



Submission

Councils and Emergencies

Victorian Farmers Federation

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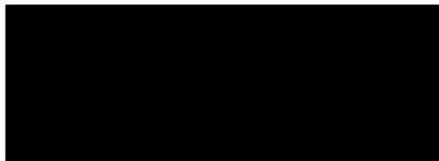
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The Victorian Farmers Federation is Australia's largest state farmer organisation, and the only recognised, consistent voice on issues affecting rural Victoria.

The VFF consists of an elected Board of Directors, a member representative Policy Council to set policy and eight commodity groups representing dairy, grains, livestock, horticulture, chicken meat, pigs, flowers and egg industries.

Farmers are elected by their peers to direct each of the commodity groups and are supported by Melbourne-based staff.

Each VFF member is represented locally by one of the 230 VFF branches across the state and through their commodity representatives at local, district, state and national levels. The VFF also represents farmers' views at many industry and government forums.



Victorian Farmers Federation

Summary of position

The Victorian Farmers Federation is interested in many aspects of emergency management as often our members are directly impacted.

The VFF Submission relates to key themes of:

- Animal welfare. Access to stock. Impact on willingness to leave early.
- Prevention. Regular planned burning on crown land. Concern of impact of burning on private land and uninsurable loss.
- Inequities in definition of an asset. Legislative focus on dwellings leads to reduction in consideration of consequence of loss of soil, fences, sheds, machinery, livestock etc. Impacts of machinery on topography and in ground infrastructure (and failure to rehabilitate)
- Expediting Access / Communications.
- Opportunities for improvement

Relevant legislation discusses impact on property but does not define what is meant by this term. Many agencies focus on dwellings rather than the wider meaning of property. Greater focus needs to be given to the third dot point below extracted from the state emergency management priorities:

- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets that supports community resilience;
- Protection of residential property as a place of primary residence;
- Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability
- Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity and social values of the environment.

In relation to 'assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production' machinery, water infrastructure, soil, fencing and livestock are all relevant factors to be considered.

Definition of Asset

An emergency is defined as “*an emergency due to the actual or imminent occurrence of an event which in any way endangers or threatens to endanger the safety or health of any person in Victoria or which destroys or damages, or threatens to destroy or damage, any property in Victoria or endangers or threatens to endanger the environment or an element of the environment in Victoria*” and does include a “plague”. Property however is not defined.

The common perception is that property is “Protection of residential property as a place of primary residence”. This is only one of four ‘property’ related priorities for emergency management in Victoria. □

VFF members are often more interested in “*Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability*”. An emergency management agency may see a shed and consider this a low priority. Within that shed may be several million dollars of agricultural machinery or livestock. The loss of which, can have severe impact on economic production. In the case of breeding stock or damage to soil structure this impact may be long term and costly to rectify.

Emergency services are likely to prioritise activity on dwelling protection however there is no way for a landholder to determine the priority property / asset for protection. There can be perverse outcomes from the failure to consider non domestic items as “property” as in many circumstances the dwelling will be the least valuable and easiest insured / replaced property / asset on the land.

Damage can be done to property by fire fighting action. Dozer lines across irrigated or laser graded land may have significant impact on future production. Back burning may take out fence lines, and in some instances, has completely altered soil structure so that over a decade later productivity on the site is still compromised.

Councils need to provide landholders with the opportunity to identify key assets on their site: soil, irrigation, profiling, fences, sheds, machinery, livestock etc should be able to be identified and given priority for protection. This information could then be utilised in preparing, response and recovery.

Knowing what property assets are on the site will also assist in ensuring appropriate compensation/restoration when property is damaged during emergency management activities.

Animal Welfare

Animal welfare is often a key priority for our members. Although the discussion paper looks at encouraging a “leave early” approach the system is flawed in relation to ensuring that landholders can ‘leave early’.

Many farmers will not leave their stock as post the event they are not allowed to access their property to check on stock. In some instances stock may contain genetic material which has been bred over generations.

There are often places for those who leave early to locate to, and even to bring pets. There is rarely any thought given to the identification of evacuation centres where breeding stock could be contained and biosecurity risks managed – such as a saleyard or a show ground.

Ways to expedite landholder return to sites, for instance being escorted in with the DEDJTR vets should be investigated.

Consultation should occur with primary industry owners regarding the barriers to ‘leaving early’ and how these can be overcome.

Prevention

There is an increasing focus on undertaking preventative action on private land. There have been adverse outcomes from the appropriate procedures and protocols regarding land holder authorisation of these activities in the past which have had significant impact on the individual’s livelihood even a decade later.

The majority of ‘risk’ factors for the more common emergencies (flood and fire) arise from unmanaged risk on crown land including waterways. The VFF believes increased attention should be given to regular planned burning of crown land and better management of linear reserves (roads and rivers).

Expediting Access / Communications

Ability to access property and access information about events is of critical concern for our members. Rural areas often have poor mobile reception making it difficult to access real time information regarding events. Opportunities to improve mobile communications, both voice and data, should be promoted.

Many farmers now have property over a wide area – sometimes up to an hour’s drive from the “home” property. Being able to access information in a time critical manner to allow access to relocate stock or assets could be considered.

Opportunities for improvement

- Better use of GIS mapping in conjunction with primary industry - move towards much better mapping all social, economic, cultural and infrastructure assets so agencies can better plan response. Knowing – where are the key assets – chicken sheds, intensives, large machinery, in ground infrastructure – how can this be shared with ICC for operations.
- <https://ajem.infoservices.com.au/items/AJEM-24-01-07>
- Clearly define 'property' and 'asset' to include soil, sheds, machinery, fences, livestock, profiled land, in and above ground irrigation / stock watering etc.
- Resolving gaps with what can be insured – for instance soil.
- Ensuring agency compliance with legislative requirement on landholder notification and consent of burns on private land.
- Provision of evacuation centres with ability to safely house stock.
- Warnings need to clearly state there is stock handling / biosecurity available and where
- Relief efforts need to be improved for farming. Often lose income and place of resident. Should not be reliant on volunteers such as blazeaid filling the gap.
- Have something similar to a 'natural and cultural heritage rehabilitation' for agriculture – be proactive and plan to avoid loss and have effective / targeted recovery efforts.