

Enquiries: [REDACTED]

File Reference: [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
Local Government Victoria

8 May 2017

Dear [REDACTED],

Re: 'Councils and emergencies directions' paper

The City of Whittlesea welcomes the request from LGV to provide feedback on the 'Councils and emergencies directions paper'.

LGV is to be commended for compiling a list of Councils' responsibilities as laid out in the Emergency Management Act and in the Ministerial Guidelines – Emergency Management Manual Victoria. This list accurately describes the current formal responsibilities of local government.

We note that some changes to these responsibilities have been foreshadowed in the Discussion Paper with regard to Planning and the role of the MEMPC (1,2,3,5), which sees the concept of shared responsibility leading to the development of a municipal plan rather than a council-owned plan.

Other responsibilities have been altered through policy changes, particularly with regard to Initial Impact Assessment, which is to be undertaken by the control agency (94).

However, we have a number of general and specific concerns:

1. We are deeply concerned that the paper goes beyond simply describing the current responsibilities and identifies additional actions that are undertaken by individual councils on an *ad hoc* basis. LGV, through its consultation with stakeholders, has identified over 100 additional actions that might be undertaken by local government. This provides useful context for discussions about future directions for local government activities, however, there is a real danger in the additional actions being included as if each has an equal weighting. Actions that are prescribed by legislation are undertaken by all councils – yet, these sit beside activities that are undertaken by single councils without contextualisation.

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2. Further, there is a danger in producing a list of the various responsibilities laid out in various Acts and those laid out in the EMMV without acknowledging the difference in legal weight. As the EMMV defines its own purpose (my emphasis added):

It is designed to provide information and **guidance** on what the emergency management arrangements are, the role of the various organisations within them, and the planning and management arrangements that bring all the different elements together.

... For those with specific planning responsibilities, the manual provides policy **guidance** on emergency management planning in the municipal and regional situations.

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Where a Council needs to comply with responsibilities laid out in the Emergency Management Act, the arrangements described in the EMMV provide a structure for both planning and activation. To present the two different sets of actions together without comment blurs the distinct line of difference.

3. A third concern is that in collating the list of responsibilities from a range of sources, there have been a number of inaccuracies introduced as the author has paraphrased or combined a number of responsibilities into one, or drawn them from the wrong source. This is needs to be addressed before any further work is done.

As LGV has expressly asked for feedback on current responsibilities, other than the comments given above, we will limit our response to specific concerns.

- Whilst Council is in agreement that the actions outlined accurately describe Council's responsibilities, the question is not whether these responsibilities reflect what we currently do, but whether this is what is needed in a coordinated emergency management framework. There is a need for the development of a strategic vision that articulates what emergency management is seeking to achieve.
- Council is concerned about role creep in the delivery of emergency management activities, the level of expertise that is required to effectively deliver resilience building and mitigation activities, and the pressure this puts on Council. The additional 100 items listed in the directions paper give a clear example of how Councils are undertaking *ad hoc* roles that are neither legislated nor resourced across the sector leading to uneven outcomes. We believe the State Government and EMV have a chance to strongly engage with Councils and provide guidance about responsibilities.
- Council believes there is a need for greater clarity about the roles and activities that Council will be expected to undertake in the EM realm. That State, through EMV, has an opportunity to make a strong statement about what capacity is expected from Local Government.

- There is a need for greater clarity about what is expected from Council in terms of community building. Council is mindful that specialised Community Building activities and emergency management often work at arm's length in Council, with very little crossover. The Community Resilience Framework should provide greater guidance, but Council would appreciate a clear statement from the State about what community building activities it supports.
- Council is concerned that the emphasis in state funding focuses primarily on project funding and we suggest that the State should consider shifting the emphasis to medium-term, recurring funding. Our experience of managing the recovery process from the Black Saturday bushfires shows that community recovery from a major event should be considered as a 5-7 year program. There should also be a clear statement about what level of financial support Council should make to agencies such as the CFA and VICSES and for what purpose.
- Council is concerned that there are extremely limited opportunities for local government staff to access professional development opportunities and there is an ongoing lack of accredited, competency-based training in emergency management. This significantly affects the capacity and capability of Councils to meet their obligations, particularly in large-scale or protracted events. State Government has the opportunity to both set the standards for EM positions and to develop and deliver training to ensure local government capacity.
- Council is concerned that there is no clarity about who 'owns' the Vulnerable Persons Register system, or why it should fall to Council to manage it. Apart from a reference in the Bushfires Royal Commission report, there is no reason for Council to manage this system, although they should certainly be a party to it. The system requires a substantial review as it is not clear that it is meeting the spirit of the Bushfires Royal Commission's recommendation.

If you have any queries, please contact me on [REDACTED] or email [REDACTED]@whittlesea.vic.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]