

PROOF VERSION ONLY

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

Melbourne – Tuesday 10 October 2023

MEMBERS

Sonja Terpstra – Chair

David Ettershank – Deputy Chair

Ryan Batchelor

Melina Bath

Gaelle Broad

Wendy Lovell

Samantha Ratnam

Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell

Sheena Watt

PARTICIPATING MEMBERS

John Berger

Ann-Marie Hermans

Joe McCracken

Evan Mulholland

Rachel Payne

**Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee**

WITNESSES

Cr Alan Getley, Mayor, and

Wayne O'Toole, Chief Executive Officer, Buloke Shire Council;

Kathryn Doroshenko-Pempel, Emergency Management Coordinator, and

Jane Bowker, Flood Recovery Coordinator, Pyrenees Shire Council;

Dr Graeme Emonson, Administrator, and

Kate Goldsmith, Acting Emergency Management Coordinator, Moira Shire Council; and

Cr Liam Wood, Mayor, Mildura Rural City Council.

The CHAIR: I declare open the committee's public hearing for the Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. Ryan Batchelor is an apology for today's meeting, and John Berger will be a substitute member for Mr Batchelor on committee matters today. This public hearing is for the Environment and Planning Committee, an all-party committee of the Parliament looking into the October flood event. We will be providing a report to Parliament which will include recommendations to the government. Please ensure that mobile phones have been switched to silent and that background noise is minimised.

I would like to begin this hearing by respectfully acknowledging the Aboriginal peoples, the traditional custodians of the various lands that we are gathered on today, and pay my respects to their ancestors, elders and families. I particularly welcome any elders or community members who are here today to impart their knowledge of this issue to the committee. I welcome any members of the public in the gallery and remind those in the room to please be respectful of proceedings and to remain silent at all times.

For witnesses that are appearing before us today, all evidence that is taken is protected by parliamentary privilege as provided by the *Constitution Act 1975* and provisions of the Legislative Council standing orders. Therefore the information you provide during the hearing is protected by law. You are protected against any action for what you say during this hearing, but if you go elsewhere and repeat the same things, those comments may not be protected by this privilege. Any deliberately false evidence or misleading of the committee may be considered a contempt of Parliament.

All evidence is being recorded, and you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript following the hearing. Transcripts will ultimately be made public and posted on the committee's website.

At this point I will take the opportunity to introduce myself to you, and the committee members can also introduce themselves to you. My name is Sonja Terpstra. I am the Chair of the Environment and Planning Committee. I am also a Member for the North-Eastern Metropolitan Region. Perhaps, Wendy, we could start with you and work around the table.

Wendy LOVELL: Hi, I am Wendy Lovell. I am a Member for Northern Victoria Region.

Samantha RATNAM: Good afternoon, everyone. Samantha Ratnam, Member for Northern Metropolitan Region.

David ETTERS HANK: David Ettershank, Western Metropolitan Region.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Rikkie-Lee Tyrrell, Member for Northern Victoria Region.

Melina BATH: Melina Bath. Good afternoon. Eastern Victoria Region.

John BERGER: John Berger, Southern Metropolitan Region.

Gaelle BROAD: Hi, I am Gaelle Broad, Member for Northern Victoria.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you all very much for those introductions. With that, we will now hand over to the panel. I understand each council will have about 5 minutes to make their opening remarks – I do not mind which of you want to lead off first – and then of course we will have plenty of time for committee members to then ask you questions. I am just going to perhaps start with Buloke shire. Maybe you might like to lead off with your opening remarks of about 5 minutes, and then we will just work through the list. Thanks.

Alan GETLEY: Thank you. On behalf of the Buloke shire I would like to thank the Chair and the committee for the opportunity to provide evidence at today's hearing. As a result of the October flood emergency in 2022, the Buloke shire road network has been severely impacted by flooding and detours, with over 80 council-managed roads – sealed and unsealed gravel roads – closed within Buloke and a major detour off the Calder Highway, with large vehicles being diverted onto our local road network. At the time of writing, the total cost of the immediate damage to the council road network, following AGRN 1037, is estimated at \$32 million, excluding costs associated with counter-disaster operations. The true damage to the road network will only be realised in the future, outside the window within which the council can apply for DRFA funding. The fact that the Buloke Shire Council fully redeployed all its works, operational project delivery and asset engineering staff to emergency and immediate works from October 2022 until April 2023 means that the regular maintenance program required under the council's asset renewal and maintenance program was postponed, ultimately adding more degradation to the council's extensive road network.

It is imperative that government understand the long-term effects of the impairment. Our most recent condition assessment has established the following: abnormal degradation of approximately \$3.1 million across our gravel network, abnormal degradation of approximately \$17 million across our sealed network and 246 kilometres of unclaimable shoulder rehabilitation works valued at \$3 million. Significant damage from the floodwaters has had and will continue to have a major impact on the agricultural community, including through significant crop losses throughout the shire that have caused financial and mental health concerns within our community. Numerous community events were required to be cancelled throughout the shire during the Buloke flood emergency, including but not limited to the Mount Wycheproof cup horserace, the Wycheproof stock sale, Birchip B & S ball, the Charlton show and a range of other community events. It is anticipated that there will be significant infrastructure, economic, agricultural and social impacts to the community in Buloke as a consequence of the October flood event for many years to come.

The Buloke shire welcomes the Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. This investigation recognises that disasters can deeply impact people's lives and livelihoods and that helping communities recover from disasters can be challenging and complex. Every community is unique and will have its own history, values and experiences. Without a whole-of-government approach to preparedness, response and recovery, events will continue to stretch agencies, local authorities and communities beyond their capacity. I would like to speak to how some of the key issues relating to the terms of reference impacted the Buloke community.

Advocacy and effectiveness of early warning systems: the process of the early warning system for the Buloke shire appeared to be ad hoc at best and informal and inconsistent with what was actually happening on the ground. This resulted in wildly fluctuating advice in the week prior to the event, which made mitigation, planning and effective execution of response efforts incredibly challenging. The VicEmergency app is customer focused and not detailed enough for specific localities and councils to use effectively in an emergency response. The VicRoads website was unable to update in real time, or indeed even close to real time, causing major issues with references to detours and council-closed roads.

The CHAIR: I will just let you know you have 1 minute left on your 5-minute opening remarks.

Alan GETLEY: Rightio, thank you. Resourcing of the SES: in prior Victorian inquiries emergency management and the need for joint agency responses have been recognised and highlighted as necessary for emergency management preparation and response. The creation of silos that impacted the same in the midst of the emergency was keenly felt within Buloke shire and with over-reliance on local volunteers stretched the local agencies beyond capacity. It is noted that VICSES volunteers were available to support the Buloke shire.

Betterment: council was very pleased to receive \$1 million in betterment funding and this will go some way to improve infrastructure and avoid repeated damage across the municipality. Council estimates that we require \$6 million over a two-year period for these purposes. I thank you for your time.

The CHAIR: Thank you very much for that. We might go to the Pyrenees Shire Council next perhaps. Over to you.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Good afternoon, everybody. My name is Kathryn Doroshenko-Pempel from the Pyrenees shire. I would like to extend our apologies for the senior leadership team that were unable to come today due to conflicting commitments. Being such a small council, sometimes we all have to step in and do our bit, so Jane and I are here today to deliver our story basically.

What I thought I might open with is my role as the Emergency Management Coordinator. I was also hands on during the flooding event of October. The Pyrenees shire is located in the south-west in the Grampians region as per the emergency management planning arrangements. We are located in an area that actually has four CMAs. Probably you are aware that there are multiple councils that have that same complexity. As a result, we are affected by many different flows of water during flooding. The elevation is approximately 900 metres above sea level, so that gives you an idea about the fall and how much it flows. Drainage downhill is in a rapid way and often impacts small towns and some of our major towns, being Beaufort and Avoca. It only takes a matter of hours for creeks and river systems to reach peak flood levels when the towns are located close to the waterways, and sometimes there is little time to warn and react accordingly. Towns like Lexton, Avoca, and Beaufort were all affected by those recent floods in October 2022.

The topographic factors mean that our main risk for the Pyrenees is flash flooding so that is where we are most impacted. The factors contributing to two rain events in October 2022 were: the preceding seasonal rain already had saturation point in soils so there was not much capacity for the soil to absorb much more moisture; then we had the first rain event and two weeks later we had a second rain event, and it was a short duration of heavy rain, and again that sort of rain in the catchment was not draining so of course there was a second lot of flooding and often to the same properties that were already impacted. The impact of flash flooding was felt throughout the shire in many small towns like Lexton, as I said, and larger towns like Avoca and Beaufort because they are close to those river systems and drainage systems. One of the most important factors, like most people have mentioned, is the impact to roads and the road networks, which allow access to the towns for people coming and going, evacuating and for emergency response. They quickly became impacted and created concerns for us and for the agencies that were trying to respond in that response phase.

Residents became landlocked in their properties – there are a lot of agricultural and rural properties – and sometimes some of the towns were cut off for short periods of time. Obviously, as the water receded, the roads became open and we were able to get in there and assess them accordingly, because that was probably a critical point to work out whether those roads were actually passable and to get that information out to the public and out to the agencies.

The next point I would like to outline are the concerns the residents shared during the SIA process, which is the secondary impact assessment. Not having an SES located in the shire did create some logistical problems in that resourcing had to be drawn from a number of different areas outside the shire. These resources left the shire fairly quickly after giving some assistance given that they probably had to respond to situations within their own shire. No local knowledge meant conversations about further assistance were limited as the SES had no information to share with the residents at the time of their attendance during the response. We believe this may be a contributing factor to the quality of the data received in the final RIA report from the SES, which was well after the event transition to recovery so we did not actually even get a proper handover for quite a few weeks if not a month after the event.

The CHAIR: You have 1 minute left on your opening remarks.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: I will hand to you.

Jane BOWKER: Thank you. I am Jane Bowker, Pyrenees shire Flood Recovery Coordinator. With 1 minute left, I will just go through some of the recommendations that we are looking for. One is around the disaster recovery funding arrangements. We are recommending some more assessment officers are employed for a quicker turnaround of the approval process, and we are looking for possible funding for the pre photos, because we have to have a series of photos for the claims. We are looking for the funding around there which has to happen every four years, I believe, and we are doing a three- to four-year rolling process of the photos.

We are looking for either the state to fund those photos or organise a contractor to possibly do those photos on our behalf.

The other one is around betterment. We really appreciate that we have received betterment and we would like to see that continue for future events. But we would like it at an earlier point in time if possible, so we can coordinate the works we have to go out and do with those betterment works for a better process.

The CHAIR: Okay, thank you. Your time has expired, but no doubt we will get plenty of time to ask you questions. We will come back around but your time has expired for now.

Jane BOWKER: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Perhaps we will move on to Moira shire. Over to you, Moira shire: 5 minutes opening remarks, thank you.

Graeme EMONSON: Thank you, Chair and committee members, for the opportunity to present today. I am joined today by Kate Goldsmith. Kate is our Acting Emergency Management Coordinator. I am a very recent appointment as an Administrator at Moira, but Kate has the lived experience of being deeply activated throughout the 2022 flood event, so I am delighted to have Kate here to share some of her experience today.

I want to highlight at the outset that Moira participated in a very detailed joint submission of the Murray region group of councils and that comprises Campaspe, Loddon, Mildura, Gannawarra, Swan Hill and Moira. I am not going to repeat much of the content of the joint submission today. It is very detailed, and I know has been made available to the committee. It is a really useful resource and does well capture many of the issues and areas of concern to Moira.

I also would highlight though that Mitchell, Murrindindi, Strathbogie and Moira commissioned Deloitte Access Economics to do an impact assessment. When I say impact, I mean social, financial and economic costs of the flood event in 2022. They estimated that the damage alone across those four municipalities is more than \$430 million and that the impact, though, will have a very long tail. They also estimate that in the period of 2022 to 2030 we should expect to see a decrease of gross regional product of more than \$600 million and on average across that eight-year reporting period a loss or decrease in employment numbers of something like 580 lost jobs as a direct result of the impact of the floods. By any measure this is a really significant impact for Moira and the broader region. Moira, by way of context, is bordered by the Murray River. It stretches from Bundalong in the east to Barmah in the west. We have the major towns of Cobram, Nathalia, Numurkah and Yarrawonga, but importantly, we also have 20 smaller townships or settlements that make up Moira. We are bounded by the Murray, the Goulburn, the Ovens, the Broken and the Boosey creeks and the Muckatah depression, all really significant waterways that are a key feature of Moira. Given that we are a very flat terrain, the extent of the waterways network and the significance of some of those rivers mean that flooding is a really significant impact for us, particularly in the agriculture sector. Agriculture in Moira contributes about 40 per cent of the total GRP of over \$1.6 billion, so agriculture is a very significant economic contributor and driver for our region, which means that overland flooding is a really significant economic impact for us.

We had over 70 per cent of our land mass impacted by the 2022 flood event. Significant waterways spilled out over a very flat terrain, about 70 per cent affected by floodwaters, which is really significant. The total production loss across the agriculture sector was estimated in that year alone at \$75 million, and tourism is another significant economic driver for us. We had 88 per cent of our businesses experiencing tourist cancellations. Interestingly, 34 per cent of those businesses indicated to us at that time that they would have difficulty surviving without financial assistance. So the impact of the floods on our tourism sector was really significant. Domestic visitor numbers declined by about 22 per cent in 2022, so a really significant impact across the year.

In terms of council's impact – our own infrastructure – we expect the cost of the damage bill to be around \$17 million, but as other council colleagues here today have indicated, that is still unravelling. We are still finding damage, and some of that will become clearer over the longer period.

The CHAIR: You have 1 minute left on your opening remarks.

Graeme EMONSON: Sure. Thank you, Chair. We are not as severely impacted as some of our neighbouring municipalities, but a \$17 million minimum repair bill for our infrastructure is a really significant cost impact for us, which will take many years for us to accommodate. We have got a really extensive recovery action plan underway, and I am really pleased to say that we are well advanced in the implementation of that recovery plan. The restoration of infrastructure assets is proving difficult – contractors, skill shortages, being able to get onsite. We had 100 mms of rain again last week in some of our areas, so physically being able to do the restoration in that environment of contractor and skill shortages is really significant. I do want to highlight the issue of building back better. Others have mentioned it and I will not dwell on it, but for the purposes of resilience and efficiency going forward – resilience of communities and infrastructure – building back better is really, really critical and more energy and effort needs to be contributed.

The CHAIR: Thank you, Graeme, your time has expired.

Graeme EMONSON: Chair, I will wind up there, thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Okay, over to Mildura.

Liam WOOD : This is always the issue: when you speak last, everyone has stolen all of your good ideas.

Melina BATH: Reiterate them.

Liam WOOD : That is right. I will just chat quickly about Mildura. Obviously, Mildura city council is one-tenth the size of Victoria and is the largest LGA in Australia for agricultural output. Not many people think when you have a flood that you have water issues with watering agriculture and things like that, but obviously assets and pumps and everything have to be taken out. Our damage bill just from infrastructure directly and tourism is around \$30 million, and as everyone else was talking about, the rest of it is not quantifiable about the agriculture and obviously ongoing maintenance and infrastructure of roads, because we just do not know the true effect of them at the moment. I think that is what everyone has said on the table as well, that the small window of opportunity to actually get these submissions in is a real issue, because 12 to 18 months later we do not know the subsurfaces of the roads et cetera. I think the scrutiny and how tight the submissions are is a real issue as well. Also, I think it really needs to be sometimes site specific because just one of our projects, which was actually in the submission, is a pathway from one of our caravan parks to our town, which is hugely used by everyone for social reasons, health reasons and as a connector. That is valued at about \$1.7 million to fix. That sits outside the scope, and obviously if that is unfunded we have to find \$1.7 million in our budget, which knocks out about five or six projects already in our capital works. So the flow-on effect is massive.

Flood damage will not always be evident. As I was saying before, for example, underlying roads – 12 to 18 months, and there needs to be further consideration that caters for damage identified in the longer term. Obviously, we have spoken before about the scrutiny of the before photos. I do not think anyone really in any of our regions would have before photos of those things. Also the lack of flood recovery support for indirect damage caused by the flood event – an example is damaged roads caused by trucks travelling to build levee banks. These roads were not flooded but were damaged by trucks to combat the floods. One example: we had a levee that had to be built in 14 days – 90,000 cubic metres, or the equivalent of 2000 trucks travelling over 14 days on non-specified roads that are not affected by floods but have just completely buckled in our suburban areas.

The insurance caps are another huge one. Along our riverfront is our most important area. We have gone from \$20 million down to \$2 million, so we cannot even actually insure the infrastructure that we have got there. Supply lines are another huge one. Obviously flooding across the state makes sure that trucks will find whatever way they can actually go, so they were rerouted onto other roads that were not specifically used for trucks. In regard to our specific damages we had sealed roads 23 kilometres, unsealed 44 kilometres, 12 kilometres of footpaths and also multiple drains and stormwater systems that were impacted across that.

The biggest thing I think that I really want to harp on is the lack of economic stimulus funding following the floods for Victoria. For a very site-specific example, once the floods had gone through South Australia there were travel vouchers, Fringe Festival events were moved to those flood-affected areas and they bounced back very quickly. At one point they were actually advertising in our local paper, which was a real kick in the guts, but they are absolutely thriving at the moment. We put in a submission in January this year for a flood event led recovery, and we have had zero stimulus package.

The CHAIR: You have got 1 minute left.

Liam WOOD : Yes, sure. I think the prolonged effect, going from two years of COVID, bouncing back very quickly from a COVID events led recovery, we could see what that could do to our regions not only socially but economically and to people's wellbeing, getting back out and about. And then we are smashed again by a prolonged flood. We were the last cab off the rank, so our flood feels like it lasted eight to 10 months. As we have heard before, businesses are severely affected and are struggling to survive, and it is a very quick fix in that regard. Thanks very much for your time; much appreciated.

The CHAIR: Thank you all very much for those opening remarks. I know it is very challenging to get a lot of information in 5 minutes, but you all did very, very well at that task. Now we will hand over to questions from committee members, and I might invite Ms Bath to go first with a question.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I have got about 400 questions, so I will see how quickly – thank you all very much.

The CHAIR: Just so you know, we do have allocated time so that each member can get questions in.

Melina BATH: That is right. We have roughly 10 minutes. Is it about 10 minutes?

The CHAIR: Eleven.

Melina BATH: 11 minutes, okay. So just to recap: Buloke, \$32 million. So that is the bill for essential infrastructure rebuild?

Wayne O'TOOLE: That is right, and that is based on what we currently know, and we do not know everything.

Melina BATH: What you can identify – so how much of that have you had any funding or grants for?

Wayne O'TOOLE: We have had approximately \$11 million to date.

Melina BATH: Okay, so you have still got two-thirds to go. All right, let me go to Pyrenees. What was your approximate amount of essential road infrastructure cost?

Jane BOWKER: About \$8 million.

Melina BATH: \$8 million. And how much do you reckon you have got in terms of grants so far?

Jane BOWKER: We have received \$1.5 million in advancements through DRFA. So we have got about \$5.5 million –

Melina BATH: A large gap.

Jane BOWKER: Yes.

Melina BATH: Okay. And where am I going next? Moira, what was yours, did you say?

Graeme EMONSON: Our council infrastructure cost estimate is \$17 million. To date we have submitted claims under \$1 million, and obviously we are actively working in the next phases of that.

Melina BATH: Beautiful. So still again, substantial to go.

Graeme EMONSON: Absolutely.

Melina BATH: I will go to Mildura: yours?

Liam WOOD : Yes, ours is about \$18 million in direct infrastructure, and I believe it is about \$4 million that we have received.

Melina BATH: Okay. I am going to make a quick comment first before I ask a couple of questions. Pyrenees, listening to the northern regions councils and all the others that we heard – Echuca, Campaspe,

et cetera et cetera – they said, ‘Why do we need all these photos in the first place?’ You are saying that you need help and funding because the parameter is set this high. In the 2011 floods there was not the requirement for photos every 500 metres before and after. I mean, it is mind-blowing, to my mind, how challenging that is. You might want to make a quick comment on that.

Jane BOWKER: Yes, and that is exactly right. We have done a rolling program every three years to have the photos done, and luckily we had them done before the floods came in, so that has helped us immensely. But it is the time taken to go and retrieve those photos and then upload them into the system. So for each claim that we do we are looking at about 1 to 1½ hours for each line item of each claim, and that includes the photos and uploading any costings. And when we have put in I think nine claims and each one could be anywhere between 17 and 74 line items, it is really time consuming. But we were looking for help for the photos, funding for those photos, if it has got to be done every four years, either through being provided funding for those photos or whether it is something that the governments can roll out and get a contractor to do all the photos and then we will have dual access to those photos, to just assist with our funding.

Melina BATH: If you looked at the cost impost on councils to do that, it would be interesting to quantify the cost impost net the benefit. And this is not being disrespectful to the process, but is there an idea that you might be fudging it and the roads are really fabulous? Is that the theory? If you made a recommendation back to us as a collective here, if I open it up to the floor, what would you say in relation to the onerous task? What is a fair and appropriate level of accountability to get those grants?

Liam WOOD: I would think, to start off with, no council is ever trying to be untruthful about the process. So a level of respect about what is going on is probably number one for me.

Melina BATH: Point one.

Graeme EMONSON: Yes, the administrative task involved here is disproportionate to the effort that is required. In my mind, it would not take a lot of imagination to be able to come up with a sampling cost estimate process that you could universally apply across different road substructures and climates. You could have sample cost rehabilitation frameworks without this requirement for almost every road across Victoria being photographed every four years. It just seems an administratively disproportionate burden that could be quite easily, in my mind, administratively simplified with a templated approach across different types of road infrastructures.

Melina BATH: Sure. And there is almost a net loss in your resources in directing all this focus to do that. You are not doing other things, other valued services.

Graeme EMONSON: Sure. Yes.

Melina BATH: I am going to go to Buloke now. Once upon a long time ago, in about 2015–16, we had a thing called a rate-capping inquiry, and Buloke stood out as being one of the smallest rate revenues – a small number of people, a large area. You were always struggling, and there was a lack of ability to gain parking meters et cetera. It always stands out. You are always doing it tough, Buloke, punching above your weight.

I am interested in decommissioning channel systems. Now, you have put that in your submission. I think it might be an anomaly to you or specific to you. Well, you have got 3 minutes, 2 minutes – can you give a recommendation back to us just to outline what you are talking about in this submission?

Wayne O’TOOLE: When the pipelines were put through, some of that channel system that went throughout that region was all decommissioned, so it was all –

Melina BATH: Years ago.

Wayne O’TOOLE: Well, not that long ago, probably in the last sort of three to five years. So as a result, where stormwater would go along those channels and then would be dispersed, all that infrastructure is now gone. So then that water is still looking for somewhere to go, and as a result you have got water going across the land rather than just, you know, up and down the river systems. So that is sort of causing issues where there are floodwaters in places where we simply have not seen floodwaters before, because that channel system did a job and it no longer does because it does not exist.

Melina BATH: So what is a recommendation back to us? What would you want to see done?

Wayne O'TOOLE: I would suggest, within the flood studies that need to be done certainly across Buloke – and we are also within three CMAs – looking at how drainage systems and stormwater systems would then be able to manage those sorts of flood events, bearing in mind we have had four one-in-60 flood events in the last 11 years.

Melina BATH: Fantastic. Thank you. And I am not trying to rush, I am just trying to get the maximum amount in my time lot. The Nationals had our regional professional development in January. And I walked with Gaille along the lovely river, but the tracks and pathways were decimated. They were covered. They had bollards. And it is a tourist town. That is why I would go there, not to work per se but for tourism. You mentioned that infrastructure funding, to pull back. You have said there have been no leads or no response. I think Jade Benham might have written on your behalf. Have you had any response?

Liam WOOD: Not as yet. We have written to both Murray Watt and Jaclyn Symes, and we are waiting for an exemption. This is the chat between state and federal. It sounds very promising from a federal level, but you have to get an exemption from the state level because it is not deemed a critical asset. But as I said before, we very much see it as a critical asset.

Melina BATH: It is particularly a tourism connection.

Liam WOOD: It is a connection point, and as I said, you cannot put a quantifiable figure on health and wellbeing and the rest of it. As I said, tourism is a huge one. But it is simply not on the radar, and as I said, we are either going to have to think of knocking out five other projects to do it or it is going to be put on the backburner for, you know, years to come.

Melina BATH: Yes, okay. And my next questions go to – we heard this in Seymour about information. This is at the ICC, incident control centre. I think, Buloke, you have referenced it, but I think, Pyrenees, you might have too, about that information. So Graeme is on. He is about to clock off, and Liam is going to take over. If there is not that good transfer of information – the community coming into the ICC or ringing in – there can be a loss of information and therefore a loss of time when time is critical. Who wanted to speak to that? Anybody could – Buloke as well. Thanks, Alan.

Alan GETLEY: I would just speak to that. The Avoca River comes down into Buloke. Now, we had information from farmers in our area that they had had 103 millimetres of rain in an hour at Logan. And that water was never factored in to the BOM or whatever because they were not talking to farmers, not listening. Most of our farmers have really good gauges, really good information, but they could not get that information in. They were saying, 'No, it's all right. We've factored that water in. We're going to have a 6-metre flood.' But all of a sudden it turned around: 'Ooh, shit, we've got an 8-metre flood. Where's this water come from?' But we knew it was there. I knew it was there. One of my own clients – I am an estate agent by trade – rang me and said, 'Oh, we've had a hell of a lot of rain here.' But we could not get that water factored in to the BOM and the emergency people because they just were not listening. I think there is a solution there that, if they need it, farmers have got really good recording systems. They could have two or three throughout the catchment – it is a long catchment – and then we could get that information in, because we could not get that information in. We knew the water was coming. We knew it was there; we were not listened to.

Melina BATH: So some real-time monitoring but not necessarily just from a limited, say, number for you. It can come from external humans, from farmers or the like – is that what you are suggesting?

Alan GETLEY: Yes, that is correct. Yes, because there is no actual BOM recording stuff in that system. They have got no recording system there. We knew the water was there because our residents were telling us, but we could not get that water put into the system, and that is a really important issue.

Melina BATH: To have that knowledge. Did you want to say something?

Liam WOOD: Just quickly about the VICSES – they took over, and they were the lead agency for the flood period, and then there was supposed to be a transition and a downtime, and then council was supposed to do that. That happened overnight. They left, and council became the lead agency which then had to collate all the information coming from other agencies and from CMA. So that put further pressure on council, because they

left, basically, as I said, immediately, when there was supposed to be a transition period and a takeover period, which I think you mentioned before.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes.

Melina BATH: Why was that? That was what I was going to ask you about.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: The rapid impact assessment must be done, and there is a formal transfer –

The CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Bath and witness, order. Your time has expired, so I will move to the next committee member for questions. Ms Lovell, a question, thanks.

Wendy LOVELL: Thank you. Moira shire, I am really interested in the southern section of your shire around Kaarimba and the damage that happened there due to Goulburn–Murray Water not pulling the bars on Loch Garry quick enough and the Goulburn–Murray Water owned levee banks blowing out, which flooded most of Kaarimba and Bunbartha. There was water sitting still on Sandilands Road in mid-February. I am interested in the extensive damage that happened in that area, to people who were not in a flood plain, and what seemed to be the lack of drainage to get rid of that water post the flooding event as well – if you could just explain to us what went wrong in that area, please.

Graeme EMONSON: Sure. I might defer to Kate, who was on the ground at the time. I am not sure, Kate, whether you have got any specific details in relation to that particular area?

Kate GOLDSMITH: I cannot give too many specifics, because I do not have the background in drainage infrastructure – that is not my area of expertise. But you are correct, they were heavily impacted in that region. There were a number of properties that were inundated for quite some time, and a number of our roads were inundated for a significant number of weeks.

Wendy LOVELL: Months.

Kate GOLDSMITH: Yes, nearly eight weeks for some of those roads, and there were certainly some heavily impacted farmers with their crops, and residential houses as well.

Wendy LOVELL: So has the council looked at the infrastructure that has been built in that area – the Goulburn–Murray Water channels et cetera – that the farmers are telling me is the reason that the water was not draining from the area?

Graeme EMONSON: Our infrastructure engineers, Member, would have that detail. We might need to take that on notice today. We do not have that information in front of us, but I would be very, very confident that our infrastructure engineers have a view on that, and we would certainly be happy to take that on notice and come back to the committee.

Wendy LOVELL: Thank you. Liam, Mildura seemed to be the forgotten flooded community, because by the time the water got to you the media circus had moved on and they had started to concentrate on state elections rather than what was happening as the water moved past – beyond Echuca really. The impact on your community from just feeling left out and forgotten – did you have enough attention from the state government in concentrating on what was happening in Mildura at the time of the emergency?

Liam WOOD: Yes, I think the real issue for us was, as I said, it was such a prolonged – it was like standing in front of a train for a long period of time, because obviously the flood-affected areas upstream were creating quite a bit of angst within the community waiting for it to come, but also the fact that it heavily affected tourism, like many have spoken about, for such a long period of time. We were operating as normal as a community, but we were getting none of that influx that we usually get at our peak time, so that really hurt us, not only economically but emotionally as well. Then probably the small nail in the coffin was when Albanese flew into our airport and then drove on to Renmark, and they had not even been hit by floods yet and we were well amongst it. But that type of situation, yes –

Wendy LOVELL: Demoralising.

Liam WOOD: Very much so, when we know it is coming – everyone knows it is coming – and then to be in it and to feel largely left out or that it is not as important as it was before.

Wendy LOVELL: And the impact on your horticultural sector?

Liam WOOD: That is an ongoing issue that will take a long time to quantify, but as I said, we are the largest LGA in Australia for output. Many of the issues will come from not being able to water the agriculture during that prolonged period of time because of having to take out assets along the river, so that is a real issue and something that we are going to have to keep a close eye on. And that is just another thing adding to commodity prices, as we all know, and many other factors such as workforce as well.

One thing I will touch on that we have welcomed, though, is the CMA study into levees and ownerships. We very much welcome that, but obviously then who owns them and what the upkeep is is a real issue. If it is to be put on council, then there will have to be, unfortunately, an abundance of funding for that because they are such a huge infrastructure asset.

Wendy LOVELL: Yes. And Buloke, you have had two floods – probably neither of you were there at the time – in relatively recent history, in 2011 and now 2023. The impact of the 2011 flood – I can remember walking through raw sewage in the Charlton hospital; it was just awful. The response from government to the two different flood events – do you feel that you have had the same level of support? Has there been less support?

Alan GETLEY: I think in 2011, and I was there –

Wendy LOVELL: You were there?

Alan GETLEY: I was there. I have been through the lot of them – we got a lot of government support. Obviously, we got a new hospital out of that, as you are probably fully aware, and a new trade trading centre, because the damage was so great. We dodged the bullet in Charlton in 2022, simply because this fellow here and my predecessor mayor listened to the public, and they were able to knock down some private infrastructure, dams that were pushing water into Charlton. Instead of having an 8.05-metre flood, which would have put 140 houses underwater, we were able to knock those dams out, let the water go, and we only ended up with 7.87 and only ended up with four homes underwater and a couple of –

Wendy LOVELL: That is wonderful.

Alan GETLEY: Because we were able to listen to local knowledge, we did not require the same level of support in 2022 for the town as we did in 2011 – because in 2011, as you are aware, 80 per cent of Charlton went underwater, and some to a considerable depth. So we did not require the same level, but I suppose the downside is that we have now got the infrastructure damage and the road network damage. As our friend from Mildura said, the trucks had to get through. They found a way through, but that was to the detriment of our local roads. We are putting B-doubles on roads that can take a 14-tonne grain truck, and that, you know, has done a lot of damage that we are still seeking funding now to recover from.

Wayne O'TOOLE: And if I may, just to add on to the role of the SES, certainly for us in Buloke where there are no volunteers within the SES, for us then to be the lead agency is simply an unreasonable request for them to be able to do that. But the impact of not having any volunteers to be able to undertake that role meant council took the lead, and we are not equipped nor funded nor resourced nor whatever to be able to do that, particularly over a sustained period of time. So that certainly impacted on staff particularly, but also on the ability for us to be able to deliver that relief and recovery service to the community.

Wendy LOVELL: And that is not something that you are isolated in too. We have heard that from a number of communities about the SES, because they are volunteers too. Their houses were under threat, and they were trying to sandbag for themselves but also trying to do their best for the community and doorknock and warn others. So there needs to be some better system.

Wayne O'TOOLE: That is right. Certainly for us the SES is not best equipped to be the lead agency in Buloke, because they just do not have the people.

Alan GETLEY: Or the ability to get there once the water hits, because we are an island – you cannot get in; you cannot get out. You have got no way in. So if they are not there, we are stuffed.

Liam WOOD: And I think greater communication cross-border as well is really important. Mildura City Council and Wentworth council shared many trucks and graders and things like that because we had to, but the communication probably from a state level was lacking.

Wendy LOVELL: Yes, I think that is something only those of us who live on the border fully understand, those cross-border issues. It is something that needs a focus.

Liam WOOD: It is the one river.

Wendy LOVELL: Yes, one river and one community.

Liam WOOD: It floods on both sides.

Graeme EMONSON: Yes, that issue is a particular issue for Moira as well. We have got Cobram–Barooga, Yarrawonga and Mulwala. The protocols and the understanding of this, working closely with our New South Wales counterpart councils, are really critical. Those communities operate as one, and we need in these crisis times to be able to operate seamlessly. So I would reinforce the Mayor of Mildura's view around that – that understanding and working across the border is really critical.

Wendy LOVELL: Yes. When Liam spoke about the recovery for the tourism in South Australia, it just reminded me of COVID, where we had the gyms in Barooga advertising 'Come and do your exercise with us', but the gyms in Cobram were closed down and forced to close down, and the difficulties that that imposed on small businesses was really hard.

Liam WOOD: The funny thing is as well – we were obviously building the Mildura Sporting Precinct at the same time, and our major construction company that was doing that, many of them lived on the Wentworth side of the river. We were under funding pressure from something totally away from floods because we had to meet funding agreements and time lines, but that construction company was dealing with their houses going under. It just adds another layer of complexity.

Wendy LOVELL: I think the best way of making Melbourne people understand is saying it is like one side of Hoddle Street or the other, and you have got a whole different set of road rules and a whole different registration system for tradies. It is just incredible, the cross-border issues.

The CHAIR: All right. Thanks. Anything further, Ms Lovell?

Wendy LOVELL: No. You can pass on to the next one.

The CHAIR: Great. All right. Thank you. We will move to Ms Broad for questions.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you very much. Thank you all for making the effort to be here today. We do really appreciate it. You have talked about the funding shortfall that you have got at the moment – huge costs, not a whole lot coming back in. What is the practical impact of that in your shires? What does that mean, that delay in time frame? Do you want to start?

Graeme EMONSON: The delay largely is a cashflow issue for us. We do not have the rate bases and therefore cash holdings that some of the larger metropolitan councils particularly would have, so budgeting is pretty tight in rural and regional councils. To be undertaking significant restoration with a lag time of funding reimbursement is a significant financial drain for rural councils, and we need to manage that. We are going to need to manage the flow of works with expectations and forecasts of when we will receive grant funding to make sure we are managing our cash flow. It will also mean that some other capital projects particularly will probably be delayed, or deferred potentially, to ensure that we can manage our financial arrangements from a cashflow perspective. It does not mean those projects will never happen, but we will need to be carefully managing our cash, because cash going out and cash coming in obviously is a really critical issue for councils with smaller rate bases.

Gaëlle BROAD: Okay. But you have not had guarantees that that will all be covered yet.

Graeme EMONSON: No guarantees. We are confident that we are going to be able to demonstrate and meet the criteria, but there is a time lag associated with committing the works, undertaking the works and receiving grant funding.

Gaëlle BROAD: Okay. And Mildura, I guess you would have similar concerns.

Liam WOOD: Yes. I think there is actually a real threat of some capital works not actually happening at all. We have seen cost blowouts increase dramatically over the last two years. We have got an adventure playground. Touch wood, luckily, it was not – we were actually putting it down at the riverfront, and just because of delays in what actually happened, we did not actually build it there. Thank God we did not, because we would have lost it. But that started off at about \$600,000, and we funded for that. We have gone back to it, and it is now \$1.4 million. Those are the type of issues when you are trying to get necessary infrastructure such as roads and footpaths – those ones that are really integral to the wellbeing of the community can actually not be built at all.

Gaëlle BROAD: Yes. Okay.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Agreed. I think it is the business-as-usual stuff, so it is just the commitments we make through council plan and annual plan that just have simply not been delivered within that time frame. But critically for us as we are coming into yet another harvest season all of those roads have not been repaired, so they are not in the sort of condition to carry 50- or 60-tonne vehicles across them. They are only going to get worse; they are not going to get better. That is the real impact for us.

Gaëlle BROAD: That is having a practical impact on the businesses there, on the farmers not being able to use those roads or having to go round longer.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, that is right. And farmers will find a way, so they are going down other roads that they simply should not be travelling down, because this is food security. This is about getting food onto the plate. They are carrying grain. It is important to them. And whilst we understand that, the lack of money coming through means we do not have the cashflow to be able to pay to repair those roads. We are waiting for that external money to arrive so we can do the work. It has not arrived, the work has not been done.

Gaëlle BROAD: No, that is fair enough. And Pyrenees?

Jane BOWKER: We have got a total budget of \$25 million at Pyrenees.

Gaëlle BROAD: Jeepers.

Jane BOWKER: So \$7 million worth of works takes a big chunk out of that budget. I mean, we appreciated the funding that we got through the Council Flood Support Fund and the community recovery officer funding to be able to have funds to engage staff members to go and do those works. We have also got money through the recovery hub funding and then the DRFA advancement, so that has been appreciated. But it does put a huge strain on our staffing and business as usual as you were talking about before. We are finding the longer that some of the roadworks are stretched out, the worse the damage is becoming as time is going on. That is putting up the cost of the actual works. What might be a small part of the road that is –

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Impacted.

Jane BOWKER: impacted, with time that goes on that we do not get funding to go and get those works done as quickly as we would like to, the damage gets a bit worse just with cars travelling over and other rain and weather events. We are finding that costs are going up more. What might have been our \$7 million costs might blow out even in 12 months time.

Gaëlle BROAD: Okay. Now, you mentioned betterment, and there seemed to be agreement across the table that you were keen to see that. I guess as far as percentages go, the betterment funding compared to your other funding, I guess I am just interested in that. And how long did it take for you to get access to betterment? I guess we are looking at recommendations for the future. Are you all wanting to see betterment earlier in the process and a lot easier to access? Just your comments or thoughts on that. Do you want to start?

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, absolutely. I think that it is key to us being able to put the infrastructure back better than it was. With another event that will invariably come, then hopefully that infrastructure will not be as impacted as it has been over and over again, as I say, four times in 11 years. That infrastructure keeps getting impacted, so with that betterment funding becoming available, then hopefully we can mitigate that as much as possible subject to the event.

Gaelle BROAD: How long did it take for you to get access to betterment funding?

Alan GETLEY: Ten months – about 10 months.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, something like that. This was not the first time we had been talking about it of course, so probably that sort of time frame. Equally for us within our roads network is that we have a lot of 4-metre seal across our network. That was fine 40 to 50 years ago with a 6-tonne Bedford truck carrying a few bales of hay, but we have got road trains going down some of these roads now. And the minute they get off the seal and onto the shoulders, then that road is completely undermined.

Gaelle BROAD: Did anyone else want to make a comment about that?

Graeme EMONSON: Perhaps a general comment in terms of build back better – at the moment the current arrangements are it is almost something that needs to be considered in addition to. In the ideal world the rule would be that building back better would be actually the default position –

Gaelle BROAD: Preferred option.

Graeme EMONSON: not 'We will give you something and then you have to beg for betterment.' Betterment should actually be built into the first default arrangement. The reason I say that is it is actually not only an inefficient approach to managing infrastructure, but there is a really significant psychological impact here in terms of resilience of both infrastructure and the communities. If communities know we are just going to build something back to the way it was and it will be destroyed in the next one-in-20-year flood again, there is actually a psychological trauma that is associated with that. If you can show and demonstrate to communities that you are building back better, it will be resilient next time, there is a really significant positive psychological impact to the community as well.

Gaelle BROAD: You have given insights into councils and your grant process. You guys have also been involved in that recovery process for people on the ground. Have you got any comment about the grants for individuals, for businesses and farmers, about that process and what could be perhaps improved next time?

Alan GETLEY: Just to talk on the farmers' side of it, obviously we are a huge agricultural area, as you are aware. The farm grants came out right in the middle of a big harvest and, quite frankly, farmers were telling us when they were talking with us that they have not got the time. They just do not have time to do the paperwork and fill it all in – we have got 2 million bucks worth of canola to get off and get into the silo. We do not have time. And we have got fences down, and we have got silos knocked over. We do not have time. It is too onerous on them and too time consuming and they just do not have time to do it in the time frame for the farming grants. That is just from the farming perspective.

Gaelle BROAD: That is helpful. Kate, did you have a comment?

Kate GOLDSMITH: We have the exact same issue that the farmers were saying, the exact same thing; it is a significant amount of time to complete those applications. We had a similar situation: there were people that did not have their crops impacted, but they could not get their trucks into the roads, because they were impacted, to get their crops off, and then they had no hope of filling out the paperwork to claim the expenses. And is that claimable – if their crops are actually still standing and they are harvestable but they cannot get to them? The other impact was the milk tankers. They are still milking their cows in whatever capacity they can, but we cannot get the milk tanker to get to them, or over the border into New South Wales or Victoria. Is that claimable, if the milk cannot get to the –

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: It is a big issue, that one.

Liam WOOD: And I think that comes back to the betterment as well, about supply lines. Not having the roads to get agriculture and industry to metro affects everyone.

Gaëlle BROAD: I have also got a question for the Pyrenees. My understanding is that there has been a levee proposed as part of the flood mitigation project, but works have not commenced on that. Has there been progress in that regard?

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: This is the rec reserve.

Jane BOWKER: We have got two community assets. We put our applications in under the resilient funding, I think it is, just to look at the mitigation options around our Avoca Recreation Reserve, because that always just gets flooded – every time we get a certain amount of rain, it always gets flooded – so there are rebuilding costs there, and also around our Lake Goldsmith steam rally site, which has huge tourism impacts on our community. That got flooded, so that was not able to run, our steam rally, which – the cost of tourism for them is devastating. So we have put in applications for looking at them. They both come under flood studies, so they are recognised areas for further investigation into levees around or what the better options are for those two sites.

Gaëlle BROAD: Okay. So there would be some –

The CHAIR: Thank you. Sorry, Mrs Broad, your time has expired. If we have got more time at the end, we can come back around for another round.

Gaëlle BROAD: Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIR: Mrs Tyrrell, question.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Yes. So Buloke, you were mentioning before the filling in of the channels and how farmers are not being heard, especially when it comes to – well, not not being heard, but their message is not getting across. How much community consultation was done prior to the channels being filled in?

Wayne O'TOOLE: My understanding would be: not a lot.

Alan GETLEY: Yes, not a great deal. I mean, the Wimmera–Mallee pipeline came through, and that has been a godsend for our region. But the channel system used to provide water to farm dams – that was their drink. The channels were decommissioned because there was no water going down them; they are not natural things. I mean, there are still some channels out in the system, but the majority of the farmers that had them, they filled them in to reclaim the land because that land then became croppable land. So community consultation: there was nothing really with GWM, they did not really consult – ‘The main feeder channel is no longer used, we don’t want to maintain them, we don’t want to have the crossings and the channel stops and the heads’; they just pulled them out, pushed them in and got rid of them. But that was over a period of years. I mean, there are still some there, but the majority of them are gone now.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: But do you think if they consulted with people, that you would have had a definite opinion to give to them?

Alan GETLEY: Probably in some of the big flooded areas where the flood came through, because they can move the water from the channels into our creeks and river system and help push it through. But that is not happening now.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: No – they are filled in.

Alan GETLEY: They are gone.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Yes. All right. This next question is for everybody, so when I am reading it, please know that I am looking at you all, individually. Do you think that a review of what agencies should take the lead in a flood situation would be of benefit for a future flood event?

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Can I comment on that?

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Yes.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Only because it was in my next section, before I got cut off.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Oh, beautiful.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: I have only been in this field of expertise for a short period of time, but when the *Emergency Management Act* changed in 2020 and put our core lead agencies in place, which was the SES with flood and storm – so we all know that the SES are recovery and rescue and assistance, but they are not in the business of monitoring, managing, mitigation. So for us, as a group we have talked about what we could possibly do to warn people, because this is the only space. You cannot control the water falling out of the sky, but you can control the information that you have – when it might come and how we might manage when it does come is obviously the CMA's. So the catchment management authority really needs to be a recognised agency, and it does not matter what LGA boundaries we are talking about; it crosses a whole catchment area. We are in a better place when we know what is happening up here and what is happening down there and we are fed into some sort of platform or IT system that we can all look into. We can all look at that data and get our experts or our people that have got that expertise to know what is happening and make assumptions, or to tap into their organisation and say, 'Right, what do you think is happening?' Let us get better at predicting and understanding the effects across the whole catchment.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Buloke?

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, I agree with that. I think roles and responsibilities for who is the lead agency, but also for the ICC as well. We have lots of really lovely strategies and documents and flow charts and all that sort of thing, but when it comes time, those things really are not looked at all that much. I think for each of the parties that are involved, we need to understand the roles and responsibilities – so, who is in charge here? Who is actually making the decisions? Who is authorising the spending of funding to break a road or build a levee or all of those sorts of things? Because it just – it happens, it is quick; someone saying, 'Yeah, just do it,' but in the end that person maybe was not authorised to be able to make that decision. So then, now who is paying? So it is all that sort of stuff. When you are in the middle of it and it is in the middle of the night, quick decisions are made and then you come back weeks later and you go, 'Oh no, we probably shouldn't have done that, because that person' – it is understanding who is doing what and who is authorised to make decisions et cetera. I think that would be very useful.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Thank you. Mildura?

Liam WOOD: I think it is also important, the longevity of how long they are in each incident. As I was saying before, they left very quickly and there are probably more questions and unanswered things after a flood than there are before it. I think everyone very much bands together and tries to get the best outcome for the community in the lead-up to the flood; it is the aftermath, when everyone starts to splinter off and go their own way and try and get their own things done – which is totally fair enough, but it would be great to see a lead agency there for many months after the actual –

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: So a debriefing, a proper debriefing – is that what you are asking for?

Liam WOOD: Well, just a go-to agency to get the clear answers, and a lot to do with funding, I suppose as well, after the incident.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Beautiful. Probably, Kate?

Kate GOLDSMITH: Yes, I think everyone has said everything we were going to bring up. I agree with all of everyone's points there. The SES did a great job for what they were able to do with the numbers of people that they have. Everyone did their utmost. In every ICC that I have been in or even just within the volunteers within our community, everyone absolutely goes above and beyond – including our own internal staff. But I do not think that it is what is best at the moment. I am not sure whether there is something that needs to be looked at in who should be that lead.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: Okay. Thank you. How much time do I have left, Chair?

The CHAIR: You have about another 6 minutes, but it is up to you how you use your time.

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I can save that for later and pass on to another at the moment. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Sure, no problem. All right. Thank you for that. We might go to Dr Ratnam.

Samantha RATNAM: Thank you, Chair. Firstly, thanks everyone for being here today; a lot of travel probably involved for a number of you. Thanks also for your written submissions, which are really comprehensive, and also for what is demonstrably a lot of care and support you provided your community in response to the flooding event, but on an everyday basis as well, so I just want to acknowledge all of your good work out there. Just picking up on some of the questioning that has been begun already by my fellow committee members, firstly, on the funding arrangements – and I think we have heard some evidence over the course of the hearings, but I just want to make sure I have got the accurate picture here – you are basically saying that to access disaster recovery funds at the moment you need to have photographic evidence for every 500 metres of the infrastructure that you might in some future term need to claim repair work for. Is that correct; is that the requirement at the moment? So all infrastructure, you have got to have photos prior to an event, that you might or might not anticipate, to be able to claim?

Okay. I know a number of councils, including yours, have talked about potentially a model of a jointly funded disaster recovery funding program, especially to be able to build back better. I understand, Buloke, you have referenced being able to access some build back better funding. Can you talk us through it? Was that an exception, or was that what you are able to access as of right now?

Wayne O'TOOLE: So we have been – there are a number of councils across that part of the region that were awarded. Some were close to about \$10 million, I think, so we got about just under \$1 million of that to be able to undertake some betterment work as part of some of the recovery reconstruction work that we are doing.

Samantha RATNAM: That is one aspect of it, but it is not, in some ways, 'as of right now' in terms of accessing the usual disaster recovery funds. Is that correct?

Wayne O'TOOLE: It was separate.

Samantha RATNAM: It is separate.

Graeme EMONSON: It was a special allocation.

Samantha RATNAM: So the pool that you ordinarily access does not allow for that betterment work, but you have to apply to this special pool for the betterment work.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, that is correct.

Samantha RATNAM: We have certainly heard from other councils that, should there be more climate disaster events, which we unfortunately anticipate there will be – more severe and more frequent – they would like to be able to access, as an ordinary mechanism, funds to be able to build back better. So that would be your view as well – that would be the wish for the system?

Graeme EMONSON: Definitely.

Samantha RATNAM: Do you all have particular views on a joint state and federally funded type of arrangement? Have you got any ideas about how the system could work better, notwithstanding the administrative issues that you have outlined very well, that needing to be streamlined and simplified so it is not too onerous? Do you have any other recommendations for that recovery funding that you would like us to note in our recommendations?

Alan GETLEY: Just probably that if we did not have to go through two levels of government or two –

Samantha RATNAM: Okay.

Alan GETLEY: I mean, that would be better, if we could just have one single thing. Wayne and I spent a week in Canberra lobbying numerous ministers for betterment, and luckily we got it. But then we have to come and deal with the state as well, and then the state hand out money from the feds. I mean, it is too complex. Money comes from the feds for the state and then to us. It should not happen.

Samantha RATNAM: Yes. Thank you. That is very clear. I am also interested in your views. What do you think the approach is, from the advocacy you have done at both the state and federal levels, and what do you think the views are about how we deal with these types of disaster events in the future and the need for

infrastructure rebuilding costs? Do you feel like there is a view that councils are just going to have to factor that into their ordinary budgeting? What is your view? Do you think there is another plan – that we should just get better at being able to administer this kind of funding? What are the expectations, do you think?

Wayne O'TOOLE: I think there are a couple of things in that. One is, yes, we do need to get better so that when we are assessing the damage we also assess the opportunity for betterment and then those two are put together. They should not be two separate processes. That seems to be what is happening now, and then that creates a gap of course. Certainly for a place like Buloke – and again, yes, we are very small with a \$30 million operating budget – we are relying on pretty much everybody else's money to be able to do that. We only have \$12 million in rates come in. To have our own money that is committed to roads, which we do anyway – we have 5000 kilometres of roads, so we commit a significant amount of our budget to that. But then with betterment that means we are not doing maintenance or upgrades to other roads that we probably should have been doing based on their condition.

Samantha RATNAM: Yes. And I guess one of the reasons I ask that question as well is that my concern is that if we do not start preparing for the future, what we are going to get is this system that in some ways invariably shifts costs. I mean, it might be deliberate or might be inadvertent, but it is just being really clear, with the likelihood of more frequent and more severe climate-driven events, about what the future is going to be for councils in terms of being able to be recompensed somewhat for the infrastructure loss. Will it be the expectation that councils just have to factor that in, or will it be a shared responsibility of all levels of government? That is the open question I have.

Liam WOOD: Yes, and I think that is the issue with the efficiencies. I think there are many councils still dealing with the 2016 floods and the 2011 floods. They were still trying to get back from there, and then there was another major floodwater. I think it is inevitable that they are going to become more frequent, whether it is flood or drought or whatever it is, and the less efficient it is or the less streamlined it is to get access to that funding, the more you are creating a lag that you are never going to be able to recover, because you are actually dealing with the next disaster while you are still dealing with the last disaster.

Samantha RATNAM: Yes. Thank you very much. Just on another line of questioning, a number of councils, including yours, have talked about statewide flood overlays. I was wondering if anybody wants to speak to why they think that would be important. What difference do you think it could make, reflecting on the 2022 experience?

Wayne O'TOOLE: Look, I think, as we are learning, each event is different and the impacts are quite different. Statewide overlays would obviously then lead to appropriate development within those areas, based on the events that are happening, plus being informed by flood studies and the like, so some of the modelling would be able to help with that. Certainly after 2011 there was some LSIO, land subject to inundation overlay, that was put into Charlton, so that then informed those local residents about what they could do and where they could do it. Statewide it just kind of, I guess, extrapolates that notion.

Samantha RATNAM: Great. Thank you. And one further question – have any of your councils been invited to participate in any formal debriefing processes with either lead emergency management response agencies or state government agencies to be able to understand your experience and particularly the lessons that you have learned about your community for future disaster preparedness?

Kate GOLDSMITH: Yes, we did. We met with the lead agency, the SES. We had a great conversation on lessons learned, and it was really informative to have those discussions.

Samantha RATNAM: Was that local or was that –

Kate GOLDSMITH: They came to us at Moira, and we met with – sorry, I would have to go back to my notes for the people that I spoke with. But they were there for probably an hour and a half, and we talked right through the event, the management and how Moira was impacted. It was great to have them come to us.

Alan GETLEY: We had the BOM and we had the catchment management authority, the SES, our council staff and local landholders that had contributed to the flood. We had a debrief and a dinner and really, really good conversations, and we were able to feed in some of that local knowledge that I was talking about before that they did not have. It was really good, and we had that after the flood.

Samantha RATNAM: Great. Did you all initiate that or was that initiated by others?

Wayne O'TOOLE: We instigated that.

Samantha RATNAM: You instigated that. But for your debrief, did you instigate that?

Kate GOLDSMITH: It was a joint decision.

Samantha RATNAM: You were in conversation. Okay. Great.

Melina BATH: But was it the SES from Melbourne or local?

Wayne O'TOOLE: Local.

Alan GETLEY: Local.

Melina BATH: So it was not Melbourne SES.

Alan GETLEY: No.

Kate GOLDSMITH: We had both.

Samantha RATNAM: You had both?

Kate GOLDSMITH: Sorry, we had both. We had our local representatives, including one of the incident controllers from the event, so he had firsthand experience. And the others were our local catchment area person as well as someone from Melbourne. So, yes, we were fortunate to have really different people.

Samantha RATNAM: Anything else from anyone?

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: I just wanted to say we were in an unfortunate time when we were transitioning from one SES boundary to another. We were sort of between the south and the new north, which was Bendigo, so we struggled a little bit there. We only had our debriefs through our normal EMC process, so all our agency representatives had a bit of a chat and noted down what things we could do better into next year.

Samantha RATNAM: Okay. Thank you. That is it for my questions for now. I might come back if there is time. Thank you very much, everyone.

The CHAIR: Great. Thank you, Dr Ratnam. Ms Watt, a question.

Sheena WATT: Lovely. Hello. Thank you all for being here and for your submissions. There is a lot in them. Many of the committee members have asked lots of questions around flooding and infrastructure, but I am particularly interested in the collaboration with the other agencies when it comes to health. It is something that I have noted, particularly in the submission from Pyrenees. Thank you very much. You talked about local health services being preferred over a centralised hotline for recovery case management. I am just interested in if you could talk to us a little bit about what that model is, what you are thinking, what you saw and what it was that made you come up with that position, because that was, I think, informed obviously by some local knowledge there.

Jane BOWKER: Yes, and I can speak to that. Thank you. Back in 2011 I was involved in another flood in another local government area, and there were case management staff that were employed – or the local health service was given funding to engage case management workers. Then as council flood support we were able to work collaboratively and really closely with the case managers. We had regular face-to-face meetings, and the case managers there had good local knowledge. They were employed locally, so they had great local knowledge of those areas. We have found where we are in the Pyrenees that we have not had that opportunity. While we have some really good contact with the personnel and they are skilled and they are really helpful, I find it more beneficial to work with people that are locally based and then have local knowledge of the area. We are a big farming district, so – you know, ringing farmers at lunchtime and having all those sorts of ideas. Our local health service did not have that opportunity to have some case managers working locally.

Sheena WATT: Did you have an influx of health professionals afterwards? What were the support structures around the need for health professionals afterwards?

Jane BOWKER: We have had certainly the mental health requirements. There was also support with some food and accommodation and things like that. We had about 250 cases that we have had to – and we are still working with people. So with a hotline service there, they are making those connections and ringing up and it is really good they are doing a check-in. But having compared the two, I found it really more beneficial to have a local case management service rather than one –

Sheena WATT: That continuity of care and that trust.

Jane BOWKER: Absolutely.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: But there are opportunities for that now because the Department of Health are now a member of the EMC, an absolutely terrific bunch, really motivated, and the allied health services of the Grampians have really stepped up to take active parts in committees now and looking to develop further. Whatever they can do to assist in emergency management is their primary focus at the moment. We hope that maybe through that we could probably implement something in the future.

Sheena WATT: I think perhaps there might be other panellists that may have some commentary around health services, health response and health coordination to share. Otherwise, I am happy to move onto something else.

Liam WOOD: I think access to funding immediately through the event, whatever it is, is really important because communities will do whatever they have to do to get through it – to have their own health workers and people on board. They just need the funding and for it to be immediate.

Sheena WATT: Is it funding, or is it about immediate personnel deployment for the specialists as well? I imagine there is a bit of a lag between getting the dollars in the door and then getting the –

Liam WOOD: Obviously that is the dream, but as we know, personnel are short everywhere. So for people on the ground to be able to step back into that role, they might be part time or whatever it is – to get them immediately in that space is something important.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Certainly I think the access to that sort of support – and I am thinking of a specific example in our relief centre where we had someone who had significant mental health issues, but we were not aware of what their conditions were – and then being able to access details around their caseworker was really hard. It probably took us 72 hours trying to get that matter sort of resolved to the satisfaction of the particular individual. So the local hospital in Wycheproof, we offered an awful lot of help around medications and some of those sorts of things – that was great. But as we said a couple of times, we were an island for probably three or four days, so it was really hard to get that sort of support on a face-to-face basis.

Kate GOLDSMITH: We had 55 households that advised that they would require mental health support.

Sheena WATT: Mental health support, okay.

Kate GOLDSMITH: And there were others, about 11, that advised they had a family member with a chronic illness. So there were significant requirements for some of our staff and our residents.

Sheena WATT: Was that requiring any particular mobility aids or particular equipment that you had challenges with, or was that just that they had chronic conditions? It was not like access to ventilators and other sorts of medical needs?

Kate GOLDSMITH: Access to the medical services, whether they had to travel and then coming back to the infrastructure of the roads, travel to get the services. So if they were located in some of our smaller townships, that is not where they are getting their medical services. They are travelling to the bigger regional cities of Wangaratta or Shepparton or sometimes Melbourne, Albury–Wodonga or Echuca, and to be able to get there is just as big of an issue for them – for their ongoing treatments, if they have got terminal illnesses or different care needs.

Sheena WATT: Yes, okay. That is actually especially interesting. What about the longer term mental health challenges in the community? Do you feel like that has been adequately responded to? Does what you have got work for you right now, or do you have any recommendations about the long-term post-emergency mental health management?

Kate GOLDSMITH: Sorry, I have a whole page on that. We have had the 2019–20 bushfires, the millennium drought, the 2012–2016 floods, the 2017–2019 drought, 2016 blue-green algae threat, numerous locust and mouse plagues that follow on through those drought times and the COVID pandemic which then flowed into the floods. We had Japanese encephalitis and Barmah and Ross River virus outbreaks. Now we are looking at monitoring the foot-and-mouth biohazard, and I would say that would stretch right the way down this side of the table.

Liam WOOD: The major issue coming out now too is still the aftermath of all the water lying around, so we are having a real issue with accessing funding now. We have got to start fogging, basically, for huge mosquito outbreaks. We have had a couple of deaths in Mildura from Japanese encephalitis. This issue is only happening now from a flood that happened eight months ago, 10 months ago.

Jane BOWKER: We have got some really tired communities out there at the moment. We are looking for engagement with communities to help with infrastructure restoration and their recovery – so community-led recovery. And they are just really tired. We have to look at creative ways of engaging with communities around their recovery and their resilience, and it is certainly challenging.

Kate GOLDSMITH: And the mental health of a time line of trauma like that for our whole region.

Sheena WATT: Just thinking of that sort of compounded trauma, were we responding effectively to the challenges of that with the limited health services you have got and the service and social structures around that?

Liam WOOD: As we touched on earlier, events-led recovery, when we did it out of COVID, was such a small amount of money that we put forward for a string of events that people almost immediately bounced back from emotionally to get out and socialise and to enjoy themselves.

Sheena WATT: It is about possibly rethinking how we measure a success on event-led recovery. It is not just actually about economic outputs but also about the social and emotional wellbeing of the community that can be measured in some way.

Liam WOOD: And it needs to be a prolonged approach. It cannot be us having an event for the end of the floods. It needs to be community led – sports, arts, culture – for a prolonged period of time because it is going to take a long period of time for people to recover.

Sheena WATT: I appreciate that. Chair, I am sure there are others that have some questions. I am happy to return if time permits, thanks.

The CHAIR: Great, thank you, Ms Watt. Mr Berger.

John BERGER: Thank you, Chair; and thank you, everybody, for your appearance here today. I know we have probably done this topic to death, but I want to have another go at it – and that is the betterment side of things. I just want to understand the process that is there at the moment which, from all appearances, seems very arduous with the photos and things like that. Have you guys had an opportunity to streamline it to a particular or narrow it down to a field that might help you get that across the line a lot quicker? I am sure the people that read those applications have got the same thing. They would be thinking, ‘Oh, God, I’ve got to look at this again. Has everybody ticked this box? No. Have we got to back and get this off them? Yes.’ So are there any particular elements of that process that might streamline it and make it easier? I am not suggesting you can do it right here and now, but perhaps collectively, because you are all doing it across all of the shires, what might make it a lot easier in the time to come?

Liam WOOD: Graeme, I think you hit the nail on the head before that it needs to be together.

Graeme EMONSON: I think there are substantial opportunities to take a more streamlined approach which could look like a standard unit cost for different road profiles. You could have a series of criteria which match

soil types and climates and vehicle traffic numbers et cetera, but it would not be that difficult to come up with a relatively small number of typical road types and then apply a standard unit rate which has a betterment factor built into it. Yes, there will be some swings and roundabouts, but the benefit of that is that you would have it much more streamlined and much greater certainty in terms of rehabilitation and restoration. It would give councils much greater confidence to get on with works, and it would strip out an enormous amount of administrative burden that is there at the moment. The purpose of the photos at the moment is essentially to prove what was there with the view then though that we will build back what was there, whereas it is starting in the wrong spot.

John BERGER: I would not suggest that that is always possible over the time.

Graeme EMONSON: Well, it is not.

John BERGER: And the different rated roads for B-doubles, singles or just for car traffic – there are all those variations – and bridges where you have got weight limits and things of that nature. So all of those different elements and components need to be popped into a category that would make it a lot easier. And then when you have the state versus the federal component of it, now you have got your different elements in different parts of the country as to the types of roads and how they might be affected by different conditions. I think in Victoria we have a unique set of road systems here that are particular to us, especially up in the northern area. I think the recommendations coming from you about how we streamline this are very important. So I would encourage you to get your collective heads together and come up with a set of what you think are principles or guidelines that might be easier to work through, and priorities too.

Graeme EMONSON: And embedding betterment as the default position, rather than an additional add-on.

Liam WOOD : It would be interesting to see the cost of a road that has been washed away four times compared to one road that has been built in the betterment situation.

John BERGER: You have only got to look at some of the roads that the grain trucks have got to go on, whether you have a good year or a reasonable year, and what the weight tolerances are going to be and how they are going to wear.

Liam WOOD : I do not think with betterment we are talking about going from tar to concrete. It is a reasonable thing to ask for, we believe.

John BERGER: But consideration for the weights of vehicles that are going to travel along them – so you can have that first part of it there. My second part – we have heard a little bit about it in other regional settings – is the non-approved levee banks that might exist around the place and how you deal with them. In one particular instance a farmer said that he would not do a particular change in the course of the water, if you like, because it was going to affect the people down the line. How does that play out in your setting? How do we go about educating? Does there need to be an educative process for farmers or anybody that has the capacity to alter things that will have an outcome that is detrimental to people further down the track, and how might that be addressed in your different regions?

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, it is a great question. You discover these kinds of things when the water is coming through. There is a bit of education in there about understanding the impact of building a levee, because for us it certainly pushes the water straight back up into Charlton. So it might fix a problem downstream, but it creates an even bigger problem somewhere else. I think flood studies can probably inform some of that, but it is also taking those property owners along for that kind of journey so they can understand what they are doing and what is the problem that they are actually trying to fix. Are there some better ways to be able to do that, bringing some experts in to be able to help in those situations?

John BERGER: With the flow – and your experience is probably the best example of it – you had a few days to have a look at where it was going to come and what it might have looked like. Equally there would be people sitting down and thinking, ‘Gee, how can I change the course of this to make sure that my –

Liam WOOD : Yes, I think it needs to be pointed out probably, and better education too, the fact that your man-made levee can have a hugely detrimental effect on your own property. We saw countless levees actually retaining the water on the wrong side and flooding people’s houses and things like that. When they are not

compacted properly and they are not engineered properly there are a whole raft of issues. I think the CMA are doing a great job with that levee ownership and mapping, so hopefully something really good comes out of that as well.

Wayne O'TOOLE: I think this comes back to roles and responsibilities again, because it is the CMA's responsibility to be able to manage that, but again, in the moment they are not equipped nor resourced to be able to do that sort of thing. But Liam is right, we had a number of examples of panicked phone calls: 'Oh, we've been building a levee, but now the water is heading straight for our house,' or whatever it might be. 'Can you come and help?' So we have got to then divert resources to go and get them out of a situation that was of their own making.

John BERGER: So you think a proper education process would be helpful for people along the way?

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes. I agree. Flood modelling will be able to help with that, with water flows and whatever – 'Let's not do that, let's do something else' – and there will be people who –

John BERGER: Look, I understand that every situation is going to be different, and by volumes of water as well. But I think as a standard base level there should be some sort of process in place for it. Thanks, Chair.

The CHAIR: Great; thanks, Mr Berger. I might have a few questions if I can as well. Just following on from Mr Berger's line of questioning, when we are talking about levees, as part of that conversation I know you are mentioning flood studies. This is a question for each of the councils. Perhaps can you talk about your involvement, if any, with flood studies through catchment management authorities, and things like how often are they updated and any modelling that you been able to participate in? Perhaps we will just start there.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: We will start. We have had a number of flood studies in the Pyrenees. I recently pulled the data out of our system, because our new SES representative wanted to update all the information online and also on our own webpage, so we had about seven I think dating from 2009. A lot of them have been part funded by council, which I find quite strange because it is probably more like a CMA-driven process. The most recent one came out of some federal funding, and that was to do a flood study in I think it was Lexton town again. This was the third time that it was impacted, and there are quite a few residents there that are also very vocal about what we are doing and holding council accountable also. Again, the lead was pushed back to council again about leading those flood studies, but they have come to an arrangement about how that might be managed. I think in the past it has sort of been pushed back to council a fair bit. So we are not –

The CHAIR: Why do you think that is though? Is that because they think that maybe because you are on the ground locally you are best placed to be able to give input into local knowledge or local things on the ground?

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: I think it is about money. I think it is about funding, it is about staff and it is about resources. In their structure – I am not basing this on any foundational knowledge, but it seems like – they do not have the staff to do it. I approached them recently about modelling. There is modelling in the fire space, where you can simulate a fire event and you can look at it and you can start planning, and I asked them if there was any modelling on flooding that the CMAs have that we can access to look at this levee that we want to do at Avoca. They said 'Oh, no, there is really nothing. We don't have the money in the budget to upgrade the systems.' There are some systems around, but they are internationally available. It is not rocket science, it is quite a common tool that they use. So it sort of leads into that. They need more support to provide those services so that we are assisting them but not leading it.

The CHAIR: Great, sure. Anyone else want to have a response? Is there a similar response amongst all the councils, or are there different responses?

Wayne O'TOOLE: I think it is slightly different for us in Buloke in that we have had some flood studies that have been done to us, probably without enough input. It is all very well to have a whole range of theories and recommendations and the like, but it is only when you stand in the middle of a flood and you can see what the water behaviour might be that you do become more aware of what might happen. That certainly was the example for us in this recent event, so we have actually done the opposite – we are offering to take control of the two flood studies that would be done throughout Buloke so that we can hopefully get some outcomes that will be beneficial to us long term.

The CHAIR: Thank you. Anyone else?

Graeme EMONSON: Yes, Chair. Building on Buloke's comments, I think it is critically important that local government is front and centre on the flood study and the modelling. Firstly, councils are on the ground, and they have got a lot of inherent local knowledge. They are also the responsible planning authority, and there is a lot of crossover from the flood modelling – well, there should be – into the planning system. So who ultimately takes responsibility does not worry me too much, but what I am pretty clear on is that local government should be front and centre on any of the models that are done, for the reasons I have just outlined.

Liam WOOD : I think it is integral that they are connected, though. Once it has gone past your doorstep, whose problem is it after that? That is a real issue. In our area, I think our flood plain is about 35 kilometres wide, so you are talking massive amounts of area. But if you are putting levees up, that water is going downstream and into other states, into New South Wales and South Australia, so there needs to be a flood mapping of the whole system – overarching, but site specific as well in the LGAs.

The CHAIR: Yes, and I guess reviewing or updating that modelling is going to be a necessary function, because things do change. As you are saying, if someone did put up an informal levee bank, how would you know about it? You may only know about it when the behaviour or the water flow changes, and you go back later and go, 'Well, this has changed. The topography has changed, something has changed, and this is the reason why we've had a different response,' to perhaps what you might have had before. So updating those sorts of things is probably critically important.

Just to perhaps shift to another topic for a moment, I just wanted to ask you about your experiences in dealing with insurance. Now, some of your assets may have been able to be insured, others may not have been able to be insured. Can you, just for each council, give me a breakdown on things that were not insurable or could not be insured and things that were insured? And what were your experiences in getting claims back through insurance agencies? So whoever wants to start can.

Liam WOOD: I think, just quickly, this time around is certainly not going to be as bad as the next time. I spoke about – from our riverfront we were insured for around \$20 million. That has gone down to \$2 million now. So basically anything along the riverfront is not insurable, which is our greatest asset. We all live along water systems because they are our greatest asset, and to have that basically as a deterrent for you to build any infrastructure along that space is a real argument we are going to probably have with ourselves, because we know how integral it is but how difficult it is that it is basically a loss if we have another flood.

The CHAIR: Anyone else?

Wayne O'TOOLE: I think it is similar for us. The amount of infrastructure that was impacted that was claimable under insurance would be, oh, probably \$700,000 or \$800,000, so not significant. It was largely campgrounds and some of those sorts of things, there was a caravan park and the like, so it was pretty minor. It is not surprising it has been slow to work through the claims process. To date it certainly has not been approved yet. We have been given assurances that it will be right on the night sort of thing, but we are yet to see the money in the bank.

The CHAIR: Sure.

Jane BOWKER: And for Pyrenees, we have worked closely with the insurance companies, and they have been pretty responsive for council. They are really strict around rebuilding like for like when there could be the opportunity for mitigation initiatives or betterment to reduce the need for the amount of insurance claims in the longer term. For an example, at our Avoca Recreation Reserve the air conditioning systems are on the ground, so the request was to put them up. The extra resources and funding had to be found to just be able to put those air conditioning systems up off the ground to make them more resilient for the future.

Graeme EMONSON: From Moira's perspective, Chair, Kate and I do not have specific details in front of us, but my understanding is insurance is not a significant pain point for us. A bit like Buloke, there are some minor aspects, but my understanding is it is not a particular pain point.

The CHAIR: Okay. Great. And just on that point, I think what, Pyrenees, you were talking about, and it goes into I think what Dr Ratnam was talking about, you know, is how do we make our communities more

resilient. So it might well be that you have to rethink how things were built in the past. If through your insurance claims they have said, 'Look, if you put the air conditioners up, there's less likelihood that they will be damaged in subsequent flooding,' then I think that is the thing that we need to start to think about. Some of the assets that might be there before are going to continue to be subject to perhaps future flooding.

As we know we are going to be seeing more extreme weather events. I think the predictions are we are going to have less water into the future but more extreme weather events, so the risk for flooding or fire events is going to be more extreme. And when you are looking at rebuilding and betterment and those sorts of things, how can you futureproof your asset? So is that something you are thinking about going forward? Is that something that is featuring in your thinking right now?

Jane BOWKER: An experience for Pyrenees at the moment is one about the men's shed. That is right on the edge of the creek, and that was damaged through the floods. So at the moment we are working with the insurance company and the men's shed to relocate that men's shed, because they have just been hammered, and the mental health outcomes of that would be ongoing. We just do not want them to have to go through that again.

The CHAIR: Anyone else?

Liam WOOD: As I mentioned before, the adventure playground that we had earmarked for Nowingi Place, which is on the riverfront – it was to encourage people to go down to that end of the riverfront – we have had to re-scope it, move it to higher ground down the other end of the riverfront and basically start the project again, because it was site-specific obviously. There will be some things that are kept in the design, but we are now re-scoping a whole precinct down there due to this.

The CHAIR: Sure. And I am going to have to end that session there because my time has expired. So I will move to Mr Ettershank's question.

David ETTERS HANK: Thank you, Chair. Look, thank you very much. It has been fascinating reading your submissions and also hearing you today. I just have a couple of small questions and then maybe a biggie. In terms of I think Pyrenees, I think when you were asked who should be the lead agency, you said CMA.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Yes, in the flood space.

David ETTERS HANK: Yes. I think you said earlier on, though, that you have four CMAs within the shire.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Yes, that converge in the shire.

David ETTERS HANK: How would that work, do you think, in terms of on the ground in real time if you had four catchment authorities across the council area trying to manage those things concurrently?

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: In respect to –

David ETTERS HANK: I am just thinking there are a lot of chiefs for a very –

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: In a response phase, you mean?

David ETTERS HANK: Yes.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: So they would be more on the data and the information, a bit like how we see the BOM providing that information, the data, for how we might respond or how we might prepare. So if you have got enough leeway and time to do something that might mitigate some impact, then that is what you would do. You would not be in there in that response state. That still sits with police, SES and Vic fire and CFA. So they are your response agencies, and they remain there. But actually they might be in the ICC. And at different times there are different representatives in the ICC providing data for water flows and things like that. I think we do rely on the SES for that, but that is not their primary role. And I think we would be in a better space if those lead experts were engaged more closely in those situations and before and after. So it is about preparation. It is about what we do before something happens rather than chasing our tails afterwards.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. Liam, you look like you –

Liam WOOD: Yes. The CMA were really good in the community conversations that we had all the way along in our small communities and bringing that data to the fore. And they were consistently updating the flood mapping, if not hourly, and feeding it back to those communities. So I think they were a really integral part of our communications during that time and I think largely put a lot of those communities not at ease, but by having that knowledge they had a greater outlook on what was going on. So I think the catchment management authority were really good, and I think their information is pretty damn accurate too.

Kate GOLDSMITH: Yes, we had a very similar experience with our catchment management authority, and they were talking to the neighbouring catchment management authorities so we could see what was coming from upstream, which was really crucial for us in a number of moments. They were always present for any community meetings that we were going to run. They were quite happy to be there and be present – and they are not always the easiest things to be present in. And they had a consistent presence through the ICC. And at any stage that we needed to talk to them, they were easily contactable. And still even just in this most recent rain event we have had our internal staff in contact with the catchment authority. So they have been great; they have got a wealth of knowledge, and they are always happy to share it with us.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay, great. Thank you. I cannot help but go on to this question of build back better and the betterment funding. The breadth of my ignorance here is profound, so take that on board, but I am getting the sense that really, with that betterment funding, it is fairly focused on existing assets and trying to make those assets more resilient. I guess I am thinking in terms of if everything is correct about climate change – and I do not think there is any reason to doubt that we are going to have a lot more floods and a lot more droughts and such like. The question in my mind is: what are your thoughts about how we become more proactive in terms of planning for infrastructure and those assets? How as communities do we respond and adapt and build resilience to climate change? Maybe I can just throw it open for people's thoughts as to what the machinery to underpin that sort of work might look like and the role of councils within that. Is that too huge?

Liam WOOD: I do not know if I am going to answer it at all, but we have seen exponential growth and systematic change of building houses for climate change, yet when it comes to the infrastructure of local government, state and federal, it seems to be, like we were talking about, building it back the way it was. Some of these roads are decades old. We are not even talking about building it back the same way it was yesterday, we are talking about building it back the way it was 50, 60 or 70 years ago, which is just crazy when we are doing the exact opposite in every other facet of our lives.

David ETTERS HANK: Mildura is obviously at the larger end in terms of the councils along the river. What capacity do you have as an organisation to be able to enter into, lead or participate in a dialogue that would actually have that broader strategic consideration?

Liam WOOD: We would certainly be keen to have any conversation in that regard on betterment. The capacity for us, though, is probably the same as many of the other councils – it is non-existent. We are dealing with shortfalls all the time. We would love to get ahead of the game, because we know it would cost us less in the long run, but we simply cannot leapfrog that without any help.

Graeme EMONSON: When we are building particularly significant infrastructure, sometimes the life of that infrastructure is 80 or 100 years, and yet we do not have very sophisticated predictive modelling about what the situation and local environment might be within a reasonable projected forward time frame. We pretty much build infrastructure that might have an 80-year life frame based on today's conditions, and we do not have access generally to very good predictive modelling that can assist us to think more strategically and broadly when we are building that infrastructure. I think there is both a more global aspect to that predictive modelling and a local effect to that. Councils are never going to have the capacity to do the broader predictive modelling. They will have local knowledge, and we can apply local knowledge to broader predictive modelling. But I think that is a space where both Commonwealth and state governments could take a significant lead role for local government – to give us the evidence and the knowledge about the predictions and what it is going to look like, so that when we are actually building resilient infrastructure we are confident about its resilience. At the moment we pretty much build infrastructure with a long lifetime built on today's environment.

David ETTERS HANK: Maybe I will just pass it down the –

Wayne O'TOOLE: I was going to say certainly local knowledge is key. Probably one of our big learnings is that we have third-, fourth- and fifth-generation farmers who know the history of flood events, and they know how the water is going to behave. The key learning for us around that was community consultation is key to this, so it is a matter of going out. You have got some other agencies around – Infrastructure Victoria, for example – who would have experts in the field who would be able to go out with council and have those discussions with our communities around what the infrastructure of the future will need to look like.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. Thanks.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: I suppose for us it is all about: how do we fund that? How do we find the money within our budgets to support those initiatives?

David ETTERS HANK: Yes. Okay.

Jane BOWKER: And it is about having the staff and resourcing to be able to look at those resilience measures and those climate adaptation measures. We are looking for some funding support to be able to employ people and staff, because we have got some funding, which is really helpful, around the recovery hub and community recovery, but that is going to stop. Then it is about trying to embed all those good measures that these staff members are doing now into what we can do into the future around resilience and climate change adaptation. It is about funding to keep that going for additional staff to be able to do those roles.

David ETTERS HANK: Okay. Thank you. Chair, I know Ms Bath is itching with a whole lot more questions, so I am happy to hand over the balance of my time to Ms Bath to ask questions.

Melina BATH: You are very kind. Thank you very much. I will do some quick –

The CHAIR: Sorry, Ms Bath. Before we do that, I note that we have got about 5 minutes left for this session. I know there were some members who had some additional time on their clock, so I will go to those members first who had time. Mrs Tyrrell, you have some time left on your clock. Do you have any questions?

Rikkie-Lee TYRRELL: I am happy to give it to Ms Bath, thanks.

The CHAIR: Okay. I note Ms Watt also has some time left, so I will just have to watch the clock very carefully. Thank you everyone for chairing over my chairing, but we will go to Ms Bath for a few minutes, and then I will go to Ms Watt. Thank you.

Melina BATH: Thank you. I might just put these few questions on notice, rather than having an elaborate discussion, because some of these things I would like to look at –

The CHAIR: That would be more appropriate. Yes, thank you.

Melina BATH: That is right. That is fine. So just a couple of quick ones: Graeme, you mentioned that there was a Deloitte impact assessment report. Could you provide that to the committee?

Graeme EMONSON: Definitely.

Melina BATH: That would be really helpful for us to drill down a little bit more. Thank you very much. In relation to the SES and the discussion around that as the lead agency and the thin nature of volunteers – and we adore volunteers in our community – and the CMA, it would be interesting for you to maybe provide some feedback. We can give you the Hansard record on this anyway. CMAs are very much the information gatherers. As you said, Kate, they are in the field, but they do not do emergency response. So what other agency – could it be a CMA CFA? I am just literally throwing that on the table. If you could provide a suggestion or a system review of that, maybe with the CMA involved but maybe with a CFA involved – just have a think around that.

The other topic is just a quick one. Moira shire, when the Melbourne-based SES came to visit you and debrief with you, what time was that? Was that before Christmas or after?

Kate GOLDSMITH: No, it was earlier this year.

Melina BATH: Earlier this year. Beautiful. And then Buloke – it was a no for you, like not a Melbourne-based offer.

Wayne O'TOOLE: No, it was local.

Melina BATH: Thank you.

Wayne O'TOOLE: I reckon that was four or five months ago we ran that.

Alan GETLEY: Yes.

Melina BATH: And yes or no? There was not a Melbourne-based offer. And Mildura – if that was Pyrenees shaking their head, thank you very much.

Liam WOOD: We have had several local, but not –

Melina BATH: Yes. Not a Melbourne-based one. And then, probably the other two – Pyrenees, you did a wonderful job talking about rapid impact assessments and the fact that you felt that they were not done within those 8 to 48 hours, which is the stipulated requirement from the SES, and that had an impact on how you could deal and respond. You put a lot of great context there, but I am looking for a recommendation to us. Do you want to take that away and have a little bit of a think about what you would like? It is okay if you want to.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: No, that is great.

Melina BATH: Because it is really important.

Kathryn DOROSHENKO-PEMPEL: Yes, it is.

Melina BATH: They are good pieces of information.

The CHAIR: If that could be provided on notice, that would be appreciated.

Melina BATH: That is right. And then my last one of still hundreds of others was: in the *Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy* of 2016, so that is the government 2016, there was a recommendation, and it is 17d, about who looks after flood levees. You do not have to do this homework, but if you are interested to do it, you did make some really positive comments about that tension between who is responsible. Is it the burden of councils or who else, a joint-joint-joint, a three-three-three or who? If you want to have a go at saying what you would like to see –

The CHAIR: Thank you, Ms Bath.

Melina BATH: Done.

The CHAIR: Thank you. We have a minute left, so I will go to Ms Watt.

Melina BATH: Thank you so much.

The CHAIR: Ms Watt, the last minute is for you. Thank you.

Sheena WATT: Last one. Thank you. Oh, gosh, I have got 15 questions, and I am not sure which one to go to. I wanted to ask about the cross training between emergency staff. This was a recommendation from the Buloke submission, if that is all right, including council staff. Did you have a chance to speak to that already or would you have some –

Wayne O'TOOLE: No, not already. It was within the event itself and the people who are in the municipal control centre – all of those people do have the same training. In emergency management there is a myriad of acronyms and all this sort of stuff.

Sheena WATT: Yes, ways of doing and –

Wayne O'TOOLE: And in the moment getting everybody on the same page is really challenging, so I think the same training for all of the agencies across the board would be really useful when you are in the situation.

Sheena WATT: And some foundational agreements on terms and terminology.

Wayne O'TOOLE: Yes, and roles and responsibilities.

Sheena WATT: Roles and responsibilities. Okay. That is actually really helpful.

The CHAIR: All right. Great. If there are any further questions – I am just noting the time; it is now 4:30. But if other committee members have questions, please provide them on notice. I am sure that it will give witnesses more time to answer. I just want to thank you all for coming in today. We really appreciate your contributions. They have been very insightful.

Just to note as well that you will receive a copy of the transcript of today's hearing for review about a week before it is published on the committee website. I just want to thank you all for attending today, and we will end today's session there.

Committee adjourned.