Councillors and Emergencies Directions Paper Consultation
Local Government Victoria
Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning

Email: LGV.emergencies@delwp.vic.gov.au

Dear [Name]

Councils in Emergencies Directions Paper

The East Gippsland Shire Council welcomes the opportunity to respond to Local Government Victoria’s (LGV) Councils and Emergencies Direction Paper.

East Gippsland is a municipality that has experienced many emergency events over an extended period of time and the way that Council allocates resources and approaches the task of planning for, responding to and recovering from events has been shaped by our experience. We have also observed substantial changes in the way that Emergency Management sector practice has been shaped by events large and small. East Gippsland Shire Councils applauds the continuous learning approach adopted in Victoria that seeks to understand how best to support the community to manage the impact that events have and will continue to have on our places, environment and economy. Our observation is that over time, the expectations of Local Government have continued to evolve and the expectations of the community about the role that government will play has grown.

In this context, it is considered that there is substantial merit in undertaking this examination of the role of Councils and emergencies, as it is considered there is a need for improved clarity about the value that Local Government brings to the Emergency Management sector for:

- Councils that find themselves working in this environment and responding to agencies and communities;
- Combatting agencies that often do not understand our role; and
- Communities that we have an overarching responsibility to work with.

East Gippsland Shire Council also made a detailed submission to Emergency Management Victoria’s Discussion Paper examining the concept of Resilient Recovery. It is considered that there are substantial connections between these two processes given one of our most substantive roles is working with communities to build their resilience before and after events.

East Gippsland Shire officers attended a workshop conducted by the Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) during the consultation phase of this part of the Discussion Paper process and have considered the submission prepared and submitted by the MAV on behalf of the Local Government sector in formulating our response.
East Gippsland Shire Council would like to indicate our support for the approach and recommendations outlined in the submission developed by the MAV. Our rationale for this support is as follows:

- There is overall a need to be clear about what the value is that Local Government contributes to the Emergency Management arrangements in Victoria.

  Our experience is that our role and the insight that we bring from a community perspective is not always well understood by combating agencies and this value is not always captured or capitalised on. The MAV in their position paper provides very good context for the strengths and limitations of the sector, in particular recognising our ongoing connection with our communities and the work that we do as core business in supporting impacted people and places.

Building and maintaining relationships between Local Council’s and the wide range of agencies that operate in the Emergency Management sector are key to the effectiveness of the Emergency Management sector into the future. Our submission to the EMV Resilient Recovery Discussion Paper highlights what we see as the risks and opportunities for Local Government in seeking to work more effectively in this role now and into the future. A lack of clarity or confusion about the role that the various agencies play can only lead to a lack of clarity and trust at a community level, which will ultimately impact of the work that everyone does to build the capacity and resilience of communities to manage the impact of events in a constructive way.

A copy of our submission to EMV can be provided if required.

- It is considered that there is a need to provide quite specific guidance about what is required of Local Government through the Emergency Management process.

  A lack of certainty or clarity about how we will be involved, what is expected of Local Government and the ability to access resources to fulfil these roles will ultimately be critical for success in understanding how Local Government organisations should be involved in emergencies. This need for clarity is reflected in the detailed approach taken by the MAV in reviewing the key responsibilities identified in the Discussion Paper. Our current operating environment means that greater certainty about expectations of Council is important as we will be under pressure to respond to impacts and implications for our communities in a proactive and timely way and we need to know what the boundaries of our formal responsibilities are. A lack of clarity represents a real risk and exposure to resource constrained Local Government organisations. As Council’s have such a broad focus on the community and we manage a complex set of functions that are designed to support community functioning and sustainability, unlike the very specifically focussed combating agency, setting agreed and realistic expectations is likely to be challenging.

- Local Government organisations are all shaped by different drivers and priorities

  Each Local Government organisation will be shaped by different experiences, our risk exposure, connections with and geographic spread of communities, available resources, skill and multiple varying pressures.

East Gippsland Shire Council considers that there are some minimum requirements that could reasonably be expected by a Local Council in supporting their communities in managing the immediate and longer term consequences of emergency events. It is for this reason that we believe that the proposed maturity model presented by the MAV has merit for more detailed exploration and consideration with the Local Government sector.
We also consider it is important that there is recognition that some municipalities will need to operate at a higher level of capacity and capability simply because their environment means that there will be more frequent events that impact their communities and the built and social assets that make them functional. To a great extent, many of these vulnerabilities are substantially beyond the ability of a Local Council to mitigate or minimise and in many cases the very things that the Victorian community values are directly related to the very place specific impacts felt in Council's across the State. Some of us will feel the impacts of emergencies more frequently than others and this needs to be recognised.

East Gippsland Shire appreciates that the Victorian Government has recognised the unevenness of impacts and the need to develop capacity at a local level through funding made available through the Municipal Emergency Resource Program. It is considered that the Maturity Model proposed by the MAV may support the enhancement of this approach by “smoothing” the impact of events on Local Government organisations across the State.

East Gippsland Shire Council has not taken the approach of commenting on all of the various responsibilities and descriptors set out in the Discussion Paper. While we have worked through the various elements identified through consultation and other processes, we do not think that this represents an effective use of our time and we don’t think it will assist in seeking resolution of the challenge that LGV has set for this process. Instead we would support the MAV position that LGV and EMV need to draw more strongly on the expertise of the Local Government sector to understand the role that we play and the value that we bring to emergency management activities in Victoria. Given the experience that East Gippsland Shire in this area of operation, we would be very willing to contribute to this ongoing examination.

The East Gippsland Shire Council is committed to and understands the importance of taking a proactive approach to Emergency Management and community resilience. If there are matters raised in the submission that you believe would benefit from further clarification or discussion, please do not hesitate to make contact.

Yours sincerely