



September 2005

Critical issues for the COAG Counter-Terrorism Summit

The Council of Australian Governments meeting on counter-terrorism issues, on 27 September 2005, presents a unique opportunity to significantly advance the domestic security agenda. While the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Territory Chief Ministers have identified a series of topics for the agenda,¹ there are a number of other critical issues that should be addressed on the day as they would enhance national security significantly.

Below is a list of initiatives which should be discussed at the Summit.

1 Broaden and deepen engagement with business

Future work is required to build on the government-business initiatives to date.² This engagement needs to address as a minimum:

- building industry's confidence that information will flow from governments when it becomes available,
- a serious commitment to the sharing of security costs between business and society, and
- the support for the development of tools, guidelines and standards to assist businesses integrate terrorism threats into their business continuity and emergency management arrangements.

2 Harmonise State, Territory and Commonwealth laws

Current and planned legislation needs to be harmonised in key areas such as private security licensing, security standards for businesses and detention of terror suspects.

3 Increase the security of public places

With the ongoing targeting of public places by terrorists, increased attention needs to be given to public place and mass gathering security. As a minimum, a commitment is required to enhance the security of these areas by exploring options such as large scale

evacuation exercises, developing precinct security by engaging building owners and police on a SMS and email network, and providing regular crime briefings between police, business and community groups.

4. Review the National Alert Levels

Given that the primary function of the National Alert Levels is to "inform government planning and preparation",³ a review is required of the effectiveness of the alert levels for the public and business. The current system is very much a one-size-fits-all approach. In particular the graduation levels, locale-specificity and expected response of each alert level need to be reviewed.

5 Reinvigorate security awareness campaigns

While past awareness campaigns have been appropriate for a time when the security threat was new, today's audience is better informed and requires information tailored for its needs. Two campaigns are required. One should be aimed at the public, addressing common misconceptions and empowering individuals. A second one should be aimed at business, providing practical tools to enhance their organisation's security as well as closing the expectation gap on what information and resources government can provide to industry. The States and Territories, and associations and community groups should be encouraged to develop their own preparedness campaigns.

6 Audit all security initiatives to date

After 4 years of experience following the 11 September 2001 attacks, there is a need to audit the effectiveness and efficiency of all initiatives. This is to ensure that these initiatives are still relevant, that they represent best outcomes given competing needs and that there are no gaps in the nation's counter-terrorism response.

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The Australian Homeland Security Research Centre undertakes independent, evidence-based analysis of domestic security issues.



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Specifically, a framework needs to be developed which would allow for costs and benefits of different security options to be compared, in order to ensure the right balance is maintained between prevention, preparation, response and recovery.

7 Review arrangements for catastrophic disasters

Following the recent large scale disasters around the world, it has become imperative that large scale catastrophic disaster and post-disaster planning is accelerated. While work has been underway for several years,⁴ planning needs to be broadened to examine the impact of huge multi-jurisdictional catastrophes that will affect a large area for months and years. An example of this is the evacuation for at least 6 months of a city following the detonation of a dirty bomb. Scenarios developed to identify post-disaster planning need to be shared with business to allow for the development of a national business continuity plan in much the same way as the all-stakeholders Tourism Crisis Management Plan in Queensland has been developed.

8 Develop a National Security Education and Training Strategy

To date, the provision of security education and training has been sporadic and of varying quality. While some organisations⁵ have started providing professional development courses and the odd homeland security unit of study, areas for considerable improvement include enabling the learning to lead to articulation and the provision of a comprehensive range of education offerings. A commitment is required to develop a National Security Education and Training Strategy which would provide providers of education and training with information needed to plan courses which meet the needs of employers and students.

9 Build on Muslim community support

Following the recent meetings of Islamic leaders with the Prime Minister, and the Muslim Reference Group, a strategy for sustaining long-term engagement with the Muslim community is required. While the Australian Government would play a leadership role in this, such a strategy must include States, Territory and Local Governments, and business and community groups.

10 Accelerate the involvement of local government

Local government has a major involvement in the initial response and recovery of attacks, as well as in their prevention and preparation. To date, the Australia Government's engagement with local government has been limited and needs to be accelerated with an explicit statement that mayors and council leaders have a significant role to play and they require support to deliver their responsibilities.

Information

For more information, see the following AHSRC *National Security Practice Notes*.

1. *Who should pay for security enhancements? Creating a defensible and equitable process for sharing costs and benefits between critical infrastructure and the community*
2. *Community involvement in national security: An essential but difficult task*
3. *Addressing national security misconceptions is critical in developing effective public awareness campaigns*

These are available from:

www.homelandsecurity.org.au/publications.html

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Footnotes

- 1 The stated agenda items consist of counter terrorism legal frameworks; surface transport security; identity security; more effective prevention of any advocacy of terrorism, including through the engagement of community and religious leaders, and; enhancing community understanding of an engagement in the national counter-terrorism arrangements.
- 2 Examples are the Trusted Information Sharing Network and the Business-Government Advisory Group on National Security.
- 3 Protecting Australia Against Terrorism: Australia's National Counter-Terrorism Policy and Arrangements, 2004, p. 29.
- 4 Catastrophic Disasters Working Group of the Australian Emergency Management Committee.
- 5 Such as the Research Network for a Secure Australia (RNSA) funded by the Australian Research Council.