



Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

Hearing Date: 12 October 2023

Question[s] taken on notice

Directed to: Department of Justice and Community Safety

Received Date: 16 November 2023

1. **Ryan BATCHELOR, page 13**

Question Asked to Tim WIEBUSCH:

Maybe on notice you can provide us with the locations and times, I suppose, of when those alerts were provided for the relevant period that is in discussion here. I think that would help clear things up.

Response:

Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) advises that one Emergency Alert was issued for the Greater Shepparton area on 25 October 2022. This Emergency Alert was related to the operation of the relief centre.

There were no other Emergency Alerts issued. A range of community engagement activities and a suite of Vic-Emergency notifications combined with a lead time of 54 hours between the major flood warning and the peak at Shepparton provided multiple avenues for warnings to be disseminated to the community.

2. **Ryan BATCHELOR, page 14**

Question Asked to Tim WIEBUSCH:

It might be useful if on notice you could provide us with a list of the local councils that you have met with post the October 2022 floods who were affected in the context of those conversations.

Response:

Between June and July 2023, VICSES Deputy Chief Officer and Regional Assistant Chief Officers met with the following municipal councils:

- Gunnawarra Shire Council on 23 June 2023*
- Campaspe Shire Council on 19 July 2023*
- Swan Hill Rural City Council on 20 July 2023*
- Mildura Rural City Council on 21 July 2023*
- Moira Shire Council on 31 July 2023*
- Shepparton City Council on 31 July 2023*
- Mayors and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of Mitchell Shire Council and Murrindindi Shire Council with Goulburn Murray Water and the*

Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA), on 29 June 2023

- CEOs of Maribyrnong City Council, Moonee Valley City Council, Melbourne City Council, Brimbank City Council and Macedon Ranges Shire with DEECA, Emergency Recovery Victoria and Red Cross.

These meetings were provided as an opportunity for VICSES and the municipalities to review the response to the flood event and revitalise their strong and ongoing partnerships.

3. **Samantha RATNAM, page 16**

Question Asked to Tim WIEBUSCH:

Sorry to interrupt there, but would you be able to provide us on notice the list of those SESs that you have been out to, to do that follow-up work with?

Response:

Follow-up work was conducted with the following VICSES units:

Review planned	Invited Audience
<i>Boating and Water Rescue</i>	<i>Boating volunteers and staff SMLs</i>
<i>Community Engagement</i>	<i>All Unit members</i>
<i>General Rescue and Local Response - East</i>	<i>Unit members – Eastern Region</i>
<i>General Rescue and Local Response - West</i>	<i>Unit members – Western Region</i>
<i>Alexandra Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Echuca Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Essendon Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Footscray Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Hastings Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Kerang Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Lilydale Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Marong Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Mildura Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Murchison Unit – Unit requested the review not to go ahead due to lack of member interest. Conversations held with UMT.</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Orbost Unit – review discussion held but nil reported outcomes</i>	<i>Unit members</i>

<i>Robinvale Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Rochester Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Seymour Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Shepparton Search and Rescue (SAR)</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Swan Hill Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Tatura Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Upper Yarra Unit</i>	<i>Unit members</i>
<i>Wodonga Unit - Unit requested the review not to go ahead due to lack of member interest. Conversations held with Controller/ UMT</i>	<i>Unit members</i>

Members from independent rescue providers Shepparton Search and Rescue and Echuca Moama Search and Rescue were also participants on the Boating and Water Rescue After Action Review (AAR), as well as the General Rescue and Local Response AARs for East and West.

4. **Melina BATH, page 21**

Question Asked to Chris STEPHENSON:

Can I just ask: who was the state response controller during the 2022 floods?

Could you give us a list of who it was during that flood period, maybe from the start of October through to the – could you give us that?

Response:

Throughout the Flood Event, several State Response Controllers (SRCs) were rostered on. The SRC roster consisted of a four-day rotational schedule involving personnel from four agencies: Country Fire Authority (CFA), Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and VICSES. The SRCs rostered on from each agency between Tuesday 11 October 2022 and Friday 6 January 2023 were:

- *CFA:*
 - *Jason Heffernan, Chief Officer*
 - *Garry Cook, Deputy Chief Officer, Operational Response & Coordination*
 - *Alen Slijepcevic, Deputy Chief Officer, Fire Risk Research & Community Preparedness*
- *FFMVic:*
 - *Chris Hardman, Chief Fire Officer*

- *Andrew Morrow, Deputy Chief Fire Officer*
- *Darrin McKenzie, Regional Director, Gippsland, Forest, Fire and Regions Group*
- *FRV:*
 - *Gavin Freeman, Fire Rescue Commissioner*
 - *David Bruce, Deputy Commissioner, North-West Operations*
 - *Martin Braid, Deputy Commissioner, Strategy*
- *VICSES:*
 - *Tim Wiebusch, Chief Officer Operations*
 - *Alistair Drayton, Deputy Chief Officer*
 - *David Baker, Deputy Chief Officer, Operations*

5. **Melina BATH, page 21**

Question Asked to Chris STEPHENSON:

Why did the emergency management commissioner disband the volunteer consultative committee? We heard that; we have seen it in a submission. Can you explain why that would have been the case?

Chris STEPHENSON: [...] The previous commissioner has decided with government to take a review of how they engage with volunteers right across Victoria [...] Obviously, it was not my decision – I was not the emergency management commissioner – and I am also willing to take on notice and provide more advice about what that review will look like.

Response:

The Volunteer Consultative Forum was disbanded in early 2023 and the Victorian Government asked Emergency Management Victoria to undertake a review into the volunteer consultation model.

The Review will identify opportunities for enhanced participation and engagement with the volunteer workforce, with a strong focus on inclusiveness and diversity, ensuring the voices of both new and existing sector partners are heard.

The Review will seek input from volunteers on the topics of recruitment and retention, as well as improved mechanisms for on-going engagement, to inform the new ways of working required to meet the challenges ahead.

6. **Melina BATH, page 21**

Question Asked to DJCS:

The rapid impact assessments, and you might like to take this on notice. The Pyrenees council said there was a delay in carrying out rapid impact

assessments, which then affected the secondary impact assessments, and I guess that is all about recovery and the ability to respond and recover. That is something that you might be able to respond to on notice.

Response:

Following the main rainfall event between 13 and 14 October 2022, Initial Impact Assessment (IIA) Teams were deployed to the Pyrenees Shire local government area (LGA) on 17 October 2022.

Under the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) Flood Sub-Plan, the aim of IIAs is to capture, during the initial 48 hours of an emergency, the nature and scale of the flood impact on people, community infrastructure, and the economic, natural, and built environments, so that emergency relief and early recovery activities can commence. The data collected from IIAs is then used to identify where to focus early recovery activities (including secondary impact assessments).

While it is preferable for IIAs to be undertaken within the first 24-48 hours of an emergency event, flood-specific factors can result in delays to the deployment of IIA teams, such as the need to wait for water to subside before affected areas can be accessed. The broad geographical nature of the Flood Event is an additionally important factor when considering how rapidly IIA teams and other resources were mobilised.

7. Melina BATH, page 21

Question Asked to DJCS:

The last one I have that I would like to ask is in relation to – you have heard concerns around Melbourne Water’s flood modelling problems due to the table rating. I know you have mentioned table ratings. At Deep Creek and at Darraweit Guim flood warning sites were inaccurate. You might want to just respond from an emergency management point of view –

Response:

Emergency Services utilise flood forecasts supplied by Melbourne Water or the Bureau of Meteorology to inform warnings issued through Vic Emergency channels and through community engagement. The robustness of these forecasts and the underlying technical methods is a matter of the flood forecasting agencies.

8. Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL, page 22

Question Asked to Kate FITZGERALD:

If I can just add, there were 17 emergency alert campaigns throughout the

flood emergency, so we are able to provide on notice the detail to the inquiry in relation to where those alerts were issued.

Response:

During October 2022, 17 Emergency Alert campaigns were issued, with an SMS and/or call to a landline providing critical information about the flood emergency and how to stay safe. The date, time and location of each Emergency Alert is as follows:

Date	Time	Location
13 October 2022	5:17pm	Rochester
	7:46pm	Carisbrook
	9:13pm	Benalla
	9:36pm	Seymour
14 October 2022	1:18am	Wedderburn
	2:25am	Wangaratta
	3:35am	Charlton
	3:45am	Benalla
	4:25am	Maribyrnong
	6:01am	Maribyrnong
15 October 2022	4:11am	Echuca & Echuca Village
16 October 2022	8:28am	Echuca & Echuca Village
	4:27pm	Loch Gary Camping Area
	10:12pm	Iraak
19 October 2022	1:43pm	Kerang
25 October 2022	2:03pm	Shepparton
30 October 2022	5:02pm	Bogong Village Landslide

9. **Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL, page 22**

Question Asked to Tim WIEBUSCH:

Talking about the texting and whatnot, when we have no signal on our phones, we can make an emergency call. Is it possible for you to send an emergency message in the same circumstances, when people do not have reception?

Tim WIEBUSCH: I would have to take that on notice, I think.

Response:

The sending of emergency messages to mobile phones relies on land-based reception (and does not utilise satellites), if a mobile phone does not have reception, it will not receive an Emergency Alert notification.

In recognising the importance of having robust and effective communications capabilities during emergency responses, the Victorian Government has supported the development of an emergency roaming capability since the 2019-20 bushfires. Emergency roaming can provide a vital link when telecommunications services are impacted by natural disasters.

The Victorian Government has been an early and consistent advocate for such reforms and has raised the issue in several submissions for Commonwealth Government processes, including the 2020 Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements and the ACCC's Regional mobile infrastructure inquiry 2022-23.

On 23 October 2023, the Commonwealth Government announced it would work with industry to scope an emergency mobile roaming capability to keep Australians connected during natural disasters.

10. **Gaelle BROAD, page 24**

Question Asked to Kate FITZGERALD:

You can take it on notice, but can you provide a flowchart of who does what – just a brief kind of review? It can be A3; it probably will not fit on an A4. I think that would be really helpful for us to sort of see all the different parties involved. You mentioned the inspector-general and that sort of thing too, so I guess just everyone involved in that emergency response specifically to floods. That would be really helpful.

Response:

A diagram outlining and describing the general roles, governance and relationships for Class 1 emergencies is provided at pages 39 and 40 of the SEMP, which is published at -

[Victorian State Emergency Management Plan \(SEMP\) - Interactive and functional PDF document - October 2021.PDF \(emv.vic.gov.au\)](#)

11. **Gaelle BROAD, page 25**

Question Asked to DJCS/Chris STEPHENSON:

You mentioned incident control centres are sort of predetermined. I guess this is a question on notice: are you able to provide a list of those for regional Victoria? That would be super, thank you.

Response:

Each Incident Control Centre (ICC) has a pre-determined footprint/designated area of responsibility.

An Incident Emergency Management Team (IEMT) for a major emergency will meet formally and should locate in an ICC.

ICC locations are determined by reference to facility size and the necessity for the location not to be impacted by the event to ensure continued operations and supporting infrastructure.

ICCs are located throughout the state in both regional and metropolitan Melbourne. The Level 3 ICCs located in regional Victoria are as follows:

- *ICC Colac*
- *ICC North Geelong*
- *ICC Hamilton*
- *ICC Heywood*
- *ICC Warrnambool*
- *ICC Bairnsdale*
- *ICC Bendoc*
- *ICC Erica (Parkers Corner)*
- *ICC Heyfield*
- *ICC Noojee*
- *ICC Orbost*
- *ICC Swifts Creek*
- *ICC Traralgon*
- *ICC Ararat*
- *ICC Ballarat*
- *ICC Horsham*
- *ICC Alexandra*
- *ICC Benalla SES*
- *ICC Corryong*
- *ICC Mansfield*
- *ICC Ovens*
- *ICC Seymour*
- *ICC Shepparton*
- *ICC Tallangatta*
- *ICC Wangaratta*
- *ICC Wodonga*
- *ICC Bendigo*
- *ICC Gisborne*
- *ICC Mildura*
- *ICC Swan Hill*

12. Gaelle BROAD, page 26

Question Asked to Chris STEPHENSON:

And Chris, you mentioned the real-time monitoring response. You had over

4000 comments compiled, and you were turning those into insights and publishing them. Are you able to table that information for the committee's reference? In the absence, I guess, of a multiagency kind of response, that would be very helpful for us to view.

Response:

On 13 November 2022, the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) released State Control – Advisory Bulletin 4 - Coordinated Real Time Learning Arrangements for the 2022 Victorian Floods. This outlined a Coordinated Real Time Learning Approach for the event to ensure a consistent method was applied when capturing observations, analysing for insights and identifying lessons of state-wide multi-agency significance throughout this event.

The Coordinated Real Time Learning Approach aimed to capture learnings, drive real time continuous improvement and provide regular opportunities for personnel debriefing and sense making throughout the protracted event. All learnings captured throughout the event were continuously analysed by the SCC State Lessons and Evaluation (SLE) Functional Unit, with insights provided to relevant personnel for consideration.

The coordination of the implementation of lessons is integral to the EM sector's ability to learn lessons and inform change based on community and personnel experiences. Through the Coordinated Real Time Learning Approach, lessons were identified, categorised, assessed and approved. Lessons gathered fell within the following themes:

- *Intelligence and information sharing*
- *Evaluation and Water Rescue*
- *Relief and Recovery Arrangements*
- *Resource Management*
- *SCC Functional Collaboration*

To ensure the lessons identified lead to lessons learned and positive change across the emergency management sector, the following implementation shall occur:

- **Strategic:** *The implementation of strategic lessons will reflect the approach being taken in other reviews and inquiries and ensure the lessons are considered as part of long-term strategic planning, including the Strategic Action Plan.*
- **Operational:** *The EMV Lessons and Improvement Team will load the lessons onto EM-COP and distribute the identified lessons to State Emergency Management Team for consideration in ongoing continuous improvement activities.*

- **Agency-specific:** *The EMV Lessons and Improvement Team will distribute the identified lesson and associated insights to the relevant agency on behalf of the EMC for consideration. The agency identified will be required to determine the action required to address the lesson and ensure the actions are embedded into operational planning. It is expected the lessons are considered by all emergency management agencies as part of ongoing or new projects/programs if this has not already occurred, and where appropriate, directly address.*

It is expected the lessons are considered by all emergency management agencies as part of ongoing or new projects/programs if this has not already occurred, and where appropriate, directly address.

13. **Gaelle BROAD, page 26**

Question Asked to Kate FITZGERALD:

Now, warnings are something that has been talked about so much, because it is just foundational to people's response and reaction, getting that information right. We had Jan Beer, who is an expert in water, appear at the Seymour hearing. She gave the committee a list of flood warning gauges and locations but was not sure which ones had actually been installed. Again, you could take this on notice, but perhaps it is a question for Emergency Management Victoria. If you could provide, in response to that list, which ones have actually been installed as far as flood gauges, because there seem to be a number of areas that are not covered.

Kate FITZGERALD: I am happy to discuss that one. Though the responsibilities for the flood gauge network are responsibilities of DEECA, the department of environment, so we would probably have to defer to them on that matter.

Gaelle BROAD: Are you able to defer to them in that kind of coordination capacity?

Kate FITZGERALD: Yes.

Response:

This question has been referred to DEECA for response. (see attachment)

14. **Ryan BATCHELOR, page 27**

Question Asked to Tim WIEBUSCH:

I have raised with a couple of people the issue of helping people understand risk that is confronting them. You mentioned you had been doing some social research on the flood guides that you have been preparing, I assume to figure out what people need to know and the efficacy of the materials you are providing to them. If that has concluded, that research, I was wondering if you would consider on notice providing a summary or a copy of that or some key learnings of that to the committee.

Tim WIEBUSCH: It is a piece of work that is active right at the moment, and we expect by February next year that we will have the outcomes of that. But also that will inform the basis of what our future local flood guides will look like and what they will contain.

Response:

VICSES are currently undertaking a project (funded through the Risk & Resilience Grant program) to enhance the accessibility and comprehensibility of information provided in the Local Flood Guide (LFG) product. Quantum Market Research completed Milestone 1 of the project in October 2023, which consisted of:

- *Literature Review: A comprehensive review of relevant documentation that focuses on public flood advice sought from intrastate and international sources.*
- *Social Research: Using in-depth interviews, this research engaged with Victorians residing in both regional and metropolitan areas covered by a local flood guide.*

The Milestone 1 Report can be accessed via the following link:

[Milestone 1 Report - Quantum Market Research - LFG Project.pdf](#)

Milestone 2 is currently in progress and will develop a new LFG template using insights from the literature review and initial social research. A second round of in-depth interviews will then be conducted to evaluate the new LFG format before this is finalised and content from existing guides moved to the new format.

15. Ryan BATCHELOR, page 28

Question Asked to Tim WIEBUSCH:

I might just go to the question of engagement with volunteers. I have just got some questions about a particular committee that has been disbanded. You might not have the detail here, but on notice if you could provide us with any other bodies, working groups, fora that volunteers or volunteer organisations are represented in, that would be useful, because obviously as you say it is important that the voices of volunteers are heard in decision-making processes, and I assume, although I would like to have it confirmed, that one committee was not the sum total of your engagement with volunteers. If you could provide to the committee on notice any further details you have got about the way that various parts of the emergency management response deal with and engage with volunteers, that would be exceptionally helpful. That is probably it.

Response:

VICSES has a range of consultation and engagement mechanisms with volunteers. This includes Unit Area Group forums each quarter, specialist working groups and a Board Volunteer Reference Group with broad and diverse representation of VICSES volunteers from across all parts of the State.

16. Melina BATH/Gaelle BROAD, page 28

Question Asked to Kate FITZGERALD:

I just want to follow up on the question from my good colleague Gaelle. Sorry, too many words. She mentioned about Queensland being the best practice or the highly regarded practice into DRFA claims and betterment, so if you could take it on notice to undertake your comparison between what you are doing now and what they are doing and maybe come back to us with a commitment from Emergency Recovery Victoria in relation to trying to get Victoria to be at that best standard.

Response:

Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV) has a strong working relationship with recovery leads across Australia, including the Queensland Reconstruction Authority (QRA).

ERV is committed to continuously improving how disaster relief and recovery is coordinated and delivered in Victoria, and we look to good practice applied locally and interjurisdictionally, including QRA. The emergency management arrangements and risk profiles differ in each state and territory and the model applied to betterment must take this into account. Betterment is a well-known concept recognised in the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements and ERV is working with the Commonwealth to maximise the supports available to Victoria to enhance disaster recovery outcomes for our impacted communities.

ADDITIONAL QONS

To: Emergency Management Victoria

17. Question Asked:

The Rochester community had to manage the initial flood response without any formal assistance for approximately a week. Why did it take so long to get assistance to Rochester?

Rochester hearing transcript, page 7-9:

“That first week it was us here on our own, and we watched Chinook helicopters fly overhead to Echuca.”

“And after several days we did have 10 members of the ADF come here, and they were providing some assistance... That was several days into that first week, but outside of that there was no other formal assistance.”

Response:

Emergency Services worked closely within the Rochester community to support the flood response particularly in relation to the issuing of flood warnings, providing advice to the community and undertaking rescues.

A Flood Watch was issued on Tuesday 11 October 2022 ahead of the predicted major flooding from Thursday 13 October for the Campaspe River.

A community meeting was held in Rochester on Tuesday 11 October at the Town Hall (with the meeting also live streamed online) to inform residents of the forecasts and likely impacts.

A Watch and Act message was issued on Wednesday 12 October warning of major flooding for Barnadown overnight Thursday and at Rochester town from Friday afternoon.

On Wednesday a second community meeting was held, indicating 115.5 to 115.6m and therefore going to be higher than 2011 and that people needed to plan to leave.

In a subsequent Watch and Act Move to Higher Ground issued on Thursday 13 October these expected timings were brought forward to Thursday afternoon for Barnadown and Friday morning for Rochester.

A Door Knock of approx. 900 houses was completed in Rochester on Thursday 13 October which was around 24 hours ahead of the expected peak.

At 5:16pm Emergency Warning and an Emergency Alert were issued on Thursday 13 October to the Rochester township advising people to ‘Evacuate Immediately’.

The various peak height forecasts for the Campaspe River at Rochester were issued as follows:

- *Thursday 13 October 2022 at 9:35pm - “Likely to reach around 115.50 metres”.*
- *Friday 14 October 2022 at 2:50pm - “Likely to reach around 115.60 metres”.*
- *Friday 14 October 2022 at 8:42pm - “Likely to peak around 115.70 metres”*

More than 210 rescues occurred on the evening of Friday 14 October and morning of Saturday 15 October.

18. Question Asked:

What was the decision-making process in deciding to build the emergency levee down Pakenham Street, Echuca?

Response:

A 2.5km temporary levee ('the emergency works') was built to protect the township of Echuca from the Flood Event, after it was identified that the forecast peak was likely to exceed the protection provided by the permanent flood mitigation scheme (i.e., existing levees along Goulburn Road). The emergency works protected approximately 200-300 homes.

On 14 October 2022, a Campaspe Shire representative provided recommendations on where temporary levee should be constructed and advised the water would be too deep along the east end of Pakenham and Moama Street to be reliable. There was then a 4-day window from 15 to 19 October to construct the emergency works.

On the afternoon of the 16 October, the Incident Controller held a meeting with the responsible Catchment Management Authority (CMA), several Campaspe Shire staff, Goulburn Murray Water and Victoria Police to discuss the temporary emergency levee, including whether it was to be built with sandbags or earth. The attendees agreed to proceed with the engineered option proposed by the Campaspe Shire.

An options analysis undertaken by the Incident Management Team (IMT) confirmed this to be the best approach and construction was authorised to proceed, noting that an Executive Director of the Shire had provided approval for locating it on Council roads/land.

VICSES has the power to construct a levee under the Victorian State Emergency Service Act 2005 (VICSES Act). Section 32AC(1)(a) (when read with s 32AA) provides that a Service member or a volunteer assisting VICSES, at the direction of a Service member, may enter onto any land or premises and construct, remove, or alter a levee on that land if they believe it is required to protect life and property.

In a major emergency, like the Flood Event, this power can be exercised by the State Response Controller, a Regional Controller or an Incident Controller as per Section 37(7) of the Emergency Management Act.

VICSES must ensure that rectification works take place as soon as practicable after the threat to life or property has passed, unless the damage caused is taken to be damage caused to property by the emergency itself (with implications for insured assets) (s32AC(2)-(3) VICSES Act).

The Standard Operating Procedure 036 (SOP036) 'Construction, Removal or Altering of Levee and Removal of Debris' supports consistent and effective decisions to construct a levee, remove or alter a levee.

Supplementary Q: Who gave the final approval and sign off for it?

Response:

Decisions regarding the construction of the levee were made by the Incident Controller, in partnership with the Incident Emergency Management Team, including representatives from the Municipal Council and the responsible Catchment Management Authority.

Relevant considerations included what was practicable in a short amount of time to mitigate the impacts of the flood on this community.

19. Question Asked:

Coliban Water had a substantial inventory of small pumps that were exclusively designated for use within the company. Why hasn't a more efficient system for resource sharing been established among different agencies and regions?

Response:

Flood emergencies by their nature require multiple agencies to bring together resources and communities to coordinate flood preparedness, response, relief and recovery.

The Emergency Management Act 2013 and the State Emergency Management Plan establish command, control, coordination and consequence management arrangements for the response phase of an emergency. They ensure that of the various agencies involved in the response to an emergency deployed in a coordinated way.

During the Flood Event, agencies across the country worked collectively to ensure the response activities undertaken were sufficiently resourced. For example, in the week of 24 October 2022, personnel from Queensland Fire and Emergency Services, the Western Australia Department of Fire and Emergency Services and South Australia Emergency Services, were deployed across Victoria to assist with response, relief and recovery efforts.

These resources were requested through the Australasian Arrangement for Interstate Assistance, Fire and Emergency Services. Interstate and Commonwealth assistance supported IMTs, flood boat and in-water rescue crew, as well as sandbagging operations.

20. **Question Asked:**

Has there been an assessment conducted to address the difficulty in attracting professional support workers, specifically mental health professionals, to communities as a result of the constraints imposed by short-term contracts?

Supplementary Q: What strategies is EMV planning to utilise to attract additional professional support workers, specifically mental health professionals, to communities impacted by emergencies?

Response:

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) is not the recovery lead agency for mental health services and cannot answer this question for the Committee. EMV advises that this question is best addressed by the Department of Health.

ADDITIONAL QONS

To: VICSES

21. **Question Asked:**

What specific criteria was used to determine the need to establish the Incident Control Centres (ICC), and at what point did this decision occur?

Response:

The arrangements for location and activation of ICCs are set out in the [State Emergency Management Plan](#), the [State Flood Sub-Plan](#) and [the Joint Standard Operating Procedure JSOP2.03](#).

These documents consider, amongst other things, the availability and sustainability of personnel, and accessibility to the facility during the response operations.

22. **Question Asked:**

[Are] there ways the decision-making process between the divisional command, the ICC and Senior Management in Melbourne could be improved? If so, what changes should be made?

Supplementary Q: Will you implement these changes?

Response:

Division Command is a subgroup of the Operations Cell and any decision should be made in consultation with the ICC Operations Officer, where those decisions are outside the agreed objectives in the Incident Shift Plan.

Regular meetings are scheduled between the ICC Operations Officer to ensure compliance with the Objectives set and this can include any changes identified by the Division Commander through discussion on the ground.

Incident Controllers report through the Region Controller and provide regular briefings, including details obtained from other Incident Management Team (IMT) members through regular IMT meetings throughout the day which are also scheduled.

Finally, updates are provided to the State Response Controller via the Region Controller

23. Question Asked:

During a wet season cycle with a flood risk, why isn't there a readily accessible supply of sandbags on hand?

Response:

VICSES has a current stockpile in excess of 1,482,000 sandbags. Key strategic stockpile locations include Kerang, Bairnsdale, Shepparton, Mooroopna, Wodonga and Geelong.

In total, VICSES deployed more than 1.5 million sandbags to flood-affected areas during the flood event.

VICSES worked closely with local governments to identify 215 sandbag collection points across Victoria, and to set up arrangements for sand supply and activating these locations, in partnership with local community groups.

24. Question Asked:

Who is responsible for managing the allocation of sandbags, both statewide and within river catchments?

Response:

The allocation of sandbags was managed by VICSES, working in collaboration with local communities and Councils.

25. Question Asked:

The town of Undera had to purchase their own sandbags. Is this common practice? If not, why was this the case?

Undera submission, page1:

The community raised \$8000 which was used to purchase sandbags of

which 3500 were purchased in Melbourne and used as a preventative measure to protect lower areas of levee banks.

Response:

VICSES provided community access to sandbags in the Greater Shepparton LGA at Shepparton, Tallygaroopna, Congupna, and Tatura.

26. Question Asked:

We have fire bombers on standby for fires, but when it comes to floods, there is an insufficient reserve of sandbags or a sandbag filling station. Why aren't we similarly prepared for flood situations?

Rochester hearing transcript, page 75

Tuesday BROWELL: *I was trying to obtain sandbags from about 7 October with no luck. On 14 October Torrumbarry had a meeting with the SES. It was our community information meeting. We had the CFA, the SES, the shire, the National Party's Peter Walsh was there, and at that point everyone knew that we were going to be getting a flood and it would be affecting our houses, our homes, our nature, our cattle and our crops. Everybody knew. Meanwhile on my property we had started to build a little levee around our dwellings. I asked for sandbags at that meeting and I was told that it was not actually an emergency at the time and that we could not have sandbags. So I was sitting there trying to get these sandbags. I ended up like a mad chook running around. Moama at that point had sandbags, and I could get 25 from them. Echuca had some. I begged for 50, because it is 25 per household.*

Response:

As outlined in response to Question 23, VICSES has a current stockpile in excess of 1,482,000 sandbags. Key strategic stockpile locations include Kerang, Bairnsdale, Shepparton, Mooroopna, Wodonga and Geelong.

Following 2010-11, VICSES developed a policy to issue 25 sandbags per residential property to cover drainage holes within the home (e.g. showers, toilets, sinks) to stop back flow of water and to place across main doorways.

Whilst sandbags can be an effective form of mitigation in smaller scale flood environments and domestic settings, in larger scale events, such as the Flood Event, current research suggests that in order to be effective they need to be accompanied by pumps and person power to manage seepage.

Research has also noted that sandbag walls can collapse or overtop, the process of filling sandbags was described as time and labour-intensive, and sandbags often retain contaminants from floodwater.

It is for this reason that sandbagging is not considered to be an alternative option to permanent flood protection methods.

VICSES will continue to work with communities during flooding events to ensure a diverse range of preparedness activities are undertaken.

27. Question Asked:

Why do you opt for white polyethylene bags for sandbags, even though they tend to slip, instead of the more effective hessian bags that provide better stability when stacked?

Response:

Hessian sandbags are the preferred bag for VICSES as these are better for the purpose, they form better when laid properly, they are easier to handle/carry, and they are also more environmentally friendly as they are designed to breakdown especially once they have been wet.

Polyethylene bags are provided when supplies of the hessian bags have been diminished.

28. Question Asked:

Was it the case that once sandbags got wet they were too heavy for SES Volunteers to move when re-collecting them during the clean-up phase?

Supplementary Q: What is the most likely reason for this? Is there a weight limit they must adhere to?

Response:

The manual handling of the filled sandbags, dry or wet, requires the use of appropriate techniques. A sandbag filled to two-thirds full (the required and recommended maximum amount for use in a wall) weighs approximately 15 to 20kg.

Generally, as a service, VICSES attempts to restrict member lifting limits to 20kg for work health and safety reasons.

Once wet and saturated, the sandbags could weigh up to twice the dry weight. In addition to this, depending how long sandbags have been in place and compacted, wet bags will begin to rot and break down and can cause the sand to become hard like concrete.

29. Question Asked:

What was the reason for the SES declining to dispatch text messages to inform the Rochester community about the flood preparedness meetings organised by the community?

Supplementary Q: Is the SES planning to utilise its messaging system to distribute messages regarding crucial community meetings in the lead up to and during a future emergency event?

Response:

Notifications of community meetings in Rochester were made employing a range of channels including social media (Facebook), doorknocking, word of mouth and public notices in local community places of interest (shop fronts etc).

Like all warnings, agencies should be mindful that overuse of Emergency Alert may contribute to community complacency and/or the community becoming desensitised to the importance of the warning content.

In the instance of community meetings, Emergency Alerts can be considered an appropriate communication channel. However, in most instances, dissemination will be through other forums such as existing community networks, social media, referenced in Vic Emergency Warnings, community newsletters, flyers, and other means.

30. Question Asked:

The Committee has consistently heard people saying the corporate memory gets lost when there is a change of shift. Can you explain how the knowledge transfer is carried out by the ICC and the Divisional Command Centre and how this could be improved?

Response:

The Incident Controller (IC) is required to ensure that the appropriate information is efficiently communicated through the incident structure to emergency personnel. This may be achieved through:

- Targeted briefings towards a specific audience, e.g. Division Commanders, and then cascading the briefing down through the incident structure as appropriate.*
- Staggering the Incident Management Team (IMT) and field changeovers to facilitate briefings.*

At the start of every shift there is a SMEACS-Q (Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration, Command/Comms, Safety, Questions) briefing, which provides situational awareness for those new on shift by detailing

critical response information, such as command and control arrangements, overviews of the incident and incident objectives, and logistics and safety information. All incident personnel have a responsibility to ensure they are briefed and understand their tasks before they commence their duties.

As the situation changes and new information becomes available, updated briefings are also provided throughout the incident structure and an After-Action Review is usually held at the end of each shift.

New personnel on shift can also refer to previous logbooks, which are required to be maintained by personnel and provide a record of operational communications and any items relevant to duties.

Knowledge transfer is also assured through Joint Standard Operating Procedures (JSOPs). For example, JSOP 'J03.06 – Incident Briefings' requires the provision of prompt and regular information to all emergency personnel, and JSOP 'J03.15-Transfer of Control at Class 1 Emergencies' requires an outgoing IMT to produce an appropriate handover ensuring Incident Objectives and Incident Action Plan directions are maintained for each function of the incoming IMT.

These and other embedded processes and procedures allow for continuous improvements to be made both during and after responses.

31. Question Asked:

In Pyrenees Shire Council submission, they were frustrated about the lack of VicSES presence in the Pyrenees area which affected the completion of Rapid Impact Assessments (RIA). Could you please expand on why there was a lack of SES presence, and how this impacted the RIA's?

Supplementary Q: Additionally, the submission highlighted that the deficiency in RIAs delayed Secondary Impact Assessments (SIA). What measures or improvements are being made to enhance the process for handling future events?

Page 4 of submission: "As there wasn't a strong presence of VicSES in the Pyrenees, Rapid Impact Assessments (RIA) were not fully undertaken which is a responsibility of VicSES. The information that was received was very sparse and took longer than it should have. As a consequence, council didn't get an early snapshot of the emergency impact used to inform relief activities and delayed Secondary Impact Assessments (SIAs) being started. In addition, there was an increased reliance on Council to provide data to government departments, and at times, at short notice.

The extent of the flooding in Pyrenees wasn't acknowledged at first or had the impact reports to support the extent compared to lower catchment

communities. It appears that Pyrenees was left out of the bigger picture, and we found ourselves trying to prove our impacts as time went by.”

Response:

Whilst VICSES does not have a VICSES Unit located with the Pyrenees Shire Council area, the community has consistently been served well by VICSES Maryborough, St Arnaud, Ararat and Ballarat Units.

During the floods of 2022, these VICSES Units responded to around 90 Requests For Assistance, including when access to Lexton was cut by flood waters and to Avoca even when it was cut off from the south, SES crews from Stawell, Ararat and St Arnaud Units were able to support flooding impact within this community.

The complex nature of the record flooding that was experienced across such a large area of the state meant that emergency service resources had to be constantly re-evaluated and moved to where the greatest risk was at the time, and this included where Incident Control Centres were operating from.

Please refer to response for Question 6 for information relating to Rapid Impact Assessments.

32. Question Asked:

The Rochester community had to manage the initial flood response without any formal assistance for approximately a week. Why did it take so long to get assistance to Rochester?

Rochester hearing transcript, page 7-9:

“That first week it was us here on our own, and we watched Chinook helicopters fly overhead to Echuca.”

“And after several days we did have 10 members of the ADF come here, and they were providing some assistance... That was several days into that first week, but outside of that there was no other formal assistance.”

Response:

Duplicated question. Please see response at Question 17.

ADDITIONAL QONS

To: Emergency Recovery Victoria

33. Question Asked:

We have heard from multiple communities about the challenges individuals encountered when trying to apply for emergency relief grants, due to the exclusive online application process, which was hindered by a lack of available telecommunications. Why weren't portable emergency cellular towers deployed in these towns to facilitate connectivity?

Response:

Emergency relief grants are not administered by Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV). ERV is not in a position to answer this question for the Committee. ERV advises that this question may be best addressed by the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).

Decisions regarding the deployment of portable emergency cellular towers is a decision of the incident controller and the regional relief coordinator (DFFH).

Supplementary Q: What processes will you change to prevent a recurrence of this situation in the future, and how will you provide assistance to individuals who are not computer literate?

Response:

Emergency relief grants are not administered by ERV. ERV is not in a position to answer this question for the Committee. ERV advises that this question may be best addressed by DFFH.

34. Question Asked:

Johns Lyng Group arrived in Rochester several weeks after the flood to aid in the cleanup. By the time they arrived, most houses had already been cleared of debris. What measures are being taken to expedite the appointment process for future events?

Response:

The Clean Up Panel was activated during the response phase, and Johns Lyng Group (JLG) were on the ground two days after the flood water began to recede.

JLG engaged local contractors where they conducted the Street Debris Program in Rochester, picking up flood debris and waste from property owners' kerbside.

The Clean Up Program also cleaned up the rubbish dumping site in Rochester that had accumulated flood waste.

35. Question Asked:

Has there been an assessment conducted to address the difficulty in attracting professional support workers, specifically mental health professionals, to communities as a result of the constraints imposed by short-term contracts?

Response:

Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV) is not the recovery lead agency for mental health services and cannot answer this question for the Committee. ERV advises that this question may be best addressed by the Department of Health.

Supplementary Q: What strategies is ERV planning to utilise to attract additional professional support workers, specifically mental health professionals, to communities impacted by emergencies?

Response:

ERV is not the recovery lead agency for mental health services and cannot answer this question for the Committee. ERV advises that this question may be best addressed by the Department of Health.

36. Question Asked:

Has there been a comprehensive count of homes affected by flooding in Rochester, and the degree of flooding within those homes? If so, where is the data available?

Response:

Municipal councils are the lead agency for secondary impact assessments. The Campaspe Shire Council is the owner of this information and requests for housing impact data in Rochester are recommended to be directed to the Council.