



**Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee
Enquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria**

Submission from

Victoria SES Volunteers Association (VicSESVA) www.vicsesva.org.au



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Contents

Glossary.....	4
Introduction.....	6
Executive Summary.....	8
Terms of Reference #1: Causes and contributors to the flood event.....	15
The situation.....	15
Gauges.....	16
Terms of Reference #2: Adequacy and effectiveness of early warning systems.....	17
1. Advance notice doorknocks to advise residents of potential event.....	18
2. Intelligence.....	20
Before the Flood.....	20
During the Flood.....	21
After the Flood.....	22
3. Public information on emergency agency/other websites, social media, public broadcasters etc.....	23
4. Warnings published on websites and other media.....	25
Warning Terminology.....	26
Local Flood Guides published for community information.....	27
4. Notifications via social and other media advising of sandbag collection points and other information.....	28
5. Immediate evacuation doorknocks when the flood is imminent.....	33
Terms of Reference #3: Resourcing of the State Emergency Service, the adequacy of its response to the flood event and the adequacy of its resourcing to deal with increasing floods and natural disasters in the future.....	34
Maribyrnong River Flood: Situation of Local VICSES Footscray Unit.....	34
Local VICSES Footscray Unit Operational Capability.....	36
Terms of Reference #6: Flood event as a whole (in particular the Maribyrnong River).....	39
Readiness.....	39
Incident Control Centre.....	40
Division Command Point.....	41
Intelligence.....	42
Misleading information about the scale of the disaster.....	42
How many homes were flooded in Maribyrnong?.....	42
Impact Assessments.....	44

Consequence.....	45
The Extent of the Damage and Loss.....	45
Safety.....	46
Community Engagement.....	51
Local Knowledge.....	53
Terms of Reference #8 (b): How corporate interests may influence decision-making at the expense of communities and climate change preparedness.....	56
Rivervue Apartments.....	56
Terms of Reference #9: Any other related matters.....	57
Arundel Retarding Basin.....	57
Drone Footage: intelligence, monitoring and Insurance.....	57
Flood maps.....	58
EMV Operating Model Review 2022.....	60
Conclusion.....	63
Recommendations.....	65
Community Engagement.....	65
Plans and Exercises.....	65
Training.....	66
Consultation.....	66
Mitigation Strategies.....	66
Review of Relationships and Roles.....	67
References.....	68
Appendices	
Appendix A: Volunteer personal account.....	72
Appendix B: Feedback from Regional Incident Control Centres and Operations.....	81
Appendix C: Emergency Management Volunteer Statement.....	88

Glossary

AAR: After Action Review

AHD: Australian Height Datum (the height of a location above mean sea level in metres)

AWS: Australian Warning System

BoM: Bureau of Meteorology

CFA: Country Fire Authority

CMA: Catchment Management Authority

COO: Chief Officer Operations (VICSES)

DCP: Division Command Point

DRA: Dynamic Risk Assessment

EMC: Emergency Management Commissioner

EMT: Emergency Management Team

EMV: Emergency Management Victoria

IAP: Incident Action Plan

ICC: Incident Control Centre

IMT: Incident Management Team

IRB: Inflatable Rescue Boat ('rubber duck')

JSOP: Joint Standard Operating Procedure

LFG: Local Flood Guide

LSIO: Land Subject to Inundation Overlay

MEMP: Municipal Emergency Management Plan

MEMPC: Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee

MW: Melbourne Water

RFA: Request For Assistance

ROEM: Regional Officer Emergency Management

SEMP: State Emergency Management Plan

SMEACS: standard method of giving information in a briefing, describing: Situation, Mission, Execution, Administration and Logistics, Command and Communications, Safety

SOP: Standard Operating Procedure

UDO: Unit Duty Officer

VCF: Volunteer Consultative Forum

VICPOL: Victoria Police

VICSES or SES: the Victoria State Emergency Service

VPS: Victorian Public Service

AIIMS: The Australasian Inter-Service Incident Management System provides a management structure for managing all activities to resolve the incident. The System is designed to deliver the functions of control, planning, intelligence, public information, operations, investigation, logistics and finance.

Hydraulic Jump: A hydraulic jump is a phenomenon that occurs in fast-moving open flows when the flow becomes unstable. When a jump occurs, the height of the liquid surface increases abruptly resulting in an increased depth and decreased average flow velocity downstream.

1% AEP: An 'Annual Exceedance Probability' (AEP) is the probability that a flood of a given (or larger) magnitude will occur within a period of one year. For example, a 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) Flood means you have a 1-in-100 chance that a flood of that size (or larger) could occur in any one year.

Introduction

VicSESVA makes this submission as the peak advocacy Association for around 5,000 Victorian SES volunteers. This submission is based on feedback from SES volunteers, former emergency volunteer leaders, local residents and other stakeholders, and includes experiences of those people on the ground during the multiple flood events across Victoria. A VicSESVA delegate would welcome any opportunity to address the enquiry panel in person.

General Notes:

1. This submission articulates questions which we do not have answers for. We request that the enquiry seek answers to those questions, from the officers responsible, through access to data recorded in emergency management systems and personal and shared (running) ICC logbooks.
The questions are set out from the main body of the text marked in **Bold**.
2. We have made some recommendations to improve emergency arrangements.
The recommendations are set out from the main body of the text marked in **Blue**.
3. Some comments are narrative in style, which paint a picture of what happened and how this affected those telling their story. VicSESVA endorses those comments as reflecting the reality of their lived experience.
4. Other comments refer to established emergency procedures and processes.
Acronyms or practices specific to emergency response will be referenced in the running text. Definitions are included in the Glossary.
5. Unless otherwise stated, references to VICSES or SES refer to the agency, staffed by paid Victorian public service employees, not the volunteers.
6. A clear distinction needs to be understood about workforce and roles. The emergency response workforce consists of 87-90% volunteers. They are managed by a relatively small number of paid staff (in VICSES, approximately 5,000 volunteers, with around 200 paid staff). Large scale events are managed by an Incident Management Team (IMT) in an Incident Control Centre (ICC). While volunteers have the opportunity to train in Incident Management roles to the same level as paid staff, training courses are limited and staff receive priority in IMT training. The paid staff are deployed first to major incidents, and manage the incident; determining

objectives, planning and preparing resources, tasking volunteer crews etc.

Instructions are issued from the Incident Control Centre down the chain of command - volunteers cannot self-deploy.

7. Many currently serving or former SES volunteers have preferred not to be identified in this submission nor by making their own independent submission, as they are concerned that they may be ostracised or bullied. Some live in small country towns where they can be easily identified in their local community. There has also been a recurrent campaign on an internal SES members Facebook page spreading false narratives and accusing VicSESVA officer(s) of bringing VICSES into disrepute (an internal SES disciplinary charge) and other commentary. This has been a significant dissuader to people feeling free to come forward and speak.
8. It is clear that there will be varying accounts of the events, as people have experienced them in different ways, and the events change over time. However, VicSESVA considers all accounts are valid and can establish, inform and reinforce best practice and that active listening and critical analysis can lead to improvements in emergency management. We believe all voices should be heard and no-one should feel intimidated from speaking.
9. Reviews and analyses can identify issues and challenges and make recommendations. The next step of 'doing better next time' – implementation and execution, is not always successful. In the case of these multiple flood events of 2022, and contrary to established practice, the Emergency Management Commissioner has decided not to conduct a multi-agency After Action Review (AAR). In its place, VicSESVA hopes that this Parliamentary enquiry will include recommendations on how learnings from these events will be actively incorporated into strategies for mitigating causal factors in the future, and that there will be established accountabilities for ensuring that this happens.

Executive Summary

To understand the effects of the Victorian floods of 2022, VicSESVA suggests that it is important to understand:

- both social and technical aspects of flood mitigation
- the demographics of the local communities and
- local knowledge of both current and historical events that can inform strategic decision-making.

Importantly, emergency services operate relationally to communities.

Outcomes in disasters and emergencies might be best assessed according to how the emergency response exits the Incident Control Centre and the pages of the 'rule book', and crosses over into people's lives.

Cohorts of local emergency responders, of which 87-90% in Australia are volunteers, join up to serve their local communities, and accountabilities might be measured by how effectively this service has occurred –based on both a realistic expectation of what is possible, and the testimony of people in the community- not whether Emergency Managers felt they operated their internal processes according to their established policies and procedures. This latter test would only sustain a silo-ed approach so often criticised in past enquiries and reviews. The former measure of effective service to communities is surely the *raison d'être* of emergency response and must be informed and judged by those communities if it is to be valid.

This submission contends that in many locations and events:

1. Volunteers executed their tasks to the best of their abilities. Many put themselves at risk and saved lives.
2. Lessons learnt from previous floods such as those of 2010-2012 have not been embedded into practice. Its groundhog day.
3. There were many instances where communications from emergency Managers (both to communities and to SES crews) were tardy, inconsistent and inappropriate.
4. Incident Control of the Maribyrnong River flood was exercised without a holistic

understanding of local conditions and history, and this affected the capacity of the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC), the VICSES Chief Officer Operations (COO) and the Incident Controller (IC) to uphold their responsibilities of coordination, control and consequence management.

5. Some communities were not adequately informed of their exposure to risk, and some who could have been assisted, were not helped at all.
6. Workforce sustainability and preparedness has declined: Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) has not adequately trained an Incident Management Team (IMT) workforce in the past 4 years.
7. Local knowledge and volunteer engagement was not effectively utilised. For example:
 - a. some local SES Units were not called to respond in areas where they had local knowledge;
 - b. Maribyrnong council officers were not included in the Emergency Management Team (EMT) at the ICC in control of the Maribyrnong River flood event;
 - c. opportunities to consult with volunteers through their representatives on the multi-agency EMV Volunteer Consultative Forum (VCF) were not considered. This will further decline since the Emergency Management Commissioner without notice or consultation disbanded the VCF on 22 April 2023.
8. Many SES units were affected by declining capability:
 - a. in human resources terms due in part to Covid-19 member attrition, loss of long-serving experienced skilled members, or low morale (cultural issues). VicSESVA expresses sincere thanks to the many CFA volunteers who were deployed to many flood zones and took on the response work

Recommendation: *to improve interoperability by providing more cross-agency training, to upskill SES and CFA volunteers who are already a skilled and experienced workforce, and not to rely on EMV plans to train public servants as a surge workforce, as outlined in their 2022 Operating Model Review, proposals #4-#6.*

- b. in material resources terms due to, for example, the entire fleet of VICSES heavy and medium rigid trucks being offline for major repairs (cracking

chassis of trucks etc.), and other Units having to share their vehicles and vessels

- c. In management terms, the October floods, and the Maribyrnong River flood in particular, occurred while VICSES was implementing its organisational restructure, and the chain of command, staff roles and responsibilities and contact details were not clear to all members, hindering timely and accurate information gathering, problem solving, preparation and response. One staff member commented “it was chaotic for everyone”. Another staffer sent an email to Units on 17 October 2022: “Unfortunately this event (the Maribyrnong flood) has occurred with the ‘go live’ of the new operating model...we are still trying to understand our roles and relationships...We haven’t had any handovers from the ‘old’ teams either”. This organisational restructure also resulted in the loss of senior experienced staff (e.g. through retirement), including experienced Level 3 Controllers.

Was there internal chaos in VICSES that contributed to the poor communications?

How did the VICSES organisational restructure affect their internal capability to manage the flood events?

9. Learning opportunities will be missed because there has been no comprehensive After Action Review (AAR). A year after the floods, there has only been some very limited internal SES reviews, which cannot capture all the relevant information.
- a) In the case of the Maribyrnong River Flood, according to the Maribyrnong Storm and Flood Emergency Management Plan (p 14): “As the lead agency, VICSES will coordinate the After-Action Review (AAR) arrangements for storm/flood operations as soon as practical following an event. All agencies involved in the storm/ flood incident should be represented at the AAR”. This has not occurred. VICSES did conduct a limited internal AAR 4-5 months after the flood, but many people with feedback to offer were excluded from that review.
 - b) For an AAR into the multiple flood events Statewide, EMV has failed to conduct a multi agency operational or system level review (their responsibility, see ‘Evaluation and Continuous Improvement’ State Emergency Management Plan, p 13).

10. A whole of catchment approach to mitigation should be considered. Rivers run through multiple shire or council zones, but there is no coordinated approach to mitigation, and planning controls in one area may affect other areas. There are existing individual local government future development plans like the 'Moonee Valley Maribyrnong Master Plan' or the 'City of Melbourne Maribyrnong Waterfront' proposal, but no over-arching view. The focus surely should be on the natural course of the river, i.e. a whole of catchment approach to flood mitigation. Floods do not stop and start at council boundaries.

In the case of the Maribyrnong River, it flows from Mt Macedon to Port Philip Bay, through Macedon Ranges Shire, Hume, Brimbank, Moonee Valley, Maribyrnong and City of Melbourne councils. But the VICSES Central Region Emergency Response Plan Flood sub plan 2018 (p 29) only includes Brimbank, Hume and Maribyrnong as being affected in the Maribyrnong sub-catchment; leaving out Macedon Ranges, Moonee Valley and City of Melbourne where properties were affected in 2022, and have been before.

A whole of catchment approach is not novel. It had been recommended, for example, in 2013 by the Maribyrnong Council Manager for Emergency Management [REDACTED] (MFEP Case Study, p 13), who had developed an innovative community engagement strategy.

Recommendation: to develop a whole of catchment approach to flood management and mitigation, and to ensure all potentially affected residential areas are included in all plans

This submission articulates issues raised by stakeholders with VicSESVA and recommendations follow in the Conclusion (pp 65-67). Those recommendations are listed here for quick reference. The context, evidence and argument for the contentions raised are detailed in the main text addressing the enquiry Terms of Reference which follows this summary.

VicSESVA recommends the following:

Community Engagement

1. The emergency sector must move past producing slick reports and glossy brochures

to really commit to change-making. There must be practical, tangible, achievable actions taken to ensure communities are well served. That change should have the community at its heart. Community also includes volunteer emergency workers – they live and respond in the same area as the people they serve. They are not strangers in a faraway office.

2. Local communities should be respected and listened to, and included in all before, during and after planning.
3. The sector should be planning and implementing community engagement which reflects our contemporary social demographics, so there is equity of access to emergency information for our diverse communities. This engagement should have a restorative focus to rebuild trust and confidence in government, emergency agencies and their employees.
4. Community engagement, education and awareness methodologies should be re-assessed. Posting information on a website is not 'job done'. Whole-of-community programmes which are culturally responsive, context specific, community-led and strengths-based need to be developed for the entire sector.

Plans and Exercises

5. A substantial amount of work is invested in developing plans. But those plans should be followed – otherwise they are never tested in a real situation. If Incident Controllers or their delegates are unfamiliar with local plans, then the contextual factors, data and history that has gone into developing those plans will be wasted and subsequent ad hoc or reactive actions decided by the ICC may be inappropriate, or expose communities to increased risks.
6. Real time and in-place scenario exercising should be incorporated into plans at all levels. There is already an expectation that such exercises are conducted, by emergency agencies and local government. Often these are table-top exercises and rarely do they involve the local emergency volunteers; they are attended by paid staff. Even more rare would be the involvement of the actual communities whose risk has been identified. VicSESVA advocates that regular scenario exercises should include the community and local volunteers and be conducted in situ in local streets, suburbs or towns.

Training

7. Fast-track training should be provided for more volunteers to train in incident management roles, and be consulted or deployed in major events. One Unit Controller stated “At unit level, training is very good at preparing members for normal type RFA’s, but more training needs to be done for big events, involving multi-units, staging areas, DIV comms. There needs to be more training involving the staff and volunteers at the same time in the same events”.
8. More training courses in flood operations such as deckhand, crewperson, land-based swift water rescue and coxswain should be urgently provided for Units who will respond to flood events.
9. More inter-agency training should be provided to SES and CFA volunteers, to ensure surge capacity in both storm/flood and fire operations.

Consultation

10. While volunteers may be consulted informally by senior managers (ad hoc conversations etc.) there should be a renewed focus on formal engagement through their representative Associations; VicSESVA for SES volunteers and VFBV for CFA volunteers. During 2022, the VICSES Executive and State Operations officers cancelled all respective formal quarterly meetings with VicSESVA.
11. The Volunteer Consultative Forum – unilaterally disbanded by the EMC on 22 April 2023- should be reinstated to provide the expert multi-agency Statewide advice it was established to provide under the principles of the Volunteer Statement 2015, which was agreed to by the Premier, Minister for Emergency Management, the Emergency Management Commissioner, and all emergency agencies (see Appendix C, p 88).
12. The State Government should fulfill its obligation agreed in the Volunteer Statement to “ensure that the commitments and principles in this statement are supported across government and by emergency management volunteer agencies”.

Mitigation Strategies

13. In the Maribyrnong catchment, the Arundel Retarding Basin plan should be revived, and the safety of communities be prioritised over land developers.
14. A whole of catchment approach should be used for all flood planning and mitigation.

Review of Relationships and Roles

15. The relationship, including responsibilities for data generation, predictions, warnings, processes, line of control and accountabilities between Melbourne Water, Bureau of Meteorology, VICSES and EMV should be re-assessed for its functionality, accuracy and relevance.

Terms of Reference (1) Causes of and Contributors to the Flood Event

The situation

In simple terms, the situation across Victoria was this:

1. Australia was experiencing the third La Niña year in a row,
2. The landscape was already saturated due to persistent high rainfall, including a very wet winter and the highest October rainfall on record (BoM), therefore with limited capacity for absorption,
3. All of Australia was alert to flood dangers since South East Queensland and Northern NSW had started flooding at the end of January 2022, then more and more disastrous floods flowed down the waterways from North to South of the Eastern seaboard – the same conditions as the major Victorian floods of 2010-2011.

In the case of the Maribyrnong River flood of 14 October 2022, in addition to the above:

4. There was a high tide due in the lower reaches of the Maribyrnong River (Maribyrnong Township, 9km from the CBD) on Friday 14 October at around 6am.
5. The possible phenomenon of ‘hydraulic jump’, calculated to occur near the Melbourne Water (MW) gauge station ID 587015 at the Maribyrnong Township, was not considered.
6. Anecdotally, the river was overdue for a major flood, as it floods regularly. There have been 28 recorded floods since 1871, with major floods every 10-20 years.
7. Modelling and predictions issued by MW -leading to warnings issued by the BoM and VICSES- were circulated during the days preceding the flood, but these were inaccurate. Expert former MW hydrologists have undertaken independent investigations and asserted that:
 - a. the predictions and intelligence gathered by Melbourne Water were deeply flawed, including that the flood flow calculations from Deep Creek, Darraweit Guim (flowing into the upper reaches of the Maribyrnong), was half to one third underestimated;
 - b. that the systems of gauges had not been maintained;
 - c. that the Rivervue Apartments at Avondale Heights had been built in contravention of existing land use zoning and that there had been a faulty process used to re-classify the land so that developers could build on a flood plain;

- d. and that Melbourne Water had changed their required 100 year flood level for LSIO flooding levels for permits for the commercial development of Rivervue Apartments.

These factors were enough for some local residents on the ground to discuss the inevitability of major flooding again. You did not need to be an expert hydrologist or a trained emergency incident controller to put two and two together; this might be the 'big one' many had been anticipating for years. Some residents reported that such conversations took place, but as there was no indication of the danger from authorities, they believed they were not at risk and no action needed to be taken.

Gauges

The EMV report into the June 2021 extreme weather event (p 17) refers to gauges being renewed after the 2011 Comrie Review of Victorian floods:

"In particular, new gauges were installed on existing flood warning system networks and manually read gauges were upgraded to include telemetry as part of the implementation of the Review of the 2010-11 Flood Warnings and Response, Recommendation 8. These gauge upgrades positively improved the Bureau of Meteorology's flood prediction models, including information on water height and flow".

Were new gauges installed on the Maribyrnong catchment system as part of the implementation of the Comrie Review? If not, why not?

Terms of Reference (2) adequacy and effectiveness of early warning systems

The following commentary refers to the case of the Maribyrnong River flood unless otherwise stated.

Early warning systems can include:

1. Advance notice doorknocks and community meetings to advise residents of a potential upcoming event
2. Public information on emergency agency/other websites, public broadcasters etc.
3. Notifications via social and other media advising of sandbag collection points and other information
4. Immediate evacuation doorknocks when the flood is imminent
5. Notifications via the VicEmergency App for specific locations
6. Emergency alerts (e.g. second warnings, by SMS) for specific locations

For the Maribyrnong River flood, authorities had several days' notice of the impending event, but did they adequately inform, warn and assist the community?

According to the VICSES Chief Officer Operations (COO) Tim Wiebusch (Maribyrnong community meeting, 15 December 2022), the procedure for issuing warnings is as follows:

1. Melbourne Water (MW) provides predictions and intelligence, including crafting and generating warnings which they pass onto the BoM
2. BoM issues the warnings by publishing them on their website, through social media and emergency broadcasters. VICSES also issues the warnings.
3. VICSES engages with MW around the intelligence that has been passed on, and what the impact on the community might be, using this information as the basis for their operational decisions.

So the flow of information and resultant actions to be taken rests fundamentally with the MW "predictions and intelligence". It is the contention of many residents and affected stakeholders, that this information was erroneous and contributed in large part to the

failure of other agencies' actions (not wholly, they also had the capacity to take alternative or complementary courses of action).

The State Emergency Management Plan, Flood Sub-plan (p 18) states that "VICSES leads the coordination of business rules that govern community notifications...The business rules set triggers for the three warning levels" (Riverine floods: EMCOP-library-IMT toolbox_IMTTB-Public information-EMCOP Business Rules-Riverine Flood Business rules).

Were the triggers set out in these business rules followed?

1. Advance notice doorknocks to advise residents of potential event

According to the VICSES COO (ibid), on Tues 11 October 2022 an SES doorknock was conducted of around 150 residences in Maribyrnong. VicSESVA is not aware of any SES report that captured relevant information such as:

- how many people were actually at home and not at work,
- whether they were in the area that was at high risk or
- if they understood what they may have been told.

Although it would have been instructive to compile a report: in 2013 when the Maribyrnong council developed a comprehensive and award-winning community engagement strategy and involved the local VICSES Footscray Unit volunteers in doorknocking residents about flood risk (not during a flood event), the Unit included a report sheet, the 'Door Knock Area Result Log', which was used to identify:

- whether contact was made,
- if notices were left,
- if there was no access and
- if an interpreter was required (Maribyrnong being one of the most diverse communities in Australia).

Also, considering the prediction was for a major flood, why were more homes not doorknocked? There was time and opportunity. The 2013 VICSES Footscray flood doorknock teams visited 430 properties, identified by MW as at risk of over floor flooding. Information and feedback about those properties was transferred to VICSES for future planning and inclusion in the Local Flood Guide. While VICSES planners may refer to this number of

properties being affected only in a '1 in 100 year' event, even with a less catastrophic major flood event, SES itself estimates that 232 properties are at risk (2022 LFG, p 3).

The classification of a '1 in 100 year' event is also confusing, it holds little meaning for most communities, other than them thinking -for example in Maribyrnong- that a major flood would not happen in their lifetime, since there had been one in 1974 and there would not be another one for one hundred years.

There were no SES members from the local Unit (Footscray) with local knowledge on that doorknock of 11 October 2022. *(Note re date discrepancy: While the COO told the December community meeting that doorknocks took place on Tuesday 11 October, a VICSES Community Resilience Coordinator stated that the doorknocks were taking place on Wednesday 12 October [email 12 October 2022]).* Maribyrnong council advised that it was done by two SES staff members and two volunteers. A senior local volunteer leader queried why it was done at the last minute and not as a regular mitigation strategy: "The flood risks are well known, so why is there not an information drop in letterboxes, say annually in the leadup to the rainy season, to the identified properties? It is not a large number of homes – so why do the VICSES Comm-Ed staff team not do a doorknock, say every second year as a routine. Volunteer availability may well be a diminishing resource, so put it to better use".

Was the doorknock effective? One resident who was doorknocked said that the advice they were given was that the Angler's Tavern might be affected and perhaps half a dozen homes nearby. For a prediction of a **major** flood level (despite the underestimation of MW modelling), **this seems desperately inadequate advice.**

It appears that VICSES underestimated the scale of the event, failed to adequately warn the local community and gave misleading public advice which put people and property at risk.

Previous reports have highlighted shortcomings about warnings and advice. The EMV report into the June 2021 extreme weather event (p 43) states:

"It was noted by both emergency management personnel and the community, that warnings and information were felt to be delayed, particularly in the early stages of the event. This was potentially due to a lack of understanding by some emergency management personnel

regarding how to effectively utilise Bureau of Meteorology products and information to communicate the confidence levels and potential size and severity of the event. This was coupled with insufficient knowledge of the dangers posed by antecedent conditions to inform messaging”.

The same words could perhaps be applied to the 2022 flood event.

2. Intelligence

Before the Flood

1. On Tuesday 11 October 2022 up to 100 properties may have been doorknocked (probably many people were not at home), instead of 430 which had been identified at risk by MW earlier than 2013.
2. On Thursday 13 October 2022, Channel 9 news quoted VICSES: “The SES says only a handful of properties are in danger of flooding, but they’ve had plenty of time to prepare”.
3. On Thursday 13 October 2022, the Incident Action Plan #1 (IAP) issued at 18:00hs from the Incident Control Centre (ICC) at Dandenong advised that “Anglers Tavern above floor but patrons (sic) have been doing work there today to move everything, 3 houses in Van Ness Ave sandbagged and prepared but likely impacted, 6 properties in Flora St Keilor isolated for 48 hours but high and dry -were doorknocked pre flood (*note: the use of the past tense here, the day before the flood: did this indicate some flooding had occurred the night before or is this an error?*), 12 properties in Flora Ave and Ailsa St need monitoring will have yard flooding and not above floor with current prediction”: **a massive underestimation of what was to occur (600+ properties).**
4. On Thursday 13 October, Channel 7 news broadcast the regular press briefing from the State Control Centre, where the VICSES COO Tim Wiebusch stated “The upper reaches of the Maribyrnong are currently under a ‘watch and act’ for a major flood warning. We are likely to see, fortunately, only a small number of properties affected on that river system: around three houses and also one of the local taverns. We’re reasonably confident that as the water comes through to Maribyrnong Township, that it will remain within the levees”.

This is alarmingly misleading advice which put hundreds of residents at risk.

Firstly, if the upper reaches are already under a 'watch and act' for major flood (which was issued by the BoM earlier that morning 13 October), then Maribyrnong Township is not safe; the volume of water flows downstream to the township. Reference to this is made in the Maribyrnong Storm and Flood Emergency Plan: "Inflows from Jackson's Creek and Deep Creek upstream of Keilor North will likely impact on flood magnitude downstream at Maribyrnong" (p 25). Coupled with a predicted high tide at the township the following morning (14 October) at 6am, and other possible factors like the hydraulic jump phenomenon, that would make the situation at the township extremely dangerous. These are known factors.

Secondly, to state that only around three houses and the Angler's Tavern (there is no other tavern) would be affected is a gross underestimation of predictions and indicators, including historical factors, already publicly available.

Thirdly, to state that the water would "remain within the levees" is a dangerous lack of situational awareness ("the ability to identify, process and comprehend the critical elements of what is happening in the environment in relation to time and space", DEPI *Reference Manual Introduction to Leadership*, 2014, p 6). Given the potential threat to life consequences of this poor situational awareness, for the officer charged with control of the event (the VICSES COO) this has been seen by many residents as a dereliction of duty, as **there are no levees in Maribyrnong and there never has been.**

This erroneous advice from the VICSES COO gave residents a false sense of security that they would be safe. Many went to bed assuming nothing would happen to them. It put lives at risk, and has been perceived by residents and others as demonstrating the COO's lack of knowledge, leadership and capacity to manage this flood emergency, according to his responsibilities under the SEMP and Flood sub-plan Emergency Management Priorities, which are designed to guide all decisions before, during and after an event. The first priority is "Protection and preservation of life...This includes...safety of community members including vulnerable community members...".

During the Flood

1. On the day of the flood, 14 October 2022, the ICC issued a Sitrep (situation report) at 11.30am (6-7 hours after the emergency evacuation of residents earlier that morning), which stated “the Major flood warning triggered the evacuation of approximately 60 houses in the Maribyrnong area”. In fact, hundreds of homes in the Maribyrnong Township, Woods St Ascot Vale, the Avondale Heights Rivervue Apartments and other areas were underwater by then, and also stated that 245 (not 600+) properties were impacted. Again, an inexplicable underestimation. The Age newspaper was still quoting these ‘official’ figures on 19 October.
2. There is some debate about the map issued by EMV that day, ‘SES - Severe Weather Oct – Maribyrnong - Flood Extent 15:34 hrs 14 Oct 202 - A3P 1:7,500’. A council employee advised me that the map was not a depiction of the actual event, but was a prediction based on previous floods, and that it was later withdrawn. If this is the case, that is another example of EMV issuing misleading and inaccurate information.
3. On or around Friday 14 October 2022, at the regular press briefing at the State Control Centre, the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) Andrew Crisp, when questioned about the inadequate response in Maribyrnong, said words to the effect: “everyone who needed assistance got what they needed”. This is incorrect and a failure to understand the scale and consequences of the event, for which the Commissioner has responsibility (see State Emergency Management Plan, p 27: “The *EM Act 2013* allocates responsibility to the EMC for the management of consequences of major emergencies”).

After the Flood

1. On 15 October 2022, the Channel 9 ‘Today’ show referred to the Emergency Management Commissioner: “He was at pains to point out, on the day to us, and to every other media organisation, that people had had those adequate warnings, that 4.30am was in his view enough time to give people time to get out and get some of their stuff out” (host, Karl Stefanovic).
2. On 15 October, at least the Herald Sun newspaper produced slightly more accurate figures. Their front page headline stated “500 homes hit as Maribyrnong floods, residents rescued”.
3. The Initial SES advice about the number of properties (245) was later revised to around 300 (still an unrealistic underestimate), although news channels continued to broadcast inaccurate figures, for example, even in 2023, an ABC radio report (RN,

17 March 2023, also News Radio 30 April 2023) stated that “200 people were affected and dozens of homes”. Sky News (1 May 2023, Simon Love, senior Victoria reporter) referred back to the VICSES COO “he thought only three homes and the Angler’s tavern would go under”.

4. In May 2023, numbers were still uncertain. Maribyrnong City Council cited 525 properties affected in their submission to the Melbourne Water review (p 6).

The downplaying of the magnitude of the event continues to affect residents, who feel their situation has not been taken seriously.

3. Public information on emergency agency/other websites, public broadcasters etc.

Emergency agencies such as EMV and VICSES publish information on their websites, social media etc. While the accuracy and timeliness of the information may be arguable, there are other associated considerations:

- a) Does the community understand the roles and responsibilities of these agencies (do they even know they exist)?
- b) Do they know where to access the information and are the sites easily navigable?
- c) Do they understand the context of the published information, and are able to apply it to their personal circumstances?
- d) Do they speak and read English?
- e) Do they own a computer?

In the case of the Maribyrnong River flood, it could be suggested that many residents may answer ‘no’ to all those questions. The same might be said for multicultural Shepparton, or other communities where an ageing demographic may not have updated IT resources or skills.

The City of Maribyrnong is one of the most diverse in Australia (Census 2016, 2021)with:

- residents who come from 135 countries,
- 80 languages spoken,
- 50% of people born overseas,
- 52% have both parents born overseas,
- 42% speak a language other than English at home

- only 11.8% identify their origin as 'Australian', with China, Vietnam, India and Italy making up large groups

So a long term process of multi-disciplinary, multi-lingual engagement is needed if the community is to be adequately informed about their exposure to risk. Such engagement has not taken place, although all emergency agencies have community engagement plans. But how relevant are those plans, if residents:

1. are from refugee, migrant, or CALD groups who may not belong to or engage with a particular social demographic that assumes a certain levels of education and literacy (which they may not have, even in their own language), IT skills and equipment, English language, economic means, employment patterns that enable them to attend community meetings, etc.
2. are unaware of the existence of VICSES, EMV, BoM, MW or their websites, or phone apps such as Vic Emergency App (and many may not own a smart phone)
3. may be distrustful, because of past experience in home countries, of authority figures, people in uniforms, police et al
4. have never been exposed to information about the risk in their own language
5. do not have the financial means or family support to seek any back up if they are caught up in an emergency

The 2022 ECCV/VCOSS report *Valuing Strengths Building Resilience* states (p 12):

Emergency preparedness starts with the premise of shared responsibility. For this principle to be fully realised, Victorian communities – in all their diversity – need support to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. For this support to be effective, it needs to be culturally responsive, context specific, community-led and strengths-based.

(Valuing Strengths Building Resilience: Improving emergency management outcomes for multicultural communities in Victoria ECCV, VCOSS Sept 2022)

The residents affected by the Maribyrnong flood event can justifiably feel that they have not been supported effectively and that the particular demographics and social context were not adequately considered in emergency strategic planning. This will negatively affect their short and long term recovery.

There is extensive research in the sector which demonstrates the long term detrimental effects of major floods and loss of homes and personal possessions, including PTSD, depression and anxiety, divorce/relationship breakup, altered belief systems, substance abuse, imposition and stress on extended family members or friends who may assist. There are short term challenges like how to find new accommodation, loss of connection to neighbours and friends, financial difficulties, bureaucratic challenges dealing with government, insurance, service providers or other entities, decisions about rebuilding or relocating (and if there are viable options for these), legal matters, etc. This research into continuing effects of major floods is in the public domain (for data on impacts and mental health see also 'Household Experiences of flooding in Brisbane and Ipswich, Queensland', Geoscience Australia 2016, pp 3-8) .

***Recommendation:** that both short and long term consequences should be at the centre of all investigations and mitigations around this event*

4. Warnings published on websites and other media

There was time and opportunity in Maribyrnong on at least Tues 11, Wed 12 and Thurs 13 to communicate with residents and get them prepared. But it seems that VICSES – and perhaps this is characteristic of sector thinking - expected the community to inform themselves and have the capability to take appropriate action. It is easy when you work in emergency response and management to assume that the knowledge you have gained over years of training and service is obvious, and common knowledge. It is not. People do not automatically know what to do, and without sustained and appropriate education programmes, they won't.

It is no use blaming them. There have been comments made on internal SES Facebook pages blaming the residents that “they shouldn't live on a floodplain then” and the VICSES COO made a veiled reference to residents not following advice: “some people had chosen not to relocate in the early phases” (Maribyrnong community meeting 15 Dec 2022).

The Emergency Management Commissioner Andrew Crisp also stated on the morning of the flood (interview, Channel 9, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3MJjMIPo2Jw>) when challenged about Maribyrnong residents being given little time to prepare, that “The

feedback I've got from other people in that community is they've been well-warned". The following day (State Control Centre press briefing, broadcast on Channel 9 news, 15 October 2022), when questioned about preparedness, he stated "I don't think anyone in Victoria would have been surprised that the State was going to be confronted with a significant weather event that would result in flooding" (*its obvious, isn't it? And we all know what to do?*).

Given the demographics of Maribyrnong and other diverse Victorian communities, is the process of warnings appropriate and effective? Certainly not at 2.25-3am on Friday 14 October when people are asleep.

Nor is it sufficient to assume that because information is posted on an agency website, that therefore it will be read and understood.

Nor are warnings effective if the potentially affected people are not from a similar social demographic as the people who produce or disseminate the information about emergencies; those predominantly white, literate, male, middle aged, middle class public service-type groups.

Warning Terminology

There is inconsistency in the types of warnings and how well they may or may not be understood by the community. The BoM terminology is 'Flood watch' and 'Flood warning (minor, moderate and major categories). The SES terminology, in line with the Australian Warning System (AWS), is 'advice', 'watch and act' and 'emergency warning'. Leaving aside local social demographic factors, it cannot necessarily be assumed that an average reader/listener will understand the definitions and differences of this terminology. The similarities of word usage in 'flood watch'(BoM) /'watch and act' (SES) or 'flood warning' (BoM)/'emergency warning' (SES) do not assist the reader in understanding the subtleties of their different meanings.

As one resident asked me: "What does 'watch and act' mean? Should I go down and watch the river?"

This is not a new observation. It was identified in the EMV Community Report June 2021

Extreme Weather Event (p 68): “there is a limited community understanding regarding flood warnings including the need for non-technical language, the differences within and between minor, moderate, and major thresholds as well as the difference between a flood watch and a flood warning”.

Recommendations:

1. That State emergency arrangements consider standardising terminology, e.g. the BoM might retain information about flood levels, but add the same emergency categorisations as emergency response agencies, under the Australian Warning System (AWS)

2. the definitions of the advices under the AWS be incorporated into all emergency agency public information sources, so people know what they mean

<https://www.australianwarningsystem.com.au/>

Local Flood Guides published for community information

Information published in VICSES Local Flood Guides has changed over time, for example: According to the previous 2012 VICSES Local Flood Guide (LFG) for Maribyrnong, “SES activates the Maribyrnong River Flood Response Plan” at 1.7m. The revised LFG of 1 August 2022 does not contain this information, that is, no indication of the SES triggers/actions are mentioned.

The 2022 LFG refers to the minor, moderate and major flood levels but gives no useful information that individuals can apply to their own situation. The 2022 guide lists no advice against the minor level, whereas the 2012 guide had listed both ‘Floodwatch’, and ‘SES activates Flood response plan’ and also listed 1.68m as ‘the river breaks its banks. Minor flooding occurs and the Anglers Tavern becomes inundated’.

The 2012 guide listed predicted heights and their effects on the local community – so you might be able to foresee from this what could happen to you (e.g. “At 2.68m Raleigh Rd crossing first becomes covered by shallow water”). The 2022 flood guide instead gives examples of past floods – you might not conclude that it will ever happen again (e.g. “3.83m, 15 September 1993, Anglers Tavern lounge and bistro area under nearly two metres of water”).

At the moderate level the 2022 LFG lists “Maribyrnong River trail flooded at various locations. Burton Cres reserve impacted”. The 2012 version had listed: “at 2.68m Raleigh Rd crossing first becomes covered by shallow water. The number of homes/businesses isolated by the floodwater increases to 63. Houses become inundated”.

At the major flood level, the 2022 guide lists “Tram services along routes 57 and 82 and bus services 468 and 952 along Raleigh Rd likely to be impacted”, whereas the 2012 guide had specifically listed “flood levels above 3.8m result in major increases in the number of houses affected. Dynon Rd, Farnsworth Ave and Smithfield Rd all become inundated at 3.78m”.

In other words, the printed information tells me this: in 2012 I may have had a clear indication that many houses would be flooded, and at what river heights. In 2022 I have an indication that the river walking/bike trail may be a bit wet and that public transport would be affected.

So instead of giving a prediction of what might occur at certain heights which people can personally factor into their processing of current information, the revised 2022 LFG lists historic examples; the assumption being, one supposes, that residents can translate that information to their own current circumstances.

Recommendation:

- 1. That the VICSES Local Flood Guide for Maribyrnong be revised to incorporate information that was in previous versions and which gives a better guide to flood levels and consequences*
- 2. That community education plans include use and interpretation of the Flood Guide*

5. Notifications via social and other media advising of sandbag collection points and other information

There was some information disseminated on various platforms about sandbags. If a resident had access to those media, knew where to look, spoke English and had the means to collect sandbags, they may have been able to access some. Residents in Woods St, Ascot Vale, did not even appreciate that a flood was imminent. They were completely inundated with no warnings, alerts or evacuation advice, and could not understand why they had been

left out. They said that in the 1993 and 2010 floods, they were doorknocked days in advance and that SES delivered sandbags to them and helped them sandbag their homes.

There are pre-established sandbagging arrangements in local government areas. The usual agreed arrangements are that councils order and supply sand and SES supply sandbags and volunteers to help fill them.

For flooding, Maribyrnong council has determined that the Aquatic Centre car park would be a suitable location for sandbagging because it is a large open area, traffic can be controlled (in-out-direction-speed etc). This location is also listed in the SES publication 'VICSES Central Metro Region Flood Narrative for Major Flooding', p 9, updated September 2021.

In 2022, Bunnings was designated as the sandbag collection point. Why Bunnings and not the pre-determined location? It may have just been a practical choice: SES said they had run out of sandbags so residents would have to go to Bunnings to buy their own anyway, so they may as well put the sand there too. Or did the ICC - SES people managing the flood - not know about the pre-determined location? There was no-one from council in the ICC, so local knowledge was missing.

A lot of work goes into formulating plans, but if they are not followed, what's the point?

Some residents reported that they received conflicting advice. The SES advice to council was that during the doorknock, advice would be given to residents regarding "sandbagging location in Essendon if resident require" (sic, email, Wednesday 12 October 2022). Residents were told one thing by an SES doorknocker: to collect sandbags from Windy Hill, North Essendon (the opposite side of the river to Maribyrnong, inaccessible if the river flooded), then were told another thing on arriving there: that the sandbags were only for SES use; residents should go back to Bunnings Highpoint to collect some there.

Most residents were unaware of this, as they had not been adequately informed of the threat to the river, or were at work, or were not checking the SES website (if they knew what that was). Some residents did manage to collect sandbags, although they were rationed. Because of the widespread flooding across the state, SES said they had almost run out. Some

residents reported that they were allowed 6 sandbags each, which may be used to block the toilet or shower drain. This is and was completely ineffective in a major flood.

The Maribyrnong council Manager for Emergency Response also advised that SES had advised them that they had no more stocks of sandbags. However, this was incorrect. There are large bales of more than 8,000 sandbags at the Maribyrnong Council Operations Centre where the VICSES Footscray Unit is located. They belong to SES and have been there for some years, ready to be used in case of a major flood. That information was included in a report 'VICSES Footscray Flood Preparedness for Maribyrnong' prepared by the VICSES Footscray volunteer member of the Maribyrnong Municipal Emergency Planning Committee (MEMPC) on 9 July 2020. It appears that SES staff in 2022 were unaware of their own stock of sandbags, and that the community missed out. Those sandbags remain at the council operations centre on the storage shelves, unused.

VICSES did set up large-scale sandbag filling points, one was at the Chelsea Unit. Volunteers asked at Chelsea Unit did not know where those palletts of sandbags were destined for. There may also have been sandbag filling at the Essendon Unit, but none were delivered or made available to, Maribyrnong residents. Chelsea Unit is far from Maribyrnong and both Chelsea and Essendon are on the opposite side of the river to Maribyrnong, so when the river floods, traffic cannot get across from the Essendon side to the Maribyrnong side. Where were all those sandbags used?

Why was there no organised (council + SES) sandbag filling on the NW side of the river, until the day before the flood, and only then with limited availability?

Why did SES not supply the stock of sandbags it has stored at the council Operations Centre?

The general public has a very clear picture of flood assistance – they constantly see TV footage of SES volunteers filling sandbags and helping communities, and it is not surprising that this might be one of their expectations. The local VICSES Footscray unit was not activated to assist residents with sandbagging in Maribyrnong. There were, however, two trained boat coxswains who had been earlier placed on standby at the Footscray LHQ in case they were needed for boat operations. They were tasked (extraordinarily) direct from the

ICC at Dandenong, not via the ESTA call system, on Thursday 13 October 2022 and instructed to deliver sandbags to one local business only, the Angler's Tavern.

Why was one local business assisted and not residents?

And why was it a direct request from the ICC and not communicated as a normal request for assistance (RFA) on the emergency pager, which is the authorised communication system?

The SEMP priorities rate protection of residential properties ahead of assets supporting livelihoods and economic production (e.g. the Angler's Tavern). At the Maribyrnong community meeting of 15 December 2022, the VICSES COO reported that the SES had engaged with a local business, the Angler's Tavern: "That started our engagement with the local facilities in the area, so particularly Angler's Tavern and the like, where we were in conversation with them for several days in that space and assisting with sandbagging and the like around that area".

At this meeting, residents were angered that the Angler's Tavern had been assisted by SES for several days but not them, or the few who had been doorknocked had received no sense of urgency, being given the impression that there was little to worry about except 'maybe' a few homes might be impacted around the tavern.

The hotel is the only business located in the residential Township, not in a commercial shopping precinct, but adjacent to private homes. It is a source of tension in the local community due to loss of amenity: drug taking, drunkenness, fights, noise, etc. and with strong opposition from residents to the hotel's plans for expansion. It is by no means a critical asset that supports community resilience.

The State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP, p 7) sets out the State Emergency Management Priorities for managing emergencies. These are also articulated in the SEMP Flood sub-plan (p 13). The priorities are:

1. Protection and preservation of life and relief of suffering is paramount. This includes:
 - Safety of emergency response personnel; and
 - Safety of community members including vulnerable community

members and visitors/tourists

2. Issuing of community information and community warnings detailing incident information that is timely, relevant and tailored to assist community members make informed decisions about their safety
3. Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets that support community resilience
4. Protection of residential property as a place of primary residence
5. Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability
6. Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity, and social values of the environment.

The SEMP rates community information and warnings only second after safety/preservation of life. But the first priority also articulates safety of community members including vulnerable residents. The local tradesmen who made rescue trips on their own initiative and carried some elderly Vietnamese residents from their flooded homes in Maribyrnong Township around 7am on 14 October 2022 before SES commenced boat transfers certainly fulfilled that priority, although they may not have known it.



Where was SES? The earlier crews who had been tasked to doorknock and evacuate residents at 4.30am had been stood down and were waiting at the Maribyrnong Community relief centre. One trained Footscray Unit boat coxswain, without instruction, took the initiative to go to Footscray LHQ and bring back the Inflatable Rescue Boat (IRB) and 4WD. When he returned to the relief centre, another experienced coxswain said he would join him for boat operations, which commenced soon after.

5. Immediate evacuation doorknocks when the flood is imminent

The following comments were made by members of the audience, Maribyrnong community meeting, 15 December 2022:

- a) Some residents with the VicEmergency App reported they did not receive any warnings
- b) Some received them too late
- c) Some were not aware of warnings being issued as they had not heard about anything which affected them (e.g. the whole of Woods St, Ascot Vale, who were flooded)
- d) Most residents were not doorknocked in advance (days before the flood)
- e) At the actual time of the flood, most residents were **not** doorknocked by SES and VICPOL with directions to evacuate
- f) Some of those who were doorknocked on 14 October, first knew of the flood between 4am and 6am when they were being alerted to evacuate immediately; others had no warning at all and woke up to find themselves flooded
- g) Doorknocking at c. 4am found most residents asleep, or they did not hear the door, or were reluctant to open the door to a stranger at that time
- h) There were no audible warnings like emergency vehicle sirens, car horns, loudspeakers, amplified announcements (emergency vehicles have the capability for these). There is a system of community alerting sirens in Victoria, but less than 40 Victorian communities have them and they have been utilised mainly by CFA for fire alerts. They are designed, nevertheless, for an all-hazards approach. Melbourne CBD has a public address system at 90 sites, to be used primarily by VICPOL.

Recommendations:

1. *That Maribyrnong Township be added to the system of community alerting sirens, along with any other locations at risk of mass evacuation, and that communities be educated on the use of the sirens*
2. *That SES volunteers be educated to improvise using resources at hand if no formal audible warning system is in place*

Terms of Reference (3): resourcing of the State Emergency Service, the adequacy of its response to the Flood Event and the adequacy of its resourcing to deal with increasing floods and natural disasters in the future

The following comments apply to the Maribyrnong River flood and the local SES Footscray Unit. The Unit is significantly under-resourced, now lacks experienced members, and is located in an unhealthy work environment. It has a large response territory and –given the critical infrastructure and services within its footprint- should be a priority Unit for VICSES and the State Government to support.

In order to ensure future capability to adequately serve the local community, the Unit would require:

1. Relocation to a safe workplace that is adequately resourced
2. Priority training given to Unit members, particularly in Deckhand, Boat Crew, Coxswain, and Land Based Swift Water Rescue courses
3. Regular whole-of-Unit training and emergency scenario exercising on and around the Maribyrnong River
4. Ensuring the Unit leadership has a high level of awareness of local issues and challenges
5. A renewed focus on community engagement, led by local volunteers with local knowledge

Maribyrnong River Flood: Situation of local VICSES Footscray Unit

The current situation of the Footscray Unit is:

1. Its capability has been diminished due to loss of experienced members during Covid
2. Volunteers work in an unhealthy and possibly unsafe environment due to high levels of nuisance dust classified as Industrial Waste Category C, containing significant levels of Total Petroleum Hydrocarbons (TPH) and high levels of inorganic and organic respirable particles smaller than the accepted threshold of 10µm. This

environmental hazard is detrimental to volunteers' health and safety and a barrier to retaining and recruiting volunteers.

3. The Unit does not have (and has never had) its own premises, instead it is co-located in a corner of a warehouse which is part of the City of Maribyrnong Operations Centre and has been there for the past 10 years. It is not fit for purpose and located at the outer edge of the Unit's response territory (making it hard for volunteers to respond promptly), difficult and slow to access: there are fourteen multiple gates, doors and padlocks to unlock and lock every time volunteers respond.
4. The Unit is too small for the number of members, does not have any dedicated training area, meeting room, sufficient office storage or adequate vehicle parking space. The only office is a demountable inside a part of the caged-off area of the warehouse, which creates significant issues with communications reception due to a Faraday Cage effect (a tin shed in a tin shed). These factors are not only a barrier to recruitment and retention, they also have a direct impact on delivering emergency response for the local communities.
5. Two months before the Maribyrnong flood, senior VICSES management staff visited the Unit and threatened the Unit with closure within 12 months if its alleged response time and performance did not improve (note, the Unit members disputed this assertion, made without evidence, and many believed they were just being put in the 'too hard basket'). This has had a damaging effect on volunteer morale and led to at least one long-term member standing down from a senior role. With no benchmarks for improvement set and no further discussion, the Unit Controller was informed his position would not be renewed and in December VICSES installed a new Controller from outside the area (City of Monash).
6. Along with the re-structure of the Unit leadership, the new Controller made a decision to abolish the position of Deputy Controller Community Engagement, although all emergency planning emphasises the importance of community engagement and education, and it is one of the core functions of agencies. Throughout its history, the Footscray Unit has had strong connections to the local community, business and council. The Unit has participated regularly in both small

and large-scale community events and education campaigns, and the role of volunteers in community engagement has been regarded as one of the Unit's most important functions.

7. VICSES Footscray had its primary emergency response vehicle (a medium rigid rescue trucks) taken offline due to the VICSES state-wide heavy-rigid rescue and medium-rigid rescue truck fleet being found to have mechanical/structural failures. The other rescue truck used by the unit was removed by VICSES and allocated to another Unit. It was not returned until May 2023.

8. The Unit response territory includes some of the most critical infrastructure and strategically important areas in Victoria, such as the Royal Melbourne/Women's /Children's hospitals, the Victorian Comprehensive Cancer Centre, the East Melbourne Epworth hospital, the Footscray hospital, the Bolte and Westgate bridges, the Yarra and Maribyrnong rivers, the Metro, Burnley and new Westgate tunnels, major urban and regional rail, tram and freeway networks, the MCG and Marvel Stadiums, the Melbourne Zoo, Universities and research institutes, two cemeteries, the Port of Melbourne, CBD and Docklands business precincts, heavy industry, hazmat facilities, fuel storage depots, etc.

Local VICSES Footscray Unit Operational Capability

In all major events, one local Unit cannot handle the scope of work and SES crews are called from across Melbourne to assist. However, local Units pride themselves on standards of operational readiness and being able to deploy as many people and resources as possible in a major event.

Was the local Footscray Unit capable of responding effectively to the 2022 Maribyrnong River flood event?

The Unit had lost its 2 rescue trucks and other resources had come and gone. Four days before the flood event, VICSES removed its second Inflatable Rescue Boat and re-deployed it to Pakenham Unit. At the time of the flood, the Unit was left with two 4WDs. One is always needed to tow the boat and trailer, so that left only one for general response.

The Unit's operational membership is around 30 people. However, the Unit was left with only enough capability -one 4WD- to transport 3-4 responders. Under-resourced is an understatement.

There was also a lack of experienced leadership, as volunteers must juggle competing demands from employers and others. Some volunteers gain employment with VICSES, but when they do, that makes them often unavailable for duty as a local volunteer. In major events, VICSES staff are deployed to manage the incident, often away from their local area and are not available to exercise local control. Because of this, VICSES has a practice that no staff member can be the Controller of a Unit, but they can take on other leadership roles.

In the case of Footscray, the Deputy Controller Operations (DC Ops) is also a VICSES staff member. The day before the flood, he was the Unit Duty Officer, but was relieved in the afternoon as he had an interview related to his employment. He is also an experienced boat rescue operator and was tasked with boat operations on the day of the flood. That made him unavailable to coordinate other volunteers. This is no reflection on his service; it is a reflection that SES human resources are spread thinly; those with specialist training are undertaking multiple roles and there are too few skilled volunteers available for surge capacity.

The Unit has provided service to the community for 60 years. It previously had effective practices that emphasised preparedness and capability, particularly centred around the Maribyrnong River, for example:

1. Unit members were continually educated about the Maribyrnong River and flooding, especially with graphic video footage of the 1974 flood taken by a local resident amateur filmmaker David Sheridan, and through training exercises on and around the river
2. Unit members responded to major river flood events in 2010-2011, 2017 and other smaller events
3. In forecasts of high rainfall or potential flooding, unit members were rostered on over a 24-hr period to check the MW gauge at Chifley Drive
4. With predicted large scale weather events, the UDO would chart a phantom roster, organising for additional crews to be on standby

5. The Unit has a loudhailer for communicating (outside, to groups etc.) if power and phone lines are out
6. The Unit had keen cyclists and in the past worked to form a bicycle squad who could quickly access off road areas in an emergency (e.g. Maribyrnong River trail)
7. The Unit ran the 2013 community doorknock campaign, visiting 430 residences and educating people about flood risk. There has been periodic discussion since 2013 about VICSES running another doorknock campaign, but this has not occurred.

Recommendation:

That dedicated funding be provided so that

1. *VICSES can prioritise the provision of specialised training within the next 12 months to the VICSES Footscray Unit to ensure continuing capability in flood and storm operations, targeted on flood operations for the Maribyrnong River (deckhand, LBSWR crewperson, coxswain courses)*
2. *That VICSES implement the same training across the service for other Units in flood zones*

Terms of Reference (6): Flood Event as a whole, including but not limited to, the catchments and floodplains of (various systems...).

The following comments refer to the Maribyrnong River in particular unless otherwise stated.

Readiness

JSOP 2.02.03 (p 1) details the process to establish the minimum predetermined level of readiness for IMTs based on the forecast of significant weather conditions and consideration of potential risk and consequence. It also states that information on readiness and unresolved issues will be recorded in Fireweb by 17:00 the day prior to the readiness day (p 5).

Was there an understanding of having volunteers available to respond if needed on Friday 14 October? There was obviously an understanding that the river might flood, as boat crews had been put on standby, SES had assisted the Angler's tavern with sandbagging, residents had been referred to Bunnings, the BoM Had issued severe weather warnings and a flood watch, the SES had issued an 'advice', river height estimates had been rising since Monday and VicPOL were enquiring about a possible Incident Control Point.

But on the evening of Thursday 13 October, SES deployed the local Footscray Unit crew to the Craigieburn Unit to assist with storm damage Requests For Assistance (RFAs), and possibly to be on standby to then go to Whittlesea. However, ten minutes before they reached Craigieburn Unit, they were recalled.

Cluster arrangements are in place to assist neighbouring Units, but Footscray is in a cluster with Northcote, Essendon and Brimbank. Craigieburn is in a cluster with Sunbury and Fawkner. By the end of this evening, Footscray crew members were fatigued (volunteers already work their full day job, then keep working after hours for emergency operations). They would likely get less than 2 hours sleep before being alerted to the flood.

What information about readiness was recorded in Fireweb in the days leading up to the Maribyrnong River Flood?

Why was the decision made to send the Footscray SES crew out of their area the night before the flood, creating a fatigue management issue?

Incident Control Centre

The Maribyrnong River flood incident was controlled from the Dandenong ICC.

The VICSES Flood Emergency Response Plan states that the ICC “should be located as close to the flood incident as practical to ensure control is exercised at the lowest effective level and takes account of local experience and knowledge” (p 31). The Central Region Emergency Response Plan Flood Sub Plan designates Sunshine ICC as the ICC for the North West Metro area (p 21). The VICSES Operations Management Manual lists the Essendon Unit DivComm as reporting to the Sunshine ICC (p 95).

Pre-defined footprints and clusters for ICCs for VICSES response to flood and storm are also outlined in Schedule 4 of JSOP 2.03 ‘Incident Management Team (IMT) Readiness Arrangements’ (pp 12-14). This JSOP lists the North West Metro Region’s primary ICC as Sunshine, within an ICC cluster of Sunshine and FRV Burnley. The JSOP states that “where an IMT manages more than one ICC footprint, the Regional Controller...will determine the location of the IMT based on risk and consistent with the Regional Flood Response Plan and the SES Readiness and Activation considerations”.

A question was put to an SES operations staffer why Dandenong was used and not Sunshine. He said because there were predictions for rain and storm damage on the South East side of Melbourne and they anticipated there would be multiple callouts from there (so Dandenong would be closer to that activity). My understanding is that this decision was made by the State Response Coordinator.

What reasoning was used to make the decision to run the ICC at Dandenong? Based on what factors?

Why was the situation in Maribyrnong not assessed as the priority risk?

How experienced were the VICSES staff on night shift Thurs 13-Fri 14 October at the ICC?

Were they familiar with the Maribyrnong flood plan?

***Recommendation:** that VICSES and EMV follow their plans to stand up the Sunshine ICC, not*

the Dandenong ICC, for a Maribyrnong River flood

There was also confusion about the line of control. That same week VICSES was implementing its organisational restructure and members had not been informed of the changes. A local volunteer leader said “At the start of each major event, VICSES should release a command chart, with contact details for the person in each role, and update it as the roles change (*Note: this is a function of the IMT in the ICC, but the information is only circulated within the IMT, not out to Units*). Members outside of the staging area/DivComm team may need to make contact, and we had no clear information. We were met with phone calls unanswered, and being given outdated phone numbers. VICSES is good at circulating all sorts of other information throughout the year, and need to get better at doing things to the same level during major operations”.

Division Command Point

It seems that the Maribyrnong River incident was essentially managed as a Division Command Point (DCP), firstly on the street out of an SES vehicle, then –as flood waters approached- it was relocated to the Maribyrnong community relief centre, not the pre-existing DCP as set out in the VICSES Operations Management Manual which is the Essendon Unit LHQ reporting to the Sunshine ICC (p 95). According to the Manual (p 81), VICSES preference is to utilise permanent structures such as a VICSES Unit, to take advantage of existing communications infrastructure.

It is unusual for emergency response activities and evacuations/relief operations to be co-located. People need support services: food, clothing, bedding, etc. Emergency Managers need other types of resources and in major events there may be other considerations, such as security concerns, fatalities and confidential matters to discuss, as well as heavy vehicle traffic movements, re-supply and other operational demands. Separation of operations and the public is desirable. While the operations were coordinated in separate rooms at the relief centre, why was the designated DCP not used? My understanding is that it had been open as a DCP prior to the flood, but closed by the ICC on the evening of Thursday 13 October, just several hours before the major flood.

Why was Essendon Unit not utilised as a DCP, which it is functionally equipped to do and is a pre-planned DCP?

What reasoning led to the decision to close Essendon Unit DCP the night before the flood on Thursday 13 October?

What informed the decision to conduct operations out of the Relief Centre?

It was also reported by members of the local Footscray Unit that they were unaware of the command and control arrangements in place. There was no general email sent out to all members informing them of the ICC set up. Even the Unit Duty officer had not been informed of the establishment of the Div Comm. A senior local volunteer leader stated: "The communication between the unit and the staging area/Div Comm was less than ideal. The unit UDO was not kept informed very well, and the role was not clear. Upon seeking clarity, differing advice was given from different parties as to the UDO functions, which did not align with what was happening on the ground". A senior SES staffer from the ICC initially blamed the Unit for the communications confusion, later modifying this to "something in the ether".

Intelligence

Misleading information about the scale of the disaster

It seems that throughout this event and afterwards, the scale of the damage and loss has been routinely miscalculated and downplayed, or is confusing. Why? Did the Chief Officer of VICSES and the Emergency Management Commissioner, who gave daily press briefings at the State Control centre, not know what was happening? Did they not have accurate information or was that information not analysed and processed with a comprehensive understanding of consequences? Were they, either deliberately or out of ignorance, downplaying the scale of the flood?

How many homes were flooded in Maribyrnong?

In Maribyrnong, residents' groups have calculated that **around 606 residences were affected and 25 sports clubs and businesses**. The 'official' figures and data – which were/are those also quoted by broadcast media- and other information publicly available for preparedness follows. 'Official' figures refer mainly to over floor flooding and do not account for other significant losses, such as the basement car park of an apartment building in Kensington where, while residents were safe, around 100 vehicles were destroyed.

Published figures in preparedness plans of properties at risk are inconsistent:

1. In 2013, the VICSES Footscray/Maribyrnong Council flood doorknock visited **430** properties. The number identified by MW had been 417, but 430 properties at risk were found (for example, a block of flats had been counted by MW as one property, but it contained 8 flats which all needed information).
2. In 2018, the Maribyrnong Storm and Flood Emergency Plan, a sub-plan of the MEMPC, stated there were **411** at risk in Maribyrnong Township (p 39) and 319 over floor flooding risk and 147 flooding in yard risk, i.e. a total of **456** at risk in a 1% AEP event (p 31).
3. In 2021, VICSES identified and mapped **394** properties at risk of flooding (email, 1/12/2021 'Community Engagement in Maribyrnong')
4. In 2022, the revised SES Local Flood guide states **456** are at risk in a 1% AEP event (p 3)
5. In 2023 The VICSES website states that "The Maribyrnong flood plain is comprised of **400** properties including commercial, residential and community facilities which are threatened by large river events in the order of 1 in 100 year events"
6. Although directly following that information, the same webpage states: "In a Major flood, **232** mostly older-style residential properties are at risk of flooding, many over-floor. And at the 1% Annual Chance (1 in 100 year) flood level, **456** properties are identified as being at flood risk".

<https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/flood-guides/maribyrnong-city-council>

So which is it? 232, 319, 394, 400, 411, 430 or 456?

And why the discrepancy between any of those numbers and **600+** as residents – who lost their homes and belongings- have calculated?

And how are residents (including those from CALD backgrounds, tenants of rental properties etc.) supposed to identify if their property is one of them from reading the differing information in multiple plans?

***Recommendation:** determine the actual number of properties affected in 2022 by consultation with the residents, standardise all information, plans and maps with the most accurate data in a format which is understandable in plain English for the general reader. For multicultural communities, publish that information in appropriate languages*

Impact Assessments

There should have been timely impact assessments conducted as soon as possible after the emergency response phase of the event. The SEMP (3.6.11, p 28) states that Initial Impact Assessments should be conducted within 24-48 hours: “The Incident Controller is responsible for initiating and managing Initial Impact Assessment (IIA). The aim of IIA is to capture, during the initial 48 hours of an emergency, the nature and scale of the flood impact on people, community infrastructure, and the economic, natural, and built environments, in order that emergency relief and early recovery activities can commence”.

The 2021 Maribyrnong Municipal Storm and Flood Emergency Plan (p 10) states that “The control agency (VICSES) is responsible for coordinating the collection, collation and dissemination of Impact Assessment information on a whole of government basis during the emergency response”.

The VICSES Central Region Flood Emergency Response Plan (p 31) states that “Assessment of the impact is a vital component of the planning (situational awareness) and implementation of the response Incident Action Plans (IAPs) and recovery from an emergency incident. Assessments provide the information on which the response and recovery can be designed and adapted”. The plan further states that “VICPOL is responsible for coordinating the collection, collation and dissemination of Impact Assessment information on a whole-of government basis. The Incident Controller (VICSES) is responsible for activating VICPOL to undertake this function”.

Did the VICSES Incident Controller at the Dandenong ICC activate VICPOL to undertake Impact Assessment Information?

How soon after the initial response phase of the event?

How thorough were those assessments (given that many residents had evacuated the township and were not home for many weeks or even months)?

Were flooded homes in Woods St Ascot Vale, or the Rivervue apartments included?

Assessments inform the recovery effort to return the community back to normal as soon as possible. The Maribyrnong township remains half-unoccupied, with repeated cases of looting 6 months later, and empty shells of homes. Residents describe it as a ‘ghost town’, and many are wary to walk in the streets after dark.

To accurately assess the scale of the disaster, timely and comprehensive surveys should have been conducted shortly after the event, to check every property and gain a better understanding of the damage to properties and lives. This has not been done. The community feel that the inaccurate information disseminated by EMV and VICSES has presented the event as unimportant and they feel forgotten. People are struggling to stay engaged with any review process, as it has now dragged on for 7 months, the MW review (with limited terms of reference which do not address many critical issues) will not release findings until October, and the parliamentary enquiry not until June 2024. This is in contrast to the 2022 NSW Flood Enquiry which was commissioned in March and produced the final report in August.

To date, there is no accurate accounting of the number of people affected, number of properties and how many of those are condemned or uninhabitable, what the cost to insurers is and the personal costs for those not insured.

***Recommendation:** to properly and comprehensively assess the extent of damage and loss, involving the residents as the primary sources of information*

Consequence

The Extent of the Damage and Loss

MW did not do a timely survey or ascertain how many properties were flooded until 5 months later, and then it assessed only part of the whole. MW issued their 'Maribyrnong Flood Survey data fact sheet' on 9 March 2023. An analysis of this document provided by retired MW hydrologist G. Crapper (personal correspondence) found that:

- a) A total of 74 flood levels were surveyed, 66 at Maribyrnong, 4 at Rivervue, 3 at Keilor and 1 at Kensington.
- b) A total of 150 floor levels were surveyed, 92 at Maribyrnong, 53 at Rivervue, 4 at Keilor and 1 at Kensington.
- c) Not a single flood level or floor level was surveyed for the 20 or more residences flooded in Ascot Vale or the large number of community sporting and recreation facilities flooded.
- d) Not a single flood level or floor level was surveyed on the north side of the Maribyrnong in the Essendon North-Aberfeldie area.

- e) Only one flood level and floor level was surveyed in Kensington.
- f) Of the 53 floor levels surveyed at Rivervue, 48 were lower than the minimum 100-year flood level of 6.60m AHD

In other words, this MW survey is incomplete and does not account for the extent of the flood. There has been no other co-ordinated accounting for the impact on the community.

A local resident posted the following comments about MW surveying on facebook:

I ran into the surveyor on Raleigh Rd on 10 November. I asked what he was doing. He said surveying the flood level for MW. I asked what the level was at our house, he said best to ask MW (I have but still no response). I asked how was he doing it, his response was "well, after 3 weeks I can't really survey much as the rain has washed all the mud lines and markings off everything". He said it's really a guess. He shook his head saying "I said to MW how am I meant to do it now, why did you not appoint me within a day or so?" He had no idea why they didn't get him to do it straight away.

(Maribyrnong Floods 2022-We Want Answers facebook group, accessed 1 June 2022)

Why did MW not undertake a timely, accurate and comprehensive survey?

At post-flood community meetings, VICSES has not provided any information to residents on properties affected. At the 15 December 2022 meeting, the VICSES staffer told residents he would try to find out the information and get back to them. They have heard nothing since. At the 21 February 2023 community meeting, when residents again asked for information, the senior SES staffer told residents he could not tell them anything about the properties, as it would be a "breach of privacy" (although all the actual addresses of the projected properties affected are already listed in the publicly available flood plan). He said he would find information about the number and get back to the residents. They have heard nothing since.

Safety

The management of the Maribyrnong River flood failed to properly consider and inform the community and emergency responders about safety risks.

The VICSES Operations Management Manual (p 42) specifies that “A Field Safety officer is to be appointed during all VICSES operational incidents” and “Incident Safety Officers are to be appointed at Major Emergencies”.

The SES Local Knowledge Policy also refers to:

- Identifying community observers to perform a role of providing information and observations
- Appointing Local Information Officers (LIOs) within SES units to liaise with SES, community observers and other sources of local knowledge
- Documenting community observers and LIOs within relevant emergency plans

How has SES implemented its Local Knowledge Policy?

Are there community Observers or LIOs in Maribyrnong?

Was a Field Safety Officer appointed at the DCP?

Was an Incident Safety Officer appointed at the ICC in Dandenong?

What information did they base their safety assessments on?

What information did the Intelligence Unit at the ICC collect, and how was it recorded and disseminated?

What intelligence was gathered and relayed to Safety Officers?

Were regular and adequate briefings given to response crews?

What information was entered on Fireweb on the evenings leading up to the flood (Tues 11, Wed 12, and particularly Thurs 13 October)?

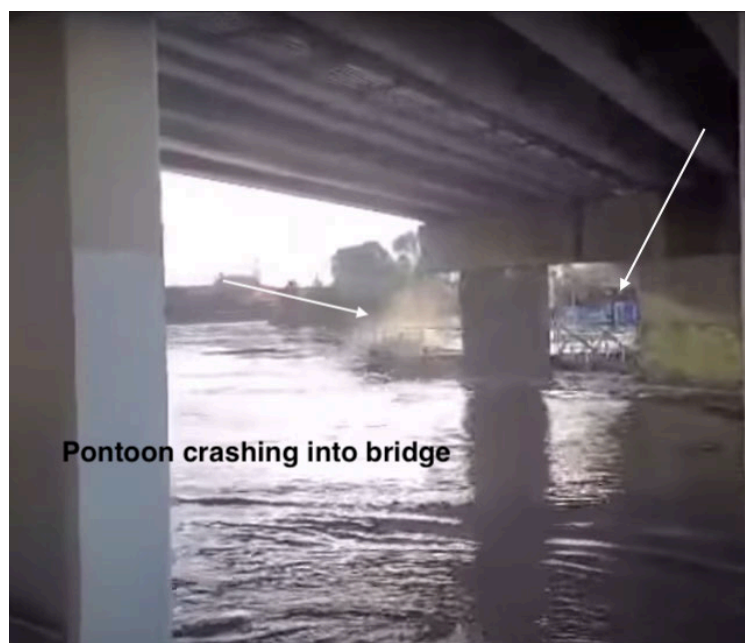
In the case of the Maribyrnong River flood, we are not aware of any coordinated intelligence- gathering on the ground on 14 October during the flood, which could happen for example by SES crews:

- assessing local conditions in real time,
- driving in vehicles to streets at risk of flooding to determine water levels,
- visually monitoring the volume and flow rate of the river,
- observing people, traffic movements and road closures etc.
- reporting back on hazards and safety issues

Some volunteer SES members of the boat crews who transported residents cut off in flooded homes have advised that:

1. They received no overall briefing about the incident and conditions before commencing operations. One volunteer commented “we received more information from the news channels than the ICC”.
2. They received no specific safety information or briefings, and no periodic updates
3. They were tasked by radio contact; basically they launched their boats and then received verbal messages on the radio directing them from location to location

Were they at risk? Most certainly, and the conditions in which they were working were a potential threat to life, of themselves and any resident in the boat with them. It is only because of the skills of the volunteers and pure luck that no lives were lost, including lives of SES volunteers who were tasked with more than 30 boat transfers of people and domestic animals in dangerous conditions and fast-flowing water during the event. The debris washing down the river at speed included two whole pontoons ripped from their moorings, a shipping container, numerous industrial waste bins, tree branches and other items. It was reported that a shipping container washed up only 100 metres from the volunteers’ boat launch and recovery point.



Angliss Stock Bridge, Kensington, 14 October 2022



A post-facto note was made of a floating hazard in the Incident Action Plan No 2, issued from the ICC on 14 October at 1800hs: “floating shipping container in Keilor near the Arundel Rd Bridge”. This was listed under ‘Other incidents of significance’, but -as reported by some volunteers- this type of information had not been communicated earlier in the day in real time during the flood to the operational boat crew(s). No mention was made in this or any other Action Plan of other major hazards like fast-flowing washed away pontoons or skip bins.

Another hazard was the presence of hazardous materials (hazmat) in the water itself. Three petrol stations were inundated and oil slicks, domestic fuel, paint and other chemicals – combining to make up Category 3 Blackwater- were all flowing down the river at 800 cubic metres per second. According to some volunteer responders, there were no safety briefings given to volunteer response crews on this or any advice on decontamination procedures.

The safety of one boat crew was compromised by a vessel with an insufficiently powerful motor. This SES IRB with only a 25HP motor could not hold against the fast flowing water. VICSES Footscray Unit IRB has a 40HP motor which was powerful enough to keep control in the conditions. An SES staffer advised that SES are replacing these larger motors with less powerful ones across the service this year, which would make them unfit for purpose in a similar flood event.

Recommendations:

- 1. That hazmat professionals be engaged in advance of a flood event to develop safety advice and warnings for responders.*

2. That dedicated experienced Safety Officers be deployed to DivComms (not just in ICCs) to continually assess and manage risks.

3. That intelligence on hazards and risks be gathered promptly on the ground (not in the ICC) in a flood event and that volunteer response crews be briefed on these by the dedicated Safety Officer.

4. That VICSES re-evaluate its plans for downgrading the power of IRB motors and ensure any replacements are fit for purpose in swift water and major flood events for Units whose response territory has known risks of swift water and major flooding.

Another safety concern was the Raleigh Rd bridge. VICPOL had established a Traffic Control Point (TCP) at the corner of Woods St and Raleigh Rd, diverting traffic back up Maribyrnong Rd away from the bridge. But the bridge was open to cyclists and pedestrians and some vehicles coming out of the Maribyrnong Township escaping the flood zone.

As the water speed increased and the height was just under the base of the bridge roadway, and there were numerous hazardous objects flowing fast downstream, a consideration might have been given to closing the bridge, as there was a risk of collision and possible damage to the integrity of the bridge structure. A pontoon did in fact crash into the Angliss Stock Bridge in Kensington. As there were no SES Emergency Safety Officers, Field Observers or Ground Observer crews undertaking reconnaissance to identify and assess hazards, it appears this risk was not considered.





Recommendation: to include in the flood plan:

1. *recommendations about traffic management in and around the Maribyrnong Township, particularly to control traumatised drivers who may be self-evacuating in hazardous conditions*
2. *a recommendation to assess the risks of leaving open access to the Raleigh Rd bridge during a flood event. This assessment should be reviewed periodically during any event by a trained IMT Safety Officer or local government engineer using a Dynamic Risk Assessment (DRA) approach.*

Community Engagement

Emergency management agencies and the SEMP continue to describe emergencies as being a “shared responsibility” with communities, but if communities are not engaged with targeted education campaigns which they can understand, and if information is contradictory and in too many confusing places, then the communities have little hope of being able to effectively help themselves (see also the 2011 Victorian Floods Comrie report pp 21-23, 84-87, 92-95 etc.).

Countless studies and reports have recommended that engaging with communities and utilising local knowledge, including that of local emergency responder groups, should be part of emergency coordination and control, for example:

- Comrie, Neil 2011 *Review of the 2010-2011 Flood Warnings and Response*
- IGEM 2012 *VIC Emergency Management Reform White Paper*
- Dufty N. 2016 *A Society-first Approach to Flood Mitigation*
- EMV 2016 *Emergency Management Diversity and Inclusion Framework*
- IGEM 2020 *10 Years of Reform in Victoria's Emergency Management*
- Vic Gov 2022 *Working Together in Place Policy Framework*
- ECCV, VCOSS 2022 *Valuing Strengths and Building Resilience: improving emergency management outcomes for multicultural communities in Victoria*
- EMV 2022 *Community Report June 2021 Extreme Weather Event*

This intent is also embedded in EMV strategies, VICSES policies, the SEMP and operational documents.

An example of where the Maribyrnong community was ignored was after the flood, at the community meeting of 15 December 2022. Attendees were advised that VICSES and Melbourne Water only agreed to appear at the meeting on the condition that there would be no open discussion or questions from the floor. Instead, individual questions would be answered at separate stands; one for SES, one for MW, one for council. This was seen as a 'divide and conquer' tactic.

Attendees were appalled when attempts at questions were shut down, and the VICPOL officer chairing the meeting closed the meeting down, council stopped filming, without allowing the final speaker to make a presentation, and without residents having any opportunity to ask for information which might affect them all. This action was seen as heavy-handed and authoritarian, and contrary to the objective of respecting and including the community in a collaborative approach to emergencies- and in this instance, dismissive of their own trauma.

This one misguided action has led to a widespread lack of confidence and trust in emergency agencies. It is totally opposite to the Comrie Review into the 2010-2011 floods, where community consultations focused on listening: "community members were neither prevented or discouraged from raising any issue related to the mitigation and management of floods" (2011, p 23).

The learnings from multiple past events have been subsequently written into emergency agency policies and frameworks. For example, the SES Local Knowledge policy 10.02 states: “The purpose of this policy is to ensure that local knowledge is respected, considered and wherever possible incorporated into VICSES decision making before, during and after incidents”. But it seem that in practice, very little changes. We are left in the same position as 2011 when Neil Comrie found:

One consistent theme which emerged during the community consultations was a strong desire for community involvement in all phases of emergency management: planning, preparation, response and recovery. Concern was often expressed that communities had not been actively engaged in this process and invaluable local knowledge was not adequately considered. There was a prevailing sense that local communities had been disempowered by the state within the emergency management framework (2011, p 5).

Local Knowledge

The SES Local Knowledge Fact Sheet (p 1) included learnings from the Comrie Review: “The Victorian Floods Review 2011 identified occasions during the 2010-22 floods where local knowledge was used to good effect to inform decision-making and cited examples of local knowledge allegedly being ignored, discounted or not being used as an information source, impacting on the response“. The VICSES News Archive (14/02/2014) clearly sets out that “Local Knowledge is a vital part of managing and planning for emergencies“. One way this occurs is through having Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPCs) with a strong local membership, including community representation.

This has been the case at the Maribyrnong council. Local representation from the VICSES Footscray Unit has been consistent for more than 10 years, contributing to emergency planning, informing on Unit capability and activities, and participating in exercises. This cannot be said for VICSES staff representation. Although there has mostly been a VICSES staff member of the MEMPC, during the same period that the volunteer SES member attended almost without exception, there has been around 10 different SES staff members who have attended (some of whom were just sitting in until an SES staff position was filled), and in some meetings SES staff have been absent. As there has always been a high turnover of SES staff, it cannot be assumed that corporate knowledge has been passed down or among those 10+ staffers. They also do not live in the area so they may have a limited

understanding of local conditions. This may have been a factor in the lack of foresight leading up to the October 2022 flood. In December 2022, the local SES volunteer member of the MEMPC was removed from the committee by VICSES. They were not informed of this by VICSES, instead the Chair of the MEMPC advised them that they (the Chair) had been notified of their removal by the VICSES NW Metro Operations Manager.

There is also intent to include local council representatives in the ICC, but this did not happen in the case of the Maribyrnong Flood. There appeared to be little knowledge of the river behaviour, the Maribyrnong flood plan, or even basic information like contact phone numbers. A council officer advised me that they had been admonished by an SES staff Regional Duty Officer who could not contact an appropriate council person after hours, because “Its too hard to find the after hours phone numbers on your website” (email, 22 October 2022). In an emergency, there is no need to search out phone numbers on public websites. All contact details for all agencies, personnel, after hours or emergency numbers etc. are listed in the MEMPC flood plan Contact Directory. Did the SES staffer not know this? Did they not have a copy of the flood plan?

Even if the council had been invited to participate in the ICC, how would they get to Dandenong when the river was flooded, crossings impassable and their community was in Maribyrnong?

Non-inclusion of council or other community representation does not align with EMV’s ‘Guidelines for preparing State, Regional and Municipal Emergency Management Plans’ (2020, 3.6.1, p 11) which states that “the SEMP supports the shared-responsibility approach to emergency management by more clearly setting out the roles of people and organisations outside the emergency management sector with whom the sector must have arrangements...if Victoria is to achieve integrated, coordinated and comprehensive emergency management”.

Were personnel in the ICC using the Maribyrnong Flood plan?

Why was the Maribyrnong council not included in the ICC?

Another instance where VICSES failed to support the Maribyrnong MEMPC was at the meeting organised to complete the Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA) process,

facilitated by the VICSES Regional Officer Emergency Management (ROEM), on 7 July 2022. This process identifies all risks, vulnerabilities, consequences, collaboration, mitigation etc. to be included in the MEMPC's emergency plans. The meeting had been scheduled for some months with all key stakeholders in the municipality, but the VICSES ROEM pulled out at the last minute, leaving the MEMPC Chair only 2 hours to find another SES staffer who could come and facilitate the meeting (there are a limited number of people who are trained to do this). A senior SES manager was asked how this occurred. They said that the ROEM staffer had offered to be deployed to NSW for flood operations support, without advising SES that they had a responsibility to facilitate a meeting critical to emergency planning in Maribyrnong and requesting a replacement staffer.

Terms of Reference (8b) How corporate interests may influence decision-making at the expense of communities and climate change preparedness

Rivervue Apartments

For the Maribyrnong River event, the permission process to allow around 50 additional million-dollar apartments (48 of which were flooded in 2022, with floor levels lower than 6.6 AHD; a '1 in 100' year flood event) to be built as part of the Rivervue development in Avondale Heights might be seen as the worst example of privileging corporate interests at the expense of communities. There will no doubt be other submissions to this enquiry which will provide a complete analysis of this, but the situation highlighted by former MW employees and numerous reports in the media is that:

- the Rivervue Apartments at Avondale Heights were built in contravention of existing land use zoning
- there had been a faulty process used to re-classify the land so that developers could build on a flood plain
- Melbourne Water had changed their required 100 year flood level for LSIO flooding levels for permits for the commercial development of Rivervue Apartments.

Four days before the flood of 14 October 2022, the developer of Rivervue applied to build a new stage of the development with 14 more villas close to land where the flood boundaries were shifted and later flooded.

Why was the land re-classified to allow the development of apartments on the flood plain?

Why did Melbourne Water alter the LSIO flood overlay?

Why was the person who signed off on the changes appointed to chair the 2022 Melbourne Water flood enquiry (before being pressured to step aside by media reports)?

What is the position of council, MW and State Government on the new proposed extra development applied for in 2022?

***Recommendation:** Return the LSIO boundaries to their previous position, and do not allow more development on or adjacent to these original flood plain levels.*

Terms of Reference (9): Any Other Related Matters

Arundel Retarding Basin

The 1986 Melbourne and Metropolitan Board of Works (MMBW) report 'Maribyrnong River Flood Mitigation Study' proposed the construction of the Arundel Retarding Basin to solve the issue of flooding in the Maribyrnong Township. Funding was promised by the Baillieu government but never provided. The solution to flooding in Maribyrnong remains dormant in the pages of the report.

With climate change, more frequent, intense, compounding and complex events are predicted. If there is a solution, now is the time to implement it, by renewing the analysis of the MMBW research and funding the construction of Arundel.

The frustration of residents at not being given reasonable mitigation advice when there is a solution ready and waiting in the Arundel Retarding Basin plan is reflected in this facebook post:

"In this week's issue 46: Maribyrnong Flood Recovery Newsletter, council suggests we look at a guide developed by Melbourne Water about retrofitting flood resilience measures to our homes.

In a suburb where the council chucks a hissy fit over a standard garage door, we're supposed to take 'A Guide to Flood Resistant Retrofitting' guide seriously? Sure, let me try and get 'flood doors' through planning permits when neighbours get rejected for raised garden beds.

I've attached a picture below of 'residential flood proof doors' that I found through google. I think if there is roaring body of water 4.2m high bludgeoning it's way down to the Bay, my best attempts at stopping this from entering my home isn't an expensive flood door, it's upstream in a retarding basin".

(Maribyrnong Floods 2022-We Want Answers facebook group, posted 2 June 2022).

Drone Footage: intelligence, monitoring and Insurance

Numerous people have uploaded their private drone footage to the internet. A post by

██████████ on mrowe's site highlights the value of progressive drone footage during an event, and also as evidence of damage for insurance purposes after the event:

"Drone footage would be great for the flood prone homes to have regular fly bys so as to keep the flood affected residents up to date with water levels, my house went under this year in Qld and regular drone footage of water levels per street would have been excellent keeping affected residents informed. A local Drone operator took great videos of the flood affected areas which is a great help for insurance etc. Thanks for your drone video the local residents will be forever grateful" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=k06DiLjBv2g>).

***Recommendation:** That emergency services be resourced to undertake drone footage during flood events for purposes of intelligence, safety, progressive assessments and insurance.*

There will already be some skilled drone pilots among the volunteer workforce who may be willing to be involved in forming film crews.

Flood Maps

Flood maps are produced by VICSES and Melbourne Water. These are distributed to local SES Units and form the basis for local information and planning around floods.

In the last iteration of the maps, Version 3 February 2018, the maps show that Flemington Racecourse will be under water in a 1% AEP event. This might have been the case prior to 2007, as Flemington Racecourse is part of the natural flood plain. Opposers of the flood wall maintained this function would be essential in major floods to mitigate damage to private residences, sports clubs, parks and gardens and other community assets.

The construction of the Flemington Racecourse flood wall in 2007 was built expressly to prevent water inundating that area. Then why is it still being shown as being under water on 2018 maps? Is this carelessness? Incompetence? An attempt to lessen criticism and lead the community to think Flemington would act as a basin for large amounts of water? Showing the racecourse as flooded would infer that less water would affect private residences. Is this not misleading to the community?

VICSES may say that they rely on Melbourne Water for data, predictions and mapping, but is there no-one in VICSES who can pick up errors? Is it because they have no local knowledge?

The VICSES flood maps show Flemington under water in the following maps:

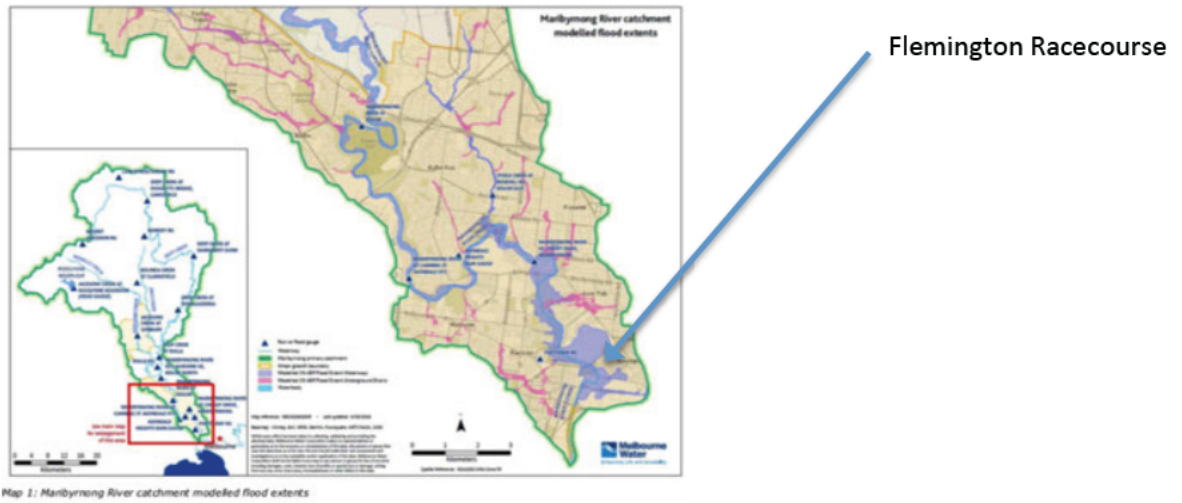
- City of Melbourne Hotspots with 1% AEP Flooding
- City of Maribyrnong A. Flood Mapping Index Map
- City of Maribyrnong No. 7 Maribyrnong River (Footscray) 1% AEP



VICSES Flood maps: Maribyrnong, City of Melbourne

Even more concerning is that in March 2023 Melbourne Water, who produce the flood maps data, also included Flemington racecourse as being flooded in their own submission to their own enquiry into the Maribyrnong floods (Melbourne Water submission, MRFR 53, p 11).

The map is annotated as “last updated 6/03/2023”. Clearly, Melbourne Water can update their dates, but not the actual map, even after a major flood event 6 months prior which proved the flood wall worked and left Flemington unaffected; safe from damage, high and dry, while the water inundated local residences and community assets.



MW submission, map updated 6 March 2023



Why do Melbourne Water and VICSES continue to publish misleading information?

Why is Melbourne Water in 2023 continuing to model Flemington Racecourse as flooding, when it has been proved that it won't, because of its 2007 flood wall?

Why are maps which are critical to intelligence and planning, not updated with current information?

EMV Operating Model Review 2022

In 2022, Emergency Management Victoria undertook an Operating Model Review, part of their emergency management reform program. Emergency responders (90% volunteers)

provided feedback through their representatives on the Volunteer Consultative Forum. The VCF could not endorse the proposed model as it was given inadequate time to consider it, and because many of the recommendations failed to properly address existing issues in the sector, which had been identified multiple times in multiple reports.

Suggestions of the review included to “build a flexible, mobile workforce across the VPS” and tackle barriers to their participation in emergencies; to train Victorian Public Service employees in IMT roles (initially from the current staff of EM agencies); and to form an EM Corps, c.400-500 people from across the public sector, based on a reservist model. The Operating Model Review, despite quoting previous reviews and enquiries which supported better training and collaboration with the already currently trained and skilled 100,000-strong volunteer workforce, had few suggestions for facing existing challenges.

Feedback from the VCF Included:

- The direction the Operating Model Review is currently taking provides a significant lost opportunity for Victoria to first realise the full potential of the existing skilled workforce it already has.
- Considering EMV’s mission of building safer, more resilient communities, we fail to understand the preference in moving towards more centralised systems and capabilities that will be more vulnerable in the face of the escalating emergencies we are anticipating.
- EMV was established as a coordinating body across the agencies involved in Victoria’s emergency management arrangements, not to replace and duplicate their work.
- We strongly disagree with the sentiment provided by the Draft Report that the decline in agency volunteer workforce is inevitable and unavoidable.
- Failure to genuinely engage and consult with volunteers is leading to the increased disenchantment and decline of volunteers therefore becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy for the sector.
- The proposals risk a further deterioration in the culture that is already driving volunteers out. Rather than attempting to address the symptoms (declining volunteer numbers) the proposals need to address the causes.
- If volunteers were better utilised in IMTs they would provide a more resilient,

decentralised, place based and agile capability bringing with them critical local knowledge to operational decision making.

- The lack of current volunteer availability to provide IMT resourcing is largely due to the barriers they face in obtaining required training and accreditation. The previous decision for EMV to centralise Level 3 IMT training and accreditation has further exacerbated this problem.
- For those volunteers that do invest their time and effort into undertaking IMT training and accreditation, their under-utilisation results in a loss of skill maintenance and disengagement. This proposal has a strong potential to increase the barriers volunteers face and diminish IMT capability.
- The increased involvement of the VPS risks adding more bureaucracy and inefficiency to the sector. These are factors that actively discourage and frustrate community and volunteer involvement and therefore will only make the problem worse.

What are the implications for emergency management in Victoria if sector reviews fail to adequately consider the existing workforce of 100,000 volunteers and their training needs and potential?

Why, after numerous enquiries and reports recommending consultation and collaboration with the volunteer workforce, has this not been adequately addressed?

Conclusion

This submission has referred throughout to emergency SOPs, policies, procedures, plans and training manuals. There is no shortage of information, systems and strategic intents that can be accessed and utilised.

It seems that what is lacking is, in terms of incident management, personnel able to competently interpret and enact those plans and/or make sound judgement calls and effective decisions.

What has changed in the past twelve months? Nothing. There has been no multiagency After Action Review, there has been no additional training for volunteers, there has been no consultation with Volunteer Associations able to provide consolidated feedback from across the State about what worked and what didn't.

One senior volunteer has reflected: "In the aftermath, the staff seemed all too quick to pat themselves on the back for a job well done, and in general comments about improvement or faults have been brushed off, dismissed, or met with a token acknowledgement at best. I have not yet heard of any initiative that may be implemented in the almost 8 months since the floods. Surely not everything needs to wait for enquiries and committees".

In the case of the Maribyrnong River flood, the local Footscray Unit has lost more experienced members and new recruits have joined. But, seven months later, there has not been one night dedicated to learning about the river, observing the conditions, understanding the scale of what happened to the Maribyrnong Township and the impact on residents and no education about the social demographics of the area. Some of the newcomers don't even know where the Township is. And it could all happen again at any time. The river has flooded two years in a row before, in 1974 and 1975. Residents are fearful every time there is heavy rain or a high tide and are not confident the SES will be there to help.

The show has moved on. The same old complacency has settled back in, with no real transparency and accountability for the management of one of Victoria's most damaging disasters. The enormous consequences of personal, emotional, social, material,

environmental harms and infrastructure replacement costs is uncalculated, perhaps incalculable.

Emergency agencies have all the training, procedures and practices to deal with disasters of this scale. We've experienced them before; we should know what to do as White Papers, After Action Reviews, Royal Commissions, and other reports have already illuminated all the questions asked and recommendations suggested in this submission.

But, as Ernest Kinoy wrote in 1973: Any fool can know. The point is to understand. Communities across Victoria expect more than what they received in the 2022 floods. Agencies speak of working with communities, that it is a shared responsibility. VICSES has a slogan: 'Safer Communities Together'. EMV's home page touts 'Safer and more resilient communities' and states its purpose as leading emergency management in Victoria "by maximising the ability of the emergency management sector to work together and to strengthen the capacity of communities to plan for, withstand, respond to and recover from emergencies".

But all too often, communities are left stranded because information, consultation, strategies and resources are not shared with them. When will the sector understand that 'shared responsibility' is a long term, collaborative, whole-of-community endeavour, factoring in difference and diversity? "Shared responsibility" should no longer mean that the Emergency Sector has the greatest share of knowledge while the Community has the greatest share of pain and loss.

Is the sector accountable to the community? Does the community – and for that matter, the frontline local volunteers - feel more or less empowered in 2022 and beyond? Do they feel safer, included, heard, part of a plan, more resilient, capable of responding and able to recover better from emergencies? If the answer to those questions is not yes – and we contend that it is not- then the sector is failing in its legislated duty, because there have been multiple reports and reviews that have advocated for communities' and volunteers' interests, and sector capabilities over decades. Where communities and individuals do feel empowered and more resilient, it is more often than not because of their own initiatives, *in spite of* the emergency services, not *because of* the emergency services.

Recommendations

VicSESVA recommends the following:

Community Engagement

1. The emergency sector must move past producing slick reports and glossy brochures to really commit to change-making. There must be practical, tangible, achievable actions taken to ensure communities are well served. That change should have the community at its heart. Community also includes volunteer emergency workers – they live and respond in the same area as the people they serve. They are not strangers in a faraway office.
2. Local communities should be respected and listened to, and included in all before, during and after planning.
3. The sector should be planning and implementing community engagement which reflects our contemporary social demographics, so there is equity of access to emergency information for our diverse communities. This engagement should have a restorative focus to rebuild trust and confidence in government, emergency agencies and their employees.
4. Community engagement, education and awareness methodologies should be re-assessed. Posting information on a website is not 'job done'. Whole-of-community programmes which are culturally responsive, context specific, community-led and strengths-based need to be developed for the entire sector.

Plans and Exercises

5. A substantial amount of work is invested in developing plans. But those plans should be followed – otherwise they are never tested in a real situation. If Incident Controllers or their delegates are unfamiliar with local plans, then the contextual factors, data and history that has gone into developing those plans will be wasted and subsequent ad hoc or reactive actions decided by the ICC may be inappropriate, or expose communities to increased risks.
6. Real time and in-place scenario exercising should be incorporated into plans at all levels. There is already an expectation that such exercises are conducted, by emergency agencies and local government. Often these are table-top exercises and rarely do they involve the local emergency volunteers; they are attended by paid staff. Even more rare would be the involvement of the actual communities whose

risk has been identified. VicSESVA advocates that regular scenario exercises should include the community and local volunteers and be conducted in situ in local streets, suburbs or towns.

Training

7. Fast-track training should be provided for more volunteers to train in incident management roles, and be consulted or deployed in major events. One Unit Controller stated “At unit level, training is very good at preparing members for normal type RFA’s, but more training needs to be done for big events, involving multi-units, staging areas, DIV comms. There needs to be more training involving the staff and volunteers at the same time in the same events”.
8. More training courses in flood operations such as deckhand, crewperson, land-based swift water rescue and coxswain should be urgently provided for Units who will respond to flood events.
9. More inter-agency training should be provided to SES and CFA volunteers, to ensure surge capacity in both storm/flood and fire operations.

Consultation

10. While volunteers may be consulted informally by senior managers (ad hoc conversations etc.) there should be a renewed focus on formal engagement through their representative Associations; VicSESVA for SES volunteers and VFBV for CFA volunteers. During 2022, the VICSES Executive and State Operations officers cancelled all respective formal quarterly meetings with VicSESVA.
11. The Volunteer Consultative Forum – unilaterally disbanded by the EMC on 22 April 2023- should be reinstated to provide the expert multi-agency Statewide advice it was established to provide under the principles of the Volunteer Statement 2015, which was agreed to by the Premier, Minister for Emergency Management, the Emergency Management Commissioner, and all emergency agencies (see Appendix C, p 88).
12. The State Government should fulfill its obligation agreed in the Volunteer Statement to “ensure that the commitments and principles in this statement are supported across government and by emergency management volunteer agencies”.

Mitigation Strategies

13. In the Maribyrnong catchment, the Arundel Retarding Basin plan should be revived, and the safety of communities be prioritised over land developers.
14. A whole of catchment approach should be used for all flood planning and mitigation.

Revision of relationships and roles

15. The relationship, including responsibilities for data generation, predictions, warnings, processes, line of control and accountabilities between Melbourne Water, Bureau of Meteorology, VICSES and EMV should be re-assessed for its functionality, accuracy and relevance.

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APPENDIX A

Volunteer Personal Account: current member, former Controller, VICSES Footscray

I include here a timeline of the week of the disaster, from my experience and perspective as an SES volunteer and leader of 17 years' experience, including membership of strategic groups at local, state and national level; experience as a frontline responder; former leader (Controller for 8 years, Deputy Controller for 9 years, Unit Duty Officer for 12 years) of VICSES Footscray Unit which has the Maribyrnong River in its response territory; skills in incident management roles of Safety Officer L2 and Operations Officer L2, and logistics functional roles of Staging Area Manager and Base Camp Manager for numerous campaign fires in Victoria, Tasmania and NSW. At the time of the flood, my role was Deputy Controller, Partnerships and Community Engagement.

Note: all information and warnings are issued following MW predictions of flood heights at the Chifley Drive gauge, Maribyrnong Township.

Flood levels are defined as: minor 1.7mAHD, moderate 2.3mAHD, Major 2.9mAHD

1. Monday 10 October

I received a call from a Maribyrnong council employee to discuss possible flash flooding due to heavy rainfall and possibly blocked drains. I referred this conversation to the rostered VICSES Footscray Unit Duty Officer for consideration in case we might need to put extra crews on notice.

That evening, I attended our regular Monday night SES training from 18:30-21:30. The Footscray Unit has two IRBs (Inflatable Rescue Boats) with trained boat rescue crews and coxswains, and until recently had two 4WDs to tow them, and two medium rigid rescue trucks. Our two trucks had been removed by SES because of a statewide issue with the SES fleet (as explained to me: the supply company had given the cheapest quote but cracking had appeared in the sub frame and some parts of the body, as they used wooden packing instead of nylon, then used with bolt clamps, which have decayed and pressed it in, they snapped).

That night, volunteers from another Unit came to take away one of our IRBs to Pakenham Unit as their boat was being serviced.

We were left with one IRB and two 4WDs, one of which would have to be used to tow the boat if needed. That left one 4WD for general rescue activities. As volunteers are not permitted to use their private vehicles for SES rescue callouts, that meant the unit had capacity to fit 4-5 people in one 4WD, and only one rescue boat instead of two for flood rescues (the Unit has more than 30 active responders). Our second IRB was not returned during the course of the next 4 days, although I am not aware that Pakenham Unit needed it at all in which case it could have been returned and been on standby and then utilised for the Maribyrnong flood.

2. Tuesday 11 October

MW prediction was a 3.3mAHD flood level (major flood level being 2.9mAHD).

'Flood watch' issued by BoM.

The City of Maribyrnong Storm and Flood Emergency Plan identifies activation triggers, but relies on SES (who relies on BoM and MW) to liaise and advise of conditions which may lead to activating the plan. The activation considerations list a Readiness Level (RL) as 'Very High' in the case of moderate flood levels, 'Severe' for major flood warnings, and 'Extreme' for two or more flood warnings. The levels were major on both Tues 11 and Wed 12, moderate on Thurs 13 and major, 2nd warning, on Fri 14. I am not sure if, how and when the plan was activated. As the RL is listed for even moderate flooding, it might be expected that the plan was activated from Tues 11 September.

3. Wednesday 12 October

MW prediction now has the flood level at 3.4mAHD (rising).

The prediction of upper end of Deep Creek was 8mAHD

SES issued 'advice' warning (Tim Wiebusch COO, community meeting 15 December 2022)

The BoM issued a 'severe weather warning', including the potential for heavy rain over the Maribyrnong River catchment.

Considering that water flows downstream from Deep Creek to Maribyrnong township, did this not ring any alarm bells? What action was taken by VICSES to inform residents on this

day? None that I am aware of, so even though the prediction was increasing, nothing further was done to communicate with residents, apart from continuing to update advice on the SES website. There were no more doorknocks, no communications with residents. Why not? Is there an inherent perception among emergency service staff that the general public cannot be trusted with information? The Vic Emergency Management Reform White Paper of 2012 refers to this: “While there is no single path to developing community resilience, there are essential principles and approaches. These include recognising that communities are inherently resilient, have many strengths and capabilities, and can be trusted to know what they need and how to meet that need”.

The consequence of not trusting communities was detailed in the inquest into the death of a woman who died in the Mersey River flood in Tasmania in 2016. There were no evacuation warnings prior to the flood. The SES coordinator did not issue an evacuation notice because “if you issue a warning too regularly, then the public become disenchanted and will ultimately disregard when there is a critical one” (██████████, ABC online 10 March 2023).

Residents I have spoken to have unanimously agreed that they would rather have an early warning and have the chance to take action, even if that advice were later rescinded.

In Maribyrnong in 2022, did the SES staff who were operating the Incident Control Centre not suspect that they should be taking more decisive action based on the predictions and intelligence?

4. Thursday 13 October

MW prediction now has the flood level at 2.5m AHD (moderate).

Expert independent hydrologists have estimated that the MW flow data monitored at Deep Creek was underestimated by a half to a third.

At 6.44 am I received a text message from Senior Sergeant AB, the Maribyrnong Municipal Emergency Response Coordinator (MERC) for VICPOL Footscray, asking: “I would like to know who is the best contact for the **threat to the river today** (emphasis added) and if there will be a forward command post and the location”. I had no advice if a forward command

post (or Incident Control Point ICP) was to be set up. I referred the Officer to the appropriate SES Unit officers: the VICSES Footscray Unit Controller and the Unit Duty Officer.

At around 10am a 'watch and act' alert was issued for the Deep Creek Upper catchment and an 'Advice' message was issued for the Maribyrnong Township. This was subsequently upgraded to a 'watch and act' (there may have been limited understanding of what these alerts mean). On hearing of this alert on the ABC emergency broadcaster, I composed a draft email to send to all volunteer members in case we would be called out to a possible flood event. I was puzzled and concerned that there had been no messaging sent out to all Unit members to alert them to the threat. At 10.03 am I sent a text message to the VICSES Footscray Controller asking if he would like me to send this email to all members about the flood warning for the river and about being prepared for the ongoing weather event. The Controller rang the SES staff North West Operations Manager first and then replied to me that he had asked our volunteer Unit Operations Officer to send such an email (which is the responsibility of that role, not mine).

I sent a further text advising the Controller that I was working from home and available to help with any emails and advice to him. As a former Controller for the Unit, I felt confident in understanding the situation we may be facing, and was ready to assist. I also coordinated the 2013 Flood doorknock and had extensive experience in large scale events. The Controller was grateful for my offer and advised that boat crews had been placed on standby and were ready at the Unit LHQ.

SES set up a sandbag collection point at Bunnings Highpoint and communicated this through their website and social media. Most residents were unaware of this, as they had not been adequately informed of the "threat to the river today" (Snr Sgt AB).

There were no doorknocks conducted by SES, although there was time and opportunity. Again, the second VICSES Footscray IRB remained at Pakenham.

At around 21:00 hrs the 'watch and act' was upgraded for the upper end of the Maribyrnong catchment to a 'Major flood' warning. As the water flows downstream, one might have thought this would have activated SES. As VICPOL were clearly already anticipating an ICP and council were involved, there must have been some discussion at a strategic level. But

why did it not include the local Unit and the residents? Even if they had commenced warning residents on Thursday evening, they could at least have saved some belongings and made plans to evacuate. As it was, most of them went to bed completely unaware of the imminent danger and the first they knew of the flood was when it was already at their door in the middle of the night, and too late to save anything.

I did not know it at the time, but was later advised that a DivComm (Division Command) point had been established at the VICSES Essendon LHQ, which is on the opposite side of the river. This LHQ is pre-set as a DivComm, with enhanced communications, equipment and facilities. I was advised that it had been running during the week but it had been closed by SES staff on Thursday night.

5. Friday 14 October

At 02.25hs MW issued an updated warning with potential for major flooding at Maribyrnong Township. This information was passed on to BoM and SES, which were operating an Incident Control Centre (ICC) at Dandenong (I did not know this at the time). There is an Incident Control Centre in Sunshine, which has been used as an ICC in the past for emergency exercises, such as 'Operation Noah', a Maribyrnong council exercise with a scenario almost exactly the same as what occurred on 14 October. The advantage of the Sunshine ICC is that it has a store of equipment and resources, it is pre-set with extensive IT and communications equipment, it is close to the Northern and Western suburbs and would be able to coordinate responses and re-supply if needed locally, especially when access from the South East side of Melbourne is cut off by road closures in a major flood.

At around 3am SES activated volunteer crews for doorknocking. This was not doorknocking in advance of an event to warn people, it was an 'evacuate immediately' direction. Council was alerted to open the relief centre.

At 4am, evacuation orders were issued for various streets.

I am not sure of the following times and actions, but I record them as told to me by a senior Unit leader:

- VICPOL had set up an incident control point (ICP) on the street in Raleigh Rd.

- The Controller of VICSES Essendon was despatched as the SES Commander and operated out of his SES vehicle, tasking crews with doorknocking residents and asking them to evacuate immediately.
- Shortly after, additional police arrived and relocated the ICP to the relief centre in Randall St due to approaching floodwaters.
- SES crews were stood down from doorknocking and moved back to the relief centre to stand by, where residents were beginning to arrive.

At 5.30am I heard announcements of street evacuations on ABC radio. I got up and cycled to the river. On the Ascot Vale side, Woods St, near the golf course and sports fields, the river had breached its banks, but was still far from residences. There were many people out walking their dogs, like a normal morning (it is a popular walking, jogging, cycling path and dog walking area). The road was closed at the Raleigh Rd bridge, with police there managing traffic.

At 6am, MW advised of increased river heights and a second emergency alert was issued via SMS and landlines.

Many residents have advised that they did not receive any alert on their phones, that they were not doorknocked, or that they did not hear the door, that they saw no police cars and that they heard no warning sirens. They remained oblivious to the disaster (audience comments, community meeting 15 December 2022).

The LFG states that “during some emergencies, we may alert communities by sounding a local siren” (p 6). *(Note: If this information is generic and not specific to Maribyrnong, it should be amended to tailor all the advice to the Maribyrnong area)*. SES vehicles are equipped with loudspeakers; announcements can be made and amplified from inside the vehicle. Police cars and emergency vehicles have car horns – did no-one think to make a noise to wake people up?

At 6.30 am the river was exceeding the major flood level.

Around 7am I observed some residents being saved by a group of local tradesmen wading through the water and carrying them to safety one by one. I observed one resident driving

her car through floodwater (above wheel height) and turning onto the Raleigh Rd bridge. She appeared in shock and almost drove into some pedestrians.

I returned to Woods St and spoke with people there. The waters were approaching. I asked them if police had attended, if they had received any warnings and if they had been advised to evacuate. The answer was no. I advised they would be flooded (this area is on the Maribyrnong Flood plan maps) and encouraged them to alert neighbours and evacuate.

I returned to the police traffic management point at the bridge and advised the officer there that Woods St would flood and that people needed to be evacuated. The officer checked with me the location on google maps and said they would communicate that back up (the chain of command, presumably). I was not in my SES uniform, I had no official capacity, so whether local residents or police heeded my warnings is unknown.

The following day, I checked back with some residents in Woods St. One person described to me that their father, who is frail elderly in his 70s and does not speak English, was traumatised. He had remained in the second story of his home because he could not get out but it was all destroyed underneath. Others said they climbed over their back fences to higher ground to escape.

In the Melbourne Water Maribyrnong Flood Survey data fact sheet published on 9 March 2023 (five months after the event), no properties in Ascot Vale were surveyed, so these losses are unaccounted for.

At around 8am I received a phone call from the VICSES Footscray Unit Duty Officer (UDO). They seemed overwhelmed and distressed, and asked if I could take over. I said I could not, as I did not have a pager (the system on which all our emergency requests for assistance are notified from ESTA). There was no other Duty Officer available to help. The UDO was extremely stressed and I was concerned for their mental health and safety and my assessment was that they was not fit to continue in that critical role. I counselled them to notify the Regional Duty Officer (RDO, further up the chain of command, a paid staffer) that they was unable to continue and that they should ask the RDO to source someone to cover the role.

At this point, I was uncertain what the Chain of Command was, as VICSES had earlier in the year undergone a restructure, which had been scheduled to be implemented by July but was being implemented this same week as the flood. I did not know which staff occupied which positions. I rang two senior staffers, no answer, then rang the staffer who is North West Metro Operations Manager. I advised that I believed the Footscray UDO needed to be stood down. She did not advise me of the arrangements in place at the ICC, the DCP running out of the relief centre or the current situation. She did however, later blame the Unit for the confused communications, although subsequently changed this to “something in the ether”.

It was not until 3 days after the flood on 17 October that this same SES Operations Manager sent an email regarding internal SES arrangements, which stated “With the current levels of activity, most BAU activities have ceased and normal staff contact is going to be a little problematic for the next little while...Unfortunately this event (the Maribyrnong flood) has occurred with the ‘go live’ of the new operating model...we are still trying to understand our roles and relationships...We haven’t had any handovers from the ‘old’ teams either”.

The situation was that the SES volunteer commander at the DCP was managing all incoming RFAs in our area, triaging them, and despatching the response crews. My understanding from the discussions with the Footscray UDO was that they were unaware of this and were simultaneously triaging the same RFAs, received on the pager alert system (double handling). The Footscray LHQ is not fit for purpose, especially in a large scale event, due to the Faraday Cage effect which intermittently disrupts signals and communications. Trying to manage RFAs can include running in and out of the building to get mobile reception as calls come in. By 10.09 in another call to the same staff SES Operations Manager, after insisting on the seriousness of the state of our UDO, I confirmed with her that our UDO could stand down. However, another UDO was not sourced for the Unit until 5pm.

I assisted as much as I could by phone. The river was impassable from the Ascot Vale side, so it was impossible for me to get to the Footscray LHQ in West Footscray. From 8am to 1pm I made a total of 43 calls and sms, to and from the UDO, the Unit Controller, SES staff and others. Several Unit volunteers rang me wanting to assist operationally, but as I had no idea of the arrangements I could not task them (this was not my responsibility, it would normally be handled by the Unit Operations officer, but they were part of a boat response crew so not available to manage other personnel). I referred them to the Unit Controller who was at

his workplace. Feedback later was that, considering the scale of the event, members were disappointed that they had not been called out en masse. Many were available and waiting at home, expecting to be called. Footscray Unit was left uninformed, with people ready to help but not called.

At 12.06 the river peaked at 4.216mAHD

Reflection

I am not alone in feeling that after years of service, the training and experience I and other volunteers had, was not utilised.

- We were not given any real advance warning of the flood – rather, all the public announcements from the State Control Centre by the COO and the EMC suggested only a few houses would be affected.
- Most of us had no idea of the ICC arrangements or that an ICP had been set up.
- The whole of Unit was not activated to respond; we could have helped people, done reccies, or assisted with intelligence at the very least.

The process of an After Action Review also seemed to exclude feedback from some volunteers who believed they had something relevant to contribute. Members were notified by email late in the evening on 26 February 2023 (4 months after the flood) that VICSES was conducting an internal AAR 2 days later. But there was a limit of only 3 members from each Unit. The Unit Controller (who had not been part of the Unit at the time of the flood and was not from the local area) selected those people.

The Footscray Unit itself conducted an internal AAR on 24 May (7 months after the flood). I wanted to attend but was excluded from the AAR by the Unit Controller on the grounds that I had not been officially tasked as an SES volunteer on the day as part of a response crew; even though I had assisted the Unit Duty Officer and other members who contacted me, and triaged numerous communications between myself, SES staff, the Unit Controller, the Unit Duty Officer, VicPOL, the Maribyrnong council MERO and others on that day and in the days leading up to the flood. I felt I had some insights to offer but was not given the opportunity to speak freely in a group conversation with other members. I expressed my view to the Unit Controller and also to the SES senior Operations Officer who was appointed to conduct the AAR, that a full picture would not be gathered and learnings would be lost.

Appendix B

Feedback from Regional Incident Control Centres and Operations

These comments are from people on the ground, mostly volunteers deployed to these ICCs, some from local residents.

Echuca

- In Echuca there were 34 different maximum river heights given, from EMV, BoM, SES.
- There was a comment on the local Facebook page this morning which made a very good observation that the lack of information was affecting the mental health of people. I guess that goes for not only people involved in this area but also all the sectors affected. Sadly social media has been in a frenzy with all sorts of rumours being spruiked as the truth (as it does) about roads being closed or opened or predicted levels, and so many things that affect people and no effort has been made from those who do know, to allay the fears or keep people informed.
- There needs to be an enquiry up around the Royal Commission level because a huge amount of public money has been used, businesses have been disrupted and communities across the State damaged and destroyed by a system that is so flawed now that it needs to be rebuilt from scratch and its reputation has been left in tatters.
- Rochester is still a shambles with the town creeping towards recovery. People have been told that the temporary accommodation at the Elmore Event Centre will close in August (I think) but many will still be homeless then, insurance companies are either not renewing cover or making the premiums so high as to be unaffordable and by the time the enquiry hands down its findings there will be no money available for a meaningful solution to the problems with Eppalock and the whole thing will happen again!

- As for me on reflection, the community meeting where the acting Shire CEO announced the flood event would be a 1 in 1000 year event was (in my opinion) designed to blindsides people and announce at the same time that there was to be a levee built which isolated a pocket of the town. This issue is ongoing as far as I am aware but when the location was announced it was met with considerable angst from those involved. The Shire response was that it was a decision made by SES and the ICC. To exacerbate the issue at least one of the pumps installed to move the storm water out of the town actually pumped this water over the levee into the area isolated adding to what water was already in there!
- Who is liable when a levee bank is constructed? Echuca set up fire trucks and pumped water into houses on the other side, making it worse for those residents.
- Not far from where we live the ADF put in a sandbag wall to protect the area from the Deakin Main Channel backflowing from the Murray. When it was completed there was one house on the far side of the levee that was in the firing line. An urgent appeal went out over social media for assistance to sandbag the house and outbuildings and as that was happening a lot of people turned up with sandbags and plastic. Halfway through the job (according to social media) “someone from SES” turned up and told the group that they were wasting their time and not to bother. Whilst this may have been true the way it was delivered was not a good image for SES and as it turned out the house was saved in the long run.
- I spoke to one of the Echuca SES members on a couple of occasions during the event and he was not happy at all. He was put in charge of one of the sandbagging stations. However whilst a large number of people had turned up and they had plenty of bags there was no sand and he was basically ignored when he repeatedly asked when the sand would be delivered. The volunteers standing around with nothing they could do. In the end he rang and organised sand off his own bat only to be berated for taking the action. Yes, not strictly correct, but he achieved what the official channels could not so I can see the big picture. He could not get information to get on with the job so he returned to the SES Unit which is in the same location as the CFA building where the DivCom is situated. On entering the CFA building he was stopped by CFA members and told he was not to enter and was “escorted” out of

the building. Needless to say he and another five SES members (as was reported to me) have since resigned. Given the situation VICSES is in at the moment they can ill afford to lose too many more members.

- I guess from where I sit having been through the major flood event in 2012 and subsequent smaller events the learning from all that was totally ignored and the experienced members ignored for no good reason.
- During this recent event I happened to receive a call from a member of another agency who happened to be at the ICC in Bendigo at the time. Up to this time there had been the one main public briefing and a couple of online presentations by a CFA ex-Captain. There had also been online briefings by the Incident Commander based in Shepparton and also one or two by the Incident Commander at the Benalla ICC explaining what was happening and what the response was. There had been nothing at all from the Bendigo ICC by anyone. I suggested to this person that it would be a very good idea for the Incident Controller to appear on social media and do a similar briefing. I was pretty blunt that it was not a good look in Echuca and the surrounds that there was a stunning silence coming from Bendigo and the rumours and stories circulating around town were not exactly helpful. I have no doubt my comments were passed on very quickly but there was no real and effective response. It seemed that it was too hard to take the time to update the locals on what the response was and just let CFA broker the news.
- Locals were looking for an authoritative voice and they got very little. Meanwhile SES seems to lurch from one disaster to the next with no solutions in sight.

Wycheproof

- It's not easy watching an event unfold in your home town with no leadership or appropriate direction.
- Disgusted to think SES/CFA have learnt nothing from previous incidents/events. Here in Wycheproof SES is non-existent with continuous bad management and unfortunately the communities suffer because of it. The current arrangements are

non existent, disorganized, little to no information, conflicting info from crews, Vicpol and CFA they seemed to have spent more time grandstanding than actually doing anything that any of the locals could see.

- Houses door knocked by Vicpol and told to be prepared to evacuate but given no other info!
- Town meeting held with two hours notice (I only found out because I saw it in Facebook). They have no clue or foresight to think that 80% of this town are over the age of 70 and don't use social media!!!!
- I arrived at the shire hall only to discover no SES, only CFA, Water authorities in attendance. One local police officer scrambling to make sense of the brief he had been given by SES. It was the most disorganized sh** show I've ever encountered in all my years of service. We were told nothing that couldn't be read off the Emergency App! I had to prompt the poor Police officer regarding levees that were constructed last time and then it was vague and even more confusing when the Shire relief guru rattled on about the aftermath and clean up, to say the odd 20 people that attended were confused is an understatement. I quietly approached the police officer after the meeting and asked what the latest SMEAC briefing is indicating, and he almost looked like he was going to cry and responded "I don't bloody have one" and this seems to be the same all over. I know Kerang were having the same issues.
- Victoria is facing two major disasters first one is continual flooding. Second is the inexperienced emergency services that are running the show.

Shepparton

- I have just retired from CFA/FRV and was an endorsed L3 Incident Controller and worked at many major incidents and conducted L2 training throughout Victoria. Unfortunately for a range of reasons, no training in this area has been conducted for approximately 3 years.

- I have some major concerns relating to the Shepparton ICC during the current floods. We need to learn from past challenges and implement them.

Various comments from volunteers at Shepparton ICC:

- It's a mess
- Everyone is staggered
- They've (the emergency managers) lost it
- People just shaking their heads in disbelief
- We had hardly any briefings
- There's been no SMEACs given to people in the field
- EMV has been a waste of space
- There's little paperwork
- Emergency warnings – roads spelt incorrectly
- There was no daily Incident Action Plan available. Under the previous EMC you had to provide a verbal IAP within 4 hrs, and a written one within 8 hrs, or you'd be out
- Crews were out and about, but didn't know they had been appointed section/Div comm leaders
- Shepparton has 60 nationalities, 70 languages, they are not being properly looked after. It was similar in Moe-Morwell at the mine fire; only 43% could read or get messaging
- We had one man, he had 4 kids in a tent at Shepparton showgrounds. He was offered accommodation at Mickleham but works in Shepparton, how will that work
- Why were there 8 fisheries people there?
- There was a crew from Townsville SES, sitting around waiting to be briefed
- There are a lot of people very, very angry
- No comms
- No mapping
- No comms tasking resources
- No IAPs
- I went to Shepparton on the Saturday, we were moved to Benalla for accommodation. We started Sunday morning, doing medical evacuations. On Monday we did half a day, then did Monday night shift. We stayed overnight at the relief centre.

- The CFA was worried about Barmah, it would take one hour to get there Code 1. Echuca is closer – why not send them?
- There was no real command and control
- SES commanders just saying YES to VICPOL without working out if its possible
- There were no briefings out of the ICC, no maps, no plans
- A Div Comm was set up at Shepparton Search and Rescue. They have proper dry suits for water operations, we don't. ICC officers never came to the centre, they turned up briefly on Wednesday night, but our Divison Commander had left on Tuesday night. He had been requesting relief. We were on our own, we did the best we could.
- Too many inexperienced people. One volunteer just had CML1 (*Note: the very basic introductory training*), had no experience, they were on some medications and only had just enough to last them. On Wednesday night the day crew went to the pub in Benalla, an 18 year old (doesn't even have P plates) got gastro or hangover.
- On Thursday afternoon 20 October, I did despatch. There were people crying in corners.
- The trailers weren't suitable for the IRBs, the IRBs sit up too high. Under our SES SOP, we are not allowed to be on a boat ramp. The preference was to launch unpowered, and do an unpowered recovery. Because If powered a full Dynamic Risk Assessment must be undertaken.
- They didn't ask for radio operators until Friday. It should have been Monday!

Various

- Concerned that local residents are not getting frank advice about re-building, and the associated insurance costs. Re-build – most people unaware, will they ever get insurance or be able to afford it? Most people will not be able to afford it.
- Lake Eppalock is still 91% full – what if there is a wet winter or spring? We will be back to Square One.
- During the last drought, Lake Eppalock got down to very low (5%?). It is Bendigo's main water source, so a decision was made to build pumping stations with water to be channelled along the Yeronga Mallee Channel from Lake Eppalock to Yeronga basin. Lake Cooper and Green's Lake were decommissioned before the flood. Take

the pump and put it at Lake Eppalock end, or pump out Lake Eppalock water to Lake Cooper and Greens' Lake, which can then be pumped into Yeronga Mallee channel (with more control over flow).

- Rushworth SES is only 35 km from Rochester. They were not called. Kyabram, 28 km away, was called, but Rushworth could have gotten involved and helped.
- Thank God for the CFA. There were no SES to be seen.

Appendix C

<https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/volunteerstatement>

Emergency Management Volunteer Statement

Volunteers play a critical role in the delivery of emergency management across Victoria. There are over 100,000 emergency management volunteers throughout the State across a wide range of agencies. A community focussed service delivery approach, with volunteers working together with agencies and paid staff, provides the best outcome for Victorian communities.

Through reference to the key principles set down in this Emergency Management Volunteer Statement, the parties commit to use and apply the Statement to strengthen the culture of volunteering in Victoria and build a shared understanding of, and respect for, the critical role that volunteers play in the emergency management sector and community.

The Emergency Management Volunteer Statement

- Is an agreed commitment between the State of Victoria and emergency management volunteers, from agencies listed in the Emergency Management Manual Victoria;
- Ensures the State of Victoria and the emergency management volunteer agencies will commit to consult with volunteers on matters which affect them, through volunteer engagement arrangements within the emergency management sector, including the Volunteer Consultative Forum, and in line with their agencies' obligations;
- Is the framework for an enduring commitment between the parties. The Statement will be reviewed as required by the parties or at the end of four years from its date of commencement;
- The parties commit to maintaining and further building emergency management volunteer capacity as required, to plan, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies and build community safety and resilience; and
- Coexists and complements the enduring effect of the CFA Volunteer Charter.

Emergency Management Volunteer Agencies

- Recognise, value, respect, promote and support emergency management volunteers who come from widely diverse communities with differing needs and characteristics;
- Recognise and acknowledge that a primary responsibility of agencies' paid staff is to nurture and encourage volunteers and to facilitate and develop their skills and competencies, and maintain and build volunteer capacity at all levels of emergency management;
- Recognise and acknowledge the value of the time that volunteers provide and ensure that their time is optimally utilised;
- Work with and support a positive integration of paid and volunteer emergency management workers;
- Develop and maintain an organisational culture and organisational relationships that support volunteer engagement in all emergency management functions;
- Ensure that volunteer views, opinions and concerns are considered before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches that impact on them as volunteers;
- Provide administrative, operational and infrastructure support in a timely manner to enable volunteers to perform their roles safely and effectively with appropriate resources; and
- Commit to maintaining and building individual and overall emergency management volunteer capacity to carry out emergency management roles;
- Recognise and value the unique range of community and industry skills that volunteers provide to emergency management;
- Endeavour to utilise suitably qualified and experienced volunteers in key leadership positions; and
- Recognise the value of volunteers and their local knowledge during emergencies.

The State of Victoria

- Recognises, values, respects and promotes emergency management volunteers, their families and employers for their contributions to the well-being and safety of Victorian communities;

- Commits to engage and consult with emergency management volunteers and their representative bodies on emergency management issues and matters that affect them, through the Volunteer Consultative Forum and other volunteer engagement arrangements within the emergency management sector taking into account the recognition of the importance of volunteers in Victoria's emergency management arrangements under the Emergency Management Act 2013; and
- Will ensure that the commitments and principles in this statement are supported across government and by emergency management volunteer agencies.

The Emergency Management Commissioner

- Commits to perform the functions having regard to the fundamental importance of the role that volunteers play in the performance of emergency management functions in Victoria

These commitments are made within a legislative and policy framework that includes the obligations of the Emergency Management Commissioner and Emergency Management Victoria to have regard to the fundamental importance of the role that volunteers play in the performance of emergency management functions in Victoria, under the *Emergency Management Act 2013*; the roles of emergency management volunteer agencies under the State Emergency Response Plan and the State Emergency Recovery Plan; and the principles and obligations agreed between the Victorian Government, CFA and its Volunteers set out in the CFA Volunteer Charter 2011 and the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER STATEMENT



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Through reference to the key principles set down in this Emergency Management Volunteer Statement, the parties commit to use and apply the Statement to strengthen the culture of volunteering in Victoria and build a shared understanding of, and respect for, the critical role that volunteers play in the emergency management sector and community.

This Statement is dated the 4th of May 2016.

Daniel Andrews MP
Premier, State of Victoria

Jane Garrett MP
Minister for Emergency Services

Craig Lapsley PSM
Emergency Management Commissioner

Emergency Management Agencies Signatories:

Raymond A Campbell ESM National Volunteer Coast Guard National Co-ordinator	Major Eddy Holman State Liaison Emergency Services Officer Victorian State Council	Stuart Stuart Victorian Council of Churches Chief Executive Officer	
Kim Lay APM Ambulance Victoria Chair	John Peberdy Country Fire Authority Action Chair	Cameron Ockley St John Ambulance Victorian Chair	Dr Faye Bendrup Volunteer Emergency Service Association Independent Chair
Penny Harrison Australian Red Cross – Victoria Executive Director	Tom Mollenkopf Life Saving Victoria Chair	Peter Akers Victoria State Emergency Service Chair	Nev Jones AFSM Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria State President

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- The parties commit to maintaining and further building emergency management volunteer capacity as required, to plan, prepare, respond and recover from emergencies and build community safety and resilience; and
- Coexists and complements the enduring effect of the CFA Volunteer Charter.

Emergency Management Volunteers:

- Selflessly give their time to protect and help others;
- Are essential to the State's response before, during and after both routine and major emergencies;
- Are part of their communities and, as such, are fundamental to community safety and resilience;
- Give of their time without expectation of financial reward, but to gain satisfaction from service, achievement, personal development and camaraderie;
- Depend on the goodwill and practical support of their families, friends and employers to enable them to serve;
- Provide their services for the protection of life and property; to create a safer community;
- Work with all emergency management volunteers and paid staff in a mutually respectful and active partnership, having regard to the principles of their agencies, other organisations, government and the community;
- Operate safely and undertake appropriate training and planning to ensure their personal safety and enhance the delivery of services in creating a safer community;
- Are committed to maintaining positive and collaborative relationships with emergency management agencies, government and each other; and
- Bring an extensive and unique range of community and industry skills to Victoria's emergency management capability.

Emergency Management Volunteer Agencies:

- Recognise, value, respect, promote and support emergency management volunteers who come from widely diverse communities with differing needs and characteristics;
- Recognise and acknowledge that a primary responsibility of agencies' paid staff is to nurture and encourage volunteers and to facilitate and develop their skills and competencies, and maintain and build volunteer capacity at all levels of emergency management;
- Recognise and acknowledge the value of the time that volunteers provide and ensure that their time is optimally utilised;
- Work with and support a positive integration of paid and volunteer emergency management workers;
- Develop and maintain an organisational culture and organisational relationships that support volunteer engagement in all emergency management functions;
- Ensure that volunteer views, opinions and concerns are considered before adopting any new or changed policies, procedures or approaches that impact on them as volunteers;
- Provide administrative, operational and infrastructure support in a timely manner to enable volunteers to perform their roles safely and effectively with appropriate resources;
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TOGETHER, WE WORK AS ONE

