

Retirement from the field – Hori Howard



Major General Brian (Hori) Howard's retirement from the position of Director General NSWSES ends a long and significant involvement with the emergency management industry generally and the State Emergency Service particularly. Whilst many will join me in expressing sadness at Hori's retirement, nevertheless I must say that my liver is rejoicing at the prospect. Hori's prowess at the bar is legendary, but more of that later.

Hori's career in emergency management took place over two phases. He was already established as the Director General of the Natural Disaster Organisation (NDO) when I first met him, and there is no doubting his significant contribution towards the culture of that organisation, particularly the role of ACDC and EMA's relationship with the States. He was untiring in promoting the value of the work of the College whilst at the same time demanding that it should be rigorous in improving its operations to maintain its' high standing. In doing so he confirmed and actively supported the College's move from training towards a broader range of multi-sectional disaster/emergency management activities.

From the outset Hori took a firm line with ACDC, demanding its contribution to the development of a more efficient and effective national emergency management capacity. Only when it proved it could do so to his satisfaction did he become the College's strongest supporter, which earned him the respect which has continued to this day (coupled with a fair amount of awe) by those who worked with him in those hectic, but productive, years.

In recognising the need for more extensive local delivery of basic emergency management courses than then being delivered by ACDC, he insisted that the College develop and distribute training packages, such as the Introduction to Emergency Management, for delivery by the State emergency management organisations and required students to have completed these as the precursor to attending any of the College's other activities.

Furthermore, he was the major contributor to a landmark 1989 publication 'Commonwealth Counter Disaster Concepts and Principles' which established the modern doctrine of 'comprehensive and integrated emergency management'. The booklet is still a primary reference work.

This background is all the more notable because, as one of nature's 'action men', Hori is not naturally predisposed to look kindly upon trainers. One can only wonder what he must have thought of those who claimed to *train* the trainers! Imagine when he became DGND0 to discover that amongst his staff at ACDC he had inherited people of both persuasions.

Following his impending retirement from the military and as DGND0, Hori was head-hunted by the NSW Government to head up the NSWSES which was, at the time, experiencing some difficulties. The changes he has implemented in NSW are remarkable and extensive. He turned the SES from a general purpose emergency service to an organisation capable of carrying out the specific role of a combat agency. He reformed the state headquarters of the NSWSES and sharpened its focus on providing leadership to volunteers and support to flood and storm effected communities. He modernised the NSW SES's equipment, communications systems and vehicles and was responsible for initiating comprehensive equipment replacement programs. By improving the SES's profile he helped it to gain respect and credibility in the community and increased the pride felt in the organisation felt by both its volunteers and staff.

He drove the adoption of competency based training for SES's on a national basis and was a key player in the adoption of the national training reform agenda. His suggestion of the SES National Training and Education Committee has led to a body representing each of the states and territories that, to this day, is responsible for achieving national training standards which are the envy of many other emergency service organisations.

His sharp mind certainly doesn't suffer fools gladly, but once you have convinced Hori of the benefit of a particular course of action he will commit to it enthusiastically and wholeheartedly. Hori advocated the concept of a peak body to represent the SES's and was instrumental in the establishment of the Australian Council of State Emergency Services (ACSES) and its second Chairperson. In this role he contributed to a major change to the professionalism of SES staff and volunteers nationally. The respect with which Hori is held by his volunteers was evident to

anybody visiting NSWSES or meeting their volunteers in other venues. Hori was a man for the people and was always working with the volunteers, coaxing, cajoling, praising and supporting them.

It wouldn't be appropriate to talk about Hori without a drinking story, so here it is. I had been appointed as Director of VICSES for about two months when he rang me in his role as DGND0.

'We're off to lecture at the Industrial Mobilisation Course (IMC).'

I, of course, knew nothing of the Industrial Mobilisation Course.

'I will pick you up at 2:30 on Tuesday afternoon', he said. 'I'll have a Commonwealth car, so we will travel together. Bring an overnight bag.'

Discovering we were actually lecturing at 8:30 the next morning, I was told of the need to go down and reconnoitre the place and establish our credentials. I leave it to your imagination what 'reconnoitre the place and establish our credentials' means.

Suffice to say that I left the Officers' Mess that night at 1:30am feeling very 'tired', leaving a boisterous Hori standing on the grand piano holding a carafe of white wine leading community singing. Not surprisingly, the next day Hori was fresher than me at breakfast and since then I have always treated a drinking session with Hori with the respect and awe that it deserves!

His act will indeed be a hard one to follow and I believe everybody in the Australian emergency management industry and overseas will wish him well in his retirement.

Rhys Maggs

Director

Victoria State Emergency Service

with acknowledgements to Roger Jones and Chas Keys