



Councils & Emergencies Direction Paper Consolidated Feedback

Introduction

The Wimmera Emergency Management Resources Sharing Program (WEMRSP) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the Councils and Emergencies Direction Paper presented by Local Government Victoria (LGV).

The four Partner Councils, who make up the WEMRSP participated in a workshop facilitated by the Wimmera Emergency Management Team (WEMT) to consider the content of the Direction Paper.

The WEMT also represented the four Partner Councils at information session held by LGV and workshops facilitated by the Municipal Association Victoria to develop a Local Government response.

The document provides consolidated feedback from the initial workshop held by the four Partner Councils and participation in other forums to discuss the Direction Paper. The feedback is focussed on confirming, rejecting or amending the role and or responsibilities of Local Government listed under each capability.

Suggested Principles for Defining Council Responsibilities & Actions

1. Reflect council's strengths and capabilities and align to its normal business functions
Comment: The principle is supported.
2. Complement those of other agencies, businesses and the public
Comment: The principle is partially supported subject to Council responsibility, capacity and capability.
3. Be engaged only where the council is the best-placed organisation to do so (meaning it should not be used as an intermediary on behalf of other agencies, particularly for processes over which it has no control or ownership)
Comment: The principle is supported.
4. Be applicable to emergencies of different scales and complexity
Comment: The principle is partially supported subject to Council responsibility, capacity and capability.
5. Be consistent with its capability & capacity, along with its other legislative responsibilities and core business
Comment: The principle is supported.
6. Provide a platform to collaborate and build partnerships with other councils to enhance the delivery of services
Comment: The principle is supported.

1. Planning

'Conduct a systematic process engaging the whole community as appropriate in the development of executable strategic, operational, and/or tactical level approaches to meet defined objectives.'

Comment: The Planning responsibility statement is supported in principle. Further work is required to explain how this would be achieved. The word 'Conduct' should be replaced with 'Facilitate' as this would describe how Councils would undertake the planning process in partnership with other relevant agencies.

The wording is quite operational and may not be understood by the community. It is suggested that compatible language be used if emergency management agencies want to engage with the community.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.6: The Councils state that they would support the maintenance and administration of the VPR but believe that DHHS is the Lead agency for this function.

No.9: The Councils state that this is the same as number 2 which could be expanded to incorporate more examples.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

2. Community Information & Warnings

'Deliver public information and warnings that are authoritative, consistently constructed and relevant for all Victorians and visitors in all emergencies.'

Provide timely and tailored information that supports the community to make informed decisions before, during and after emergencies.'

Comment: The Community Information & Warnings responsibility statement is supported. The Councils believe that this action statement would be supported by Councils but facilitated/coordinated through the controlling agency or EMV to ensure the one consistent and credible source of information principle is managed.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.15: The Councils believe this statement is poorly worded and needs to be rewritten.

No.19: The Councils request clarification as this action description is too generic.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

3. Operational Management

'Establish and maintain a unified and coordinated operational structure and process that appropriately integrates all critical stakeholders and supports the execution of core capabilities, including operational communications.'

Comment: The Operational Management responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.35: The Councils state that this description should be re-worded to read 'Manage and maintain a council emergency coordination system and facilities that can be used by Councils during emergencies.' Incident and Emergency management is now coordinated through Incident Control Centres (ICCs) and the relevant controlling agency. Councils do not need to run a 'Municipal Emergency Coordination Centre (MECC)' anymore. Their focus should be on coordinating their own internal emergency coordination and provision of resources and facilities as appropriate.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.41: The Councils state that this description should be considered after relevant consultation, risk assessment and funding/cost arrangements have been determined (prior to the emergency where possible and appropriate).

No.42: Clarification is sought on what type of support is required by response agencies e.g. physical, information etc. Council may only support this where it is safe to do so and protocols would have to be in place for risk assessment. WH& S issues etc. These tend to vary across different agencies and need to be understood.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

A general statement made by the Councils for this section 'After' is - 'when it is Safe to Do So'

No.54: The Councils believe this is covered in other description numbers particularly in 47 and 48?

No.60: The Councils state that they would 'Coordinate' not 'Lead' this description

4. **Intelligence & Information Sharing**

'To provide timely, accurate and actionable decision support information, resulting from the planning, collecting, processing, analysis and evaluation from multiple data sources, which is needed to be more proactive in anticipating hazard activity and informing mitigation, response or recovery activities. It also includes the assessment of risks, threats and hazards so that decision makers, responders, and community members can take informed action to reduce their entity's risk and increase their resilience.'

Comment: The Intelligence & Information Sharing responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.71: The Councils state that they would support the relevant agencies in the capture, process and management of large volumes of data and then facilitate the distribution to community and stakeholders.

After: The action descriptions are partially supported in principle:

No.72: The Councils state that they would carry out this process internally and support any external capture and analysis of lessons. They would support the sharing of information where appropriate.

No.73: The Councils state they would support ongoing intelligence gathering and information sharing in relation to mitigation and recovery activities. But not all Councils have this capacity and would require support.

5. **Public Order & Community Safety**

'Provide a safe, secure and orderly society through the active prosecution of regulations and laws related to the prevention of serious emergencies and to afford a safe environment for those communities affected by an emergency and any responding personnel engaged in emergency operations.'

Comment: The Public Order & Community Safety responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before – During – After: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

6. **Building Community Resilience**

'Communities strengthen their lifelines by better connecting and working together with appropriate support.'

Comment: The Building Community Resilience responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.82: The Councils state the monitoring and evaluation is primarily done by support agencies or other service providers. Councils would facilitate and coordinate this action in partnership with others.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

7. Fire Management & Suppression

'Provide firefighting capabilities to manage and suppress fires of all types, kinds and complexities while protecting lives, property, and the environment in the affected (land and water) area.'

Comment: The Fire Management & suppression responsibility statement is partially supported in principle. Council's role in firefighting is to provide support to a fire control agency within its capacity and capability. Council involvement should be appropriate to their risk profile.

Before – During: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.86: The Councils make the following comment about some of the dot points in the action statement:

- In the last dot point they would add after the word municipality the following '...to a standard'.
- The Councils state that the cost of providing, installing, marking and maintaining fire plugs should be funded by the Fire Services Levy.
- The Country Fire Act 1958 should be reviewed and updated to reflect current practices and issues.

8. Logistics & Supply Chain Management

'Deliver essential commodities, equipment, and services in support of impacted communities and survivors, to include emergency power and fuel support, as well as the coordination of access to community staples. Synchronize logistics capabilities and enable the restoration of impacted supply chains, including removal of debris.'

Comment: The Logistics & Supply Chain Management responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.88: Council has a limited role in this area e.g. sandbags. The Councils request that this action statement be clarified as to what essential equipment and materials need to be stored and maintained. The Councils have limited capacity to carry out this type of logistics function on a meaningful scale.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.90: The Councils state that they would support emergency services agencies in managing, coordinating, supplying and delivering resources under agreed arrangements (documented). This is a specialist logistics function not all Councils have (or varying degrees).

9. Impact Assessment

'Provide all decision-makers with relevant information regarding the nature and extent of the hazard and any potential consequences during and after an emergency to ensure efficient, timely and appropriate support for communities.'

Comment: The Impact responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.91: The Councils state it should read 'Develop Council impact-assessment processes and data-collection systems.' There is a number of impact assessment phases carried out by different agencies, work is required on integrating these systems to provide timely and effective assessments.

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.94: The Councils believe that initial impacts are carried out by the controlling agency in an emergency and is their responsibility. Council would support them where it is safe to do so and appropriate. Also council does not have all the expertise to assess essential infrastructure services such as power. Council would rely on those agencies to provide relevant data.

No.96: Clarification is required on what is meant by 'property losses'. In reality agencies have been requested personal information details from the council rates data base to contact property owners to assess property loss. The main agencies have a robust spatial data capacity already.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.98: Clarification is required on what is meant by this description. The councils state they would support it in some form but would rely on other agencies or service providers to undertake the actual work. It is not within the capacity of some Council's to undertake this type of work on their own.

10. Health Protection

'The coordination and implementation of legislation, programs and monitoring procedures to minimise public health risk from infectious disease, contaminated food, and contaminated drinking water supplies, radiation and human environmental health hazards. This includes the development and implementation of strategies to promote and protect public health

Comment: The Health Protection responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before – During – After: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.101: The Councils would support the establishment of funded programs in collaboration with relevant agencies as appropriate.

No.102: The Councils would not conduct these types of investigations but support the relevant agencies in conducting these types of investigations as appropriate.

11. Relief Assistance

'The provision of well-coordinated, integrated and timely assistance to meet the immediate health, wellbeing and essential needs of affected communities, during and immediately after an emergency event, with the aim to support social cohesion and build resilience.'

Comment: The Relief responsibility statement is supported in principle.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

N0.110: The action description requires clarification as to what is meant by 'Emergency Shelter' is it in relation to Relief Centres etc.?

During: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

N0.116: The Councils state that they would 'support the Red Cross and other relevant agencies in registering relief centre attendees'. It is rare that they would do this action on their own.

12. Economic Recovery

'Return economic and business activities (including food and agriculture) to a healthy state and develop new business and employment opportunities that result in a sustainable and economically viable community.'

Comment: The Economic Recovery responsibility statement is supported in principle.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

13. Natural & Cultural Heritage Rehabilitation

'Protect natural and cultural heritage resources through appropriate planning, mitigation, response, and recovery actions to preserve, conserve, rehabilitate, and restore them consistent with post-disaster community priorities and best practices and in compliance with applicable environmental and heritage preservation laws.'

Comment: The Natural & Cultural Heritage Rehabilitation responsibility statement is partially supported in principle. The Councils will protect natural and cultural heritage resources where they have ownership and/or responsibility. They will support those agencies/entities who have ownership and/or responsibility for cultural and heritage resources where appropriate.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle.

During: The action descriptions described are supported in principle except for:

No.127: The Councils state that they would do this for Council owned land/assets through their insurance and or funding opportunities. They would support other agencies that have ownership of the land/asset to coordinate rehabilitation works locally.

No.128: The description is too broad. The Councils state that they would restore local cultural heritage sites that they own or are responsible for and are covered by insurance or subject to funding assistance. They would support other agencies/owners in restoring heritage sites.

No.129: This would be done for Council owned land/asset sites. Other agencies/owners would conduct their own assessments. Council may support them as appropriate e.g. DELWP would provide their own environmental assessments on land they are responsible for –parks etc.

No.131: Council would support or coordinate monitoring as appropriate but the responsibility lies with who owns the land/asset etc.

No.132: The Councils state it should read 'With the support of Heritage Victoria and other appropriate agencies.....'

14. Built Recovery

'To restore essential infrastructure and establish safe areas during and following an emergency, ensuring the provision of facilities and services to support and benefit communities.'

Comment: The Built Recovery responsibility statement is partially supported in principle. The Councils state that they will restore essential infrastructure where it is their responsibility and they have the expertise, otherwise they would support the relevant agency as appropriate.

Before: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.135: The Councils state they agree with the first part of the statement 'Identify likely resources and equipment requirements for council recovery activities in the short, medium and long terms.' Then delete the rest of the statement. The rest is limiting on how councils may achieve the outcome.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.137: The Councils state that they would conduct stabilisation and remediation works on council land and assets. Number 143 would cover the statement about community and private land and infrastructure.

No.141: The Councils state that this should be incorporated into number 137 where it is council owned land and assets etc.

No.143: The Councils state that this covers the part of 137 not supported. Number 141 would be added to this statement.

No.146: 'As appropriate' needs to be added after exemptions in the statement. Council does not have sole responsibility in this area and would have to consult with other relevant agencies.

15. Social Recovery

'The longer term provision of assistance and access to services that allows individuals, families and communities to achieve an effective level of functioning after an emergency event. This includes safety, security, shelter, health and psychosocial wellbeing and re-establishment of those elements of society necessary for well-being.'

Comment: The Social Recovery responsibility statement is supported in principle.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No.147: The Councils request clarification on the use of the word 'Health' in this action statement, does it mean Public Health or Environmental Health? It is perceived that the Dept. of Health and Human Services (DHHS) would coordinate Public Health programs with the support of Council where appropriate. Councils would then coordinate Environmental Health programs in support of DHHS.

Clarification is required to determine if Councils responsibility for 'Health' is covered in the Health Protection capability statement?

No.148: Councils would facilitate the assessment and delivery of services in partnership with DHHS and other agencies with the expertise.

No.149: Councils believe this is a function of DHHS which Council may support where applicable.

No.150: Councils believe this is a function of DHHS which Councils may support where appropriate.

16. Assurance & Learning

'Support continuous improvement to improve emergency management practice and community safety by extracting understanding from experience and research, reviewing community consequences, investigating causes and outcomes, providing assurance and translating lessons into behaviour and change.'

Comment: The Assurance and Learning responsibility statement is supported in principle.

After: The action descriptions are supported in principle except for:

No. 153: The Councils recommend changing the word 'Conduct' at the beginning of the action sentence to 'Participate'. It is considered that Councils participate in incident management reviews that are initiated by the controlling agency and would see this as duplication.

Summary

The Partner Councils of the WEMRSP provide cautious and partial support in principle to the capabilities and action descriptions listed in the discussion paper on the role of Councils in emergencies.

Their main concerns include:

1. The role of councils in emergencies concept in this discussion paper is being considered in isolation without any Council profiling having been undertaken to determine their risk profile, capacity and capability.
2. The project having consulted with Local Govt. has also consulted with external agencies on their perceived role of Council in emergencies which may be limited due to their lack of knowledge and appreciation of the broader role and operation of Local Govt. in Victoria.
3. Council has concerns that adequate 'weight' may not be given to Local Govt. input in comparison to the external agencies.
4. Lack of consultation with the broader community on what their expectations may be of the role of Councils in emergencies and the expectation of their involvement with Local Govt. in emergency management activities.
5. The use of language that commits Council to a course of action that might not be within their responsibility, capacity or capability e.g. Lead instead of facilitate (as just one example).
6. Facilitating an open discussion on the role and potential cost of fulfilling the emergency management role and looking at options to manage those costs at the appropriate time in an acceptable process.

Forwarded for your consideration on behalf of the Hindmarsh, Yarriambiack and West Wimmera Shire Councils and the Horsham Rural City Council who make up the Wimmera Emergency Management Resources Sharing Program.

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