



# Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee

**Hearing date:** 1/05/2026

**Questions taken on notice**

**Directed to:** Emergency Management Victoria

**Received date:** 9/06/2026

## 1. P.28-29 Melina Bath

Question: -We heard very much so about first responders and communities complaining about radio congestion impacting operations, that there were mixed messages and people were not on the right station. Can I ask, Mr Heffernan: why has the short status messaging not been part of the CAD upgrades?- When? Into the future – what is the timeframe, because clearly we have got next fire season coming. We are seven months away. Can you maybe take that on notice and provide some additional context about when you foresee that happening?

**Tim WIEBUSCH:** Yes, we can get Triple Zero Victoria to provide that back to the committee.

### **Response**

Short status messaging for fire agencies is not part of the initial scope and implementation of Next Generation Computer Aided Dispatch platform (Next Gen CAD). Next Gen CAD delivery focusses on integrating with existing systems.

## **Additional questions**

### **Sarah Mansfield**

1. Access to water was a significant issue for firefighting crews during the fires at a number of sites (Colac-Otways was assisted by a recently installed water tank fundraised for by the Gellibrand CFA). Bringing in bulk water from other places incurred significant delays that did not adequately support firefighting efforts. We heard that around the Longwood fire, some water tanks weren't accessible as they weren't fitted with compatible access points for pumpers/firefighting appliances, despite being a requirement post Black Saturday.

**Response**

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) will be best placed to respond to this statement regarding the Gellibrand CFA as access points on water tanks are not within EMV's remit.

2. What is being done to address water availability and access during the immediate bushfire response?

**Response**

As part of Victoria's 2025-26 higher risk weather season preparedness arrangements, the Victorian Government approved the allocation of \$9.5 million in 2025-26 for the Country Fire Authority (CFA) to procure large capacity water tanks and bulk water carriers. These large capacity storage tanks were strategically located to support brigades and rural communities, particularly those in drought affected areas. Funding included relocation costs, bulk water carriers and transport services. This initiative was in response to significant rainfall deficits that had dramatically reduced the availability of firefighting water and introduced competing needs between human and animal consumption, and firefighting. The use of bulk water carriers and large capacity water tanks had a meaningful impact on the State's capacity to manage fires. This also reduced the need access essential water supplies held by famers and land managers.

3. Councils and communities have long called for funding to support local climate resilience programs, and this was also a recommendation from the Climate Resilience Inquiry undertake by this committee. Is a fund going to be established to support community climate resilience and adaptation?

**Response**

This question is a matter for the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action and Minister for Climate Action, and Energy and Resources to respond as the lead for climate resilience funding and programs.

EMV will continue to work with sector and community partners to amplify current resilience initiatives - including those run by Victorian Emergency Services Organisations, Councils, and community groups, and those funded through existing mechanisms like the State Municipal Emergency Resourcing Program and the Commonwealth Disaster Ready Fund.

4. The committee heard from communities who had experienced significant frustration accessing information and support following the fire. It was confusing, hard to navigate for people who had lost everything, with difficult to understand and often inequitable eligibility criteria. Will eligibility criteria (e.g. for clean up support, that differentiates between insured/underinsured/uninsured) be reviewed?

**Response**

Relief Centres, along with the Vic Emergency app, website and social media channels and Emergency Broadcasters were utilised to provide access to information and support, including promotion of the Recovery Support Program through the 1800 560 760 Emergency Recovery Hotline. The Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH) issued personal hardship assistance payments, supported councils with emergency accommodation and established the recovery support program.

The recovery support program supports impacted people in accessing available recovery programs, including clean-up.

Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) published information on eligibility criteria for the 2026 State Coordinated Clean-up Program from the day it was activated, encouraging all bushfire impacted households to contact the Emergency Recovery Hotline to discuss their circumstances and to clarify their eligibility for supports.

Eligibility criteria for clean-up support programs are determined with each event to ensure supports are being delivered to those who need it most.

5. The 1800 number provided at times didn't work, or was difficult to navigate, and there were instances where people who knew they had lost their properties being told by operators that their property loss was not yet in the system. Volunteers at community hubs took on the responsibility of trying to find the right numbers for people and help with system navigation. Is EMV aware of these issues and will you be reviewing how the support line works?

**Response**

The VicEmergency Hotline and the Emergency Recovery Hotline are two separate resources Victorians can use to access information, help and support, about emergency events or disasters. Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) is not aware of any instance where either line did not work.

The VicEmergency Hotline provides information during major incidents in Victoria. It also offers information to help householders, landowners and small businesses plan for and respond to emergencies.

The Emergency Recovery Hotline acts as a front door, supporting program delivery across the Victorian Government. Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) worked with program providers to ensure that people could access programs that were available. This included adding additional menu options to support primary producers.

The Emergency Recovery Hotline has been continually operational since the 2019-20 Victorian bushfires. After the fires in early January 2026, EMV rapidly surged staff to support the operation of the hotline and onboarded staff to support delivery of the clean-up program registrations.

EMV continually reviews the menu structure to enable people to navigate their options and will continue to update this in future based on experience from this emergency.

6. We heard that case workers took a long time to be deployed (weeks to months) but once they were these were really useful supports. Why weren't case workers deployed earlier?

**Response**

Emergency Relief Centres provided immediate psychosocial support through agencies like the Victorian Council of Churches Emergencies Ministry, Australian Red Cross, and local providers

The Emergency Recovery Support Program was announced 11 January 2026. The Emergency Recovery Support Program's objective is to assist impacted individuals and families by supporting them to 'navigate' the recovery process. The State engages providers (e.g. Windermere) to engage Recovery Support Workers – or 'case workers' – who establish a professional relationship with each client and provide a consistent point of contact for them. Each program is designed specifically to cater for the unique needs of each disaster.

7. Will DEECA ensure that in future disaster response efforts case workers are deployed immediately to support affected community members?

**Response**

This question is a matter for Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action to respond.

8. Community hubs run by volunteers have taken on a lot of responsibility for supporting local community members through the recovery process which is ongoing. Some of these groups are lacking basic equipment, like generators and portaloos, and are having to hire these. We heard that communities want recovery led by local people who know them and their context, but they need to be enabled to do this with greater funding and resources (human and otherwise). Will EMV commit including these community hubs in formal response and recovery frameworks (rather than just relying on grants programs after an event)?

### **Response**

Following emergencies such as the January 2026 Victorian bushfires, councils take the lead in local relief and initial recovery efforts. They are empowered to stand up relief centres to provide shelter and basic needs for those impacted and displaced by a disaster. The costs and operations of these relief centres are eligible to be recouped by councils through the State-Commonwealth Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

Emergency Management Victoria's (EMV) place-based teams work closely with councils and disaster impacted communities and community groups to ensure needs are well understood and recovery investments are targeted.

EMV is responsible for relief and recovery coordination at the state and regional level and works closely with relevant agencies and departments to coordinate whole-of-Victorian-Government funding submissions to ensure implementation of targeted and timely relief and recovery supports. EMV's existing recovery frameworks and funding processes focus on core emergency relief and recovery offerings and recovery programs to disaster impacted communities to ensure the right level of supports are provided to these communities.

### **Gaelle Broad**

Directed to Emergency Recovery Victoria

The Two-Tiered Cleanup Program

*Cleanup program design / policy precedent*

1. In previous major Victorian fire events like Black Saturday and Black Sunday, ERV has designed a universal cleanup program that includes insured properties. Can you explain the policy rationale for the current

two-tiered program that EXCLUDES insured properties – who made this decision, and who directed it?

*Every cleanup since Marysville has been open to both insured and uninsured properties. The standard model meant insurance companies topped up the difference between cleanup cost and the policy value — incentivising resilient rebuilding and giving the homeowner a financial head start. That model has been abandoned here.*

### **Response**

No two emergencies are the same. The eligibility criteria for recovery supports, like the Clean-up Program, are developed to address the specific circumstances and impacts of the emergency the supports are responding to. Programs in the past have not always been open to people with sufficient insurance (e.g. February 2024 bushfire and storms).

The January 2026 Victorian Bushfire State-Coordinated Clean-up Program helps people without adequate insurance who are facing hardship because they have lost their home or business and will not be able to rebuild.

Victoria hasn't seen such significant agricultural losses from fire since the devastating fires of 2009. This program has a broader approach to clean up to ensure it can assist farmers who live and work on their farms to clean up by extending the perimeter of the clean-up site. This means more structures are in scope for clean-up.

The Clean-up Program helps people who do not have adequate insurance. It is not designed to replace the role of insurance companies in delivering the services their policyholders have paid for, and playing their part in supporting communities through recovery.

Emergency Management Victoria manage the design and delivery of the State Coordinated Clean-up Program. The Program was informed by the initial impact data and was endorsed by the State and Commonwealth Government as part of the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements.

- Was this decision made by ERV, by Treasury, or by the Minister's office?
- Was there any consultation with the Insurance Council of Australia before this decision was made?
- Was a cost-benefit analysis conducted?

### **Response**

The design of the January 2026 State coordinated Clean-Up Program was approved and funded by the Victorian and Commonwealth governments.

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) maintains an ongoing relationship with the Insurance Council of Australia (ICA), and they were informed of the State Coordinated Clean-up Program in the lead up to the Program's announcement.

EMV manages the design and delivery of the State Coordinated Clean-up Program. The Program was informed by initial impact data and previous costs associated with delivering clean-up programs to baseline requirements to ensure funding requested would meet Program and community expectations.

*Cleanup program / insured homeowners / insurance market*

1. The Insurance Council of Australia has been critical of this two-tiered approach. Are you aware of their concerns, and do you accept that this program design is actively preventing insured homeowners from finalising their insurance claims?

*Without a defined government eligibility threshold for underinsured properties, insurance companies cannot calculate the gap. This has paralysed claim resolution for many affected residents. The ICA's position is that this undermines the relationship between government recovery programs and the private insurance market.*

**Response**

Insurance companies are responsible for delivering the services their policyholders have paid for and playing their part in supporting communities through recovery.

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV, which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) has met regularly with Insurance Council of Australia (ICA) and its member representatives and addressed queries relating to the State Coordinated Clean-up Program.

Properties that are adequately insured can access clean-up through their insurance company and the insurers are advising EMV that in many cases this has now occurred.

Support for people to work with their insurance company is also available through Disaster Legal Help Victoria on 1800 113 432 and Financial Counselling. Both services are free and tailored to meet the needs of people impacted by this disaster.

The criteria for the clean-up program is designed to be flexible to maximise the amount of funds under insured and non-insured households have in order to rebuild. Each clean-up is unique and therefore the cost varies significantly.

- Is this program design intended to save money for the state government?
- What is the definition of an under-insured property? Please explain the eligibility criteria for the clean-up program.

### **Response**

No, this State-Coordinated Clean-up Program has received funding of \$122 million to support eligible residents and business owners without adequate insurance to clean-up their properties.

Underinsured is defined as where insurance does not cover (for example):

- bushfire damage
- demolition or waste removal
- the cost to rebuild on the property.

Every property is different, and the assessment team considers a range of factors including the total value of insurance, the level and extent of insurance coverage, impacts of the fire and whether the coverage will enable some level of rebuild for the primary place of residence and/or key business assets.

For this reason, anyone who may be eligible is encouraged to register online or call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 to discuss their circumstances. This includes if people are still working with their insurance company to understand their entitlements; or they have agreed to or received a payout.

### *Public health / asbestos / community safety*

1. Four months after the January fires, there are multiple properties in localities like Ruffy that still contain asbestos, fuel tanks and gas bottles. Coming into winter, what is ERV's plan to remediate these properties, and what is the timeline?

*The slow pace of the cleanup has driven residents — including elderly people — to clean up their own properties, including asbestos-containing materials. This is a foreseeable consequence of program delay. There is also a serious risk of groundwater contamination from unsecured materials.*

### **Response**

Assessments commenced in the eastern part of Victoria on 9 February 2026.

Works are scheduled, underway or complete for over 60% of eligible property owners, and Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) are working hard to ensure these are completed as soon as practical.

There are range of factors impacting on timeframes to schedule and complete clean-up for the remaining eligible property owners. These factors include: timeliness of property owner opting into clean-up works (i.e. confirming they agree with the planned scope of works and that they want the clean-up works to take place), when the property owner wants them to be scheduled, permitting, availability of contractors due to completing other clean-ups and the complexity of the clean-up works.

EMV is confident that we will continue to deliver at a faster pace while taking our commitment to managing hazards such as asbestos and protecting cultural and heritage values seriously.

- How many properties in the Longwood bushfire impacted area still have asbestos materials unaddressed?
- Has ERV notified the EPA or relevant authorities of the contamination risk?

### **Response**

Emergency Management Victoria's (EMV) data on asbestos presentations only includes eligible properties who have had a site assessment completed as part of the clean-up program.

As at 2 June 26, there are 11 properties in the Mansfield, Mitchell, Murrindindi, Strathbogie local government areas (impacted by the Longwood bushfire fires) whose site assessment reported presentation of asbestos, with clean-up works soon to commence.

EMV has engaged with the Environment Protection Authority Victoria (EPA) since the pre-commencement and subsequent announcement of the State Coordinated Clean-up Program. The EPA has been present at Community Meetings and within the Recovery Hubs on a regular basis to answer questions from the community.

The EPA is part of the Clean-up Program Governance model that meets weekly, and EMV's primary contractor reports on all waste disposal metrics regulated by the EPA.

EMV works closely with the EPA and WorkSafe Victoria (WorkSafe) on asbestos handling, removal, transport and disposal. WorkSafe is notified of

every asbestos site and EMV ensures the EPA is aware as part of the transportation tracking process.

This is to ensure operations adhere to legislative requirements and also to ensure we mitigate the risks of harm to both people (working and community) and the environment.

*Cleanup program / precedent / eligibility*

2. Before the cleanup program was announced, did ERV have a published eligibility guideline for underinsured properties? If not, why not — given that a specific eligibility guideline has been published for every major Victorian disaster since the 2009 Marysville fires?

*The absence of a state-specific eligibility guideline for this event is a significant departure from standard practice. Residents, insurers and councils have been directed to generic national DRFA guidelines not designed for state-level application, creating inconsistent outcomes. Will ERV commit to publishing an event-specific eligibility guideline before the end of this month?*

**Response**

State-coordinated clean-up programs are developed based on the circumstances and impacts of an emergency. No two emergencies are the same and people are impacted in different ways, requiring different types of services and supports that will have varying eligibility criteria.

Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) has published information about eligibility on its website and encouraged anyone who may be eligible to register online or call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 to discuss their circumstances. This includes if people are still working with their insurance company to understand their entitlements or they have agreed to, or received, a payout.

Eligibility criteria are published on the clean-up webpage and available via factsheets that have been available since registrations opened on 30 January 2026. Please refer to: <https://www.vic.gov.au/clean-support-january-2026-bushfires>.

Because every property owner's circumstance is different, people are encouraged to call the Emergency Recovery Hotline on 1800 560 760 (select option 3) to discuss their circumstances and have eligibility assessed.

## Cleanup Progress and Contractor Conduct

### 3. *Cleanup program / program data*

- How many properties have registered for the cleanup program? Of those, how many have been assessed for eligibility?

#### **Response**

644 properties are registered (as at 2 June 2026). 606 eligibility assessments have been completed. The remainder are either being assessed or Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) has not been able to contact them.

- How many have been deemed eligible?

#### **Response**

There are 272 eligible registrations in the program (as at 2 June 2026).

- How many have had a cleanup commence?

#### **Response**

A total of 102 clean-ups have commenced (as at 2 June 2026).

- How many have had the cleanup been fully completed?

#### **Response**

88 clean-up works are complete (as at 2 June 2026).

- *There has been no public reporting on cleanup program progress for this event. In previous events, ERV published weekly updates. The Inquiry should have this data on the record.*

#### **Response**

Clean-up data has been made available to impacted councils to support their community recovery efforts.

- How many properties have withdrawn from the program because of delays?

**Response**

6 eligible property owners, whose site assessments were completed opted out of the clean-up program (as at 2 June 26) and indicated they would self-manage their clean up due to the standard timeframe anticipated for works.

- What is the current projected completion date for the program?

**Response**

Registrations for clean-up remain open. For people registered before 30 April who have not yet had their property cleaned up, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) expects to complete their clean-up by the end of July. Some large or complex sites (particularly community assets or businesses with lots of structures) may take longer.

*Cleanup program / Black Summer comparison*

4. After the 2019–20 Black Summer fires, more than 600 properties were cleaned up within six months. Four months on from the January 2025 fires, the program has not reached the majority of eligible properties. What is the explanation for that difference in pace?

*The Black Summer fires were far larger in scale. The fact that a smaller event has produced slower outcomes demands a clear explanation. The difference cannot be attributed to complexity alone.*

**Response**

The 2019-20 Bushfire Clean-up program was predominantly delivered in three neighbouring local government areas, with a high proportion of clean-up occurring in one local government area (LGA).

Registrations opened late January 2020 and the program was substantially complete by late August 2020, being 7 months later. In early May the program had cleaned up 122 properties, around 16 per cent of the final total.

The January 2026 Bushfires Clean-up has eligible registrations in 12 LGAs, with many properties in remote locations. Every emergency impacts

communities differently, covering different geographic areas with varying topography.

The Victorian Government had clean-up assessment teams on the ground as soon as it was safe after the January fires, and a State Coordinated Clean-up Program was launched on 30 January 2026 with registrations opened that day.

As at 2 June 26, Over 95 per cent of eligible properties have had a site assessment. Over 80 per cent of property owners who have opted in to receive a clean-up have works either scheduled, underway or complete.

It is vital that practical elements of property clean-up are done properly and safely, and property owners recovery needs are respected to ensure minimal re-traumatisation for people who have gone through so much.

- Is the slower pace a consequence of the two-tiered design, budget constraints, contractor issues, or a deliberate decision to defer costs to the next financial year?

### **Response**

The State Co-ordinated Clean Up Program is underway and on track.

Each emergency is different, which is why when eligibility criteria for recovery support like the Clean-up Program is developed, it draws directly from the specific circumstances and impacts of the emergency it is responding to. Notwithstanding this, eligibility for other clean-up programs in recent years has also been limited to those who are uninsured and underinsured.

Victoria hasn't seen such significant agricultural losses from fire since the devastating fires of 2020. This program has a broader approach to clean-up than was adopted in response to the 2020 bushfires to ensure it can assist farmers who live and work on their farms to clean up.

As at 2 June 26, out of the 272 eligible property owners, over 60 per cent have clean-up works scheduled, underway or completed.

Out of the 205 property owners who have opted in to the program (i.e. confirmed participation in clean-up works), over 80 per cent have clean-up works scheduled, underway or completed.

The process from registration to works and completion can take time. Documents can be difficult to find, decisions must be made by participants and change during the process. Each person experiences an emergency, and recovery from it, differently.

We are confident that we will continue to deliver at a faster pace while taking our commitment to managing hazards such as asbestos and protecting cultural and heritage values seriously.

Not only is it vital that the practical elements of property clean-up are done properly, but respecting the program participants managing their recovery is important to ensuring minimal re-traumatisation and respect for those who have gone through so much.

The State-Coordinated Clean-up Program has received funding of \$122 million to support residents and business owners without adequate insurance to clean-up their properties. Forge Solutions, the primary contractor engaged to lead the Clean-up Program, are an experienced and leading provider of response and recovery services for disaster recovery.

Finances relating to the Clean-up Program depend on several factors, including when works are completed and final reports and invoices are submitted. No financial decisions or timelines are impacted by financial year and therefore it has played no part in the delivery timeline of the program.

*Cleanup / contractor conduct / trauma-informed practice*

5. Multiple residents in the Ruffy area have reported the contracted cleanup provider attending their property up to four times without completing or commencing cleanup. Can ERV explain the contractual arrangement that allows for repeated inspection visits without remediation?

*Trauma-informed principles — recommended by both the Royal Commission and IGEM — require minimising the number of times a survivor must re-engage with the destruction of their property. Repeated inspection visits without action directly contradicts this. There are also credible reports that the contractor is incentivised to slow-walk completion.*

**Response**

The operating model stipulates an initial visit for Site Assessment to determine the scope of works, followed by a secondary visit to walkthrough the proposed works, gain property owner consent and provide the owner with an opportunity to ask any questions.

An additional scheduled visit may be required where there is a specialist requirement to assess complex scopes of work, complete specific hazard testing, ensure restricted access for machinery, or complete Historical, Archaeological or Cultural Heritage requirements.

On average, only two site visits are required prior to works commencing. However, other authorities or council representatives may access sites for separate purposes. For example, some residents may have confused Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) clean-up teams with Secondary Impact Assessment (SIA) visits from council.

- Is the contractor paid per inspection visit?
- What is the contractor's current profit margin under the contract, and how does that compare to previous cleanup contracts?
- Is ERV satisfied that the contractual terms incentivise timely completion?

#### **Response**

All contractors are paid an agreed rate for their services which is negotiated as part of contractual arrangements.

The margin negotiated between the primary contractor Forge Solutions and Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria) is market competitive and demonstrates value for money in accordance with Victorian Government procurement policies and obligations. The exact margin is commercial-in-confidence.

Emergency Management Victoria is satisfied that an appropriate balance between efficiency, effectiveness and quality in program delivery has been achieved, and that the program is underpinned by safety and the principle of putting property owners at the centre of decisions relating to their property.

Forge Solutions has significant experience delivering post-disaster clean-up across Eastern Australia.

#### Discovery Phase and Structural Retention

##### *6. Cleanup / trauma-informed practice / Royal Commission*

In all major events from the past 6 years BRV/ERV have had community and cleanup hubs in effected areas, these hubs have been jointly staffed and provide visible on the ground support to community's, who's direction was it to stop this practice?

*The discovery phase is a trauma-informed minimum standard. Its absence causes unnecessary additional harm to people who have already lost everything.*

## Response

The Victorian Government had clean-up assessment teams on the ground as soon as it was safe, and a State Coordinated Clean-up Program, led by Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria), was launched on 30 January 2026 with registrations opened that day and site assessments underway in less than two weeks.

The clean-up process is designed to ensure as many people as possible can register, get checked for eligibility and can have their properties cleaned up so they can continue with their recovery.

The January 2026 Clean-up has eligible registrations in 12 local government areas, with impacts dispersed across the state. Recovery hubs have been established in many impacted areas with information available on clean-up support. Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) team members have attended these recovery hubs to support clean-up registrations for those that would prefer to register in person.

The Operational Hubs coordinated by the Clean-up Program support the contractors and subcontractors active on properties. The lead contractor has an active Operational Hub in Yea which is servicing all works across the North East.

The spread and complexity of works across other areas is better serviced via a mobile model which EMV have implemented for this Clean-up Program.

The lead contractor facilitates reclamation of items of value where it is safe to do so. Clean-up works do not commence without the owner's consent and are scheduled as per the timing of their request.

- Has ERV made a deliberate decision to remove the discovery phase from the program for this event?
- Will ERV commit to contacting all registered properties immediately to offer a discovery phase before cleanup proceeds?

## Response

There has been no change to discovery facilitation. Where it is safe to do so property owners work with their site supervisors to reclaim any requested items.

Prior to clean-up works commencing, property owners attend a final site walkthrough with their Site Supervisor where they confirm any items that are not to be included in the clean-up or to flag the importance of known items within the debris they wish to recapture. This is the ongoing and accepted

practice, and many residents have taken up this opportunity, which is made available during every site walkthrough.

*Cleanup / structural retention / Royal Commission*

7. It has also been standard practice to allow structurally sound elements — concrete slabs, significant stone walls — to be retained at the property owner’s request. Residents have been told by ERV that this event is ‘all or nothing’ removal. Can you explain that change, and on what basis it was made?

*An elderly couple who stayed to defend their property and successfully preserved a stone wall have been told it must be removed entirely or they forfeit the program. This forced them to clean up the property themselves — including asbestos — rather than have the wall removed and be left with nothing. This is a direct contradiction of Royal Commission guidance.*

**Response**

Demolition means the removal of the building structure and the associated debris/waste. This usually includes structure slabs and footings. After the completion of the demolition, the site will be left in a safe, level and uncompacted condition.

Partial demolition requires a range of additional work that is not included in this program, including structural assessment of remaining parts, and for safety reasons is not possible under the program.

Where a slab can be retained, it may be requested by the property owner. Due to the damage to the structures, operational and safety considerations, the program cannot guarantee the slab will be retained without damage, but where works permit (on advice from expert contractors) slabs can be retained at the owner’s request. Significant stone walls, brick chimneys etc. cannot be retained under the program. Following a bushfire, these components of a structure present a safety concern due to compromised mortar from the heat of a bushfire and therefore must be removed to address risk of future collapse.

- What is the legal or policy basis for the all-or-nothing approach? Who made that decision within ERV?

**Response**

The basis for this approach is safety, both for the contractors completing the works and the property owners once works are complete.

The decision is based on safety and is consistent across all bushfire Clean-up Programs delivered by Emergency Management Victoria (which now incorporates Emergency Recovery Victoria).

#### Payments, Firebreaks and Budget Management

##### *Fire response / firebreak repair / contractor payments*

10. Throughout this inquiry there have been consistent complaints about delays in repairing fire breaks and in paying contractors who worked during and after the fires. There are also reports of fodder program donors waiting extended periods to be reimbursed. Are these delays a consequence of normal government accounting processes, or is there deliberate pressure to defer payments into the next financial year?

#### **Response**

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action is responsible to repairing fire breaks and would be best placed to respond to this part of the question.

Agriculture Victoria undertook urgent livestock animal welfare assessments and assisted with the euthanasia of livestock, assessed welfare needs, collected agricultural impact data and supported farmers through the early stages of recovery, including the provision of emergency fodder.

Agriculture Victoria and Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action would be able to provide any further details required.

*The Member for Euroa has received credible information that the Department of Justice and Community Safety has been directed to reduce expenditure by approximately \$300 million in the current financial year. If payments are being deferred to manage that target, affected communities are paying the cost of the government's budget problem.*

- Has the Department of Justice directed ERV to defer recovery expenditure into the 2025–26 financial year?

#### **Response**

No, the Department of Justice and Community Safety has not directed Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) to defer recovery expenditure into the

2026-27 financial year. Programs are well underway for the vast majority of programs, including Health and Wellbeing, Clean-up, Temporary Accommodation (modular homes) are not in any way being deferred until 2026-27.

The Victorian State Budget for 2026-27 provides more than \$420m in output and asset funding from 2026 to 2030 to support communities in their recovery from the January 2026 bushfire events.

EMV, like many agencies supporting Whole-of-Government recovery efforts, is engaging closely with impacted communities to identify and prioritise those most at risk whilst working towards the longer recovery requirements which, given the complexities, may take several years to complete.

- How many contractors engaged during or after the January fires remain unpaid?

#### **Response**

A wide variety of contractors are engaged by the departments and agencies involved in the January fires.

From an Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) perspective, contractors are only utilised with respect to the Clean-up program. All these contractors are and have been paid as per the conditions of their agreed contractual arrangements and EMV is meeting these commitments.

Questions relating to the payment status of other specific contractors will need to be addressed to the appropriate department or agency responsible.

#### Organisational Restructure During Active Recovery

##### 11. *Organisational management / restructure / accountability*

Can you explain why ERV undertook a significant internal restructure — disaggregating recovery functions across multiple departments — during an active disaster recovery? Who directed that decision?

#### **Response**

ERV was not disaggregated across multiple departments.

As a result of the Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service: Final Report produced by Helen Silver AO, the corresponding Government Response and within Emergency Management Victoria's (EMV) context, the government has merged Emergency Recovery Victoria (ERV) into EMV.

The organisational structure brings together all Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) Emergency Management business units as a fully integrated emergency management group under the brand of Emergency Management Victoria, within DJCS.

Changes to the departmental structure were undertaken with consideration of the emergency context, including recovery, and in consultation with senior executive of EMV and ERV.

There was no loss of resources in the regional service delivery functions which support Relief and Recovery. These important roles have continued to support local councils in the coordination of programs for impacted communities.

*Under the model established after the 2019–20 fires, ERV operated as a centralised coordination body covering all recovery functions: hardship payments, housing, agricultural grants, cleanup, and case management. That structure has been progressively dismantled. The Recovery Support Program has been transferred to DFFH, temporary housing to DFFH, and agricultural grants to DEECA. This fragmentation is directly contrary to the centralized model recommended by the Royal Commission.*

- Was this restructure directed by the Minister's office, by Treasury, or by ERV itself?

### **Response**

In response to the Independent Review of the Victorian Public Service: Final Report produced by Helen Silver AO, the corresponding Government Response and within Emergency Management Victoria's (EMV) context, the government has merged Emergency Recovery Victoria into EMV.

EMV continues to operate as a centralised coordination body across all recovery, coordinating relief and recovery at the state and regional tiers and bringing all recovery leads together to function as an integrated recovery sector. EMV also continues to maintain the resources, systems and process to engage at the local and Commonwealth levels of government.

- Was any impact assessment conducted on how disaggregation would affect recovery outcomes?

### **Response**

This question does not fall within the scope of the Terms of Reference for this Parliamentary Inquiry.

The relief and recovery role and responsibilities within Emergency Management Victoria have not changed.

- Has ERV done a cost-benefit analysis comparing the disaggregated model against the centralised BRV/ERV model?

**Response**

This question does not fall within the scope of the Terms of Reference for this Parliamentary Inquiry.

The relief and recovery role and responsibilities within Emergency Management Victoria have not changed.

*Staffing / organisational capacity*

12. How many full-time equivalent staff have left ERV in the last three months, either through resignation, redundancy, or redeployment?

Was Mariela Diaz involved in the restructure planning that resulted in her being removed as a CEO and subsequently becoming A Deputy Commissioner and did she interview for the DC role?

*There are serious concerns about the loss of experienced recovery specialists from ERV at a time when their expertise is most needed. Staff morale and retention directly affects recovery outcomes for communities like those in the Euroa electorate.*

- Of those who have left, how many were in frontline recovery roles?

**Response**

Information relevant to HR and resources are strictly confidential and they do not fall within the Terms of Reference for this Parliamentary Inquiry.

How many recovery specialists does ERV currently have deployed in or near the Longwood and Ruffy fire areas?

**Response**

The Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) maintains a base of dedicated 25 regional recovery staff that work across all impacted local government areas. This workforce is supported by a broader relief and

recovery workforce within DJCS and across government to ensure recovery needs are known and government priorities are being delivered on.

**Wendy Lovell**

**Directed to EMV and DJCS**

1. Can you please detail the current progress being made by EMV / DJCS towards the implementation of Recommendation 6.4 (Delivery of a Public Safety Mobile Broadband network) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNNDA) including work underway, requests made of the Federal Government and details of project outputs / deliverables including the timeframe in which this network will be available to Victorian agencies?

**Response**

The National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA), on behalf of the Commonwealth Government, leads the Public Safety Mobile Broadband (PSMB) program and is working with the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications, Sports and the Arts. NEMA is best placed to answer this question.

2. Can you please detail the work completed by agencies / EMV or reported to EMV / DJCS in respect to the implementation of Recommendation 9.3 (Provision of Information) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNNDA)?

**Response**

The VicTraffic Program released a major website refresh on 28 March 2023. This refresh included new infrastructure to significantly increase the speed of the website, and a new User Interface which improves how customers can view and search critical road disruption information. Further information about this work and the implementation progress of Recommendation 9.3 can be provided by the Department of Transport and Planning.

3. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 9.4 (Collective Awareness and mitigation of risks to Critical Infrastructure) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNNDA)?

## Response

The Victorian Government and Victorian critical infrastructure entities participate in a number of activities that support collective awareness and mitigation of risks to critical infrastructure.

In recent years, all jurisdictions, including Victoria, have benefitted from enhanced engagement via the Australian Government's Trusted Information Sharing Network (TISN). This includes Victorian participation in regular cross-sector briefings, events and relevant TISN sector groups.

Additionally, Victoria has collaborated with the Australian Government to support the implementation of reforms to the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018 (Cth) and improve resilience.

Victorian stakeholders from industry and government attend National Coordination Mechanism meetings, as required, which improves situational awareness and information sharing between governments and critical infrastructure sectors during emergencies.

At a state level, Government is able to use existing relationships to share or request information during emergencies via the Sector Resilience Networks or emergency management liaison functions fulfilled by industry.

Victoria has strong critical infrastructure resilience arrangements in place. Under Part 7A of the Emergency Management Act (Vic), responsible entities for 'vital critical infrastructure' participate in an annual Resilience Improvement Cycle which includes a statement of assurance, emergency risk management planning and documentation, an exercise and an audit. Infrastructure criticality is also assessed under this Part.

Victoria's Critical Infrastructure Resilience Strategy provides a framework for collaboration between government and critical infrastructure sectors, with an ongoing focus on building sector and organisational resilience against all hazards. Efforts under Victoria's Strategy include ongoing engagement with industry and validation of sector risks via the Sector Resilience Networks; development of annual Sector Resilience Plans to provide assurance to Government on the resilience of each sector; the development of Victoria's Critical Infrastructure All Sectors Resilience Report; and a regular All Sectors Resilience Network Forum hosted by Emergency Management Victoria to improve collective understanding of interdependencies and emerging risks. Victoria's Inspector-General for Emergency Management provides ongoing oversight and assurance to the State's critical infrastructure resilience arrangements.

4. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 11.1 (Responsibility for local government disaster management capability and capacity) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNND A)?

**Response**

The Victorian Government continues to work collaboratively with the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) and the state's 79 councils to strengthen emergency management capability, capacity and resource sharing at the municipal level. This includes the development of detailed role statements for councils for all their emergency management responsibilities. Further information about these activities and the implementation progress of Recommendation 11.1 can be provided by the Department of Government Services.

5. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 12.1 (Roadside Vegetation Management) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNND A)?

**Response**

The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) is responsible for roadside fuel management (for roads managed by DTP) and is best placed to answer this question.

6. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 12.4 (Sheltering terminology) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNND A)?

**Response**

The Country Fire Authority is responsible for the implementation of recommendation 12.4 in relation to sheltering terminology and is best placed to answer this question.

7. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 12.5 (National Community Education as it relates to sheltering options) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNND A)?

**Response**

As above, the Country Fire Authority is responsible for the implementation of recommendation 12.5 in relation to National Community Education as it relates to sheltering options and is best placed to answer this question.

8. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 13.1 (Australian Fire Danger Ratings System) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNDA) including details of when the full specifications / design of the system will be implemented?

**Response**

To support the implementation of the Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) in Victoria, a range of activities have been progressed. This includes the development of ICT systems and decision support products to support the application of the AFDRS to Victoria's management footprints (e.g., the Incident Control Centre boundaries) as well as the replacement of state-wide roadside AFDRS signs. Significant training and engagement has also occurred across Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVic), the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) to upskill firefighters and decision makers. Additionally, a state-wide media campaign, together with CFA's summer engagement program, promoted the AFDRS to the community, increasing their understanding of the system. Further information about the implementation of the AFDRS in Victoria can be provided by the CFA.

9. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 17.2 (Assessment & approvals process for vegetation management) of the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNDA) including improvements made / efficiencies realized by this work that are reflected in current processes?

**Response**

The Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action is best placed to respond to this question.

10. Can you please detail steps and actions taken in Victoria and by Victorian entities in response to the implementation of Recommendation 20.1 (Debris Clean-up arrangements) of the Royal Commission into National

Natural Disaster Arrangements (RCNNDA) including the detail of Victorias current policy position and arrangements including amendments made to this policy since the 2019/20 fire season?

## Response

Following the 2019-20 bushfires it was recommended to expand the Clean-up Panel to include greater specialised functions and a greater number of contractors. This was achieved in December 2021 with the establishment of an expanded panel of clean-up providers.

The Clean-Up Panel was activated for the October 2022 Floods, 2023 Floods and Storms, 2024 Bushfires and Storms and 2026 Summer Fires.

Since the October 2022 Floods, the time between event and activation of the panel has reduced with established relationships and organisational experience in responding to multiple disasters has assisted in efficiencies related to activation.

Clean-up guidance and advice is provided to Victorians as events occur, noting the application and eligibility of clean-up support is conditional to the event.

Eligibility criteria is published on the clean-up webpage and available via factsheets that have been available since registrations opened on 30 January 2026 <https://www.vic.gov.au/clean-support-january-2026-bushfires>.

11. For the 2025/26 High Risk Weather Season can you please:

- Detail and list the process, standards, criteria and minimum requirements established beyond the legislation used to satisfy the EMC of the appointment of a person to the role / position of State Response Controller.
- Detail and list the subsequent hazard specific standards, criteria / qualifications required for a State Response Controller appointment to be made in respect to leading a bushfire major emergency or risk.
- Confirm if the Chief Officers / Commissioners of the Class 1 agencies are each required to explicitly support the appointment of a person to the role of State Response Controller when that person may exercise the respective agencies statutory powers
- Detail the steps taken, information provided and where relevant program outlines that seek to confirm and demonstrate each person who is endorsed / appointed to perform the role of State

Response Controller has a working knowledge of each Class 1 agencies legislation and supporting policies. Detail and list any differences to process, standards, criteria, qualifications or hazard specific knowledge that may apply to the appointment of a Regional Controller during major emergencies caused by Bushfire. Detail and list any differences to process, standards, criteria, qualifications or hazard specific knowledge that may apply to the appointment of a Level 3 Incident Controller for a bushfire. Detail the number of shifts / days where a person was appointed as a State Response Controller who was not an employee of a Victorian Fire Agency, whilst a major fire was occurring.

- Detail the number of shifts / days where a person was appointed as a Regional Controller who was not an employee / member of a Victorian Fire Agency, whilst a major fire was occurring in that region?

## Response

The responder agencies (i.e., the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVIC), Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES)) apply shared policies and procedures based on the nomination, endorsement, accreditation and appointment of State Response, Regional and Incident Controllers. Specific processes, standards and criteria include:

- Incident Management – Accreditation Fundamentals & Policy
- Business Rule 03 – State Response Controller Nomination and Endorsement Process for Class 1 Emergencies
- Business Rule 05 - Regional Controller Nomination and Endorsement Process for Class 1 Emergencies
- JSOP 03.08 - Appointment of Class 1 Regional Controllers and Incident Controllers.

This long-standing doctrine forms part of the integrated emergency response arrangements for class 1 emergencies. The sharing of capability and resources during major emergencies contributes to a sustainable and unified system aligned with the intent of the recommendations of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. Furthermore, these emergency response arrangements are predicated on agency commanders, as operational representative of their agency, working together with and providing hazard or agency-based advice to the appointed controller at state and regional tier.

In addition to the above specified policies and procedures, there are numerous other systems, tools, reports and process that support the

identification of appointed personnel performing controller roles during an incident.

For a person to be endorsed to perform a Regional Controller (RC) or State Response Controller (SRC) role, each agency Chief Officer/ Commissioner nominates suitable candidates. It is each agency's responsibility to ensure that their nominated personnel possess the required knowledge and skill to perform the expected responsibilities and accountabilities of the position, as described in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), prior to submitting a nomination.

Personnel seeking to progress into an Incident Controller role follow an agreed multi-agency pathway of training, coaching and mentoring. Once a person has gained the prerequisite training, exposure and experience in a multi-agency/ multi-hazard environment (fire, flood, storm, etc), they may seek accreditation to move from a Level 2 to a Level 3 Incident Controller.

To confirm their suitability to perform the role, Level 3 Incident Controller candidates are nominated by their agency, following an agreed multi-agency pathway of training, coaching and mentoring, before being recommended by a multi-agency Panel, supported by the Chief/ Commissioner of their agency before final endorsement by the Emergency Management Commissioner. All nominations from agencies for State Response, Regional and Incident Controllers are considered and endorsed by the Emergency Management Commissioner.

As per the legislation and supporting doctrine, these endorsed lists are reviewed at a minimum annually, by the agency Chief Officer/ Commissioner to ensure that those endorsed are suitable and continue to have the capacity and capability to fulfill the requirements of the endorsed role. In addition to being on the endorsed list, Level 3 Incident Controllers are required to renew their accreditation every 5 years, providing evidence that they have maintained their operational knowledge and experience across a range of emergencies.

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) collaborates with responder agencies to provide regular, ongoing professional development for all tiers of controllers, including across a range of hazards. These include pre-season briefing, continuous development programs, and workshop style forums. These programs guide the shared understanding of operational management of class 1 emergencies, including but not limited to: hazards, doctrine, leadership, governance, systems and processes.

In reviewing the dates of Major Bushfires between October 2025 and March 2026 the following information is provided on the number of shifts completed by endorsed personnel who are not currently employed by a Victorian fire agency. However, it should be noted that a number of Controllers not currently employed by the Victorian Fire Agencies have previously worked and/or volunteers with fire services.

EMV notes that rosters for both RC and SRC are built on a rotation system shared equally across the 4 responder agencies (CFA, FRV, FFMV, VICSES). The below shift completed landed on where the rotation of the roster was on the day.

**Regional Controller shifts**

Number of shifts completed by endorsed VICSES Regional Controllers (noting several VICSES RC are former employees and/or current senior volunteers of fire agencies).

Region	From	To	VICSES RC Total Shift	All Agencies Total Shifts
BSW	16/10/2025	26/10/2025	2	10
	9/01/2026	10/02/2026	2	33
GMP	7/01/2026	7/01/2026	0	1
	9/01/2026	2/02/2026	3	25
LMR	4/12/2025	5/12/2025	0	2
	18/12/2025	18/12/2025	1	5
	8/01/2026	19/01/2026	0	12
Hume	5/12/2025	14/12/2025	6	10
	18/12/2025	18/12/2025	0	1
	5/01/2026	12/02/2026	2	29
	17/02/2026	24/02/2026	4	8
GIPP	5/01/2026	5/01/2026	0	2
	8/01/2026	5/02/2026	6	28
	19/02/2026	5/03/2026	7	15

NWM	11/02/2026	11/02/2026	0	1
<b>Total</b>			<b>33 (18%)</b>	<b>182</b>

**State Response Controller shifts**

Number of shifts completed by endorsed VICSES State Response Controllers. It should be noted that both VICSES Endorsed State Response Controllers are former employees of the CFA and one continues to be a long serving senior volunteer of the CFA:

From	To	VICSES SRC Total Shifts	All Agencies Total Shifts
16/10/2025	26/10/2025	2	10
4/12/2025	14/12/2025	2	11
18/12/2025	22/12/2025	3	5
5/01/2026	12/02/2026	11	29
17/02/2026	5/03/2026	3	17
<b>Total</b>		<b>21 (29%)</b>	<b>72</b>

12. For each 2025/26 Spring / Summer agency / department attestation received by EMV / DJCS can you please:

- List and detail each activity / function / service that was reported as being not achieved or not prepared including the agency / department that reported it.
- List and detail each activity / function / service or risk that was reported / identified that necessitated a qualified or partial achievement attestation to be reported, including the agency / department that reported it.
- For each activity / function / service or risk that was reported as being non-compliant / partial achievement or contained a qualifying statement, detail what actions the EMC has undertaken / continues to undertake in response.
- For each agency / department, list and describe reported risks / emerging risks and the subsequent actions, mitigations applied in response including those undertaken by the EMC?

**Response**

Seasonal attestations are provided to the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) by Departments and Agencies confidentially and in good faith and generally they are provided on the understanding that they will remain confidential due to the highly sensitive operational information they contain.

We are not in a position to answer this question, as we consider doing so would involve providing confidential information. Allowing this information to enter the public domain is not in the public interest as it will impact on the nature and content of information shared in future seasonal attestations and could be a potential risk to public safety if this information was made available and genuinely jeopardise the necessary relationship of trust and confidence between a Minister and public officials, including the EMC.

13. Having regard to evidence received by the committee in respect to communication challenges and disconnect existing between various ICC's and fireground crews, does the EMC agree with statements made within the whole of Government submission (Appendix G) that in respect to the Longwood fire states that the transition between ICC's was seamless and there was no interruption to communications at either ICC and that effective communication was maintained to the field at all times. Is this statement true and correct or does it require amendment?

**Response**

On 10 January, the Line of Control in Alexandra Incident Control Centre (ICC) was transferred to Seymour ICC on the basis that the Alexandra ICC was considered within the potential impact area of the fires. As stated in the Victorian Government submission, this transition was seamless and there was an Incident Controller in place for the duration of the fire response.

In addition, there was no interruption to communication at the Alexandra ICC.

The sector is coming towards the end of a Coordinated After-Action Review (AAR) program that is reviewing each fire at the incident tier. The Longwood AAR is scheduled for week starting 25 May and will provide further insights.

Emergency Management Commissioner

14. Did CFA communicate risks ahead of the 25/26 fire season in respect to its command-and-control capacity?
- What did you do about it?
  - Did you do enough?

## Response

The Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) does receive pre-season attestations from all relevant agencies and departments confirm the extensive work that has been done to ensure they are ready to respond to the season ahead. The Country Fire Authority indicated it was able to meet its obligations under the State Emergency Management Plan, noting some qualifications.

Seasonal attestations are provided to the EMC by Departments and Agencies confidentially and in good faith, and generally they are provided on the understanding that they will remain confidential due to the highly sensitive operational information they contain.

Emergency Management Victoria is unable to provide any further information around attestations on that basis.

15. Was the most senior fire person in charge of the events leading up to, including and immediately following 9/1/2026? If not the most senior, then at least the most suitably qualified and appropriate?
- a. Why was the ICC for the Longwood fire at Alexandra and why wasn't the ICC relocated as soon as it was identified Alexandra may be impacted?
  - b. You are responsible for effective control – we have heard many frustrations from crews with the ICC – your own maps showed Alexandra was at risk – what did you do to make sure communities were safe and CFA crews had the direction and information necessary to be safe and protect properties?
  - c. Did members of the IMT leave because their own properties were at risk, which was totally foreseeable and what did you do about it to ensure the management of the fire was not negatively impacted?
  - d. Were members of the IMT required to drive through the fireground in their own vehicles to relocate to Seymour whilst the IC took a helicopter?
  - e. When it became obvious that the IMT at Alexandria / Seymour was not effective – what actions / directions did you provide to improve operations and performance?
  - f. Do you believe deploying an IMT from interstate (NSW) into Seymour at a time when effective control had been lost, fire conditions were extreme and chaos ensued, was the right decision?

And What induction did the NSW crew receive prior to being placed in the hot seat?

g. Why did you keep affected community members out from their homes for as long as you did?

h. If checking / treating hazardous trees is the reason, then do you undertake those same safety inspections on the affected properties?

### **Response**

An Incident Control Centre (ICC) was positioned at Alexandra on 7 January 2026 to support emergency operations in the Alexandra-Seymour ICC footprint. This is governed by joint standard operating procedures in place across our emergency services agencies.

These procedures also ensure an Incident Controller is in place to ensure effective control of any emergency that eventuates.

Initial control was assumed by the local Country Fire Authority prior to transferring to the Alexandra ICC, where an accredited Incident Controller was established and was in place for the duration of the fire response.

ICCs are set up in predetermined locations based on risk assessment. This is governed by joint standard operating procedures in place across our emergency services agencies.

The Longwood fire started in the afternoon of 7 January and was transferred from the field into the line of control Alexandra ICC at 1600 hours.

On 10 January, the Line of Control in Alexandra ICC was transferred to Seymour ICC on the basis that the Alexandra ICC was considered within the potential impact area of the fires. This transition was seamless and there was an Incident Controller in place for the entire duration of the fire response.

In addition, there was no interruption to communication at the Alexandra ICC.

As of 3 June 2026, the after-action review (AAR) for the Longwood fire is still underway. The findings of the AAR may provide further insights into how the move of the ICC from Alexandra to Seymour supported or impacted the management of the fire.

16. What assurance did you have in place, and how did you satisfy yourself ahead of extreme fire danger on Tuesday 27th January that all possible work had been completed by the Colac ICC to ensure the Gellibrand fire did not escape the established control lines?

- Is it true that there were reports leading up to the 27th January from aviation and ground crews to the ICC that the SW corner of the fire was the weak spot in containment strength, what actions did you or your State Response Controllers, Regional Controllers take to ensure the Colac ICC had done all it could to prevent the residents being impacted by a fire escape? I note the fire is reportedly to have escaped from that southwest corner?

### **Response**

The strategy implemented by the Incident Controller for the Carlisle River – Pipeline Road Fire was aligned with the State Emergency Management Priorities, with a focus on creating containment lines to reduce the potential for fire spread. This strategy utilised direct and indirect strategies that deployed a mix of ground and aviation capabilities. Concurrently a public warnings strategy, including planned evacuation zones was implemented to move community away from the path of the fire if a major escape occurred.

The fire did breach containment lines but was quickly controlled by ground crews with the support of aircraft.

17. DJCS were provided with more than half a Billion \$'s to roll out new radio technology over 10 years to all of Victoria's emergency services. We have heard numerous issues around the performance of the radio network during the fires, examples of agencies not having compatible radio's or radio channels & observed issues with FRV and the operation of their communications equipment in tunnels. This project appears to have major problems. What are you doing to ensure our frontline workers have the communications they need. What have you done since the summer & why isn't it fixed?

### **Response**

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) works closely with the Country Fire Authority (CFA), Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) and all other emergency service organisations to deliver a fit-for-purpose operational communications service to support frontline responder safety and operational effectiveness. The Department of Justice and Community Safety is undertaking a number of enhancements.

In 2024 and 2025, EMV extended the contracts with Telstra and Motorola for the operation and enhancement of the Metropolitan Mobile Radio and Regional Mobile Radio networks. This includes increasing network capacity as well as battery backup and portable radio coverage.

EMV has also invested in Starlink to pilot a mobile broadband capability to provide further resilience for the sectors agencies.

EMV has also replaced pagers for Ambulance Victoria (AV), the CFA and the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES).

18. We have heard from many CFA volunteers who are unhappy with the way the fires were managed.

- Are you responsible for their poor experience?
- Should volunteers anger be directed at you or CFA?
- Given Vic's history with bushfires and their impacts – are you satisfied that bushfire (prevention and response) is given the appropriate authorising environment to discuss policy?
- If so, why aren't land managers such as roads, meeting their obligations?
- If so, why has the government not responded to all the IGEM recommendations from the 19 / 20 fires?

### **Response**

The Country Fire Authority (CFA) is best placed to respond to questions about internal training and other administrative requirements.

Our emergency management arrangements are underpinned by the principle of shared responsibility, which recognises that no single group can be responsible for all phases of emergency management – the 'all sector, all hazards, all community' approach to community preparedness.

Shared responsibility is different from inclusion or engagement – it relates to collective obligations and accountabilities. When it comes to bushfire risk management, this means each and every land managers has a part to play in helping build Victoria's bushfire resilience.

Land managers are responsible for fire prevention and fuel management works on the land they manage. For example:

- The Secretary to Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Forest Fire Management Victoria (FFMVIC) are responsible for public land.
- The Department of Transport and Planning (DTP) is responsible in relation to roadsides that they manage.
- Councils are responsible in relation to land they manage.
- Private land owners are responsible for their own land.

The CFA and Councils, for example, can issue Fire Prevention Notices to private landowners to take action where necessary.

The CFA also has responsibilities to assist with fuel management in regional Victoria (the Country Area of Victoria).

The Office of Bushfire Risk Management (OBRM), which is within DEECA, leads the coordination of fuel management policy and practice. OBRM does not have compliance and enforcement powers.

The Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) undertakes regular implementation monitoring of their reports. The latest 2024 monitoring update provided by the IGEM recorded that most of the work has been delivered.

This included the delivery of the first State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) in September 2020, which sets out Victoria's emergency preparedness arrangements and command and control arrangements for emergency response.

Further policy work is underway on a whole-of-system bushfire risk management framework, with advice to Government expected in 2026–27.

The 2009 VBRC (Royal Comm) stated “A bushfire safety policy must be capable of dealing with the fact that every fire is different and must differentiate potential firestorms from most bushfires. The most fierce fires call for a different approach to community safety, for different advice, support and responses from fire agencies. On such days, if the initial attack fails to contain a fire, the operational focus and mindset of fire agencies should move to providing information and attending to community safety rather than fire suppression.” What is the current bushfire safety policy, who is responsible for it and when was it last updated?

### **Response**

As with other emergency management mitigation activities, bushfire risk management requires cooperation and coordination across government and with communities. Various government departments and agencies have roles and responsibilities in relation to bushfire risk management, including fire agencies (e.g., Forest Fire Management Victoria, the Country Fire Authority and Fire Rescue Victoria), councils, and the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP). Bushfire risk management also involves close collaboration with Victorian communities, including private landowners who also have responsibilities to manage bushfire risk on their own properties.

The Bushfire Management Strategy (2024), prepared by the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) through extensive consultation and collaboration with community, industry and the emergency management sector, sets out the shared vision and long-term outcomes for

how bushfire risk is managed across the state. It is a joint commitment on the direction of bushfire management in Victoria.

The strategy's vision is that Victorians work together to manage bushfire risk for safer communities and healthy ecosystems in a changing climate.

The strategy has been co-designed by land and fire agencies with community, business, industry and Traditional Owners.

Delivery of the strategy is being supported by an implementation plan and a monitoring, evaluation and reporting framework.

Victoria's Bushfire Management Strategy Implementation Plan (2024-27) is a rolling 3-year plan that outlines what actions the sector has prioritised over the next 3 years to deliver the strategy's outcomes and is available publicly online <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorias-bushfire-management-strategy>.

- Does that policy suggest that the State should be attempting to move hundreds of thousands (and potentially millions) of people on days of Catastrophic fire danger? Note that on Jan 9 the Central Weather District that takes in Melbourne, Geelong and the Mornington Peninsula had a Fire Behaviour Index of 99 (one short of catastrophic) – is it really the position that the entire population of Melbourne and Geelong are to leave? And where would they go to? (see EMC media comments in the lead up to Jan 9th))

## **Response**

Ahead of catastrophic conditions on 9 January 2026, the Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) participated in media conferences at the State Control Centre on the 6th, 7th, 8th and 9th of January, which were also live streamed to the VicEmergency Facebook page, receiving hundreds of thousands of views. The purpose of these conferences and other proactive messaging was to share information on forecasted catastrophic fire conditions and share safety messages.

Catastrophic conditions signal the worst possible conditions. Under these conditions, fires will be uncontrollable, unpredictable and fast moving.

Leave early messaging was directed to those in bushland areas, bushfire prone areas, or areas that neighbour heavy bushland or grassland, as these are the areas most at risk in catastrophic conditions. It was highlighted that these areas would not be safe in forecast conditions. Advice to communities in these areas was to travel to an area of lower fire risk, including a regional centre or built-up area.

This messaging was enhanced by the production of potential impact maps, which forecast current and future risk areas and allowed for targeted messaging to those most at risk.

Those outside of risk areas were encouraged to monitor the VicEmergency app and local emergency broadcasters.

19. The 2009 VBRC found that “On Black Saturday the roles of the most senior personnel were not clear, and there was no single agency or individual in charge of the emergency”. It went on to find “the immediate appointment of a full-time Fire Commissioner as a necessary first step. The Fire Commissioner would be an independent statutory appointment and the senior professional fire officer in Victoria.” Now, since this time the States Fire Services Commissioner (as it was known) became the Emergency Management Commissioner in 2014 and Emergency Management Victoria came to be. And since that time, under Labor Governments three permanent Emergency Management Commissioners have been appointed, none of those being from a fire background (VicPol x 2 and SES is the current). Are EMV a bushfire agency?

### **Response**

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) is not a bushfire response agency.

The Emergency Management Commissioner (EMC) is a statutory role established under the *Emergency Management Act 1986* and the *Emergency Management Act 2013*, with responsibilities that extend across the full spectrum of emergencies and disasters affecting Victoria, including bushfires, floods, storms, pandemics and other major emergencies.

The role of the EMC is to coordinate Victoria’s emergency management arrangements and support effective collaboration across agencies before, during and after emergencies. This includes leading whole-of-government consequence management and response coordination for major emergencies, providing strategic advice to government, and ensuring the emergency management sector is prepared, integrated and effective. Accordingly, since the establishment of EMV in 2014, successive Victorian Governments have appointed EMCs with broad leadership and operational experience across the emergency management sector, rather than limiting appointments to individuals with a bushfire or fire services background alone.

On 17 June 2025, Tim Wiebusch ESM was appointed as Victoria’s EMC for a five-year term.

Mr Wiebusch has extensive experience leading multi-agency and sector-wide responses to major emergencies for over two decades and has regularly

participated in bushfire exercises. Most recently, this experience has included leading multi-agency responses during the 2019–20 Eastern Victoria bushfires, 2020 COVID Response, the June 2021 storms and floods, the October 2022 Victorian floods, the 2024 severe weather events, and the 2025–26 summer fires across Victoria.

### **Ryan Batchelor**

1. How many VPS staff were involved in a surge capacity in the response and recovery to the 2026 Summer Fires?
  - Please detail which department and agencies provided surge staffing during the 2026 Summer Fires.
  - How many surge shifts were completed, and over what period?

### **Response**

The State Control Centre (SCC) is a 24/7 facility with 88 dedicated Emergency Management Victoria staff, ready to respond at a moment's notice. It is designed to surge up resources as per demand. At Tier 3 it expands to being a centre operating with around 200 personnel.

On 9 January 2026, more than 230 personnel were active in the SCC. This included representatives from 21 departments, agencies and organisations including Victorian Public Service (VPS) employees from the Department of Education (DE); Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) (including Agriculture Victoria); Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH); Department of Government Services (DGS); Department of Health (DH); Department of Justice and Community Safety (DJCS) (including Emergency Management Victoria); Department of Jobs, Skills, Industry and Regions (DJSIR) and the Department of Transport and Planning (DTP). From 1 January to 31 January 2026, 721 people completed 4,137 shifts representing 34 departments, agencies and organisations from all Australian States and Territories as well as internationally.

DJCS has Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) for SCC Surge Workforce with DE; the DPC; DTP; DGS; the DTF; DJSIR; Triple Zero Victoria and Life Saving Victoria; as well as agreements with DEECA (and its Forest Fire Management Victoria partners), Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria and the Victoria State Emergency Service for surge workforce. Departments, agencies and organisations also provide Emergency Management Liaison Officers into the SCC.