



Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

Hearing date: 21/04/2026

Questions taken on notice

Directed to: Mark Billing

Received date: 06/05/2026

1. P.37 Melina Bath

Question: You said with the Colac incident control centre and the Corangamite group you felt that there was a lack of integration. Can you please give that as a case study and a recommendation of what needs to happen to be better?

Mark BILLING: Yes. I can add it in on notice if you like-

Response:

Response to Question 1 – Melina Bath

- *The key issue was not a lack of effort by personnel within the Incident Control Centre (ICC), but rather a structural disconnect between the ICC and the local CFA volunteer command structure during a rapidly evolving campaign fire.*
- *The Corangamite Group covers most of the private land impacted by the Otways fire complex. Despite this, there was minimal direct engagement between the ICC and local senior volunteer leadership during critical operational periods. Local Group Officers and brigade leaders possess significant local knowledge around access points, water supply, terrain, fire behaviour, local weather influences, asset priorities and farming operations, yet this knowledge was not consistently integrated into planning and operational decision-making.*
- *As a result, there were occasions where:*
 - *Local brigades were unclear on sector priorities and intent.*
 - *Strike teams arrived without adequate local briefing or integration.*
 - *Changes in sector and divisional leadership created communication gaps, particularly overnight.*
 - *Local brigade resources already within the fire area were sometimes overlooked or underutilised.*
 - *Information often flowed one way from the ICC outward, rather than as a two-way operational partnership.*
- *Recommendation:*

That CFA and Emergency Management Victoria formalise a requirement that local CFA Group leadership and senior volunteer officers are embedded into incident planning and operational discussions during campaign fires affecting their areas. This should include:

- *Daily operational briefings involving local Group Officers.*
 - *Dedicated liaison roles between ICC and local brigade command.*
 - *Earlier appointment of CFA sector commanders with local knowledge.*
 - *Improved transition and handover processes between shifts.*
 - *A stronger operational doctrine recognising local volunteer leadership as a core part of incident management, not simply a resource provider.*
- *The system works best when state-level coordination and local operational knowledge are fully integrated.*

2. P.38 Melina Bath

Question: I have run out of time, but take this on notice, please. We are going to go and talk to the department, and the department are going to say, ‘Oh, the communication’s great. It works very well.’ Can you provide a specific example of what you want to see to make that communication better? We are hearing from you. We will hear from, I will say, the department. I am not putting words in their mouths, but they will say no. So what needs to happen to change? What is a recommendation for us, please?

Response:

Response to Question 2 – Melina Bath

- *A practical recommendation is the establishment of a formal two-way communication and consultation framework between Incident Control Centres and local CFA volunteer leadership during campaign fires.*
- *At times during the Otways fire response, communication was heavily top-down. Information was pushed out from the ICC, but there was limited structured opportunity for local brigade and Group leadership to feed operational intelligence back into planning and decision-making in real time.*
- *For example:*
 - *Local brigades often had immediate knowledge of changing fire behaviour, road access issues, water availability and asset risks, but there was no consistent mechanism to ensure this information influenced operational planning quickly enough.*
 - *Shift handovers between divisional and sector commanders were often lengthy and disconnected from local crews, creating uncertainty around command intent and priorities.*
 - *Local volunteers sometimes struggled to identify who their direct operational contact was following leadership changes during overnight transitions.*

- *Recommendations:*
 - *Mandatory daily operational meetings between ICC leadership and local CFA Group Officers during campaign incidents.*
 - *A dedicated local volunteer liaison officer embedded within the ICC.*
 - *Greater use of local CFA sector commanders in areas with significant volunteer and farming interface.*
 - *Shorter and clearer command-channel communications focused on operational brevity.*
 - *Formal inclusion of local brigade intelligence into incident action planning processes.*
 - *Better continuity during shift changes to avoid losing local situational awareness.*

- *The volunteers on the ground are not separate from the incident management system — they are a critical part of it. The communication model needs to reflect that operational reality.*