
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT GREEN PAPER: TOWARDS A MORE RESILIENT VICTORIA

14 November 2011

VCOSS Submission



ABOUT VCOSS

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is the peak body of the social and community sector in Victoria. VCOSS works to ensure that all Victorians have access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services, through advocating for the development of a sustainable, fair and equitable society. VCOSS members reflect a wide diversity, with members ranging from large charities, sub-sector peak organisations, small community services, advocacy groups and individuals involved in social policy debates.

VCOSS is committed to living out the principles of equity and justice, and acknowledges we live in a society where people are interdependent of one another. VCOSS respects the land we live in and recognises the Aboriginal custodians of the country. VCOSS is committed to reconciling all injustices with Aboriginal Australians. The VCOSS vision is one where social well being is a national priority, and:

- ❑ ensures everyone has access to and a fair share of the community's resources and services;
- ❑ involves all people as equals, without discrimination; and
- ❑ values and encourages people's participation in decision making about their own lives and their community.

VCOSS is committed to contributing to the development of improved responses to disasters so as to better support, both immediately and over the short-, medium- and long-term, those affected and to improve outcomes for them.

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INTRODUCTION

VCOSS welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Emergency Management Green Paper, *Towards a more disaster resilient and safer Victoria* (the EM Green Paper). VCOSS congratulates the Government for initiating this fundamental review of Victorian's emergency management framework, and believes it provides a valuable opportunity to reform policy, funding and operations to improve outcomes for communities in future disaster events.

VCOSS strongly endorses the intention of the Victorian Government to:

'build a greater capacity to protect homes, businesses and livelihoods, and to minimise damage to our communities and infrastructure. Most importantly, we want to be much better placed to save lives and to reduce the personal trauma and hardship that can accompany severe emergency events.'¹

VCOSS also commends the Government's commitment to 'improving Victoria's emergency management arrangements by focusing on:

- ❑ service delivery to Victorians across government and communities;
- ❑ building community resilience;
- ❑ achieving a genuine 'all-hazards, all agencies' approach; and
- ❑ enduring and sustainable change.'²

In achieving each of these, VCOSS highlights the pivotal role of local community sector organisations - such as neighbourhood houses and learning centres, community health services, and organisations providing such services child and family, financial counselling and youth support services. Victoria's emergency management arrangements need to better recognise this role and resource the capacity of community sector organisations to fulfil this role. Community sector organisations are imbedded in their local community and provide a valuable connection to the local community. The experience of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires highlighted that people were more accepting of local community sector organisations than those who came in from outside the community.

To date, Victoria's emergency management framework and arrangements have generally not fully acknowledged the critical role that local community sector organisations can play. The focus on the roles of the State Government, local governments and emergency services is of course critical. Equally critical however is ensuring that relevant community sector organisations are resourced to be actively engaged in local level emergency planning so as to ensure coordinated responses can be implemented early in responses to emergencies.

The EM Green Paper highlights the importance of learning from the findings of the recent reports on the bushfires and floods. VCOSS supports this intention, and also identifies the critical importance of drawing on the learnings from other significant reports, including the *Evaluation of the Psychosocial Response to the Victorian Bushfires Final Report*,³ and the valuable literature review, *Community recovery after the February 2009 Victorian bushfires: a rapid review*.⁴

VCOSS supports the emphasis in the COAG *National Disaster Resilience Strategy* that disaster resilience is a shared responsibility. The requirement that individuals, communities, the private sector, emergency management and support agencies, and all levels of government contribute to the management of risk and promoting community safety recognises that emergency management is a whole of government, whole of sector, whole

of community responsibility. Within this whole of government, whole of sector, whole of community approach, VCOSS again highlights the role of local community sector organisations and believes that this role and the responsibility of local community sector organisations needs to be incorporated into emergency management approaches.

To effectively support the role of local community sector organisations in emergency management, further consideration is required as to how to resource this role. Investment in the emergency management capacity of community sector organisations is required, in a similar way to local governments, so that CSOs are better able to participate in local and regional level emergency management planning and to respond to emergencies; and also to enable CSOs to undertake risk management, planning and staff training specifically for emergency events.

Towards a more resilient Victoria - Emergency Management Green Paper

The *EM Green Paper* process is timely given Victoria's recent experience of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires and the 2010-11 floods. As highlighted in the *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report* and in the *Interim Report of the Victorian Flood Review*, Victoria's emergency management arrangements did not operate as effectively as they needed to. These findings are reinforced by the experience of local community sector organisations involved in the response and recovery for these events. The *EM Green Paper* is timely also given the new COAG *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, which is a new 'whole-of-nation, resilience based approach to natural disaster policy and programs, [that] recognises that a disaster resilient community is one that works together to understand and manage the risks that it confronts.'⁵

The *EM Green Paper* process has enabled a range of stakeholders to provide their feedback on the current emergency management framework. VCOSS believes that greater effort was required to more actively engage key local community sector organisations that have played a central and highly valuable role in responding to these recent natural disasters as well as previous fires and floods, and looks to this occurring in the remaining part of the process. VCOSS would welcome the opportunity to assist in facilitating the more active engagement of local community sector organisations that have developed significant expertise in working effectively with local communities affected by disasters.

VCOSS submission

In developing this submission, VCOSS has drawn on its work with community sector organisations in areas affected by the floods of late 2010 and early 2011, the 2009 Victorian Bushfires and the 2006-07 fires in the Grampians, Gippsland and Victorian Alps (in North Eastern Victoria). Included in this work, is a series of roundtables with community sector organisations (CSOs) and local governments working with flood and bushfire affected communities.

This submission addresses key questions and options for reform posed in the *EM Green Paper*, focusing on planning, relief and recovery and the role of community sector organisations in these.

Also provided with this submission are copies of the VCOSS submission to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission and the 2011 Victorian Floods Review, as each provide some valuable insights for the direction of emergency management in Victoria.

CONTEXT

Features of other models of emergency management to strengthen Victoria's current arrangements

The key comment that VCOSS would like to highlight in relation to the features of other models of emergency management that could strengthen Victoria's current arrangements is in relation to the resourcing of community sector organisations (CSOs) to provide relief and recovery.

The need for social support services - including counselling, case management, and support for front line staff, community development officers and other community supports following large scale emergencies is well recognised. Given this, emergency management recovery funding processes need to ensure that the providers of these services have been either identified in planning prior to an event or are identified early and receive adequate funding immediately following an emergency event which can then be subsequently increased to meet any additional demand that emerges.

The current funding arrangements do not facilitate a rapid response by relief and recovery agencies, including CSOs, nor do they facilitate longer-term recovery and building resilience within communities. The current capacity of community sector organisations and local governments to rapidly deploy services and supports to affected communities is severely hampered by a lack of state-level financial arrangements. Organisations responding to immediate need following an emergency event do not generally have the financial resources to commit to immediate relief work. Clearer mechanisms in Victoria's emergency management arrangements are required to ensure that CSOs are able to recover their costs in a timely way.

GOVERNANCE ARRANGEMENTS

VCOSS believes that it is critical that any governance arrangements support and enhance both whole of government and whole of sector approaches to emergency management in Victoria. To enable an effective emergency management framework, two key aspects need to be addressed:

1. Whole of government:
Internal government processes and structures need to ensure that responsibility for emergency management is shared across government; that roles, responsibilities and accountabilities are clear; and that there are both formal and informal communication mechanisms that assist in driving improved cross-government responses.
2. Whole of sector:
The way government works with other organisations, including local government, statutory organisations, and non-government organisations (NGOs), including community sector organisations, needs to be significantly strengthened and enhanced, including better recognition of the expertise that is located in both community sector organisations and local governments and drawing on this expertise, for example, in decision making processes.

As noted earlier, VCOSS supports the emphasis in the COAG *National Disaster Resilience Strategy* that disaster resilience is a shared responsibility. In recognition of this shared responsibility, Victoria's emergency management framework needs to recognise, clearly articulate and resource the roles of all levels of government, emergency services, and local community sector organisations.

In developing new emergency management arrangements, it is important to draw on the significant expertise that already exists within community sector organisations (CSOs), and not seek to replicate this in government. Emergency management arrangements need to recognise what government is best-placed to do and what CSOs are best-placed to do.

Best arrangements for ensuring, during an emergency, that broad social, economic & environmental implications are managed at a whole of government level

Emergencies of any scale, but particularly larger scale events, involve the delivery of relief and recovery activities by a broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including community sector organisations (CSOs). Arrangements for effectively responding during an emergency need to recognise and incorporate this diversity, both in terms of whole of government and whole of sector approaches. As noted in the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, there is a clear need to broaden partnerships with all those involved.

Effective planning at the local, regional and state level can better facilitate coordinated responses being implemented early. It is critical that community sector organisations are included in emergency management planning processes and structures given the pivotal role they play in relief and recovery, and the insight they can provide in identifying the breadth of social and economic implications during an emergency.

The establishment of specific advisory groups in larger scale events can be an effective way to draw on the expertise of a range of individuals and organisations in informing government decision making processes. One effective example of this was the establishment of the Victorian Bushfire Psychosocial Advisory Group and its Child and Youth Sub-Committee. These two structures provided a valuable forum for the Government to seek input as to immediate and emerging needs, test possible responses, and facilitate the distribution of key information to the community. The inclusion of a broad range of organisations in such structures facilitates improved understandings of levels and range of needs and in the development of responses that better meet these needs.

Best arrangements for overseeing preparedness for response and recovery implementation

There is a critical value in having a formal cross-government structure for the ongoing strategic oversight for policy development and responses to all hazards, including natural disasters, pandemics, animal diseases and security issues. Such an approach reinforces that emergency management is a whole of government responsibility, and, as noted in the *EM Green Paper*, such a forum for 'whole of government decision-making is consistent with international practice'.⁶ VCOSS recognises the value of having a forum within government to drive improved cross-government responses.

VCOSS believes such formal cross-government structures can be enhanced through both the establishment of formal advisory structures and through the involvement of key non-government stakeholders. In identifying this, VCOSS recognises that it will not always be possible for organisations and agencies outside of Government to be able to participate in all government processes. Given that effective emergency management response and recovery requires both a whole of government and whole of sector approach, broadening the membership of key governance structures will serve to enhance government emergency management policy, planning and decision making processes. Such an approach is consistent with the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* that has identified the need to broaden partnerships with those agencies that can effect the required change.

Further, if the Victoria Emergency Management Council is retained, or an alternate body is established to fulfil part of all of its function as noted in the *EM Green Paper*,⁷ it would be of value to expand its membership to reflect that responsibility for emergency management is no longer solely that of government, and that now also includes a range of non-government organisations and statutory bodies. Alongside such a step, it would be important to clarify the accountability of any formal structures and the inter-relationship between them.

Level of merit in an umbrella body for all emergency service organisations

It is the view of VCOSS that there is significant merit in establishing an umbrella body to oversee all emergency service organisations as part of the value of and emphasis on whole of government and whole of sector approaches.

If such an umbrella body was to provide leadership and coordination across not only government departments but also including local governments, NGOs, including community sector organisations, and private sector organisations, VCOSS believes that it is

critical that additional resourcing needs to be put in place to enable the full engagement of all organisations, particularly NGOs (including community sector organisations).

Mechanisms to reflect the shared whole of government responsibility for emergency management

As noted earlier, effective emergency management requires a whole of government and whole of sector approach, with an emphasis on the value of a partnership framework.

To support whole of government and whole of sector approaches, VCOSS believes it is appropriate to reflect the shared responsibility for emergency management that now exists in legislation.

There is value in allocating a specific ministerial portfolio the responsibility for relief and recovery. The current arrangements, whereby relief and recovery are coordinated by the Department of Human Services (DHS) - which reports to the Minister for Community Services, is limited due to a range of factors, including that the DHS no longer incorporates health and mental health services (transferred in the creation of the new Department of Health). In establishing a specific ministerial portfolio, it is critical to ensure that there are mechanisms from the governance through to delivery level that support strong integrated approaches both across government and across CSOs involved in relief and recovery.

VCOSS notes here the critical value of collaborative approaches, including formal partnerships, in ensuring effective emergency management. Further consideration needs to be given as to how the whole of government and whole of sector approach can be better enabled through formal and informal collaborative arrangements. A fuller discussion of the value of partnerships is provided in the *Service Delivery Performance* section on page 14.

Workforce management - Surge capacity in times of crisis

The recent amendment to the *Public Administration Act 2004* to include emergency provisions for mobilising the public sector workforce is a positive step to more effectively meet rapid increases in demand for the services of government agencies.

Further consideration is required as to how to most effectively resource local community sector organisations to significantly increase their capacity in a short time frame following an emergency event so that they can more effectively meet community needs. In any discussion, it is important to recognise that local CSOs are imbedded in their local community and are generally best-placed to provide support to local community members, particularly as they will be there over the longer-term. The recent floods provide a helpful starting point, where larger organisations in nearby regional centres, such as larger community health services, provided support to locally-based organisations. Alternatively, where there are limited locally-based organisations, partnership models between larger providers and smaller, locally-based providers need to be explored.

It would also be of value to explore arrangements for Victorian Public Service staff to be released to support the work of local community sector organisations involved providing relief and recovery services and supports.

Also critical are effective partnerships and networks, both between and across local CSOs and between local CSOs and government. Effective collaborative approaches can be central to ensuring the full activation of all existing services.

STATE-WIDE CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH LARGE-SCALE EVENTS

Most appropriate model for managing relief and recovery in major emergency events? What lessons do recent bushfire and flood experiences have for further relief and recovery?

As highlighted earlier, emergencies of any scale, but particularly larger scale events, involve the delivery of relief and recovery activities by a broad and complex range of government, statutory and NGOs, including community sector organisations. Arrangements for effectively responding during an emergency need to recognise and incorporate this diversity, both in terms of whole of government and whole of sector approaches. As noted in the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*, there is a clear need to broaden partnerships with all those involved.

In ensuring a statewide capacity, it is critical that the pivotal role of local CSOs in relief and recovery is recognised and resources. Supporting the ongoing capacity of local CSOs will strengthen their ability to be able to effectively provide relief and recovery.

For major emergency events, the State Government is well-placed to have the role of coordination so as to enable local governments, local community sector organisations and state agencies to work effectively at the local level with affected communities. Within this coordination role, it is critical that there are provisions for enabling and allowing flexibility at the local level. Such an approach is reflected in a systems theory analysis.

Systems theory resonates when considering the complexity of the systems involved in managing relief and recovery in major emergency events. The number of different government and non-government organisations, communities and stakeholders involved in providing relief and recovery and the complexity of both the events and the issues experienced by people affected has, in part, driven the current emergency management framework that has resulted in a 'siloing' of issues and responses.

Systems thinking addresses complexity by looking at issues holistically, rather than seeking to divide the problem into manageable, but separate elements, and hence can be of value for emergency management. This involves significant change from the traditional silo approach and processes employed by government.⁸ In developing a more centrally-based coordination role, it will be of improved value if such a coordination role provides a broad overall direction and:

- ❑ clearly establishes the priorities with defined broad outcome goals;
- ❑ establish targets and specify core evaluation requirements based around these broad outcome goals;
- ❑ explicitly allow for innovation and experimentation with cause and effect;
- ❑ set boundaries that cannot be crossed by any implementation strategy at the local level; and
- ❑ allocate resources, but without specifying how they should be used, with resource use to be determined at the local level.⁹

Financial models to support the effective management of relief and recovery in major events

An important component for effective relief and recovery is the rapid deployment of services and supports by local community sector organisations and local governments. This has been a significant learning from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires and the 2010-11 floods. The current capacity of CSOs is hampered by a lack of state level financial arrangements for those organisations involved in relief and recovery efforts. Clearer mechanisms are required to ensure that CSOs are able to recover their costs in a timely way.

As noted earlier, the need for social support services - including counselling and outreach services, community development officers and other community supports following large scale emergencies is well recognised.¹⁰ Given this, emergency management recovery funding processes need to ensure that the providers of these services have been either identified in planning prior to an event or are identified early and receive adequate funding immediately following an emergency event which can then be subsequently increased to meet any additional demand that emerges.

Current financial arrangements the provision of services and supports provided to affected communities is inefficient and financially penalises community sector organisations involved in response and recovery, and negatively impacts on the capacity of CSOs to provide the required services and supports. The model currently used in Queensland provides a clear mechanism, including memorandums of understanding, that guarantee community sector organisations will be financially reimbursed for providing a range of pre-agreed services and supports for affected communities.

Further discussion regarding financial models to support the effective management of relief and recovery in major events is provided in the *Financial models to support the effective management of relief and recovery in major events* section on page 13.

Effective psychosocial supports and community development approaches

In recent emergency events in Victoria, it has been easier to secure resources to replace and rebuild physical infrastructure, such as roads and bridges, than for equally critical social recovery work, such as counselling and outreach services, with a tendency by Government to dismiss examples of identified need.

Addressing economic and psychosocial recovery of communities following emergencies is critical both in ensuring that people are able to get back on their feet and in preventing disaster impacts escalating. Research literature supports the critical importance of community development approaches and supports which are tailored to the different support needs of men and women, as well as children and young people.¹¹ There is also evidence that psychosocial support interventions are particularly important for communities and individuals already experiencing disadvantage, social or economic stress prior to the emergency event.¹²

The development of the *Victorian Psychosocial Recovery Framework* has been an important step in improving responses to the social and community impacts of emergencies.¹³ There appears to be an increasing understanding within government of the long term nature of recovery and the importance of engaging communities in decision making than following previous events. This is shown by earlier commitments following the 2010-11 floods to funding recovery services at the local level with timeframes more closely

reflecting best practice, rather than the very short term funding initially offered following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires. Recognising that recovery is a long-term process is a critical aspect of effective relief and recovery for major emergency events - incorporated within this is ensuring the required supports and services are in place to enable this.

Both the Bushfires and the floods have highlighted the value of community development approaches in relief and recovery. It is known from previous emergency events, including the 2006 Grampians bushfires, that timely deployment of community development positions to effected communities greatly assists community recovery, and that community development positions that are only 'on the ground' some time after an event have much more difficulty in effectively engaging communities and supporting recovery. Two examples are of relevance here.

The first example relates to the resourcing of community development positions in local governments. While funding for a community development position was provided to LaTrobe City Council promptly following the January 2009 Boolarra fires, funding for community development positions for areas affected by the subsequent fires was not available for over three months after the bushfires.

The second example relates to the 2010-11 floods where neighbourhood houses functioned as critical places of information and support, particularly in smaller communities with limited social infrastructure. Despite this, neighbourhood houses were not able to secure even modest requests for additional funding to support coordinator positions as had been provided following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, resulting in coordinators effectively being left with no choice but to extend their role in a voluntary capacity. The critical role that social infrastructure organisations, such as neighbourhood houses needs to be recognised within any model for managing relief and recovery in major emergency events.

The formal evaluation of the psychosocial response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires undertaken by the Australian Healthcare Associates for the Department of Health, *Evaluation of the Psychosocial Response to the Victorian Bushfires Final Report - November 2010*, would be a valuable resource in informing the development of effective models for managing relief and recovery in major emergency events.

Victoria's current emergency management arrangements tend to assume a return to 'normal' community capacity and economic activity in a relatively short timeframe. This undermines the social and economic recovery of individuals and communities, by imposing inappropriate and unrealistic timeframes and expectations. The lack of investment in social infrastructure is compounded by the lack of full recognition of the need for short, medium and long-term supports for affected individuals and communities through the funding of services on the ground. In June this year, local organisations were frustrated that they were under pressure to quantify the full mental health impacts on the community from the January floods, despite that many in the community had not yet come forward, consistent with psychosocial recovery research noting that the recovery process for different individuals will vary significantly. The lack of investment in psychosocial supports, such as counselling, mean that many Victorians will face waiting times and/or need to travel to larger centres to access the supports they need - a barrier that many of them may find too great.

VCOSS Victorian Flood Review submission, May 2011

Impact assessments

Victoria's emergency management arrangements need to further develop how impact assessments are currently undertaken to ensure a more complete picture. Impact assessments that are able to adequately capture not only the level of damage but also the specific context of affected communities are critical in guiding effective and appropriate responses. Processes that are better able to capture up to date information about the social and economic conditions of communities affected by disaster and bring this information into response planning will allow for more targeted response to be implemented in a more timely and effective manner. Also important is the need for impact assessment methodology to take into account the delayed impacts from events, such as flooding, so that the extent of damage is fully captured.

Ensuring Victoria has an appropriate relief and recovery models that covers everyday incidents and can scale-up to deal effectively with large-scale and complex emergencies across all hazards?

Emergencies of any scale involve the delivery of relief and recovery activities by a broad and complex range of government, statutory and NGOs, including community sector organisations. Effective relief and recovery responses across the spectrum of events are best facilitated through ensuring that each part of the relief and recovery effort has a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities and is resourced to be able to fulfil these.

Particular consideration is required as to how to most effectively resource local community sector organisations to significantly increase their capacity in a short time frame following an emergency event so that they can more effectively meet community needs. In any discussion, it is important to recognise that local CSOs are imbedded in their local community and are generally best-placed to provide support to local community members, particularly as they will be there over the longer term. The recent floods provide a helpful starting point, where larger organisations in nearby regional centres, such as larger community health services, provided support to locally-based organisations. Alternatively, where there are limited locally-based organisations, partnership models between larger providers and smaller, locally-based providers need to be explored.

Larger-scale emergency events have, in recent times, occurred in areas with limited existing social infrastructure, including a lack of community services critical for community recovery, such as youth and mental health services. In the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, substantial resources were directed to the roll-out of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service (VBCMS), which proved to be an effective way of providing case management support for the affected communities. However, there was very limited additional investment in the range of human services to which the VBCMS case managers were likely to refer people to, including family support, mental health, youth services, drug and alcohol, and family violence services. For example, family support services in the Lower Hume region reported that 30 per cent of referrals were bushfire related, but no additional funding was provided to meet this increased demand. As organisations expanded their workload, staff capacity is increasingly strained.

It is critical that there is an equal emphasis within Victoria's relief and recovery model on physical and social relief and recovery. In each of the recent events, CSOs and local governments have highlighted that it is relatively easy to secure resources for physical

infrastructure, but much more difficult to secure resources for social infrastructure to support the recovery of the community.

Alongside this, it is also important to recognise that recovery is a long-term process and that there needs to be considerable support in place for this longer-term work of organisations with affected individuals, families and communities to support recovery. Moving quickly on physical infrastructure, including bridges and community buildings, is important. Equally important, is allowing the time for individuals and families affected by an emergency event to work through what is best for them, what supports they do and don't need, and ensuring the services and supports are in place at what ever point they may need them - whether three, six or twelve months, or three or five years.

Financial models to support the effective management of relief and recovery in major events

As identified earlier, the current capacity of community sector organisations and local governments to rapidly deploy services and supports to affected communities is severely hampered by a lack of state-level financial arrangements. Organisations responding to immediate need following an emergency event do not generally have the financial resources to commit to immediate relief work. Clearer mechanisms in Victoria's emergency management arrangements are required to ensure that CSOs are able to recover their costs in a timely way.

The current funding arrangements do not facilitate a rapid response by relief and recovery agencies, including CSOs, nor do they facilitate longer-term recovery and building resilience within communities. VCOSS supports the view of Red Cross that a separation of planning for relief and planning for recovery is required. Such an approach will strengthen longer-term recovery planning when there is a better understanding of the impacts of the event and there has been time to engage with members of the community in developing recovery services and supports. It is also important that funding arrangements recognise and address that recovery is a long-term process - looking five years ahead, and that funding needs to be provided to enable the longer-term work of organisations with affected individuals, families and communities.

In developing state-level financial models to support relief and recovery, the model currently used in Queensland provides a useful starting point. This model provides a clear mechanism, including memorandums of understanding, that guarantee community sector organisations will be financially reimbursed for providing a range of pre-agreed services and supports for affected communities.

VCOSS strongly supports the views of Red Cross outlined in their submission to the *EM Green Paper* regarding state-level financial models to support relief and recovery, including the three key elements they propose for a state-level financial model to support the work of relief and recovery agencies, including community sector organisations:

- ❑ Access to capital funding to support the equipment needs of relief and recovery work;
- ❑ Recurrent funding to support the development of capability and capacity; and
- ❑ A centralised post-emergency cost recovery process including that which is supported by the National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (NDRRA) to ensure the cost of responding to emergency events can be recovered. This process should be administered by the State Government, for example the Department of Human Services, rather than through local government.

SERVICE DELIVERY PERFORMANCE

Possible options for improving inter-agency coordination and deliver a high standard of service

VCOSS is concerned that in outlining possible options to improving inter-agency coordination and deliver a high standard of service, the focus is solely on emergency service organisations, and does not consider how to achieve improvements across the broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including community sector organisations, involved in the delivery of relief and recovery activities.

The *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* notes that:

'Disaster resilience is a long-term outcome, which will require long-term commitment. Achieving disaster resilience will require sustained behavioural change, the results of which should be seen across a number of years and political cycles.'¹⁴

In developing options to improve inter-agency coordination and deliver a high standard of service, it is critical to move beyond traditional considerations. Emergency management is no longer solely 'government business' and the responsibility only of emergency services and government departments.

The pivotal role of local community sector organisations needs to be fully recognised in Victoria's emergency management arrangements in order to achieve improved inter-agency coordination and deliver a high standard of service. Community sector organisations (CSOs), such as neighbourhood houses and learning centres, community health services, and organisations providing such services child and family, financial counselling and youth support services, are imbedded in their local community and provide a valuable connection to the local community. The experience of the 2009 Victorian Bushfires highlighted that people were more accepting of local community sector organisations than those who came in from outside the community. VCOSS strongly believes that Victoria's emergency management arrangements need to recognise, articulate and resource the pivotal role that CSOs play in relief and recovery.

To date, Victoria's emergency management framework and arrangements have not fully acknowledged this critical role that local community sector organisations play. The focus on the roles of the State Government, local governments and emergency services is of course critical. Equally critical however is ensuring that relevant community sector organisations are actively engaged in local level emergency planning so as to ensure coordinated relief and recovery efforts can be implemented early in response to emergencies.

The *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* clearly identifies the need to broaden partnerships with all those who can effect change:

'We need to develop and embed new ways of doing things that enhance existing arrangements across and within governments, as well as among businesses, the not-for-profit sector, and the community more broadly, to improve disaster resilience and prevent complacency setting in once the memory of a recent disaster has subsided.'¹⁵

Partnerships

The term Partnerships is described as two or more organisations that ...'make a commitment to work together on something that concerns both, to develop a shared sense of purpose and agenda, and to generate joint action towards agreed targets.'¹⁶

VCOSS highlights the work around partnerships between the Department of Human Services (DHS) and the community sector that has occurred over the past 10 years and the developing work around partnerships between the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and the community sector (DEECD). The 2008 evaluation of the partnership between the DHS and the community sector highlighted the value that was achieved through partnerships, in that they contributed to the achievement of improved integrated service delivery and enhanced outcomes for those using services.¹⁷ In reforming Victoria's emergency management arrangements, there would be significant benefits in drawing on this work in developing options to strengthen ways of working across the broad and complex range of government, statutory and NGOs, including community sector organisations.

Also of value would be the three *Partnership Practice Guides* developed by VCOSS for the Human Services Partnership Implementation Committee (HSPIC). These guides provide information, tools and resources that examine the three stages of partnering: preparing to partner; commencing the partnership; and, sustaining the partnership; and are intended to further strengthen and support partnerships across Victoria. Each of these Guides are available on the VCOSS website: <http://www.vcoss.org.au/what-we-do/community-sector/human-services.htm>.

More collaborative approaches

A stronger focus on more collaborative approaches across the broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including community sector organisations, involved in the delivery of relief and recovery activities will deliver improved responses for affected communities. In developing improved collaborative approaches, it is important to recognise that such approaches are not resource neutral and require specific resourcing. Two examples from the 2009 Victorian Bushfires highlight the value of effective partnerships.

In one area, one local government had actively engaged all relevant community sector organisations in its municipal emergency management plan and had kept-up regular meetings and discussions. Two neighbouring local governments saw the work but just 'copied and pasted' the principles of action, only to discover, when the emergency struck, that the organisations they had identified to provide a range of community services were not aware that they had been included in their municipal emergency management plans and were already working at capacity for the first local government. This approach is in dramatic contrast to the City of Whittlesea and the Whittlesea Community Futures group.

The second example is that of the Whittlesea Community Futures (WCF) group, which highlights the value of local networks and working in partnership. WCF is a network of over 40 human service organisations, community-based groups and state government departments working with the City of Whittlesea to deliver projects to increase local community capacity and resilience. Following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, the pre-existing relationships and communication networks established through WCF were critical in increasing the effectiveness and coordinated use of local resources and services to best meet the needs of individuals and communities affected. Building and maintaining networks and relationships between local government, state government departments,

emergency services, community sector organisations and community-based groups is a key aspect to preparation for emergencies.

Relief and Recovery

VCOSS supports enhancing the expertise in relief and recovery through the establishment of a cross-government dedicated recovery unit. In moving to such an approach, VCOSS believes that it is critical that any arrangements support and enhance both whole of government and whole of sector approaches to emergency management in Victoria, to help prevent the view that any new recovery unit has the sole responsibility for emergency management, and to reinforce that emergency management is part of the core business of all departments.

Such a recovery unit should have a strong cross-government role, and a role in developing capacity across the broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including community sector organisations, involved in the delivery of relief and recovery activities.

As noted above, partnerships need to play a central role in facilitating improved inter-agency coordination and improved outcomes. The proposed recovery unit could play an active role in facilitating the development of such partnerships.

Capacity of municipal councils

The current emergency management system in Victoria relies heavily on local government to plan, prepare for, respond to and assist communities to recover from emergencies. Such an approach ignores the huge variations across the state in the resources, staffing and expertise in local governments to undertake emergency management functions. Some local governments with strong rates bases are able to employ numerous dedicated emergency management staff – others, often smaller and relatively resource poor local governments, may not have a single dedicated position. This greatly affects the capacity of local governments to respond in a consistent manner, particularly to large scale emergencies.

Best practice emergency management planning requires strong community engagement to build trust, clarity and understanding of the various roles of different organisations in different types of emergency scenarios. Emergency management at the local level requires a range of skills including planning, stakeholder and community engagement, leadership in times of crisis and, following events, the skills to effectively work with people who have experienced trauma. With inadequate staff, resources and training, it is difficult to ensure that all these skills are available to support local communities.

VCOSS believes that there is a need to review the role of local government in emergency management, especially for large scale disasters, to ensure that the division of responsibility between local and state government in disaster planning response and recovery better aligns with resources and capacity. Further resourcing for emergency management staff within local government is also required to better ensure capacity for effective planning, communication and community engagement and a consistent response across Victoria.

Alongside this, resourcing is also required to develop the capacity of local community sector organisations to engage in emergency management planning and to provide relief and recovery. Many CSOs operate across one or more local government areas, and so may be required to participate in multiple municipal emergency management plans.

VCOSS supports the view outlined in the *EM Green Paper* that a more sustainable State and local government emergency management funding model needs to be developed. This was discussed in detail earlier in this submission under *Financial models to support the effective management of relief and recovery in major events* on page 12. As part of strengthening emergency management funding models, resources are also required to resource local community sector organisations to participate in emergency management planning, networks and training, alongside additional resources for local governments.

Assisting local governments fulfil their emergency management responsibilities

As identified earlier, a stronger focus on more collaborative approaches across the broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including community sector organisations, involved in the delivery of relief and recovery activities will deliver improved responses for affected communities. Building and maintaining networks and relationships between local government, state government departments, emergency services, community sector organisations and community-based groups is a key aspect to preparation for emergencies. Importantly, it needs to be recognised that such partnership approaches are not resource neutral and require specific resourcing.

Also noted earlier was the high variation in approaches to municipal emergency management planning by local governments. To strengthen the capacity of local governments to fulfil their emergency management responsibilities, the State Government could facilitate the sharing of good practice between local governments and local community sector organisations. VCOSS has previously utilised cross-sector forums as an effective way of sharing good practice. VCOSS has had initial conversations with the Municipal Association of Victoria and some individual local governments and would welcome the opportunity to also work with the State Government to promote effective practice around collaborative approaches.

Post-event reviews and research

VCOSS strongly supports the view identified in the *EM Green Paper* that 'lessons learned from emergency events are crucial to informing preparedness for future emergencies', and that 'implementation and oversight of issues identified from reviews is also important'.¹⁸

Currently, implementing key learnings from previous emergency events appears to occur in a haphazard and sometimes disjointed way. Immediately following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, there was a significant level of frustration among many community sector organisations that the Department of Human Services was not actively seeking advice from those that had been closely involved in previous events, such as the 2006 Grampians fires, particularly in terms of psychosocial responses and supports. This was in contrast to the 2010-11 floods where many CSOs noted the increased coordination, improved communication and strong response and recovery frameworks that were developed following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires.

VCOSS believes that there is significant value in establishing a clear mechanism for reviewing emergency events that are not routine but that are not so significant to warrant independent or judicial inquiries. In developing such a mechanism, it is important that a whole of government and whole of sector approach is taken in recognition of the broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including

community sector organisations, involved. Also important is that the review cover all stages of an emergency event – response, relief and recovery.

Following the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, VCOSS found that its early roundtables held with community sector organisations and local governments were the first opportunity that many had had to de-brief and reflect as a collective. While internal processes had been undertaken at individual organisations, there had not been the opportunity to come together with other CSOs or local governments, let alone broader agencies involved. Any review process needs to facilitate whole of sector and whole of government processes.

GOVERNMENT WORKING WITH COMMUNITIES TO BUILD RESILIENCE

To build resilience in Victorian communities, VCOSS highlights the pivotal role of local community sector organisations - such as neighbourhood houses and learning centres, community health services, and organisations providing such services child and family, financial counselling and youth support services. A much greater emphasis on and recognition and resourcing of the role of local community sector organisations is required in any approach. Community sector organisations are imbedded in their local community and provide a valuable connection to the local community.

Improving community resilience in Victoria (option 30)

Providing community information that delivers clear messages regarding the level of assistance available and the demands that will be placed on individual community members, coupled with the provision of guides, toolkits and other resources, is a sound approach. It will be critical to ensure that the information provided and the messaging is undertaken in such a way to ensure that it is accessible to all members of the community, including through the provision of any materials in multiple community languages, accessible to those with vision and hearing impairments, accessible to those with developmental delays and learning difficulties. Consideration is also required as to the limitations of some technologies, such as mobile phones, in some parts of rural and regional Victoria.

Accurate, timely and authoritative emergency warning systems are also important, both for local residents and for community services. Effective emergency warning systems are particularly important to community and health services that need to balance the risks of any emergency with those of evacuation for frail and ill patients or residents. Greater engagement with CSOs requiring warnings to support evacuation prior to emergency events will also increase confidence in the system and an understanding of key actions required in response. More effective early warning systems are also critical for those who require assistance to evacuate, and would also allow residents in areas likely to be affected – as in the case of the 2010-11 floods, to remove personal belongings and ensure vehicles and other equipment is relocated to areas where they are less likely to be inundated, thus limiting the financial impact of the event.

Vulnerable Victorians risk register (option 31)

The Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission recommended setting up a state register of vulnerable people. VCOSS has been working with the Department of Human Services on the implementation of this recommendation. Both VCOSS and the Municipal Association of Victoria have offered to provide assistance in communication to ensure that community sector organisations and local governments are aware of the new policy.

VCOSS has expressed concern regarding the current policy, particularly in relation to highly vulnerable Victorians in high bushfire risk areas, who do not have a network of support that they are able to rely on. The current approach is likely to raise expectations that people will be provided with assistance on a code red day. This is a concern given that this is not possible from the perspective of key agencies, such as Victoria Police, and is also very difficult without specific resourcing for community sector organisations that may be working

with the person. Also of concern is that community sector organisations are being expected to implement a new approach with no training or additional support.

Local governments working with their communities on emergency management planning (option 32)

As identified earlier, a stronger focus on more collaborative approaches across the broad and complex range of government, statutory and non-government organisations, including community sector organisations, involved in the delivery of relief and recovery activities will deliver improved responses for affected communities.

This is particularly relevant for local governments in working with those in their communities, including local community sector organisations. Building and maintaining networks and relationships between local government and community sector organisations is a key aspect to preparation for emergencies.

Examples highlighting the value of local governments and local community sector organisations working more collaboratively are discussed further under *Partnerships* on page 16.

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- ⁶ *Emergency Management Green Paper* ... p.13.
- ⁷ Current role of the Victoria Emergency Management Council is 'to advise the Coordinator in Chief (currently the Minister for Policy and Emergency Services) on all matters, including the coordination of activities of government and non-government agencies, relating to the prevention of, response to and recovery from emergencies.
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- ¹⁶ R Stern & J Green, 'Boundary workers and the management of frustration: a case study of two Healthy City partnerships', in *Health Promotion International*, 20(3), 2005, p. 269–276.
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- ¹⁸ *Emergency Management Green Paper*, ... p.39.