

Text of historical email with proposed solution to ID issues – went to case manager at Recovery NSW and various others around 28/05/2020.

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As discussed, I have identified and discussed the problem of identification of bushfire victims with many of our community reps in Cobargo area since the fires and written to the Premier, and our federal and state members and shadow politicians on a number of occasions now. The following is a summary of the current problem and thinking that I think will work and would be welcomed by the community.

NB: I use the term “Punter” for people impacted, because I refuse to use the term Victim or Refugee to describe our situation.

Problem Statement:

- 1) Background:
 - a. Most “total loss” Punters left their homes with only the identification in their wallets, or nothing. Everything else burnt. For most there was nothing to go to, so they evacuated as far as was safe for them, Bega, Canberra, Friends homes etc., and not necessarily to an evacuation centre, (the sensible ones got completely out of “Dodge” and were consequently never recorded).
 - b. Many partial loss or impacted (inc renting) punters were the same or evacuated to recovery centres or showground or beaches in a similar state. They tended to stay closer to their home.
 - c. The registrants at the RFS fire stations and evacuation centres and show ground had no system to register Punters, with the possible exception of Red Cross and there was no system to check and/or find evacuees. The records that were taken were incomplete and there was no formal identity check in most instances.
 - d. RFS took rolls at fire stations as people evacuated, but this is paper and per station. RFS have a database of (hopefully) all burnt out properties, but it does not necessarily have accurate punter records. Nor have the paper records cross matched to police or council.
 - e. Police have records of inspections, but difficult to cross match to RFS or council via property or personal data
 - f. Councils have a list of impacted properties and rate payers and have been using this to rebate rates. I believe this was cross matched against RFS and coronial Police records
 - g. The first formal record therefore became the Centrelink generated record from the \$1,000 payments, and then later the Red Cross payment and then later again Services NSW for the clean-up and/or various payments.
 - h. Other charities may have other records but their systems are woefully incomplete.
 - i. Due to privacy issues no agency or charity will share their records with others, even if requested to do so by the punters!!
 - j. Consequently there is no way of confirming the status of any punter other than literally visiting the site to confirm ground truth. (NB – it is likely that bodies will continue to be found in isolated properties for this same reason – i.e. nobody knows that they need to check).
- 2) As a direct consequence of the above - every punter requesting help – be it charity, goods or services, or a Government program, has to tell their story all over again in order to get any assistance, and this is getting worse as fraudsters see the opportunity to use the lack of co-ordination to their advantage. I carry an album of the worst photos on my phone (including our dead animals/cattle, and examples of how we are camping/living) so I can get people to believe how bad the situation is. But I could be a fraudster doing the same thing!! The process of obtaining any assistance almost always ends up in tears as we emotionally break down due to memories of the people, animals and homes that have been lost.
- 3) This is a very poor result from both a mental health and practical viewpoint – it wastes a lot of the punters time and adds to the feelings of utter exhaustion and just reinforces their belief that nobody came to help when this all started and nobody is coming now. The fact that some charities are now asking for police intervention to prove the punters identity make them feel like criminals for asking for help.

Proposed "Recovery Card" Solution:

- 1) This is a NSW solution – other states can probably do something similar
- 2) I believe that Services NSW currently has the most comprehensive database of Punters, and this could be cross matched with councils in NSW, and also RFS to try to ensure it is comprehensive. These all being state organisations I believe the Privacy issue is minimal. In any case – as part of the application for the card the punters can request cross matching (or a Mark 1 Eyeball visit) if needed.
- 3) Punters could be asked if they wish to obtain a "Virtual" card (using the existing Services NSW system) just like working with children or virtual boat licences.
- 4) This can be delivered to their smart device/phone via their existing Services NSW account
- 5) This would discriminate between "Total Loss", "Partial Loss", "Contents Loss" and "Rental Loss" or Impacted (T,P,C,R, I) - Business loss would be a separate issue and is probably under control already, but could be included.
- 6) The card would apply to all family members (i.e. issue if requested to all residents of address, but Total and Partial loss only applies to the property owner/s.
- 7) The existing identity/registrations for Services NSW on-line service are used – i.e. no need for any new RA (Registration Authority) process.
- 8) The card has a record number which includes
 - a. A "hash" which helps ensure the number is valid (like a credit card number)
 - b. A prefix of T,P,C,R or I
- 9) Services NSW or the Commonwealth stand up an on-line ID check service for charities and people offering discounts or benefits to bushfire punters where:
 - a. The Punter gives the Charity/Discounter their Address plus name and card record number
 - b. The Charity/Discounter enters these details in a browser
 - c. The On-line check answers back (only) Yes or No – i.e. that the data supplied by the punter including their status (T,P,C,R or I) is correct or not.
- 10) It is then up to the Charity/Discounter to do whatever else they need to do to provide the benefit – the interaction with Government is minimal and only related to the correctness of the record, not the content of the record as provided by the punter.

End Game Solution:

- 1) Subject to the above being in place – a program could be kicked off via industry associations to promote the provision of discounts or donation of building materials
- 2) The way the building industry works – this could be done via rebates to local distributors – so the system above might be part of a broader rebate mechanism where the validity of the site for assistance is registered by the local distributor to the major supplier – i.e., – there is an existing mechanism which will ensure the benefit goes to the punter – but this would be up to the suppliers, not the Government to setup (with encouragement).

Happy to chat with anyone to push this concept forward

Cheers