

Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria

Inspector-General for Emergency Management
submission

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1 Introduction

I welcome the opportunity to provide this submission to the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry (the Inquiry) into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria.

As the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM), my role is to provide independent assurance to the Victorian Government and the community about how well our emergency management arrangements are working, and to support their continuous improvement in order to keep Victorians safe.

IGEM has the following legislated objectives as set out in Part 7 of the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (the Act):

- to provide assurance to the government and the community in respect of emergency management arrangements in Victoria
- to foster continuous improvement of emergency management in Victoria.

Supporting the achievement of these objectives, IGEM delivers a significant implementation monitoring program under the provisions of the Act:

- monitor and report to the Minister for Emergency Services (the Minister) on the implementation of recommendations arising from IGEM system wide reviews pursuant to s64(1)(ba) of the Act
- at the request of the Minister, monitor and report to the Minister on the implementation of recommendations arising from reports in relation to the emergency management sector in whole or in part pursuant to s64(1)(ca) of the Act
- monitor and report to the Minister on the implementation of the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan pursuant to s64(1)(e) of the Act.

It is important to note that IGEM is not a regulator, does not have powers of enforcement, and cannot direct action. IGEM's role in implementation monitoring under the Act is one of analysis of evidence and reporting on progress. IGEM reports to the Minister on the status of recommendations and actions and under section 70(6) of the Act the Minister may, with the agreement of any other relevant Minister, make the review or report or any part of the review or report publicly available.

This submission draws on the work undertaken to monitor the implementation of recommendations and improvement actions from previous fire season-related reviews and inquiries. This work supports the Committee in the consideration of matters related to Terms of Reference 11 of the Inquiry. It focuses on the monitoring and reporting of progress on the implementation of actions and recommendations from the two most contemporary fire season-related IGEM reports; the *Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector*¹ and the *Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season Phase 1 and Phase 2*^{2,3}.

1.1 Context for this submission

1.1.1 Background

Bushfires have long been a feature of Victoria's natural environment. Major fire events including Black Friday (1939), Ash Wednesday (1983), Black Saturday (2009), the 2019–20 Black Summer fires, and the 2026 summer fires have repeatedly exposed the vulnerability of both communities and the environment to large-scale fire events.

¹ <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/publications/publications/review-of-10-years-of-reform-in-victorias-emergency-management-sector>

² <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/publications/publications/inquiry-into-the-2019-20-victorian-fire-season-phase-1-report>

³ <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/publications/media-releases/victorian-government-responds-to-igem-fire-season-inquiry-phase-2>

As a result, Victoria also has a long history of examining these events through formal reviews, royal commissions, and parliamentary inquiries. Each has provided critical lessons on preparedness, land management, response capacity, and community recovery. In recent years, the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the IGEM Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season have resulted in significant reform agendas which have shaped the state's emergency management framework. While progress has been made, many themes recur in these reviews, reflecting enduring and inherent challenges in managing risk across a fire-prone landscape.

1.1.2 Implementation of recommendations and actions generates continuous improvement

While reviews, royal commissions and parliamentary inquiries are important in identifying what works well and what needs to be improved, they do not generate continuous improvement by themselves. It is not until the recommendations or improvement actions are implemented through the system that the benefits are realised.

Prior to IGEM's establishment in July 2014, Victoria's emergency management system did not have an enduring independent body or a formal mechanism to monitor progress towards the implementation of review and inquiry recommendations and to track sector reform.

IGEM does not monitor the implementation progress of recommendations or actions of every review, inquiry or emergency management report. The Act is specific regarding what IGEM monitors and how this monitoring is triggered:

- Under section 64(1)(ba), IGEM has the power to monitor the implementation of recommendations from its own system wide reviews conducted under the Annual Forward Plan of Reviews.
- Under section 64(1)(ca), the Minister can request IGEM to monitor and report on the implementation of recommendations from reviews requested by the Minister to be undertaken by IGEM under section 64(1)(c) of the Act, and any other emergency management related reports. For example, the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season and the Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry.
- Under section 64(1)(e), IGEM monitors and reports to the Minister on the implementation of the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan.

Since IGEM's establishment, and as per the functions in the Act outlined above, the IGEM has monitored the implementation of actions from the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan, monitored implementation of recommendations from published system wide reviews conducted under IGEM's Forward Plan of Reviews, and undertaken the monitoring of recommendations and actions by Ministerial request for the following fire season-related reviews or inquiries:

- 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission⁴
- 2013-14 Fire Season Compliance Report
- Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry
- Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season.

⁴ Post sunset of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor.

2 Informing Terms of Reference 11 of the Inquiry

2.1 Implementation monitoring of fire-season actions and recommendations

To inform Terms of Reference (ToR) 11, I encourage the Inquiry to consider the implementation progress of the recommendations made by IGEM, and improvement actions committed to by government, in the *Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector*⁵ and the *Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season Phase 1 and Phase 2*^{6,7}. The recommendations in these reports and subsequent government actions are the most contemporary and relevant to the ToR of the Inquiry and the current emergency management framework.

Review or Inquiry	Government response	IGEM implementation monitoring reports
<p>The <i>Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector</i> assessed emergency management reforms in the 10 years since the 2009 Victorian Bushfires and made 5 recommendations.</p>	<p>The government released and responded to the 10 Year Review and Phase 1 report in October 2020, accepting all 22 recommendations. On 30 July 2021 the government released an implementation plan outlining 139 improvement actions and requested IGEM monitor implementation against the actions.</p>	<p>IGEM has produced public reports on the implementation progress of the 139 actions committed to by Government to deliver the 22 recommendations in the 10 Years of Reform and Phase 1 reports, as well as the implementation progress of the 15 recommendations in the Phase 2 Report. These are available on IGEM's website at the below links, listed in chronological order:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation monitoring of 'Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector' and 'Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season – Phase 1' - Progress Report 2021
<p>IGEM's <i>Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season: Phase 1</i> examined preparedness for and response to the fires and made 17 recommendations.</p>	<p>On 14 October 2021 the report was tabled in Parliament and the government responded, supporting all 15 recommendations.</p> <p>As an implementation plan was not released for Phase 2 recommendations, IGEM monitors implementation directly against the recommendations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation monitoring of 'Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector' and 'Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season – Phase 1' - Progress Report 2022 • Implementation monitoring of 'Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector' and 'Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season' - Progress Report 2024⁸
<p>IGEM's <i>Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season: Phase 2</i> examined the progress and effectiveness of Victoria's immediate relief and recovery arrangements and made 15 recommendations.</p>	<p>On 14 October 2021 the report was tabled in Parliament and the government responded, supporting all 15 recommendations.</p> <p>As an implementation plan was not released for Phase 2 recommendations, IGEM monitors implementation directly against the recommendations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implementation monitoring of 'Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector' and 'Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season' - Progress Report 2024⁸

⁵ <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/publications/publications/review-of-10-years-of-reform-in-victorias-emergency-management-sector>

⁶ <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/publications/publications/inquiry-into-the-2019-20-victorian-fire-season-phase-1-report>

⁷ <https://www.igem.vic.gov.au/index.php/publications/media-releases/victorian-government-responds-to-igem-fire-season-inquiry-phase-2>

⁸ IGEM is preparing a 2026 Progress Report and is in the process of analysing evidence from lead organisations for the recommendations or actions. The report will reflect IGEM's assessment of in progress actions up to 31 December 2025. IGEM expects to complete the 2026 Progress Report in mid-late 2026.

2.2 Implementation monitoring of the *Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector and the Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season Phase 1 and Phase 2*

In 2021 IGEM commenced monitoring the implementation of the *Review of 10 years of reform in Victoria's emergency management sector* and the *Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season Phase 1*. Implementation monitoring of Phase 2 recommendations commenced in 2023. As per the table in section 2.1, IGEM has completed 3 progress reports in 2021, 2022 and 2024 that set out the implementation progress of the 139 actions committed to by Government in response to the 22 recommendations in the 10 Years of Reform and Phase 1 reports, and the implementation progress of the 15 recommendations made in the Phase 2 report. These progress reports are published on the IGEM website. Explanations of the status that IGEM assigns for each action or recommendation are set out in Appendix A.

Summary of progress of 10 Year Review and Fire Season Inquiry Phase 1 report actions

IGEM's implementation monitoring covers the 139 actions committed to in response to the 10 Year Review and Phase 1 report. IGEM has produced three progress reports: the Progress Report 2021, which reports on implementation progress up to June 2021; the Progress Report 2022, which reports on implementation progress up to July 2022; and the Progress Report 2024, which reports on implementation progress up to 31 December 2023.

As of 31 December 2023, of the 139 actions committed to in response to the 10 Year Review and Phase 1 report, 118 actions had either been completed or closed. This equates to 85 percent of actions being completed or closed:

- 101 actions were complete
- 17 actions were closed
- 20 actions remained in progress
- one action was yet to commence.

IGEM will revisit the remaining 21 actions from the 10 Year Review and Fire Season Inquiry Phase 1 report in a final progress report, expected for completion in mid to late 2026.

Appendix B sets out the detailed IGEM reporting on the implementation of the 139 actions committed to in response to the 22 recommendations set out in the 10 Year Review and Phase 1 report. This reporting has been aggregated from the 3 progress reports completed in 2021, 2022 and 2024.

Summary of progress of Fire Season Inquiry Phase 2 report recommendations

The Progress Report 2024 covers reporting to the period ending 31 December 2023 and was the first report to monitor the implementation of Phase 2 recommendations. Of the 15 Phase 2 report recommendations monitored in this report, IGEM found that:

- 4 recommendations were complete
- one recommendation was closed
- 10 recommendations remained in progress.

IGEM will revisit the 10 Phase 2 recommendations that remain in progress in a final progress report, expected for completion in mid to late 2026.

Appendix B sets out the detailed IGEM reporting on the implementation of the 15 recommendations set out in the Phase 2 report. This reporting mirrors the progress report completed in 2024.

2.3 Limitations

IGEM notes that recommendations and actions arising from the 2019-20 Fire Season Inquiry represent a point in time analysis based on the evidence and experiences of impacted communities and the scope of that inquiry. They reflect the particular context of the Black Summer fires and its aftermath, which coincided with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Assessments of implementation progress are based on documentary evidence provided by the organisations responsible for the implementation of each action or recommendation. Evidence is supplemented by demonstrations of systems and processes where appropriate. The final assessment is a judgement of progress against the wording of the recommendation or action, and does not make a judgement of effectiveness of the recommendation or action.

Effectiveness assessments are undertaken by the IGEM and other assurance bodies, including the Victorian Auditor General's Office, as part of longer-term work programs, including audits and system-wide reviews. IGEM system-wide reviews typically involve interviews or surveys, gathering of quantitative and qualitative data, and in some cases direct observations of practical application of improvements in practice.

3 Previous IGEM implementation monitoring reports and other relevant reports

To further assist the Inquiry, links and references are provided to other previously published implementation monitoring reports that have been delivered by my office. Previous implementation monitoring reports with relevance to past Victorian fire seasons include:

- Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor Reports:
 - [Progress Report – July 2011](#)
 - [Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor’s Final Report – July 2012](#)
 - [Annual Report – July 2013](#)
 - [Annual Report – July 2014](#)
- Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Progress Reports by the IGEM:
 - [Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission – 2015 Progress Report](#)
 - [Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission – 2016 Progress Report](#)
- 2013-14 Fire Season Compliance Reports:
 - [2013-14 Fire Season Compliance Report](#)
 - [2013-14 Fire Season Compliance Report – 2015 Progress Update](#)
 - [2013-14 Fire Season Compliance Report - 2016 Final Progress Update](#)
- Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Reports⁹:
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Annual Report 2016](#)
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Annual Report 2017](#)
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Annual Report 2018](#)
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Annual Report 2019](#)
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Progress Report 2020](#)
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Progress Report 2021](#)
 - [Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry – Progress Report 2022](#)
- Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Progress Reports¹⁰:
 - [Annual Progress Report - Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015-18](#)
 - [Annual Progress Report - Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2016-19](#)
 - [Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Update #2 2017-20 – Progress Report 2018](#)
 - [Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Update #3 2018-21 – Progress Report 2019](#)
 - [Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Update #4 2019-22 – Progress Report 2020](#)
 - [Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan Update #4 2019-22 – Progress Report 2021](#)
 - [Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2022-25 – Progress Report 2023](#)
 - [Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2023-26 – Progress Report 2024](#)

⁹ The Hazelwood Mine Fire Inquiry Reports provide progress updates on a wide range of actions. Some of these actions may not relate directly to the Inquiry’s terms of reference, but represent significant reforms to the state’s emergency management arrangements.

¹⁰ The Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan progress reports are framed around different themes or strategic priorities, some of which may not relate directly to the Inquiry’s terms of reference. However, many actions relate to enhancements to the state’s preparedness for, response to, and recovery from fire emergencies.

3.1 Assurance in Emergency Management resource

Additionally, IGEM's [Assurance in Emergency Management](#) is a resource that provides a list of selected reports that are mapped against the hazard and emergency system risks that are relevant to Victoria. It is publicly available on the IGEM website.

The list includes reports developed by other government entities or independent bodies that have been mapped against a '[bushfires and other fires](#)' risk category.

IGEM provides the list in the Assurance in Emergency Management resource for general information only. A listed publication does not constitute or imply IGEM's endorsement or recommendation.

Appendix A – IGEM’s assessment of implementation status

When assessing the progress of recommendations or actions IGEM considers:

- the contribution of the reported activity to the recommendation or action it supports
- evidence available to support the reported activity.
- timeframes, including revised timeframes, delays, and progress on key milestones

IGEM assigns a status and finding to each recommendation or action based on a number of factors including progress against timeframes (if applicable) and evidence of recent implementation activity.

Table 1 describes the status that IGEM assigns for each action or recommendation.

Table 1: IGEM implementation status definitions

Status	Description
Complete	Action or recommendation has been implemented.
Closed	The action or recommendation has been partially implemented or has not been implemented, and no further activity is planned by the lead organisation.
In progress	Action or recommendation is being implemented and IGEM will continue to monitor and report on its status in future reports.
Yet to commence	Implementation has not started and IGEM provides no progress summary in the report.

Appendix B – Overview of implementation progress

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