

History of the State Emergency Service

In 1936 a Commonwealth – States ministerial conference in Adelaide agreed that the States should protect the population against gas attack, and train personnel for essential civil services. To supplement State efforts, the Commonwealth agreed to train key personnel and provide equipment, manuals, technical information and key advice.

This was probably the start of the SES of today. At this stage that most of the Civil Defence work was handled by many Commonwealth Departments!

While this policy is consistent with the outcome of the 1936 meeting, it is important to note that the States and the Commonwealth had no formal agreement on a division of responsibilities.

In a ministerial statement in 1959, Interior Minister Gordon Freeth said,

“It is a basic principle that the States are responsible for the development of their own civil defence planning and programs with the Commonwealth providing national guidance and coordination as necessary”.

This principle has not been challenged and remains the basis of Commonwealth’s involvement in civil defence.

Over the period 1936 – 1966 all States and Territories established civil defence directorates. The Evaluation Team did not analyse developments in the period in great details, but it agrees with the opinion of one commentary that these organisations were ‘little more than planning and coordinating headquarters with limited and ill-defined role in the event of a disaster’. The Commonwealth’s own Civil Defence Directorate appears to have been similar. The Evaluation Team acknowledges that there was considerable variation between the States.

In 1966 the Commonwealth convened a Federal – State ministerial meeting specifically to discuss civil defence. That meeting agreed to the following division of responsibilities:

- a. Commonwealth:
 - i. Provide the States with information on the strategic situation and on possible forms and scales of attack, and give national guidance on civil defence policy;
 - ii. Organise civil defence in Commonwealth Territories;

- iii. Arrange such cooperation between Commonwealth and State as is necessary to insure the effectiveness of the civil defence planning and preparations and provide assistance in the implementation thereof as agreed with the States;
 - iv. Provide advanced training facilities for selected students in consultation with the States;
 - v. Provide, in consultation with the States, manuals and other documents for civil defence training and the information of the public;
 - vi. Supply to the States scientific and technical information on civil defence matters;
 - vii. Arrange for cooperation by Commonwealth Government Departments and Authorities and the Armed Forces with State civil defence organisations;
 - viii. Arrange for interstate and Commonwealth assistance as necessary in an emergency; and
 - ix. Prepare Commonwealth civil defence legislation as may be required.
- b. State:
- i. Establishing and operating a State civil defence organisation including voluntary civil defence services;
 - ii. Coordination of State and Local Government services and other services in civil defence activities;
 - iii. Civil defence planning and preparations in conjunction with the Commonwealth and other States;
 - iv. Preparation of legislation required for civil defence;
 - v. The publication and dissemination of information, advice and instructions on civil defence;
 - vi. Supply to the Commonwealth scientific and technical information on civil defence matters resulting from investigations by State Department and Authorities; and
 - vii. Liaison and cooperation with neighbouring States or Commonwealth Territories on all civil defence matters of common interest.

Following the 1966 meeting there was no apparent change in the level or direction of Commonwealth civil defence activities until the creation of the Natural Disasters Organisation (NDO) in 1974. NDO was deemed to have included the responsibilities

of the Commonwealth. However, this was not made explicit in the documentation put to the Government. After 1966, the post-war civil defence directorates in the State were remodelled into State Emergency Services.

In 1939 the Department of Defence was appointed the co-ordinating authority for national defence plans. Following the Commonwealth/State Conference 31 March 1939 a section was established within the Department of Defence to handle civil defence and state co-operation matters. This section was the authority for national air raid precautions activities and dealing with state works of defence value. It was the duty of the OIC of the Directorate to correspond directly with the responsible officer in each state on technical matters and the execution of agreed policy, and for these federal and state officers to meet in direct conference on the preparation of defence plans. Col.R.W.M.Thirkell MBE, VD, was the Director of Civilian Defence and State Co-operation from 1940 until the Directorate was abolished on 26 June 1941.

On 13 November 1939 the functions were taken over by the Department of Defence Co-ordination. The Department of Home Security took over the responsibilities of civil defence from 26 June 1941.

The Directorate of Civilian Defence and State Co-operation, within the Department of Defence Co-ordination, was established in 1939 following upon agreements reached at a conference of Commonwealth and State Ministers held in Canberra in March of that year. In view of the growth in the Civil Defence Organisations and the general development of Civil Defence measures, a separate Commonwealth Department under separate Ministerial direction was established on 26 June 1941.

The Directorate was thereafter administered by the newly formed Department of Home Security which had the following responsibilities:

- (a) It acted in an advisory and co-ordinating capacity in relation to the government of the states in the measures for the protection of the lives and property of the civilian population in the event of an emergency arising out of the war;
- (b) compensation for civil defence workers and the dependants of personnel who suffered injuries while on duty or whilst training; and for injuries sustained while carrying out essential duties during periods of enemy action;
- (c) protection of bulk oil installations by screen walling, Bunding, Precautionary fire measures;
- (d) Camouflage. Preparation of schemes and supervision of their implementation to meet the requirements of the services. Preparation of technical bulletins and posters illustrating the need for camouflage measures to protect vital installations and to protect vital equipment;
- (e) prohibition of work near aerodromes under National Security (Supplementary) Regulation No 58;

- (f) Securing appropriate measure of uniformity in essential codes in regard to lighting of vehicles, air raid warnings, shelter facilities;
- (g) Air raid precaution measures in respect of Commonwealth establishments;
- (h) financial arrangements between Commonwealth and states in connection with civil defence matters;
- (i) securing fire fighting equipment, steel helmets, respirators and other essential equipment for the Commonwealth and for distribution to the states;
- (j) civil defence matters including -
 - (i) establishment of schools for air raid precautions training;
 - (ii) furnishing technical advice to the state and Commonwealth departments;
 - (iii) conducting research and experiments;
 - (iv) preparation, printing and distribution of standard textbooks;
 - (v) distribution of films.

By 1945, these functions had been extended to include:

- (a) The recovery and disposal of equipment, some of which was government property and some of which was secured under Lend-Lease;
- (b) the compilation of the history of the department's activities;
- (c) the compilation of a departmental war book and chapters in the Commonwealth War Book relating to civil defence matters.

The Department of Home Security also administered the following National Security Regulations:

National Security (General) Regulations
 National Security (Civil Defence Workers' Compensation) Regulations
 National Security (Supplementary) Regulations No 58
 National Security (Camouflage) Regulations
 National Security (Protection of Bulk Oil Installations) Regulations

The work of the Department of Home Security was closely related to wartime activities and was a vital national necessity in the early months of the war with Japan but as the war moved away from the shores of Australia the department declined in importance. At its peak in 1943 the department employed 183 staff.

During the vital stages of the establishment of the Department of Home Security, the Secretary of the department was also the Secretary of the Department of Defence but later the Assistant Secretary, Mr A W Welch became Secretary. About this time Professor W J Dakin was appointed Technical Director (Camouflage). Shortly after this, the National Security (Camouflage) Regulations were promulgated under which control over camouflage was vested in the Defence Central Camouflage Committee administered by the Department of Home Security. Rapid extension of Service Requirements following Japan's entry into the war necessitated the establishment of an expanded camouflage organisation to cope with these growing demands.

A Research and Experiments Section was established in the Department of Home Security in March 1942. Around this time a Scientific Advisory Committee was established and liaison channels were opened up between Great Britain, the United States, Russia, and other countries through which technical information was received in this country. In January 1943, a Training and Inspection Section was established in the Department of Home Security and an advanced course for Instructors from the State Civil Defence Organisations was conducted by the Department in Melbourne. This was followed by tests of the Civil Defence arrangements in Hobart, in the Queensland coastal towns and in the Perth-Fremantle areas.

From April 1944 onwards civil defence policy was reviewed on a number of occasions and restrictions were gradually relaxed. In November 1945, on the advice of the Defence Committee, War Cabinet resolved that:

- (a) there was no longer any necessity to maintain civil defence organisations on a reserve basis;
- (b) the nucleus civil defence organisation in the post war period should be limited to a planning organisation;
- (c) the Commonwealth should set up a planning organisation to keep state planning organisations advised on civil defence matters and to co-ordinate all state civil defence plans.

As at June 1945 (the date of the report of the Committee of Review into the Civil Staffing of Wartime Activities), the department was responsible for the following matters:

- (i) the recovery and disposal of equipment, some of which is Government property and some of which was secured under Lend-Lease;
- (ii) the administration of the financial agreement between the Commonwealth and the states in regard to civil defence measures;
- (iii) the administration of National Security Regulations referred to in paragraph 5 above;
- (iv) the compilation of the history of the department's activities;

- (v) camouflage research;
- (vi) the preparation of detailed proposals for a nucleus civil defence organisation; and
- (vii) the compilation of a departmental war book and chapters in the Commonwealth War Book relating to civil defence measures.

On 1 February 1946 the Department of Home Security was abolished and its activities were absorbed by the Department of the Interior.

This was notified in Commonwealth Gazette No 23 of 7 February 1946. The following people were appointed to the position of Minister for Home Security:

26 Jun 1941 - 7 Oct 1941 : Hon Joseph Palmer Abbott
 7 Oct 1941 - 1 Feb 1946 : Hon Hubert Peter Lazzarini

The following people were appointed to the position of Secretary:

1 Jul 1941 - Dec 1941 : Sir F G Shedden
 2 Jul 1942 - Mar 1944 : A W Welch
 7 Mar 1944 - 25 Jul 1945 : M S Thomson

WNC Fairweather of the Department of Defence apparently acted as Secretary from 25 July 1945 to February 1946.

Natural Disasters Organisation/ (from Jan 1993) Emergency Management Australia

This body came into being on 2 July 1974. A series of major floods in Queensland and northern New South Wales in early 1974, highlighted organisational problems associated with disaster relief.

FUNCTIONS: The Natural Disasters Organisation has the responsibility for the co-ordination of all civil defence and emergency relief operations together with the co-ordinated use of National resources through its National Emergency Operations Centre.

ROLE:

- (1) It specifically directs federal programmes of equipment and finance for civil defence and emergency services.
- (2) It co-ordinates research, prepares plans for coping with natural disasters, and directs information dissemination.
- (3) Via the Civil Defence School (#) at Mt. Macedon, Victoria, it provides a National training function, for State civil defence organisations.

As yet the Natural Disasters Organisation appears to have no legislative authority. On 2 July 1974, vide Executive Council Minute No.155, Major-General Sir Alan Stretton CBE, AO was appointed as the Natural Disasters Organisation's first Director-General.

From January 1993, the Organisation was retitled Emergency Management Australia.

SOURCES

Department of Defence Press Releases 295/74 of 27 June 1974; 300/74 of 3 July 1974; 301/74 of 11 July 1974; and 304/74 of 16 July 1974.

(#).. by 1979 called the Australian Counter Disaster College, from January 1993 the Australian Emergency Management Institute (CA 1852)