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Performance Audit

Australian Government Crisis Management Framework

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

National Emergency Management Agency

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Canberra ACT
21 October 2024

Dear President
Dear Mr Speaker

In accordance with the authority contained in the *Auditor-General Act 1997*, I have undertaken an independent performance audit in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the National Emergency Management Agency. The report is titled *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework*. Pursuant to Senate Standing Order 166 relating to the presentation of documents when the Senate is not sitting, I present the report of this audit to the Parliament.

Following its presentation and receipt, the report will be placed on the Australian National Audit Office's website — <http://www.anao.gov.au>.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rona Mellor', written in a cursive style.

Rona Mellor PSM
Acting Auditor-General

The Honourable the President of the Senate
The Honourable the Speaker of the House of Representatives
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

AUDITING FOR AUSTRALIA

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Audit snapshot

Auditor-General Report No.5 2024–25

Australian Government Crisis Management Framework



Why did we do this audit?

- ▶ The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) is the basis for the Australian Government's response to crises including pandemics, natural disasters, terrorism, and cyber incidents.
- ▶ To provide assurance to Parliament over processes to identify and disseminate lessons learnt, and on the readiness of government systems and processes to respond to future crises, as part of phase 3 of the ANAO COVID-19 multi-year audit strategy.



What did we find?

- ▶ PM&C has developed a largely appropriate framework for responding to crises.
- ▶ A structured assessment of the readiness of systems and processes was not undertaken prior to the 2023 AGCMF Review which commenced in March 2023.
- ▶ The revised AGCMF released in September 2024 incorporates an increased emphasis on continuous improvement and improved oversight.



Key facts

- ▶ Between 2020 and 2023, the AGCMF has been used to respond to crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, natural disasters such as floods and cyclones, cyber security incidents, and Australian Government humanitarian assistance to overseas disasters.
- ▶ The Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet (PM&C) conducted a review of the AGCMF in 2023.



What did we recommend?

- ▶ There were five recommendations aimed at processes to support annual updates of the AGCMF, additional guidance in the AGCMF, and the inputs into the development of the annual national exercise program.
- ▶ PM&C agreed to all four recommendations. The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) agreed to one recommendation.

9

recommendations in the 2023 AGCMF Review conducted by PM&C.

14

hazards identified under the revised AGCMF released in September 2024 — increasing from 12 in the previous version.

Summary and recommendations

Background

1. The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) outlines the Australian Government's approach to preparing for, responding to, and recovering from crisis.¹ The AGCMF describes an 'all-hazards' approach that includes mitigation, planning, and assisting states and territories to manage emergencies resulting from natural events.²
2. The AGCMF has been used to respond to a variety of crises between 2020 and 2023 including:
 - the COVID-19 pandemic;
 - natural disasters such as prolonged flood events across Australia and tropical cyclone events;
 - cyber security incidents including data breaches involving Medibank and Latitude Financial, and the security breach affecting the email gateway system supporting some ACT Government systems; and
 - the Turkiye and Syria earthquake for which the Australian Government committed humanitarian assistance.
3. In March 2023, government agreed to conduct a review of the AGCMF. The Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet (PM&C) conducted this review. Following the 2023 AGCMF Review, a revised AGCMF was released at the 2024–25 Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Summit in Canberra on 18–19 September 2024.³

Rationale for undertaking the audit

4. The AGCMF is the basis for the Australian Government's response to crises including pandemics, natural disasters, terrorism, and cyber incidents. This audit provides assurance to the Parliament on whether Australian Government entities have identified and applied lessons from crises between 2020 and 2023, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to the AGCMF in preparation for future severe to catastrophic crises.
5. In its report on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management approaches, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) recommended that the Auditor-General consider undertaking a performance audit of the AGCMF, and include within the audit scope whether the updated framework adequately reflects lessons learned from the

1 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 3.3*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, p. 5.

2 *ibid.*

3 The Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Summit brings together delegates from across governments, industry and the not for profit (NFP) sector with responsibility for response and recovery across multiple hazards to discuss integrated preparedness across the entire crisis management continuum. The inaugural summit was held in September 2023.

COVID-19 pandemic.⁴ The JCPAA also identified an audit of the AGCMF as an audit priority of the Parliament in 2022–23.

Audit objective and criteria

6. The audit objective was to assess whether the Australian Government has established an appropriate framework for responding to crises.

7. To form a conclusion against the objective, the following high-level criteria were adopted:

- Has the readiness of systems and processes to respond to crises been assessed?
- Is the AGCMF fit for purpose to respond to a changing threat environment?

8. The audit examined whole-of-government crisis coordination arrangements established through seven versions of the AGCMF between 2020 and 2023, and the 2023 review of the AGCMF undertaken by PM&C. The audit focussed on whole-of-government crisis coordination arrangements between 2020 and 2023 including the supporting mechanisms to convene key committees under the AGCMF.

9. The audit did not examine:

- the application of the framework to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic or other crises;
- the adherence to individual national plans required under the AGCMF;
- agency specific crisis coordination arrangements; or
- operational responses to crises.

Conclusion

10. In establishing the revised AGCMF, PM&C has developed a largely appropriate framework for responding to crises. The revised AGCMF incorporates lessons from prior crises and provides increased guidance for all-hazards responses, including complex and concurrent crises. The increased oversight and additional continuous improvement activities established in the revised AGCMF will be important to ensure the framework remains appropriate for responding to crises over time as threats and the environment continue to evolve. The revised AGCMF represents a shift in approach from previous versions of the AGCMF and will require sustained effort to build and maintain appropriate capability.

11. A structured assessment of the readiness of systems and processes contained in the AGCMF was not undertaken prior to the 2023 Review. Updates to the AGCMF during 2020 to 2023 were administrative in nature and reflected changes that had already been operationalised. The roles and responsibilities set out under previous versions of the AGCMF were not clearly defined. The 2023 AGCMF Review was guided by a project plan which captured evidence from a range of inputs including comprehensive stakeholder engagement and testing of recommendations and proposed actions. Clarifying arrangements for annual updates and future comprehensive reviews is important to ensure these activities adequately capture and address required changes in a timely manner. The lessons management capability and associated processes are evolving. Formal

4 Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements*, Canberra, 2023, p. xiii.

lessons activities are not conducted for all crises. Thresholds for conducting a lessons process had not been defined or documented prior to 2024.

12. The revised AGCMF released in September 2024 incorporates an increased emphasis on continuous improvement and improved oversight. These amendments, if effectively implemented, should position the framework to respond to a changing threat environment. Activities that informed the 2023 AGCMF Review, such as ‘futures workshops’, would provide value to the framework into the future as they provide an opportunity to examine whether the framework is strategically positioned to adapt to the future. The revised AGCMF introduces several new roles. The responsibilities of these roles are largely clear. Until 2024, there has been a lack of oversight over national level plans to ensure they are reviewed and updated. The annual national exercise program conducted by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has primarily focussed on natural disaster scenarios. Compounding non-natural disaster specific impacts are now being integrated into natural disaster scenario-based exercises within the program. There is scope to improve the transparency and currency of national plans and risk planning in relation to shared risks and key management personnel risks.

Supporting findings

Readiness of systems and processes

13. Within the AGCMF, specific hazards are identified with lead ministers and entities assigned to these hazards. The emergence of newly identified hazards has led to updates in the AGCMF. Space weather events were added as a specific hazard as they were identified as posing a risk to critical infrastructure. Cyber incidents were added as a specified hazard following a review of crises that indicated roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined. Under previous versions of the AGCMF, triggers and thresholds for activation of whole-of-government crisis coordination were broad and did not provide clear guidance to entities. There are multiple mechanisms that support crisis coordination and response. Some of these mechanisms were not defined in the AGCMF. The role and interactions between various crisis mechanisms could have been more clearly defined. The National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) was introduced as a means to provide broader engagement than previously existing arrangements. The NCM was embedded in the AGCMF after it became a regularly used mechanism during the COVID-19 pandemic response. (See paragraphs 2.3 to 2.33)

14. Updates undertaken annually between 2020 and 2023 were largely limited to documenting machinery of government changes. These updates varied in the approach and stakeholder engagement. There was no engagement with states and territories as part of the administrative updates in 2020, the second update in 2021 or 2022. More significant comments relating to the framework were held over in anticipation of a future review, which was conducted in 2023. The 2023 AGCMF Review had not been approved at the time. The approach to the 2023 AGCMF Review was guided by a project plan which captured evidence from a range of inputs including comprehensive stakeholder engagement and testing of recommendations and proposed actions. There are minor gaps in documentation relating to the analysis of some of this evidence base. Lessons management, including a lessons management capability, to inform continuous improvement activities is evolving. (See paragraphs 2.34 to 2.79)

15. There are gaps in lesson management at the whole-of-government level. As the lessons management capability matures, implementation of actions to address identified lessons is improving. During crises between 2019 and 2023, an APS Surge Reserve was established from lessons relating to capability across the APS. While intended to provide additional personnel capacity in the event of a crisis, the APS Surge Reserve provides staff with generalist skills. The 2023 AGCMF Review identified a gap in suitably qualified staff for crisis management roles. NEMA has sought opportunities to utilise the Centres for National Resilience for certain crises, however, an agreement to utilise Department of Finance managed centres has not yet been established. NEMA has established the National Emergency Management Stockpile to enable the rapid deployment of resources. (See paragraphs 2.80 to 2.97)

Responding to a changing threat environment

16. Risk assessments do not include potential key management personnel risks. The 2023 ACGMF Review incorporated strategic risk consideration including future scenario planning which had not previously been conducted. The Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (CASP) methodology has been embedded in NEMA's approach to operational response activities, however, the methodology has not yet been established as a consistent planning tool across the range of entities involved in crisis management, or in horizon scanning activities to detect emerging threats. When fully embedded, the CASP methodology has the potential to provide a robust approach to planning and preparedness as well as recovery. (See paragraphs 3.3 to 3.37)

17. The revised AGCMF provides increased clarity on roles and responsibilities. This includes introduction of a tiered crisis coordination model intended to provide greater flexibility as crises evolve. The revised AGCMF groups key information relating to roles and responsibilities together for an easier read. The Handbook provides additional guidance to senior officials. The revised AGCMF has largely addressed feedback obtained during the 2023 AGCMF Review to improve the clarity of the arrangements for the available crisis mechanisms. PM&C have identified ongoing activities are required to support the implementation of the revised AGCMF including by improving capability. (See paragraphs 3.38 to 3.67)

18. Previous versions of the AGCMF did not establish oversight arrangements for the full suite of national level plans to ensure they are reviewed and updated to respond to future events. The September 2024 version of the AGCMF establishes oversight arrangements. As at July 2024, thirty-two per cent of the publicly available plans have not been updated in the last three years. (See paragraphs 3.68 to 3.80)

19. NEMA delivers two annual national-level exercises primarily focussed on multi-jurisdictional natural disasters. Since 2022 compounding non-natural disaster specific impacts such as mass power outages and supply chain issues have been included in NEMA led exercises. Prior to 2024, there were gaps in the arrangements to identify and prioritise whole-of-government exercises. There are limitations with arrangements to capture information relating to exercises led by other entities, reducing the ability to advise government on the preparedness of Australian Government entities to response to crises. The expanded role of the Crisis Arrangements Committee under the revised AGCMF provides coverage of these gaps. Higher Risk Weather Season (HRWS) preparedness has evolved with the addition of ministerial exercises and the HRWS National Preparedness Summit. (See paragraphs 3.81 to 3.111)

Recommendations

- Recommendation no. 1**
Paragraph 2.44
- The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet:
- document a process for annual administrative updates that provides a consistent approach including ensuring appropriate records of engagement and input are maintained; and
 - ensure significant issues are documented to be considered in comprehensive reviews of the AGCMF.
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response:** *Agreed.*
- Recommendation no. 2**
Paragraph 2.75
- The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet:
- provide stronger guidance to entities in their development and updating of entity level and relevant national level crisis management policies and plans; and
 - provide a formal response to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit that outlines actions taken to address recommendation three from *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s crisis management arrangements.*
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response:** *Agreed.*
- Recommendation no. 3**
Paragraph 3.23
- The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet embed arrangements for future scenario planning into ongoing review and update arrangements for the AGCMF. These should be appropriately documented to ensure lessons are captured and can be learned.
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response:** *Agreed.*
- Recommendation no. 4**
Paragraph 3.79
- The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet include in the Australian Government Crisis Management Handbook criteria for the publication of plans to appropriately inform stakeholders of crisis arrangements.
- Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response:** *Agreed.*
- Recommendation no. 5**
Paragraph 3.97
- The National Emergency Management Agency document its consideration of Crisis Arrangements Committee advice on gaps and priorities for whole-of-government exercising, as well as the annual analysis undertaken to review and update the list of identified hazards under AGCMF, to inform the development of the annual national exercise program. This should include ensuring that exercises consider both natural and all-hazard scenarios.
- National Emergency Management Agency response:** *Agreed.*

Summary of entity responses

20. The proposed audit report was provided to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet and the National Emergency Management Agency. Letters of response provided by each entity are included at Appendix 1. The summary responses provided are included below. The improvements observed by the ANAO during the course of this audit are at Appendix 2.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) welcomes the proposed report on the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF). PM&C accepts the key findings and recommendations, and has commenced steps to address these matters.

PM&C is committed to strengthening the Australian Government's crisis management arrangements and preparedness in partnership with other Australian Government agencies. It has undertaken a comprehensive review of the AGCMF, resulting in the development of a new and enhanced Framework, supporting Handbook and more robust continuous improvement processes. It will continue to enhance guidance under these products to guide the publication of plans, assessment of staffing capacities and the development of surge arrangements.

PM&C will also continue to work other relevant agencies, including the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), to enhance guidance on national planning and preparedness activities, including human rights considerations and consider options to clarify crisis responsibilities following machinery of government changes. It will establish improved guidance and repeatable processes for the annual review of the AGCMF, as well as for future comprehensive reviews, to ensure lessons from future scenario planning and exercises are captured. PM&C will also assess its senior staffing capacities in the context of crisis response.

National Emergency Management Agency

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) welcomes the findings of the ANAO Performance Audit of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) and is committed to preparing Australia for all hazard crisis events, now and into the future. The Performance Audit complements the recent review of the AGCMF. NEMA will continue to work with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), the Australian Government, jurisdictions, industry and non-government organisations for continuous improvement in crisis management preparedness.

NEMA will work with PM&C to ensure whole-of-government crisis exercising aligns to the priorities identified by the Crisis Arrangements Committee, including consideration of natural and all-hazard impacts and consequences.

Acknowledging the current and future risk of consecutive, compounding and concurrent crises, NEMA will continue building crisis capability within the agency and across the Australian Government. NEMA will work alongside PM&C to assess crisis workforce planning needs and increase crisis workforce capability.

NEMA is committed to building the Australian Government's strategic crisis planning capability through the Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (CASP) methodology. We will continue to support a nationally-consistent approach to planning and preparedness activities through CASP, ensuring Australians and their communities are supported before, during and after crisis events.

Key messages from this audit for all Australian Government entities

21. Below is a summary of key messages, including instances of good practice, which have been identified in this audit and may be relevant for the operations of other Australian Government entities.

Governance and risk management

- Crises require rapid responses. Preparedness for crisis response should occur in a non-crisis setting and requires robust planning informed by risk assessments. Testing and exercising helps to ensure that roles and responsibilities are clearly defined and understood. These mechanisms also help to ensure that entities can implement relevant plans quickly and, where multiple stakeholders are involved, in a coordinated manner. Regular evaluation of preparedness, including risk reviews to identify new and emerging risks and threats and allow for minor course corrections over time, rather than requiring a significant shift without sufficient testing.
- As crises become more complex, concurrent, and cut across multiple sectors, the breadth of consequences increases, and more stakeholders are involved. This necessitates a governance structure where roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated.

Records management

- In a sector where senior officers and key personnel change, well established lessons processes that include sound records are important to communicate reasons behind changes. This is to ensure that their importance is clear to future decision-makers and prior mistakes are not repeated.

Audit findings

1. Background

Introduction

1.1 The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) outlines how the Australian Government prepares for, responds to, and supports recovery from crises.⁵ Crises are characterised by three key conditions; a high degree of danger or threat against something that is desirable to protect, a lack of certainty regarding the specific nature of the threat and its consequence, and time pressure or urgency of counter measures.⁶ Crises may impact Australia's economy, security, infrastructure and environment, and can have a significant impact on Australian's health, wellbeing and livelihoods.⁷ Crises are often difficult to predict and have no standard response.

1.2 Australia's threat and risk environment is evolving, resulting in new hazards with increased intensity and duration.⁸ This includes an increase in concurrent and consecutive hazard events, a changing climatic environment, increased digital connectivity and evolving national security environment.⁹

1.3 A number of reviews and inquiries into disaster events and crises have highlighted the impact of crises on vulnerable communities, including the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements¹⁰ and the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 report.¹¹ Vulnerable communities may have a range of characteristics, such as impaired mobility or sensory awareness, chronic health conditions, or social and economic limitations, that may reduce their ability to prepare for and respond to crises. This can result in a greater risk of loss, injury, illness, and death during crises.¹²

The Australian Government Crisis Management Framework

1.4 The AGCMF describes an 'all-hazards' approach to crisis management that recognises the need for consistency across the Australian Government's crisis management systems in preparation for the full spectrum of hazards that may affect life, property or the natural environment.¹³

5 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 4*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2024, p. 1.

6 Department of Home Affairs, *Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (CASP)*, Home Affairs, Australian Government, Canberra, 2020, p. 11.

7 *ibid.*, p. 22.

8 Hazard is defined as a process, phenomenon or human activity that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, social and economic disruption or environmental degradation. Hazards may be natural, anthropogenic or socio-natural in origin.

United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, *Sendai Framework Terminology on Disaster Risk Reduction*, [Internet], available from <https://www.undrr.org/terminology/hazard> [accessed on 3 May 2024].

9 National Emergency Management Agency, *Statement of Strategic Intent 2023*, NEMA, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, pp. 10–11.

10 Royal Commission into Natural Disasters, *Royal Commission into Natural Disasters Report*, 2020.

11 Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *Final Report*, 2022.

12 Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services, *People with vulnerabilities in disasters: A framework for an effective local response*, Queensland Government, Brisbane, 2016, p. 3.

13 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 4*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2024, p. 1.

1.5 In 2008, a Review of Homeland and Border Security¹⁴ highlighted the need for a more integrated approach to emergency management. The review highlighted the need for an overarching policy framework and strategic direction to better equip the Australian Government to plan and evaluate the national security activities of agencies and address fundamental gaps in emergency management. The AGCMF resulted from this review. Since its release, the AGCMF has been updated on 11 occasions.¹⁵

1.6 The AGCMF has been used to respond to a variety of crises between 2020 and 2023 including:

- the COVID-19 pandemic;
- natural disasters such as prolonged flood events across Australia and tropical cyclone events;
- cyber security incidents including data breaches involving Medibank and Latitude Financial, and the security breach affecting the email gateway system supporting some ACT Government systems; and
- the Turkiye and Syria earthquake for which the Australian Government committed humanitarian assistance.

Australian Government crisis management continuum

1.7 The Australian Government crisis management continuum comprises seven phases of crisis management and recovery.¹⁶ These phases are:

Table 1.1: Phases of the Australian Government crisis management continuum and their definitions

Phase	Definition
Prevention	Measures to eliminate or reduce the severity of a hazard or crisis.
Preparedness	Arrangements to ensure that, should a crisis occur, the required resources, capabilities and services can be efficiently mobilised and deployed.
Response	Immediate actions taken to ensure that crisis impacts and consequences are minimised, and that those affected are supported as quickly as possible.
Relief	Meeting the essential needs of food, water, shelter, energy, communications and medicines for people affected by a crisis event.
Recovery	Early and longer-term measures to restore or improve the livelihoods, health, economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets, systems and activities, of a disaster-affected community or society.

14 The Prime Minister commissioned Mr Ric Smith, Secretary of the Department of Defence, to report on the best and most efficient way to coordinate Australia's national security arrangements. PM&C provided the ANAO with a 'Summary and conclusions' document of this review. PM&C was unable to locate a full copy of the report.

15 Version 2.2 was in effect at the time the COVID-19 pandemic response was declared in March 2020. The current version of the AGCMF is version 4.0 (September 2024).

16 In versions of the AGCMF prior to September 2024, this was referred to as the National disaster management and recovery continuum.

Phase	Definition
Reconstruction	Implementing longer-term strategies post-incident to 'build back better' from a crisis, including identifying sustainable development approaches and mitigation measures that may be applicable beyond the directly affected community.
Risk reduction	Reducing future risk and identifying measures that may be taken to reduce the impact of future crises.

Source: Australian Government Crisis Management Framework.

1.8 The focus of the AGCMF is near-term crisis preparedness, response, relief and early recovery.¹⁷

Roles and responsibilities

1.9 The Australian Constitution establishes the legislative powers of the Parliament of Australia.¹⁸ States and territories retain legislative powers over matters not specifically listed in the Constitution. State and territory governments are the first responders to incidents that occur within their jurisdictions. The Australian Government contributes to crisis management during significant crises.

1.10 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) is responsible for setting, and oversight of, whole-of-government crisis management policy, including coordinating updates to the AGCMF.¹⁹ The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) is the custodian of Australian Government crisis capabilities that support some or all elements of crisis coordination. This includes administering the National Coordination Mechanism on behalf of Australian Government agencies, the Australian Government National Situation Room and providing guidance on crisis preparation and strategic planning, crisis communication and recovery.^{20 21}

2023 Australian Government Crisis Management Framework review

1.11 In March 2023, government decided to conduct a review of the AGCMF. PM&C conducted this review. The scope of this review was to consider the:

- objectives of the framework;

17 The AGCMF defines near-term preparedness activities as activities conducted by senior officials and agencies to rapidly prepare to respond to forecast impacts and consequences of an imminent crisis. This period could be marked by a sudden shift in the crisis threat environment generating potential for significant and acute consequences to Australia or Australian interests. The principle of 'speed to action, speed to decision' would now drive preparedness and response behaviours and an increased level of coordination actions across government would be expected.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 4*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2024, p. 10.

18 *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1901* (Cth), section 51.

19 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet advised the ANAO that it draws this responsibility for crisis management from its responsibility for whole-of-government national security and intelligence policy co-ordination.

20 Commonwealth of Australia, *Administrative Arrangements Order*, Canberra, 2022, p. 25.

The Department of Home Affairs was responsible for Commonwealth emergency management prior to NEMA's establishment in 2022.

21 The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) has responsibilities for international crisis management, including maintaining and activating all-hazards contingency plans for international crises.

- triggers for escalation;
- accountabilities of agencies and ministers and mechanisms to resolve accountabilities where they are unclear or overlap during a crisis;
- arrangements for coordinating information, decision-making, reporting and transparency;
- arrangements for the receipt, coordination and deployment of international assistance; and
- gaps in the framework including providing confidence the framework can deal with crisis at scale, multiple crises and new and emerging vectors.

1.12 Following the 2023 AGCMF Review, a revised Australian Government Crisis Management Framework was released at the 2024–25 Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Summit in Canberra on 18–19 September 2024.

Other scrutiny

1.13 The operations of the crisis management framework — including in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic response — have been subject to external scrutiny such as:

- Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements February 2020;
- Senate Select Committee on COVID-19; and
- Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s crisis management arrangements.

1.14 The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements was established on 20 February 2020 to inquire into and report on national natural disaster arrangements at all phases of disaster management, including mitigation, adaptation, preparedness, response and recovery, and make recommendations about any policy, legislative, administrative or structural reforms the Commissioners deemed appropriate.²² The report was published on 28 October 2020.

1.15 The Senate Select Committee on COVID-19 was established on 9 April 2020 to inquire into and report on the Australian Government’s response to the COVID-19 pandemic.²³ The Committee undertook public hearings and received submissions from a range of stakeholders. The Committee released its final report in April 2022.²⁴

1.16 The JCPAA undertook an inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s crisis management arrangements, based on the findings and recommendations made in Auditor-General Report No.39 2021–22 *Overseas Crisis Management and Response: The Effectiveness of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s Management of the Return of Overseas Australians in Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic*.²⁵

1.17 The Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry was announced on 21 September 2023. The inquiry will review the Commonwealth Government’s response to the

22 Royal Commission into Natural Disasters, *Royal Commission into Natural Disasters Report*, p. 48.

23 Parliament of Australian, *Terms of Reference – Parliament of Australia*, Canberra, 2020, available from https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/COVID-19/COVID19/Terms_of_Reference [accessed 7 May 2024].

24 Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, *Final Report*, Canberra, 2022, pp. 117–159.

25 Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s crisis management arrangements*, Canberra, 2023, p. xi.

COVID-19 pandemic and make recommendations to improve response measures in the event of future pandemics.²⁶

Rationale for undertaking the audit

1.18 The AGCMF is the basis for the Australian Government’s response to crises including pandemics, natural disasters, terrorism, and cyber incidents. This audit provides assurance to the Parliament on whether Australian Government entities have identified and applied lessons from the crises between 2020 and 2023, including the COVID-19 pandemic, to the AGCMF in preparation for future severe to catastrophic crises.

1.19 In its report on the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s crisis management approaches, the JCPAA recommended that the Auditor-General consider undertaking a performance audit of the AGCMF, and include within the audit scope whether the updated framework adequately reflects lessons learned from the COVID-19 pandemic.²⁷ The JCPAA also identified an audit of the AGCMF as an audit priority of the Parliament in 2022–23.

Audit approach

Audit objective, criteria and scope

1.20 The audit objective was to assess whether the Australian Government has established an appropriate framework for responding to crises.

1.21 To form a conclusion against the objective, the following high-level criteria were adopted:

- Has the readiness of systems and processes to respond to crises been assessed?
- Is the AGCMF fit for purpose to respond to a changing threat environment?

1.22 The audit examined whole-of-government crisis coordination arrangements and the 2023 review of the AGCMF being undertaken by PM&C. The audit focussed on whole-of-government crisis coordination arrangements between 2020 and 2023 (i.e. excluding agency-specific crisis coordination arrangements) including the supporting mechanisms to convene key committees under the AGCMF.

1.23 The audit did not examine:

- the application of the framework to the response to the COVID-19 pandemic or other crises;
- the adherence to individual national plans required under the AGCMF;
- agency specific crisis coordination arrangements; or
- operational responses to crises.

26 Department of the Prime Minister & Cabinet, *Commonwealth Government COVID-19 Response Inquiry*, PM&C, Canberra, 2023, available from <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resources/commonwealth-government-covid-19-response-inquiry-terms-reference> [accessed 7 May 2024].

27 Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade’s crisis management arrangements*, p. xiii.

Audit methodology

1.24 The audit involved:

- reviewing records concerning the administration of the AGCMF, particularly relating to updates to the AGCMF between 2020 and 2023, and the 2023 review of the AGCMF; and
- meetings with key Australian Government officials involved in whole-of-government crisis coordination arrangements and the review of the AGCMF.

1.25 The audit was conducted in accordance with ANAO Auditing Standards at a cost to the ANAO of approximately \$440,165.

1.26 The team members for this audit were Jacqueline Hedditch, Jade Ryan, Mary Potter, and Corinne Horton.

2. Readiness of systems and processes

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the readiness of systems and processes to respond to crises has been assessed. Systems and processes for crisis response are contained within the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF).

Conclusion

A structured assessment of the readiness of systems and processes contained in the AGCMF was not undertaken prior to the 2023 Review. Updates to the AGCMF during 2020 to 2023 were administrative in nature and reflected changes that had already been operationalised. The roles and responsibilities set out under previous versions of the AGCMF were not clearly defined. The 2023 AGCMF Review was guided by a project plan which captured evidence from a range of inputs including comprehensive stakeholder engagement and testing of recommendations and proposed actions. Clarifying arrangements for annual updates and future comprehensive reviews is important to ensure these activities adequately capture and address required changes in a timely manner. The lessons management capability and associated processes are evolving. Formal lessons activities are not conducted for all crises. Thresholds for conducting a lessons process had not been defined or documented prior to 2024.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made two recommendations aimed at the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) documenting a process for annual administrative updates and providing guidance to entities for the consideration of human-rights in entity-level and relevant national-level crisis management policies and plans.

The ANAO also identified an opportunity for improvement for PM&C to work with the Department of Finance and the Australian Public Service Commission to consider machinery of government guidance and associated guidance to entities to ensure crisis responsibilities are captured.

2.1 The nature of a crisis requires a quick response to minimise impacts and provide support for those affected.²⁸ Readiness of systems and processes includes establishing arrangements to ensure that the required resources, capabilities, and services can be efficiently mobilised and deployed.²⁹ Clear definitions of roles and responsibilities and regular reviews of arrangements, including processes to identify and learn lessons, are important to ensure that Australia is ready to respond to increasingly severe and complex crises often with events occurring concurrently.³⁰

2.2 This chapter relates to versions of the AGCMF in effect between 2020 and 2023 and the review processes related to these versions.

28 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 3.3*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, p. 11.

29 This is defined as 'preparedness' within the AGCMF.

30 Department of Home Affairs, *Alternative Commonwealth Capabilities for Crisis Response – Discussion Paper August 2023*, Home Affairs, p. 8.

Were roles and responsibilities clearly defined in previous versions of the AGCMF?

Within the AGCMF, specific hazards are identified with lead ministers and entities assigned to these hazards. The emergence of newly identified hazards has led to updates in the AGCMF. Space weather events were added as a specific hazard as they were identified as posing a risk to critical infrastructure. Cyber incidents were added as a specified hazard following a review of crises that indicated roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined. Under previous versions of the AGCMF, triggers and thresholds for activation of whole-of-government crisis coordination were broad and did not provide clear guidance to entities. There are multiple mechanisms that support crisis coordination and response. Some of these mechanisms were not defined in the AGCMF. The role and interactions between various crisis mechanisms could have been more clearly defined. The National Coordination Mechanism (NCM) was introduced as a means to provide broader engagement than previously existing arrangements. The NCM was embedded in the AGCMF after it became a regularly used mechanism during the COVID-19 pandemic response.

2.3 The AGCMF was first released in 2010 following the 2008 Australian Government Review of Homeland and Border Security. The AGCMF has been updated on 11 occasions since the previous format³¹ was released in 2012. This includes five updates in the period 2020 to 2023.³² The updates were published in:

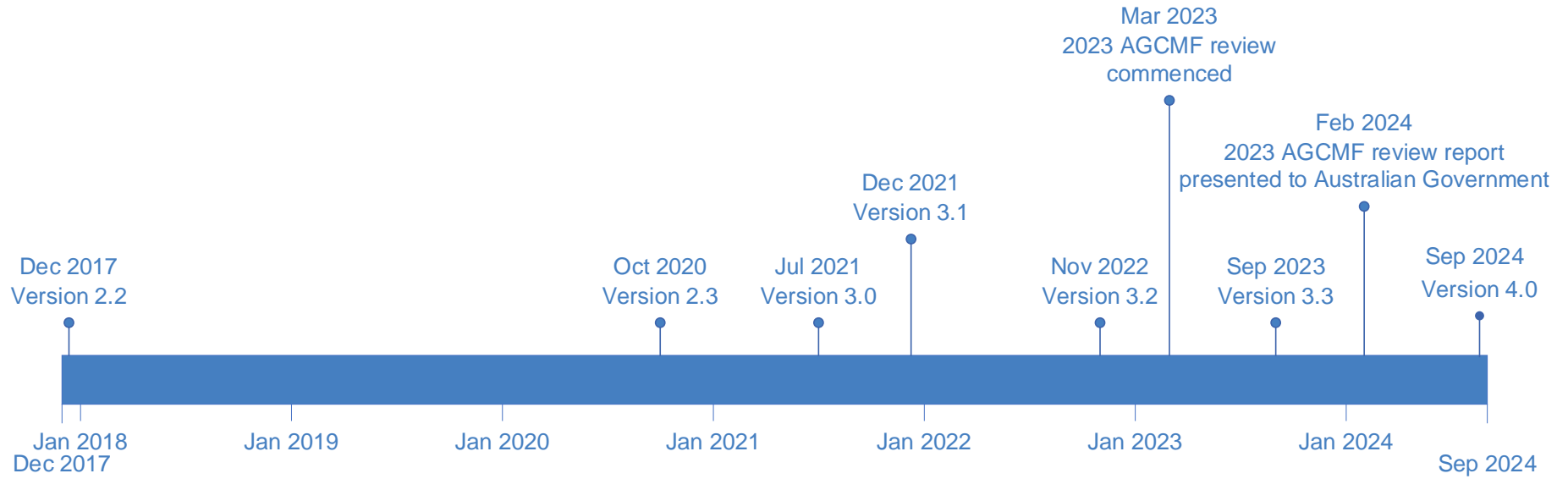
- October 2020;
- July 2021;
- December 2021;
- November 2022; and
- September 2023.

2.4 In 2023, PM&C commenced the first comprehensive whole-of-government review of the AGCMF since its establishment. A timeline of updates to the AGCMF is outlined in Figure 2.1.

31 Refers to the format of the AGCMF used from December 2012 (version 1.0) to September 2023 (version 3.3).

32 The version of the AGCMF that was in force when the COVID-19 response commenced was dated December 2017.

Figure 2.1: Timeline of updates to the AGCMF



Source: ANAO.

Oversight roles

2.5 PM&C is responsible for whole-of-government national security and intelligence policy coordination. The Resilience and Crisis Management Division in PM&C has:

policy responsibility for Australian Government crisis management arrangements and continuity of executive government, coordinates across government to support continuous improvement and reform of Commonwealth disaster management policy and capability. This includes undertaking a comprehensive review of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework and leading the National Preparedness Taskforce.

2.6 PM&C is responsible for setting, and oversight of, whole-of-government crisis management policy, in accordance with the AGCMF.³³

2.7 The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) was established on 1 September 2022 to provide national leadership and strategic coordination for emergencies and disaster preparedness, response, relief, recovery, reconstruction, risk reduction and resilience.³⁴ NEMA was created by combining the National Recovery and Resilience Agency (NRRRA) and the Emergency Management Australia (EMA) division of the Department of Home Affairs.³⁵

2.8 NEMA has defined one of its strategic objectives as ‘leading and coordinating national action and assistance across the emergency management continuum.’³⁶ References to NEMA were included throughout the AGCMF for specific activities, such as:

- developing and delivering the annual national exercise program (see paragraphs 3.81 to 3.111);
- maintenance of the Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning methodology (see paragraphs 3.25 to 3.35);
- operating the Australian Government National Situation Room (see paragraph 3.37);
- working with lead agencies to capture observations as part of the lessons management process (see paragraphs 2.64 to 2.68); and
- chairing or co-chairing relevant crisis committees (see paragraphs 2.20 to 2.33).

2.9 NEMA also has responsibility for specific national-level crisis plans (see paragraphs 3.68 to 3.80).

2.10 As outlined in paragraph 1.9, state and territory governments retain primary responsibility for the protection of life, property and the environment. The Australian Government provides support to states or territories where the nature of the crisis has or is expected to exceed the sovereign capacities of the state or territory to manage.

33 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 3.3*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, p. 19.

34 NEMA is an executive agency within the Home Affairs portfolio established under the *Public Service Act 1999* by order of the Governor-General on 18 August 2022. Under the Administrative Arrangements Orders, the Department of Home Affairs is responsible for Commonwealth emergency management.

35 Minister for Home Affairs, ‘New agency to deliver support before, during and after disasters’, media release, 31 August 2022, available from <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/MurrayWatt/Pages/new-agency-deliver-support-disasters.aspx>.

36 National Emergency Management Agency, *Corporate Plan 2023—24*, p. 9.

Lead ministers and agencies

2.11 Under the AGCMF, a lead minister is responsible for the coordination of the Australian Government's near-term crisis preparation, immediate crisis response, and early recovery from a crisis arising from specific hazards. The lead minister is determined by the nature of the hazard or hazards. The lead minister is responsible for overseeing the coordination and delivery of the Australian Government response in conjunction with state and territory counterparts, exercise executive responsibilities in consultation with ministers with relevant portfolio interests and representing the Australian Government as the key spokesperson.

2.12 Under previous versions of the AGCMF, ministerial and lead agency responsibilities for specified hazards were outlined in Annex C.³⁷ The minister responsible for Home Affairs, supported by the minister responsible for Emergency Management, is the lead minister where there is no clear ministerial lead for a domestic crisis.

2.13 The lead agency is also determined by the nature of the hazard or hazards. Prior to September 2024, lead agencies were responsible for:

- coordinating, leading and implementing whole-of-government response actions and overseeing the strategic response to a crisis;
- providing support and advice to lead ministers, preparing and exercising plans to manage all-hazards³⁸;
- providing subject matter expertise;
- ensuring that ministerial directions and decisions are implemented;
- exercising relevant powers and decision-making responsibilities;
- working with jurisdictional partners to inform Australian Government situational awareness; and
- contributing to predictive analysis and decision support through effective information sharing.

2.14 In 2020, ten specific hazards were identified in the AGCMF.³⁹ Space weather events were added as a hazard in July 2021, and cyber incidents were added in September 2023. Space weather events were added as a specific hazard as they were identified as posing a risk to critical infrastructure.⁴⁰ Cyber incidents were added as a specific hazard following a review of significant

37 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 3.3*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, pp. 48–92.

Under version 4.0 of the AGCMF, ministerial and lead agency responsibilities are outlined in Annex A.

38 An all-hazard approach acknowledges that while hazards vary in source (natural, technological, societal), they challenge systems in similar ways. As such, activities across the Australian Government crisis management continuum can be implemented using the same framework, regardless of the hazard.

39 These hazards were international crises; domestic security related incidents (excluding terrorist incidents); domestic terrorist incidents; maritime terrorist incidents within the Australian Maritime Domain; domestic natural disasters; domestic biosecurity crises; domestic public health crises; domestic energy supply crises; incidents involving offshore petroleum facilities in Commonwealth waters; and transport incidents (maritime and aviation) within Australia, the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone, or the Australian Search and Rescue Region.

40 This risk was identified in November 2020 as part of the Department of Home Affairs Quarterly Strategic Review.

cyber incidents which indicated that cyber incident response roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined.⁴¹

2.15 While new hazards have been identified and specific response plans have been developed, there has been no review of the appropriateness of the collective suite of existing plans (see paragraphs 3.72 to 3.78 for further detail). As outlined in paragraph 2.41, machinery of government changes have resulted in some conflict in relation to roles and responsibilities for specified hazards. Under the revised AGCMF released in September 2024, the Crisis Arrangements Committee has an expanded role in relation to crisis plans (see paragraphs 3.58 to 3.59).

Triggers and thresholds for activation

2.16 Triggers for activating a whole-of-government coordination response are identified in the AGCMF. These triggers remained the same between December 2017 and September 2023. Potential triggers for activating a whole-of-government coordination response included:

- the scale of the crisis and its potential or actual impact on Australia, Australians, or Australia's national interests;
- formal ministerial consideration of the event;
- a crisis affecting multiple jurisdictions or industry sectors;
- a request from an affected nation, state and/or territory for Australian Government capabilities or assistance;
- a crisis with both domestic and international components;
- a crisis resulting in a large number of Australian casualties;
- community expectations of national leadership; or
- multiple crises occurring simultaneously which require coordination, resource prioritisation and de-confliction.

2.17 Previous versions of the AGCMF outlined that entities 'may also choose to escalate issues where there is a novel event or crisis for which a specific Government plan does not exist.' Previous versions of the AGCMF did not provide further guidance for entities to escalate such issues or detail on which supporting arrangements such as crisis committees may be utilised.

2.18 Triggers and thresholds for activation have been updated in the revised AGCMF released in September 2024 (see paragraph 3.55).

Crisis mechanisms

2.19 Crisis mechanisms such as crisis committees support crisis preparedness and response activities. The AGCMF identified some of these crisis mechanisms. Other mechanisms also operated in support of the AGCMF, however, were not defined in the AGCMF. These can be categorised as one of three types of mechanisms.

- Australian Government — these mechanisms and committees include representatives from Australian Government entities.

41 The review was commissioned subsequent to Optus and Medibank cyber-incidents and data breaches, to analyse cyber security incident response roles and responsibilities across government.

- National — these mechanisms and committees include representatives from Australian Government entities, states and territories, and where relevant may include other external stakeholders such as industry and non-government organisations.
- State and territory — these mechanisms and committees relate to states and territories.⁴²

Australian Government crisis mechanisms

Crisis Arrangements Committee

2.20 The Crisis Arrangements Committee (CAC) is intended to provide strategic direction in the development of coordinated Australian Government crisis management arrangements. The CAC was formed in 2015 to assist in developing coordinated, whole-of-government approaches to Australian Government crisis management matters. Membership includes Senior Executive Service (SES) Band 2 or 3 level officials from agencies with roles in crisis or emergency management matters.

2.21 PM&C advised the ANAO on 27 February 2024 that prior to its re-establishment in 2023, the CAC last met in December 2019. The CAC was re-established in June 2023 to provide whole-of-government oversight of the 2023 AGCMF Review. Prior to September 2024, the CAC was not defined in the AGCMF.

Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee

2.22 The Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee (AGCRC) was the ‘primary mechanism for bringing together relevant Australian Government Agency representatives, primarily in response to domestic crises’.⁴³ The AGCRC did not have a formalised terms of reference to guide its operations. The scope of the AGCRC was defined as ‘crisis with a predominantly domestic impact’ under the AGCMF. The AGCRC provided similar operational support to what is now the NCM (see paragraphs 2.22 to 2.23).

2.23 During the 2023 AGCMF Review, entity consultation identified that the existence and usage of multiple coordination groups, particularly at the senior officials’ level which includes the AGCRC, may cause confusion and duplication. The consultation feedback highlighted issues around the clarity of purpose and quantity of committees and mechanisms in place for crisis response and coordination. The AGCRC has since been replaced by an NCM function known as NCM-AUSGOV (see paragraphs 3.65 to 3.67).

Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force

2.24 An Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) ‘manages the whole-of-government response to overseas incidents or crises that impact or threaten to impact Australians or Australia’s interests overseas.’ An IDETF is chaired by the Deputy Secretary Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and may be co-chaired by the Deputy Secretary PM&C.

2.25 As part of the 2023 AGCMF Review (see paragraphs 2.48 to 2.63), DFAT provided feedback to PM&C that indicated further clarity around the triggers for and identification of participants in

42 State and territory activities and committees are not examined in this audit.

43 Prior to version 3.0 of the AGCMF and the establishment of the AGCRC, there were two committees, the Australian Government Crisis Committee (AGCC) and the Australian Government Disaster Recovery Committee (AGDRC). The AGCC was responsible for coordinating the Australian Government response for the most significant national domestic crises. The AGDRC coordinated Australian Government recovery efforts for all-hazards on behalf of the Australian Government.

an IDETF may be beneficial. DFAT also queried whether both the AGCRC and the IDETF were necessary.

National crisis mechanisms

National Cabinet

2.26 The National Cabinet is a mechanism comprising the Prime Minister, state premiers and territory chief ministers. The National Cabinet held its first meeting on 15 March 2020.⁴⁴ On 29 May 2020, the Prime Minister announced that National Cabinet would replace the Council of Australian Government (COAG).⁴⁵ The role of COAG was not defined in the AGCMF.

2.27 In the October 2020 version of the AGCMF, the National Cabinet was referenced only in a note to a visual representation of the relationship between state and territory coordination arrangements, entity led coordination, and whole-of-government coordination, stating that ‘in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the National Cabinet was convened to support coordination between First Ministers.’

2.28 The July 2021 version of the AGCMF included the National Cabinet as an option to ‘ensure coordinated, timely action across Australian governments where cooperation across all states and territories is required.’ The wording remained through to the September 2023 version. There was no further guidance as to the scope or role of the National Cabinet in a crisis or its link to other committees within crisis coordination arrangements.

2.29 The National Security Committee (NSC) is a committee of Cabinet. The role of the NSC is to consider the highest-priority, highest-risk and most strategic national security matters of the day.⁴⁶ Prior to 2024, the NSC was not specifically identified in the AGCMF, however, has acted as one of the key decision-making committee’s during crises.⁴⁷

National Coordination Mechanism

2.30 The AGCMF stated that:

in some cases it may still be appropriate for the Prime Minister, or the Minister leading the response to a crisis, to establish special purpose / temporary response mechanisms in parallel with existing response mechanisms (AGCC, NCC or IDETF). Special purpose/temporary mechanisms may include, for example: the appointment of a special envoy; an ad hoc Secretaries’ coordination meeting; and/or a dedicated whole-of-government taskforce. Any special purpose/temporary mechanisms should be guided by existing arrangements, to ensure a consistent and effective whole-of-government response.⁴⁸

44 Department of Parliamentary Services, *Australian COVID-19 response management arrangements: a quick guide*, report prepared by K Elphick, Research Paper Series: 2019–20, DPS, Canberra, 2020.

45 COAG was the peak intergovernmental forum in Australia. Its role was to manage matters of national significance or matters that needed coordinated action by all Australian governments.

Department of Parliamentary Services, *National emergency and disaster response arrangements in Australia: a quick guide*, report prepared by K Elphick, Research Paper Series: 2019–20, DPS, Canberra, 2020.

46 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Cabinet Handbook 15th edition*, page 42.

47 The National Security Committee of Cabinet was used during crisis coordination for the 2019–20 Bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic response.

48 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 3.3*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, p. 34.

Special purpose mechanisms are similarly described on page 31 of version 4.0 of the AGCMF.

2.31 The NCM was established on 5 March 2020 as part of the COVID-19 pandemic response.⁴⁹ The intent of the NCM was to operationalise plans used during the COVID-19 pandemic and coordinate Commonwealth agencies' planning and preparedness measures for non-health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The NCM was formally embedded in the October 2020 version of the AGCMF. NEMA administers the NCM on behalf of Australian Government entities. The relevant Deputy Coordinator-General NEMA convenes or chairs the NCM. The Deputy Secretary PM&C may elect to co-chair the NCM.

2.32 The Department of Home Affairs drafted Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the NCM in March 2020. The draft ToRs were returned to the NCM in May 2020 as 'not endorsed' with a note that they were 'not required'.⁵⁰ On 18 July 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that the NCM does not fit within the typical construct for government committees and is not designed for stakeholders to have a 'seat at the table' and that ToRs for the NCM 'would not be appropriate for its modality'. The NCM continues to operate under a national coordination and domain concept, which is a visual representation of the groups that may participate in the NCM.⁵¹

2.33 Prior to the establishment of the NCM, the National Crisis Committee (NCC) was the committee by which Australian Government and relevant state and territory government coordination in response to domestic crises would occur. As part of the 2020 administrative update of the AGCMF (see paragraph 2.36), entity feedback highlighted that there was a lack of clarity between the NCC and NCM which could create a 'real risk' during a crisis. The NCC was included in the AGCMF until July 2021.

Were updates to the AGCMF informed by evidence and analysis?

Updates undertaken annually between 2020 and 2023 were largely limited to documenting machinery of government changes. These updates varied in the approach and stakeholder engagement. There was no engagement with states and territories as part of the administrative updates in 2020, the second update in 2021 or 2022. More significant comments relating to the framework were held over in anticipation of a future review, which was conducted in 2023. The 2023 AGCMF Review had not been approved at the time. The approach to the 2023 AGCMF Review was guided by a project plan which captured evidence from a range of inputs including comprehensive stakeholder engagement and testing of recommendations and proposed actions. There are minor gaps in documentation relating to the analysis of some of this evidence base. Lessons management, including a lessons management capability, to inform continuous improvement activities is evolving.

2.34 As the AGCMF has been utilised to support a range of crises between 2020 and 2023 (see paragraph 1.6), there is a base of actual experiences available to examine and analyse in order to identify examples of good practice and opportunities for improvement to be adopted in updates.

49 Department of Parliamentary Services, *Australian COVID-19 response management arrangements: a quick guide*, report prepared by K Elphick, Research Paper Series: 2019–20, DPS, Canberra, 2020.

50 The terms of reference were returned by a Deputy Secretary in the Department of Home Affairs.

51 A domain describes a cooperative community of related parties. The domain concept is intended to allow related parties to cooperate within formal and informal arrangements in line with both explicit and implicit commitments and authorities. The NCM coordination 'hub' connects the domains and is intended to deconflict and synchronise efforts.

Updates to the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework

2.35 The December 2017 version of the AGCMF stated that the framework is ‘updated as necessary to maintain its relevance and currency and may be comprehensively reviewed every three years if required.’⁵²

2.36 In 2020, PM&C wrote to four entities to provide input to an administrative update led by PM&C. These entities were the Department of Home Affairs⁵³, Department of Health, Department of Defence, and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

2.37 An agenda for a 3 September 2020 Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) meeting was prepared to discuss:

- entity comments and proposed amendments,
- changes to the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) architecture and establishment of the National Federation Reform council, and
- interim decisions on disaster management.

2.38 There are no meeting minutes or outcomes arising from the IDC meeting.

2.39 A requirement to conduct an annual review of the AGCMF was introduced in 2021.⁵⁴ Prior to 2021, there was no time-based requirement to review and update the AGCMF.

2.40 The AGCMF was updated twice in 2021 — once in July 2021 which saw an update from version 2.3 to 3.0 (considered by PM&C to be a ‘more comprehensive review’) and again in December 2021 which saw an update from version 3.0 to 3.1 (considered by PM&C to be an administrative update).

2.41 In 2022, PM&C wrote to thirteen entities to comment on an updated draft of the AGCMF. As part of the PM&C clearance process, sensitivities relating to machinery of government (MoG) changes between Home Affairs and Attorney-General’s portfolios were identified as ‘difficult to reconcile within the scope’ of the 2022 administrative update. PM&C noted that ministerial and agency lead responsibilities remained unchanged and would require further consideration in a more extensive review proposed to commence in early 2023. At this time, the 2023 AGCMF Review had not been approved.

2.42 The 2023 annual administrative update was undertaken concurrent to the 2023 AGCMF Review (see paragraphs 2.48 to 2.63). Twenty-two Australian Government entities were provided with the opportunity to comment on an updated draft of the AGCMF. Some comments made by entities as part of this update were to be considered as part of the 2023 AGCMF Review.⁵⁵

52 Wording within version 2.2 of the AGCMF dated December 2017 was that ‘The AGCMF is updated as necessary to maintain its relevance and currency and may be comprehensively reviewed every three years if required.’

53 This included Emergency Management Australia, which was a division of the Department of Home Affairs at the time.

54 ‘updates will be released by October of each calendar year, and prior to the commencement of that season.’ Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 3.0*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2021, p. 38.

55 Entities included National Indigenous Australians Agency, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Health, and the Department of Home Affairs.

2.43 PM&C does not have a documented process for undertaking administrative updates. The level of stakeholder engagement in each of the annual administrative updates varied. As there was no process documentation, it is not clear how and why stakeholders were identified for inclusion in each administrative update.

Recommendation no. 1

2.44 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet:

- document a process for annual administrative updates that provides a consistent approach including ensuring appropriate records of engagement and input are maintained; and
- ensure significant issues are documented to be considered in comprehensive reviews of the AGCMF.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

2.45 *PM&C will review and document the processes for annual administrative reviews and updates of the AGCMF. These processes will include the documentation of significant issues to be considered in future comprehensive reviews.*

2.46 Machinery of government changes often result in changes to roles and responsibilities between ministers and their relevant departments. In previous versions of the AGCMF, PM&C had not established triggers to prompt an administrative update of the AGCMF, other than noting the requirement to conduct a review annually. The revised AGCMF released in September 2024, states that machinery of government changes may prompt an administrative update of the AGCMF.

Opportunity for improvement

2.47 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet work with the Department of Finance and the Australian Public Service Commission to consider including references to the AGCMF in the guidance to entities for implementing machinery of government changes so that those with new crisis responsibilities are clear on their role in a crisis.

2023 AGCMF Review

2.48 On 27 March 2023, the Australian Government agreed to a review of the AGCMF to be led by PM&C, with staff seconded from relevant agencies. The review was framed as a ‘comprehensive review’. The AGCMF Review team comprised of seconded officers from NEMA, the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department of Home Affairs.⁵⁶

Project management

2.49 PM&C developed a project plan for undertaking the review which defined five stages for delivery of the review. These stages, activities and timing are outlined in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Stages, planned activities and planned timings for the 2023 AGCMF Review

Stage	Activities	Timing
Environmental scan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Entity consultations Issues exploration and identification International benchmarking 	July 2023
Insights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Synthesis of outcomes from consultations Prepare insights and themes to be addressed by the review Test insights with stakeholders 	August to September 2023
Options	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop options that address key themes and insights Test options with stakeholders using scenarios Draft review report 	September to October 2023
Recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide recommendations about an update to the AGCMF Consolidate final report for ministerial endorsement 	November to December 2023
Enhanced crisis framework	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Draft and consult on an updated AGCMF based on review outcomes Enhanced crisis framework to government Enhanced crisis framework published 	Through to June 2024.

Source: PM&C documentation.

2.50 The AGCMF review team developed a ‘placemat’ which was updated on several occasions to reflect updates to work conducted and planned. The first of these was titled ‘initial draft’ and is

56 As of July 2024, the review team comprised:

- An EL2 from PM&C. The individual in this position changed in November 2023 — the position was filled from June 2023 onwards.
- An EL1 level secondee from NEMA from January 2024.
- Two APS6 level advisers from PM&C — one from January 2024 and the other from February 2024.

Prior review team members included:

- An EL2 secondee from NEMA between March and December 2023.
- An EL2 secondee from DFAT from May 2023 to May 2024.
- An EL1 secondee from Home Affairs between October 2023 and March 2024.

dated 21 July 2023. The ‘placemat’ was updated on 25 July 2023 and four times in August 2023.⁵⁷ The ‘placemat’ was used to summarise emerging findings from the review based on the desktop research and consultation conducted by the review team. The emerging findings subsequently formed the basis of the 2023 AGCMF Review report.

2.51 While the placemats and report refer to lessons identified from the review of four prior crises (conducted as part of issues exploration and identification in the environmental scan phase as outlined in Table 2.1), it is unclear what analysis was conducted over these lessons to validate and contextualise them. Recurring themes identified during consultation with entities were reflected in the placemats and report. Comparison activities with international crisis management arrangements were also referenced, however, there were limitations with the documentation relating to this input.

2.52 PM&C considered the crisis management arrangements of the United Kingdom, Germany, France, Japan, Canada, Singapore, and the Republic of South Korea (environmental scan as outlined in Table 2.1). The 2023 AGCMF Review Report also refers to input from New Zealand and the United States, however, there was no evidence of input received from these countries.

Environmental scan phase

2.53 As part of the environmental scan phase, PM&C conducted consultation with Australian Government entities as well as states and territories, industry stakeholders and non-government organisations.

2.54 In July 2023, PM&C advised the CAC of emerging insights, which included ‘desire for increased clarity in the interface with State and Territory arrangements.’ This ‘desire’ was identified in consultation with Australian Government entities. Consultation with states and territories subsequently took place in September 2023.

Insights phase

2.55 Following the consultation undertaken as part of the environmental scan phase, PM&C developed an ‘observations report’ that provided a summary of observations from the consultation with Australian Government entities. This report was provided to the CAC in September 2023. A summary of observations is outlined in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2: Summary of observations from entity engagement as presented to the Crisis Arrangements Committee

Category	Observations
Awareness and useability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low level of awareness of the AGCMF across Commonwealth entities, particularly in areas with lesser/supporting roles. • Reliance by entities on advice from NEMA when responding to a crisis under the AGCMF. • A need for greater visibility of human rights, First Nations communities and vulnerable Australians in the AGCMF document.

⁵⁷ The August updates to the placemat were dated 3 August, 9 August, 24 August, and 31 August 2023.

Category	Observations
Gaps for future risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of several emerging or evolving threats requiring guidance or further assessment. • Challenges for managing cross-sectoral, compounding or even catastrophic crisis events. • A need for certainty on treatment of economic crisis which are not covered by the AGCMF. • A need for greater visibility of human rights, First Nations communities and vulnerable Australians in the AGCMF document.^a
Scope and structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As the AGCMF aligned to hazard not consequence presents challenges when consequences extend beyond the remit of a single entity. • A desire from entities to change the lead entity when a crisis escalates or becomes cross-sectoral.
Governance and coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clearer articulation of the role of PM&C and NEMA within the AGCMF as the two entities are often considered 'de-facto crisis leads' for cross-sector crises. • Confusion created by multiple coordination groups at the officials' level (AGCRC, IDETF and IDCs). • Lack of clarity as to whether there is an emergency situation committee that brings ministers, officials and experts together.
Capability and improvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Resourcing and capability constraints for entities to meet obligations under the AGCMF. • Need for continuous improvement to be embedded into the AGCMF acknowledging that administrative updates are not sufficient. • Limited number of surge APS staff with a common set of emergency management skills to support the AGCMF. • Identified gap in exercising or testing at the AGCMF level.

Note a: This observation was included under both 'Awareness and useability' and 'Gaps for future risks'.

Source: ANAO summary of PM&C documentation.

2.56 In September 2023, PM&C presented an update on the 2023 AGCMF Review to the CAC. The update stated that 'a number of pieces of analysis are feeding into the AGCMF Review including workshops, international comparisons and engagement with non-Government stakeholders and industry partners.' There was consultation with all Australian states and territories and input from Queensland, the Northern Territory and Western Australia. This input was provided in September 2023, after the need for clarity relating to the interface with states and territories was reported to the CAC. There is no evidence of input from the remaining states and territory.

Options phase

2.57 The project plan outlined that the options phase would include developing options that address key themes and insights; testing options with stakeholders using scenarios; and drafting a report.

2.58 PM&C developed a 'preliminary model' for testing with the Deputy Coordinator-General NEMA in September 2023.

2.59 PM&C developed a document titled ‘Next steps and suggested recommendations options’. This document builds on the thematic categories outlined in Table 2.2 and was presented to the CAC. This document was intended to inform discussions between PM&C and NEMA and to inform ‘co-design’ sessions with selected entities.⁵⁸ PM&C facilitated two co-design workshops — the first on 4 October 2023 and the second on 13 October 2023.

2.60 The first workshop involved a discussion on ‘key’ draft recommendations and potential options to improve the AGCMF. The draft recommendations and whether it was supported by participants is outlined in Table 2.3.

Table 2.3: Draft recommendations and support from workshop participants

Recommendation	Support from workshop participants
Tiered, scalable model for whole of government response	Supported in principle
Ability to pivot response from hazard management to consequence management	Supported in principle
Triggers and thresholds for escalation	Supported in principle
One lead coordination body for severe to catastrophic, novel or cross-sectoral crises	Supported in principle
Mechanisms for advising and reporting to government	Requires refinement
Activation vs Notification	Supported in principle
Provision of operational guidance for crisis response	Requires refinement

Source: ANAO summary of PM&C documentation.

2.61 The second workshop was referred to as a ‘futures workshop’. This workshop was intended to explore future scenarios based on input from the national intelligence community. PM&C advised the ANAO on 19 February 2024 that as this workshop was based on a classified scenario, no documentation was developed as an input to the workshop.

2.62 Proposed recommendations were presented to and agreed by the CAC in November 2023.⁵⁹ A summary of the recommendations presented to the CAC are outlined in Table 2.4.

Table 2.4: Summary of recommendations presented to the CAC in November 2023

Recommendation number	Summary of recommendation
1	Reaffirm the status of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework as the Australian Government’s capstone policy framing Australia’s national crisis management arrangements. This included an updated framework and new Australian Government Crisis Management Handbook.

58 PM&C identified entities that were considered to have large equities in the AGCMF to participate in the co-design workshops.

59 The CAC agreed to the recommendations ‘in principle’ noting that the implementation of the recommendations would be discussed in later meetings.

Recommendation number	Summary of recommendation
2	Clarify and codify a coordinated approach to whole-of-government crisis communication and public messaging, including clearly articulating communications-related roles and responsibilities during a crisis.
3	Clarify the role of the National Security Committee of Cabinet (NSC) during crises.
4	Introduce a new tiered scalable crisis response model in the framework.
5	Establish NEMA as the lead coordination agency for Australian Government responses to cross-sectoral, concurrent and catastrophic crises.
6	Address gaps identified during the 2023 AGCMF Review including the establishment of new national plans.
7	Establish continuous improvement and exercising of Australia's crisis management arrangements.
8	Improve crisis management capability, capacity and surge workforce arrangements.
9	Formalise the Crisis Arrangements Committee (CAC) as the peak whole-of-government senior officials' body for crisis management planning and preparedness.

Source: ANAO summary of PM&C documentation.

Recommendations phase

2.63 PM&C presented the 2023 AGCMF Review Report to the Australian Government in February 2024. The report and its recommendations were noted.

Lessons management processes and capability

2.64 Lessons management is an overarching term that refers to collecting, analysing, disseminating, and applying learning experiences from events, exercises, programs and reviews.⁶⁰ A lesson is knowledge or understanding gained by experience. An experience may be positive or negative. The concept of lessons learned requires two components — the identification of a lesson and resulting change in behaviour.⁶¹

2.65 Version 3.0 of the AGCMF introduced a requirement for the lead minister's entity to work with NEMA to capture lessons learned in the management of crisis as part of the government's commitment to continuous improvement.⁶²

2.66 NEMA utilises the Observations – Insights – Lessons Identified – Lessons Learned (OILL) methodology as set out in the Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook for Lessons Management.⁶³ The OILL methodology is intended to provide a repeatable process NEMA can use throughout and following crises.

60 Department of Home Affairs, *Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection Lessons Management*, Home Affairs, p. 3.

61 *ibid.*, p. 6.

62 At the time version 3.0 of the AGCMF was published, the responsible entities were Emergency Management Australia and the National Recovery and Resilience Agency.

63 https://www.aidr.org.au/media/1760/aidr_handbookcollection_lessonsmanagement_2019.pdf [accessed 12 February 2024].

2.67 On 26 February 2024 NEMA advised the ANAO that a lessons process is applied to some but not all events or crises. NEMA further advised on 18 July 2024 that a general guiding principle was that a lessons process be conducted for activations of the Crisis Coordination Team and events of national significance. NEMA had not documented or defined what it considered to be events of national significance. NEMA is refining its lessons approach following the 2023 AGCMF Review, noting the recommendation for lessons to be conducted following Tier 4 events (see Table 3.3).

2.68 On 18 July 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that it also utilises adaptive and agile lessons processes to implement strategic and operational changes during or as close as possible to a crisis occurring. For example, in December 2022 NEMA provided support to New South Wales and Victoria in response to flooding on the Murray River. Following these requests for assistance, NEMA developed a new internal product to assess the likelihood of future assistance from South Australia as flood waters moved down the Murray River. This internal product allowed NEMA to identify potential types of requests for assistance and map against expected flood levels and timing based on inputs from the Australian Climate Service.

Implementation of recommendations from external scrutiny

2.69 As discussed in paragraphs 1.13 to 1.17, the Australian Government response to crises (including the COVID-19 pandemic) has been subject to scrutiny such as parliamentary inquiries and Royal Commission reviews, that have resulted in recommendations relating to crisis management.

2.70 In March 2023, the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) presented *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements*. The JCPAA recommended that PM&C, in the 2023 review of the AGCMF, incorporate human rights considerations in the framework, and outline measures to ensure that any crisis response limiting or restricting human rights is necessary, reasonable and proportionate.⁶⁴

2.71 The JCPAA also recommended that PM&C should require relevant entities to update their entity-level crisis management policies and plans to reflect this change. The government has not provided a response to this recommendation.⁶⁵

2.72 PM&C advised the ANAO on 5 April 2024 that:

the new principles for the revised framework endorsed by the Crisis Arrangements Committee in June 2023 stated that the Framework:

- Acknowledges community at the core of a response and considers the particular needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged Australians
- Recognises the importance of engaging with First Nations people and their communities before, during and after emergencies.

2.73 The principles outlined in the revised AGCMF include that the framework 'acknowledges human rights considerations to ensure that measures enacted during crises are necessary,

64 Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements*, Canberra, March 2023, Recommendation 3, page xiii.

65 Responses to recommendations within JCPAA reports are due within six months of the tabling date of the report.

Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, Parliament of Australia, *Role of the committee*, available from https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Public_Accounts_and_Audit/Role_of_the_Committee [accessed 5 August 2024].

reasonable and proportionate'. There is no further information relating to the consideration of human rights.

2.74 The JCPAA recommendation was not identified in the ToRs or other planning documentation for the 2023 AGCMF Review. In September 2024 the CAC ToRs were updated to incorporate human rights considerations. The ToRs state that 'the CAC has agreed to invite a representative from appropriate agencies to provide advice on human rights considerations relating to crisis arrangements'.

Recommendation no. 2

2.75 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet:

- provide stronger guidance to entities in their development and updating of entity level and relevant national level crisis management policies and plans; and
- provide a formal response to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit that outlines actions taken to address recommendation three from *Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements*.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: Agreed.

2.76 *PM&C is working with NEMA to develop stronger guidance for agencies on national plans and policy, through the current review of the National Plan Guidelines. This will include guidance on the consideration of human rights. PM&C has updated the terms of reference for the Crisis Arrangements Committee (CAC) to include a representation from the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) to support consideration of human rights in strategic crisis preparedness and planning activities.*

2.77 *PM&C will provide a formal response to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit that outlines these actions which address Recommendation 3 from Report 494: Inquiry into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's crisis management arrangements.*

2.78 The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Commission) report was published 28 October 2020. The Commission was established in response to the 2019–2020 bushfires, however, extended its scope to include natural disaster management. The role of the Australian Government was highlighted as necessary to ensure the coordination of whole-of-government cooperation and effort.

2.79 The Commission made 80 recommendations in total. Sixty-five were the responsibility of state and territory governments either independently or in partnership with the Australian Government. The Australian Government assumed primary responsibility for the remaining 15. The commission did not make any specific recommendations relating to the AGCMF. However, in recommendation 24.1, the Commission noted that the Australian Government should establish accountability and assurance mechanisms to promote continuous improvement and best practice in natural disaster arrangements. An interim report prepared by NEMA on 20 October 2023 that outlines the status of implementation of recommendations stated that the 2023 AGCMF Review

would address this recommendation. The status of the recommendation was recorded as implemented.⁶⁶

Were lessons relevant to the AGCMF applied?

There are gaps in lesson management at the whole-of-government level. As the lessons management capability matures, implementation of actions to address identified lessons is improving. During crises between 2019 and 2023, an APS Surge Reserve was established from lessons relating to capability across the APS. While intended to provide additional personnel capacity in the event of a crisis, the APS Surge Reserve provides staff with generalist skills. The 2023 AGCMF Review identified a gap in suitably qualified staff for crisis management roles. NEMA has sought opportunities to utilise the Centres for National Resilience for certain crises, however, an agreement to utilise Department of Finance managed centres has not yet been established. NEMA has established the National Emergency Management Stockpile to enable the rapid deployment of resources.

2.80 As noted in paragraph 2.64, the concept of lessons learned requires two components — the identification of a lesson and resulting change in behaviour.

2.81 Gaps in lessons management at the whole-of-government level were identified as part of the 2023 AGCMF Review. This included reporting to the CAC in September 2023 that ‘we aren’t very good at ‘learning our lessons’ from major crisis responses’. The 2023 AGCMF Review report included a recommendation for lessons identified to be recorded to inform updates to the Framework and Handbook.

2.82 Reviews of the AGCMF were administrative in nature between 2020 and 2023. There was an absence of process to capture lessons relating to the operations of the framework at the whole-of-government level. The application of lessons to the AGCMF were primarily driven by lessons identified by, or recommendations from, external scrutiny.

NEMA lessons implementation

2.83 As outlined in paragraph 2.67, a lessons process is applied to some but not all events or crises. Where a lessons process is conducted, NEMA develops insight reports as part of the lessons learned process.⁶⁷ One purpose of these reports is to validate and prioritise the insights among senior executive and subject matter experts, and that separate pieces of work will progress the actions and lessons identified that may result from these reports.

2.84 Although NEMA has captured a large volume of insights from prior crises, it is not clear that all insight reports progress to lessons identification and development of recommendations. On 26 February 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that it considers lessons management to be a maturing process.

2.85 An example of where NEMA has identified insights that have transitioned to lessons identification and some lessons have been learned is outlined in Case Study 1.

66 NEMA reported against the implementation of recommendations to the Minister for Emergency Management. On 14 December 2023, the Minister for Emergency Management announced the completion of all 15 recommendations directed solely to the Australian Government.

67 Insights reports are part of the OILL methodology outlined in paragraph 2.70.

Case study 1. Lessons learned from the 2022 east coast floods

In February 2022, the Director-General Emergency Management Australia (EMA) activated the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan (COMDISPLAN) in anticipation of requests for non-financial assistance from states affected by severe rain and flooding. EMA produced an insights report following the event. The insights report included 246 observations that informed 17 insights. The insights report informed the development of a lessons and recommendation report. Five whole-of-government lessons were identified, and 11 recommendations were made.

Although there is no evidence of further reporting against the lessons and recommendations report that demonstrates active tracking of recommendations, six of the relevant recommendations made in relation to NEMA (then EMA) that relate to the scope of the AGCMF audit have either been implemented or are in the process of being implemented. These recommendations include:

- education and awareness of the entire emergency management continuum;
- a review of COMDISPLAN;
- advising Chief Operating Officers of Australian Government departments of the requirement for Deputy Secretary level representation on the Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee and the National Coordination Mechanism;
- Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (see paragraphs 3.25 to 3.34) training;
- Establishing the National Joint Common Operating Picture (see paragraph 3.37); and
- improvements to the National Situation Room (see paragraph 3.37).

Two recommendations have been considered as part of the 2023 AGCMF Review. These include that PM&C should update the AGCMF to reflect machinery of government changes and continuous improvement, and improvements to whole-of-government talking points.

In the absence of tracking, the status of the following recommendations could not be determined.

- Improvements to the National Emergency Declaration governance, processes, education and awareness.
- Engagement with the Australian Civil Military Centre to explore training options for Australian Government liaison officers.

Capacity and capability related recommendations

2.86 The NEMA Corporate Plan 2023–24 to 2026–27 states that a robust, tested and collaborative national emergency management capability and capacity is critical for Australia to be ready to respond and recover from increasingly intense and severe disasters.⁶⁸ Emergency management capability and capacity includes people and assets to support coordination and response activities.

68 National Emergency Management Agency, Corporate Plan 2023-24 to 2026-27, p. 6.

People

2.87 The COVID-19 pandemic impacted the operation of the Australian Public Service (APS), which needed to deploy staff on a large scale to support critical functions and quickly adapt to operating in a COVID-safe environment.⁶⁹

2.88 Auditor-General Report No.20 2020–21 *Management of the Australian Public Service's Workforce Response to COVID-19* found that whole of government crisis management documents did not include information on managing the APS workforce in response to a pandemic, and there would be value in whole-of-government crisis management frameworks, plans and arrangements being updated to include consideration of APS-wide operational management matters, such as roles and responsibilities for identifying critical functions, mobilising the APS workforce and issuing-APS wide directions.⁷⁰

2.89 The 2023 AGCMF Review Report refers to feedback from agencies that 'the current Australian Public Service Commission surge reserve, whilst used during the Covid-19 response, often did not provide officers that were appropriately trained or experienced in the specifics of crisis management'. While the APS surge reserve is intended to provide staff with 'generalist' skills, the 2023 AGCMF Review Report acknowledges the capability gap in relation to crisis management skills and includes a recommendation to improve cross-government crisis management capability, capacity and surge workforce.⁷¹ This includes the development of a standard crisis management training package to be developed by NEMA to support a surge crisis workforce across the APS.

Assets

Centres for national resilience

2.90 Centres for National Resilience are purpose-built quarantine facilities in Melbourne, Brisbane and Perth constructed as part of the response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Australian Government funded construction of the centres and state governments were responsible for the operation and management of the facilities for the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Centres for National Resilience were expected to provide Australia with a new resilience capability following their use during the COVID-19 pandemic.⁷²

2.91 NEMA considers that the Centres for National Resilience may provide capacity to support COMDISPLAN⁷³ or AUSRECEPLAN.⁷⁴ For COMDISPLAN the Centres for National Resilience may provide temporary accommodation for people displaced due to natural disasters or emergency service personnel. For AUSRECEPLAN the Centres for National Resilience may provide temporary accommodation and quarantine for returning citizens and permanent residents.

69 Auditor-General Report No.20 2020–21 *Management of the Australian Public Service's Workforce Response to COVID-19*, Canberra, 2020, para 1.5, available from <https://www.anao.gov.au/work/performance-audit/management-the-australian-public-service-workforce-response-to-covid-19>.

70 *ibid.*, paras 2.6 and 2.7.

71 The Australian Public Service Commission website states that the 'APS Surge Reserve is an opportunity to use your generalist APS skills and experience to help your fellow Australians in their time of need.'

72 The Department of Finance is responsible for management of the non-Defence property portfolio including the Centres for National Resilience.

73 COMDISPLAN is the Australian Government Disaster Response Plan.

74 AUSRECEPLAN is the Australian Government Plan for the Reception of Australian Citizens and Approved Foreign National Evacuated from Overseas. This plan is activated for the repatriation and reception of Australian citizens following a disaster or emergency overseas.

2.92 The Department of Finance and NEMA commenced drafting a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) in March 2024, to establish a framework that allows for the potential use of the centres for national resilience for emergency accommodation as well as general storage and emergency management stockpile. As at July 2024, this MOU has not been finalised.

National Emergency Management Stockpile

2.93 The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements made recommendations relating to enhanced preparedness through resource sharing arrangements and review of supply chain risks to ensure supply of essential goods during natural disasters. The 2023 Defence Strategic Review⁷⁵ highlighted a need to shift away from reliance on Australian Defence Force (ADF) resources in response to domestic disasters, and recommended that the Australian Government work with states and territories to develop national resilience and response measures without the need of ADF support. The development of a National Emergency Management Stockpile (the stockpile) goes towards addressing these recommendations.

2.94 Established in the 2023–24 financial year the stockpile consists of the following components.

- The NEMS Standing Offer Panel which provides a purchasing mechanism for government entities.
- Assets such as sandbags and self-sustaining emergency shelters. Assets include both re-deployable assets and single-use or seasonal consumables.
- Memoranda of Understanding and strategic partnerships with humanitarian and crisis response capabilities.

2.95 The physical stockpile is housed in ‘strategic’ locations intended to support asset deployment north, east and west.⁷⁶ The stockpile is intended to be used predominately by states and territories as a form of non-financial Australian Government assistance.

2.96 A National Emergency Management Stockpile Working Group (the working group) was established in October 2023 to ‘enable inter-jurisdictional representation on the deployment, delivery and operation of the National Emergency Management Stockpile’. The working group consists of a Commonwealth representative (NEMA) that acts as chair and representatives from all Australian states and territories. Members were appointed via nomination from the Australia and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC).⁷⁷ The working group has met a total of five times since its establishment, this included twice in 2023 and three times in 2024.

2.97 NEMA is responsible for the development of the stockpile capability and creating draft materials for circulation across the working group. To date, state and territory members have largely been responsible for identifying subject matter experts to support panel evaluation and

75 The Defence Strategic Review was commissioned in 2022 by the Australian Government to ‘assess whether Australia had the necessary defence capability, posture and preparedness to best defend Australia and its interests in the current strategic environment’.

76 Physical assets include off-grid semi-rigid emergency shelter camp capability, which is stored in South Australia. Other disaster goods such as long-lasting consumables, water purification systems and emergency power generation are stored by a third party in Victoria.

77 The Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee is the senior officials committee responsible for emergency management. It is co-chaired by the Coordinator-General of the National Emergency Management Agency and a jurisdictional Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee member on a one year, rotational basis.

procurement activities and the socialisation, and coordination of feedback, within each jurisdiction, on draft materials for the stockpile.⁷⁸

78 This includes the Jurisdictional Deployment Agreements (JDA) and development of product cards. JDA is a structured checklist to support a clear understanding of roles and responsibilities of each party involved in a NEMS deployment. Product cards are unique to each stockpile and are intended as a guide to understand the item and discern if it will meet the user's needs.

3. Responding to a changing threat environment

Areas examined

This chapter examines whether the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF) is fit for purpose to respond to a changing threat environment.

Conclusion

The revised AGCMF released in September 2024 incorporates an increased emphasis on continuous improvement and improved oversight. These amendments, if effectively implemented, should position the framework to respond to a changing threat environment. Activities that informed the 2023 AGCMF Review, such as ‘futures workshops’, would provide value to the framework into the future as they provide an opportunity to examine whether the framework is strategically positioned to adapt to the future. The revised AGCMF introduces several new roles. The responsibilities of these roles are largely clear. Until 2024, there has been a lack of oversight over national level plans to ensure they are reviewed and updated. The annual national exercise program conducted by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) has primarily focussed on natural disaster scenarios. Compounding non-natural disaster specific impacts are now being integrated into natural disaster scenario-based exercises within the program. There is scope to improve the transparency and currency of national plans and risk planning in relation to shared risks and key management personnel risks.

Areas for improvement

The ANAO made three recommendations aimed at embedding ongoing future scenario planning into review arrangements for the AGCMF; identifying criteria for the publication of plans; and documenting the consideration of gaps and priorities relating to hazards and exercise activity to inform the development of the annual national exercise program.

The ANAO identified two opportunities for improvement aimed at increasing engagement with the Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (CASP) methodology and developing an approach that increases visibility of exercise activity.

3.1 The AGCMF adopts an ‘all-hazards’ crisis management approach. This approach recognises that crises are difficult to predict and that there is no standard response. Risk assessment and management activities should be designed to support delivery of government services by providing clarity around roles and responsibilities, identifying the required frequency for review of key plans and supporting improved preparedness for unexpected events.

3.2 This chapter considers version 4.0 of the AGCMF released in September 2024, following the 2023 AGCMF Review.

Has an appropriate risk-based approach to planning been established?

Risk assessments do not include potential key management personnel risks. The 2023 ACGMF Review incorporated strategic risk consideration including future scenario planning which had not previously been conducted. The CASP methodology has been embedded in NEMA's approach to operational response activities, however, the methodology has not yet been established as a consistent planning tool across the range of entities involved in crisis management, or in horizon scanning activities to detect emerging threats. When fully embedded, the CASP methodology has the potential to provide a robust approach to planning and preparedness as well as recovery.

3.3 The Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework defines planning as the ability to systematically plan for and implement scalable strategic, operational, and tactical level approaches to dealing with catastrophic disasters.⁷⁹

3.4 Strategic planning involves the identification of objectives and resources and is often longer term and forward looking, however, may also relate to responding to an immediate objective where the 'big picture' and longer-term issues also require consideration. Operational planning translates the strategic intent into implementation. Tactical planning is where operational activities are planned and executed within short timeframes (often 24 to 48 hours). A risk-based approach to crisis planning incorporates consideration of risk across all levels.

Entity level risk planning

3.5 Section 16 of the *Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013* requires accountable authorities of Commonwealth entities to establish and maintain appropriate systems and internal controls for the oversight and management of risk.⁸⁰

3.6 As discussed in paragraphs 3.40 to 3.42, PM&C is responsible for setting and oversight of whole-of-government crisis management policy, including coordinating updates to the ACGMF, and NEMA has responsibilities for domestic crisis management including convening key committees and maintaining a national all-hazard crisis exercising program.

PM&C risk planning activities

3.7 Divisional planning documents for the Resilience and Crisis Management Division (see paragraph 2.5) include references to the 2023 ACGMF Review and supporting departmental and whole of Australian Government preparedness via the Higher Risk Weather Season (HRWS) exercise (see paragraphs 3.109 to 3.111).⁸¹ Table 3.1 outlines the information included in divisional planning documents which identify risks, controls, risk ratings and activities intended to address these risks.

79 Department of Home Affairs, *Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework*, Home Affairs, 2018.

80 Section 16 of the PGPA Act.

81 Resilience and Crisis Management Division is part of the Economy, Industry and Resilience Group. The Resilience and Crisis Management Division is responsible for providing support and advice on whole of government coordination of emergency management and national resilience.

Table 3.1: Risks, controls and activities related to crisis management identified in the Resilience and Crisis Management Division business plan 2023–24

Risk ^a	Controls	Initial risk rating	Planned activities to address risk	Target risk rating
Coordinated whole of government management of a national crisis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Roles and responsibilities outlined in AGCMF • Legislation • National plans and guidelines 	Medium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of AGCMF • Participation in exercises • Internal processes and training 	Low

Note a: The risk ‘staff wellbeing’ is not replicated in the above as it does not have a direct relationship to the AGCMF. Source: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

3.8 The divisional planning documents do not include an assessment of shared risks, such as those relating to capability and capacity within NEMA or other entities and the potential impact of those risks, as it relates to the effective operations of the AGCMF or delivery of the revised AGCMF.

NEMA risk planning activities

3.9 NEMA has identified a strategic risk — ‘the impact of all-hazards on Australian communities is not diminished by the Australian Government’s (facilitated by NEMA) involvement, due to an inability to provide effective coordination and national leadership in emergency management’. The AGCMF is listed as one of the controls for this risk.

3.10 NEMA documentation does not include an assessment of shared risks, such as those relating to capability and capacity within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) or other entities and the potential impact of those risks, as it relates to the effective operations of the AGCMF or delivery of the revised AGCMF.

Key management personnel risk

3.11 There is a potential risk relating to key management personnel for both NEMA and PM&C.⁸² Neither PM&C nor NEMA have documented key management personnel risks in their internal risk management documentation.⁸³

3.12 In relation to PM&C, this risk relates to the ad-hoc nature of engagement in some areas (see paragraphs 2.35 to 2.43 which discuss informal engagement during the administrative update processes and paragraph 2.14 which discuss the identification and inclusion of annexes etc.) There is a risk that the operations of the framework become reliant on relationships resulting in decisions

82 Key management personnel are the people with authority and responsibility for planning, directing and controlling the activities of an entity, directly or indirectly.

83 NEMA risk documentation includes the following risks relating to staff which are not specific to key management personnel:

- We fail to adequately support the physical and psychological health, safety and wellbeing of Agency staff.
- We do not attract, retain and develop a diverse and high performing workforce with the necessary capability and capacity to achieve government priorities.
- A culture of risk aversion may limit innovation threatening business and operational sustainability, effectiveness and efficiency.
- We fail our duty of care for international deployed capability.
- We fail our duty of care for domestic deployed capability.

being made without appropriate documentation being kept or other stakeholders not being appropriately engaged.

3.13 In relation to NEMA, there is a risk that consecutive, concurrent or compounding crises of national significance may overwhelm existing Australian Government capabilities and may require surge support for sustained events, including at the Senior Executive level. In particular, the Deputy Coordinator-General Emergency Management Response Group plays a significant role in both strategic and operational activities.

3.14 Certain crisis scenarios may result in key personnel becoming unavailable and may necessitate contingency arrangements to ensure continuity.⁸⁴ Planning for these potential scenarios may reduce the risk that key staff become unavailable or that other personnel required to fulfil these roles are unaware of their roles and responsibilities.

Opportunity for improvement

3.15 PM&C and NEMA assess senior staffing capacity in the context of responding to consecutive, concurrent or compounding crises of national significance and document surge and contingency arrangements.

3.16 PM&C could also provide further guidance to entities with crisis responsibilities to assess staffing capacity and develop surge arrangements to support consecutive, concurrent or compounding crises.

Future scenario planning

3.17 The main focus of the AGCMF is near-term crisis preparedness, immediate crisis response and crisis recovery arrangements.⁸⁵ Effective near-term crisis preparedness, immediate crisis response and recovery arrangements are informed by future planning activities such as horizon scanning and risk assessments.⁸⁶

3.18 The AGCMF states that the Australian Government undertakes threat and security risk assessments and provides national security capabilities to prepare for and respond to events determined to be of national significance. There is no evidence that these assessments are considered within the context of the whole-of-government AGCMF. The 2023 AGCMF Review identified an absence of a centralised process to ensure critical hazards and risks are being systematically addressed in planning and preparedness activities.

3.19 As part of the 2023 AGCMF Review, advice relating to future risks framed around mega trends was provided by the national intelligence community.⁸⁷ Two ‘futures workshops’ were

84 For example, a pandemic may present a risk that staff with crisis responsibilities become unavailable due to illness, or that illness may affect multiple staff with crisis responsibilities.

85 Under the AGCMF, NEMA are responsible for managing ‘some’ longer-term crisis risk reduction and resilience building activities (which are not covered in detail in the AGCMF as its focus is near-term crisis preparedness, immediate crisis response, and crisis recovery arrangements).

86 Department of Home Affairs, *Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (CASP)*, Home Affairs, Australian Government, Canberra, 2020, p. 8.

87 Mega trends are trends that have an effect on a global scale. An overview of emerging mega trends was presented by the national intelligence community in a verbal unclassified briefing as part of the first futures workshop on 8 August 2023.

conducted with senior officials from approximately 20 Australian Government agencies (see paragraphs 2.59 to 2.61).

3.20 The first workshop was intended to explore a response to concurrent, cross-sectoral and catastrophic crisis. Documentation for workshop one is limited and there is no evidence of how participant input from the workshop was analysed for input into the report. The second workshop was intended to explore a specific future risk identified in the intelligence briefing.

3.21 High level insights were captured from the second workshop. Insights are grouped into discussion themes that are aligned to proposed revisions to the framework. There is no analysis document that documents how the insights were considered and addressed. The AGCMF Review Team observed the workshop.

3.22 Since 2020, discussions such as ‘futures workshops’ have not occurred. On 9 April 2024, PM&C advised the ANAO that longer term strategic horizon scanning takes place under the Crisis Arrangements Committee (CAC). As discussed in paragraph 2.21, the CAC did not meet between December 2019 and June 2023 and was re-established for the purposes of providing oversight to the 2023 AGCMF Review. As such, there has been limited opportunity for the CAC to perform this function.

Recommendation no. 3

3.23 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet embed arrangements for future scenario planning into ongoing review and update arrangements for the AGCMF. These should be appropriately documented to ensure lessons are captured and can be learned.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

3.24 *PM&C will embed arrangements for future scenario planning and ensure lessons are captured into ongoing arrangements review and update arrangements.*

Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning methodology

3.25 The CASP methodology is a tool for planning for responding to hazards and ensuring preparedness. The methodology provides processes and products to support decision-makers to evaluate and categorise risk and ensure appropriate priority is assigned to risk areas. The CASP methodology also creates a record of decisions and documents how key decisions were made. References to the CASP methodology were introduced into the AGCMF in version 3.1 which was released in December 2021.

3.26 Although the CASP guidebook is publicly available via the NEMA website, efforts to embed usage have been predominantly internally focussed. NEMA has identified a desired end state for the emergency management sector — which includes Australian Government, states and territories, and industry — to use the CASP methodology as a common tool to plan for crises. To reach this end state, NEMA is undertaking capability development activities internally and externally. NEMA advised the ANAO on 2 July 2024 that for the period 2021 to 30 June 2024, 304 people were trained in the use of CASP.

Key elements of the CASP

3.27 CASP comprises four steps:

- define the environment;
- mission analysis;
- developing courses of action; and
- executing the plan.

Define the environment

3.28 The CASP guidebook states that defining the environment involves laying the foundation of the common operating picture⁸⁸ by outlining the who, what, where and when of the incident environment. Data from situation reports, media and other sources are inputs to the common operating picture. The CASP guidebook states that the length of time required to establish the initial common operating picture varies and may be in the order of 15–20 minutes for ‘no-notice’ incidents, 30–45 minutes for emerging incidents and more than 60 minutes for long-range incidents.⁸⁹

Mission analysis

3.29 The CASP guidebook states that analysing the mission involves four interrelated processes:

- developing priorities;
- conducting gap analysis;
- developing desired end state; and
- defining lines of effort and success conditions.

Developing courses of action

3.30 The CASP guidebook notes that with the strategic intent formulated, planning commences to inform the operational level of incident management.

Executing the plan

3.31 The CASP guidebook acknowledges that the process of providing mission tasks varies and that the end format is determined by what is necessary to meet agency-specific policies and requirements.

Application of the CASP

3.32 An example of where the CASP methodology has been used as a planning document is outlined in Case Study 2.

88 A common operating picture (COP) is a continuously updated overview of an incident or crisis. It includes information across the life cycle of the incident or crisis from shared data sources. The goal of a COP is real-time situational awareness across all levels of incident or crisis management and stakeholders.

89 ‘No-notice’ incidents occur unexpectedly or with minimal warning. Expectations for a rapid response may reduce the amount of time available for planning activities such as establishing an initial common operating picture.

Case study 2. Identification of potential Commonwealth support to Western Australia

NEMA used the CASP methodology to identify potential Commonwealth support to Western Australia in preparation for the response to Ex-Tropical Cyclone Ellie.^a This document was developed on 7 January 2023 and was updated on multiple occasions throughout January and February 2023. Initial documentation included the activation of COMDISPLAN and consideration of response activities such as evacuation and temporary accommodation, supplies and support, and the restoration of supply routes and infrastructure and services. Defining the environment identified a number of ‘big questions’. As the weather event progressed, use of the CASP methodology and related documentation transitioned from a preparedness focus to early recovery activities. The ‘big questions’ were answered as the situation progressed and more information became available. This included articulating roles and responsibilities between the Australian Government and state government, as well as identifying administration priorities for the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Note a: Tropical Cyclone Ellie crossed the Northern Territory coast on 22 December 2022. It then weakened below tropical cyclone intensity on the morning of 23 December, however, continued to impact the Northern Territory and Western Australia as a tropical low until 8 January 2023.

Bureau of Meteorology, Past Tropical Cyclones — Tropical Cyclone Ellie [Internet], available from <http://www.bom.gov.au/cyclone/history/Ellie-2022.shtml> [accessed 30 April 2024].

3.33 The CASP guidebook states that contemporary risk management practices in the preparedness phase involve risk assessment through horizon scanning, risk radars and forward-looking analysis to detect emerging threats.⁹⁰ The current use of the CASP methodology is focussed on responding to crises and early recovery planning and does not maximise value in planning for potential crises.

3.34 Noting that the process to embed the CASP methodology remains ongoing, CASP has the potential to support conformity and interoperability between different entities and stakeholders. Finalising the suite of documentation including templates and continuing to develop capability has the potential to provide consistency and speed in planning and responding to crises. On 23 September 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that since May 2024 it has undertaken the following activities to support the CASP methodology.

- Fourteen CASP courses have been delivered across Australian Government, jurisdictions and NEMA staff.
- Five CASP training modules have been delivered.
- A pool of subject matter experts has been established in NEMA to support states and territories in strategic planning during times of crisis.
- The CASP doctrine including the Guidebook and supporting templates have been updated.

⁹⁰ Preparedness is the second phase of the seven phase Australian Government crisis management continuum. Refer to paragraph 1.7 for further detail.

Opportunity for improvement

3.35 There is an opportunity to increase engagement with the CASP methodology across Australian Government for planning and preparedness activities prior to a crisis event commencing.

Situational awareness

3.36 Intelligence⁹¹ and situational awareness⁹² are key capability requirements identified in the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework.⁹³ Under the AGCMF, the Australian Government facilitates near-real time national situational awareness to support state and territory governments to deliver on their responsibilities for the protection of life, property, and the environment in their jurisdictions.

3.37 The Australian Government National Situation Room (the National Situation Room) within NEMA provides 24/7 all-hazard situational awareness, impact analysis and decision support to Government. The National Situation Room was officially opened in November 2022.⁹⁴ It was formerly known as the Crisis Coordination Centre. The National Situation Room incorporates the National Joint Common Operating Picture (NJCOP).⁹⁵ The establishment of the NJCOP is one component of efforts to address recommendations 3.6 and 4.2 from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.⁹⁶

91 Data is made up of individual, unprocessed facts. Information is produced when data is joined together and processed to be useful for a specific purpose. Intelligence is the product that results from collecting and analysing all available data and information relevant to a topic, to inform decision-making on that topic.

92 Situational awareness is the act of monitoring current and emerging sources of risks and threats and combining this information with pre-existing knowledge to anticipate what is likely to happen next.

93 Department of Home Affairs, *Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework*, Home Affairs, 2018.

94 Minister for Home Affairs, 'Australia's enhanced National Situation Room unveiled', media release, 30 November 2022, available from <https://minister.homeaffairs.gov.au/MurrayWatt/Pages/australias-enhanced-national-situation-room-unveiled.aspx>.

95 The National Joint Common Operating Picture is an IT based near-real-time geospatially enabled platform intended to provide all-hazards situational awareness and impact related information. It is an official-classified platform available to all Australian Government emergency management stakeholders, state and territory emergency management agencies, and relevant industry stakeholders.

96 Recommendation 3.6 — Enhanced national preparedness and response entity

The Australian Government should enhance national preparedness for, and response to, natural disasters, building on the responsibilities of Emergency Management Australia, to include facilitating resource sharing decisions of governments and stress testing national disaster plans.

Recommendation 4.2 — Common information platforms and shared technologies

Australian, state and territory governments should create common information platforms and share technologies to enable collaboration in the production, analysis, access, and exchange of information, data and knowledge about climate and disaster risks.

Have clear roles and responsibilities been established?

The revised AGCMF provides increased clarity on roles and responsibilities. This includes introduction of a tiered crisis coordination model intended to provide greater flexibility as crises evolve. The revised AGCMF groups key information relating to roles and responsibilities together for an easier read. The Handbook provides additional guidance to senior officials. The revised AGCMF has largely addressed feedback obtained during the 2023 AGCMF Review to improve the clarity of the arrangements for the available crisis mechanisms. PM&C has identified ongoing activities are required to support the implementation of the revised AGCMF including by improving capability.

3.38 As discussed in paragraphs 2.48 to 2.63, PM&C completed a review of the AGCMF in 2023. As a result of this review, a revised AGCMF was released in September 2024 during the 2024–25 HRWS National Preparedness Summit (see paragraphs 3.109 to 3.111).

3.39 The Terms of Reference (ToRs) for the 2023 AGCMF Review acknowledged a need for better national coordination and integration in the context of increasingly complex, cascading, compounding, and concurrent national and international crises.

Oversight roles

3.40 Under the revised AGCMF, PM&C retains responsibility for whole-of-government crisis management policy. The revised AGCMF specifies additional responsibilities and states that, if required, PM&C can:

- initiate an Australian Government response;
- determine the initial tier of coordination and adjust the tier over time;
- determine the initial Australian Government Coordinating Agency;
- co-chair the peak senior officials' crisis coordination committee, including the National Coordination Mechanism or Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF);
- change the Australian Government Coordinating Agency and Lead Coordinating Senior Official following consultation with relevant senior officials; and
- initiate escalation to a NEMA-led Tier 4⁹⁷ coordination.

3.41 Under the revised AGCMF, NEMA is responsible for:

- administering the NCM on behalf of Australian Government agencies;
- supporting whole-of-Australian Government situational awareness through the National Joint Common Operating Picture and National Situation Room briefing products (see paragraph 3.37); and
- supporting Australian Government crisis management capabilities by providing best practice guidance, including preparatory and strategic planning, crisis communication and recovery.

⁹⁷ Under the revised AGCMF released in September 2024 'Tier 4' refers to the complexity and severity of impacts and consequences that require whole of Australian Government coordination and support during extreme and catastrophic crises.

3.42 NEMA continues to hold responsibility for delivering an annual national crisis exercising program and maintaining a national crisis exercising register (see paragraphs 3.84 to 3.105 for further detail).

Lead ministers and agencies

3.43 The revised AGCMF consolidates definitions and guidance for defined roles and responsibilities. These roles and responsibilities, the intersection between the different roles and the arrangements for them to change are outlined in Table 3.2.

Table 3.2: Comparison of roles and responsibilities

Role	Description	Previously included in the AGCMF?	Proposed intersection between roles and responsibilities under the new framework
Lead Minister	Responsible for leading coordination in response to a significant crisis caused by an identified hazard under the framework.	Yes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The lead minister can change throughout a crisis if it evolves and begins to impact a different Australian Government entity.
Australian Government Coordinating Agency	Required to lead the coordination for a significant crisis caused by an identified hazard under this framework.	No — previously coordination was the responsibility of the 'lead agency'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supports the lead coordinating senior official and can change throughout a crisis if it evolves and begins to impact a different Australian Government entity. Can be directed to change by PM&C.
Lead Coordinating Senior Official	Responsible for leading the coordination for a significant crisis.	No — general roles and responsibilities for senior officials were mentioned throughout the AGCMF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advises and supports the lead minister. Can change when the Coordinating Agency changes. Can be directed to change by PM&C.
Sector Lead Agency	Contributes to whole of government crisis coordination activities and leads the consequence management activities relevant to agency functions and responsibilities.	Replaces role defined as 'lead agency' in previous versions of the AGCMF	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If NEMA assumes the role of Australian Government Coordinating Agency, from another agency, that agency becomes a Sector Lead Agency and continues to lead the consequence management activities within their own sector.

Role	Description	Previously included in the AGCMF?	Proposed intersection between roles and responsibilities under the new framework
Enabling Agency	Administers relevant programs, provides specialist technical, scientific, intelligence or information capabilities or conducts any other enabling activities to support consequence management activities.	No	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not outlined in the framework.

Source: ANAO analysis of versions of the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework.

Hazard identification

3.44 The revised AGCMF identifies 14 specific hazards — an increase from 12 hazards under the September 2023 version of the AGCMF. The two additional hazards added are ‘radiological / nuclear incidents’ and ‘novel or ambiguous hazard’. Radiological or nuclear incidents were identified as emerging hazards requiring further guidance and documentation as part of the consultation process for the 2023 AGCMF Review.

3.45 For each hazard, the roles of Lead Minister, Australian Government Coordinating Agency, Lead Coordinating Senior Official are defined (see Appendix 3). The applicable coordination mechanism and relevant national plan are also specified.

3.46 As part of the 2023 AGCMF Review consultation process, PM&C identified that economic crisis events such as the global financial crisis are not captured under the AGCMF and there is a need for certainty over how this should be treated. PM&C advised the Crisis Arrangements Committee of this observation in September 2023, noting a need for certainty on how to treat such an event.

3.47 The CAC agreed that the AGCMF is not intended to consider economic crises, noting that it should be used to address economic consequences of crises and that the framework should be able to deal with nationally significant consequences of all crises. While the revised AGCMF considers the potential for compounding economic impacts as a result of other crises it does not identify or incorporate any guidance on an economic crisis event.

Capability considerations

3.48 As outlined in Table 2.2, the findings of the 2023 AGCMF Review were aggregated into five overarching themes. One theme related to improving national crisis capability to ensure responsibilities articulated in the Framework can be fulfilled.

3.49 The Review also states that regardless of the cause or hazard, if the required response extends beyond one single entity’s capability and capacity to undertake its role as the lead coordinating agency, NEMA should provide coordination and assistance to lead the response. In the revised AGCMF, it notes that if NEMA becomes the Australian Government Coordinating Agency, the agency that had primacy as lead, becomes a sector lead agency, as defined in Table 3.2, and continues to lead the consequence management activities within that sector. The introduction of a tiered crisis coordination model in the revised AGCMF further clarifies these arrangements.

3.50 Personnel that have key roles under the Framework should be supported through activities such as briefings and opportunities to exercise the arrangements outside a crisis. PM&C has identified the need for ‘deliver’ and ‘educate’ phases to support the implementation of the revised AGCMF. PM&C has developed an ‘Awareness Raising Campaign’ (the campaign) outlining seven initiatives to increase understanding of the revised AGCMF.⁹⁸ The campaign was to begin rolling out in September 2024 and finish early 2025.

Revised Australian Government Crisis Management Framework and new Handbook

3.51 The 2023 AGCMF Review noted that entities requested more crisis management guidance to support systematic response and decision-making during a crisis. This led to the development of the Australian Government Crisis Management Handbook (the Handbook) to provide high-level principles-based guidance to support senior officials in coordinating strategic responses and articulate the national crisis mechanisms that can be used. PM&C advised the ANAO on 22 July 2024 that the Handbook will not be publicly available.

3.52 The revised AGCMF has undergone a significant change to its presentation since the last publicly available AGCMF released in 2023. The revised AGCMF has structured content under five main headings, ‘Introduction’, ‘Preparedness’, ‘Crisis coordination spanning near-term preparedness, response, relief and early recovery’, ‘Recovery’ and ‘Key Legislation’.

3.53 In comparison to the previous versions of the AGCMF, the revised version has reduced in length following the introduction of a figure outlining the hierarchy of documents that underpins the Australian Government’s crisis management arrangements. The revised AGCMF also brings together key information that was previously presented in different sections of the AGCMF to improve readability. The addition of the Handbook, which supports the Framework, has meant that more specific and detailed guidance can be outlined separate to the Framework.

3.54 The Handbook is intended to be an operational document designed to ‘support senior officials to fulfil their responsibilities under the Framework’. As outlined in paragraph 2.16 and 2.17, guidance on escalation triggers previously lacked detail and clarity for entities. The Handbook includes more detailed guidance for senior officials including principles-based thresholds for activation, escalation and deactivation of responses to significant crises, how to coordinate whole-of-government crisis communications and specific questions to guide lead coordinating senior officials in coordinating a crisis response.⁹⁹

98 The initiatives include:

- a letter from the Prime Minister to ministers with roles under the AGCMF to ensure portfolios are prepared in line with the revised AGCMF;
- briefing materials to support agency-led ministerial briefings;
- information sessions for ministers (if requested) and Australian Government officials;
- online publication of the AGCMF;
- online training modules and;
- an animation clip for awareness of key stakeholders.

99 The Handbook outlines 12 questions lead coordinating senior officials should use to develop their approach and understand their responsibilities as a lead entity during a crisis.

Tiered crisis coordination model

3.55 One of the recommendations of the 2023 AGCMF Review related to a gap in the existing Framework about ‘cross-sectoral, concurrent, consecutive, compounding and catastrophic crises’. In responding to this gap, the revised AGCMF introduces a tiered crisis coordination model. The tiered model is intended to ‘provide guidance on the appropriate level of Commonwealth decision-making and coordination. The model also allows flexibility to adjust the lead coordination agency and minister where required, to reflect changes in likely impact and consequences’. Table 3.3 below outlines the tiered crisis coordination model.

Table 3.3: Tiered crisis coordination model

Tiers of coordination	Severity or complexity
Tier 1 — Support from the Australian Government Coordinating Agency	Limited impact or complexity
Tier 2 — Coordinated by the Australian Government Coordinating Agency	Major impact or complexity
Tier 3 — Coordinated by the Australian Government Coordinating Agency	Severe impact or complexity
Tier 4 — Coordinated by NEMA	Extreme to catastrophic impact or complexity

Source: Australian Government Crisis Management Framework September 2024.

3.56 The Handbook provides further defines the process of transitioning between tiers and who can authorise these decisions.

Crisis mechanisms

3.57 During the 2023 AGCMF Review, entity consultation identified that multiple coordination groups could cause confusion and duplication (see paragraph 2.23). The consultation feedback highlighted issues around the clarity of purpose and quantity of committees and mechanisms in place for crisis response and coordination.

Australian Government crisis mechanisms

Crisis Arrangements Committee

3.58 The 2023 AGCMF Review recommended that the CAC be formalised as the peak whole-of-government senior officials’ body for crisis management planning and preparedness. The revised AGCMF outlines the roles and responsibilities of the CAC as:

- annually review and update the list of identified hazards in the Framework;
- oversee the development and maintenance of new national hazard plans when required;
- annually review and report on the status of cross-government crisis management capability, capacity and surge workforce, and provide advice if required to address vulnerabilities
- audit existing national plans and arrangements for ongoing relevance and currency;
- review the full suite of national plans at least once every three years; and
- oversee Australian Government and relevant multinational crisis exercises and advise on gaps and priorities for whole-of-government exercising.

3.59 In September 2024, the CAC ToR were updated. The ToRs largely reflect these roles and responsibilities, except for clearly aligning with the following roles:

- reviewing and reporting on the status of cross-government crisis management capability, capacity and surge workforce; and
- oversight of Australian Government and relevant multinational crisis exercises and advising on gaps and priorities for whole-of-government exercising.¹⁰⁰

Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force

3.60 The revised AGCMF does not change the operations or usage of the Inter-Departmental Emergency Task Force (IDETF) for coordination during Australian Government response to international crises other than specifying that the IDETF would apply for crises between tier one and three.

3.61 As outlined in paragraph 2.25, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provided feedback to PM&C as part of the 2023 AGCMF Review that indicated a need for further clarity around the triggers for and identification of participants for an IDETF. No additional information has been provided in the revised AGCMF to address this feedback.

National crisis mechanisms

National Cabinet

3.62 The revised AGCMF includes a statement outlining the role of National Cabinet, stating that:

The Prime Minister may convene the National Security Committee of Cabinet (NSC) and the National Cabinet at short notice to ensure coordinated action across the Australian, state and territory governments.

3.63 The revised AGCMF identifies the National Cabinet as a mechanism for crisis coordination. National Cabinet is identified in the national coordination and domain concept diagram that describes the NCM.¹⁰¹ However, this diagram does not define a role for National Cabinet.

National Security Committee

3.64 As part of the consultation process, the AGCMF Review received feedback from three entities¹⁰² on clarifying the role of the National Security Committee (NSC), including feedback on clarifying the role of the NSC during a crisis. The role of the NSC has been clarified.

National Coordination Mechanism

3.65 A CAC meeting held on May 2024 discussed the need to streamline coordination arrangements for domestic crises, with particular focus on the similarity of roles between the Australian Government Crisis and Recovery Committee (AGCRC) and the NCM. PM&C proposed the 'streamlined' approach which focussed on a specialised NCM combining the functions previously

100 The ToRs state that the CAC will discuss and make decisions on the operation, exercising or review of crisis response and emergency plans.

101 A domain describes a cooperative community of related parties. The domain concept is intended to allow related parties to cooperate within formal and informal arrangements in line with both explicit and implicit commitments and authorities. The NCM coordination 'hub' connects the domains and is intended to deconflict and synchronise efforts.

102 The Department of the Treasury, the Department of Finance and the Department of Home Affairs.

performed by the AGCRC, known as the Australian Government NCM (NCM-AUSGOV). This decision was agreed by members of the CAC.

3.66 Under the revised AGCMF, the NCM-AUSGOV is to be chaired by the relevant Deputy-Coordinator General NEMA, with the option for the relevant Deputy Secretary PM&C to elect to chair or co-chair.

3.67 On 1 July 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that NCM-AUSGOV serves the same purpose as the AGCRC, however, instead of three mechanisms that perform similar functions (NCM, AGCRC and the IDETF) there are now two (NCM and IDETF). NEMA's website states that the NCM 'brings together Australian Government, states, territories, industry and community organisations to ensure effective and efficient consequence management of events across the emergency management continuum'. The NCM is already intended to be a flexible mechanism that can be held with relevant stakeholders as necessary. It is not clear that the establishment of NCM-AUSGOV reduces confusion identified in the 2023 AGCMF Review (see paragraph 2.23). This risk may require further testing by NEMA and PM&C.

Are there oversight arrangements to ensure plans are reviewed and updated to respond to future events?

Previous versions of the AGCMF did not establish oversight arrangements for the full suite of national level plans to ensure they are reviewed and updated to respond to future events. The September 2024 version of the AGCMF establishes oversight arrangements. As at July 2024, thirty-two per cent of the publicly available plans have not been updated in the last three years.

3.68 The AGCMF is implemented through a series of national-level crisis plans that detail the preparation, response and recovery phases of the Australian Government crisis management continuum (see paragraph 1.7). These plans consider natural, human-induced, and multi-faceted hazards and are maintained by relevant Australian Government agencies identified as hazard lead under the AGCMF.

3.69 Under the AGCMF, the Minister for Emergency Management is responsible for response and recovery of a number of hazards. NEMA's website states that it undertakes a rolling review of national-level plans to ensure they remain fit-for-purpose.¹⁰³ NEMA developed a forward work program which outlines proposed review timeframes for plans for which NEMA has responsibility. These timeframes are outlined in Table 3.4.

103 National Emergency Management Agency, *Emergency Management* [Internet], available from <https://nema.gov.au/about-us/emergency-management> [accessed 4 June 2024].

Table 3.4: Proposed review of national-level plans led by NEMA

Plan	Purpose	Date published	ANAO comment
COMDISPLAN — domestic	Enables states and territories to request non-financial assistance from the Australian Government (eg: specific capabilities)	2020	The forward work program indicated an updated plan due to be provided to the Crisis Arrangements Committee in June 2024. On 3 May 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that COMDISPLAN will be reviewed following implementation of the 2023 AGCMF Review recommendations, subject to priorities of the 2024–25 HRWS.
AUSASSISTPLAN — international	Enables Australian Government to provide emergency physical assistance to overseas countries	2018	Not listed in the forward work program. On 3 May 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that AUSASSISTPLAN will be reviewed following implementation of the 2023 AGCMF Review recommendations, subject to priorities of the 2024–25 HRWS.
AUSRECEPLAN — international	Outlines arrangements for reception into Australia of Australian citizens and permanent residents, and their immediate dependents, and approved foreign nationals evacuated from overseas	2017	Listed as an agenda item for the Crisis Arrangements Committee meeting in June 2024. There was no discussion had about this plan in June 2024. NEMA advised the ANAO on 25 September that the AUSRECEPLAN will be discussed at CAC following consultation with relevant stakeholders.
OSMASSCASPLAN — international	Provides an agreed framework for agencies in all Australian jurisdictions to assess, repatriate and provide care for Australians and other approved persons injured or killed overseas in mass casualty crises	2017	Not listed in the forward work program. On 3 May 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that OSMASSCASPLAN will be reviewed following implementation of the 2023 AGCMF Review recommendations, subject to priorities of the 2024–25 HRWS.
AUSSPREDPLAN — domestic	Provides for the coordination of Australian Government support to States and Territories in response to a space debris re-entry threat	2017	Listed in the forward work program, however, no review timeframes included.

Source: ANAO analysis of NEMA documentation.

3.70 On 18 July 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that it intends to review and implement all national level plans that it leads during 2024, 2025 and 2026 subject to priorities of each HRWS

3.71 As at August 2024, NEMA has developed interim arrangements for the following plans:

- Australian Government Arrangements for the Reception of International Assistance (AUSARIA) — a new plan under development.
- Australian Government Space Weather Event Plan (AUSSWEPLAN) — a new plan under development.
- Australian Government Catastrophic Plan (AUSCATPLAN) — a new plan under development.

Review arrangements and currency of national plans

3.72 Prior scrutiny of planning arrangements for crises identified deficiencies in planning such as plans that were outdated, not fit for purpose or not used.¹⁰⁴ The version of the AGCMF current until September 2024 did not stipulate a timeframe for review of plans.

3.73 Sixty plans¹⁰⁵ and documents relating to national arrangements¹⁰⁶ were identified by PM&C in the September 2023 version of the AGCMF. Thirty of these are national plans of which 22 are publicly available. Of the publicly available plans, 59 per cent have been updated within the last five years. Less than half (32 per cent or seven of 22) have been updated within the last three years.

3.74 In September 2020, PM&C requested that NEMA (then EMA) undertake a stocktake of plans as part of the administrative update process. The request noted a need to remind plan owners of the need to review. In April 2021, June 2022 and April 2024, NEMA requested national plan owners review the Australian Government Crisis and Response Plans Matrix.¹⁰⁷

3.75 The September 2024 version of the establishes a requirement for the full suite of national plans to be reviewed at least once every three years with oversight by the CAC. The AGCMF does not specify which national plans make up ‘the full suite of national plans’. In September 2024, the CAC ToRs were updated to reflect this additional responsibility.

3.76 As at August 2024, NEMA has commenced drafting Australian Government National Plans Guidelines, which are intended to promote a consistent approach to developing and reviewing national plans.

3.77 The revised AGCMF outlines nineteen existing, in progress and proposed national plans for twenty identified hazards. Of the 15 plans that have been completed 10 are publicly available. The

104 As the COVID-19 pandemic was emerging, in correspondence dated 1 February 2020 with the Prime Minister, Minister for Home Affairs and Cabinet Secretary, the Secretary for Home Affairs stated Australia’s whole-of-government civil contingency planning was ‘outdated and not fit for purpose’. Auditor-General Report No. 12 2021-22 *Management of international travel restrictions during Covid-19* found that ‘Following a 2019 Health expert review, which concluded that the use of international travel restrictions and mass quarantine of arrivals to control a pandemic should not be attempted, at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic Australia did not have planning in place to support the implementation of such measures.’

The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements found that NATCATDISPLAN (the National Catastrophic Natural Disaster Plan) had not been triggered.

105 This includes the five national plans listed in Table 3.4 above.

106 Other arrangements included policies, Memoranda of Understanding, standard operating procedures and legislative instruments.

107 This request was made through the Australian Government Planning Group (AGPG). The AGPG is a working level planning group, chaired by NEMA at the Director (EL2 level), with member representation invited at EL2, EL1, or equivalent who hold an active NV1 clearance. Members are drawn from agencies with a lead or support role in crisis, emergency management, relief and early recovery matters.

remaining 10 plans either do not exist or have not been finalised. As of July 2024, the revised AGCMF includes 11 less national plans as version 3.3 of the AGCMF.

3.78 Where plans are not made publicly available, this limits stakeholders' visibility of crisis arrangements including limiting their ability to plan for their role in supporting crisis response activities.

Recommendation no. 4

3.79 The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet include in the Australian Government Crisis Management Handbook criteria for the publication of plans to appropriately inform stakeholders of crisis arrangements.

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet response: *Agreed.*

3.80 *PM&C will include criteria for the publication of plans in the Handbook.*

Have arrangements been established to review and test preparedness?

NEMA delivers two annual national-level exercises primarily focussed on multi-jurisdictional natural disasters. Since 2022 compounding non-natural disaster specific impacts such as mass power outages and supply chain issues have been included in NEMA led exercises. Prior to 2024, there were gaps in the arrangements to identify and prioritise whole-of-government exercises. There are limitations with arrangements to capture information relating to exercises led by other entities, reducing the ability to advise government on the preparedness of Australian Government entities to response to crises. The expanded role of the Crisis Arrangements Committee under the revised AGCMF provides coverage of these gaps. HRWS preparedness has evolved with the addition of ministerial exercises and the HRWS National Preparedness Summit.

3.81 Preparedness is defined as developing arrangements to ensure that, should a crisis occur, the required resources, capabilities and services can be efficiently mobilised and deployed.

3.82 NEMA, under the AGCMF, is expected to develop and deliver an annual national exercise program and report on observations and insights to inform future preparedness, policy and capability requirements.¹⁰⁸ This includes maintaining a register that consolidates and creates a single picture of Australian Government national-level all-hazard crisis exercises.¹⁰⁹

3.83 Additionally, NEMA has preparedness responsibilities ahead of the HRWS which runs from October to April each year. While all Commonwealth, state and territory governments and agencies have responsibilities to reduce disaster risk and ensure preparedness for the HRWS, NEMA acts as the lead entity in ensuring preparedness, through the HRWS program.

108 An exercise is a controlled, objective-driven activity used for testing, practising or evaluating processes or capabilities.

109 The Department of Home Affairs through the Australia-New Zealand Counter-Terrorism Committee (ANZCTC) manages the Counter-Terrorism National Tiered Exercise Program in partnership with states and territories. This program validates and strengthens Australia's national counter-terrorism capabilities to support counter-terrorism prevention, preparedness and response.

Annual national exercise program

3.84 The requirement for an annual national exercise program has been in place since at least 2017.¹¹⁰ The AGCMF states that ‘NEMA delivers an annual national crisis exercising program’.

3.85 NEMA’s 2022–23 to 2025–26 Corporate Plan Performance Measure 2.1¹¹¹ outlines the delivery of ‘at least two national-level exercises and the HRWS National Preparedness Program, which includes the HRWS National Preparedness Summit. NEMA has established an annual national exercise program that comprises two multi-jurisdictional exercises. Internal NEMA business planning documentation for 2023–24 identifies ‘two annual multi-jurisdictional, multi-entity exercises from severe to catastrophic hazards to support preparedness and continuous improvement’ as a deliverable. NEMA advised the ANAO on 18 July 2024 that the exercise conducted as part of the annual HRWS National Preparedness Program is considered one of the two national-level exercises delivered..

3.86 NEMA has delivered nine national-level exercises since 2021 (see Table 3.5).¹¹²

Table 3.5: NEMA-led exercises between 2021 and 2024

NEMA-led exercises	Date	Focus	Participants
Ministerial HRWS Exercise	September 2021	Exercised ministerial responsibilities related to a severe weather event within in a COVID-19 environment.	Commonwealth ministers.
National Emergency Declaration (NED) Act ^a familiarisation	October 2021	Delivered through the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee. ^b Overview of the NED Act and discussion of intersection with national level-exercises.	Australian Government, states and territories and New Zealand NEMA.
NED Act discussion	May 2022	The exercise scenario discussed whether a tropical cyclone and associated flooding events would meet the thresholds required for activation of a NED.	Commonwealth representatives of the AGCRC.
National Catastrophic Space Weather discussion	July 2022	Whole-of-government preparedness and exercising for space weather events, supported Emergency Management Australia’s obligations under Annex C.11 Space Events in AGCMF version 3.1.	Australian Government agencies, state and territory jurisdictions and industry representatives.

110 Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework Version 2.2*, PM&C, Australian Government, Canberra, 2023, p. 11.

111 Performance Measure 2.1: Effective collaboration and engagement with Commonwealth, state and territory and industry partners, enhances Australia’s ability to prepare for and respond to disasters.

112 The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements was published October 2020. NEMA (then Emergency Management Australia) delivered its first multi-national exercise in October 2021. NEMA reported the implementation status of Recommendation 6.5 as completed in October 2023.

NEMA-led exercises	Date	Focus	Participants
Catastrophic Tsunami (Exercise Bombora)	August 2022	Examined the impacts of a potential tsunami on the east coast of Australia.	Co-designed and co-led by EMA and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES). Co-design participants included the Bureau of Meteorology, Geoscience Australia, NSW State Emergency Service, and the Australian Tsunami Advisory Group (ATAG).
HRWS Ministerial Tabletop Exercise	October 2022	Raise ministers' awareness of preparedness for the 2022–23 HRWS and the Australian Government's all hazard crisis architecture.	Australian Government agencies senior officials and Cabinet ministers.
Asia Pacific Earthquake Response (APERRE)	August 2023	The exercise was to 'strengthen' the preparedness and response to a catastrophic earthquake in accordance with local, state and national plans.	Co-led by QFES, Fire and Rescue NSW, NEMA and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. There were 316 participants from 29 countries.
HRWS National Preparedness Summit	September 2023	Held as part of the HRWS National Preparedness Program. A national preparedness exercise was delivered on day two of the Summit to 'war game' and 'stress-test' existing emergency plans.	Australian Government agencies, state and territory jurisdictions, not-for-profits organisations, and industry representatives. There were 296 participants from 155 organisations that attended.
2024 Catastrophic Space Weather Exercise ^c	May 2024	Discussed preparation, response and recovery of a catastrophic space weather event. Assisted in the development of the AUSSWEPLAN (national space weather plan).	Australian Government agencies, state and territory jurisdictions, not-for-profits organisations, and industry representatives.

Note a: The National Emergency Declaration Act was passed in 2020 in response to Recommendation 5.1 of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements.

Note b: ANZEMC is the senior officials committee responsible for emergency management. It includes members from each Australian state and territory government plus a member from New Zealand and the Australian Local Government Association.

Note c: As at July 2024, the report for this exercise has not been finalised.

Source: ANAO summary/analysis of departmental documentation.

3.87 As outlined in Table 3.5, NEMA has largely focussed on exercising severe to catastrophic natural disasters. Since 2022, NEMA has introduced broader consequences from all-hazard scenarios into exercises. This included mass power and telecommunication outages and supply chain issues which were explored within the context of several exercises¹¹³ including the space weather event exercise held in May 2024.

113 Exercises that explored elements of non-natural crises included the Catastrophic Tsunami and Asia Pacific Earthquake response.

Exercise development process

3.88 NEMA has developed documentation to support entities to design, deliver and evaluate crisis exercises and build Australia's exercising capability. This documentation is not intended to include all materials required for an exercise and is intended to be read in conjunction with the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Managing Exercises Handbook.¹¹⁴

3.89 The current suite of documentation includes 28 templates, documents and checklists categorised under six sections to assist in the development of an exercise. These six categories and stages of an exercise are outlined below.

- Planning (concept documentation, risk register and planning group materials)
- Event management (floor plan, participant registration form and event run sheet)
- Media and communications (checklist and branding)
- Delivery (exercise program, master schedule, scenario)
- Evaluation (feedback survey and observation collection form and evaluation plan)
- Post-exercises (exercise report and dashboards).

3.90 Of the six categories, planning, delivery, evaluation and post-exercises contain the majority of the resources available. An example of the use of these resources is the development, delivery and post exercise activities of the 2023 APERE, in which NEMA used 18 of the 28 documents and templates. There are additional resources listed under the six categories¹¹⁵, however, in the context of the APERE, this is an example of the level of documentation and planning that is required throughout the development and delivery of a national-level exercise.

Identification and selection of exercise topics

3.91 NEMA established the National Crisis Exercise and Lessons Capability (NCEC) team in 2021 in response to Recommendation 6.5 from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (the Commission). The Commission recommended that Australian, state and territory governments should conduct multi-agency, national level exercises, not limited to cross-border jurisdictions.

3.92 The purpose of the NCEC is to design and implement the national crisis exercise program for multi-jurisdictional and multi-entity events that require national coordination and consequence management. The NCEC also supports the uplift of lessons management, exercise management and continuous improvement.¹¹⁶

114 Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, *Managing Exercises*, AIDR, 2023.

115 Other resources not used for the APERE include:

- Planning: project schedule, working group task tracker and exercise plan.
- Event management: checklist and professional conference organiser scope of works.
- Media and communications: checklist
- Delivery: participant handbook/joining instructions
- Evaluation: observation collation and analysis spreadsheet and evaluation plan
- Post-exercise: dashboards and exercise report.

116 National Emergency Management Agency, *Emergency Management* [Internet], available from <https://nema.gov.au/about-us/emergency-management> [accessed 3 June 2024].

3.93 The NCEC strategy (the strategy) was first approved in October 2022 and was designed as a one-year strategy. The strategy states that the NCEC will establish a program of national crisis exercises 'to support, examine and evaluate current national capabilities for crisis response and early recovery'. One of the objectives was to 'develop a three-year strategy to provide a long-term vision and ability to plan the NCEC program of work'.¹¹⁷

3.94 The strategy outlines how exercises can be identified, which includes a consultation process with the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) on exercising priorities, feedback on draft exercise programs and providing recommendations from national crisis exercises. On 13 March 2024 NEMA advised the ANAO that although consultation with the ANZEMC is part of the strategy it has not been formally adopted or utilised in this context.

3.95 NEMA has identified potential exercises beyond natural disasters to be conducted at a national, whole-of-government level. A 2024 exercise work program was drafted which outlined four 'National Crisis Response Exercises'. In addition to the standing HRWS Preparedness Program exercise, the three other exercises that were included related to El Niño, space weather and a cyber event. On 25 March 2024 NEMA advised the ANAO that the work program was developed as part of an internal NCEC planning session. Cyber and El Niño events were not incorporated into NEMA's 2024 annual exercise program. However, cyber consequences were integrated into one of the 2024 Catastrophic Space Weather Exercise. On 18 July 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that design of the HRWS Summit exercise scenarios is supported by the Bureau of Meteorology¹¹⁸ and that these relate directly to El Niño (and La Nina) events.

3.96 On 13 March 2024 NEMA advised the ANAO that exercises consider events that are considered to have a low likelihood and high consequence. There was no risk assessment process to support the identification of these types of events and to inform the establishment of the annual exercise program. As the annual exercise program has historically focussed on natural disaster events and as a risk assessment process has not been established to identify and assess broader consequences, there is a risk that the exercise program does not provide sufficient coverage of priority natural and all-hazard scenarios.

117 The 2024-27 NCEC Strategy was due to be finalised in March 2024, however, was delayed due to the AGCMF Review.

118 NEMA advised the ANAO that 'the 2024 space weather exercise scenario was based on medium term climactic forecasts which are based on El Niño Southern Oscillation (ENSO) cycles'.

Recommendation no. 5

3.97 The National Emergency Management Agency document its consideration of Crisis Arrangements Committee advice on gaps and priorities for whole-of-government exercising, as well as the annual analysis undertaken to review and update the list of identified hazards under AGCMF, to inform the development of the annual national exercise program. This should include ensuring that exercises consider both natural and all-hazard scenarios.

National Emergency Management Agency response: *Agreed.*

3.98 *NEMA will continue to work with the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and the Crisis Arrangements Committee (CAC), to use CAC's threat assessment, to ensure that whole-of-government exercising aligns to priorities and threats identified by CAC, and where relevant consider both natural and all-hazard scenarios.*

Exercise governance

Australian Government Exercise and Lesson Managers Forum

3.99 The Australian Government Exercise and Lesson Managers Forum (the Forum) was re-established¹¹⁹ in November 2022 following the establishment of NEMA and approval of the NCEC strategy. The NCEC strategy states that it will 'build and share a register of nationally significant exercises, supported by advice from forum members'.

3.100 The forum is intended to share exercise reports and lessons identified to inform the development of Australian Government policy, plans, capability and recommend priorities for the national exercise program to the National Crisis Exercise and Lessons Steering Committee (the Steering Committee) (see paragraphs 3.102 to 3.104). The forum is open to officer-level representatives from the Australian Government, State and Territory Government departments and agencies with responsibility for crisis management exercising.

3.101 As outlined in the Strategy the forum is required to meet twice annually. Since its re-establishment the Forum met in November 2022, March 2023, November 2023 and June 2024. A review of the meeting minutes indicate that the forum discussed planned and completed exercises, and exercise capability, however, there is no evidence that the forum identified priorities to recommend to the National Crisis Exercise and Lessons Steering Committee.

National Crisis Exercise and Lessons Steering Committee

3.102 The Steering Committee is chaired by NEMA's Deputy Coordinator-General of Emergency Management and Response. It includes representatives from the Australian Government, states, and territories.

3.103 The Steering Committee is to prioritise and agree on the national crisis exercise program. Its ToRs state that the Steering Committee will meet twice annually. The Steering committee met in February¹²⁰ and December 2023.

119 Previously under Emergency Management Australia the forum was called the Australian Government Exercise and Lessons Forum and met in November 2021.

120 Outcomes of the November 2022 Forum meeting were discussed during the Steering Committee meeting in February 2023.

3.104 The Steering Committee discussed the draft exercise program in February 2023, as well as matters relating to capability, strategy and specific exercises in both the February and December 2023 meeting. While the timing of exercises, specifically to avoid peak response periods, was discussed, there is no evidence that prioritisation of exercises or specific scenarios was discussed.

National Crisis Exercise Register

3.105 Under previous versions of the AGCMF, NEMA was required to maintain a register that created a single picture of Australian Government national-level all-hazard crisis exercises. Under the revised AGCMF, this remit is no longer outlined. The National Crisis Exercise Register (the Register) was intended to provide the National Crisis Exercise and Lesson Forum members with visibility of exercising and contacts across the Australian Government, states and territories and allow for opportunities to increase efficiencies and identify gaps in national preparedness to inform the national crisis exercising program. The Register was intended to be distributed quarterly or as requested from the NCEC team.

3.106 The Register recorded exercise events since October 2021 and provided an overview and objective of exercises facilitated by Australian Government agencies (including NEMA), state and territories and international agencies. There were gaps in the Register as information for some exercises was incomplete. On 13 March 2024 NEMA advised the ANAO that limitations with the completeness of the register were due to reliance on stakeholders to provide complete input. This limited the ability to report on all-hazards preparedness.

3.107 Increased visibility of exercises and lessons identified and learned reflecting the all-hazards nature of the AGCMF would increase transparency relating to preparedness. The 2023 AGCMF Review recommended that the CAC should oversee Australian Government and relevant multi-national crises exercises and advise on gaps and priorities for whole-of-government exercising.

Opportunity for improvement

3.108 To increase visibility of exercise activity there is an opportunity for PM&C to embed exercise reporting within the AGCMF as the responsibility of entities with exercise requirements. This could be overseen by the Crisis Arrangements Committee to identify where it is necessary to brief government on Australian government crisis preparedness issues.

Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Program

3.109 A HRWS National Preparedness Program (the Preparedness Program) has been delivered since 2014.¹²¹ NEMA is responsible for the design and delivery of the preparedness program. The Preparedness Program has evolved in recent years with the addition of ministerial exercise activities and the establishment of the HRWS National Preparedness Summit. As part of the Preparedness Program, NEMA delivered a ministerial exercise in October 2022 (see Table 3.8).

121 Previously known as the Annual Preparedness Program and created following the Victorian Royal Commission into the 2009 Bushfires recommendation 11.2.

3.110 In September 2023 NEMA held the first ‘inaugural HRWS National Preparedness Summit’¹²² over a two-day period at Australian Parliament House. Representatives from the Australian Government, state and territory governments, industry, non-government organisations and other stakeholders were involved. NEMA’s reported on its website that ‘the Summit is the first time all key stakeholders ... have come together to prepare for the coming Higher Risk weather Season.’

3.111 Maintaining an annual HRWS National Preparedness Summit and an exercise component can ensure stakeholder engagement remains consistent and ongoing. The annual HRWS National Preparedness Summit and associated exercise component provide opportunities for consistent and ongoing stakeholder engagement.



Rona Mellor PSM
Acting Auditor-General

Canberra ACT
21 October 2024

122 On 13 March 2024, NEMA advised the ANAO that as part of the annual exercise program, the standing exercise is the HRWS Summit.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Entity responses

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet



Australian Government

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet

SECRETARY

Ms Rona Mellor PSM
Acting Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
OfficeoftheAuditorGeneralPerformanceAudit@anao.gov.au

Rona
Dear Ms Mellor,

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposed Australian National Audit Office (ANAO) audit report on the Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF). The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C) accepts the key findings and recommendations made in the ANAO's report, and has already commenced steps to address these matters.

PM&C's summary response and responses to the proposed audit recommendations are at **Attachment A**.

PM&C is committed to strengthening the Australian Government's crisis management arrangements and preparedness in partnership with other Australian Government agencies. In 2024, PM&C led the development of a new AGCMF in response to Government-agreed recommendations from the 2023 comprehensive review of the AGCMF. The new AGCMF addresses a number of observations made in this report, including by more clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of ministers and senior officials in crisis coordination. The new AGCMF was launched at the 2024–25 Higher Risk Weather Season National Preparedness Summit on 18–19 September 2024.

I would like to thank the ANAO audit team for their professional and collaborative approach and acknowledge the usefulness of the insights and suggestions for improvement that are included in the report.

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If you would like further information on PM&C's response, please contact Janet Quigley, First Assistant Secretary, Resilience and Crisis Management at janet.quigley@pmc.gov.au.

Yours,



Professor Glyn Davis AC
24 September 2024

National Emergency Management Agency



Australian Government
National Emergency Management Agency

Coordinator-General

EC24-004850

Ms Rona Mellor PSM
Acting Auditor-General
Australian National Audit Office
GPO Box 707
CANBERRA ACT 2601

Dear Ms Mellor

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Australian National Audit Office's (ANAO) Section 19 Report on the *Australian Government Crisis Management Framework (AGCMF)*.

We welcome ANAO's findings that the revised AGCMF, if implemented effectively, will position the Australian Government and the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) to respond to all-hazard crises.

The current environment of consecutive, concurrent, compounding, and increasingly complex crises prompted the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (PM&C), with support from NEMA, to conduct a full review of the AGCMF in 2023. The gaps identified by the review have been confirmed by this audit's findings, and were broadly addressed with the implementation of the AGCMF review's recommendations.

We concur with the audit's emphasis on the importance of preparedness, and agree to recommendation five, and note that NEMA will continue to work closely with PM&C and the Crisis Arrangements Committee.

We note the audit's assessment that compounding crises of national significance could impact NEMA's staffing capacity, particularly at the senior executive level. NEMA will work alongside PM&C to assess and document workforce planning and contingency arrangements.

Whilst concurring with the audit's identification of the value of the Crisis Appreciation and Strategic Planning (CASP) methodology in preparedness and response, we note that NEMA has already seized upon this opportunity. NEMA has trained more than 270 officials in CASP since January 2024 and will continue uplifting Australian Government CASP capability.

We would like to take this opportunity to thank your staff for the professional and collaborative way in which this audit was conducted.

Yours Sincerely

Brendan Moon AM
Coordinator-General
20 September 2024

Enc: NEMA Response
NEMA Editorial Matters

National Emergency Management Agency

Appendix 2 Improvements observed by the ANAO

1. The existence of independent external audit, and the accompanying potential for scrutiny improves performance. Improvements in administrative and management practices usually occur: in anticipation of ANAO audit activity; during an audit engagement; as interim findings are made; and/or after the audit has been completed and formal findings are communicated.
2. The Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (JCPAA) has encouraged the ANAO to consider ways in which the ANAO could capture and describe some of these impacts. The ANAO's corporate plan states that the ANAO's annual performance statements will provide a narrative that will consider, amongst other matters, analysis of key improvements made by entities during a performance audit process based on information included in tabled performance audit reports.
3. Performance audits involve close engagement between the ANAO and the audited entity as well as other stakeholders involved in the program or activity being audited. Throughout the audit engagement, the ANAO outlines to the entity the preliminary audit findings, conclusions and potential audit recommendations. This ensures that final recommendations are appropriately targeted and encourages entities to take early remedial action on identified matters during the course of an audit. Remedial actions entities may take during the audit include:
 - strengthening governance arrangements;
 - introducing or revising policies, strategies, guidelines or administrative processes; and
 - initiating reviews or investigations.
4. The 2023 Review of the AGCMF and resulting development of the revised AGCMF was underway during the course of the audit, which resulted in a period of significant change for both entities in relation to crisis management arrangements. As such, it is not clear whether changes or actions undertaken by the entities were in response to proposed or actual audit activity.

Appendix 3 Ministerial and lead agency responsibilities under the September 2024 AGCMF

Hazard	Lead minister	Australian Government Coordinating Agency
International crises	Minister responsible for Foreign Affairs	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Domestic security-related incidences (excluding terrorist incidents)	Minister responsible for Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
Domestic terrorist incidents	Minister responsible for Home Affairs	Department of Home Affairs
Maritime terrorist incidents within the Australian Security Forces Authority Area	Minister responsible for Home Affairs	Australian Border Force (Maritime Border Command)
Domestic natural hazard disasters	Minister responsible for Emergency Management	National Emergency Management Agency
Domestic biosecurity crises	Minister responsible for Agriculture	Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry
Domestic public health crises	Minister responsible for Health and Aged Care	Department of Health and Aged Care
Domestic energy supply crises	Minister responsible for Energy	Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water
Incidents involving an offshore petroleum facility in Commonwealth waters	Minister responsible for Resources	Department of Industry, Science and Resources
Transport incidents within Australia, the Australian Search and Rescue Region, or the Australian Exclusive Economic Zone	Minister responsible for Transport	Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
Space weather events	Minister responsible for Emergency Management	National Emergency Management Agency
Cyber incidents	Minister responsible for Cyber Security	Department of Home Affairs (National Office of Cyber Security)
Radiological/nuclear incidents (excluding domestic terrorist incidents)	Minister responsible for Health and Aged Care	Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Agency
Novel or ambiguous hazard	Minister responsible for Emergency Management (as the default until such time that a more appropriate Lead Minister is agreed)	National Emergency Management Agency (as the default until such time that a more appropriate Australian Government Coordinating Agency is agreed)

Source: ANAO summary of ministerial and lead agency responsibilities under the AGCMF.