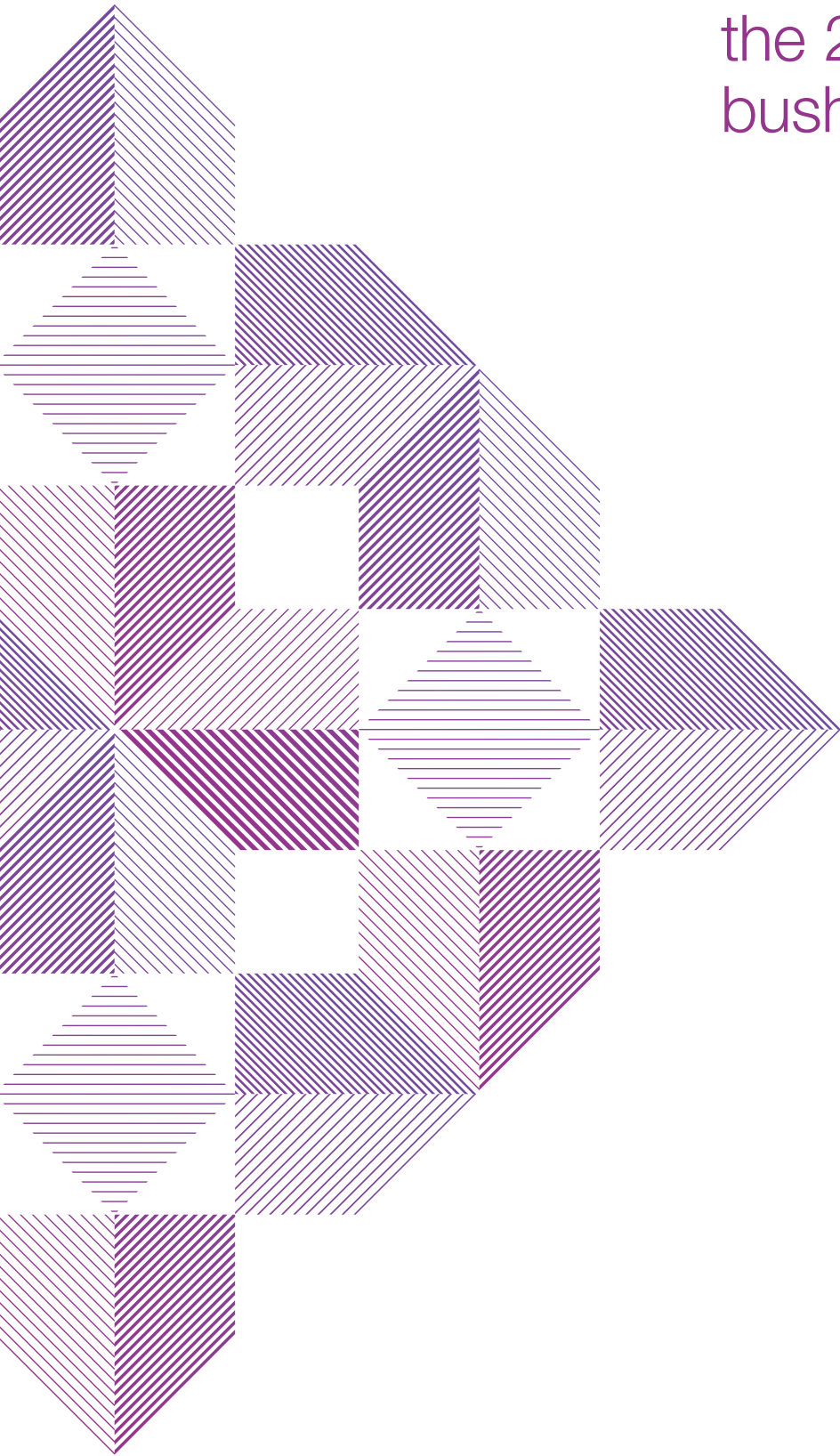


Review of community recovery following the 2013–14 Victorian bushfires



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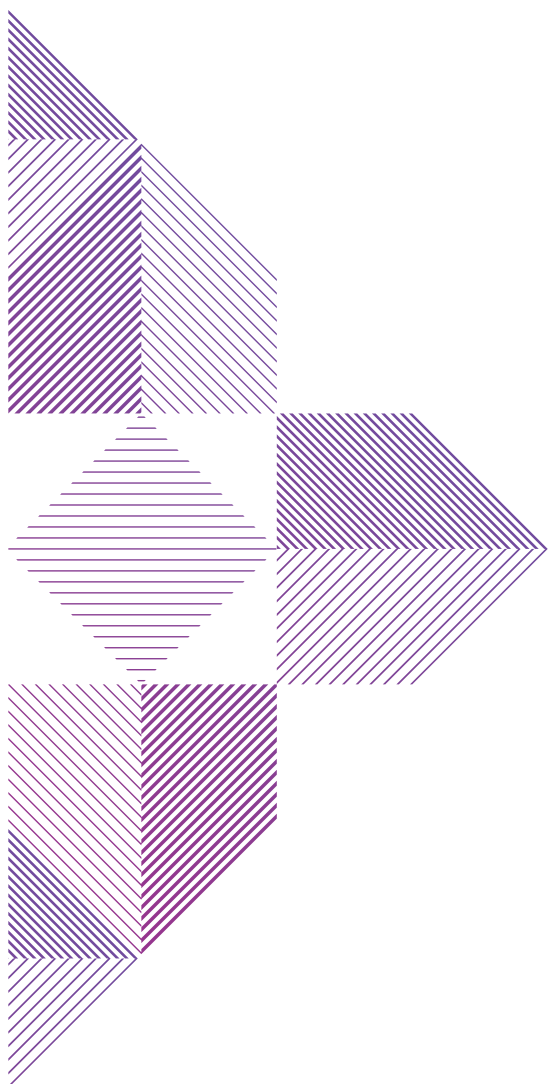
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Acronyms

CFA	Country Fire Authority
DEDJTR	Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources
DELWP	Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning
DHS	Department of Human Services
DHHS	Department of Health and Human Services
EGS	East Gippsland Shire
EGSC	East Gippsland Shire Council
EMC	Emergency Management Commissioner
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
EMMV	Emergency Management Manual Victoria
HC	Hume City
HCC	Hume City Council
IGEM	Inspector-General for Emergency Management
LGV	Local Government Victoria
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plan
MEMPC	Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee
MERO	Municipal Emergency Resources Officer
MERP	Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program
MRM	Municipal Recovery Manager
RDV	Regional Development Victoria
VCC	Victorian Council of Churches
VICSES	Victoria State Emergency Service

1. Executive summary

Victoria is one of the most bushfire-prone regions of the world. Over the years, bushfires have resulted in extensive community, economic and environmental damage, with the outcomes of inquiries, such as the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, bringing significant reform in the State's emergency management arrangements.

For many emergencies, it is the long-term impacts and consequences rather than the emergency event itself that challenges individuals and communities. Recovery may take many years, as individuals rebuild their lives, find new directions and patterns of normality.

In undertaking this review, the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) examined the 2013–14 recovery experiences of East Gippsland Shire Council and Hume City Council, and their communities.

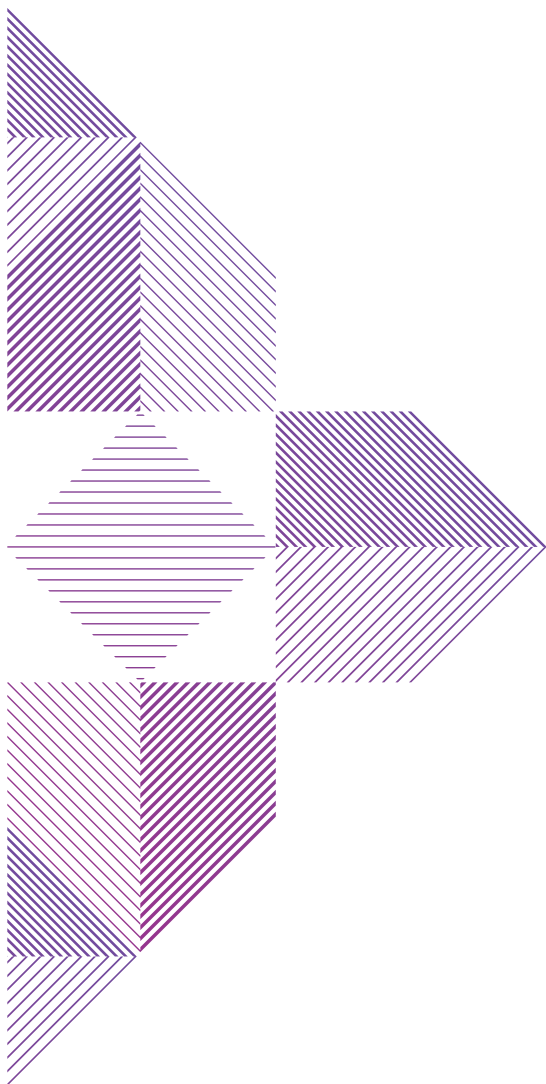
Through these case studies, IGEM was able to identify characteristics of the State's recovery arrangements that may be helping, or inhibiting effective support for communities' recovery.

In 2013–14, Victoria experienced its most significant fire season since 2008–09, challenging both the emergency management sector and communities. The fires caused widespread damage to property and affected the livelihood of many communities.

East Gippsland Shire and Hume City, along with many other municipalities, were affected by the 78 significant fires of the 2013–14 season.

Throughout January 2014 lightning strikes ignited fires in East Gippsland's mountainous Deddick region and in other parts of the East Gippsland Shire. On 9 February, fire swept south into the remote townships of Tubbut, Bonang and Goongerah. The Goongerah-Deddick fire was not controlled until 28 February by which time it had damaged or destroyed more than 33 properties and burnt nearly 170,000 hectares of private and public land.

Also on 9 February 2014, fires at Mickleham and Sunbury in Hume City rapidly spread south towards new residential estates, coming within metres of residential blocks before a wind change drove them north as far as Kilmore. The Mickleham-Kilmore fires consumed over 22,000 hectares of pasture, crop and destroyed 18 homes and thousands of head of livestock.



Community recovery

Recovery is the process by which individuals, communities, businesses and governments deal with the impacts of an emergency.

Individuals' recovery is central to all other aspects of recovery, influencing and influenced by the wider restoration of community life, economic and agricultural activity, and the rebuilding of homes, infrastructure and facilities.

Individual and community recovery is influenced by a range of factors, particularly the nature and intensity of the event. However, the strength of social and community networks, and the support that individuals receive, are perhaps most important in influencing their recovery.

Municipal councils undertake a wide range of community-related activities during recovery. Aimed at people that are recovering from experiences of the emergency event, such activities can strengthen the social processes required to support individuals' and communities' recovery.

Victoria's recovery arrangements

The State's emergency management arrangements are organised around three phases: prevention, response and recovery.

Recovery starts at the same time as the response to the emergency, and continues until affected people and communities return to an effective level of functioning.

The State Emergency Recovery Plan, part of the *Emergency Management Manual Victoria*, is the framework within which State Government departments and agencies, and municipal councils, plan and manage recovery.

Municipal planning is undertaken by Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPCs). MEMPCs prepare Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMPs) for consideration of the municipal council.

Municipal councils' recovery responsibilities include operating relief and recovery centres, assessing impact, coordinating volunteers, and facilitating the recovery of communities.

At the time of the February 2014 fires, the then Department of Human Services (DHS)—now the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS)—had responsibility for both State and regional recovery coordination.

State Government departments with recovery responsibilities—the State recovery agencies—support DHHS, coordinating social, economic including agriculture, built, and natural recovery. Social recovery, of relevance to this review, refers to restoration of the health and wellbeing of affected individuals and communities.

Activation of recovery arrangements depends on the scale of emergency events. Events that remain confined within municipal boundaries are the responsibility of the relevant council. Events that escalate to regional or State significance activate regional or State recovery coordination, and State recovery agencies.

Financial support for emergency recovery comes from municipal, State and Commonwealth governments, as well as charitable sources. Such support is contingent on the scale and significance of the damage. Support for social and community recovery is intended to help individuals and households meet their immediate needs and to progress their recovery, not as compensation or to cover insurable losses.

Emergency management reform

Victoria is currently reforming emergency management with the aim of making communities safer and more resilient during natural emergencies such as bushfires, floods or storms, as well as other types of emergency.

Reforms include establishing Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), which is responsible for coordinating implementation of the *Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan* (the plan) on behalf of the State Crisis and Resilience Council. The plan provides the roadmap for Victoria's emergency management reform program.

Preparing to support communities' recovery

Preparing for emergency recovery involves considering, planning, and exercising arrangements that will help ensure communities' needs are met, and their functioning is progressively restored. Municipal councils' planning for recovery also includes developing communities' awareness of emergency risks, and strengthening their self-sufficiency.

Municipal councils' ongoing responsibilities for community consultation, planning and development require that they recognise the distinct characteristics of groups in their communities. This provides a basis for working with different groups to strengthen community connections for preparedness and recovery, and improving the effectiveness of recovery communication.

However, segments of municipal populations, including certain vulnerable groups, may be considerably less aware than others of recovery communication, and of opportunities to become involved in community groups that are supporting emergency preparedness or recovery activities.

Municipal councils' and MEMPCs' recovery planning should ensure the existence and effectiveness of strategies to build community connections, and to communicate effectively during recovery, with all parts of municipal populations.

Recommendation 1

IGEM recommends that:

- Local Government Victoria and Emergency Management Victoria provide opportunities for municipal councils to share expertise and better practices in building connections with communities, and strengthening communities' capacity to support individuals' recovery from emergency events.

Recommendation 3

IGEM recommends that:

- Local Government Victoria, in consultation with Emergency Management Victoria, facilitate the exchange of better practices, and the liaison between senior municipal managers, in order to share expertise and strengthen municipal councils' organisational capacity to mount recovery operations.

Recommendation 2

IGEM recommends that:

- Emergency Management Victoria reviews the arrangements for MEMPCs to ensure that municipal councils' strategies for building community connections for emergency preparedness and recovery, and for communicating with communities during recovery, are considered as part of municipal councils' overall emergency preparedness.

Recommendation 4

IGEM recommends that:

- Emergency Management Victoria, with recovery agencies and councils, develop a model for guiding and facilitating community recovery that draws on the State's experience, and ensures that community recovery programs are coordinated, empower community action, and reflect communities' characteristics and needs.

After the emergency event

In the aftermath of an emergency, individuals and families will be recovering from the trauma of their experiences. There may be extensive damage to homes and businesses, farms and public infrastructure.

Municipal councils start recovery during the emergency, monitoring impact, and readying their organisations. Councils have responsibility for providing relief services, and keeping residents informed throughout recovery. Councils assess impacts, address building safety, public health and livestock risks, and facilitate volunteerism. They also work with communities to involve them in recovery planning.

Emergency recovery places significant strain on municipal councils. Those council organisations that have effectively integrated recovery capability offer valuable models for others seeking to more effectively manage the surge in workload after an emergency event.

Funding for programs to support community recovery may not become available for several months. In the interim, community recovery planning activities could help affected residents seeking visible demonstrations of support from authorities, and constructive involvement in their own recovery.

Planning community recovery projects may be challenging in the aftermath of a major emergency. Stronger guidance and facilitation of such planning offers the potential to better draw on the State's recovery experience, reflect the characteristics and needs of communities, and combine the expertise of communities, municipal councils and State recovery agencies.

Community recovery programs

After the trauma of an emergency recedes, people experiencing loss must focus on re-establishing their lives. This reality often becomes a preoccupation that narrows engagement with families, friends, and social connections.

Community recovery activities can help people reconnect and share experiences, create a more positive sense of the future, and resolve anger remaining after the emergency event. Effective community recovery programs help residents cope with their new situation in their own way.

Most municipalities have distinct cultural and demographic groups. Connections with these groups are required to ensure that opportunities for involvement in community recovery activities are culturally and practically appropriate and accessible.

Community recovery is likely to involve affected residents coming together to develop recovery objectives, and to plan and make decisions about local recovery, and community recovery projects. People who are experienced in facilitating the work of groups facing similar challenges are likely to contribute positively to recovery outcomes.

Approaches to community recovery have often been employed in earlier recovery situations. While every recovery situation is different, models from other contexts could provide valuable starting points for municipal councils or communities planning their own recovery.

Recommendation 5

IGEM recommends that:

- Emergency Management Victoria with municipal councils, the Department of Health and Human Services, and Regional Development Victoria, prepare guidance on successful community recovery project models, including the use of group facilitation, to assist municipal councils and community groups that are developing community recovery activities.

Concluding remarks

IGEM is grateful for the participation of East Gippsland Shire Council and Hume City Council, and their communities, in providing an understanding of their experiences of community recovery following the 2013–14 bushfires.

Residents of the two municipalities have vivid memories of the fires of January and February 2014, and for many the personal journey of recovery continues today.

Social and community life plays an important part in supporting individuals in their recovery. A social fabric that accommodates individuals' experiences will help them to resolve their new identity and the changed future that is formed out of emergency events.

Victoria is familiar with bushfires and floods, and with the processes of recovering from the consequences of such emergencies. Many municipal councils have experience managing the demands of recovery, and in working with affected communities. The State's recovery agencies also have significant expertise in coordinating and managing their recovery responsibilities.

In this review, IGEM provides case studies, observations and several recommendations aimed at improving preparation for community recovery, planning in the aftermath of an emergency event, and the ongoing support for community recovery.

A number of the recommendations aim to further exploit the State's recovery experience by encouraging greater sharing of community recovery knowledge and experience.

All recommendations are consistent with priorities for reform identified in the *Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015–18*.

Implementation of the recommendations will strengthen the work of municipal councils and recovery agencies, and further enable affected communities and individuals seeking to support their own recovery.

2. Introduction

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) is a legislated appointment established under the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (the Act) to:

- provide assurance to the Government and the community in respect of emergency management arrangements in Victoria
- foster continuous improvement of emergency management in Victoria ^[1].

Supporting the achievement of these objectives, IGEM undertakes system-wide reviews, including reviews of the emergency management functions of responder agencies and government departments as defined in the Act ^[1].

These reviews are based on an Annual Forward Plan of Reviews developed by IGEM in consultation with the emergency management sector (the sector) and shared with the Minister for Emergency Services (the minister). In addition, IGEM may also conduct reviews at the request of the minister under the provisions of Section 64(1)(c) of the Act ^[1].

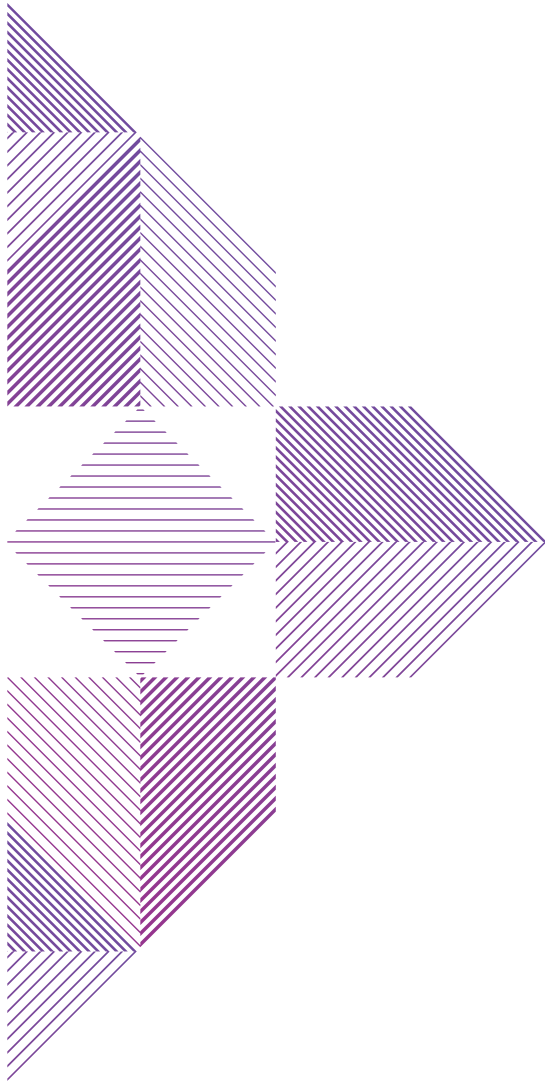
In developing this plan, IGEM invited responder agencies and government departments to identify key issues or risks facing the sector. The sector is defined in the Act as "...comprising all agencies, bodies, departments and other persons who have a responsibility, function or other role in emergency management" ^[1].

IGEM also considered strategic issues emerging from recent events and reviews of emergency management arrangements in Victoria ^[2].

IGEM assessed these issues based on:

- the significance of the risk and whether it justified the commitment of IGEM resources
- the potential for a review to lead to sustainable and systemic improvement
- whether recent reviews had examined similar issues
- whether improvement actions were in the process of being initiated or early stages of implementation.

Community recovery following the 2013–14 Victorian bushfires is a system-wide review identified in IGEM's *2015 Annual Forward Plan of Reviews* ^[2]. It is conducted pursuant to section 64(1)(b) of the Act ^[1].



In preparing the final report for the minister, IGEM provided draft copies to, and invited comment from, all relevant agencies to which this report relates. Comments received by IGEM from relevant agencies have been taken into account for this final report.

IGEM invites comment to meet its objective of fostering continuous improvement of emergency management in Victoria, and to meet legislative obligations contained in section 70 of the Act ^[1].

2.1 Objective of the review

The objective of this review *Community recovery following the 2013–14 Victorian bushfires* is to identify opportunities to improve strategies for engaging with communities and supporting community recovery following a major emergency ^[2].

2.2 Scope of the review

The review examines community recovery strategies, their implementation and effectiveness in supporting recovery of fire-affected communities.

IGEM selected the municipalities of East Gippsland Shire (EGS) and Hume City (HC) as case studies for the review, based on the impacts of the 2013–14 summer fire season.

The review examines pre-emergency recovery planning, as well as post-emergency recovery planning, implementation and ongoing management of recovery strategies.

It identifies and assesses the effectiveness of, and community satisfaction with, recovery strategies implemented following the 2013–14 fires in both municipalities. This includes the ways that communities were engaged and involved.

In undertaking this review, IGEM focused on municipal councils' and communities' role in recovery, and the factors affecting how communities are engaged through the recovery process. Regional and State arrangements and services are assessed in respect of their impact on municipal councils' effectiveness. The review considers only social and economic recovery interventions.

2.3 Structure of the report

The report's structure reflects the progression of emergency management from pre-event planning to post-event assessment and planning, and ongoing management of recovery activities.

- Chapter 1: Executive summary
- Chapter 2: Introduction
- Chapter 3: Background – outlines community recovery and Victoria's recovery arrangements, the characteristics of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City and their 2013–14 fire experience
- Chapter 4: Preparing for community recovery – discusses municipal planning and preparedness for community recovery
- Chapter 5: After the emergency event – discusses the initial stages of recovery: post-impact assessment, clean-up, and planning community recovery activity
- Chapter 6: Programs for community recovery – discusses community recovery projects, and their ongoing management in the community.
- Chapter 7: Concluding remarks
- Chapter 8: References.

2.4 Stakeholders

The fire-affected communities of EGS and HC, and their municipal councils, East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) and Hume City Council (HCC), are key stakeholders for this review.

Municipal councils and the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) have an interest in councils' emergency management responsibilities and the State's arrangements for recovery.

State agencies with responsibilities for relief and recovery coordination, social and economic recovery, and funding arrangements are concerned with opportunities for improving current arrangements for recovery:

- the Department of Health and Human Services, which in 2014 as the Department of Human Services, coordinated emergency relief and recovery at State and regional levels
- the departments of Premier and Cabinet and Treasury and Finance, which manage the State's relationship with the Commonwealth Government in relation to applications for Commonwealth support under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements
- Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), which supports the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC), coordinates development of whole-of-government policy for emergency management and implements reform initiatives. From September 2015, EMV coordinated recovery at State level
- Local Government Victoria (LGV) in the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), which works with municipal councils to improve business and governance practices
- Regional Development Victoria (RDV) in the Department of Economic Development, Jobs, Transport and Resources (DEDJTR), which supports economic and community recovery initiatives in rural and regional areas affected by emergencies, as well as initiatives to build capacity to prepare for, withstand and recover from all types of hazards.

Emergency management organisations are involved in aspects of recovery and in preparing communities for emergencies:

- Country Fire Authority (CFA)
- Land and Fire Management functions of DELWP
- Victoria Police
- Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES).

2.5 Approach

This review is presented as a case study of the experiences of EGSC and HCC, and their residents and communities in recovering from the fires.

IGEM considered a range of information in conducting this review, including:

- working with officers of EGSC and HCC to understand their experience of the 2013–14 bushfire recovery and their perspective on community recovery, recovery arrangements, and municipal councils' recovery responsibilities
- surveying 788 of the combined total of 2,747 households of EGS and HC located in areas close to, or directly affected by the 2013–14 fires. In addition, IGEM interviewed individuals directly affected by the fires
- consulting emergency management organisations and Victorian Government departments with responsibilities relevant to emergency management
- consulting experts in individual and community recovery, and reviewed a range of better practice and research material
- reviewing a range of data and documentation obtained from EGSC and HCC, State agencies and departments.

Through this approach, IGEM identified opportunities to improve the State's arrangements for community recovery.

Senior representatives of EGSC and HCC, and State agencies and departments with responsibilities for recovery provided relevant comment on the draft report prior to its finalisation.

2.6 Acknowledgements

IGEM is grateful for the participation and assistance of EGSC and HCC representatives in preparing this report.

The Inspector-General particularly thanks the residents of EGS and HC who provided their time to share their experiences of the 2013–14 fires and in doing so, provided a valuable contribution to the information and evidence informing this review.

The willingness of representatives from the emergency management sector in providing their insight, information and evidence, affirms the sector's commitment to working as one for continuous improvement in the State's emergency management arrangements.



Mickleham-Kilmore fire (image courtesy Keith Pakenham AFSM, CFA)

3. Background

Victorians are familiar with natural emergencies and their consequences ^[3, 4]. Nearly every year fires and floods damage or destroy houses and farms, threaten businesses and livelihoods, and disrupt lives ^[5].

The emergency management sector is at the frontline during these events. In addition to their response duties, many members of emergency services organisations, together with volunteers and volunteer organisations, advise residents preparing for events, contribute to emergency management planning, and help residents clean up and recover after emergencies ^[6, 7].

Municipal councils carry significant responsibility during recovery. Councils bring together municipal knowledge, and connections with residents, community groups, businesses and public services. This enables councils to coordinate the recovery work of communities, local organisations and volunteers, and the State's recovery agencies, and to play a central role in preparing communities for emergencies ^[3, 8, 9].

The contexts in which municipal councils work, their organisational capacity, and ability to commit resources to emergency management, vary significantly. As municipal councils have such an important role in recovery, this variation is accommodated in Victoria's recovery arrangements ^[10, 11].

This review examines community recovery from the fires of January and February 2014 through the experiences of two municipal councils. The review focuses on two quite different municipalities — EGS and HC — to help identify opportunities to improve the State's recovery arrangements and the support available to municipal councils and communities.

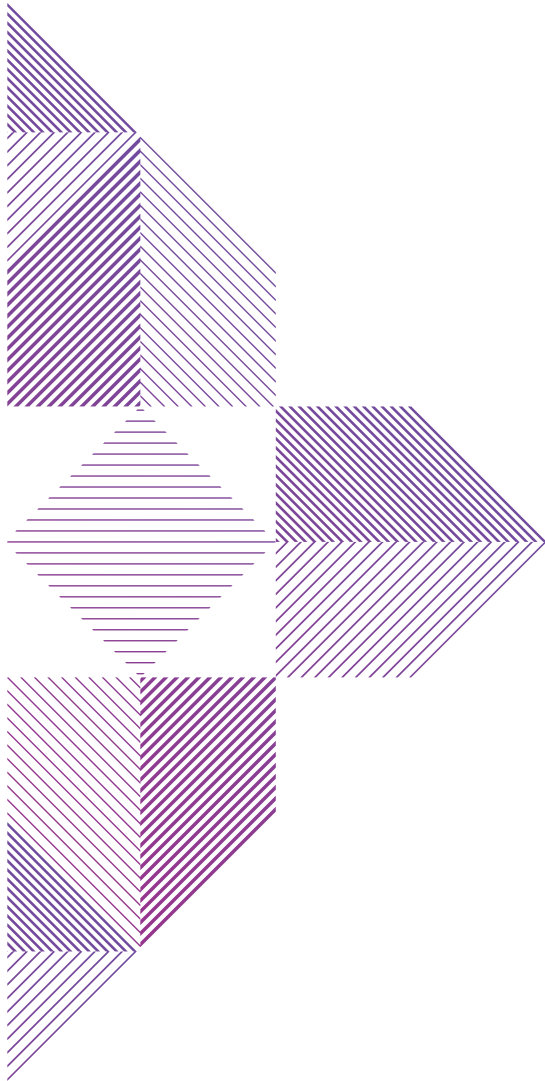
3.1 Community recovery

Recovery is the process by which individuals, communities, businesses and governments deal with the impacts of an emergency on the social, economic, built, natural and agricultural environments ^[6, 7, 12].

Evidence varies as to the proportion of people that suffer continued problems, or reduced quality of life, as a result of traumatic experiences in an emergency ^[13].

However, there is now a significant body of knowledge about the patterns of individual and community recovery from traumatic events, and the most effective means of supporting these processes.

Individuals' recovery is central to all other aspects of recovery, influencing, and influenced by the wider restoration of community life, economic and agricultural activity, and the rebuilding of homes, infrastructure and facilities ^[6, 8, 12, 14].



Effects of emergencies on individuals and communities

Emergencies may threaten life, destroy familiar environments, threaten businesses, jobs and livelihoods. Individuals affected by such events may experience high levels of stress ^[13, 16, 17].

People whose lives are threatened during an emergency may suffer significant trauma, and as a result, become profoundly disconnected with their previous lives. This can lead to break-downs in relationships with friends and loved ones, disinterest in career, and a loss of sense of identity ^[13, 16, 17].

With time, individuals begin to reconnect as the immediacy of the emergency event passes. However, the personal impact can mean the event becomes their reference in relationships with others. People identify with those having had similar experiences, and their interactions are intensely focussed around those experiences ^[14, 18–21].

Affected people may experience emotional difficulty, perceiving differences in others' coping, or feeling guilt at their relative good fortune ^[22]. Loss of previous identity, and an unfamiliar dependence on public services, may lead to anger and resentment towards authorities ^[17, 19].

The role of community in individuals' recovery

Individuals' recovery is influenced by a range of factors, particularly the nature and intensity of the event. However, social and community life can play an important part in supporting individuals in their recovery ^[13, 14, 22].

Individuals need to feel part of a social system that gives meaning to their experiences. People affected by an emergency event will continue to seek others that were involved, to find reference points for their own experiences ^[14, 23].

These are social processes, relying on a social fabric that accommodates individuals' experiences of the emergency. They involve people who are seeking to resolve their sense of identity after the personal disruption of the traumatic event ^[14, 19].

Managing community recovery activities to support individuals and communities

Municipal councils and the State's recovery agencies undertake a wide range of community-related activities during recovery.

These activities may include:

- communicating about the event, and the progress of recovery activity
- providing access to information and services such as financial assistance, counselling, case support, emergency accommodation and health
- helping residents clean up, and restore homes, fences, and trees
- facilitating communities' involvement in recovery decision making, and in planning activities to support communities' recovery.

These actions are aimed at people that are recovering from their experiences of the emergency event, and undergoing at times, difficult personal processes.

The importance placed on processes for managing community recovery reflects the impact such activities can have, either in advancing or inhibiting the social processes required to support individuals' and communities' recovery ^[14, 19].

3.2 Victoria's recovery arrangements

The State's emergency management arrangements are organised around three phases: prevention, response and recovery.

Within these arrangements, recovery starts at the same time as the response to the emergency. Recovery assistance continues until affected people and communities return to an effective level of functioning. Prevention includes activities to plan and prepare for emergency events, and for the process of recovering from such events ^[6, 8, 12].

The Act sets out responsibilities for planning at the State level ^[1]. Since July 1, 2014 the EMC has had responsibility to prepare a *State Emergency Recovery Plan* ^[1].

The *State Emergency Recovery Plan* forms part of the Emergency Management Manual Victoria (EMMV) and is the framework for State recovery agencies' and municipal councils' planning and management of recovery ^[12].

Municipal responsibilities

The emergency management responsibilities of municipal councils remain as set out in Part 4 of the *Emergency Management Act 1986* (the 1986 Act) ^[24].

Under the 1986 Act, councils have responsibility for preparing and maintaining a Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). MEMPs include plans for recovering as well as for preparing and responding, to emergencies ^[1, 12, 24, 25].

MEMPs are high-level plans that set out local policy for stakeholder organisations' collaborative management of risk, their roles and responsibilities in responding to different types of emergency, and their roles and responsibilities during recovery ^[12, 24, 25].

Municipal councils are required to appoint Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPC) comprising representatives of the council, response and recovery agencies and local community groups involved in emergency management issues ^[1, 12, 24, 25].

Under the 1986 Act, a MEMPC's role is to prepare a draft MEMP for consideration of the council. MEMPCs also play a role in assessing local risks, preparing and implementing risk management plans. The 1986 Act also requires councils to appoint a Municipal Emergency Resources Officer (MERO). Councils may also appoint a Municipal Recovery Manager (MRM) ^[1, 12, 24, 25].

The EMMV details the specific responsibilities of municipal councils during recovery. These include operating relief and recovery centres for affected residents, assessing impact, working with State recovery agencies, ensuring the availability of local and volunteer services, and facilitating the recovery of communities ^[12, 25].

Recovery coordination and State support

At the time of the February 2014 fires, the Secretary of DHHS (then DHS) had responsibility for both State and regional recovery coordination. The Secretary appoints coordinators at State and regional level. Councils have responsibility for coordinating recovery in their municipalities ^[12].

In February 2014 the State managed recovery activity across four environments: social, economic including agricultural, built, and natural. State recovery agencies supported the State Recovery Coordinator and had responsibility for coordinating the recovery environments ^[1, 12].

Activation of recovery arrangements depends on the scale of emergency events. The arrangements provide for the State's recovery agencies to respond flexibly to events that grow in scale, or to assist municipal councils with limited resources ^[12].

Minor events that remain confined within municipal boundaries are the responsibility of the relevant council. Events that escalate to regional or State significance activate the responsibilities of regional or State recovery coordinators, and the agencies responsible for the recovery environments ^[12].

With activation of regional or State recovery coordination, municipal councils work closely with the relevant Regional Recovery Coordinator and the recovery agencies ^[12].

With responsibility for supporting both State and regional recovery coordinators in 2014, DHHS coordinated impact, loss and damage reports, and relief and recovery information. DHHS liaised with municipal councils to manage preparation of impact, loss and damage data and to identify funding requirements. DHHS also managed distribution of recovery funds to councils ^[12].

Outside the context of an emergency, DHHS staff are members of relevant municipal councils' MEMPCs. DHHS assists councils with recovery planning and with exercising recovery arrangements ^[26].

Social recovery

Social recovery refers to the health and wellbeing of affected individuals, families and communities.

DHHS has responsibility for social recovery coordination. This includes financial support, counselling and case support, emergency accommodation, and health services. Social recovery programs include interventions to support community recovery ^[12].

Social recovery is closely linked to economic recovery, which refers to the restoration of jobs, farms and businesses, particularly in industries such as tourism, that may be affected by emergency events ^[27].

RDV led economic recovery after the 2013–14 fires ^[12]. RDV also manages the Resilient Community Program which funds innovative community-led projects to build capacity to prepare for, withstand and recover from all types of hazards ^[28].

Recovery funding

Financial support for emergency recovery comes from municipal, State and Commonwealth sources, contingent on the scale and significance of the damage ^[29–31].

Small events confined to a municipality remain the responsibility of the municipal council. For events causing significant damage, or where the council has limited capacity to fund recovery work, the State is able to assist through its Natural Disaster Financial Assistance scheme ^[29, 30].

Commonwealth assistance for recovery is based on similar principles.

The Commonwealth regards state and territory governments as having primary responsibility for recovery costs. However, where costs exceed the criterion for small disasters (currently \$240,000), under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, the Commonwealth is able to assist aspects of recovery on a cost-sharing basis, generally 50 per cent ^[30, 31].

To ensure that critical aspects of recovery can proceed, the Commonwealth makes available certain categories of recovery support without the need for approval. This includes funding to alleviate hardship and distress, restore or replace essential public assets, and support businesses, primary producers, volunteer groups, and individuals and households in need, or suffering hardship. However, other categories, including support for clean-up, restoration and community recovery, can be subject to lengthy approval processes ^[29–31].

While continuing to support these aspects of recovery, governments have since 2009 increasingly emphasised individuals' and businesses' responsibility to protect their own assets and other interests from the risks of natural disasters ^[7].

State Government also supports rural, regional and peri-urban municipal councils through the Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program (MERP). This program helps these councils prepare communities for emergency events, and to identify and register vulnerable people and include their needs in emergency management planning ^[32].

Emergency management reform

Victoria is currently reforming emergency management with the aim of making communities safer and more resilient during natural emergencies such as fires, floods or storms, as well as other types of emergency ^[5].

Reforms include establishing EMC and EMV. EMV supports the EMC, coordinates development of whole-of-government policy for emergency management and implements reform initiatives ^[5].

A key part of EMV's work is to prepare a rolling, three-year Strategic Action Plan under the auspices of the State Crisis and Resilience Council—the State's peak crisis and emergency management advisory body ^[1, 5].

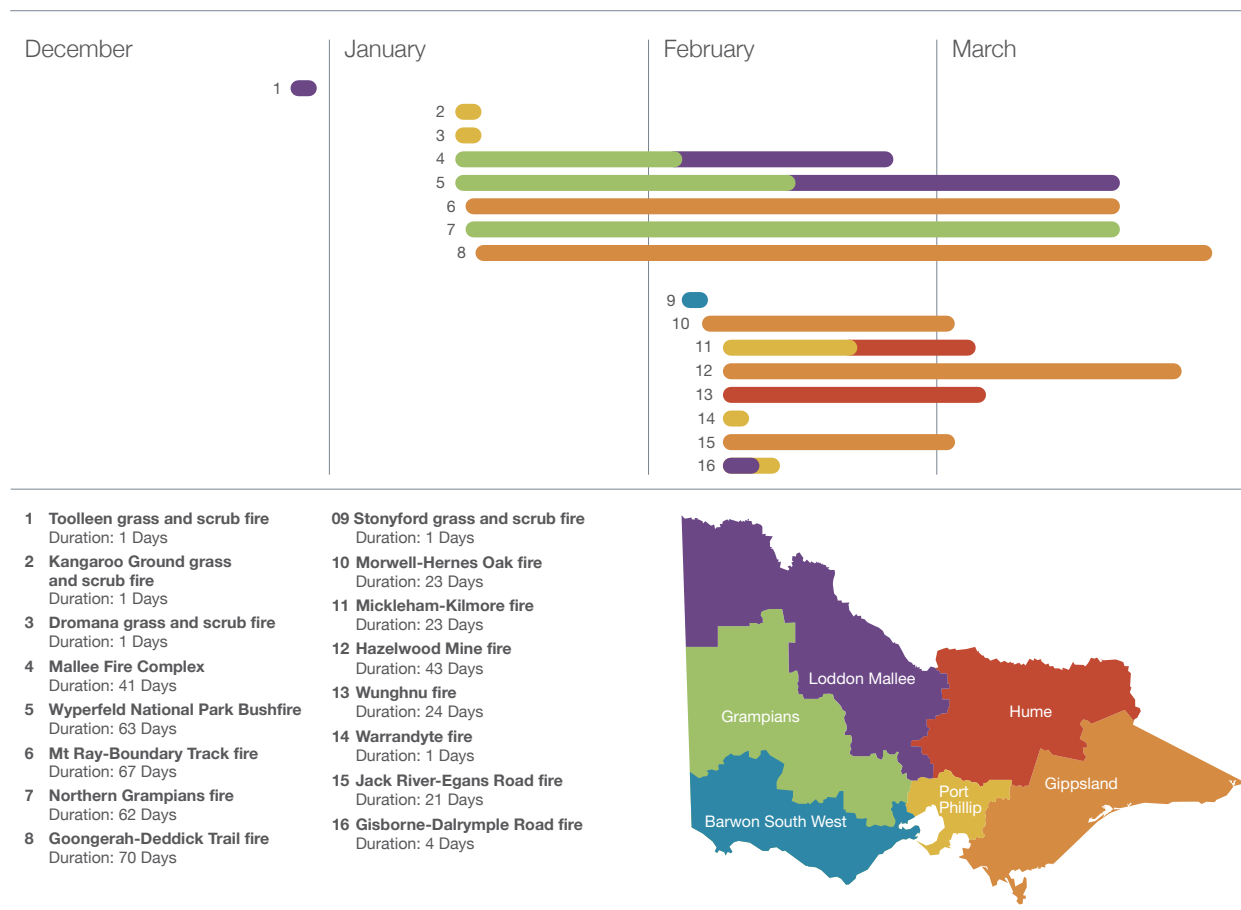
The *Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015–18* provides the roadmap for Victoria's emergency management reform program ^[5].

3.3 Victoria's 2013–14 fire season

EGS and HC were two of several regions affected by serious fires during the summer of 2013–14. The State's emergency management resources were also stretched across major fires. In the west of the State, these included the Mallee, Wyperfeld National Park and North Grampians fires, and in the east, the Mount Ray-Boundary Track and Hazelwood Mine fire. The Hazelwood Mine fire, and its impacts on the neighbouring town of Morwell, demanded significant emergency management and other government resources over a prolonged period ^[33, 34].

Figure 1 on the following page, shows the scale and location of significant fires during the 2013–14 fire season, together with their duration from outbreak to being declared safe. There were 16 long-running fires in the Gippsland, Grampians and Loddon Mallee regions.

A large number of smaller fires not shown in Figure 1 further tested the resources of emergency services.

FIGURE 1: VICTORIAN 2013–14 BUSHFIRE SEASON OVERVIEW

(Source: CFA Annual Report 2013/14, EMV 2013–14 Fire Season Overview and narrative)

3.4 East Gippsland and Hume City

IGEM examined the experience of EGSC and HCC to highlight the challenges of community recovery in rural and peri-urban municipalities.

East Gippsland Shire

East Gippsland Shire is located in far-eastern Victoria. Bounded by the NSW border to the north, Bass Strait in the south and east, Wellington and Alpine shires in the west, the Shire's area comprises around 10 per cent of the State ^[35–37].

EGS is mostly rural, with grazing and forestry predominating. Vegetable growing has arisen more recently in the southern parts of the shire. Tourism is also important, particularly around the Gippsland Lakes ^[35, 36].

East Gippsland has a high risk of fire due to its climate and high proportion of forested land ^[37, 38]. EGS has a long history of natural emergencies including fires in 2003 and 2006–07. Substantial flooding also occurred in 1998 and 2007 ^[37, 39].

EGS' 44,026 residents live in more than 42 towns and small communities. Most of its residents are clustered around the Gippsland Lakes and in the larger towns of Bairnsdale and Orbost ^[36]. One quarter of the Shire's population lives in Bairnsdale.

There are also many small communities located in the remote parts of EGS, long distances from the major centres. Bonang, Goongerah and Tubbut in the Shire's north-east, are around three hours' drive from Bairnsdale. At only 2.1 people per square kilometre, East Gippsland is one of the most sparsely populated areas of the State ^[35, 36].

Early 2014 saw widespread thunderstorm activity trigger several fires in East Gippsland. The largest, the Goongerah-Deddick Trail fire, started in the mountainous Deddick region near the NSW border where it remained in inaccessible country before escaping on 9 February.

Sweeping south through the remote townships of Bonang, Goongerah and Tubbut, the fire was not controlled until 28 February, by which time it had burnt nearly 170,000 hectares of public and private land ^[40–42].

Fire also affected other parts of EGS. On 16 January, the Mount Ray-Boundary Track fire began north of Glenaladale, a township 30 kilometres west of Bairnsdale. High temperatures and strong winds on 17 January led to the fire spreading quickly to the south, damaging properties in its path.

EGSC reported that 15 houses and 34 outbuildings had been destroyed across the Shire, as well as significant other farm and plantation infrastructure and assets ^[41].

Hume City

Hume City is located on Melbourne's northern fringe, around 30 minutes' drive from the central business district. From the established suburb of Broadmeadows in the south, HC extends north as far as Mickleham and Clarkefield, and north-west to Sunbury. Melbourne Airport is located in the south-west of the municipality ^[43].

HC has a history of intense, fast-running grass fires, usually occurring between January and March. Significant fires occurred in 1998, 2003 and 2007. There is also a risk of fires involving hazardous materials at manufacturing sites in the southern part of the HC ^[44].

HC also has a history of major non-fire emergencies including a siege in 2004, airport evacuation in 2005, and an accident involving hazardous materials in 2014 ^[44].

HC's population is growing rapidly. HC estimates it is now home to 193,000 residents, an increase of more than 30 per cent since 2006. HC received around four per cent of metropolitan Melbourne's total migration intake, and 17 per cent of its humanitarian intake over the five years to 2015. HC's residents now originate from more than 160 different countries. Twenty-eight per cent are from a non-English speaking background ^[43, 45].

The Mickleham-Kilmore fires affecting HC started on Saturday 9 February 2014. At midday, a tree on the Mickleham Road in Craigieburn fell across a powerline causing sparks that ignited grass, tinder dry after weeks of hot weather. A few hours later, another fire started on Dalrymple Road in Sunbury, the result of arson or an unextinguished cigarette ^[46].

Strong north-westerly winds drove both fires south. By 7 o'clock in the evening, residents of the new Trillium housing estate in the north east of HC were confronted with uncontrolled fire within metres of their homes ^[46].

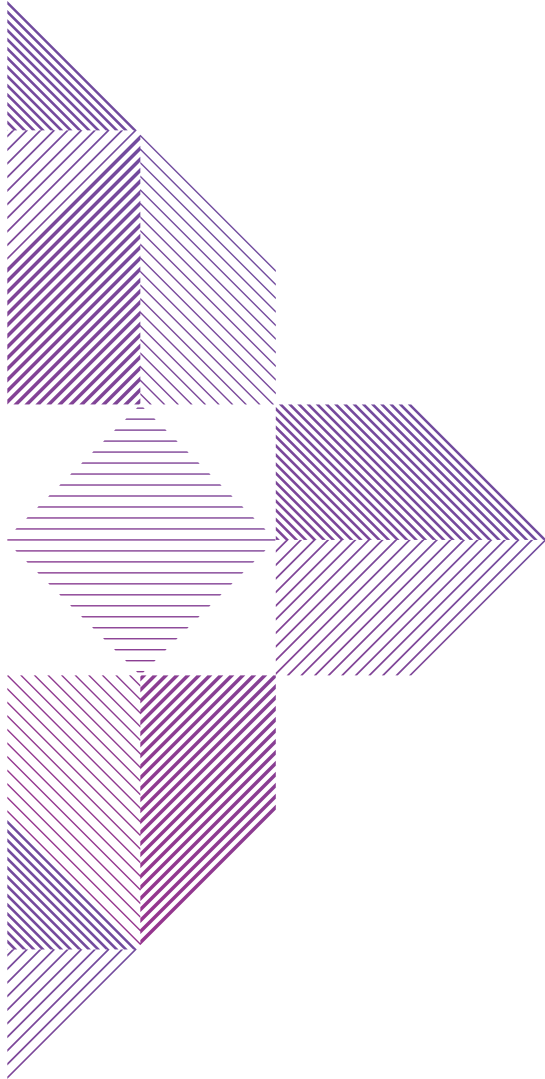
The residential estate was saved as a southerly wind change caused the fires to move rapidly to the north, damaging established farming properties as it swept across open grassland ^[46].

The fires caused widespread disruption. Some residents of larger blocks or small farms, away from home on a Saturday afternoon, were unable to return to their properties for many hours ^[47].



Mickleham-Kilmore fire (image courtesy Keith Pakenham AFSM, CFA)

4. Preparing for community recovery



Preparing for recovery involves considering, planning, and exercising arrangements that in the event of an emergency, will help ensure orderly and effective handling of the needs of communities, and progressive restoration of an effective level of functioning ^[7, 48].

Municipal councils' planning for recovery also includes developing communities' awareness of emergency risks, and strengthening their self-sufficiency. Communities that understand the dangers and are prepared for the outcomes of emergencies, are more likely to recover and adapt to changed circumstances.

Many of the State's rural municipalities are prone to natural emergencies. Their communities are likely to have experienced an emergency and the long process of recovery, and be aware of the need to prepare for emergencies ^[27]. Additionally, many community members contribute their time as volunteers with emergency services organisations, or in helping-out their neighbours ^[27].

Urban communities and their municipal councils face different challenges, particularly those on the fringes of major cities ^[7, 49]. As an example, these urban fringes remain vulnerable to major fires, yet their communities may have insufficient appreciation of the potential for such events, and the danger they create ^[50].

Many people living in urban areas do not have the skills and experience of fire that are common in rural communities. For many, personal and social networks are widely spread rather than based in local neighbourhoods. In some urban municipalities, a high proportion of residents are recent arrivals in Australia, and may not be confident in English ^[6, 43, 47].

Emergency management planning sits alongside a municipal council's broader responsibilities for consulting with, and planning on behalf of, their communities. Among these responsibilities is the requirement under the *Local Government Act 1989* to prepare a Council Plan every four years outlining objectives and strategies for the council ^[51].

In undertaking such planning, municipal councils work with their communities to identify priorities and aspirations, and to encourage participation ^[52]. The Council Plan also provides a broad framework for municipal councils' emergency management planning, undertaken by their MEMPCs.

Through MEMPCs councils engage with response and recovery organisations, non-government organisations, such as Victorian Council of Churches (VCC), and members of the community, around local risk management, emergency preparedness, and recovery ^[12, 25].

While many MEMPCs have sub-committees devoted to recovery planning, formation of such sub-committees, and the approach to recovery-specific plans, remains at the discretion of municipal councils ^[25, 40, 53].

4.1 The councils' approach

East Gippsland Shire

Across EGS, communities' priorities reflect the regularity of natural emergencies, and the vulnerability of residents living in small townships and on rural properties ^[54, 55].

In four of the years between 2010 and 2015, EGS experienced emergency events that qualified it for Commonwealth recovery funding ^[56].

Reflecting these realities, a major goal of EGS' Council Plan is to help its communities lift their resilience and adaptability. In addressing this, EGSC supports community planning at the district level, and an ongoing program of development work in its communities ^[54, 55, 57].

Each EGS district has prepared a Community Plan, setting out a vision for the future, and the outcomes and strategies required to achieve that vision. Through its Council Plan, EGSC commits to working with its communities to implement the priority actions of Community Plans ^[55, 57].

EGSC's emergency management function is within its Planning and Community division. Emergency management staff facilitate ongoing work in communities, including local incident management planning, risk assessment, and other actions that communities may have identified in their Community Plans. Several of these plans place priority on improving safety ^[40, 54, 55, 57].

Local risk assessments are used to strengthen the MEMPC's whole-of-municipality risk management program. These activities help maintain networks of residents that can contribute to emergency preparedness and recovery ^[40, 57].

EGSC's emergency management roles are allocated to operational, rather than executive, staff. Two full-time positions are shared between three staff. These staff fill the statutory role of MERO, as well as response and recovery roles ^[40, 53, 54].

EGSC committed to funding a full-time senior emergency management position in 2007 following a period of almost annual fires and floods. This reflects the responsibility involved in municipal councils' emergency management planning and their management of recovery ^[53].

EGSC has further strengthened its emergency management work with communities, in 2013 using MERP funding, to create the position of Emergency Management Coordinator.

EGSC decided in 2012 to bring together its MEMPC and recovery sub-committee. The combined committee has a membership of between 30 and 40 members ^[53, 58].

Hume City Council

HC's communities place a high priority on community safety. HCC sees emergency management strategies as part of its response to this priority. Its Council Plan draws together actions to strengthen community safety and respectful behaviour ^[52].

HCC is experienced in responding to emergency events, having managed many in recent years, including damaging weather events, transport accidents and industrial incidents. However, the grassfires of February 2014 created a much larger recovery task ^[44].

Recovery planning for HCC focuses around managing the surge in workload in the aftermath of an emergency ^[46, 59]. HCC maintains a small emergency management coordination function, and has arrangements to draw on resources of the wider organisation during a recovery operation.

Emergency management responsibilities are allocated to senior executives. HCC's Manager, Services carries the role of MERO, and Director, City Communities, the role of MRM ^[45, 52, 59]. Each position has a number of deputies, and is supported by HCC's Emergency Management Officer. This position has responsibility for administration and coordination, including supporting emergency management committees, preparing and maintaining plans, liaising with State agencies, and supporting exercises ^[46].

HCC has also used MERP funding to strengthen its emergency management work with communities, employing a full-time Community Resilience Project Officer until September 2015 ^[52, 59]. This position was to involve communities in local incident management planning. However, the position was needed to help with HCC's recovery following the February 2014 fires ^[45, 46, 52].

HCC considers recovery planning to be part of the work of the MEMPC and has not established a separate sub-committee to focus on recovery planning.

HCC's MEMPC has around 20 members, including representatives of Country Fire Authority, DHHS, HCC, Melbourne Airport, Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board, Parks Victoria, power company Jemena, and VicRoads ^[44].

At the time of the February 2014 fires, the HCC Recovery Plan was in the early stages of preparation. HCC started preparing the Plan in 2011 and used a recovery exercise to test its effectiveness in late 2013. Finalised in 2015, the Recovery Plan aims to guide organisational operations, and sets out key recovery activities, processes and responsibilities within a phased recovery framework ^[60].

4.2 Observations: Preparing for community recovery

Community networks and awareness

The extent of emergency management awareness, communication and contact during recovery varies between groups within communities ^[47, 61, 62].

An understanding of such variations, and the role of informal groups and networks, is required for effective recovery planning, and for developing the emergency awareness and self-sufficiency of communities ^[6, 12, 62].

Across EGS and HC there were clear differences between resident groups in the level of contact with authorities, awareness of recovery activities, and perceived opportunities to contribute to, or have their say about recovery ^[47].

Residents with strong and established local networks—such as those living in an area for more than 20 years or volunteers in emergency services organisations—were more likely to receive recovery communication or assistance after the emergency. The converse was also true. Those not receiving communication during recovery were far less likely to be involved in emergency management planning, preparation or recovery activities ^[47].

This suggests that established informal networks play an important role in spreading information about community meetings and offers of help during recovery, but also in opening opportunities for involvement in emergency management outside the context of an emergency.

However, this contact appears to be mainly within these established networks, and does not extend to residents who are outside these networks ^[63].

Figure 2 shows the characteristics of residents in EGS and HC who were most and least likely to receive communication about community meetings.

Residents who were most likely to receive communication about community meetings are volunteers in an emergency services organisation, live in a house on a large farm, participants in local groups, have lived in their house for more than 20 years, or live in a household without dependents.

Figure 2 also shows that residents who were least likely to receive communication about community meetings are members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, have lived in their house for five years or less, or live in a household with children.

FIGURE 2: COMMUNICATION ABOUT COMMUNITY MEETINGS

Fire affected residents of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City who received communication about community meetings immediately after the fires:



51% are volunteers in an emergency services organisation



41% live in a house on a large farm



35% participate in local groups



34% have lived in their house for more than 20 years



32% live in a household without dependents

Fire affected residents of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City who did not receive communication about community meetings immediately after the fires:



90% are members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities



79% have lived in their house for five years or less



77% live in a household with children

(Source: IGEM survey of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City residents who live in or close to areas affected by the 2013–14 bushfires)

There was a high likelihood of certain groups of residents in EGS and HCC receiving contact, or help after the February 2014 fires.

Figure 3 shows the characteristics of residents in EGS and HC who were most likely to be contacted or receive help from a local group.

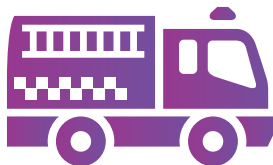
Figure 3 shows that residents most likely to be contacted or receive help were those who live in a house on a large farm, are volunteers in an emergency services organisation, or live in a household with an elderly person.

FIGURE 3: CONTACT AND HELP FROM A LOCAL GROUP AFTER THE BUSHFIRE

Fire affected residents of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City who were contacted by or received help from a local group after the fire



18% live in a house
on a large farm



17% are volunteers in
an emergency services
organisation



11% live in a household
with an elderly person

(Source: IGEM survey of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City residents who live in or close to areas affected by the 2013–14 bushfires)

Finally, culturally and linguistically diverse communities have strong informal networks, with almost two-thirds of these residents being involved in an existing informal group. However, residents in these groups tended not to be involved in emergency management activities ^[47].

Figure 4 shows the residents of EGS and HC that were the most and least likely to be involved in an emergency planning, preparation or recovery group.

Figure 4 shows that residents who were most likely to be involved are volunteers in an emergency services organisation, live in a house on a large farm, participate in local groups, or have live in their house for more than 20 years.

Figure 4 also shows that those residents who were least likely to be involved are members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities, are engaged in home duties, have lived in the area for five years or less, or do not participate in local groups.

While culturally and linguistically diverse community residents were less likely to receive communication or be involved in emergency management activities, the existence of strong networks in such communities suggests they are important in fostering community activities and supports. These networks could play an important role in strengthening connections and involvement in emergency management, with positive implications in times of recovery.

There are also opportunities and challenges in strengthening connections with other groups identified as less likely to receive communication or be involved in emergency management activities.

FIGURE 4: INVOLVEMENT IN EMERGENCY PLANNING, PREPARATION OR RECOVERY

Fire affected residents of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City who were involved in an emergency planning, preparation or recovery group at the time of the fires:



50% are volunteers in an emergency services organisation



31% live in a house on a large farm



27% participate in local groups



26% have lived in their house for more than 20 years

Fire affected residents of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City who were not involved in an emergency planning, preparation or recovery group at the time of the fires:



97% are members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities



94% are engaged in home duties



93% have lived in the area for 5 years or less



93% are not participants in local groups

(Source: IGEM survey of East Gippsland Shire and Hume City residents who live in or close to areas affected by the 2013–14 bushfires)

Planning for recovery engagement with all parts of the community

Differences in communities' awareness of emergency management, and in the contact they receive during recovery, have implications for municipal councils' recovery planning, and their ongoing community development strategies.

A municipal council's recovery work relies on effective contact with residents. This includes:

- communicating about recovery meetings or recovery services
- checking on the welfare of individuals and families
- coordinating volunteer services, and enabling residents to volunteer in recovery services ^[64].

Contact is also important outside the context of emergency recovery. Involving residents and community groups in emergency preparedness activities, such as local incident management planning, is an effective way of helping them to better cope with emergencies and become more self-sufficient in recovery ^[6].

Both EGSC and HCC outlined their approach to working with communities before emergencies, and during recovery ^[53, 59].

HCC's *Council Plan 2013–17* prioritises actions to support and build the capacity of a range of local community groups. During the recovery, HCC made considerable efforts to directly contact and assist affected residents. It also created opportunities for residents to share their experiences. These strategies are now included in HCC's final Recovery Plan ^[52, 60].

EGSC's ongoing work with its communities helps maintain their preparedness for emergencies. EGSC's Council Plan provides the framework for these preparedness activities. After the fires, EGSC's emergency management officers made contact with residents while assessing impacts ^[53, 54].

Despite the efforts of both councils, results of IGEM's community survey indicate there are groups that are not engaged in ways that are appropriate to their needs. This suggests that as part of their recovery preparations, municipal councils and their MEMPCs need to place greater emphasis on ensuring that strategies for building community connections for emergency preparedness and recovery are in place, and are evaluated for effectiveness.

Findings

- Municipal councils' responsibilities for community consultation, planning and development require that they recognise the distinct characteristics of groups in their communities. These responsibilities provide a basis for engaging different groups to develop community connections for preparedness and recovery, and to improve the effectiveness of recovery communication.
- Segments of municipal populations, including certain vulnerable groups, may be considerably less aware than others of recovery communication and of opportunities to become involved in community groups that are supporting emergency management or recovery activities.
- Municipal councils' and MEMPCs' recovery planning should ensure the existence and effectiveness of strategies to build community connections, and to communicate effectively during recovery, with all parts of municipal populations.

Recommendation 1

IGEM recommends that:

- Local Government Victoria and Emergency Management Victoria provide opportunities for municipal councils to share expertise and better practices in building connections with communities, and strengthening communities' capacity to support individuals' recovery from emergency events.

Recommendation 2

IGEM recommends that:

- Emergency Management Victoria reviews the arrangements for MEMPCs to ensure that municipal councils' strategies for building community connections for emergency preparedness and recovery, and for communicating with communities during recovery, are considered as part of municipal councils' overall emergency preparedness.

5. After the emergency event

In the aftermath of a large-scale emergency many individuals and families will be recovering from the trauma of their experiences, or the shock of seeing neighbours, friends or family suffer loss. There may be extensive damage to homes and businesses, farms and other agricultural businesses, public infrastructure and facilities ^[13–15, 19].

Residents may be relying on relief centres if their homes are damaged or destroyed, or if ongoing danger prevents them from returning home. They may be resentful about perceived inadequacies in emergency preparations, in the performance of response services, or the disruption caused by evacuation and their inability to return to their properties ^[13, 47, 65].

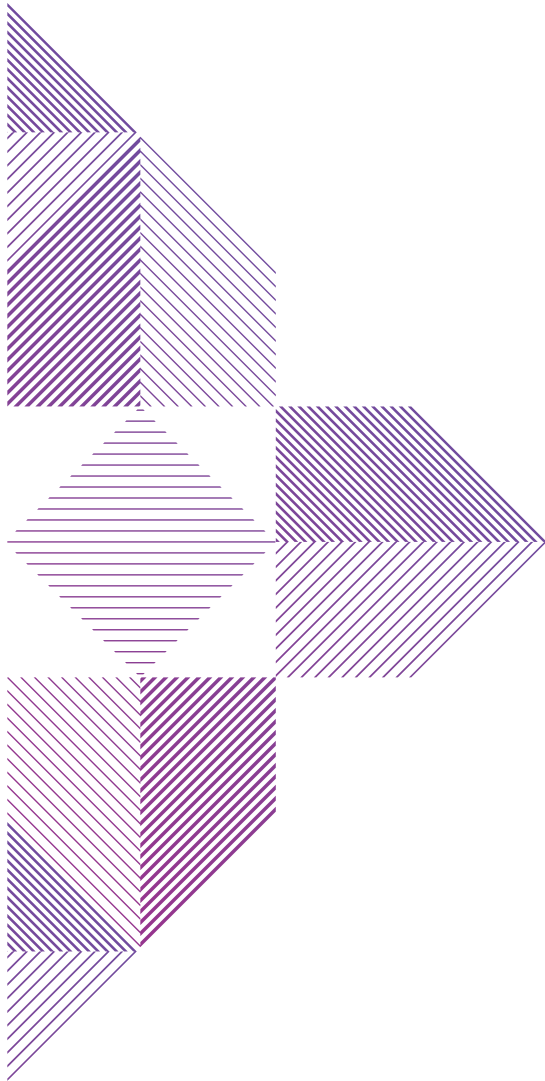
Municipal councils start recovery work during the emergency. Councils monitor the evolving impact, loss and damage, activate recovery plans, and ready their organisations so that recovery operations can commence immediately after the incident ^[8, 12].

Municipal councils may need to establish relief centres during or immediately after the emergency to meet residents' essential and urgent needs. In certain cases, councils may establish recovery centres where residents having ongoing needs for service. Municipal councils operate relief and recovery centres with the support of DHHS and non-government organisations, such as the Red Cross ^[12, 37, 44].

Municipal councils have principal responsibility for keeping residents informed of engagement opportunities, services, and progress of recovery activity throughout the period of recovery. Community meetings are often held immediately after the emergency, and relief or recovery centres, local media and councils' inquiry services are used to disseminate information ^[3, 9, 12].

An important early recovery responsibility of a municipal council is to assess the extent and scale of damage and impact on communities. Often within days of the event, a municipal council begins collecting data directly from households and businesses, as well as information on damage to local roads, facilities and infrastructure ^[6, 12, 15].

Data on the impact of the emergency is required so that municipal councils can estimate recovery costs in support of claims for State or Commonwealth financial support ^[30].



Impact data also allows municipal councils to direct services to residents, particularly those who are vulnerable. This might include checking safety of damaged buildings, assessing health risks, dealing with dead livestock, referring volunteers to help residents clean up, and providing access to personal support ^[6, 12, 15, 66].

A municipal council will also have substantial interaction with State recovery agencies, and will be involved in coordinating the work of agencies that provide social, economic and other recovery services ^[12].

After this period of intense activity following the emergency, municipal councils start to work with communities in ways that allow them to be involved in recovery planning and decisions. This may include facilitating community recovery committees, or working with community groups that wish to play an active role in recovery ^[12, 67].

5.1 The councils' approach

East Gippsland Shire Council

EGS suffered several significant fires in the early months of 2014. Affected communities suffered considerable hardship. Four relief centres operated and over 40 relief payments were made. In addition to those directly affected, tourism businesses suffered as visitor and tourist numbers were reduced ^[41, 58, 68].

There was considerable anger among some residents who believed response to the fires was inadequate. For example, residents of the north-eastern townships felt more should have been done to contain the Goongerah-Deddick fire at an earlier stage ^[42, 47, 58].

After the fires, many residents chose to relocate, reducing community contact for those remaining. Young people were particularly affected. Fire breaks on the grounds of the Goongerah school meant students had to be relocated while the grounds were cleaned up. While this was only for a short period, it contributed to the disruption of routines, and loss of contact with friends and other families that resulted from relocations and emotional strains affecting community members ^[58, 68, 69].

EGSC faced the difficult task of assessing impacts, and deploying information and services across this large Shire with extensive fire damage.

Some roads remained blocked or damaged. Distances within the Shire mean long travel times, limiting what staff can achieve in a day. Staff who are located in Bairnsdale face a drive of over three hours to reach the remote townships of Bonang and Goongerah ^[53].

EGSC's emergency management staff began assessing impacts on residents on 10 March, shortly after the fires were contained on 28 February. Two Shire staff visited affected households, noting damage and support needs. Staff also noted impacts on farms and businesses. EGSC's building surveyor and public health officer visited residents separately ^[40].

VCC volunteers also visited residents in some areas to offer advice and support, and to identify residents in particular need of assistance ^[53]. EGSC and VCC undertook 131 impact assessments, with associated referrals to services. Responding to urgent need in the community, EGSC liaised with State recovery agencies to obtain funds for counselling services for affected residents in Bonang, Tubbut and Goongerah ^[40].

Recovery coordination was undertaken at the Gippsland regional level. During this period there were no community recovery committees established to allow residents to be involved in recovery planning ^[70].

From March 2014, EGSC and a community organisation—Regional Arts Victoria—worked with DHHS and RDV to develop recovery projects in readiness for State and Commonwealth funding. At the same time, RDV was working with the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses on a proposal for Resilient Community Program funds ^[40, 70, 71].

Hume City Council

The fires within HC were substantially contained by 10 February, although they remained active in neighbouring municipalities until 14 February ^[69].

The fires were fast-moving, driven by strong winds into the neighbouring municipalities of Mitchell and Macedon Ranges, eventually covering an area of nearly 23,000 hectares. In Hume, three homes and many private buildings, fences and trees were lost ^[46, 68, 69].

When the fires started on Saturday 9 February, many residents were at local shopping centres or undertaking other weekend activities. Some residents were not able to access their properties for several days until the roads were made safe for travel. Those who remained on their properties were unable to leave as road-blocks would prevent their return. Some residents remained isolated in their homes without power for several days ^[47, 59].

Some long-established farming residents were angered at being prevented from protecting their properties, and what they saw as ineffective handling of the fires by emergency services organisations. Other residents were concerned that HCC had not acted to clear dry grass on land abutting new residential estates ^[47].

The fires led to HCC's most demanding recovery operation. HCC began assessing the impact on 13 February, three days after the fire. This work continued until 27 February, with follow-up services, volunteer help and visits from municipal council staff continuing for several months ^[46].

HCC formed four teams to visit homes, assess impacts and the needs of affected residents. The teams comprised officers from HCC's local laws, public health, building, and social development service groups. Council's aim was to minimise the demands on residents by visiting each affected property only once. In total, teams visited 151 properties ^[46].



Hume City Council recovery staff and partners (image courtesy Hume City Council)

Teams undertook building safety inspections, checked water tanks and dams for contamination, and were equipped to deal with injured or roaming animals. The presence of a social development officer meant the teams were alert to residents' need for welfare support, or the assistance of HCC's Home and Community Care services for elderly or otherwise vulnerable residents. Teams spent around one hour at each property, many residents appreciating the opportunity to talk about their experiences ^[46].

Between 10 and 28 February HCC also responded to 221 telephone enquiries and requests for help. Fifty-seven of these were for fencing, 36 for removal of debris and 30 for replacement of contaminated water. There were nine requests for psychological assistance ^[46].

HCC coordinated the services of State recovery agencies, and non-government and volunteer groups' assistance to residents. This included personal support, and help in cleaning up and replacing fences ^[46].

HCC sought to remain in touch with its affected communities in several ways. It set up an SMS portal to inform residents of recovery actions. After the assessment team visits, an HCC officer made follow-up telephone calls to check on residents' needs, and to schedule service visits where required ^[46, 72].

In addition, VCC volunteers visited over 300 properties. These visits allowed residents to talk about their experiences and to make requests for help. The volunteers were able to refer residents to counselling or other services. The VCC's reports provided HCC with further information about the needs and concerns of residents during this period.

HCC also sought to collect additional information through a community recovery meeting in March 2014, and follow-up questionnaire.

Those attending the community recovery meeting indicated that they wanted further information on fire preparedness, a chance to meet local staff of emergency services organisations, and an opportunity to meet and share experiences with other affected community members.

HCC's follow-up questionnaire sought affected residents' views on the response to the fires, and actions for the future. Notably, while HCC mailed approximately 200 questionnaires, it received only 11 responses ^[46, 72].

5.2 Observations: After the emergency

Municipal councils meeting the demands of recovery

Municipal council organisations and their municipalities vary significantly. However, the experience of HCC is an example of how council organisations can adapt their capabilities to meet the challenge of recovery operations ^[9].

At the time of the February 2014 fires, HCC had limited experience in large-scale recovery, and did not have a fully-developed recovery plan. However, HCC was experienced in managing small-scale events, working with emergency services organisations and handling public communication ^[45, 46].

Well before the February 2014 fires, HCC had committed to strengthening its emergency preparedness.

HCC had not formed a separate MEMPC recovery sub-committee, but had commenced developing a recovery plan, and late in 2013 with the advice of DHHS, had conducted an exercise to test the plan and to identify areas for improvement.

HCC had assigned emergency management responsibilities to executives. This allows HCC to ensure that emergency management is considered in the context of ongoing services and that the authority to mobilise resources is in place. HCC's MERO has responsibility for municipal services, and its MRM for community development ^[44, 45].

HCC had tested staff interest in recovery work. At HCC, staff involvement in recovery is voluntary. Staff members are invited to express interest and there is no penalty for those preferring not to be involved. HCC's approach meant it had a group of staff ready to participate. This contributed to the success of its multi-function assessment teams.

Some HCC staff were already familiar with emergency management. HCC's public health staff had completed emergency management training as part of their professional qualifications. HCC has also enabled other staff to undertake emergency management training prepared by a regional group of municipal councils ^[73].

HCC was also able to draw on existing systems and functions. HCC used its core client system to manage requests for council or volunteer assistance, its depot manager was deployed to assist emergency services organisations during response, and cost tracking handled by its property services office.

While placing a significant strain on its organisation, HCC's experience suggests the capabilities of municipal councils are well suited to managing recovery. The steps taken by HCC to prepare its organisation enabled it to cope with the surge in service demand, and its recovery plan now provides the basis for it to maintain this capability in readiness for future events.

The expertise of senior managers in HCC and other municipal councils that are experienced in recovery should be drawn together to complement existing guidance, such as the *Disaster Recovery Toolkit for Local Government*, to assist councils seeking to develop their organisations' readiness to manage recovery operations ^[8].

Managing community recovery planning to meet the evolving needs of those affected

After major emergency events, Commonwealth support for community recovery may take several months to become available.

In the absence of meaningful social involvement with other affected people, individuals and families may have limited opportunities to share and resolve their experiences, receive the social support needed for personal recovery, and be involved in their community's recovery ^[18, 19].

Both EGSC and HCC placed emphasis on communication during the recovery process, and recognised the importance of maintaining contact with residents. In EGS and HC, impact assessment, clean-up, and follow-up activities saw the municipal council and volunteer groups in contact with many residents. Residents appreciated such clean-up and volunteer help ^[52, 53, 60].

Community recovery projects also play a valuable role in drawing together communities and affected individuals in ways that promote individuals' recovery. However, in both EGS and HC several months passed before any community projects commenced ^[40, 46, 47, 71].

EGS communities were fire-affected from February, with fires continuing until March. EGSC emergency management staff had some contact with communities when undertaking impact assessments in March. However, community recovery projects did not commence until August 2014.

EGSC developed a project, Adaptation for Recovery, that did not start until August. East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses developed a project, Study Circles, that was supported by RDV's Resilient Community Program. While not a recovery project, its design was consistent with recovery objectives. The project had its first meeting in late September ^[40, 41].

Similarly, HCC conducted clean-up work during March and April but only in August did it receive support to employ a recovery officer to coordinate work in the community ^[46].

The experience in EGS and HC suggests there are opportunities for municipal councils and State recovery agencies to better stage their engagement with residents around their recovery. This would take more account of the recovery needs of individuals and communities.

In EGS, preparation of submissions to RDV and DHHS for community and economic recovery projects, and for RDV's Resilient Community Program, commenced in the first quarter of 2014.

However, RDV was concerned there was insufficient involvement of EGS communities in planning the submitted economic recovery proposals. In addition, EGS' Adaptation for Recovery project was devised within EGSC, without community consultation.

Similarly, RDV felt there was opportunity to better engage communities during planning of the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses' Study Circles project. An advisory committee was included in revised arrangements to involve a wider group in the project ^[70, 74, 75].

Staging the engagement with residents through clean-up, planning and implementing community recovery interventions would reduce the risks of communities feeling abandoned or becoming disengaged, particularly where a municipal council is unable to make visible contributions through clean-up activity.

Such processes would require that municipal councils, recovery agencies and community groups work collaboratively to involve residents, consider objectives and needs, and identify options for a program of community recovery activity ^[7].

Stronger guidance of community recovery planning

The development of the community recovery program in EGS suggests that a more strongly guided approach would help municipal councils and recovery agencies improve community recovery planning, and the effectiveness of interventions arising from such planning.

Municipal councils face many demands in coordinating and managing recovery ^[9]. However, the work of a council with its communities is a central part of recovery. Where community recovery is compromised by poor communication, inequitable allocation of assistance or an absence of visible activity, residents can easily become angry towards authorities. This can become entrenched, inhibiting residents' ability to deal with their changed circumstances ^[13, 17, 76, 77].

In EGS a number of factors affected community recovery planning. EGSC, RDV and DHHS were involved in developing and funding several closely-related community recovery projects and a community resilience project. However, there was insufficient coordination of this program as a whole.

EGSC was already supporting community development as part of its Council Plan priority of developing resilient and adaptable communities. EGSC's development of its proposed Adaptation for Recovery project was part of this work.

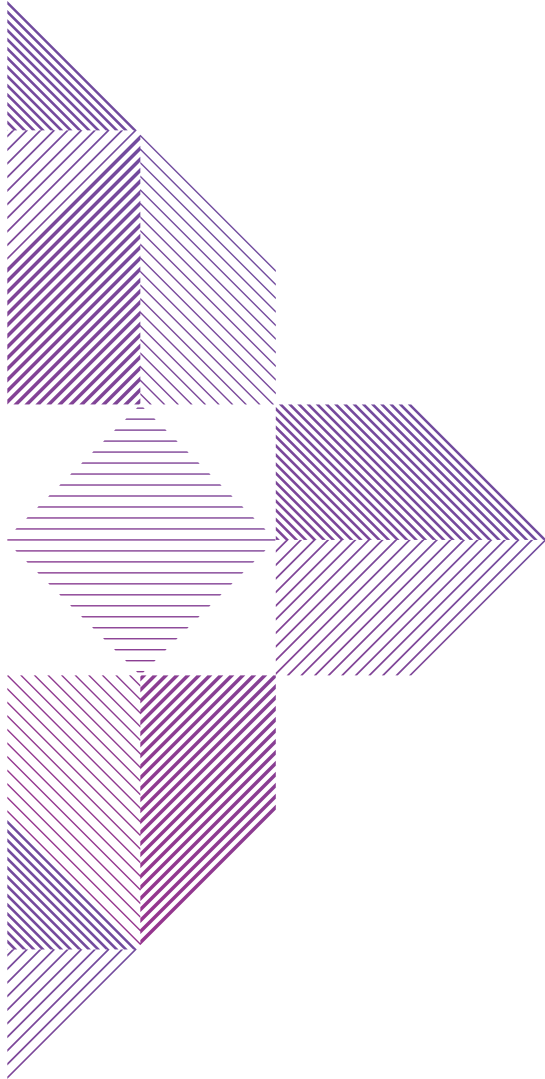
DHHS funded Adaptation for Recovery, which would involve intensive work with vulnerable communities. DHHS also supported a community body, Regional Arts Victoria, to undertake a second art-based recovery project ^[26, 53].

RDV funded a community arts project, business recovery and resilience projects and community recovery events to be provided by EGSC. RDV also separately funded the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses' Study Circles project from its Resilient Community Program ^[70, 75].

In considering proposals, RDV found that communities had not been sufficiently engaged in planning the projects put forward for funding. RDV addressed this, working with EGSC and East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses to ensure the project designs would allow residents to guide the initiatives once they were underway ^[70, 75].



Bonang local incident management meeting (image courtesy of Lorelee Cockerill, Community Recovery Facilitator, Orbost Regional Health)



However, there was no mechanism for, EGSC and the communities, together with DHHS and RDV, to jointly consider coordination of the overall program of recovery and community projects, and other recovery services.

As a result, two projects overlapped, providing similar activities in three townships. In addition, two arts project grants were provided separately by DHHS and RDV. One project with funding only to employ an arts facilitator, while the second project only had funding for community activities ^[71].

With the projects funded and progressing, DHHS, EGSC and RDV have each exercised project-level oversight through their funding agreements. However, significant effort of a regional DHHS officer was required to manage potential conflicts as the projects were implemented ^[26].

While EGS recovery activity was coordinated at regional and municipal levels, this coordination did not exercise sufficient influence to ensure the separate projects were considered as a single program of activity.

In addition to the coordination of projects, the characteristics of groups within communities should be considered in planning recovery programs. Differences in residents' existing involvement in emergency planning, preparation or recovery affect individuals' perceptions of their ability to contribute to community recovery ^[47].

Stronger guidance and facilitation in planning community recovery programs is required to reduce the risks to effective coordination resulting from the demands on municipal councils, State recovery agencies, and communities in the aftermath of major emergencies.

A model for such guidance and facilitation would be consistent with current recovery arrangements, but would make available expertise in challenging recovery situations to work with councils, communities and State recovery agencies.

It should ensure:

- community recovery planning is undertaken with reference to lessons from the State's experience, and contemporary knowledge of individuals' process of recovery from traumatic events
- a holistic approach to involving and coordinating individuals, communities, municipal councils and recovery agencies, that empowers emerging community action, while considering practical approaches that have been successful in previous community recovery programs
- pre-existing characteristics of communities, distinct groups' needs, and their ability and desire for involvement, are considered in planning and designing recovery initiatives.

Each organisation involved in community recovery in EGS worked diligently within its responsibilities to ensure the best outcome for bushfire-affected communities. However, the experience in EGS suggests the need for expertise in guiding and facilitating community recovery planning that can support municipal councils, communities and State recovery agencies increase the effectiveness of community recovery programs.

Findings

- Municipal council organisations that have effectively integrated recovery capability offer valuable models for others seeking to more effectively manage the surge in workload after an emergency event.
- Funding for programs to support community recovery may not become available for several months. In the interim, community recovery planning activities could help affected residents seeking visible demonstrations of support from authorities, and constructive involvement in their own recovery.
- Stronger guidance and facilitation of community recovery offers the potential to better draw on the State's recovery experience and knowledge, support emerging action and the needs of distinct community groups, and coordinate the work of communities, municipal councils and State recovery agencies.

Recommendation 3

IGEM recommends that:

- Local Government Victoria, in consultation with Emergency Management Victoria, facilitate the exchange of better practices, and the liaison between senior municipal managers, in order to share expertise and strengthen municipal councils' organisational capacity to mount recovery operations.

Recommendation 4

IGEM recommends that:

- Emergency Management Victoria, with recovery agencies and councils, develop a model for guiding and facilitating community recovery that draws on the State's experience, and ensures that community recovery programs are coordinated, empower community action, and reflect communities' characteristics and needs.

6. Programs for community recovery

Several months may be required for the immediate trauma of an emergency to recede for those affected ^[18, 20, 67]. People experiencing loss must put aside or re-prioritise plans to focus on the slow process of re-establishing their lives ^[64].

This unwelcome reality often becomes the preoccupation for those most affected, narrowing their desire to engage with families, friends, and social connections ^[13, 14, 17, 19].

There may be conflicts as people struggle to deal with their own situations, while perceiving differences and inequities, and falling into judgement and criticism of others ^[19, 76, 77].

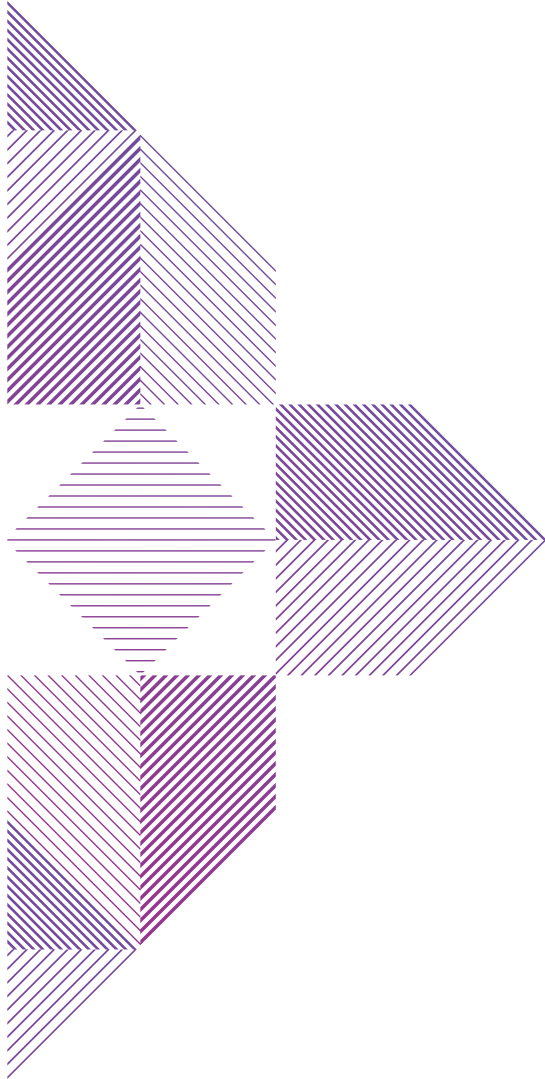
During this period social, economic and community recovery services and project funding play an important role. DHHS with responsibility for coordinating social recovery, arranges recovery-specific advice and assistance where required, and may supplement local providers' funding in areas such as counselling to meet demand from affected individuals and communities ^[12].

RDV as the economic recovery agency, provides grants for recovery projects of community and business groups and municipal councils. Outside the context of emergencies, RDV funds community projects to encourage new approaches to preparing for, withstanding and recovering from emergencies ^[28, 78, 79].

Social recovery services include financial assistance, temporary accommodation, personal and health support. These services address impacts of the emergency on the health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, prevent the escalation of needs, and mitigate the potential for long-term negative effects ^[12].

Specific help may be required for vulnerable groups, who are often the hardest hit in emergencies ^[6, 7, 12, 80, 81]. This may include help for young people in remote townships, the elderly, parents, and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds ^[6, 12, 66, 80].

Economic recovery support may include assistance in meeting post-emergency regulatory requirements, such as taxation, addressing business continuity or management issues, or industry promotion. These services aim to get businesses back on their feet and minimise down-stream effects on households and local economies ^[12].



Community recovery programs play a vital role.

Such activities help residents:

- reconnect with others, share experiences and advice about common problems, and reach out to those who may have become isolated ^[15]
- cope with the burden of rebuilding by enabling them to imagine, develop and work on recovery projects that create a positive sense of the future ^[6]
- work towards resolving anger that may remain after the emergency event ^[19, 82].

Importantly, community recovery programs are a way for municipal councils and State recovery agencies to make a visible and tangible contribution to communities' recovery ^[19].

Community recovery works in tandem with more direct forms of social and economic recovery support. However, community recovery should enable communities to define their own directions and priorities, and to enact aspects of those priorities in ways that are positive and empowering ^[6, 12, 64, 83]. Effective community recovery helps residents cope with their new situation in ways of their own choosing ^[7, 64].

In the early stages of recovery, municipal councils and recovery agencies should make proactive decisions about meeting recovery needs ^[12, 15, 48]. As affected people become able to contemplate their future, there is a need to facilitate and support individuals' and communities' recovery. This requires skills that are quite different to those needed for effective coordination and control of activities in the aftermath of an emergency ^[15].

6.1 The councils' approach

Councils, community and business organisations were involved in recovery projects in EGS and HCC. These are outlined to illustrate the nature and range of activities provided to support community and economic recovery.

East Gippsland Shire Council

Several activities contributed to recovery in EGS in the months following the February 2014 fires. These activities are listed in Table 1.

**TABLE 1: COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY AND DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS
IN EAST GIPPSLAND SHIRE**

PROJECT	AIM	PROPONENT	FUNDING	COMMENCED
Adaptation for Recovery	Support recovery through participatory projects	East Gippsland Shire Council	DHHS	August 2014
East Gippsland Building Community Resilience (Study Circles)	Facilitate local networks in rural communities	East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses	RDV	September 2014
Creative Arts Recovery Facilitators	Support local artists and communities to develop arts projects	Regional Arts Victoria	DHHS	August 2014
Creative Tourism Streetscapes	Community led town beautification project	East Gippsland Shire Council	RDV	November 2014
Gippsland Tourism Incident Resilience Project	Tourism resilience development workshops	Destination Gippsland Ltd	RDV	August 2014
Business Capacity Building for Orbost and District	Mentor businesses to cope better with effects of emergencies.	Orbost District Chamber of Commerce	RDV	September 2014
Gippsland Community Events Package	Encourage community interaction and sharing of experience	EGSC	RDV	May 2014

Source: Inspector-General for Emergency Management based on East Gippsland Shire Council data

In EGS, community and industry groups and EGSC prepared proposals for recovery projects for consideration of recovery agencies DHHS and RDV. The recovery agencies subsequently worked with proponents to ensure the proposed projects would effectively support recovery ^[40, 70, 71].

The projects include:

Adaptation for Recovery – arising from EGSC's aim of developing its communities' resilience and capacity to adapt to changed circumstances, this ongoing project aims to help five vulnerable communities that are dealing with unresolved issues arising from the trauma and disruption caused by the fires of February 2014. Facilitators work with groups of community representatives, helping them to find their own leadership, build on existing strengths, and establish their own programs of work focussed around emergency preparedness ^[40].

Study Circles – originating from an East Gippsland resident's experience working with rural communities, the project has contributed to the recovery and resilience of six communities by enabling members to share their experiences, lessons and priorities. The project has trained community volunteers as facilitators for the groups, and has prepared a kit to enable similar work in the future. Study Circles was conducted through the East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses, as an innovative approach to building community resilience ^[40].

Two separately funded arts-based projects were undertaken as a single project:

Creative Arts Recovery Facilitator – an initiative of Regional Arts Victoria aiming to support local artists and the community by coordinating, coaching and facilitating local arts projects, performances and events. The project was intended to respond to community ideas and wishes, assisting with community resilience and recovery building ^[71].

Creative Tourism Streetscapes – through developing and installing public installations at Tubbut, Bendoc, Goongerah and Bonang, the project aimed to support communities' pride and sense of place, and to restore their sense of control over their destiny. The project created public symbols to strengthen tourists' recognition of each community.



Goongerah community hall sign project (image courtesy Andrea Lane, Creative Arts Recovery Facilitator, Regional Arts Victoria)

Two economic recovery projects were also supported:

Orbost and District Business Capacity Building Project – established in response to the negative effects of bushfires and floods, and the reduction and aging of the EGS population, the project aims to build business capacity by providing training workshops, mentoring, and networking events. The project would also advocate on behalf of small business to increase its involvement in large regional projects ^[71].

Gippsland Tourism Incident Resilience Project – initiated to reduce the tourism industry's vulnerability to the impact of natural emergencies, and funded through RDV's Resilient Community Program. Project activities aimed to help: tourism-based communities take a more active role in local emergency management; tourism businesses be better prepared for emergencies; and tourism industry leaders more effectively use media to promote and provide accurate information to potential visitors in the aftermath of emergency events ^[71].

Hume City Council

HCC undertook several community recovery activities in the months following the February 2014 fires. These are listed in Table 2.

TABLE 2: COMMUNITY RECOVERY PROJECTS IN HUME CITY

PROJECT	AIM	PROPONENT	FUNDING	COMMENCED
Community Fire Preparedness at Trillium Estate, Sunbury	Lift residents' awareness of fire preparations	HCC	DHHS	November 2014
Dr Rob Gordon evening and dinner	Opportunity for fire-affected residents to meet and hear about psychological recovery from emergencies	HCC	DHHS	January 2015
Four coffee and conversation sessions	Opportunity for fire-affected residents to meet	HCC	DHHS	February 2015
Fire preparedness information and awareness events	Lift residents' awareness of fire preparations	HCC	DHHS	February 2015

Source: Inspector-General for Emergency Management based on Hume City Council data

In March 2014, HCC held a meeting with fire-affected communities to discuss their issues and priorities ^[46]. In August HCC received \$30,000 for community recovery, the bulk of which was used to employ a Grassfire Recovery Project Officer who provided community support and organised small events in fire-affected communities ^[46].

HCC held two family barbecues to increase residents' awareness of fire risks, and to facilitate social connections ^[46, 59]. One was held at Trillium Estate in the north-east of HC, and the other at Sunbury Neighbourhood House in the northern part of the municipality. Both days received positive feedback, although attendance at Trillium Estate was considerably higher with 45 attendees compared to eight at the Sunbury Neighbourhood House ^[46, 59].

In response to a request from residents for a social gathering where they could meet the staff of emergency services organisations, HCC organised an evening function where Dr Rob Gordon, a psychologist specialising in recovery from emergencies, spoke about the steps of recovery. HCC received encouraging feedback after this event, as well as requests for additional social opportunities ^[46, 59].

Responding to a community request, HCC organised four coffee mornings at centrally located cafes in Sunbury and Craigieburn. These meetings were intended to allow continuing community communication and networking, following the evening with Dr Gordon. Disappointingly for the Council, no community members attended any of the sessions ^[46, 59].

6.2 Observations: Supporting community recovery

Designing community recovery programs to meet the distinct needs of communities

The State's municipalities, towns and suburbs are made up of many distinct cultural and demographic groups ^[80]. Careful planning on the part of municipal councils is required to ensure that communication, and opportunities for involvement in emergency management preparation and community recovery, are culturally and practically appropriate to all these groups ^[67, 80].

Much of the State's experience of emergencies lies with rural farming communities, and those living in bushland, forest, and small towns ^[7, 49, 84]. The Black Saturday fires of 2009 evoked memory of earlier emergencies, when the Australian bush culture of farmers, timber cutters and bush townships prevailed ^[20]. Many stories of recovery from these events revolve around close-knit rural towns destroyed in catastrophic fires.

Cultural assumptions originating in these historic symbols of fire and flood may limit thinking about the most appropriate ways of working with today's emergency-affected communities ^[84].

In both EGS and HC there are distinct groups with different cultures and identities. Some identify with communities of place, others not. During emergency recovery, these differences create the potential for groups to be left out ^[36, 43, 47].

Gaps in communication, personal and cultural barriers may result in people being unaware or unable to access help, become involved in community activities, or in supporting others ^[47].

HC is an example of a municipality with a diverse population. Around one quarter of HC's population is culturally and linguistically diverse. Nearly five per cent have been in Australia for less than five years ^[43]. Many of these residents are connected with neighbours and friends through local networks ^[47].

Despite having networks of local contacts, these residents appear to be experiencing barriers in accessing the established volunteer groups and networks involved in helping people recover ^[47]. A very large proportion reported not knowing how to get involved in such groups, or not being approached or invited to be involved. A third of those residents who were not involved indicated they would have liked to have contributed ^[47].

After the fires, HCC made significant efforts to make personal contact with fire-affected residents, and to respond to their needs and suggestions. HCC's recovery officer attempted to telephone all residents known to have been affected, and Council staff also took opportunities to make personal contact at community recovery activities ^[46, 59, 72].

Once HCC had funding for community recovery, it provided a number of opportunities for residents to get together. These met with mixed success. HCC's Grassfire Recovery Officer also worked informally to identify pockets of residents who were isolated or had psychosocial needs ^[46, 59].



Hume City community recovery gathering at Trillium Estate (image courtesy Hume City Council)

In towns in EGS, people affected by the fires have been supported with opportunities to connect with other residents, confront difficult issues, and move towards positive plans for the future. These activities are building a more positive outlook. Yet EGS also has residents who were unaware of the services available to help them, and how they might access such services ^[47].

Recovery agencies and municipal councils are aware of the need to work with existing community networks, such as clubs, religious groups, and schools, to lift awareness of emergency risk and preparedness ^[9, 62, 64, 85].

However, a greater emphasis on sharing successful approaches for working with community groups and networks, together with practical guidance, may help municipal councils undertake this more effectively. EMV's *Disaster Recovery Toolkit for Local Government* is a valuable model for how such guidance can be made available to municipal councils ^[8].

Skills and experience required for community recovery work

Community recovery involves people working together to respond to individual and collective need. People who are skilled and experienced in facilitating the work of such groups are likely to contribute to the effectiveness of community recovery ^[7, 64].

Groups addressing such needs may appear at the initiative of residents. Some may work informally, outside the view of municipal councils or services, while others may work with councils and governments around aspects of communities' rebuilding ^[64]. Alternatively, municipal councils or recovery agencies may help establish such groups to provide residents with the opportunity to be involved in their own recovery.

Local recovery groups featured strongly in the community recovery work in EGS. Both EGSC's Adaptation for Recovery and East Gippsland Network of Neighbourhood Houses' Study Circles involved small groups of residents working together to strengthen networks and relationships, and to collaboratively decide on, and develop local projects. Facilitators worked with the groups in both cases ^[40].

For Adaptation for Recovery, EGSC engaged a facilitator with many years of experience in working with groups in rural contexts. One community member was of the view that the facilitator's skill and competence played a significant role in the success of this work ^[86].

Study Circles, which piloted an innovative approach to building community networks, took a different approach. The project involved training local volunteers who facilitated the groups' progress through a step-by-step process. This approach would contribute to communities' capacity and preparedness, and Study Circles made a valuable contribution in EGS after the fires ^[71, 86, 87].

However, the use of volunteer facilitators may be less suitable in difficult recovery situations where residents are coping with significant anger or emotional disruption, or where heavy demands on volunteers extend over several months ^[40, 87].

The evolution of a small group follows distinct stages, and such groups can fail for a variety of reasons. For example, groups may be unable to agree on a common purpose, there may be differences in values, or patterns of decision-making lead to some members departing ^[64]. For groups set up to help in recovery, such failure would have negative consequences for individuals and communities already disempowered, and burdened with the rebuilding task ^[88].

In these circumstances an experienced facilitator can help groups work in ways that are purposeful and inclusive, and that reflect the needs of members ^[89].

An effective facilitator works with what residents bring, not imposing assumptions, ideas or timetables on the group. An experienced facilitator can ensure that emotions are managed safely, helping individuals to contribute. This assistance can enable the group to find purpose, identify its priorities, and take action, so contributing to effective recovery ^[6, 83].

Making use of previous community recovery experience

Experiences of community recovery, and the activities used to support such recovery, could be a valuable resource for communities and municipal councils that are planning a program of community recovery activities.

Each of the projects contributing to recovery in EGSC drew on the experience and expertise of its proponents ^[40]. Despite not involving affected communities in their design, the projects have made a positive contribution, involving communities, and supporting their evolving recovery.

EGSC's Adaptation for Recovery arose from the Council's strategy for developing communities' awareness of natural emergency risk, and strengthening their capacity to adapt to the impact of emergencies. While EGSC designed the project, it has successfully engaged community groups, led to them taking positive action, and built on their existing strengths ^[40].

The approach used in the Study Circles project has been used in Australia and other countries to help communities dealing with issues as diverse as land management, racial equality, and strengthening neighbourhoods. The approach involves a series of discussion group meetings that encourage inclusive dialogue and sharing of experiences. The project used an approach to building community resilience that is similar to that used by EGSC's Adaptation for Recovery ^[40].

Arts-based projects used in EGS communities' recovery, have also been used in earlier recovery situations. Creative arts facilitation was used after the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires^[90]. Community members who lost homes and loved ones spoke of the overwhelming need to rebuild community confidence. Murrindindi Shire Council responded, employing arts facilitators to support activities initiated by the community^[91].

EGS' recovery experience suggests that the State's efforts to support communities recovering from emergencies would be strengthened if there were a greater sharing of expertise and experience.

Easily accessible resources on successful approaches to community recovery and project models would also be valuable. Such resources would provide a starting point for municipal councils considering how to take positive action in the aftermath of an emergency. It would also help community groups and residents to develop their own initiatives, independent of municipal councils and recovery agencies.

Findings

- An understanding of the different groups in communities is required to ensure that opportunities for involvement in community recovery activities, and in strengthening community connections outside the recovery context, are culturally and practically appropriate.
- Community recovery is likely to involve affected residents coming together to develop recovery objectives, and to plan and make decisions about local recovery, and community recovery projects. People who are experienced in facilitating the work of groups facing similar challenges are likely to contribute positively to recovery outcomes.
- Approaches to community recovery have often been employed in earlier recovery situations. While every recovery situation is different, models from other contexts could provide valuable starting points for municipal councils or communities planning their own recovery.

Recommendation 5

IGEM recommends that:

- Emergency Management Victoria with municipal councils, the Department of Health and Human Services, and Regional Development Victoria, prepare guidance on successful community recovery project models, including the use of group facilitation, to assist municipal councils and community groups that are developing community recovery activities.

7. Concluding remarks

IGEM is grateful for the participation of East Gippsland Shire Council and Hume City Council, and their communities in providing an understanding of their experiences of community recovery following the 2013–14 bushfires.

Residents of the two municipalities have vivid memories of the fires of January and February 2014, and for many the personal journey of recovery continues today.

Social and community life plays an important part in supporting individuals in their recovery. A social fabric that accommodates individuals' experiences will help them to resolve their new identity and the changed future that is formed out of emergency events.

Victoria is familiar with bushfires and floods, and with the processes of recovering from the consequences of such emergencies. Many municipal councils have experience managing the demands of recovery, and in working with affected communities. The State's recovery agencies also have significant expertise in coordinating and managing their recovery responsibilities.

In this review, IGEM provides case studies, observations and several recommendations aimed at improving preparation for community recovery, planning in the aftermath of an emergency event, and the ongoing support for community recovery.

A number of the recommendations aim to further exploit the State's recovery experience by encouraging greater sharing of community recovery knowledge and experience.

All recommendations are consistent with priorities for reform identified in the *Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015–18*.

Implementation of the recommendations will strengthen the work of municipal councils and recovery agencies, and further enable affected communities and individuals seeking to support their own recovery.

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