9 May 2017

Local Government Victoria

Dear

VICSES feedback – Councils and Emergencies Directions Paper

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback into the Councils and Emergencies Directions paper.

In general, VICSES believes in part that the document accurately reflects the current role that councils play in emergency management. We recognise that many council’s currently provide most of the functions prescribed in this paper, however depending on the resource capacity some may obtain support from other areas or have local arrangements or delegations in place to meet all of the capabilities listed.

Please see our agency's feedback relevant to three of the core capabilities noting that the feedback is based on the current intended arrangements, rather than examples of where these capabilities have or have not been met.

Planning

1. In accordance with current legislation, councils are responsible for appointing a Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC) to draft a Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) for consideration by the council. VICSES is responsible for assisting municipal councils in relation to the performance and exercise of their duties and responsibilities.

In regard to risk assessment, VICSES currently facilitate an all-agencies approach to risk assessment at the municipal level through Community Emergency Risk Assessment (CERA) to support councils and the committee structure. The VICSES led CERA process has been implemented in some areas at the township scale as well as in asset specific environments (i.e. airports, ports). More information will be available on this shortly with the release of the VICSES CERA Findings report 2016/17. Some council’s also may lead a risk assessment at the township or community level through Community Based Emergency Management (CBEM) approaches.

We have no issue with the way this is currently worded in the paper and as an agency are keen to continue this work to support councils, however perhaps this description should be in white text given it is not directly referencing the legislation.

2. Whilst we agree that councils prepare and maintain the MEMP through the MEMPC, current practise has seen VICSES initiate the hazard sub-plans relevant to our control hazards such as Municipal Flood Emergency Plans (MFEP) on behalf of the MEMPC. That said, we have no issue with the way this is currently worded in the paper and are keen to continue to assist municipal committees and councils in this manner.
4. We agree that in terms of hazard-specific risk assessment that it is often councils playing a 'support' role to agencies such as CFA (VFRR-B) or MFB (VERMS) as is mentioned in this paper. However as an integrated and all hazards approach, the CERA, facilitated by VICSES on behalf of councils continues to be a valuable resource to support councils with collating separate hazard-specific assessments into a single coordinated all-hazard risk assessment process across the municipal footprint.

Operational Management

41. Of critical importance to VICSES is that appropriate council representatives are available to support Incident Control Centres (i.e. Municipal Emergency Resource Officer and Municipal Recovery Manager).

VICSES and other agencies expect to always have a point of contact for these two important functions across each municipality. Recent events have highlighted some councils may have issues with capacity particularly over holiday or long weekend periods but from our perspective the expectation of councils here is accurate.

Building community resilience

77. It is great to see the council role in this important function articulated here. The wording in the paper is of councils in this area being to 'support' agencies to empower individuals and the community to exercise choice about and take responsibility for risks. We note, given the community development capacity within many councils that sometimes it is council 'leading' these resilience building initiatives, particularly in an all hazards context. We look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with councils in community centred approaches and delivering on the VICSES Community Resilience Strategy (2016-2019).

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment and we look forward to working collaboratively with you on the next phase of the Councils and Emergencies Project.