



NATIONAL  
GUIDELINES FOR  
THE PROTECTION  
OF PLACES OF  
MASS GATHERING  
FROM TERRORISM

NATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM COMMITTEE

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## Introduction

In November 2009, COAG SOM agreed to recommendations of the Review of the National Critical Infrastructure Protection Arrangements, including that work relating to the protection of places of mass gathering should be coordinated by the National Counter-Terrorism Committee (NCTC).

In December 2009, NCTC noted that the protection of places of mass gathering is most effectively delivered through a business government partnership, and agreed to coordinate at a national level, work associated with protecting places of mass gathering. In December 2010, NCTC agreed to establish the Mass Gatherings Strategy Group (MGSG) to operate as a national forum to share information on issues and best practice relating to the protection of places of mass gathering from terrorism.

NCTC also agreed to establish a consultative forum with business comprising national and major venue owners and operators, through a Business Advisory Group (BAG), to exchange information, and engage with law enforcement authorities to discuss Australia-wide issues relevant to the protection of places of mass gathering.

## Purpose

Places of mass gathering not only present terrorists with potential opportunities for mass casualties, symbolism and high impact media coverage, they pose a broad range of security challenges for their owners and operators. NCTC noted that places of mass gathering have been specifically identified by religious and political extremists as attractive targets.

All jurisdictions have robust and well tested arrangements for the planning and management of major and specific events. However, determining which places of mass gathering are at higher risk is not an easy task given the sheer number and variations of such places, and the limited security resources available. Once identified, they further present the challenge of what consistent risk mitigation strategies to develop and implement.

This document has been developed to ensure a nationally consistent approach is taken by all Australian jurisdictions in the development of their own guidelines for the protection of places of mass gathering from terrorism. The approach supports a systematic process identifying security risk management activities which can be integrated into existing jurisdictional emergency management arrangements. It provides a basis for:

- identifying places of mass gathering that are vulnerable to the threat of terrorism, and
- risk management arrangements associated with this threat, based on the roles and responsibilities shared among all private and public stakeholders.

## Definition

Places of mass gathering incorporate a diverse range of facilities including, but not limited to, sporting venues, shopping and business precincts, tourism/entertainment venues/attractions, hotels and convention centres, major events and public transport hubs. This also includes significant one off events. They are characterised by having a large concentration of people on a predictable basis and often have a minimum of security controls present. Identification of places of mass gathering for the purpose of this document is based on risk and not on any arbitrary numerical threshold.

Given the pervasive threat to a diverse range of targets, the identification of places of mass gathering cannot be precise.

The identification of places of mass gathering potentially at risk from terrorism should be informed by the current security context.

## Security context

The current security context for mass gatherings is provided by the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) and is at [Annexure A](#).

Places of mass gathering are potential targets for terrorist attack, particularly in larger cities, as they may satisfy the following criteria:

- provide opportunity for attack in terms of accessibility and vulnerability
- cause high-impact imagery likely to be generated by an attack
- have high symbolic value, and
- have consequences in terms of mass casualties, economic impact and public anxiety in the broader community.

By concentrating large numbers of people at high density in accessible places, at regular or predictable times, mass gatherings present the opportunity for terrorists to inflict mass casualties, cause economic damage, and instil public fear.

Places of mass gathering, or the events themselves, may have symbolic value, or be representative of Western culture. Furthermore, any terrorist attack against a place of mass gathering would generate considerable media interest.

## Principles

The national approach is based on the following principles:

- counter-terrorism preparedness for places of mass gathering focuses on the protection and safety of people
- all levels of government contribute to the prevention, preparedness, response and recovery from a terrorist incident, including local government
- event managers and owners and operators of places of mass gathering are responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure the protection and safety of people
- prevention and preparedness arrangements for protection from terrorism are underpinned by an intelligence-led, risk management approach
- security arrangements for places of mass gathering recognise the dynamic nature of the terrorist threat and are responsive to changes in the security environment, and
- effective security outcomes in complex mass gathering environments require cooperation and coordination between all stakeholders.

Note: security at public transport hubs is considered more specifically under the Inter-Governmental Agreement on Surface Transport Security.

## Process for engaging with places of mass gathering at risk from terrorism

The national approach relies on an active business government partnership. This partnership will be achieved through three principal methods of engagement based on an intelligence-led, risk management process.

- **Guided self assessment:** all owners and operators of places of mass gathering have an obligation to consider the risk of terrorism in their security and emergency planning processes. Governments should make available tools through which owners and operators can self assess the risk of terrorism to their operation.
- **Top down:** intelligence-led advice will be provided to owners and operators when relevant.
- **Bottom up:** specific responses to enquiries from industry/owners and operators about the threat of terrorism to their operations will be provided. The exchange of information and engagement with law enforcement authorities to discuss Australia-wide issues relevant to the protection of places of mass gathering will occur via the BAG.

## Risk management in the current environment

The Australian and New Zealand Standard for Risk Management (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009) is the standard by which all places of mass gathering will be assessed. In accordance with ISO 31000:2009, it is first necessary to establish the strategic context for actual and potential threats. In the current security environment, all security risk assessment processes should consider terrorism in all its forms. Refer to [Annexure A](#).

Following completion of an assessment, the development of appropriate security and on-site emergency management plans may be an appropriate treatment strategy. Additionally owners and operators should engage with State and Territory and local governments regarding recovery issues.

## Roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders in the protection of places of mass gathering

### Role of the Commonwealth Government

The Commonwealth Government has responsibility to:

- communicate relevant intelligence and information to State and Territory government stakeholders, and other relevant stakeholders
- participate in the promulgation of a nationally consistent approach to the protection of places of mass gatherings
- where relevant, liaise with and support State and Territory governments in providing protective security arrangements for places of mass gathering
- regulate aviation and maritime industry participants, based on a preventative security approach
- assist industry through peak bodies and advisory groups as appropriate
- coordinate the establishment of a task force for major events where Commonwealth Government action is required, and
- manage and coordinate public information and the media at a national level.

## Role of State and Territory governments

State and Territory governments have responsibility to:

- provide leadership and whole-of-government coordination in implementing the nationally consistent approach for the protection of places of mass gathering by providing owners and operators with jurisdictionally or otherwise developed guidance material
- where relevant liaise with the Commonwealth Government on mass gathering protection arrangements
- communicate relevant information through jurisdictionally agreed arrangements, and
- manage and coordinate public information and the media within the jurisdiction.

## Role of State and Territory police

Where appropriate, State and Territory police have responsibility to:

- assist in the provision of protective security guidance (as deemed appropriate by the respective police service/force) to event organisers and owners and operators of places of mass gathering and develop protective security strategies to counter terrorism
- advise event organisers and owners and operators of places of mass gathering of relevant threat information, in accordance with jurisdictional arrangements
- communicate directly with owners and operators of places of mass gathering where there is an imminent and specific threat and coordinate the operational response, and
- establish and maintain liaison with owners and operators of places of mass gathering in accordance with jurisdictional arrangements.

State and Territory police also have operational responsibility for preventing and responding to acts of terrorism and investigate terrorist activity, threats and incidents.

## Role of the National Counter-Terrorism Committee

The NCTC (senior representatives from relevant Commonwealth Government agencies and First Ministers' departments and police from each jurisdiction) has responsibility to build national capability and promote the protection of places of mass gathering in a manner consistent with broader counter-terrorism arrangements. The NCTC supports the operation of the MGSG to provide a conduit for the national exchange of information within a government and business partnership via collaboration with the BAG. This model seeks to create a culture of collaboration between stakeholders to improve Australia's capacity to operate in a heightened terrorism environment.

## Role of owners and operators of places of mass gathering and event organisers

Owners and operators of places of mass gathering and event organisers are encouraged to:

- maintain an awareness of their operating environment
- provide adequate security for their assets, based on threat and risk
- actively apply risk management techniques to their planning processes
- conduct regular reviews of risk assessments and security, emergency and contingency plans
- report any incidents or suspicious activity to State or Territory police
- develop and regularly review business continuity plans, including identifying interdependencies
- conduct training and exercise their security, emergency and contingency plans, and
- participate in government exercises to assist in harmonising prevention, response and recovery arrangements with relevant controlling agencies.

## Role of the Mass Gatherings Strategy Group (MGSG)

The MGSG shall:

- provide a forum for all jurisdictions to share information, initiate strategies and/or oversight activities on issues and best practice relating to the protection of places of mass gathering from terrorism, and
- supplement and support existing or proposed arrangements within jurisdictions, and coordinate at a national level the work associated with protecting places of mass gathering, recognising the varying capabilities of jurisdictions.

## Role of the Business Advisory Group (BAG)

The BAG shall:

- operate as a forum for national and major venue owners and operators to exchange information, and engage with law enforcement authorities to discuss Australia-wide issues relevant to the protection of places of mass gathering.

## Roles of peak bodies and associations

Peak bodies and associations are encouraged to disseminate and promote information in consultation with the BAG to support the nationally consistent approach to the protection of places of mass gathering from terrorism.

## Distribution of relevant intelligence and information/communications protocols

ASIO is the national assessing authority for security threat assessments and security intelligence reports (SIR). Threat assessments and SIR are prepared on the basis of information available from Commonwealth Government, State and Territory resources, overseas liaison and open sources. From time to time, specific risks or threats may emerge that require an immediate response. On these occasions, a well coordinated but more operationally focussed response will be required from governments and industry.

Responsibility for the distribution of relevant intelligence and information is summarised below.

- ASIO has responsibility to provide intelligence to relevant Commonwealth Government departments and agencies, the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and State and Territory police.
- In the knowledge of an imminent and specific threat, ASIO will liaise with the State and Territory police, owners and operators of places of mass gathering and other relevant stakeholders.
- State and Territory police liaise with relevant owners and operators of places of mass gathering, in accordance with jurisdictional arrangements, to provide information on the national and localised security threat context. Police will communicate directly with key bodies where there is an imminent and specific threat and will coordinate the operational response. Police also gather and disseminate intelligence to relevant agencies as required and as appropriate.

- State and Territory governments liaise with relevant owners and operators of places of mass gathering, in accordance with jurisdictional arrangements, to promote the harmonisation of prevention, response and recovery plans between governments and owners and operators of places of mass gathering.
- The owners and operators of places of mass gathering and event organisers are expected to provide adequate security of their assets, including staff and pass information to the police on incidents and specific activities such as hoaxes/threats, unusual purchases or thefts, unusual training, or apparent surveillance.

While some overlap may occur in information being passed from industry peak bodies to their constituency and the mechanisms within States and Territories, this is preferable to the possibility that information might not be passed to some owners and operators of places of mass gathering.

## Annexure A

### Current security context

The main terrorist threat to Australia emanates from al-Qa'ida (AQ) and Islamist terrorists inspired by AQ's world view. Public statements by AQ figures and other extremists continue to criticise Australia, and identify Australians and Australian interests as legitimate targets.

Despite international counter-terrorism efforts, AQ retains the intent and capability to conduct terrorist attacks and to operationally influence like-minded terrorist networks to undertake attacks. The threat to Australian interests domestically and overseas from AQ like-minded groups will endure for the foreseeable future.

Critical infrastructure and places of mass gathering feature prominently in terrorist attacks linked to AQ and its affiliates – characterised by their symbolic nature, concentration of people in enclosed spaces and economic and social importance. Terrorist attacks have targeted government buildings, diplomatic and consular offices, commercial buildings including hotels and other tourist facilities, residential compounds, commercial and military shipping, aviation, oil and other energy and transport infrastructure. The aviation sector remains a particular focus for AQ and its affiliates.

AQ and like-minded terrorist networks have considered, undertaken and trained for a range of attack methodologies, including suicide bombing using person-borne and vehicle-borne (car, truck, boat and plane) improvised explosive devices, assassination, missile attack and remote-control truck bombing.

Conventional and improvised weapons remain the primary feature of terrorist attacks, despite terrorist groups having an interest in, and having ready access to, information on cyber attacks and on weapons of mass destruction. Innovation and ingenuity in circumventing security measures is a feature of terrorist attacks. However, past plots may not provide a basis for future attack planning.

Australian Security Intelligence Organisation  
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