



Bushfire inquiry makes 80 recommendations to improve Victoria's fire preparation and response

Telcos need to strengthen the resilience of critical telecommunications and power infrastructure in bushfire-prone communities, a report tabled in the Legislative Council today has found.

Critical failures in mobile phone tower infrastructure undermined the response to the 2026 summer fires, the report found.

The Legislative Council's Environment and Planning Committee examined the impacts of the 2026 summer bushfires through public hearings across regional Victoria, including Colac, Quantong, Alexandra, Harcourt and Melbourne, as well as online hearings for communities in North-East Victoria. Members also conducted site visits and community listening posts in fire-affected areas to ensure local experiences informed the inquiry's work.

Committee Chair Michael Galea said: "One of our key aims was to give a voice to fire affected communities. Their views and experiences form a significant body of evidence which has informed our own findings, and can be drawn on by others."

The Committee made 93 findings and 80 recommendations. It found that despite the catastrophic conditions and enormous scale of the fires, strong preparation and the tireless work of responders limited fatalities.

Victoria's 'leave early' bushfire safety messaging also played a critical role in protecting communities. Supported by sustained public education campaigns and widespread use of the VicEmergency app, the approach contributed to significantly improved safety outcomes compared with major fire events in previous decades.

"The inquiry found that the 'leave early' message continues to save lives," Mr Galea said.

The report notes that widespread community adoption and trust in the VicEmergency app likely contributed to the low fatality rate during the 2026 summer fires.

Concerns were raised about the widespread disruption to critical infrastructure during the fires and the consequences for both emergency response and community safety.

Mr Galea said the inquiry heard evidence that failures in telecommunications and power networks significantly affected firefighting operations and residents' access to emergency information.

"The resilience of critical infrastructure, particularly telecommunications networks, was a recurring theme throughout this inquiry," Mr Galea said.

"Communities, firefighters and emergency services rely heavily on power and communications systems during emergencies. When those systems fail, the impacts are felt across every aspect of emergency response and community safety," Mr Galea said.

To strengthen network resilience, the Committee recommends that the Victorian Government advocate to the Commonwealth to implement mandatory resilience standards for mobile phone towers, which should include minimum backup capacity for 48 hours in the event of a power outage.

The report further recommends that the Inspector-General for Emergency Management consider ways in which local knowledge can be better incorporated into the critical work of incident control centres, reflecting recurring views expressed to the Committee.

The report can be found on the Committee's website.

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