create local government in whatever form the state concerned desires, again as a residual power as local government is not considered in the Constitution (Painter, 1993). Consequently, the states are directly responsible for most of each of the four phases of emergency management (as shown in Figure 1 above). Land management, for example, is a key element in preventing hazards impacting on communities – flood can be virtually eliminated as an emergency if buildings, roads and other assets are kept out of flood plains. Land management is normally the preserve of the states, although recent High Court decisions have introduced limitations (Nelson, 1993). The expansion of the Commonwealth's external affairs power to control land use in certain heritage listed areas (eg. the Franklin River in Tasmania) or the Mabo native land rights decision are examples of the new limits.

With respect to the preparedness and response phases, the states provide the police, fire, ambulance and state emergency services, although it should be noted that in some states such as Western Australia, local government may be authorised by the state to establish a rural fire service (McKay, 1996). Hospital and medical services are similarly the preserve of the states. The recovery phase is also dominated by the states through their provision of the community welfare departments, although the non-government sector's philanthropic agencies like the Salvation Army have an important role. While there are many similarities, each state's emergency management arrangements are unique: the powers available to authorities varies, responsibilities vary and the requirements placed on local government vary (McKay, 1996). At the legislative level, all states except Western Australia have legislation governing emergency management, albeit introduced at different times with

⁴ For the purposes of this discussion, the 'states' is taken to also include the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory since for emergency management purposes they function in the same fashion as the states. In the other territories, such as Christmas Island, the Commonwealth retains full responsibility for emergency management.

consequential differences in powers and coverage. Most states separate the police from the other emergency services; some states have a single fire service, while others may have separate rural and urban fire services. Ambulance services may be provided by a state agency or by a contractual arrangement with the private sector or a philanthropic organisation.

The role of local government in emergency management in Australia is less well defined. Although seen as being a critical component of the nation's emergency management arrangements (Ingle-Smith, 1997), local government in Australia is far more limited in what it can do than is the case in the United States. Painter (1993, p 194) notes that 'Most people probably associate local government with roads, kerbs and gutters and garbage collection; they are not too far off the mark'. He also notes that compared to Europe or the United States, Australian state governments provide many services that would be a local government responsibility. Australian local governments do have an important role in land management – in most states they have at least some delegated authority from the state to grant building approvals. They do not, however, provide the police or other emergency services (except for some rural fire services), nor do they provide hospital, medical or the primary community welfare services. Most local governments do possess or have access to various types of plant and machinery, such as bulldozers, that can provide support during an emergency. Local governments in Australia are rarely able to innovate or take the initiative in implementing emergency management as the state governments usually reserve this privilege to themselves (Ingle-Smith, 1997).

The role of local government in emergency management is one of implementing some aspects of state emergency management policy, particularly in respect to land management and providing a range of supporting services during the event. They also, by virtue of their land management role, have an important part to play in managing community recovery after the impact of a hazard. By way of comparison, in the United States, local governments provide many of the key services involved in emergency management, including the police and fire services. This does lead to a potentially complicating factor absent in Australia – the sheer number and proliferation of services. A report issued by FEMA (1998) noted that there were over 32 000 separate fire services in the US. This compares to an Australian total of approximately a dozen fire services.

Australian emergency management fits well with a theory discussed by Painter (1988; 1998), who argued that Australian federalism was characterised by cooperative arrangements between the state and commonwealth governments. Australian cooperative federalism, as discussed by Painter (1988; 1998), stems from the division of powers in the Constitution. Although the framers of the Constitution intended to limit the Commonwealth to a specific set of powers, in practice however, neither the states nor the commonwealth have complete and exclusive jurisdiction in any policy arena. As we have seen, Australia's emergency management arrangements had their origin in the civil defence programs established by the states to counter a defence situation (defence being an area of Commonwealth jurisdiction). As civil defence transformed into emergency management arrangements coping with natural and man-made hazards (an area of state responsibility), the Commonwealth continued to play an important role, thus supporting a cooperative approach to the subject.

International developments in the theory and practice of emergency management have strongly influenced Australian emergency management. Although some research into disasters and emergencies took place as early as 1917 and in an ad-hoc fashion in the 1920s and 1930s (Wettenhall, 1975, Britton, 1989a), the field did not develop into a recognised research discipline until the cold war period following World War II provided a vital catalyst. Defence officials in the United States were concerned over the effects nuclear attack would have on civilian communities and considered that studies of the impact of natural hazards could provide useful information (Wettenhall, 1980). Although nuclear war did not occur between the Soviet Union and the West, it was found that the information being gained through the study of disasters was useful in its own right. This was because disasters kept occurring and there was an expectation that government would act (Wettenhall, 1980; Rossi, Wright and Weber-Burdin, 1982; Turner, Nigg and Heller Paz, 1986; Schneider, 1995).

The outcome of the impetus provided by the military's need for knowledge was the development of disaster research as a mature and recognised field of study with a rich body of research into the effects of disasters on communities, albeit primarily in the United States (Wettenhall, 1975). This body of knowledge has provided much of the theoretical basis for understanding how communities, organisations and individuals respond to the effects of disasters and how hazard agents are best managed.

Australian researchers such as Wettenhall and Britton have applied the concepts to studies of Australian disasters and elements of the work of United States researchers such as Quarantelli, Dynes and Foster can be found in manuals and other publications released by Emergency Management Australia.

Quarantelli (1987, p 1 – 13; 1997, p 41) summarised the state of knowledge in the late 1980's on how best to manage disasters and emergencies. Based on the findings of research into social and behavioural response, he recommended ten criteria for good planning that are well accepted as standards to measure the effectiveness of emergency management. The criteria were:

1. Recognition that disasters are different to emergencies,
2. Planning should cover all hazards and not be agent specific,
3. Planning should be integrated not fragmented,
4. Planning should be coordination orientated not command/control oriented,
5. General principles are more important than specific details,
6. Process is more important than the final document,
7. Anticipation is better than reaction,
8. Realistic responses should be used, not ideal state,
9. Planning should be knowledge based, and
10. Scientific knowledge should be used.

In addition to these criteria, disaster researchers identified a number of other important principles that apply to emergency management generally. Although military command and control models are often applied in the civil emergency management environment, significant research indicates they are not appropriate. Dynes (1994) brought these arguments together in an important work that challenged the military command and control paradigm. He argued that civil society is characterised by loose structures and partnerships that overlap each other and the military models could not adequately cope with the need for cooperation and interaction essential for effective functioning in civil society. Dynes' (1994) model presents six principles for emergency management. Firstly, confusion is normal during disasters, but this is not chaos and should not be seen as abnormal and something to be controlled. Secondly, people will cope with the event and will continue do their jobs or react appropriately to the situation. Thirdly, the normal social structure is the most appropriate one to manage response and recovery activities. Fourthly, planning should assume that people would make rational decisions. Fifthly, plans need to value decentralised decision-making. Finally, the aim

of planning should be to solve problems using open systems that enable flexibility and initiative.

The salience of emergency management to political decision-makers has also been extensively researched in the United States. General agreement exists that, other than during a disaster and the immediate post-impact period, emergency management is a low priority issue with decision-makers. Rossi, Wright and Weber-Burdin (1982) reported that neither the public nor decision-makers ranked it highly, while Petak (1985) commented that most public administrators reacted to events as they occurred rather than practise pre-impact mitigation. Turner, Nigg and Heller Paz (1986) reported that while survey respondents expected governments to manage natural hazards, other issues were ranked as more important. Tierney (1989) postulated that one reason for the low salience was the absence of interest groups pushing these issues onto the policy agenda, other than during the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Schneider (1995) noted that market failure is a feature of emergency management. Generally people are unwilling to pay pre-impact to prevent a hazard because of low perceived risk, but may be unable to pay post-impact because the directly impacted population may not be large enough to fully fund restorative action.

The sociology of disasters has also provided an important field of research, particularly studies of the way organisations and individuals respond. In 1970, Dynes published his influential book "Organised Behavior in Disaster", a pioneering work that provided a typology and theoretical foundation for disaster sociology (Britton, 1989a). It argued that because of the community disruption caused by disasters and the critical place of organisations in society, it was vital to understand how organisations reacted to community disruption. Dynes' work postulated a typology of four classes of organisations (established, expanding, extending and emergent) that has been widely applied (Britton, 1989b). Wettenhall (1975), for example, applied the typology in his discussion of the organised response to the 1967 Tasmanian bushfires. Research into individual behaviour during disasters has also provided critical information for emergency managers. Perry, Lindell and Greene (1981), for example, investigated how emergency managers can most effectively communicate with people in communities at risk from hazards. They point out the importance of consistent messages from official sources and emphasise that people will seek confirmation

from their own experience and from neighbours, friends and relatives, often placing greater reliance on unofficial sources.

Australia's emergency management arrangements are also contingent to an extent on the nature of the hazards, particularly natural hazards, which threaten Australia. Australia is prone to a wide range of natural and man-made hazards. Tropical cyclones threaten the northern half of the continent each year between November and April with the scale of the threat varying with the *El Nino* phase of the Southern Oscillation (Oliver, 1986). During the winter months, severe storms and gales can affect the southern half of the continent. Floods, often in the aftermath of tropical cyclones or storms, can affect huge tracts of land for weeks or months at a time. Flash floods can strike with little warning and can be devastating in highly populated urban areas (Chapman, 1994). Bushfires cause more fatalities than other natural hazards, even if the annual economic loss is lower than other hazards and they can affect any part of Australia when conditions are right (Oliver, 1986; Childs Report, 1994). Earthquake is a significant hazard for much of Australia, albeit one that is much less well appreciated by the community than the more frequent and visually obvious bushfire and meteorological hazards. Earthquakes strike without warning and because of the very short period for which historical records are available, they may occur in areas previously thought to be at low risk. Oliver (1986), for example, includes a risk map that indicated most of the Northern Territory to be earthquake free. By 1988, this map has substantially changed because a large earthquake near Tennant Creek in January 1988 brought to light a 'new' risk area in the Territory (Denham & Michael-Leiba, 1989). Offshore earthquakes can also cause tsunamis, although only relatively small parts of the Australian coast are at risk. Landslips have caused loss of life and property losses – the tragedy at Gracetown in Western Australia in 1996 and the substantial property loss near Wollongong in 1998 are examples.

Australia faces the normal complement of man-made hazards, most stemming from some form of technological or human failure. Aircraft can crash, buses, trucks and cars collide, dams can fail, industrial accidents take place and hazardous materials can be released as a result of any of the above. Disasters can occur from the failure of critical lifelines as the power supply problems suffered in Auckland, New Zealand during 1998 showed. Fire in man-made structures remains a constant threat to life and property.

Communities will be more or less vulnerable to these hazards dependent on factors including proximity to the location and magnitude of the hazard, socio-economic status, pre & post-impact mitigation activities and past experience with the hazard. Economically disadvantaged communities tend to be more vulnerable to floods (Britton, 1987) and industrial hazards (Britton & Lindsay, 1995) because 'at-risk' land is normally less expensive. Yates (1997) noted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote areas are particularly vulnerable to hazards because of their generally poor socio-economic status and the ability of governments within the federal system to evade responsibility for the problems facing the communities.

To cope with these natural and man-made hazards, the Australian states have established the conventional range of police, fire and other emergency services that can be found in any developed nation. Unlike many developed nations, however, Australia places great reliance on volunteer participation in the emergency services. The terms of reference for the inquiry by the Senate Committee emphasised the importance of volunteers by specially requiring the Committee to 'fully respecting and utilising the skills and capabilities of volunteer organisations' (Childs Report, 1994, p iv). It has not been possible to obtain an estimate of the number of volunteers in the Australian emergency services overall. Research into emergency service volunteers found that there were over 2.6 million persons providing voluntary work in Australia in 1995 (Australian Bureau of Statistics cited in Reinholdt & Smith, 1998, p 5). In Western Australia, figures are available on the number of emergency service volunteers. The WA State Emergency Service (1997) reported 2 300 volunteers and 42 permanent staff, the Fire and Rescue Service (1997) reported 2 317 volunteers verses 972 career staff and the Bush Fires Board (1997) estimated 16 000 volunteers and 45 career staff. Volunteers thus often outnumber career emergency services personnel and can be found in almost any Australian community, no matter how remote or isolated. Volunteers can participate alongside career personnel – most Australian fire services have both career and volunteer firefighters. Some organisations are almost entirely volunteer based, with only a small career staff cadre to provide some training and management functions – the State Emergency Services being an example. Volunteers are also found in many of the philanthropic services that support communities, particularly during the recovery phase. The Salvation Army and Red Cross are just two of many examples. Britton (1986) used the term

Disaster-Relevant Organisation Network (DRON) to describe the full range organisations – public sector, private sector and philanthropic – that participate in emergency management. Volunteers can be found in many DRON organisations and without them, the total cost of emergency management would be much greater.

As in the United States, Australian DRON organisations have tended to focus on preparing for and responding to emergencies rather than attempting to prevent their occurrence altogether. Foster (1980), a Canadian, made a major contribution with his book 'Disaster Planning' to addressing this problem. His comprehensive study discussed managing hazards to prevent disasters and placed great emphasis on thorough investigation and assessment of risk through geographical information systems and rational ranking of hazards. His work was very influential, not only in the United States, but also in Australia. Examples of it can be found in emergency management planning guides issued by Emergency Management Australia. The Childs Report (1994) noted, however, that the response phase continued to be emphasised by emergency managers and more attention needed to be paid to all aspects of hazard mitigation, including prevention.

Emergency management has not been immune from the sweeping changes affecting the public sector because of the global phenomenon of economic rationalism/managerialism. Within the rich literature on the subject, there is considerable debate on what to call this phenomenon (Alford, 1997). Hood and Jackson (1991) refer to new public management while Emy (1993, p 16) refers to 'economic rationalism'. Painter (1997, p 151) uses 'economic liberalism' and Considine and Painter (1997, p 4) differentiate between economic rationalism and 'managerialism/new public management'.

Considine and Painter's (1997) differentiation of new public management and economic rationalism appears to be most useful when considering the impact of the new paradigm on emergency management. New public management describes a fundamental change away from the classical Weberian rational/legal bureaucracy towards a notionally more efficient model for government where outcomes are more important than processes (Hood and Jackson, 1991). Economic rationalism refers to the imposition of market concepts onto government activities through the introduction of competition, outsourcing, the purchaser-provider model and wide spread corporatisation and privatisation of many government services (Painter, 1997). Both

new public management and economic rationalism have become dominant themes in government. In Australia, for example, there is effective bipartisan support for the new paradigm at federal and state levels that ensures its implementation (Painter 1997).

Alford (1997) discusses some of the ways the new paradigm can have a positive impact on the emergency services. Fire services that have traditionally focussed on response measures such as fire fighting have begun to investigate actions to suppress fires by preventing their occurrence. This results in firefighters undertaking more education activities and less fire fighting. The intended outcome is fewer fires and hence reduced fire losses.

Many writers, however, do not share this positive view of the impact of economic rationalism. Davis (1997, p 210) describes concerns over the loss of impartial advice to governments, reductions in the ability of governments to 'nation-build' and the tendency for government to become a series of unrelated contracting units lacking cohesion and depth. Similarly, Wettenhall (1997) notes that government must consider and act for the whole nation, not segments of it. This, he believes, is fundamentally in conflict with market driven solutions that may exclude sections of society. Both of the issues raised by Davis and Wettenhall could tend to reduce the ability of government to undertake emergency management.

Hood and Jackson (1991) take the view that one of the adverse consequences of new public management is increased vulnerability to emergencies and disasters. This is because it emphasises efficiency in place of technical quality, fragments the public sector, imposes significant funding reductions, promotes output in place of process, generates poll driven policies and has minimal regulation. In aggregation, Hood and Jackson (1991) believe that these increase the probability of a disaster and reduce the ability of government to respond. Gabriel (1998) notes that the new paradigm may increase risk due to uncertainty on how well newly privatised utilities will cope with the demands of emergencies and disasters. A similar argument exists on the ability of local governments and other government agencies that have contracted out their workforce, plant and machinery to meet the increased demand for services that often occurs during disaster. Anecdotal evidence indicates that this is already becoming a problem as surplus capacity is not immediately available. Quarantelli (1997) also notes the potential for conflict between the public and private sectors because the

private sector is less able to act in the community's interest as opposed to a narrow sectional interest.

Economic rationalism is also impacting adversely on the willingness and ability of people to volunteer for the emergency services according to a study by Reinholdt & Smith (1998). They note two adverse consequences stemming from economic rationalism. Firstly, it has exacerbated the population decline in rural areas as the public and private sectors close offices and facilities leading to fewer people in the appropriate age/skills cohorts suitable as volunteer emergency services personnel. Secondly, the increased working-hour demands placed on workers in many industries have reduced their availability to undertake volunteer activities.

Kouzman, Jarman & Rosenthal (1995) wrote critically on the state of Australia's emergency management arrangements. They noted that:

Crisis and disaster management, for example, is clearly one inter-disciplinary and inter-agency policy arena of "wickedness" needing a considerable breakthrough in governmental policy and planning capacity. (p 21).

They called into question Australian mitigation arrangements for earthquakes, for example, noting that earthquake risk zones and building standards appeared to be inadequate in the light of new information on the magnitude of the hazard. They also noted high levels of fragmentation in policy development and significant but suppressed conflict between the emergency services. Australia also compared poorly to North America and Europe in terms of tax relief given to disaster affected businesses. Kouzman, et al, (1995, p 23) argued that this tax relief greatly improved business recovery post-disaster but was a strategy ignored in Australia. They also argued that all of this information had been available for many years – many of their references were dated before 1990. They recommended radical change to Australia's emergency management arrangements, including *inter alia* greater involvement by the military, establishing high-level policy bodies, improved citizen engagement and establishing a national policy college.

Cobb (1998) investigated the vulnerability of Australia to disruption to modern information technology. His study for the Australian Parliament examined the threat posed to Australia from disruption to the nation's information technology infrastructure. Noting the complex and interdependent nature of Australia's information technology infrastructure, he concluded that immediate Government

action was essential to protect it from attack or damage however caused. He gives the extended power failure in Auckland in early 1998 as an example of what can occur. In particular, he points out that management strategies cannot be sectionalised or isolated within one part of government. Cooperative action across society is vital.

In summary, Australia's Constitution dictates that emergency management is the preserve of the states and, consequently, the states remain the primary deliverers of emergency management to the community. The states provide most of the organisations involved in the DRON and are also responsible for establishing local government, the third tier of government involved in emergency management. Local government's emergency management role is quite circumscribed when compared to Europe and the United States, being limited to land management activities that may prevent disasters and providing resource and other support during emergencies. Local government also normally has a leading role in helping a community recover from the impact of an emergency or disaster. The Commonwealth, while constitutionally limited in its role, in fact provides considerable leadership to the states and possesses substantial resources that can assist the states during large-scale events where state resources are insufficient. Unlike the United States, however, there is no national legislation setting a formal goal to be achieved and putting in place a national framework. Developments in the theory and practice of emergency management, largely from the United States, have been highly influential in the evolution of Australian emergency management, providing a theoretical basis for the work of Australian emergency managers. More recently, economic rationalism has been impacting, in both beneficial and adverse ways on the ability of the public sector to provide emergency management services to the community.

It must also be recognised that Australia has, to date, been comparatively free from major disasters. Australia has been spared the impact of a devastating earthquake on a capital city causing hundreds of deaths and thousands of injuries, for example. Our experience is limited to events that, although calamitous to the community concerned, have not over-stretched national or, with the exception of Darwin in 1974 after Cyclone Tracey's impact, state capabilities. Even events such as the Ash Wednesday wildfires of 1983 did not threaten the continued ability of government and philanthropic organisations and the community generally to function. The potential for devastating disasters to occur in Australia does exist – some of our capital cities

are at risk from natural and man-made hazards that could cause great loss of life, many injuries and severe damage to private and public assets. Although the nation's emergency management arrangements cope effectively with the many day-to-day emergencies and the rather less frequent larger scale events, the ability of the arrangements to cope with a major disaster remains untested and, as will be discussed in the next chapter, infrequently evaluated.

This then was the policy environment of critical issues facing the Senate inquiry when it began its deliberations into emergency management in Australia.

Chapter 3: The Senate Inquiry – Conduct & Findings

The ability of Senate and other parliamentary committees to undertake effective reviews of public policy and executive government has been subject to considerable debate in Australia. Proponents argue that they can be an effective means of holding the executive accountable for its actions and policies and provide a mechanism for a public debate over the merits or otherwise of an issue or policy. Detractors argue that they are often dominated by partisan politics, lack technical skills or knowledge of the issues being considered and are unable to gain acceptance by the executive of the results of their work. The purpose of this chapter is to review the conduct of the Senate Committee's inquiry into Australian emergency management and to analyse the recommendations presented to the government for action by the Committee.

Parliamentary committees in the Australian Federal Parliament are unable to initiate inquiries into issues without first receiving formal approval by the House to which the committee belongs (Parliament of Australia, 1998). This requires that a majority of members of the House support the inquiry's motion. Because Governments of the day normally dominate the House of Representatives, inquiries by Representatives Committees are limited to issues that the Government wishes to be investigated. This has acted to limit the effectiveness of Representatives committees (Marsh, 1995). Senate committees, however, may be able to investigate issues contentious in the Government's eyes, as it is no longer normally able to dominate the Senate. This enables Senate committees, in theory, to be able to critically scrutinise and evaluate the operations of government (Marsh, 1995).

At the time of the Senate Committee's inquiry into emergency management, the ALP held Government with a majority in the House of Representatives, but did not have a majority in the Senate. The Senate then comprised 30 ALP members, 36 Liberal/National Party coalition members with the minor parties and an independent (the ubiquitous Senator Brian Harradine) providing the balance. The Australian Democrats were the most numerous of the minor parties with 7 members, and the Greens had two members. Consequently, the minor parties and independent, by siding with either of the major parties, had the ability to control the outcome of Senate votes on legislation or other matters.

On 15 October 1992, Senator Foreman (ALP – and the party then in Government) put the following motion that was passed without further debate or comment to the Senate:

That the following matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure for inquiry and report on or before the last day of sitting in February 1994:

The capacity of public sector authorities to plan for, forecast and respond to major disasters and large scale emergencies, fully respecting and utilising the skills and capabilities of volunteer organisations. (Foreman, p 1882).

The purpose of this chapter is to examine and discuss the composition of the Senate Committee, the conduct of the inquiry, including the methodology used, and to analyse the findings presented in the Committee's report.

In May 1993, the Standing Committee on Transport, Communications and Infrastructure was combined with the Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology to form a single committee. The new Standing Committee on Industry, Science, Technology, Transport, Communications and Infrastructure, to give it its full name, agreed to continue with the 15 October 1992 terms of reference (Senate Hansard, 29 Jun 94, p 2210).

The composition of the new Committee was: Senator B. K. Childs (ALP - NSW), Chair; Senator B. R. Burns (ALP - Qld); Senator J. R. Devereux (ALP - Tas); Senator S. Murphy (ALP - Tas); Senator G. Chapman (LP – SA); Senator I. D. Macdonald (LP – Qld); Senator J. H. Panizza (LP – WA); and Senator J. R. Coulter (AD – SA). In addition to the parliamentary members, a Secretary, four researchers and two executive assistants supported the Committee.

Of the eight Senators, four were members of the ALP, three were Liberals and one was from the Australian Democrats. No National Party members were on the Committee. No one party dominated the Committee – although the ALP had four out of eight members, it provided the Committee's Chair, thus giving the ALP and the Liberals equity of members, together with a single Australian Democrat left holding the 'balance', as far as that applies in Senate Committee work.

The Committee, in both its variants, conducted its inquiry into Australian emergency management over a period of nearly two years. The inquiry was authorised on

15 October 1992 and the report, Disaster Management (the Childs Report), was tabled in the Senate on 29 June 1994.

The Committee’s report does not provide a specific description of the methodology used to conduct the inquiry. It is possible, however, to make some observations about the methodology used from information in the report and other sources. The Committee called for written submissions through an advertisement in a national newspaper, evidence was taken at public hearings in various locations across Australia, and briefings and inspections were likewise conducted across Australia.

Written submissions were received from 85 individuals or organisations. Table 1, below, gives a break down of the submissions based on whether they were from an emergency service organisation, another public sector organisation, the Health sector, local government, non-government organisations or individuals.

Table 1

Emergency Services	Other Public Sector	Health Sector	Local Government	Non Government Organisations	Private Individuals
17	26	6	4	21	21

Source: Derived from the Childs Report (1994, 121 – 125)

The relatively low number of submissions from the emergency service organisations is significant. Counting just the police, fire, ambulance and state emergency services established in Australia, there are at least 32 official state or territory emergency service organisations that could have made a submission. Just over half chose to do so, per Table 1, although the 17 submissions from emergency service organisations are boosted by submissions from groups like the Australian Assembly of Fire Authorities and federal agencies like the Australian Maritime Safety Authority. If these are removed, then somewhat less than half of the 32 official state or territory emergency service organisations made a submission to the inquiry. This suggests that the inquiry did not achieve input from as many critical emergency service organisations as would have been desirable.

The broader public sector, excluding emergency services, provided the largest cohort of submissions. This is to be expected as many public sector agencies are involved to

a greater or lesser extent in responding to emergencies and disasters. Submissions were received from federal and state public sector agencies.

Six health authorities saw fit to make a submission. This is an indication that they, at least, were sufficiently interested in the inquiry to prepare and submit their opinion/s on the matter.

Local government, however, was sadly under-represented in the number of submissions made to the inquiry. Of the hundreds of local governments in Australia, every one of which is involved in emergency management, only four made the effort to make a submission. They may have been blissfully unaware of the inquiry or were sufficiently disengaged from the process as to be unwilling to devote the time and effort to preparing a submission.

Submissions from non-government organisations formed the equal second largest cohort. Organisations making submissions included a major airline, a radio station, salvage companies and no less than eight submissions from various branches of the South Australian Farmers Federation. Given the emphasis the Senate Committee gave to a mouse plague that affected South Australia during the course of the inquiry in its report, it is presumed that these submissions proved to be an effective means of raising an issue with the Committee.

Finally, submissions from private individuals, the other equal second largest cohort, came from people across Australia. Notable amongst them were submissions from several authorities in the field, including Professor Wettenhall and Roger Jones, then Director of the Australian Emergency Management Institute.

Public hearings were held on eleven occasions in three clusters. In July 1993, hearings were held in Melbourne, Adelaide, Darwin and Port Hedland. In October 1993, hearings were held in Canberra (twice) and Wudinna in South Australia. Finally, in February and April 1994, hearings were held in Canberra, Sydney and Perth.

From the List of Witnesses provided in the Childs Report (1994), it is evident that the emergency services and other public sector organisations dominated the public hearings. Table 2 below shows the break-up of witnesses by group.

Table 2

Emergency Services	Other Public Sector	Health Sector	Local Government	Non Government Organisations	Private Individuals
16	17	1	1	3	4 + 13 SA farmers

Source: Derived from the Childs Report (1994, 129 – 136)

It appears that the emergency services gave almost equal weight to the need to both make written submissions and the need to appear at the public hearings, as virtually the same number made written submissions as appeared at the hearings. The other public sector agencies suffered a significant fall off in support between making the written submissions and appearing at the public hearings, with nearly one third fewer choosing to attend a public hearing. The Health sector showed a great fall off, dropping from six written submissions to one at a hearing. Local government continued to be very poorly represented at the public hearings, with only one, Port Hedland, choosing to attend. The number of non-government agencies also fell off dramatically, reducing from 21 written submissions to 3 appearances at hearings. The figures for private individuals are of interest. In raw terms, there was only a small drop off from 21 written submissions to 17 hearing appearances. When, however, the 13 South Australian grain farmers are removed, the number of private hearing appearances falls off from 17 to 4 persons. As with the written submissions, the concurrent impact of the mouse plague in South Australia proved a major incentive for people to make appearances before the Committee. This lobbying appears to have been successful in so far as the Committee did make recommendations on the management of rodent plagues.

The conduct of the Committee's public hearings limited wide consultation with the broader Australian community. No public hearings were held in Queensland, Tasmania or rural Victoria, New South Wales or the Northern Territory. This may have restricted the ability of citizens and local governments from making verbal submissions. Whilst this may not have been critical to the outcome, it does cast doubt on the quality of the consultative processes used. It also resulted in the omission of a significant portion of the population at risk from tropical cyclones and the hazards consequent to them. Although the Northern Territory and Western Australian

coastlines are cyclone risk areas, they are comparatively unpopulated compared to much of the Queensland coast. Queensland suffers a major proportion of Australia's flood and cyclone damage, due to a large extent to the relatively heavily populated coastline. In the Northern Territory and Western Australia, there is a reasonable chance that a cyclone crossing the coast will do so over a sparsely populated area, thus limiting the damage no matter how severe the cyclone is. In Queensland, however, the high growth rates and subsequent development of the coastline from Coolangatta north has resulted in population densities much greater than either the Northern Territory and Western Australia (Local Government Association of Queensland, 1998). The likelihood, therefore, of a cyclone affecting a populated area and causing damage is greater. It could be argued that for the Committee to gain a full appreciation of Australia's situation in respect of disasters, it should have consulted with communities in Queensland at risk from tropical cyclones.

Similarly, Tasmania has a history of bushfires, with the devastating 1967 fires being one of long list. Written submissions from Tasmania were made, but Tasmanian organisations and individuals are absent from the witness list for the public hearings. Including Tasmania in the public hearing process would have improved the consultative processes even if the outcomes were not affected.

Finally, the Committee did not hold hearings in any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly those in remote areas. Nor did any of the peak Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander representative groups or Government agencies dedicated to Aboriginal affairs make written submissions or appear at any of the public hearings. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities are affected by disasters as much or more so than mainstream communities (Yates, 1997). Their generally poor socio-economic status limits their ability to fund adequate mitigation measures and they are often lost in a never-never land when seeking government support. Local government claims not to be responsible as they generally are not rate-payers, while the state and Federal governments blame each other for successive policy failures (Yates, 1997). Consultation with the peak representative groups and with the communities themselves would have added considerably to the Committee's appreciation of the state of disaster management in Australia and may well have resulted in additional recommendations.

There is evidence, however, that inquiries into public policy issues can undertake too much public consultation. Uhr, cited in Hynd (1996), argues that because there may be too many competing views and positions on policy issues, inquiries that attempt too much consultation tend to fail to achieve consensus, resulting in dissenting reports. Given the low salience of emergency management to either the public or to policy-makers, Uhr's view may not be as valid for this issue as for other public policy inquiries.

The Committee attended seven briefings on an aspect of disaster management. One was at the Australian Institute of Emergency Management in Victoria where it was presumably informed on the operation of the facility. It would appear that this might have, in part, prompted the Committee to recommend its retention. Two briefings were held in Newcastle, investigating the response and recovery following the 1989 earthquake. Another briefing was in Canberra – while no details are listed, the Childs Report (1994) notes that the Committee was briefed on the function of Canberra based Emergency Management Australia. Sydney was the site of another briefing, but the purpose of this is unknown. The last two briefings were held in the Western Australian goldfields in an area affected by a major bushfire in the early part of the Committee's inquiry. The Childs Report (1994) gives this bushfire considerable consideration and a number of recommendations stem from it. As with the South Australian mouse plague, events happening concurrently with the Committee's inquiry appear to have been influential in the Committee's deliberations.

The findings of the Inquiry were published in the report 'Disaster Management' tabled in the Senate on 29 June 1994 by the Senate Committee's chair, Senator Childs (1994). Senator Childs noted in his speech that the report was unanimous and had full support from all members. When describing the task set for the Committee's inquiry, he commented that it was to 'Consider the role the Commonwealth government plays in disaster management' (Childs, 1994, p 2210). This statement is not in complete agreement with the inquiry's Terms of Reference that charged the Committee to inquire into "The capacity of public sector agencies ..." without stipulating a limitation to the federal level. Nor, in fact, is the report limited solely to federal issues, making a number of recommendations that can only be implemented by state governments.

Senator Childs went on to state that the Committee believed that too much emphasis was being given to responding to emergencies and disasters. It recommended, therefore, that greater attention needed to be given to other mitigation activities, particularly those that prevent adverse events occurring (Childs, 1994, p 2211). Other findings by the Committee pointed out by Senator Childs included the need for improved state/federal cooperation, retention of the Commonwealth's training facility at Mt Macedon and removal of Emergency Management Australia from the Defence Department.

Also speaking to the report was Senator Chapman, one of the Liberal Party's members on the Committee. Senator Chapman pointed out it was at his instigation that the inquiry considered the mouse plague problem in his home state, South Australia (Chapman, 1994b, p 2213). Senator Chapman spoke at some length on the mouse plague issue, and although extolling the bi-partisan nature of the report used the opportunity to attack the Government for its ineffective response to the plague.

Senator Murphy, another of the ALP's members on the Committee spoke more briefly on the inquiry, noting 'Personally, it was a great experience to be able to travel around the country and look at some of the effects that have occurred.' (Murphy, 1994, p 2214). He also expressed concern over the unwillingness of fire fighting authorities to adopt aerial fire bombing as a suppression technique.

The Australian Democrats sole Committee member, Senator Coulter, reiterated Senator Murphy's concerns on aerial fire bombing, speaking at some length on the subject, including showing the Senate a model of a suitable aircraft (Coulter, 1994, p 2215).

The last speaker, Senator Panizza, a Liberal Committee member, stated in his speech that his primary interest during the inquiry was the bushfire hazard. His comments on the way the Committee considered the subject are worth noting: 'We looked at them right at the end of our inquiry. It might have even been New Years Day ... when I rang Senator Childs and asked whether we could take that in at the end of the inquiry.' (Panizza, 1994, p 2216). Assuming he is referring to 1 January 1994, then the Committee does not appear to have given the bushfire hazard any significant attention until almost the last moment and after most of the public hearings have been completed (only three of the eleven were conducted after 1 January 1994). This,

however, is not entirely concordant with the witness list presented in the report. The list indicates a number of bushfire orientated witnesses, mostly rural fire services, as having appeared at public hearings well prior to 1 January 1994. What caused Senator's Panizza's sudden revelation will never be known due to his death in 1997.

After Senator Panizza's speech, there was no debate on the motion by Senator Childs that the Senate take note of the report and the motion was passed. The other Committee members, Senators Burns, Devereux and Macdonald, did not speak on the subject.

The report tabled in the Senate on 29 June 1994 ran to an Executive Summary, 45 recommendations, and 119 pages of text organised in eight chapters and eight appendixes.

The Executive Summary provides an overview of the report and summarises its main conclusions. The coordinating role of Emergency Management Australia (EMA), the federal agency responsible for emergency management at the national level, is supported, but it is recommended that more attention be given to mitigation activities. The placement of EMA into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet is strongly supported, as is retention of EMA's training institute at Mt Macedon. The United Nation's International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction is highlighted as a program that should receive greater attention. The need to improve post-disaster recovery arrangements is also highlighted. An improvement in coordination generally across federal agencies is called for.

The Executive Summary includes forty-five recommendations aimed at improving Australian emergency management. As a general comment, the recommendations are pitched at a relatively low level and propose no substantial alterations to the current Australian arrangements for managing emergencies and disasters. This could either mean that Australia's arrangements are, largely, effective and appropriate, or that the inquiry by the Senate Committee failed to address the issue in a substantive manner and an opportunity for comprehensive reform has been missed.

The recommendations have been assessed by dividing them into two groups: those recommendations that address matters of policy and those that address matters of administrative detail. Before considering this break-up, however, it is necessary to define what the terms 'policy' and 'administrative detail' mean.

Agreeing on what constitutes ‘policy’ has proven to be a thorny issue (see Wildavsky, 1979; Davis, Wanna, Warhurst & Weller, 1988). There is a range of definitions, mostly revolving around a decision-making process that leads to a course of action or scheme of implementation undertaken by government (or other agency). For the purpose of this analysis, a recommendation is defined as being ‘policy’ when it has a substantive impact on the general principles, processes, concepts and plans that govern Australia’s arrangements to cope with disasters and emergencies. Inevitably, the assessment of whether a recommendation does make the grade as policy or policy related is subjective and not all will agree with the allocation made below.

Matters of administrative detail are comparatively easier to define. They are those matters that are not policy and, hence, do not have a substantive impact on Australia’s emergency management arrangements.

Godfrey, cited in Hynd (1996), used the policy – administrative-detail dichotomy in a study of parliamentary oversight of public service activities. He points out that too great a concern with administrative detail may result in management being done by the parliamentary committees instead of by the managers. Godfrey calls for committees to focus on policy issues and community engagement.

An example may assist to clarify the definitions. A recommendation that proposed new legislation governing Federal emergency management arrangements would be a policy level recommendation because if implemented will substantively impact on national arrangements that are currently not governed by a specific statute. On the other hand, a recommendation proposing that funding for a specific program be increased or decreased merely changes the emphasis within an established policy regime. Such a recommendation, although it might have a major impact on the program, does not represent a substantive policy change and would therefore be categorised as a ‘administrative detail’ type recommendation.

The first and most important point revealed by the analysis of the recommendations is that none of them makes a statement regarding the overall direction of Australia’s broad policy for the management of emergencies and disasters. Nowhere in the Executive Summary or the recommendations is there any assessment, comment or proposal that Australia’s arrangements, overall, are good, bad or indifferent. There are statements contained within the body of the report that lead to the inference that

the Senate Committee was satisfied with the overall arrangements, but this is not specifically stated. It can be argued, on the basis of this, that the Committee does not appear to have considered macro-level issues of whether the system used by Australia is, in fact, the best that could be done in our system of government.

Of the forty-five recommendations, eighteen were assessed as being relevant to policy issues, and the remaining twenty-seven were considered to be pertaining to details with the existing policy framework.

A further analysis that can be undertaken is to compare the recommendations to the Committee's Terms of Reference for the inquiry. The Committee was charged with inquiring into 'The capacity of public sector authorities *to plan for, forecast and respond to* major disasters and large-scale emergencies, fully respecting and utilising the skills and capabilities of volunteer organisations' (emphasis added). Each recommendation can be assessed as to whether it contributes towards planning for, forecasting or responding to disasters or emergencies. Within this analysis, it is recognised that recommendations may apply to one, two or three of these categories. Some recommendations may not apply to any of the three. Appendix 1 shows the results of this analysis. Once again, it must be recognised that the assessment of whether a recommendation contributes to one or other of the categories is subjective, being based on an assessment of the content and meaning of the words in the recommendation. A generous rather than restrictive view was taken and whenever doubt existed as to whether a category applied, the recommendation was assessed as applying to the category.

Twenty-four recommendations were assessed as being within the 'planning' category. Fourteen of these recommendations were also assessed as being policy items, with the remaining ten addressing detail issues.

Examination of the cohort of recommendations assessed as both planning and policy related, and thus likely to be the more substantive planning related recommendations, revealed that they addressed a broad and unrelated range of issues. One proposed greater attention to encouraging quality research projects for the International Decade for Natural Disaster Reduction (IDNDR) program managed by Emergency Management Australia (Rec. 1). One recommended Commonwealth government agencies implement disaster recovery plans for their information systems (Rec. 2).

Two sought better management and research into earthquakes (Rec. 10, 11), while another two recommended strategies for the management of rodent plagues (Rec. 12, 13). Legislation covering the management of exotic animal diseases was proposed by one recommendation (Rec. 14). A further research related recommendation strongly emphasised the need to revitalise the study of Australian bushfires (Rec. 27), while another two recommended a greater commitment to bushfire control (Rec. 35, 36). One recommendation called for the States and the Commonwealth to give more attention to mitigating the effects of disasters and emergencies in place of the strong response orientation that is currently in place (Rec. 40). Two recommendations addressed improvements in Australia's civil defence arrangements at the national level (Rec. 43, 44). One recommendation called for the re-vitalisation of the Commonwealth Counter Disaster Task Force (Rec. 45), although this recommendation is arguably at odds with a finding in the Executive Summary that Emergency Management Australia already performs the role recommended for the Task Force. This possible conflict is not addressed or considered in the Executive Summary or the report proper.

The cohort of ten planning related recommendations assessed as administrative detail covered a wide range of items. They include the use of simulators for training, making more use of remote sensing and information dissemination technologies, improving maritime disaster planning, better arrangements for overseas assistance, planning at the Lucas Heights nuclear reactor, the use of broadcast media, better fire suppression on Commonwealth land and EMA's corporate plan.

Ten recommendations were assessed as being in the 'forecast' category. A cohort of six of these were also assessed as being policy related, and hence the more significant recommendations. Of this cohort, one sought improved research into natural hazards through the IDNDR program (Rec. 1), one proposed that a university be nominated as a centre for earthquake research (Rec. 11) and another recommended action to improve the warning of rodent plagues (Rec. 13). Improved arrangements for bushfire research that would give better warning systems was called for by one recommendation (Rec. 27), another sought development of a national bushfire strategy (Rec. 35) and one recommendation sought improvements to State and Commonwealth preparedness arrangements which include forecasting and warning systems (Rec. 40).

The remaining four forecast related recommendations assessed as administrative detail called for better use of remote sensing and information technology to provide forecast and warning systems, better forecasting systems for bushfires and more research generally into natural hazards to give an improved ability to forecast hazard impacts.

The 'response' category was the largest with 28 recommendations. Of these, only eight were also considered policy matters, and they covered a wide range of issues. One sought improvement to the protection of vital Commonwealth records (Rec. 2) while another called for a single agency to be responsible for earthquake management in each state (Rec. 10). The inclusion of rodent plagues in the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements was recommended (Rec. 13), as was the adoption of uniform exotic animal disease legislation (Rec. 14). The states were called on to improve bushfire response in one recommendation (Rec. 36), and another called for general improvement in response capability through better preparedness (Rec. 40).

The remaining 20 response oriented recommendations covered many and varied minor response issues. They ranged from suggesting Western Australia improve bushfire fighting equipment, enhancing remote sensing, uniform qualification standards for forensic scientists, increasing standardisation across the emergency services generally to conducting water bombing trials.

On 11 May 1995, Senator Crowley, for the Government, tabled its response to the report in the Senate, nearly twelve months after the report itself had been tabled (Crowley, 1995, p 332). Appendix 1 also lists the recommendations that were accepted by the Government.

Of the 45 recommendations, the response indicated the Government either accepted, endorsed or noted 33 of them, rejecting the remainder either explicitly or implicitly. Taken overall, this is an acceptance rate of 73% that could be considered quite good – nearly three-quarters were supported to a greater or lesser extent. A different picture emerges when the analysis of whether recommendations were substantive policy issues or matters of administrative detail. Of the 18 recommendations considered substantive, only ten were supported, an acceptance rate of 55% - considerably lower than the overall rate. Conversely, of the 27 administrative recommendations, 24 or 89% were accepted. Thus, the Government was much more likely to accept or

support a recommendation if it involved a matter of administrative detail than if it was a matter of substance.

The Senate noted the report without comment or debate. Senator Crowley obtained leave to make further remarks later, but there is no evidence that this occurred.

A number of conclusions about the conduct and findings of the Senate inquiry can be drawn from the above. The first conclusion that can be drawn is that the inquiry adds support to the argument that emergency management is an issue of low salience to decision-makers and the community. The evidence for this is that the inquiry was neither contentious nor able to excite any interest in the Senate when it was proposed that it be conducted. Similarly, when both the Childs Report and the Government's response were tabled in the Senate, it was an issue unable to spark any level of debate. This conclusion is further supported by the comparatively low participation rate by Australia's emergency services, the very low participation rate by local government and by the few members of the public who participated. While it can be understood that the issue is not one that is foremost in the minds of the general public, the failure of many emergency services and the vast majority of local governments to participate is of great significance. It calls into question the conduct of the inquiry and poses a question of whether there is too high a level of complacency in Australia regarding our vulnerability to major disasters among local governments and the emergency services.

It can also be concluded that the inquiry has not been able to base its recommendations on all of the available information and knowledge in the field of emergency management. On the evidence available, it did not undertake any research into international best practice in emergency management, nor does there appear to have been any effort to obtain input from any of the recognised international experts in the field. This omission may have contributed to the inquiry's failure to consider issues such as the need for national emergency management legislation, the benefits of regular evaluations of national capability, the impact of federalism and the impact of economic rationalism.

The inquiry also appears to have failed to give consideration to the provision of emergency management services to remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. These communities, that rank among the most disadvantaged in the

land, can be severely impacted by natural and man-made hazards, yet are poorly served by the emergency services and public policy for mitigating the effects (Yates, 1997). There is no evidence that the inquiry gave any significant attention to the problems and no recommendations for action were presented in the Childs Report.

There is considerable evidence that the inquiry was influenced by emergencies and events that were occurring during its conduct to the extent that it may have given those hazards that were publicly prominent greater attention than they may have warranted. The Childs Report and speeches by Senators Panizza and Chapman gave prominence to bushfires and rodent plagues, events that received considerable media coverage during the inquiry, whilst giving lesser consideration to hazards such as floods and tropical cyclones that cause greater losses or hazards such as earthquakes that have great potential for large scale destruction.

Finally, the inquiry failed to address a key issue – how effective and efficient were Australia's emergency management arrangements at the time? The Childs Report made no attempt to make an assessment of this or to deliver an evaluation of the arrangements. This is a critical omission and an opportunity lost.

Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Senate Inquiry

The inquiry into Australia's emergency management arrangements provided a unique opportunity for a comprehensive and wide ranging review and assessment of the arrangements by a potentially highly influential mechanism – a Senate Committee. This chapter evaluates the work of the Senate Committee during the inquiry to enable an assessment of its effectiveness to be made. In short, the chapter attempts to evaluate whether the Senate Committee was a suitable means to investigate and recommend improvements to Australia's emergency management arrangements. It is unlikely that assessment of the arrangements by a body as influential as a Senate Committee will occur again in the foreseeable future, thus it was important that the inquiry was carried out effectively and that it was conducted thoroughly and in depth.

Although Senate Committees are generally seen as effective means for reviewing public policy, Gavin (1994) identified obstacles to effective performance. Citing Jaensch's (1992, p 112), she noted three barriers facing parliamentary committees. The first problem is that they cannot compel government to comply with their recommendations. Although this is strictly true, in practice Senate committees have significant power to obtain concessions from government if the issue is one that the government needs to obtain Senate support for. This is due to the inability of recent federal governments to dominate the Senate or its committees.

The second problem is the inevitable role party politics plays in the deliberations of committees. Regardless of the merits of the situation, Senators take their party affiliations with them into the Senate committee room and they may follow a particular line regardless of the merits of the situation. This can lead to outcomes predicated on party lines, thus weakening the evaluative role of the committees. Other writers, however, have pointed to the development of bi-partisanship in Senate committees that may be at odds with the public displays in the Senate chamber or the media (Hayden, 1991; Young, 1997).

The third problem noted by Gavin (1994) is the absence of any requirement for the House of Representatives to consider reports prepared by Senate committees. This can be a significant limitation on the ability of Senate Committees to influence the policy process. The need however, for Federal Governments to gain Senate support for all legislation acts to moderate this problem. A government that consistently

ignored important Senate committee reports, particularly those supported by the minor parties, would be likely to have more difficulty gaining Senate approval for important legislation. In the current climate where governments are unlikely to command a majority in the Senate, pragmatic politics will dictate that governments at least consider recommendations made by Senate committees, particularly on issues that have high salience.

Having considered some of the obstacles to effective performance by parliamentary committees, the performance of the Senate Committee during its inquiry into Australia's emergency management arrangements will be discussed. The first item to be addressed is whether the scope of the inquiry was sufficiently wide as to enable it to conduct a thorough inquiry.

The scope and significance of the Senate Committee's inquiry into emergency management can be considered by reference to its Terms of Reference:

The capacity of public sector authorities to plan for, forecast and respond to major disasters and large-scale emergencies, fully respecting and utilising the skills and capabilities of volunteer organisations. (Foreman, 1992, p 1882)

This is a broad inquiry. It is not limited to any one agency or policy. The term 'public sector authorities' is very wide, encompassing all public service departments, statutory authorities and the defence forces. It is also not limited to the work of these authorities at any one level of government. The public sector includes federal, state and local government authorities, employing in 1991 1.7 million Australians or nearly 30% of the workforce (Davis, Wanna, Warhurst and Weller, 1993, p110).

The inquiry is also broad in its consideration of emergency management as a topic. As noted previously (in Chapter 2), emergency management can be divided into four phases – prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. The Terms of Reference require the Committee to consider planning, forecasting and responding to disasters and emergencies. It is evident from the Childs Report (1994) that the Committee applied the four-phase model to its inquiry. It included in its considerations issues on improving prevention and preparedness, made recommendations to enhance response and highlighted the importance of effective recovery management post-impact.

The scope of the inquiry is further broadened by the specific requirement to address the role of volunteers in Australia's emergency management arrangements. The Childs Report (1994, p 67) noted that this requirement was included to permit 'the

Committee to consider the role of volunteers ... although it is primarily a state responsibility.' Inclusion of volunteers has the effect of widening the scope of the inquiry well beyond the public sector to include a range of non-government philanthropic organisations such as the Red Cross, volunteer sea rescue groups, amateur radio groups and the Salvation Army.

It can be fairly argued, therefore, that the scope of the inquiry is broad, appropriate and was not a limiting factor.

Another way of evaluating the inquiry is to consider salience of the issue being inquired into and the way in which the Senate Committee handled it. An issue that has high salience with the community and decision-makers will involve different pressures and problems than one that has low salience. A high salience issue may be politicised with multiple competing interest and lobby groups and there is likely to be little difficulty engaging public and media interest. On the other hand, an issue that is of low salience may require special efforts to engage community and decision-maker interest.

In theory, emergency management and hence the Senate inquiry should be one of significance and of interest to the community. Disasters and emergencies occur across Australia and no community can say that it is immune from one form of disaster or another. Lives are lost to all forms of natural and man-made hazards, be they deaths in motor vehicle accidents, drowning in floods or dying in bushfires every year. In addition to the cost in life, significant damage to property, economic loss and community disruption is inflicted on numerous communities throughout the nation every year. In theory, the inquiry should be a matter of concern to all Australians. In practice, however, this is not the case.

Numerous studies have shown the low salience emergency management has with both the general public and elected officials (Rossi, Wright and Weber-Burdin, 1982; Petak, 1985; Turner, Nigg and Heller Paz, 1986; Tierney, 1989; Berke and Beatley, 1992; Schnieder, 1994). These studies indicate that normally there are many other issues that communities and decision-makers consider more important than emergency management. This is most likely because although disasters and emergencies are frequent events when considered across a whole state, they are relatively rare events in most communities and for most people (Nielsen and

Lidstone, 1998). Emergency management generally lacks a sense of immediacy - that something needs to be done now – as opposed to the many competing issues such as crime or pollution that are highly visible and are directly affecting people and communities. Most research notes that the salience of emergency management rises immediately after a disaster occurs. The US Federal Emergency Management Agency's (undated) guide for emergency program managers even exhorts them to capitalise on the occurrence of a disaster to gain support from the community and decision-makers for their programs. Other research, however, cautions that even recent disaster experience may not be sufficient to raise salience (Nielsen and Lidstone, 1998). People may draw the wrong conclusions from their experience – a weak tropical cyclone that causes little damage may result in their concluding that all cyclones will have the same minor impact (Berry and King, 1998). Consequently, the salience of that hazard may be considerably reduced.

The number of public submissions made to the Committee can infer evidence of the salience of the inquiry. While it would be expected that the professional agencies involved would make submissions; the general public is only likely to on issues of importance to them. The Committee called for public submissions through advertisements placed in the national newspapers. Some 85 written submissions were made together with a further 55 witnesses at the public hearings. The emergency services sector and public sector dominated the written and witness submissions generally. Local government submissions and witnesses were at a very low level, four and one respectively. Twenty-one non-government organisations made written submissions but only three presented as witnesses at the public hearings.

A similar result occurred with private individuals – twenty-one made written submissions with seventeen witnesses (but thirteen of these were South Australian farmers pressing a point on rodent plagues). The absence of significant input by local government is indicative of two things. Firstly, the Committee could not be said to have truly undertaken comprehensive consultation with local government with such a low rate of participation. This leads to a conclusion that the Committee did not obtain complete information on the views of local government on emergency management, a potentially serious omission. Secondly, it supports the research findings that emergency management is of low salience to governments generally and in this case to Australian local government in particular. The low level of public participation

reinforces the research findings of low salience of emergency management with the public.

The problem of low salience should have become apparent to the Senate Committee in the course of its inquiry – the sparse public submissions and almost complete absence of input from local governments should have prompted the Committee to act to increase participation. This is especially true of local government, given the important role played by local government in managing emergencies and disasters.

The fact of low salience does not, however, remove the argument that emergency management is, because of the threat posed by natural and man-made hazards, inherently an important issue. The same research that indicates its low salience equally indicates the strong expectation that government will undertake effective mitigation to prevent the loss of life and damage. Community outrage when this expectation is not reasonably fulfilled can be intense, as reported by Schneider (1994) in her study of government failure in US disasters.

The effectiveness of the Senate Committee's inquiry can also be assessed through consideration of the use made of recognised experts in the emergency management, both Australian and international, and of references to best practice in the literature on emergency management.

The Senate Committee made some use of available Australian expertise, although this was mostly in the form of presentations and submissions from the emergency services. Such submissions, although a vital source of information for the Committee, cannot be considered to be independent or detached. Official submissions are more likely to 'gild the lily' through promoting the agency's perspective of the problems and budgetary deficiencies or they may be tempted to over-emphasise their capacity to cope with the impact of disaster. Independent expertise is less likely to be biased in this way and so should be given careful consideration during inquiries. Only one recognised Australian researcher is listed in the Childs Report (1994) as making a written submission, Professor R. Wettenhall, who has written authoritatively on emergency management and political issues.

There is also no evidence that the Committee took into consideration any of the significant body of international research into emergency management other than that which may have been provided through submissions made to the Committee. The

written submission of Mr R. Jones (1993), then Director of EMA's Australian Emergency Management Institute at Mt Macedon, is available and he refers to the importance of the international research, but the Committee appears not to have taken the matter further.

The Childs Report (1994) shows no awareness of many of the issues identified by international research into emergency management. Issues such as the low salience of emergency management with both government and the general public, the incompatibility of military command models in the civil emergency management environment and the problems that result when expectations of government's role are unable to be fulfilled are not considered in the Childs Report. No awareness of the criteria developed by Quarantelli (see Chapter 2) to measure the effectiveness of emergency management is apparent in the Childs Report, although any reasonable review of the emergency management literature will highlight the work of Quarantelli.

The Committee also does not appear to have undertaken any comparative studies between Australian emergency management and overseas practice, thus cutting out a potentially useful source of information. The problems that face Australia in mitigating natural and man-made hazards are not unique. Countries such as New Zealand, the United States and Canada share many of the hazards and have similar demographics, culture and geography. The United States and Canada are also federal states, so share many of the issues associated with federalism. Furthermore, information on emergency management in these countries is readily accessible. As has already been noted, most research into emergency management has been conducted in North America and many of the publications generated by this research are available in the EMA library at the Australian Emergency Management Institute at Mt Macedon. It is inconceivable that the Committee was not briefed on the capability of the Library during their visit. A request to the US Federal Emergency Management Agency for information on North American arrangements by a Senate Committee would most likely have resulted in the provision of a great deal of material.

The Committee could, had it so chosen, obtained considerable relevant information without great difficulty. There is no evidence that this was done.

The Senate Committee's Report also does not demonstrate an awareness of important Australian political issues relevant to emergency management. The impact of federalism is not considered as an issue, despite the Childs Report itself providing examples of the problems of Australia's federal system (see for example its discussion of problems with rodent plagues or bushfire management). The absence of a national emergency management framework endorsed by federal legislation is not considered – yet the importance given to national legislation providing the framework in the United States features highly in readily accessible documentation by the US Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Similarly, no consideration was given to the impact of economic rationalism on emergency management and the ability of government agencies to provide essential services during disasters and emergencies. The debates over economic rationalism and new public management are well known and it is reasonable to argue that the Committee ought to have been aware of the issue. No reference is made in the Childs Report to the reduced capability governments at all levels across Australia have to respond to emergencies because resources that they formerly controlled have been downsized and contracted out. This is despite evidence that this is a characteristic outcome of the economic rationalist approach (Hood and Jackson, 1991). Examination of the transcripts of the public hearings demonstrates that the issue was brought to the Committee's attention. Sneeuwjagt (1994, pp 1293 - 1297), a senior officer of the Western Australian Department of Conservation and Land Management, pointed out that:

Our main concern is the reduction in resources to manage fires, both within government agencies and in the [volunteer fire] brigade arena. This is as a result of government cutbacks a lot of activities are now just being sent out to contract.

Littleton (1994), a former Director General of EMA, made comments in a similar vein, calling for caution and careful thought before the capacity of government agencies to respond to emergencies were cut in the name of efficiency. The Committee, however, did not take cognisance of the issue and did not discuss it in its report or make any recommendations concerning it.

The final point for considering the effectiveness of the Senate inquiry is to ask what the Government did with the recommendations in the Childs Report. If the recommendations were largely accepted, then it can be argued that the Committee has

been influential in policy development and implementation. If, on the other hand, the recommendations were not accepted, then it can be argued that the Committee has been ineffective.

The Childs Report contained 45 recommendations, of which the Government accepted, endorsed or noted 33 of them. Although this indicates a reasonably good acceptance rate, when the acceptance rate of substantive recommendations, that is those that address major issues, is considered the situation changes. Of the 45 recommendations, only 18 were considered substantive or policy oriented – of these, the Government accepted ten or slightly more than half. Reasons given by the Government for the non-acceptance of these more important recommendations include comments that existing arrangements were equal or better, other action was underway or that it was a state issue (Crowley, 1995).

The relatively low rate of acceptance by the Government of the significant recommendations indicates that the Senate Committee's inquiry was not particularly effective in influencing or changing public policy for emergency management in substantive way.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

The Senate Committee's inquiry into Australia's emergency management arrangements was a unique opportunity for a comprehensive review of the arrangements used by federal, state and local governments to protect the community from harm by natural and man-made hazards. It was an opportunity to assess whether Australia uses the best practice to mitigate the hazards, whether the resources allocated are adequate and whether issues such as economic rationalism and federalism contribute in a positive or negative way.

In the main, the inquiry was an opportunity lost. Although the inquiry did result in recommendations for change, a number of which were adopted by the Federal Government, the inquiry failed to address or come to grips with significant issues that needed to be fully considered if the full potential of the inquiry was to be reached.

The report of the inquiry released by the Senate Committee did not make any overall findings about the state of Australia's emergency management arrangements. There is no general evaluation on the nation's overall effort nor is any attempt made to conduct a comparative evaluation between Australian arrangements and those used in comparable states such as the United States, Canada, New Zealand or the United Kingdom. Such a comparative review would have revealed, for example, that many countries have a national framework established by legislation. In the United States, there is a clear statement of the goal to be achieved – protecting the community from the effects of hazards. State and local legislation giving force of law to emergency management complement this statutory framework. No such federal legislation exists in Australia, nor does the Senate Committee consider the subject.

Further, the Senate Committee does not appear to have attempted to examine the views of recognised international expertise on emergency management. As a field of study and thought, it is well developed in North America and there is a wealth of knowledge on ways to improve public policy for the management of disasters and emergencies. Much of this body of knowledge has been adopted for use in Australia, sometimes uncritically, but the Senate Committee did not attempt to access it. The use of international expertise coupled with comparative studies of other jurisdictions might have enabled the identification of benchmarks against which Australia's performance could have been assessed. Such benchmarks and a comparative

assessment would have provided a base line to measure future improvements in the nation's emergency management arrangements. This would have provided a management tool of lasting value. However, this was not done or considered.

Consideration of the views of recognised experts may have allowed the Committee to consider new or competing ideas and concepts for the management of emergencies and disasters. Senate committees provide an opportunity for consideration of radical concepts that might otherwise be suppressed by the bureaucracy or simple inertia. There is no evidence in the Childs Report that this form of debate was even considered let alone conducted. The absence of such competing ideas may have resulted in the Committee's considerations being heavily influenced by the preponderance of submissions from the bureaucracy. The majority of the written and verbal submissions were made by either the emergency services themselves or by other public sector agencies. The submissions made by these agencies are unlikely to have been derogatory to themselves or the arrangements managed by them. Consequently, the bulk of the submissions may have been somewhat one-sided. The use of independent expertise would have helped to balance the submission made to the Committee.

Despite there being evidence of the problem in the Senate Committee's report, no consideration is given to the impact of federalism on Australian disaster management. The Childs Report provides examples of problems where the levels of government evade responsibility for the management of a problem and, apart from recommending that the state governments spend more, fails to consider why this occurs. There would have been value in comparing the effectiveness of arrangement in unitary states such as New Zealand or the United Kingdom with the arrangements in federal states such as Australia, the United States or Canada. This was not done.

Although the impact of economic rationalism and new public management on the community generally should have been known to Committee members and given that the problem in respect to emergency management was brought to its attention, no effective consideration of the issue was undertaken by the Committee. This is despite the specific requirement in the inquiry's Terms of Reference that issues affecting volunteers be considered. The reduction in volunteer numbers in rural areas was discussed in the Childs Report, but no recommendations to address the problem are presented or discussed. This is a serious failure to properly meet the Terms of

Reference as well as a missed opportunity to consider strategies to address the problem.

The Senate Committee appears to have been heavily influenced by issues of the moment. At the time of the inquiry Australia was being affected by a series of major bushfires and a mouse plague, both of which received considerable media attention. The mouse plague affected a narrow but organised and vocal segment of the community from one state that was able to convince the Senate Committee to include a number of recommendations targeted at their particular problem (that were subsequently rejected by the Government). Bushfires also received disproportionate consideration compared to other equally or more damaging hazards. Had the inquiry been conducted during early 1999, it is likely that tropical cyclones, floods and hailstorms (events then in the public eye) would have received greater attention than they did in the inquiry.

During the course of the inquiry, the Senate Committee was unsuccessful in engaging many key stakeholders in the consultative process. Less than half the nation's emergency services made written submissions; there were very few public submissions and only four out of the hundreds of local governments made written submissions. Only one local government made a verbal submission. The Senate Committee did not engage large groups of 'at-risk' communities and no action was taken to address the problem although it should have been obvious to the Committee that many stakeholders were not participating.

The issue certainly failed to ignite any level of political interest. Senate debates on establishing the inquiry were limited to voting in favour of the motion to hold it and there was no debate on the Government's response to the inquiry's recommendations even though most of the significant recommendations were rejected. It sank without trace from further consideration by either the Government or Opposition. It could be argued that the inquiry had bi-partisan support – support for it to be a non-issue.

The Senate Committee gave no attention whatsoever to disadvantaged groups in the community. Disadvantaged groups are often more vulnerable to disasters because they often can only afford to live in more vulnerable areas and lack the skills and resources to mitigate the effects of the hazards. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are often at great risk –they are located in hazard prone

areas and are ill-prepared. The Senate Committee did not visit any of these communities nor did it consider it as an issue. Consequently, no recommendations to improve the situation were made.

The Senate Committee gave considerable attention to administrative issues of lesser importance than the major questions of policy. Twenty seven of the forty five recommendations addressed matters of administrative detail with only eighteen being assessed as policy oriented. Whether the attention to administrative detail was a conscious decision or is the result of the lack of technical expertise held by Committee members and the failure to consult with independent experts cannot be known from the evidence available.

In addition to the focus on administrative matters, the Senate Committee was not particularly successful in gaining Government endorsement of its substantive recommendations. Of the 18 substantive or policy recommendations, the Government only accepted ten, a relatively low acceptance rate of 55%. From the effectiveness viewpoint, any inquiry that is only able to gain support for half of its major recommendations cannot be considered highly successful.

As has been noted, the Terms of Reference for the inquiry specifically tasked the Senate Committee to be cognisant of the importance of volunteers in Australian emergency management. Although one full chapter of the Childs Report discussed volunteers and the challenges they face, not one recommendation is presented. This is a significant failing in the inquiry given that important problems were revealed and are discussed in the Report.

When assessed against the criteria established in the literature on evaluations, the inquiry by the Senate Committee also falls short of the mark. No attempt was made to establish what the objectives for Australian emergency management are or ought to be. There is no attempt to consider whether established emergency management programs are achieving the outcomes that governments might have set. These are all considered valid issues for parliamentary committees to investigate and report on to hold the executive accountable. The inquiry made no attempt to achieve this.

There are two primary reasons for the failure of the inquiry to make a substantive contribution to the development of Australia's emergency management arrangements. Firstly, the issue of emergency management in Australia and overseas is characterised

by low salience to both decision-makers and the public other than during the immediate aftermath of a disaster when both groups demand prompt solutions to often intractable problems. The low salience of the issue resulted in many key stakeholders failing to participate effectively in the inquiry and hence provide input on problems and possible solutions.

Secondly, and closely related, is the absence of any key pressure groups attempting to place emergency management as an issue on the policy agenda. The absence of an active and influential pressure group has been noted in the literature as being a significant problem affecting the effectiveness of emergency management arrangements. The ability of a small group of grain farmers in South Australia to influence the outcome of the inquiry by gaining support for recommendations on what is the relatively minor problem of rodent plagues is an example of the potential such groups can have. They can be effective in both getting issues onto the policy agenda and on raising the salience of the issue.

The result was an inquiry that was unable to come to grips with a significant number of key issues in emergency management in Australia and that did not result in significant change to emergency management policy. As a consequence, a unique opportunity to reduce the cost (deaths, injury and financial) of disasters and emergencies in Australia was lost.

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ANALYSIS OF THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CHILDS REPORT

No.	Recommendations	Plan For	Forecast	Respond To	Other	Policy?	Administrative Detail	Accepted?
1	Promote IDNDR projects state & Commonwealth	Y	Y			Y		Y
2	Improve Commonwealth agency records management	Y		Y		Y		
3	Uniform National Building Codes				Y	Y		
4	Simulator Training			Y			Y	Y
5	ADMIN as model for information exchange	Y	Y	Y			Y	Y
6	Technical GIS committee to be formed	Y	Y				Y	Y
7	Investigate use of remote sensing technology		Y	Y			Y	Y
8	National quals. for forensic scientists			Y			Y	Y
9	Standardisation among emergency services			Y			Y	Y
10	Earthquake management - state organisation	Y		Y		Y		Y
11	Earthquake research	Y	Y			Y		
12	Rodent Plague Commission	Y	Y	Y		Y		
13	Rodent plagues - NDRA inclusion in	Y		Y		Y		Y
14	Uniform national Exotic Disease legislation	Y		Y		Y		Y
15	Review NDRA re technological disasters				Y	Y		Y
16	DSS pamphlet re relief payments			Y			Y	Y
17	Maritime planning to be best practice	Y					Y	Y
18	Chemical plans for maritime spills	Y		Y			Y	Y
19	Improve marine charts				Y		Y	Y
20	Image spectrometer & navigation				Y		Y	Y
21	Compulsory pilotage				Y	Y		Y
22	Maritime recommendations in international treaties				Y		Y	Y
23	CAA locate rescue boats at major airports			Y			Y	Y
24	ANSTO plan for Lucas Heights	Y		Y			Y	
25	Commonwealth Planning	Y					Y	Y
26	DSS payments to volunteers			Y			Y	Y
27	Bushfire research	Y	Y	Y		Y		
28	SMA & WA frequency allocation			Y			Y	Y
29	Communications standardisation			Y			Y	Y
30	Water bombing trial			Y			Y	
31	Emergency use of broadcast stations	Y		Y			Y	Y
32	Improve international support coordination			Y			Y	Y
33	DSS payments to vollies see Rec 26			Y			Y	Y
34	Fire suppression on Commonwealth land	Y		Y			Y	
35	Bushfire research & bushfire strategy	Y	Y	Y		Y		Y
36	States to do better with bushfires	Y		Y		Y		Y
37	Better equipment for bushfires in WA			Y			Y	Y
38	EMA focus on core business via Corporate Plan	Y		Y			Y	Y
39	EMA & states to do more IDNDR work	Y	Y				Y	Y
40	Improve preparedness of states & Commonwealth	Y	Y	Y		Y		
41	Retain AEMI at Mt Macedon				Y		Y	
42	EMA to be relocated to PM's Department				Y	Y		
43	Civil defence to go to EMA	Y				Y		Y
44	Joint civil defence & EM planning role	Y				Y		Y
45	Role of Commonwealth CD Task Force	Y				Y		
		24	10	28	8	18	27	33