

# 2019–20 Snapshot

A highlight of just some of our activities ranging from significant reviews and monitoring responsibilities, to the many challenges presented with a pandemic emergency.

## A coordinated approach to assurance



Activities such as monitoring, reviewing, investigating, and evaluating all contribute to identifying opportunities for better practices in Victoria's emergency management arrangements.

### **The Framework**

In September 2019, we released the refreshed *Assurance Framework for Emergency Management*. Originally published in 2015, extensive sector engagement and ministerial consultation has informed the updated Framework which seeks to drive a more coordinated, less burdensome and more valuable approach to sector-wide assurance.

Adoption of the Framework and its principles will drive continuous improvement of the emergency management system and contribute towards better outcomes for Victorian communities before, during and after emergencies.

### **Highlighting assurance**

Published in July 2019, our Annual Assurance Summary provides government with a high-level overview of assurance activities undertaken in 2018–19 and serves as a record of progress achieved by the emergency management sector.

In 2018–19 a range of emergencies affected Victoria including:

- industrial fires
- Bourke Street incident
- statewide storm and heatwave
- bushfires
- blue-green algae

This fourth annual Summary also reflects another year of progress by the sector in implementing the State's reform agenda.

## Continuous improvement through evaluation and review



Conducting assurance activities – including evaluation and review – allow us to identify opportunities for continuous improvement and provide the government and community with the confidence that Victoria's emergency management arrangements are effective.

In supporting achievement of our objectives prescribed in the *Emergency Management Act 2013*, we undertook one system-wide review based on our 2019 Annual Forward Plan of Reviews.

### **Review of ten years of emergency management reform**

Conducted over an 18-month period, this comprehensive review examined the progress made in the emergency management sector since the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

The review looked at five key themes in achieving better outcomes for Victorians – before, during and after emergencies.

- governance
- capacity and capability
- community engagement and preparedness
- rebuilding and recovery
- safety and resilience.

Through wide consultation over many months, we reviewed hundreds of documents, received 175 community survey responses, and engaged with over 100 sector stakeholders including more than 50 local governments.

The review was completed in late December 2019 and we look forward to the government's response.

Under the Emergency Management Act, the Minister for Police and Emergency Services can request that IGEM reviews a specific policy topic or major emergency in the context of the effectiveness of the emergency management system.

## **Fire Season Inquiry**

In January 2020, IGEM received a request from the minister to conduct an independent Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian Fire Season.

Through this Inquiry, IGEM is examining Victoria's preparedness for the fire season, its response to fires in large parts of Victoria's North East, Gippsland, and Alpine regions, and the relief and recovery efforts.

The Inquiry is being conducted over two phases, collectively spanning 18 months, and is being informed by extensive community participation through meetings, submissions, and surveys.

Under Phase 1, we held 26 community meetings, received 476 submissions, and captured insights from 96 completed online surveys.

An extensive schedule of state and national stakeholder interviews has been completed, with written submissions and responses to formal requests for evidence complementing sector information, data gathering and literature reviews.

In late March, health restrictions in response to the coronavirus pandemic challenged our planned community engagement approach of place-based meetings and local visits.

The importance of offering fire-affected Victorians ways to continue participating in our activities and stay connected with the Inquiry, prompted a swift move from face-to-face meetings to online (digital) meetings.

Despite telecommunication challenges for some fire-affected communities, the online meetings were well received, and we gained valuable experience for future engagement activities.

Due to the significant scope, timeframes and resource commitments associated with the Inquiry, IGEM did not publish an annual forward plan in this period, nor conduct any additional planned system-wide reviews. However, IGEM did publish a forward projection of reviews which outlines topics for potential review in future years.

# Monitoring Victoria's emergency management arrangements



Regular monitoring and reporting on performance and progress with implementing desired changes is a key part of providing assurance to the government and community and supporting continuous improvement of Victoria's emergency management arrangements.

## **System-level emergency management planning**

In September 2019, we commenced our legislated function to monitor, review and assess emergency management planning at a system level.

Since then we've finalised our system-level assurance plan and provided our first formal observations to the minister on the implementation of the emergency management planning reforms through the IGEM 2019 *SAP Progress Report*.

## **Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiries**

The *Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry 2019 Annual Report* was tabled in Parliament in June 2020 receiving positive feedback from government and industry stakeholders.

This is the final Hazelwood Annual Report required to be tabled in Parliament spanning four years of tabling of progress reports on the Hazelwood reform journey. However, we will continue to monitor and report to the minister on the implementation of outstanding actions.

## **COVID-19 pandemic**

In March 2020, we initiated proactive monitoring of the emergency management sector's COVID-19 pandemic response.

This includes analysis of large volumes of information and routine observation of governance forums including the State Control Team and State Emergency Management Team.

Observation reports are provided to government on a regular basis as part of this assurance function.

## **VENTC safety oversight**

After four years of assurance of WorkSafe's compliance monitoring program, we completed our oversight of the safety of Victorian Emergency Management Training Centres.

### **Our other monitoring activities also include:**

- Critical infrastructure resilience
- DELWP planned burns that breach control lines
- ESTA non-financial performance including adverse events, implementation monitoring, and investigations
- Inquiry into the CFA Training College at Fiskville implementation monitoring
- System-wide reviews implementation monitoring
- Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan implementation monitoring.

## **Field observation**

As an important part our monitoring role, we observe emergency management activities before, during and after emergencies to understand if agreed improvement actions are being implemented.

In late January 2020, the Inspector-General travelled through East Gippsland and North East Victoria to get an appreciation of the scale and complexity of the bushfires, compared to those we've reviewed in past years.

It also provided an opportunity for the Inspector-General to meet with regional operational personnel to talk about the Fire Season Inquiry approach, and their experiences of the fire season.

## **Exercise observation and evaluation**

Over the year, we've deployed our staff to a range of exercises – such as those related to critical infrastructure resilience and Class 2 emergencies – and emergency responses, to directly observe that agreed improvement actions are being implemented.

Of note, few exercises in Victoria have engaged the community in a significant way as a part of the scenarios as Exercise Praesidio.

The opportunity to observe the conduct of Exercise Praesidio – a multi-agency evacuation exercise of three Yarra Valley communities Powelltown, Gilderoy and Three Bridges – was greatly valued.

Held in late October 2019, the exercise was a part of the state's summer preparations and an opportunity for the sector to work together with the community to respond to a bushfire emergency scenario.

Across the three phases of the exercise our staff attended and observed all activities including the briefings, the media call, the Incident Control Centre and the emergency relief centre.

In addition, and similar to previous years, IGEM attended and evaluated exercises conducted by the Security and Emergency Management Committee of Cabinet, and the State Crisis and Resilience Council.

## Our culture



Fostering - or encouraging - improvement is about recognising opportunities which may lead to better ways of working. This applies to our own ways of working

### **COVID-19 – positive change from a pandemic**

The arrival of the coronavirus pandemic has brought so many profound changes to Victorian's livelihood and lifestyle. Additionally, while our work is all about emergencies, we've never found ourselves so immediately and deeply affected by one.

While this pandemic is an emergency event, it is different to the more 'traditional' fire or flood emergency. As a result, the Office of IGEM has, as have organisations across the globe, experienced significant disruption. However, with such disruption comes the opportunity to exercise our agility, to test our ability to innovate, and ultimately to introduce appropriate change.

For example, by late-March 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic rightly assumed a significant amount of community and government focus.

Through review of our traditional practices, the effort and flexibility of the entire IGEM team, and the identification and adoption of alternate practices, the Fire Season Inquiry progressed undiminished and at full pace.

In the period of a week, we moved the Inquiry's remaining schedule of place-based meetings to nine online meetings held throughout April. While not our preferred in-person approach, meetings continued to offer people from across Victoria a positive opportunity to connect with the Inspector-General, share their views on bushfire preparation, and their experiences of the fire season.

During this time, IGEM also took on a significant task monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic response while maintaining its other monitoring functions.

By the end of end of June 2020, as an office we'll have spent close to four months working apart, yet we are still connected with our stakeholders, and we are still very much working together to achieve our goals and meet our legislative responsibilities.

Just as IGEM's assurance work focuses on improvements in the emergency management context, we'll use our COVID-19 disruption experiences to look at other ways of connecting with communities and working with our sector partners – all towards supporting better outcomes for Victorian communities before, during and after emergencies.

Observations and learnings from our pandemic experience will also contribute to Victoria's public sector reform which seeks new ways of working, thinking for innovation, and opportunities for improvement to meet Victoria's future challenges.

Last, and by no means least, IGEM celebrated its sixth birthday on 1 July.

We are proud of what we have achieved since our inception. As a team, we are looking forward to the next twelve months of working with Victorian communities and the emergency management sector to make Victoria a safer and more resilient place.

**Web:** [igem.vic.gov.au](http://igem.vic.gov.au)

**Email:** [igem@igem.vic.gov.au](mailto:igem@igem.vic.gov.au)

**Twitter:** IGEM\_Vic

**Facebook:** IGEMVictoria