

Summary

- **Report Title:** Evaluation of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative Volume 1: Final Report
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- **The evaluation was undertaken by:** Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd
- **Date of the evaluation report :** December 2005
- **Synopsis**

This evaluation was carried out for the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment and centred of the recovery effort after the 2003 fires in the Alpine regions of Victoria. Many government agencies were involved in the recovery effort and this evaluation sought to find a smooth transition from suppression (fighting the fire) to recovery given that roles and personnel within these agencies change with the transition. This evaluation should be seen in light of other activities currently being undertaken by the Department of Sustainability and Environment, such as the Public Land Fire Initiative and the work on Operational Fire Management.

The main purpose of this evaluation was to identify how future bushfire and other recovery efforts could be structured, governed and managed. Part of the evaluation also outlined planning arrangements for future emergency events, and these arrangements are applicable to events beyond bushfires.

Evaluation of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative

**Volume 1:
Final Report**

Prepared for
The Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment

by

Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd

December 2005



Roberts Evaluation Pty Ltd



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Acronyms

ACT	Australian Capital Territory
BERP	Bushfire Recovery Environmental Program
BFR	Bushfire Recovery
CFA	Country Fire Authority
CGRC	Central Government Response Committee
CMA	Catchment Management Authority
CSMAC	Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council
DHS	Department of Human Services
DPI	Department of Primary Industries
DSE	Department of Sustainability and Environment
DVC	Department for Victorian Communities
EMA	Emergency Management Australia
IMT	Incident Management Team
MERC	Municipal Emergency Recovery Centre
MERO	Municipal Emergency Recovery Officer
NRM	Natural Resource Management
VPS	Victorian Public Service
WofG	Whole of government

Executive summary

The main purpose of this evaluation was to identify how future bushfire and other recovery efforts could be structured, governed and managed in the future. Part of the evaluation also outlined planning arrangements for future emergency events, and these arrangements are applicable to events beyond bushfires.

This evaluation should be seen in light of other activities currently being undertaken by the Department of Sustainability and Environment, such as the Public Land Fire Initiative and the work on Operational Fire Management conducted by Ellis. The findings from this report, should, wherever possible, be implemented in parallel with the other research and planning being conducted.

Outcomes of projects

Given the area of devastation and the urgency of the tasks, the Bushfire Recovery Initiative should be regarded as a success. An indicator of that is that a follow-up audit found one year after treatment that 95% of disturbed area was recovering well. It should be recognised that the success was due in great measure to the enormous effort put in by staff and volunteers.

Overall the objectives of Bushfire Recovery Initiative were met. The work was delivered in the time and budget provided. Taking all the information together, of the 39 projects (including sub-projects) the objectives were met in 29 cases (75%). For the remainder, there was either no information (10%) or they were on going (15%).

Residual Risks

A significant amount of risk generated by the 2003 bushfires has been dealt with by projects funded through the recovery initiative. In particular, environmental risks posed to waterways and catchments have been addressed extensively, as have the risks to the public posed by damaged built assets.

In relation to residual risks which remain for government (residual risks being areas where the community is still dissatisfied and may require ongoing government attention), three main areas were found:

1. Ensuring that lessons learnt and skills are not lost;
2. Funding for continuing work; and
3. Managing community perceptions.

These areas are discussed in detail in the body of this report.

Governance and management

At the local and regional level the management worked well and projects were effectively delivered, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. The rehabilitation and recovery

plans were well targeted and the funding provided was, in the main, adequate. At the operational level the cross tenure approach to the projects was effective and in general the cooperation between agency staff was at a high level.

At the statewide level there were some concern regarding the clarity of budgetary information and reporting against project deliverables but overall, it was felt that governance was adequate and the oversight of the Initiative was reasonably well managed. One area that caused concern was the delay in signing off on the projects allowing the next phase of the recovery projects to proceed. A range of participants spoke of competition for funds by members of the cross-agency Steering Committee, which also slowed down the process of delivering funds to the regions.

Budget

In relation to budget management, funding for recovery needs to be provided on a longer term basis rather than completed within 12 to 18 months. This issue was in part caused by the need for Treasurer's Advances to be spent within the financial year, but there also appeared to be general confusion as to what needed to be spent within one year, and what could be carried over to the next year.

There were also challenges faced in monitoring and accounting for projects which were in part due to the use of different financial management systems by the three agencies involved (DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria) and the fact that the pool of money for recovery was made up of new funds in addition to funds that had been re-directed and claimed through insurance.

Suppression to recovery

One of the major messages to emerge from this evaluation was the need to move more smoothly from the suppression to recovery. It was perceived that there was a gap between suppression and recovery activities which ultimately hampered the effectiveness of recovery efforts. Positioning recovery staff so that they became integrated with the Incident Management System for suppression was identified as an important way of improving the transition from suppression to recovery. This is reflected in the recommendations and proposed bushfire recovery structure.

Communication

In relation to communication of the recovery effort, evidence from the evaluation data indicate that a communication plan for recovery should be developed before the suppression activities have finished, and there needs to be dedicated staff centrally and regionally who were committed to this process.

Case management

Another major issue to emerge was that traumatised landholders became frustrated by being visited by a number of staff (often well-meaning) from organisations and agencies

each asking the same questions to ascertain their eligibility for support. A case management approach to dealing with affected individuals was proposed and is currently being explored by the State Emergency Recovery Unit. Related to this is the development of an information management system accessible across agencies to avoid duplication of effort.

At the project level, there were issues relating to coordination, contract management, insurance and staffing that need to be addressed by planning in the future.

Proposed planning structure for emergency recovery

The need for high level planning for emergency management has been recognised by the Victorian Government and the model for the proposed by the Victorian Department of Human Services for the restructuring the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee has been used as the basis for the proposed recovery planning arrangements for this evaluation. In particular, it is recommended that DSE leads a Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional (Recovery) Subcommittee and that a Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager be appointed now to chair this Subcommittee and establish a range of planning Working Groups. As a starting point, it is suggested that these Working Groups should cover issues such as:

1. Budget, contract and insurance management.
2. Information and database management.
3. Human resource management (training, staffing policy).
4. Policy, planning and project management.
5. Community engagement and development.

Proposed Bushfire Recovery Implementation Structure

Arising from the data gathered in this review, a set of principles underpinning the recovery structure at the statewide, regional and project level have been developed and the suggested new structure is based on these principles. The structure builds upon that used for the 2003 Alpine Fires (See diagram figure 4 attached).

For a fire of significant scale the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce and Project Team are still proposed, as is a body acting in the capacity of the Steering Committee (we suggest this should be the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee). The role of Regional Fire Recovery Manager already exists in effect as does the Municipal Emergency Recovery Centres, although it is suggested that DSE better integrate with this body. Accepting the need for a smooth transition from suppression to recovery, the implementation structure builds upon the Incident Control System for suppression in which Incident Management Teams play a central role.

In summary the main changes to the recovery implementation structure recommended by this evaluation are:

- The recovery effort be supported by the planning process outlined above.
- Fire Recovery Officers nominated to suppression Incident Management Teams (planning section) and the role formalised .

- Greater involvement of the lead agency's corporate finance division in budget management and accountability.
- The Steering Committee liaise closely with the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee.
- Establishment of Regional Recovery Committees chaired by DHS (but recognising that DSE has its own responsibilities).
- Greater DSE involvement in Municipal Emergency Recovery Centres (MERC) and vice versa (co-location of the Integrated Multi-Agency Centre [which continues from suppression to recovery] and the MERC to occur where possible).

Recommendations

Outcomes from projects

- 1. That the lessons learnt from the suite of projects designed in response to the 2003 Alpine fires be used to guide planning and policy for future bushfire events.**

Residual risks

- 2. That managers of program areas (catchments and water quality, assets, cultural and ecological heritage and private landholders) assess what work still needs to be done and what contingencies need to be accounted for that can cause on going risk and apply for funds to complete the works.**
- 3. That an explanation be given to the fire affected communities by way of closure about what works were carried out in the recovery phase, what was achieved and what still needs to be completed. The perception that DSE was responsible for the fires could also be addressed at this time.**

Structure for planning

- 4. That the structure presented here (or something similar) be accepted that sets up a planning framework to be effective immediately (see Figure 3).**
- 5. That a Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager be appointed now within DSE. This person will be responsible for chairing the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee, establishing Working Groups and will be a member of the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. The Recovery Manager will also play a significant role in the implementation of recovery efforts.**
- 6. That Working Groups be set up to deal with the planning for the next recovery operation. These Working Groups would fall under the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee and would take into account the learnings from the 2003 fires.**

Structure for Implementation

- 7. That the structure as presented (or something similar) be accepted to ensure that there is a smooth transition between suppression (crisis) and recovery (see Figure 4).**
- 8. That for future recovery events there be one central point within each affected region where all the information and personnel are housed (a one stop shop) so that community members and others have easy access to information. This logically should be the Municipal Emergency Recovery Centre.**
- 9. That the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager convene a project team immediately a crisis emerges to develop a comprehensive planning document. This team needs to be made up of individuals with the most relevant skills that relate to the current crisis. They should also be individuals with high level interpersonal skills who can work cooperatively in a period of great stress.**
- 10. This project team is guided by the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee of which the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager is already a part.**
- 11. That a designated Fire Recovery Officer be nominated as part of the suppression Incident Management Teams and have authority to manage the initial stages of recovery. This will involve identifying the areas that will require attention during the recovery and either designing projects to address these areas or co-opting skilled and experienced personnel from around the State who can undertake this task.**
- 12. That Recovery Officers need to be nominated in advance and undergo training in recovery planning and practice. It is likely that Emergency Management Australia can provide assistance in this regard.**
- 13. That the role and responsibilities of Regional Fire Recovery Manager be clarified now with regard to recovery but that they only become operational at the time of a crisis and will then have responsibilities to coordinate the recovery effort and to report to the Regional Recovery Committee.**
- 14. That a Regional Recovery Committee, chaired by the Department of Human Services, be convened at the time of the outbreak of the crisis and that it relate to the Project Team and the Municipal Emergency Recovery Centre while ever these are involved in the recovery phase.**
- 15. That a communications plan be developed as part of the recovery plan so that the needs of government, affected communities, the public and the media are accounted for effectively.**
- 16. That a communications unit headed by a spokesperson who can speak for the whole recovery effort (such as the Regional Fire Recovery Manager or the chair of the Regional Recovery Committee) be put in place at the time**

of suppression and move from reporting about suppression to reporting about recovery.

17. That the development of a case management approach to disaster recovery for affected individuals continues to be explored.

Recommendations for the next steps for the utilisation of the findings of this report as suggested by the Steering Team at the presentation of findings on the 6th December 2005 were.

Step 1. The report be sent in the first instance to the Manager - Forest Estate Condition and Monitoring, Coordinator Bushfire Recovery - 2003 Alpine fires.

Step 2. Through him it is provided to the Steering Committee and the Regional Integration Team.

Step 3. If endorsed, it is forwarded to the Minister for approval.

Step 4. If approved, it is sent to the Fire Emergency Management Committee to take action on the recommendations.

Step 5. The report is forwarded to the head of the State Emergency Recovery Committee for his information.

1. Background

The Bushfire Recovery Initiative arose in response to the bushfires which began in Gippsland and North East Victoria in January 2003. The extent, nature and impact of these bushfires are documented extensively in *The Victorian Alpine Fires: January-March 2003* (Wareing and Flinn 2003) and *The Recovery Story* (2005). In response to the fires, a Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery comprising senior government ministers was established and they released an interim report on 28 February 2003, followed by a final report in April 2003. The final report outlined the scale of the recovery efforts, the recovery activities that had already been delivered and the areas where funding was to be directed in the future. The Ministerial Taskforce final report acted as the strategic document shaping the recovery effort.

Through this report, four major Initiative areas were identified by the Bushfire Recovery Steering Committee (comprising representatives from Department of Sustainability and Environment [DSE], Department of Primary Industries [DPI] and Parks Victoria):

1. Recovery of Catchments and Water (\$23.9 million)
2. Restoring assets in Parks, Forests, and Alpine Resorts (\$24.9 million)
3. Restoring Ecological and Cultural Heritage (\$13.2 million)
4. Providing practical assistance for fire affected land holders, communities and local industry (\$8.6 million).

Activities involved in the recovery of catchments and water included soil erosion control, catchment rehabilitation on public land, and monitoring of rivers and water quality. Asset restoration included the replacement of refuge huts, toilets, snow poles, bridges and signage, in addition to the replacement of major assets such as the Mt Seldom Seen Fire Station. The restoration of ecological and cultural heritage involved Indigenous surveys, regeneration surveys, restoration and survey of European Cultural Heritage sites, and native species recovery. Assistance to private land holders has been in the form of immediate post-fire support (including assessing stock losses and providing surviving stock with feed and water), and grants for environmental rehabilitation, wild dog management and weed control. In addition to these on-ground activities, DPI also provided farm advisory services such as whole farm planning and agronomic advice to fire-affected landholders. It is estimated that around 450 staff were working on Bushfire Recovery projects at one stage (under the Natural Resource Management Portfolio).

The objectives of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative (endorsed by the Bushfire Recovery Ministerial Taskforce) were:

1. To protect, and progressively rehabilitate, fragile ecosystems that had been placed under additional threat by bushfires;
2. To rebuild (and where possible, enhance) public land assets destroyed in the bushfires, to contribute to social and economic recovery;
3. To support natural resource based industries (including agriculture, timber and nature based tourism) to rebuild and recover;

4. To address catchment, water quality and water supply issues;
5. To encourage partnerships between affected communities and Government agencies in the bushfire recovery;
6. To assist in restoring community confidence, and to help communities contribute to their own social, economic and environmental recovery;
7. To ensure monitoring and evaluation initiatives were built into bushfire recovery programs;
8. To ensure lessons learnt from the bushfire suppression and recovery programs were built into the future management of natural resources; and
9. To ensure organisational recovery.

2. Introduction

The evaluation focused on the management and governance arrangements that were in place to deliver the Bushfire Recovery Initiative. A particular emphasis was required on the coordination of the Initiative, and how service delivery involving cross-agency cooperation could be improved for future recovery efforts. The evaluation did not focus on the more technical aspects of the recovery effort (such as lengths of fencing restored, area of bush rehabilitated, etc.).

The DSE identified three main terms of reference for the evaluation:

1. Identify the effectiveness or value for money of the Initiative and ensure the Government response to the Ministerial Taskforce recommendations has been delivered;
2. Identify key learnings from the Initiative for effective implementation of other departmental programs; and
3. Evaluate the governance arrangements that are in place and establish if these arrangements have allowed for maximum delivery and ensured success on the ground.

Essentially, DSE wanted to know *how is the best way to organise and coordinate bushfire recovery activities if and when they are required again*. As part of this exercise, the way the different projects were integrated was considered. This evaluation focused only on those projects which were established in response to the 2003 Alpine Fires and covers only those that were delivered through the Natural Resources Management Portfolio (thereby excluding recovery programs delivered through Department of Human Services [DHS], Department of Victorian Communities [DVC], or any other agencies outside this portfolio).

The key evaluation questions are based on those outlined by DSE, and three further questions (8-10) were added.

1. How well have outcomes been achieved against Initiative objectives and what is attributable to the Initiative in relation to:
 - Protection of catchments and water,
 - Rehabilitation of private land,
 - Restoration and protection of ecological and cultural heritage assets, and
 - Reinstatement of park and forest assets.
2. What residual risks remain for government (Parks Victoria, DSE, DPI, CMAs, local government)?
3. How well has governance and management occurred overall at the Initiative level, and what can be learnt or improved?
4. How well has overall budget management occurred, and what can be learnt or improved?

5. How have the fire-affected communities perceived the recovery effort and how well do they believe they have been assisted in the recovery effort?
6. What outputs have been delivered by the initiative against the commitments by the government following the Final report by the Ministerial Taskforce and against each project?
7. What are the major learnings from this initiative that would be applicable to other whole of government programs and/or any future cross agency/Departmental recovery initiatives?
8. What is the role of the media in recovery?
9. What is the role of the local government emergency response committees?
10. What is an appropriate strategy for bushfire recovery planning in the interim phase (that is, between fires)?

3. Methodology

The methodology employed for this evaluation involved the following activities:

1. Clarification meeting with Initiative staff (including ongoing consultation throughout the project)
2. Document review
3. Literature review
4. Telephone and face-to-face interviews (some stakeholders opted to respond through e-mail)
5. One regional workshop in Bright with staff from both Gippsland and North East
6. One Statewide workshop in Melbourne
7. Reporting through Milestones and drafts

DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria had already undertaken a number of debriefing and evaluation activities prior to this evaluation. Reports and documents provided by these three agencies underpinned the evaluation and were used to assist in addressing a number of the evaluation questions. These reports largely identified the context of the recovery Initiative (that is, what happened, and in some circumstances, how well). The Final Report by the Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery was also reviewed as it set up much of the recovery effort that was to follow. Individual project evaluation feedback forms and project applications were also crucial as they outlined aims, objectives, activities, outcomes, level of funding etc. for individual projects.

A detailed assessment of the documents was undertaken at this stage because the scope of the review did not include consultation with the fire-affected communities or the individual project teams (except in a few instances where project staff could offer a regional perspective).

In carrying out the review of documents, evidence was sought on the integration and coordination of the projects and of the Initiative as a whole. Gaps or questions arising from the documents were noted so that explanation could be sought from relevant stakeholders at a later stage.

A literature review was also undertaken to provide context to the evaluation, to find out how others managed the recovery phase and to assist in framing recommendations. Particular attention was paid to bushfire recovery efforts in the ACT. It was also necessary to look beyond bushfire recovery to the literature relating to disaster relief and emergency management more generally. The work conducted by Emergency Management Australia in its Australian Emergency Manual Series was useful here. Literature was reviewed in order to ascertain what has worked well in other circumstances and what could be employed in the Victorian context. Literature relating to whole-of-government, governance and accountability arrangements was also reviewed.

In addition to a review of the documents and literature, two workshops were also held with stakeholders involved with the recovery initiative. One workshop was held in Bright involving regional stakeholders from DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria. These stakeholders were asked to comment on the outcomes of the initiative, how effective they felt

governance and management arrangements were, and what future recovery efforts could look like.

A Statewide workshop was also held with head office and regional staff of DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria. Significant input was also provided by the Manager of the State Emergency Recovery Unit located within DHS. At this particular workshop, the main emphasis was on presenting and gaining feedback on:

- The results of the evaluation;
- The proposed arrangements for emergency recovery planning; and
- The proposed arrangements for bushfire recovery implementation.

These stakeholders were able to amend and subsequently agree on the arrangements proposed and the results are included within this report.

4. Document Review

Following is a summary of the document review. The unabridged version appears in Volume 2 of this report.

The circumstances surrounding the 2003 Victorian Alpine Fires have been documented elsewhere. The work prepared for the Fire Management division of the Department of Sustainability and Environment by Wareing and Flinn (2003) outlines the extent of the fires and the manner in which they were responded on a daily basis and *The Recovery Story* documents the events that occurred during the recovery phase. The *Report of the Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires* chaired by the Emergency Services Commissioner Bruce Esplin was designed 'to look into all aspects of the preparations for, and response to these fires, and in particular to identify opportunities to learn from them and further improve Victoria's fire management capability - prevention, mitigation and response' (Esplin et al 2003: XIV).

Central to this evaluation was the *Final Report from the Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery* which outlined the amount of funding to be spent on the recovery effort and the areas on which it was to be spent. Projects were developed in concert with (and in response to) this final report.

Project specifications and evaluation feedback provided for most of the projects under the Initiative were also reviewed. These largely formed the basis for the assessment of project outcomes appearing later in this report.

Proceedings from a Bushfire Recovery Debriefing Workshop held in August 2004 also captured issues and learnings relating to the delivery of each of the four program areas, with a specific focus on issues relating to the budget and communications.

DSE also commissioned an evaluation of the Bushfire Recovery Project shortly after the Project Team disbanded. One of the intentions of this evaluation was to 'capture and communicate learning to facilitate improvements in cross-business policy development and project management'. The evaluation, by Just Add Water, gave critical insight into the operation of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative in the early stages of development and implementation.

Acumen Alliance conducted an evaluation of governance and coordination arrangements of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative in September 2004 (this was in addition to evaluating the project practices of four other DSE projects). The evaluation found that overall governance of the Bushfire Recovery Project was 'reasonable' but improvements could be made in relation to project reporting and other areas.

The Department of Primary Industries has also undertaken an evaluation of the Bushfire Recovery projects on private and agricultural land. Findings and recommendations from the DPI report have informed the present evaluation. In some instances, particularly the involvement of recovery staff in Incident Management Teams and the adoption of a case management approach to dealing with fire-affected landholders, our findings are synonymous.

Integral to the formulation of recommendations in this evaluation was the *Review of Community Support And Recovery Arrangements Following Disasters* (undertaken by the Disaster Recovery Subcommittee of the Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council) and the position paper of the State Emergency Recovery Unit on the *Restructure of the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee*. The *Emergency Management Manual Victoria* was also useful. These documents outlined a framework in which future recovery planning could take place and it has been built upon in this evaluation.

5. Literature Review

Below is a summary of the literature review. The full review appears in Volume 2 of this report.

There is a vast range of literature relating to emergency management from Australia and overseas. Emergency Management Australia (2004) identifies that prevention, preparedness, response and recovery should be mutually interdependent processes in emergency management activities. The need for community participation and empowerment in the recovery process is also noted as an important aspect of effective emergency management. The EMA Recovery manual also identifies eight principles of disaster recovery management which provide a management context for recovery managers. These principles include the establishment of planning and management arrangements that are clear to all involved, beginning the recovery process early on, and ensuring recovery personnel are properly trained and skilled in their roles.

The literature also refers to the importance of evaluation following crises and the need for appropriate management structures and training.

The *Report of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce* from the Australian Capital Territory was useful in providing a counterpoint to this evaluation. The report detailed the recovery effort in the ACT (also precipitated by bushfires in early 2003), identifying the role and composition of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, Taskforce Secretariat, Community Expert Reference Group and Bushfire Recovery Executive. The report also outlined the activities of the Bushfire Recovery Centre (the one-stop shop) and the development of the Bushfire Recovery Action Plan. A strong emphasis was also placed on communication during the recovery effort. The ACT example, which included employing a communications consultant for the first three months of the recovery, could be further explored for the Victorian situation. The report also identifies a number of factors which led to a successful recovery effort in the ACT:

- High level of community involvement;
- Ensuring that the community was well informed about the recovery process;
- Ensuring that the recovery process was supported by individuals with a comprehensive range of skills and perspectives;
- Maintaining flexibility and adaptability;
- Investing early; and
- Developing a clear plan of action.

Literature relating to public administration and governance were also canvassed. The Victorian Auditor-General identifies four pillars underpinning the governance arrangements of a governing body (such as a Government Department or agency):

1. Strategy and direction;
2. Structures and relationships;
3. Performance monitoring; and
4. Compliance and accountability (Cameron 2003).

While Bushfire Recovery operates slightly outside the normal functioning of Government, these four pillars still hold. For instance, the Ministerial Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery Final Report provided the strategic direction to the Initiative, the structures and relationships that were needed to deliver programs and projects under the Initiative and the monitoring and accountability processes. While the strategic planning and delivery cycle is compressed due to the nature of the crisis, it is still understood that good governance is required of the Initiative and associated programs and projects. These 'four pillars' are all addressed to some extent in this report. This very evaluation, it can be said, assists in the performance monitoring and compliance and accountability aspects of governance.

The work of the Australian Public Service Commission (2004) on whole of government responses to service delivery was also useful in the context of this evaluation. Some of the challenges inherent in whole of government approaches noted by the Commission were also evident in the Bushfire Recovery Initiative. The Commission also identified that there needs to be several characteristics which should inform the development of whole of government approaches:

- Leadership for activities being shared or one agency having a clearly identified leadership role involving the work of other agencies;
- A focus on expertise and relationships, rather than on the status of individuals or organisations
- An increased focus on flexible team processes and outcomes, rather than structures and rules;
- Resources being pooled cooperatively when necessary; and
- A focus on whole of government outcomes, rather than portfolio protection.

The Australian Public Service Commission also provides a best practice checklist for the establishment of cross-agency taskforces. They should have:

- Clear charter and term;
- Appropriate decision reference points, for example, Minister, Cabinet committee, senior staff committee and process for reporting;
- Clear protocols for relationship between taskforce members and home organisations;
- Clear protocols for consultation between taskforce leadership, affected agencies and external stakeholders;
- Appropriate skills mix and resources;
- Focus on an outcome not just a product;
- Loyalty to the taskforce;
- Members with good interpersonal and consensus-building skills;
- Co-location of members where the task is full-time and complex; and
- Attention to team building, roles of members and leadership.

The characteristics and principles above can be useful when establishing future whole of government Initiatives (be it in relation to disaster recovery or other areas where cross-agency cooperation is required).

The Australian Public Service Commission also identified that managing information was crucial as this can assist in better decision making and program delivery. It is noted that information sharing requires structured and systematic approaches to the collection and

use of data. Information management was also an issue that arose in the bushfire recovery.

The Commission notes that whole of government approaches are particularly useful in dealing with crisis situations. The key suggestions in relation to whole of government crisis management are as follows:

- Plan early and test the plan;
- Establish clear leadership;
- Define roles of all players early;
- Use formal chains of command; and
- Ensure strong public affairs management.

These points above are also touched upon in the evaluation.

The literature also referred to the importance of managing communications and the media. This was found to be a significant issue in the Bushfire Recovery Initiative.

6. Outcomes of projects

This section responds to the following evaluation questions:

1. *How well have outcomes been achieved against Initiative objectives and what is attributable to the Initiative in relation to [the four program areas]; and*
6. *What outputs have been delivered by the initiative against the commitments by the government following the Final report by the Ministerial Taskforce and against each project?*

6.1. Overall assessment

Overall the objectives of Bushfire Recovery Initiative were met. The work was delivered in the time and budget provided. Taking all the information together, of the 39 projects (including sub-projects) the objectives were met in 29 cases (75%). For four projects there are no data and in the remaining six the objectives were partially met. In the latter group some of the projects are ongoing, especially the eradication of pest plants and animals.

Given the area of devastation and the urgency of the tasks, the Bushfire Recovery Initiative should be regarded very successful. An indicator of that is that a follow-up audit found one year after treatment that 95% of disturbed area was recovering well. It should be recognised that the success was due in great measure to the enormous effort put in by staff and volunteers. There were however some difficulties and many lessons learnt, some of which are discussed elsewhere in this report (See Governance and Management). This section focuses on the achievements.

This assessment is based on primary data collected for this review but more particularly on the numerous evaluations conducted previously for the various projects and by some of the agencies. A number of the evaluations provided to us were based on information accumulated some time ago and more work may have been carried out in the meantime. Similarly, some of the project reports did not provide feedback on the achievement of objectives but that information may now be available.

6.2. Specific learnings from projects, workshops and interviews

With regard to projects, one stakeholder also commented that:

There needs to be project outlines in the first instance before a disaster so that staff aren't forced to hastily conjure up projects. The recovery projects after the 2003 fires provide a useful baseline for the development of future projects. These projects can help inform future projects and need to be documented more formally somehow.

And another commented that there was a need to:

Document the learnings and systems used in the Alpine Fires including Country Fire Authority, local government and other agency systems and inputs.

This matter is addressed in more detail in the section below that relates to planning for the next recovery effort.

6.2.1. Protection of catchments and water

As much of the work done under this Program related to private land there is considerable overlap with Program 2 Rehabilitation of Private Land and these two sections need to be read together.

Success: Catchment (general)

- Cross tenure or tenure blind approach worked well, particularly regarding surveys for cultural heritage, hut and indigenous surveys, weed control, ecological surveys and fire line rehabilitation.
- The use of dedicated specialists was perceived to be effective and efficient because rehabilitation is an area which requires input from a range of specialists in fields such as biodiversity, plant management, cultural heritage and crew management for on ground works.
- Interagency communication improved-PV, DSE, CMAs, Indigenous communities.
- Using resources allocated for fire suppression was very effective.
- Good on ground assessments.
- The project format and design for BERP [Bushfire Environmental Recovery Program] was based on a previous disaster recovery incident and this allowed the development stage to be completed quickly and avoided some of the past mistakes.
- Banksia awards submission for fire recovery program strengthened relationship with community, volunteer groups.
- There was quick learning on how to stabilise soils on a large scale.
- Road stream crossing survey proved useful for planning.
- Providing bottled water quickly.

Issues/improvements

Control lines

- A need for a consistent approach to control line rehabilitation with a code. inconsistency of approach to methods for rehabilitation. Refer to "Rehabilitate control lines in Park".
- Need to prevent lines being rehabilitated and then cleared again because it had been decided that they were now strategic breaks.
- Mapping control lines put in place during the suppression effort (eg GPS on bulldozers) would save a lot of time and money.
- Various agencies (and landholders) put in trails in front of the fire and there was confusion as to who was responsible later on.

- Before the policy of fixing trails on private land was introduced, equipment was passing through private land which caused hostility from landholders. Landholders must be consulted before any work is done on their property to the extent that the property should be passed over and returned to later if the landholder is unavailable at the time the machinery is [in the area].

Water

- Bridge/culverts – greater attention needed regarding water quality.
- More awareness required of flash flooding issues – i.e. Weather monitoring, OH&S.
- Better coordination of hydrological projects (bog rehabilitation, forests, catchments, water quality, CMA).
- Water yield and quality (e.g. Gippsland lakes).
- Impacts on end users of water resources.
- Possible to present all the work done to alleviate run-off and water quality issues, i.e. control line rehabilitation.

Miscellaneous

- There appeared to be opportunities for better efficiency if projects were managed together, e.g. Rehabilitation of Emergency Fire Trails on Farmland and Debris Removal Along Crown Boundaries.
- Quality of road asset register needs to be improved.
- Reporting for research projects on a monthly basis is too frequent. Reporting should be based on milestones and scale of projects.
- Need a clear policy on the replacement and alignment or re-alignment of boundary fences lost during the fire.
- Shires and DPI need a joint contact database approach.
- Need to give the Catchment above works time to stabilise.
- With regard to moss bed rehabilitation assessment of condition and priorities not delivered.
- Crown land licensed areas were eligible for weeds grants but this was not adequately publicised.

Successes: Landholders

- Cleaning dams of silt (160 cleared).
- Sowing pasture, fencing off riparian areas, controlling gully erosion.
- One on one in dealing with the landholders.
- Getting a local person with local knowledge to help landholders.
- DPI recovery staff have been a consistent and active presence in these communities for the past 2 years.
- Provided opportunity for tendering and increased cash flow for affected landholders.
- Fencing containment areas worked well for containing weeds from imported hay.

- In relation to the weed control grants, landholders were found to be 'generally happy with what was offered' and some felt that as a result of the grant they were in a better position to tackle weeds after the fire than before.
- Landholders were also found to be 'very happy' with the agronomic advisory services offered after the fires. Landholders appreciated an outsider's view and many had ongoing contact with the consultant.
- Landholders were satisfied with the mail-outs but felt that local follow-up by a staff member would also have been of benefit.

Issues/improvements

- Clearing width of boundary fences.
- Subsidy rates. Contractors were used and paid directly to undertake clearing in the North East v Gippsland where the payment was based on a per metre rate. Use of contractors was very successful c.f. \$ per metre.
- Help needs to be timed according to landholder's ability to undertake work.
- Problems with use of DPI staff supervising dog fence construction as a State Forest boundaries and land clearing concerned.
- In some cases little could be gained from advisory services because the consultant lacked local knowledge.
- In relation to the wild dog fencing grants, landholders felt that the fencing practices were 'too hard and didn't suit the area' and that the 'specifications [were] very difficult'.
- Difficulties faced in trying to hire contractors who were in high demand.
- There was also initially some confusion over fencing policy which led to landholder reluctance to act on fencing issues.
- It was also realised that there was a need to have one database of all landholders, as different recording systems posed a problem.
- Department officers indicated it would have been far more cost effective to have done the landholder work at the same time, potentially reducing costs by as much as one-third.
- Case management is recommended in dealing with landholders as it allows all queries to be answered by one person and provides the opportunity for better coordination of related projects such as rehabilitation of fire trails and debris removal.
- Private lands program was not strategic.

6.2.2. Consultation and communication

- Community consultation/ mail outs etc need to be managed across all projects via a mix of public notices and direct mail outs.
- As there were multiple mail outs as policies changed and new initiatives became available communication with landholders was often duplicated and overwhelming. This led to both landholder stress from extra paper work and project staff work overload in meeting mail out deadlines.
- Need to be able to match landholder and Program timelines causing low uptake of concessional loans.

- Advertisements in newspapers may be a better approach than direct letter to fire affected landholders in the first instance.
- . Need to get good news stories out early.
- CMOs/DPI staff are often the first contact landholders have with government post the fire. Need to ensure staff are adequately trained and have adequate support to deal with this.
- Use one to one, local contacts and networks.

Recommendations from DPI evaluation

(Set out below are the recommendations from the DPI evaluation. There is some repetition with the points made above however they are reproduced in full because of the greater level of detail and explanation. Some also apply to the next section which deals with Rehabilitation of Private Land).

1. That DPI recovery staff are involved in the Fire Incident Management Team to allow more comprehensive information to be collected. This is to allow for information on landholder numbers, location and property damage to be collected early, so a timely, effective response can be made. The initial information collected revolved around animal welfare, many landholders were initially missed as were the locations of constructed earthen fire breaks. **(DPI)**

2. That for an emergency response, the time frame should be appropriate to the size of the event and the capacity of traumatized landholders. The time required to obtain funds, appropriate staff and contractors varies accordingly to the magnitude of the disaster. Recovery then relies on the capacity of traumatised landholders often low in resources to undertake work. There needs can be classified into

(a) Immediate works: Animal health, fodder, stock water, concessional loans, stock containment areas.

(b) Secondary needs: Fire trail rehabilitation, whole farm planning and debris removal.

(c) Longer term programs: Wild dog fencing packages on crown boundaries, wild dog management, erosion control programs, insurance compensation, agricultural advisory service and weed control grants. **(DPI & DSE)**

3. That training of up to 50 emergency recovery officers is undertaken which includes environmental recovery. Staff working in the program were often unaware of issues and consequently went through a steep learning curve. Training would improve program efficiency and effectiveness. Each of the 17 current emergency response areas needs a capable manager that can run a fire recovery program from the moment the fire starts. **(DPI)**

4. That staffing of projects needs to be undertaken by both; staff that have their workloads reallocated, and regional and external contractors or consultants

Staff found it quite stressful due to the workload of having to do bushfire recovery work as well as their other duties. The opportunity to use contractors and casual technical facilitators should be planned in advance and used wherever possible. The landholder interviews suggested that we should have access to contractors from other districts to undertake works on weeds and fencing. The VFF may be able to play a part in

organising contractors. Available contractors would also reduce the stress levels of landholders. Staff felt administrative support would have reduced their workload. **(DPI)**

5. That the existing access database be improved with other Government Departments to contain all recovery projects, the needs of all agencies and be web based.

This would reduce the current duplication between agencies and improve the quality of the information collected. The database should be developed in coordination with the DHS and Local Government. There should only be one database, interchangeable with other Government Departments. **(DPI & DSE with emergency committees)**

6. That a case management approach is used in dealing with landholders to reduce the numbers of staff visiting each landholder and reduce the huge volume of correspondence. A case manager would assist landholders by developing priorities and organising appropriate resources. The landholder interviews indicated they were happy receiving mail, but dealing with multiple staff and different Departments was difficult. **(DPI)**

7. That funds given to community groups should be given with guidelines of how the funds should be spent. This will expedite assistance to affected landholders. The problem that arose was that there were no previous guidelines of how to deal with coordination, or how money should be legitimately used. Time was lost developing guidelines. The committees now have a model that can be used in future disasters. **(DPI)**

8. That the restoration of fire breaks and removal of debris for crown land fencing (where involved) is undertaken together after a works plan is made. This will prevent multiple visits, reduce costs and improve landholder relationships. The opportunity of using plant on-site, in hindsight, may have been better managed if it were delayed until coordinated programs could be developed. **(DPI & DSE)**

9. That the Incident Management Team records the location of fire trails on private land. This was not done at the time the trails were constructed, so adding to the complexity of recovery. **(DSE)**

10. That erosion control programs be planned over a minimum of three years, desirably five years. This matches Recommendation 2 but highlights erosion as an event that usually occurs later after the first rain and can extend over a longer period. **(DPI & DSE)**

11. (a) That aerial photos and whole farm planning advice be provided to landholders as an early priority. This will allow replacement fencing to be relocated on land class boundaries to improve land management. **(DPI)**

(b) That a central catalogue of aerial photo datasets be prepared and sharing agreements put in place. At present there is no central database and CMA's who have bought photos involve contracts which do not allow for sharing **(DSE)**

12. In future programs, information should be provided to staff on how to manage stressed clients during the recovery period. A major benefit from the program was

the support that staff gave to traumatised landholders. It would be beneficial if staff were aware of the stages of the grief cycle to recognise where the landholder was at. **(DPI)**

Other matters identified by staff

Collection of information from landholders can be streamlined ensuring that all information is collected at the one time. To include:

- Names and contact details of landholders.
- ABN if grants are involved.
- Issues being faced on the property – what damage has been done? (such as to fences, stock, property etc).
- GPS readings at all visits.
- Social structures (demographics, absentee owners, lifestyle farmers).
- Who are their neighbours (to ensure that people aren't overlooked)

6.2.3. Rehabilitation of private land

Successes: Fencing

- The [wild dog fencing] project offered a unique opportunity to get a large amount of fencing work done that would not have been implemented through other programs .

Issues/improvements

- The dog fencing had various problems to do with boundary locations and standards where clearer policy is needed. More work was needed due to lack of policy.
- There were problems with the use of DPI staff supervising dog fence construction concerning State Forest boundaries.
- Staff faced time pressure because they worked on both the wild dog fencing and the weed project.
- There was confusion over whether the funding would be ongoing and some delays in getting approval for fence alignments. This meant timelines were tight.
- Lack of development of an appropriate data base that used across projects and by both regions – this made tracking and progress difficult.
- Collaboration with indigenous owners and the discovery of heritage sites from that association.
- Landholders taking the opportunity to protect remnant bush.
- There was anger about the damage caused to landholder fences when fire trails were constructed.
- It is difficult to formulate an appropriate emergency budget due to the varied nature of the debris to be removed and the terrain and location of fence lines. This led to the transfer of funds back to forests.

- Projects such as Debris Removal Along Crown Land Boundaries should be managed regionally for better communication between projects staff and more empathy with local issues.
- DSE refused to realign boundaries for ease of re-fencing on Crown Land.
- Obtaining contractors was difficult in the period after the fire because so much work was available.
- There were public objections to the environmental damage caused by the Debris Removal leading to disputes with neighbours which are ongoing.

Successes: Volunteer coordination

- This sub-project had a 'huge positive impact on the recipients as highlighted by all involved, from coordinators to Department project staff'. The support of the volunteers was seen by the landholders as greater than just clearing fences as it was an emotional boost to know people were giving up their time to help them recover.
- Different approaches were taken by Gippsland and the North East, although in both cases arrangements were made with Municipal Recovery Committees and volunteers supported the recovery and rebuilding effort.

Issues/improvements

- The compilation of the volunteer list took time (up to four months) and by then the interest in volunteering had waned.
- Volunteers were 'unaware of the landholders needing time to recover before moving into clearing mode and being ready for the volunteers'.
- Volunteer teams needed to have a variety of skills (such as fencing and removal of fencing, in addition to four wheel drive experience).
- A clear list/ database of eligible landholders is required by the coordinators early in the project otherwise time and resources are wasted in contacting the wrong people. This also would allow for better matching of landholders to volunteers.
- There was a feeling that media interest in the fires waned after a few months which led to the perception that the fires were 'over with' even though recovery had a long way to go.
- It was also necessary for the support committees to have links to other departments and potential access to other sources of funding.

Establishment of stock containment lines

- The SCAs provided the added benefit of containing the threat of weed seed contamination from imported fodder.
- If possible there should be one visit per landholder even if this involved 2-3 Department staff.

- Flexibility was required by staff in relation to the implementation of SCAs because distances from watercourses and watering points varied.

Success: Fodder Relief

The success of the program relied on the local VFF coordinators. They are able to make timely and informed decisions on where the need is greatest. The coordinators need to be supported as some landholders may be unhappy with the process.

Issues/improvements

- The 'donations' can create tension between those receiving them and those who do not.'
- Project staff have made suggestions as to how the distribution can be handled better.
- Subsidising transport costs appears to be an option that avoids influencing the market price of fodder.
- The transportation of fodder heightens the risk of weed contamination from other regions.

6.2.4. Restoration and protection of ecological and cultural heritage assets

Successes

- These projects showed what can be achieved when different groups can be brought together to work on common issues. One good example is the work done with the indigenous community and the identification of many sites previously unknown.
- A good job was done initially in relation to pest plant control but more follow-up is needed beyond three years.
- In relation to non-indigenous sites there was very good cross-tenure coordination, the building of relationships with stakeholders and the collection of information on sites, both mining and huts.
- Involvement of universities and community groups has proven useful in getting people to understand impacts and the regeneration/ rehabilitation process.

Issues/improvements

Long term planning:

- Many effects are long-term (moss beds, sediment, water quality/ yield, habitats) and need to be treated accordingly.

- Long term commitment needed for Alpine Rehabilitation.
- Long term process of recovery for species.
- Resourcing for long-term monitoring and delivery (NVM).
- Budget needed over 4-5 years, not 2 years.
- Further funding needed for site protection – indigenous and European cultural heritage sites in particular.

Post fire management

- Post-fire management is important in relation to threatened species, e.g. weeds.
- Information needed on how long Mt. Pilot will take to recover.
- Protection against further disturbance needed post fire in most cases.
- Need to control vandalism of cultural sites (non-Indigenous) that are uncovered by the fire.

Other

- Recognition of other factors besides fire may contribute to species number, i.e. drought.
- Struggle for recognition of importance of moss beds, threatened species.
- Should fire containment lines be placed along narrow ridges where they have the greatest potential to disturb indigenous sites?
- Late getting organised – i.e. Threatened species (the importance of transition from suppression to recovery).
- Natural processes – have a lot to learn, funding decisions need improvement.
- Cultural sites need to be on fire management plans and maps so as to protect them during suppression activities.
- Property can be rebuilt but once an Aboriginal site is disturbed or destroyed it can't be rebuilt. The information from the site is lost forever.
- Easy access routes for machinery are most likely to have been easy access routes in the past for pre-contact populations.
- Area provides good communications stories for the whole program but is often least funded.

Success: Wild dog management

- Local wild dog controllers were employed because they are familiar with the bush in their locality, have strong community links and are trusted.
- Planning of poisoning programs drew on knowledge from a wide range of stakeholders from both government and the community, which was also found to be effective.
- Media coverage was also found to increase participation in events such as fencing field days.

Issues/improvements

- Evaluation feedback also identified that the use of a specific individual to implement actions (while simple in delivery) is not as effective as having multiple delivery sites using a range of individuals for projects such as fence assessment.

Successes: Pest plant management

- There is a need for a combination of early response then follow up (some weeds can be tackled immediately, but some require time to appear).
- The project used an Expression of Interest panel list of contractors and this was seen as a good approach and should be continued.
- Contractors were found to work better than employing casuals/staff.
- There was also a lot of support from partners such as CMAs, water authorities and leaseholders.

Issues/improvements

- Longer term funding (at least three years) was also seen as necessary by a number of stakeholders.
- Quicker allocation of funds and appointment of appropriately skilled people/project officers.
- A need for immediate response to predators immediately post fire and up to five years after.
- It was also felt that a dedicated coordinating team in addition to coordinators and project leaders are required early on.

Successes: Grazing management strategy

- The establishment of a scientific advisory panel to provide independent scientific advice was a good approach to show transparency in the process and consider a wide range of issues from a number of perspectives.
- Setting up a dedicated and multifunctional/ interagency project team with a clear and disciplined project plan and milestones managed by a project manager with time commitments to match was a good approach which kept the process on track.
- Being prepared to consult widely with stakeholders throughout the process. Decisions were consultative as well as scientific.

Issues/improvements

- The PV Grazing management system proved of great worth in dealing with this issue efficiently and effectively. DSE's lack of such a system delayed the process somewhat and made it more difficult for them.
- The difference in licence conditions also led to inconsistencies in approach including DSE approach to measuring recovery not being suitable for National Park areas.
- Not 'having enough field staff on ground to manage the return to grazing conditions'.
- Improve interagency liaison. [There is a] need for a pre-project brief so as all involved are clear on the possibility of overlapping/ duplication of projects as well as key players for communication purposes.

6.2.5. Cultural values management: Indigenous Heritage

Success

- The project resulted in 'great relationship building that wasn't in place before the fires and project'.

Issues/improvements

- There is a need to have Indigenous people readily available during and after fire to advise on values and monitor rehabilitation.
- Be realistic about time frames, working with communities is a long process and there are still many issues surrounding representation for areas with traditional owners and legislative groups that are unresolved.
- Steering Group and Project team structure with indigenous representation put strength in project administration and management.
- Consult widely and engage early.
- Need to focus now more on research, excavations and partnerships [in order to] take advantage of momentum and continue to drive recommendations through fire management.
- Obtaining community agreement on involvement in works/ surveys. There were difficulties and delays caused by frictions between traditional owner groups and local Indigenous communities.

6.2.6. Cultural values management – Non-Indigenous

Successes

- The fire provided a good opportunity to discover new structures and other features of cultural significance.
- It was also felt that the cooperative DSE/PV approach worked well as heritage values and significance needed to be assessed in a tenure-blind manner
- The Fire Recovery Manager noted that ‘the fire gives great opportunities for survey of mining areas due to biomass reduction’.
- The operators responded well to ecological workshops of this nature and there was a need to conduct them on a more regular basis.

Issues/improvements

- It was also recommended that funding over a 2-3 year period would be more appropriate because a considerable amount of time is required for survey-strategy development-planning in addition to finding contractors to undertake the work.
- One project officer noted that there was a need to move faster immediately post fire in initiating projects.
- A Project Officer made a recommendation that a strategy be developed for managing historic values during future fire events. This could be done through workshops with staff, tour operators etc.
- The delay in funding was an issue as was getting staff to read and comment on large documents (the surveys) during busy times of the year.

6.2.7. Reinstatement of park and forest assets

Successes

- There was a good initial response which saw the reopening quickly once the risk assessments had been made.
- The rehabilitation program provided an opportunity to replace damaged structures to contemporary standards
- PV had insurance claims process well in hand.
- Joint track reopening strategy and huts info on the PV website worked well.
- Return promotions and interpretive training for tour operators worked well.
- Cross tenure/ cross agency focus is good and cost effective with assets projects such as huts, cultural heritage sites, and track reopening, engaging stakeholders, ecological tour operators.

- Return promotions early on were good and appreciated by local communities and businesses.

Issues/ improvements

- Communications focus should now be on telling people what facilities have been replaced and encouraging people back into the bush. (As with recent huts article).
- Need good communications in the first year to encourage people back into Alpine resorts.

Residual risks:

- Mine shafts, falling trees etc – public liability. Fires expose new risks.
- Bridge standards.
- Still a high risk to assets including those recently replaced from landslips and high run off, post fire.
- Keeping tracks open with rapid regeneration of understorey shrubs and continued tree [growth] will be a challenge.
- Ongoing maintenance of recently improved recreation facilities.
- Repair completion.
- Ongoing funds to maintain recently improved recreation facilities.

Data:

- There is a need for good recreation facility databases – DSE's needs work – some learnings from PV to be had here.
- Need improvements to recreation facility registers – both PV and DSE.
- Need good sign plans and standards.
- Importance of good datasets: asset mapping.

Delays:

- Delays in budget splits between PV and DSE and between regions caused delays in project start up times particularly in the autumn right after the fire.
- Delays in budget decisions, particularly splits in funds between regions and agencies chewed up time.

Miscellaneous

- Needs measured response to risk.
- Challenge ahead is to build on the co-operation and relationships established across agency and with communities.
- Lack of clarity in autumn/ winter 2003 with how or if the rehabilitation process should be integrated with IMT.
- Road, Track and Assets across public and private land.

Successes: Repair and replacement of National Park infrastructure assets

- Park re-opening strategy being developed in consultation with community and [is a] very useful approach to asset re-establishment.
- The community was 'very supportive' and there was 'lots of passion and interest in [the] huts'.

Issues/improvements

- With the large number of contracts needed, deficiencies in the system showed up relating to consistent and efficient contract management.
- There were also difficulties in sourcing contractors to do the work.
- Another issue was 'interdepartmental and agency rivalry' which 'appeared to slow the process considerably'. This was in relation to getting rehabilitation plans approved, and then agreeing within the agencies on who was to deliver what.

This situation was found to have improved considerably in the second year.

6.2.8. Parks Victoria East Region Evaluation findings

As with the DPI evaluation set out above, this evaluation raises some matters dealt with elsewhere however it is reproduced here because of the greater detail and useful insights.

Successes

- Early initiation of rehabilitation programs in order to make use of available expertise and equipment.
- The Incident Management Team was (in many cases) retained to manage the commencement of rehabilitation.

Issues/Improvements

- Data gathered for mapping rehabilitation lines was of poor quality and there were many errors on the maps provided.
- Lack of compatibility between Parks Victoria and DSE systems (e.g. Mapinfo and Arcview). It is suggested that either the two systems should be made compatible or staff should be trained in both systems.
- Staff within Incident Management Teams needed the skills and equipment and equipment to record the containment lines they were putting into place on a daily basis.
- The Rehabilitation Plans were cumbersome and difficult to interpret for on-ground works application. The plans should be more strategic than prescriptive.
- Generic specifications, project briefs (including standards) and generic contract documents need to be incorporated into the Rehabilitation Plans.

Repair and replacement of State forest assets

- Need for better understanding of DSE insurance policy and its application to these assets,
- Engage/second additional staff to survey, collate, plan and if necessary, deliver infrastructure projects.

Recommendation: That the lessons learnt from the suite of projects designed in response to the 2003 Alpine fires be used to guide planning and policy for future bushfire events.

7. Residual Risks

This section responds to evaluation question 2: *What residual risks remain for government (Parks Victoria, DSE, DPI, CMAs, local government)?* And question 5. *How have the fire-affected communities perceived the recovery effort and how well do they believe they have been assisted in the recovery effort?*

Residual risk refers to areas where the community is still dissatisfied and may require ongoing government attention. Government has an interest in reducing, if not eliminating, the residual risk. Handmer et al (2001) argue that emergency management and environmental risk management should involve engaging stakeholders to communicate the issues and concerns (the residual risks) and take part in developing appropriate management responses during planning phases. A significant aspect of managing residual risk thus involves processes of community engagement and empowerment. It is not suggested here that the community be involved with risk assessment at this stage but for future events this should occur.

A significant amount of residual risk generated by the 2003 bushfires has been dealt with by projects funded through the recovery initiative. In particular, environmental risks posed to waterways and catchments, have been addressed extensively, as have the risks to the public posed by damaged built assets. Much recovery activity to date has dealt with residual risk, even if implicitly.

Writing in the context of environmental protection and biodiversity conservation from the perspective of Environment Australia (now the Department of Environment and Heritage), Handmer et al. (2001: 242) noted:

The success of a recovery plan will depend to a large degree on the human and financial resources available for its implementation, and on the commitment of stakeholder groups. Building the capacity to respond to residual risk will also increase the likelihood of long-term success. In determining membership of a recovery planning team, Environment Australia advises that consideration should be given to issues of representation, manageability, expertise and resources, commitment and capability. Broadly, recovery teams can include representatives from any groups that will/should have a role in implementing actions, [and] have a diverse range of experience.

Based on the data collected as part of this evaluation (both secondary and primary), the principal residual risks remaining after the 2003 Alpine fires are found to fall into the following categories:

1. Ensuring that lessons learnt and skills are not lost;
2. Funding for continuing work; and
3. Community perceptions.

These residual risks are summarised below and many of these risks are addressed in other sections of this report. Most of the recommendations that form a part of this evaluation report are part of a broader risk management framework. This is in line with calls from the Victorian Auditor-General's office (2003) which identifies risk management as an important aspect of effective governance in the public sector. This report has

tended to focus on managing residual risks which can be addressed through better planning, governance and communication. It is taken that physical risks remaining from the bushfires (such as fallen trees and exposed mine shafts etc.) are more a matter for the regions to attend to, never the less the major risks are listed below.

The issue of building on lessons learnt and recommendations are dealt with elsewhere in this report.

7.1. Ensuring that lessons learnt and skills are not lost

There is a concern expressed in a number of quarters that a lot had been learnt during the recovery process and it was important to build on that experience. Some of the specific issues here are to do with:

- Collating data and having it in an available form for the future. Incorporating this data into further research.
- Preventing the loss of capacity and skills in staff.
- Preventing the loss of local knowledge.
- Needing to build on the cooperation and relationships already established through the fires.
- Maintaining interest in recovery between fires.

DSE through its publication *The Recovery Story* sought to document some of what happened in the recovery period.

7.2. Funding for continuing work

Erosion is an issue that is likely to remain for a number of years, both for public and private land. Potential problem areas include:

- Catchment surface erosion.
- Track damage.
- Re-silting of dams.
- Damage to streams and rivers.

In some cases there is more work to be done, such as repair completion. Pest plant and animal reduction is an area requiring ongoing attention. Areas requiring monitoring are the wild dog program and related fencing, pigs and deer. English Broom and other weeds will remain a problem. Other issues were:

- Public liability risks from fallen trees and exposed mine shafts etc.
- Threatened species, biodiversity issues.
- The effect of the fire will continue to affect water quality until vegetation has been re-established.
- Funding for monitoring for residual risk was needed over a number of years.
- Still using base funds to fix recovery jobs/fire effects that can impact on other projects.
- Tracks regrown because of regeneration.

7.3. Community perceptions of the recovery effort

Given the focus of the evaluation on governance and management arrangements for bushfire recovery, the evaluation did not involve engaging fire-affected landholders directly. In order to gain an appreciation of the community's perceptions of the recovery effort and the assistance they were provided, it was necessary to assess this using the documentation provided and discussion with Initiative staff. The section relating to outcomes from the rehabilitation of private land projects also includes community satisfaction with the recovery effort.

In the main, it appears as though the community were reasonably satisfied with the Government's recovery effort and the level of assistance provided. This was so especially after the different programs and projects were in place and the benefits began to be felt.

Nevertheless there are some residual risks arising from the community perceptions of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative. These include:

- A lingering perception that DSE (or "government") was to blame for causing the fires. This issue was covered extensively by the Esplin Review and is being addressed by various initiatives arising from this. The notion that it was the government's fault will be heightened at times when impacts recur, eg erosion off burned hillsides following heavy rain. There is also the potential reduction in water harvesting levels as forests regrow.
- In some quarters there are poor perceptions of government and agencies by the community arising from the size, intensity and length of time covered by the fire together with the way that the recovery program was implemented. Some of the risk could have been overcome at the time by better communication about the recovery and this is recommended in the future. The need to deal with these perceptions is still required in the view of some respondents to explain (i) what has been delivered, and (ii) that the initiative does not continue indefinitely, and (iii) that the level of support may not always be consistent. A strong communication campaign has been suggested to address this as well as local advocacy by stakeholders. Failure to manage this might result in community views that Government has walked away from the issue.
- Landholders who had different priorities immediately after the fire (that is those who were not in a position to even consider rebuilding riparian fences and replanting vegetation) may perceive that they have been unfairly treated when they decide to carry out these activities in the future without the benefits of the recovery program .
- Operating in reverse of the points made above, some staff felt that the level of assistance provided in response to the 2003 Alpine Fires sets a precedent for what affected landholders will expect in the future. The matter was also raised in relation to public land where it was suggested that the hut replacement by Parks Victoria was very effective but this sets a precedent for DSE which does not have the resources to do the same.
- The closure of the alpine grazing areas may place subsequent pressure on State Forests to carry additional stock but this may not be possible because of the fires.

Recommendations

Continuing work

That managers of program areas (catchments and water quality, assets, cultural and ecological heritage and private landholders) assess what work still needs to be done and what contingencies need to be accounted for that can cause on going risk and apply for funds to complete the works.

Community perceptions

That an explanation be given to the fire affected communities by way of closure about what works were carried out in the recovery phase, what was achieved and what still needs to be completed. The perception that DSE was responsible for the fires could also be addressed at this time.

The comment was made by the DPI that “final community information sessions were proposed by DSE but DPI were not keen to be involved as it was felt they would inflame and agitate what is now a settled community”. In the end the sessions were not held but it is thought that some sort of closure is still needed.

8. Governance and management

The following section addresses the following evaluation questions:

3. *How well has governance and management occurred overall at the Initiative level, and what can be learnt or improved?*
7. *What are the major learnings from this initiative that would be applicable to other whole of government programs and/or any future cross agency/Departmental recovery initiatives?*
8. *What is the role of the media in recovery?*

8.1. The Victorian Auditor-General's perspective on governance

The Victorian Auditor-General, speaking on the topic of governance and risk management in 2003, quoted the International Federation of Accountants who stated that 'governance is concerned with structures and processes for decision making, accountability, control and behaviour at the top of an entity' (Cameron 2003). The Auditor-General noted that governance is generally understood to encompass issues of authority, stewardship, leadership, behaviour, direction and control, in addition to how an organisation sets and achieves its objectives, monitors risk and assesses performance.

As stated in the literature review, the Auditor-General identifies that the heart of good governance involves leadership, stewardship, management control and risk management, and that the governance arrangements of a governing body (such as a Government Department or agency) is underpinned by four pillars:

1. Strategy and direction;
2. Structures and relationships;
3. Performance monitoring; and
4. Compliance and accountability.

8.1.1. Strategy and direction

Significantly, in the context of this particular evaluation, the Auditor-General notes that 'it is important that strategy, policies and other directions be clearly specified, communicated and understood by those parties responsible for their implementation. Responsibilities and accountabilities must be clear' (Cameron 2003).

In the case of the bushfire recovery, this strategy and direction was provided by the Ministerial Taskforce Final Report, in addition to individual specific project specifications.

8.1.2. Structures and relationships

This aspect of governance involves the organisational structure, business processes, standards of behaviour, roles and relationships and communication. As Cameron (2003) asserts:

Effective governance requires explicit role definition of key participants in the governance process. It must include the control, reporting and accountability arrangements established to facilitate communication, action and monitoring. Governing body members need a proper induction process to ensure they are clear about their role and about that of management, the nature of the relationship with government (usually the responsible minister) and the department. The nature, timing and method of information flows need to be defined.

8.1.3. Performance monitoring

Performance monitoring is another critical aspect of good governance arrangements. The Victorian Auditor-General states that governing bodies need to report against goals, money, tasks and risk management activities and 'this means that coherent data collection and reporting systems that need to be coordinated, integrated and accurate' (Cameron 2003).

8.1.4. Compliance and accountability

Compliance and accountability involves policies and procedures to ensure that the governing body is complying with relevant legislation and is meeting its stated objectives and responsibilities. This process is assisted by internal audits, external evaluations and annual reports.

8.1.5. Prerequisites for effective governance

The Auditor-General identifies a number of prerequisites for effective governance in the public sector. They are:

- Establishing clear roles for each of the parties, and ensuring that all parties understand their own roles and those of the other parties.
- Constructive relationships and accountabilities based on those roles.
- An effective governing body.
- Effective monitoring arrangements which reflect the balance between the interests of parliament, executive oversight and the autonomy of the governing body and/or management.
- Effective communications.
- Good external reporting.
- Sound risk management practices.

8.2. Governance of the Bushfire Recovery Initiative

8.2.1. Local and regional level

From the data collected it appears that at the local and regional level the management worked well and projects were effectively delivered, sometimes in very difficult circumstances. The rehabilitation and recovery plans were well targeted and the funding provided was, in the main, adequate (although there were some issues relating to the budget, see below). As noted earlier, at the operational level the cross tenure approach to the projects was effective and in general the cooperation between agency staff was at a high level. The success on the ground can be attributed to a considerable extent to the dedication of the staff concerned.

8.2.2. State wide level

At the statewide level there were some concern regarding the clarity of budgetary information and reporting against project deliverables but overall, it was felt that governance was adequate, the oversight of the Initiative was well managed and that:

Under the circumstances of planning and implementing the recovery from a major disaster within extremely short timelines the project achieved its outcomes of successfully managing a major environmental disaster with the resources available.

While the Ministerial Task Force moved to identify key recovery areas, there was later some variation in the interpretation of policy, particularly the assistance given to private landholders. These variations in policy caused some frustration and delays at the local level. Of greater concern was the delay in implementing the initiatives on the ground once the priorities were identified and planning began. One area that caused difficulties was at the level of the Steering Committee where delays occurred in signing off on the projects allowing the next phase of the recovery project to proceed (this issue is further explored below under the section titled 'budget management'). A range of participants have spoken of competition by some of the staff from the different agencies in the Steering Committee and a perception that Parks Victoria was inappropriately leading and driving the process. This also caused delays in agreeing to projects.

To assist the process and the work of the Steering Committee, the Project Team was formed but there *'was a considerable overlapping of effort and lack of clarity about roles and responsibilities between the Project Team, Policy and Planning Teams and the regions. This affected the smooth operation of the Steering Committee and had a negative impact in the field and the Policy and Planning Teams. This lack of clarity was exacerbated by the concurrent Departmental restructuring'* (Just Add Water, 2003). Having said this, it was articulated by a respondent in our evaluation that the 'project team and steering committee structure with the ability to make decisions worked well'.

8.2.3. Main messages

The strongest message to come from this review was the lag time between the initial phase and the next stage of recovery getting underway. Relevant to this aspect of the Initiative was the role of Treasury which stipulated that all monies (from Treasurer's Advances) had to be spent within one year. This caused anxiety about how the projects could be completed within this time frame given the initial delay.

While projects in general delivered the outcomes required of them there are many instances in the various evaluation reports and other data indicating confusion about boundaries of projects, lines of authority, contract management, insurance issues and the like which point to a strong need for more planning before a similar event. There is a strong desire from those involved that the shortcomings, successes and knowledge gained should not be lost before the next fire. These issues are addressed in the section relating to planning for recovery.

The diagrams below detail the organisational structures for the suppression and recovery phases of the 2003 Alpine fires. These models are built upon in the proposed bushfire recovery structure appearing later in this report.

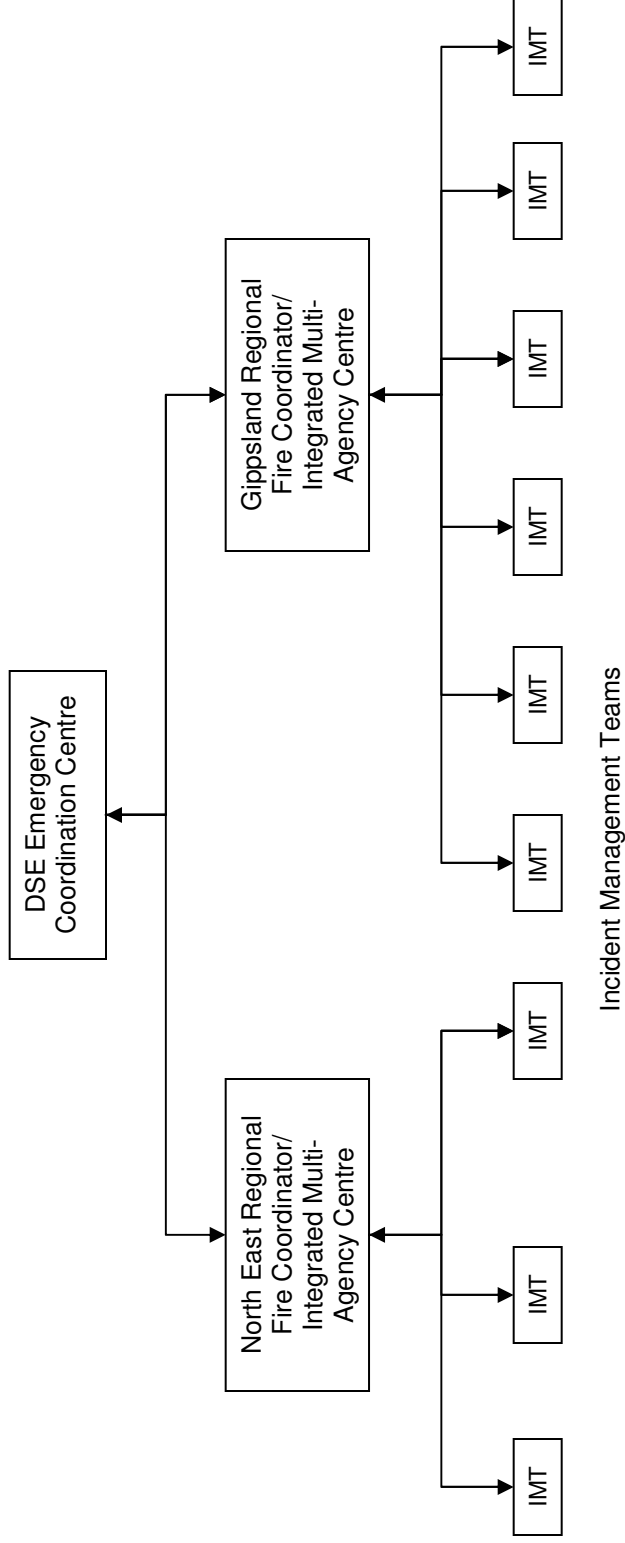


Figure 1.. Bushfire Suppression Organisational Structure – 2003 Alpine Fires

Incident Management Teams (IMTs) are made up of a Planning Officer, Operations Officer and Logistics Officer. They are responsible for coordinating the suppression activity in their specific area and reporting activity back to the Regional Fire Coordinator (and the Integrated Multi-Agency Centre once it is established).

At present, the bushfire recovery phase is seen as separate to this response phase.

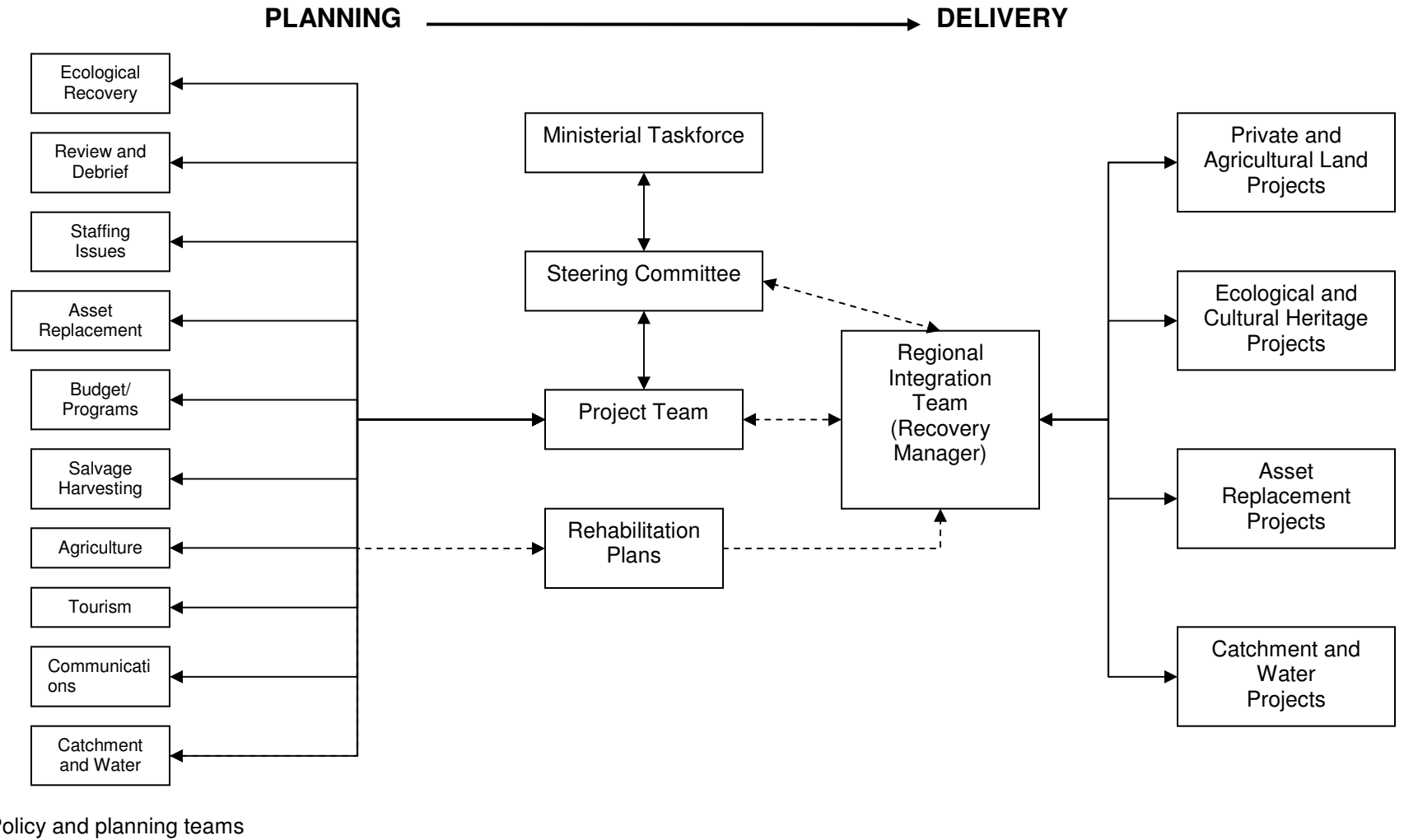


Figure 2. Bushfire Recovery Organisational Structure – 2003 Alpine Fires

8.3. Managing Recovery

8.3.1. Moving smoothly from fire suppression to recovery

The need to move more smoothly from the suppression to recovery is strongly supported by the data gathered for this study, including feedback from Initiative staff and the broader literature on emergency management and recovery. Suppression and recovery should not be seen as separate events. A designated person (or persons) for fire recovery should be part of the fire suppression team and should be in a position to take over immediate control and capitalise on the effort already mounted. Decisions that need to be made immediately after fire suppression is complete range from making decisions about the use of equipment to handling the media. The Fire Recovery Officer would also be responsible for coordinating implementation teams and accessing personnel with relevant skill and experience. The development of a register of staff with recovery expertise (recommended elsewhere in this report) would be useful in this respect.

As one respondent put it there is a need to avoid people 'going back to their corners' and rivalry occurring after the main event. There also needed to be an appreciation of the political environment and the need for Government to act quickly in responding to an emergency. As one person noted:

In the immediate aftermath of such an event, we need to expect/predict a political desire to respond in some way, that is, to "do something". We should be active in anticipating this and, to the greatest extent possible, influencing these early decisions along the most appropriate paths.

The planning and structural changes recommended later address this point.

It was also suggested that there should be at least one such recovery officer trained within each of the fire districts. These Recovery Officers will need to be nominated beforehand. This will be a matter for the relevant agencies.

It is recognised that one difficulty here is the fact that many personnel are involved in both the suppression and recovery and often they are exhausted. This raises issues of staffing and planning which are discussed in more detail below.

8.3.2. Communication and community engagement

Communication at the local, regional and statewide level could be improved.

During suppression

The media plays a significant role in communication, as do departmental extension staff who come into direct contact with fire-affected landholders. The role of communication

and the media during suppression is widely addressed in the Esplin report. That inquiry found that:

In general, the efforts of the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Country Fire Authority to keep the community informed of the 2002-2003 summer fires established a new standard in emergency response in Victoria. Importantly, the agencies advised communities on how to prepare for the passage of fire, as well as informing them of the progress of the fires. Community meetings, community telephone trees, call centres and the support of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation's radio and other media outlets all resulted in a heightened level of community preparedness.

Setting up Community Information Units within Incident Management Teams was an effective way to provide accurate and timely information to communities that could be affected by the passage of the fires. Community members were briefed by senior members of the Incident Management Team and were able to question them directly.

The Inquiry found that the DSE and CFA's use of the Internet as a means of informing the wider community about the progress of the fires and their efforts to contain them, was a significant advance that should be further developed. The scope for Internet-based systems to link users to other useful information was also noted (Esplin et al 2003: 212).

During recovery

There was some concern expressed that the communication structure established during the suppression phase of the bushfires was subsequently disbanded during the recovery phase. This made it difficult to articulate the intent of the recovery initiative and also to publicise some of the key successes. This point is reflected in the comment below:

During the fire suppression effort an extensive community information and media program was established and utilised. This could have been retained in some form and extended to the recovery program to keep the community informed on the full range of recovery activities on private and public land, i.e. progress with works, availability of assistance etc.

It was thus suggested that there was a need to recruit communications officers and activate a recovery communications strategy prior to suppression activities ceasing. This would enable communications teams (made up of representatives from all agencies involved) to be effectively operating immediately after the fire has been suppressed. The skills needed by the communications officers would need to include the ability to manage 'outrage' (skills that officers from the Department of Human Services have). It was identified that such an approach would involve existing central agency communications staff on a part-time basis (for fire recovery) and then this group would assist in the establishment of a regional recovery communications team. It was suggested that the recovery budget should contain funding for at least one new full-time (fixed tenure) appointments and that recruitment should occur immediately (during suppression). Regular meetings between the central communications group and the regional group would ensure that the set of skills among the staff would be used to full effect. There was also a suggestion that communications staff needed to be introduced to the locations, project teams and communities affected because existing regional knowledge was an advantage for some regional appointments.

Preventing duplication

While in the main it appears the community was satisfied with the support received, a deal of frustration was expressed at being visited by a number of people many of whom asked the same questions. This was also a point made in the Esplin report. It is understood that the development of an interagency information management system (accessible, for instance, by DHS, local government, DSE and DPI) is being explored by the State Emergency Recovery Unit. It was also identified by a group of stakeholders that:

Someone needs to take the lead [in communication]. Information flow is critical. Knowing where others are working (so as no double up occurs) is critical. This was handled by multiple task groups, at various levels across organisations. Knowing what the help/assistance was available so each Government representative can assist landholders get information was critical.

These comments support the development of a case management approach to dealing with affected individuals and could alleviate problems caused by already stressed landholders being contacted on a number of different occasions. The physical manifestation of this case management approach would be the establishment of a 'one-stop shop', which was found to be effective in the recovery from the ACT bushfires. Co-location of Municipal Emergency Recovery Centres and DSE Emergency Coordination Centres could also help foster this case management approach and improve communications between agencies.

Another issue that arises with regard to duplication is the need to prevent duplication of effort by staff in responding to requests for information from others within the recovery effort. An instance was cited in which one individual was asked to respond to the same request for information from different sources.

Use of local links

In order to promote and communicate recovery operations, it was also suggested that more effort could be put into utilising the strong community links already established by the Country Fire Authority. DSE has already undertaken work in this regard.

It is suggested that the issue of communications during recovery be assessed by a Working Group established as part of the new state emergency recovery planning arrangements (see later section). These efforts will need also to tie in with the extensive community engagement efforts being undertaken in response to the Esplin report (in particular the Public Land Fire Initiative).

Communication needs

Comments made by individuals involved in the creation and implementation of the Ministerial Task Force report stated that communication needs to take several parts into account. These are needs in respect of:

- The relevant government Ministers and Cabinet who need information about how the recovery effort is proceeding;
- The media so that they have got up to date information to inform the public;

- All individuals involved in the recovery effort so that their effort is recognised;
- The community so that they are kept informed as well as have the opportunity to tell their story;
- Communication officers will need to have the skills to deal with communities who are from time to time outraged and anxious during the recovery period; and
- Agency staff putting together a recovery plan so that they know how to have it accepted by Treasury and Cabinet so that it can be passed quickly and implemented.

It was also suggested that a single spokesperson for the recovery effort should be nominated. This person would need to be sufficiently skilled to attract the confidence of all agencies involved – ‘someone equally comfortable talking to landholders, scientists, senior management and Ministers’.

The former Bushfire Recovery Communication Coordinator offered the following ways in which the communication of future recovery efforts could be improved:

- Act quickly to brief the media about recovery plans and identify how problems and issues will be countered.
- Liaise quickly and closely with central/ regional communications teams to ensure all parties understand priorities and reporting relationships.
- Structure a clear Media Opportunities List – identify well in advance those items most likely to attract media interest and establish methods of how these news topics can be maximised for public interest.
- Schedule regular Bushfire Recovery communications meetings.
- A Bushfire Education Program (utilised this time in the North East but not in Gippsland) should be activated in the affected regions to introduce the bushfire story and recovery actions into the school/community group networks. The emphasis should be on expanding the program beyond schools to engage a range of stakeholders.
- Ensure commitment to the communications process from all agencies involved with recovery – a more cohesive and impressive approach would have been to provide one multi-agency story.
- Ministerial media advisers should be invited to the early Bushfire Recovery communications sessions so that they can identify potential Ministerial media opportunities well in advance.

There is more information regarding communication and public perceptions in Volume 2 of this report.

Recommendations with regard to this section are made in the later section on planning.

8.3.3. Clarity of roles and responsibilities within the whole of government approach

One of the messages to emerge from the evaluation was that roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability were clear during the *suppression* phase of the bushfires (within the Incident Control System of the Australian Inter-Service Incident Management System), but roles, responsibilities and lines of accountability for *recovery* were less

clear. It was suggested that a 'tenure-blind' approach to bushfire suppression has long been established but that this has not translated to the recovery sphere. Some of the projects as part of the 2003 recovery initiative, in particular the cultural and ecological heritage projects, were successful in generating an interagency, cross tenure approach, but it was felt that this took some time to establish. Future recovery efforts can be informed by the approach and learnings from these projects.

It was also suggested by some stakeholders that it was unclear who was driving the recovery operations and that communication between agencies before, during and after events needed to be improved. In particular, the DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria staff engaged during this evaluation remained uncertain as to what roles were played by the Department of Human Services, Department for Victorian Communities and local government in the recovery effort. There were also some uncertainties expressed about the role of the CMAs. It was suggested that local government could have been used better to engage local landholders and for general communications, and the same is true for the Country Fire Authority (see draft CFA-DSE Cooperative Agreement on Recovery in Volume 2).

Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of various agencies in relation to one another will need to be addressed by planning before the next major event. DHS and local government will also need to be involved with this conversation. Again, the new arrangements for emergency recovery planning in Victoria should assist with this process.

Recommendations with regard to this section are made later.

8.3.4. Contract management and insurance

There were some issues in relation to contract management in some cases. In the case of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural heritage projects the full tender process undertaken delayed the start of the projects for some months which allowed for a significant amount of vegetation regrowth which slowed down contractors due to loss of visibility. The DPI only had one contract to employ agricultural advisors at call and there were no difficulties here.

An example of good contract management was Parks Victoria who used a panel contract system (listing previously registered contractors) to carry out weeds work under the bushfire recovery initiative. This significantly sped up the process of getting works carried out.

Where an expression of interest or tender process was most appropriate, it was suggested that there needed to be a streamlined process for approval of contracts. It was also suggested that there needed to be agreement by all agencies (in particular DSE and Parks Victoria) on templates for contracts. The Wilson's Promontory Recovery Plan is seen as a good reference point in this regard.

There was also some suggestion that Parks Victoria had dedicated staff and a good system in place for handling insurance claims whereas DSE did not. Planning for

insurance issues could take place within the recovery planning structure proposed below.

Recommendations with regard to this section are made later.

8.2.5. Staffing issues

Issues relating to staffing arose in a number of areas from this evaluation. Results from both workshops indicated that regional staff felt that recovery workers should have been relieved of their normal duties or given support during the critical phase of the recovery effort. Needing to fulfil the obligations of the particular recovery project they were involved in, in addition to their normal tasks and deliverables was seen as too onerous. It was felt that management did not account for this meaning that staff faced difficulties in meeting their timelines. One representative from an agency indicated that staff from his organisation were reluctant to become involved with the recovery effort precisely because they were aware that their regular duties would not be covered in their absence.

One area in which DPI staff in particular faced challenges was in the provision of counselling to fire affected landholders. It was suggested (during our evaluation and in the DPI private land report) that staff needed some skill in dealing with traumatised landholders – not necessarily becoming grief counsellors but at least knowing how to give people support and/or refer them to more specialised services.

It was also felt that staff with the appropriate skills needed to be chosen for the suppression and recovery efforts. One person commented that:

[There is a] need to carefully manage how many people are thrown up for recovery operations initially. Some people did not necessarily have the appropriate skills, which made it difficult from a management perspective.

To address this issue, there was a call for the development of a register of staff with appropriate skills in recovery. This register could initially be based on the staff involved with the 2003 recovery and be updated on a regular basis. Furthermore, it was stated that there was a delay in filling recovery positions and this could perhaps be overcome by a simple expression of interest rather than a full recruitment procedure.

8.4. Budget management

The following section answers the evaluation question below:

4. How well has overall budget management occurred, and what can be learnt or improved?

Generally the view expressed was that the quantum of funds allocated was reasonable, the estimated requirements were close to the expenditure and (in the end) all funds were

accounted for. At the agency level the budget allocation was appropriate and once committed to the projects it generally worked well although the tracking and monitoring of funds caused difficulties mainly because of differences in budgetary procedures across DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria.

One regional stakeholder in the recovery effort felt that 'not enough of the resources reached the ground where it was needed'. This person felt that 'regional staff could have handled what staff were employed to do in Melbourne', which supports comments from another stakeholder who argued that there was a need to 'devolve integration of efforts to the greatest extent possible' and 'ensure resourcing is available to respond to community-generated initiatives' such as providing support to volunteers. While this may be the case, it was also strongly identified that the political imperatives of needing to account for funds at a State wide level always meant that the budget would have to be managed centrally. These matters can be further explored during the planning phase for recovery.

There were three main issues that arose in relation to the budget: they related to the time that it took for the funds to be allotted to the projects; the need for the budget to extend beyond one year; and the difficulty of tracking funds once distributed.

8.4.1. Delays in funding

Timing of budgetary approval and allocation was an issue in two periods: immediately after the recovery started and when the longer term planning began.

Once the suppression finished and the recovery began some decisions had to be made immediately, mainly to do with the rehabilitation of the control lines. This work began immediately as the equipment was still in place, however, it had to proceed without budgetary approval.

The second issue here was the length of time that it took after the planning began before the allocation was signed off for the projects to commence work. In some cases it took up to six months before the work began. This delay affects the success of many activities such as the protection of threatened species because the period immediately after the fire is most important. It has been suggested that during suppression there is an understanding that agencies are able to spend as much as is needed to suppress the fires but that funding for recovery is more uncertain and agencies are more reluctant to undertake recovery works where funding has not received approval. Some staff suggested that agencies need to 'take a risk' and begin recovery works before funding has been approved. This practice would be in line with the way in which fire suppression is currently managed. These matters need to be clarified.

Interagency rivalry

Another issue to emerge was interagency 'competition for funds after the Ministerial Taskforce had announced the funds that would be available for recovery'. It is understood that some of the competition occurred because the majority of the funds announced had been re-directed from other programs and projects. While the *Ministerial*

Taskforce on Bushfire Recovery Final Report identified the total amount of monies that were to be spent on particular areas, there was apparently little indication of how the funds would be divided among the agencies involved. It was felt that the rivalry between agencies could have been overcome by having a 'global budget' (that is, the budget for the entire Initiative) which was 'more transparent and easier to understand'.

In order to address these issues relating to budget management, it has been suggested that there needs to be a structure in place to ensure that there is no interagency 'posturing' and delays caused by that. The funding needs to be made available quickly once the planning has been done with an assessment or recognition that the recovery phase has to be commensurate with the fire event and is likely to stretch over a number of years.

As one respondent put it:

A recovery phase is significantly longer than the incident phase and in most cases far more demanding. Therefore there needs to be a recovery team (proportional to the size of the incident) mobilised from the beginning to maximise the use of the technical capabilities and at the same time not reducing their effectiveness through overwork.

This also supports the recommendation for a dedicated Fire Recovery Officer to be a member of Incident Management Teams.

8.4.2. Length of funding

There was an issue with the budget in that some funds were allocated on a one year basis and this caused problems in relation to monies unspent at the end of that period. The problem was exacerbated by the slow start. The budget needs to be allocated across the whole of the anticipated recovery period. The initial allocation over the short time frame meant that in some cases there was a rush to get work done and at times this resulted in inefficiencies that would have been avoided if more time was known to be available at the outset. While some funds were able to be carried forward to the next year, there appeared to be some confusion in the regions as to what would happen to monies left unspent by the end of the first year. This may have been caused by the fact that funding provided through Treasurer's Advances have to be spent within the year they are allocated. Future planning for recovery needs to address this issue.

In relation to the recovery efforts on private land, the following comments were made:

The major issue associated with the budget was expenditure within short timelines. Recommendation 2 of the [DPI bushfire recovery on private land] report is 'that the timeframe should be appropriate to the size of the event'. Availability of funds, appropriate staff, contractors and traumatised landholders need to be coordinated. Initially, landholders were unable to take up the funds that were offered due to the trauma they had experienced but they did so in the subsequent year. The anticipated expenditure of the budget did not take into account the trauma experienced by landholders and its impacts on their decision making ability.

This supports the call to fund recovery projects for longer periods of time (commensurate to the size of the event).

One person suggested that a 'six monthly catch up with those still implementing any works that have resulted from the fire can demonstrate that these recovery efforts are necessary for many years after the fire'. This could then be used to provide evidence of the need for longer term funding arrangements.

8.3.3. Monitoring and reporting of projects

The monitoring and accountability of bushfire recovery projects was largely the responsibility of the Regional Integration Team who faced challenges in tracking funds once they had been distributed to the regions. The Regional Integration Team had a Budget Coordinator within its ranks but this person was still required to perform their regular duties, which was also an issue. Challenges faced in monitoring and accounting for projects were in part due to the use of different financial management systems by the three agencies involved (DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria) and the fact that the pool of money for recovery was made up of new funds in addition to funds that had been re-directed and claimed through insurance. This caused problems in reporting to Ministers as it was difficult to come to agreement over the figures at any given point (such as the length of fencing replaced).

Greater participation from DSE Corporate Finance (or at least someone familiar with treasury processes) was suggested as a way of overcoming the difficulties faced in accounting for expenditure by coordinating project monitoring and reporting across the regional project teams. It was recommended that the relevant project or finance officers involved with regional project teams should submit financial information (linked to the delivery of project outputs) to the Coordinator from Corporate Finance. The Coordinator, of whom at least part of their responsibilities would be dedicated solely to bushfire recovery, could put in place a system that generated consistency across and among the agencies involved with the whole of government recovery effort. As one stakeholder put it there was a need to:

Take the time to develop sound and agreed reporting systems, match the reporting points and detail what's required by the different levels of government.

This would lead to better data accessible by Ministers. Ultimately, this would also require more regional commitment to project monitoring and reporting.

The need for better tracking of projects to measure delivery and accountability was consistent with the report of Acumen Consulting who suggested that *project reporting requires improvements (in particular, the reporting of percentage of tasks completed, as compared to milestones; and estimated cost at completion)*. It appears that Parks Victoria had a good system in place to deal with this and similar contract management issues.

The comments below also capture some of the issues relating to budget management and project accountability:

Reporting on progress of recovery works was slow and inadequate at the start of the program and put pressure on field staff to provide information to all levels of government. Reporting at

the end of the program was very satisfactory and met requirements. Use of traffic light reporting format etc was working very well at the end of the program.

And:

Overall oversight and reporting was not well controlled until Jan 2004. This required a new more robust project control structure to be established. [The Bushfire Recovery Coordinator] did this. Also initiated the simplified monthly reporting and reporting through the Bushfire Recovery Steering Committee and Minister. An agreed approach to this upfront to use from day one would be preferred.

9. Planning for Emergency Recovery

The following section responds to the following evaluation questions:

7. *What are the major learnings from this initiative that would be applicable to other whole of government programs and/or any future cross agency/Departmental recovery initiatives?*
10. *What is an appropriate strategy for bushfire recovery planning in the interim phase (that is, between fires)?*

The need to plan in advance for recovery from disasters is widely recognised as a crucial element of emergency management. Many of the issues faced in attempting to implement the bushfire recovery initiative can be directly linked to a lack of planning before the event. Future recovery planning will also require significant input from the State Emergency Recovery Planning Unit and the associated Working Groups which are established to support this. It is also envisaged that local government will begin to play a greater role in recovery operations than they have done in the past. This was a point mentioned in the Esplin review and is also a matter for the State Emergency Recovery Unit (located within DHS).

As noted previously, planning activities need to take into account the experiences and learnings arising from the extensive efforts undertaken during recovery from the 2003 Alpine Fires and other recovery projects.

9.1. Emergency Management Australia guidelines for recovery planning

Emergency Management Australia (2004) notes that recovery plans need to link in with other planning relating to preparedness, response and recovery. This needs to occur at the local, regional and state/territory level and be in accordance with the existing legislation.

EMA also identifies that recovery plans should:

- Set out to develop and formalise arrangements for the effective management of the recovery process;
- Facilitate the recovery of affected individuals, communities and infrastructure as quickly and practicably as possible;
- Describe the organisational networks and structures appropriate to recovery from a range of different types and scales of events;
- Involve all agencies with a role to play in the recovery process, including response agencies;
- Only be detailed for specific functions, such as contact and resource listings;
- Be developed by all agencies responsible for providing specific recovery services;
- Be based on normal management strategies (agency recovery roles should preferably require only minor deviations from their normal functions);

- Be reviewed on a regular basis;
- Cater for a wide range and scale of events;
- Ensure community participation in the recovery process;
- Identify responsibilities and tasks of key agencies;
- Set out appropriate resourcing arrangements;
- Outline recovery management structures and management processes; and
- Be as simple as possible.

The EMA identifies the steps required in developing a recovery plan include:

1. Obtaining the appropriate authority for the development of the plan;
2. Obtaining detail of the scope to be covered by the plan. This is particularly important to ensure that the plan covers all required functions;
3. Detailing all the stakeholders to be involved, including those from other emergency management agencies;
4. Defining the aim of the plan (generally this is to facilitate the recovery of affected individuals, communities and infrastructure as quickly and as practicably as possible);
5. Consulting with stakeholders and communicating with the community in order to increase understanding, participation and ownership;
6. Developing the plan (to include activation mechanisms; responsibilities and tasks; recovery services; resourcing arrangements; and management structures and processes);
7. Gaining approval/endorsement of the plan and making it publicly available to relevant agencies and the community at large; and
8. Reviewing the plan regularly.

Following this process, EMA suggests a format for the recovery plan as follows:

- Authority – who has authority over the plan?
- Scope – the boundaries of the plan
- Functions – Including detailed aims
- Definitions – define recovery-specific terms
- Interface with other plans – including liaison with other emergency management committees
- Member agencies – including specific roles in planning, response and recovery
- Activation procedures – who does what in certain circumstances
- Services – what services are to be delivered, and by which agency or agencies
- Frequency – details of the frequency and arrangements of meetings
- Review/Exercises
- Contact list of stakeholders – attached as an appendix due to continual change

The Australian Government Community Services Ministers' Advisory Committee Disaster Recovery Subcommittee reviewed recovery arrangements across Australia and identified a number of areas at the state level where vulnerabilities may exist in relation to disaster recovery management and planning:

- *Lack of dedicated positions for recovery planning and development in both head office and regional/ district environments;*
- *Reliance upon the interest and commitment of individual staff to ensure preparedness in regions or districts; and*

- *Loss of corporate knowledge and commitment through staff turnover (particularly as, unlike response activity which is core business in emergency service organisations, involvement in recovery programs may only occur once or twice in a career) (CSMAC 2004: 25).*

The revised recovery arrangements outlined below are designed to assist in addressing these vulnerabilities by establishing a commitment to recovery in periods between disaster events (infrequent as they are).

The Review also identified a range of key characteristics which have led to effective state recovery programs. These can be used to inform the development of the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee and associated Functional Subcommittees. These characteristics are:

- Development of formalised structures, including coordination and operational procedures to achieve an integrated, whole-of-government approach to recovery (incorporating the key aspects of recovery);
- Agreed arrangements, such as partnerships or memoranda of understanding, to formalise service delivery arrangements;
- Development of positive working relationships with other recovery agencies and broader emergency management networks (often achieved through involvement in committees and practical exercises);
- Use of recovery taskforces or leaders to promote whole-of-government approaches to recovery; and
- A commitment to recovery management principles and concepts, including long-term recovery programs with the aim of empowering individuals and communities to manage their own recovery and enhance ongoing sustainability.

Effective recovery planning, management and implementation can also be assisted through the development of cross-jurisdictional networks and the use of expertise for ongoing mentoring of recovery planners.

The State Emergency Recovery Unit, located within the Emergency Management Branch of the Victorian Department of Human Services has, in response to the Commonwealth Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council review, released a position paper on restructuring the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. This new structure (see Figure 3 below) has been used as the basis for the proposed recovery planning arrangements within DSE. This Committee needs to be active rather than one whose members meet just to exchange information. It needs to plan, create policy and exchange Memoranda of Understanding in this phase.

9.2. Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee

Building on the framework adopted for restructuring the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee, it is suggested that the DSE take responsibility for the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee. This Subcommittee will be responsible for issues beyond fire recovery, for instance addressing planning for floods and disease outbreaks among animals.

9.2.1. Appointment of a Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager

It is recommended that a full-time manager be appointed by DSE as the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager and that this person be responsible for coordinating the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee. That person will serve as the representative on the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee (the ongoing position may become part-time once the new arrangements are in place). This person will need to have management experience (likely to be VPS Level 5 or 6).

This person will be responsible for co-opting members to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee and establishing the Working Groups that assist this Subcommittee. This Subcommittee will then be responsible for environmental recovery planning, with strong liaison with the Functional Subcommittees dealing with other aspects of recovery (Economic; Built environment; and Social, health and community). An outline of this structure follows (Figure 3).

Recommendation: That the structure presented here (or something similar) be accepted that sets up a planning framework for that work to begin immediately (see Figure 3).

It is also expected that the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager begin the process of developing a stronger culture of recovery planning within DSE, which is perceived to focus significantly on fire preparedness and response, but not recovery. The development of a register of staff with skills in recovery management (see 'staffing issues' under the governance and management section of this report) could also be the responsibility of the Recovery Manager.

During a bushfire event of significant scale, the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager will be responsible for managing and coordinating the recovery effort at a statewide level, with assistance with relevant regional personnel. The Functional Subcommittee and associated Working Groups should also form the basis of Bushfire Recovery implementation teams when the need arises.

Recommendation: That a Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager be appointed now within DSE. This person will be responsible for chairing the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee, establishing Working Groups and be a member of the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. The Recovery Manager will also play a significant role in the implementation of recovery efforts.

9.3.2. Working Groups

Supporting the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee will be a number of Working Groups, which the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager will be responsible for establishing. These Working Groups will be responsible for policy and

planning for future recovery operations. Based on the findings of this evaluation, the formation of five groups is suggested, although the ultimate structure and composition of the groups may vary. The five groups, suggested as a starting point, are as follows:

1. Budget, contract and insurance management.
2. Information and database management.
3. Human resource management (training, staffing policy).
4. Policy, planning and project management.
5. Community engagement and development.

Some issues will relate specifically to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee and be dealt within this discrete branch, but others issues will need to be addressed at a whole of government level, involving representatives from across the various Subcommittees (Social, health and community; Economic; and Built environment). As such, two strands of Working Groups are proposed: one strand that relates exclusively to each of the Recovery Subcommittees; and one strand that relates to all of the Recovery Subcommittees. Discussion with the Manager of the State Emergency Recovery Unit indicates that more work is still to be done on this. The table below indicates issues that will likely need to be addressed by the Working Groups at the natural and cultural environment and whole of government levels. The list of issues is by no means exhaustive and other issues will emerge as the structure comes into place.

Recommendation

That working groups be set up to deal with the planning for the next recovery operation. These Working Groups would fall under the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Committee and would cover the following areas (see section ‘Working Groups’ Vol. 1) and would take into account the learnings from the 2003 fires (see section ‘Specific Learnings’ Vol. 2).

Working Group 1. Budget, contract and insurance management

Issues relating specifically to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee	Issues relating to whole of government
<p>Budget</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition that the management of the budget centrally is appropriate and necessary. • Planning for how the budget is to be handled during the two periods: immediately after suppression and for the longer term planning. This means ensuring the availability of funding for recovery and rehabilitation works immediately after suppression; and allowing for a more rapid allocation of funds so projects can begin swiftly. • Ensuring systems and protocols are in place to avoid competition between agencies for funds. • Recognition that for large fires the recovery period is likely to extend for a number of years. • Development of protocols and procedures on how monies can allocated and tracked. Here a number of issues need to be taken into consideration: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Funds come from three sources: new money, re-directed money and insurance. - The use of different financial management systems by the different 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Funding using Treasurer’s Advances • Tendering processes • Development of standard contract templates • Dealing with insurance issues • Budget management and project accountability for whole of government operations.

<p>agencies and even within some agencies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Greater use of DSE Corporate Finance to coordinate budget monitoring. - Having finance officers from regional teams submit financial information (linked to the delivery of outputs) to the appointed Coordinator from Corporate Finance. <p><u>Contract management and insurance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of guidelines for when a full tender approach is needed and how to implement a streamlined tendering process. • Consideration of alternatives to full tender approach such as panel system for contractors. • Development of standard contract templates across agencies. • Development of uniform reporting process for projects across agencies on matters such as reporting points and detail. Adoption of the monthly and traffic light reporting format system which was used after January 2004 appears to be useful in this regard. • The use of dedicated staff to process and track insurance claims (such as used by Parks Victoria in 2003). 	
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Working Group 2. Information and database management

Issues relating specifically to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee	Issues relating to whole of government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a register of skilled recovery personnel (these are people working in a relevant field). • Development of a data base of other relevant experts (both inside and outside of government). • Development of consistent spatial data systems between DSE and Parks Victoria. • Recording of data collected during the 2003 fires on assets (e.g. Indigenous and non-Indigenous), parks, roads etc so it is available for future use. • Investigation of the appointment of a Data Manager who would manage the data gathered about the effects of the fires, assets lost, control lines etc. This person could work closely with the communication team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a multi-agency shared database for collecting landholder information after an emergency.

Working Group 3. Human resource management (training, staffing policy)

Issues relating specifically to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee	Issues relating to whole of government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Investigation of ways to assist exhausted personnel (including psychological support). • Development of staffing policy regarding release from other duties while on recovery duties. Recovery staff should be dedicated to the recovery tasks and not need to meet other deadlines at the same time. There needs to be recognition of this at the corporate level. • Development of training procedures for recovery workers. Training can include technical and procedural aspects of recovery, as well as how to assist traumatised individuals. • Ensuring training in project and contract management. • Ensuring that staff skilled in implementation of recovery are tasked more strategically as their expertise is invaluable. • Recognition of the effects of stress on staff caused by factors such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Changes to budgets and timelines. - Failure of senior management to better recognise the huge efforts put in by staff under difficult circumstances. - The continual change in project leadership roles which made the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of training procedures for recovery workers. • Assisting exhausted personnel. • Developing recovery staffing policy.

<p>more difficult for those involved.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Dealing with landholders and the public who were traumatised and at times angry and frustrated with the “government” who they blamed for the fires. o Development of training and systems to prepare for the next event regardless of its size. o Investigation of the need for a simple expression of interest rather than full recruitment procedure for recovery personnel, who are often required urgently. o Use of awards an ceremonies for public recognition to increase morale, for example, the Banksia Award. 	
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Working Group 4. Policy, planning and project management

Issues relating specifically to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee	Issues relating to whole of government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a clear articulation of roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders in recovery (this includes establishing clear lines of accountability and reporting). • Recognition of the need for a project manager to manage the projects across whole of government with regard to natural resource management. • Recognition that in the aftermath of such an event, a political desire to respond in some way can be expected and staff should anticipate this so far as possible and influence early decisions along the most appropriate paths. • Issues regarding coordination include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opportunities for better efficiency if projects were managed together, e.g. Rehabilitation of Emergency Fire Trails on Farmland and Debris Removal Along Crown Boundaries. - Doing all of the landholder work at the same time. - Have detailed brief prepared and experienced staff available. - Ill-defined boundaries of many recovery projects. - Uncertainty over boundaries and roles between DPI, local government, CMAs, DHS, DVC. • Parks and State Forests had a good integrated approach for dealing with tourism. • Development of program areas and project templates in response to specific emergency events (such as fires, floods, disease outbreaks etc). The projects from the 2003 Alpine Fires are a good guideline for future bushfire recovery initiatives. For Specific Learnings see Volume 2. • Development of whole of government evaluation procedures. 	

Working Group 5. Community engagement and development

Issues relating specifically to the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Subcommittee	Issues relating to whole of government
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a case management approach to dealing with affected landholders (this links in with developing a shared database for collecting information from emergency affected individuals). This will also help ensure that consistent messages are being given to affected landholders. • Identification of methods to communicate with the public and affected individuals more effectively. Current techniques include communication through the media and more directly (such as through agency field officers and community forums). • Exploration of the ways in which the communication network with other agencies such as CFA, local government and DHS can be improved. • Consultation with landholders before any work is done on their property. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Development of a case management approach. • Communication with the public and affected individuals.

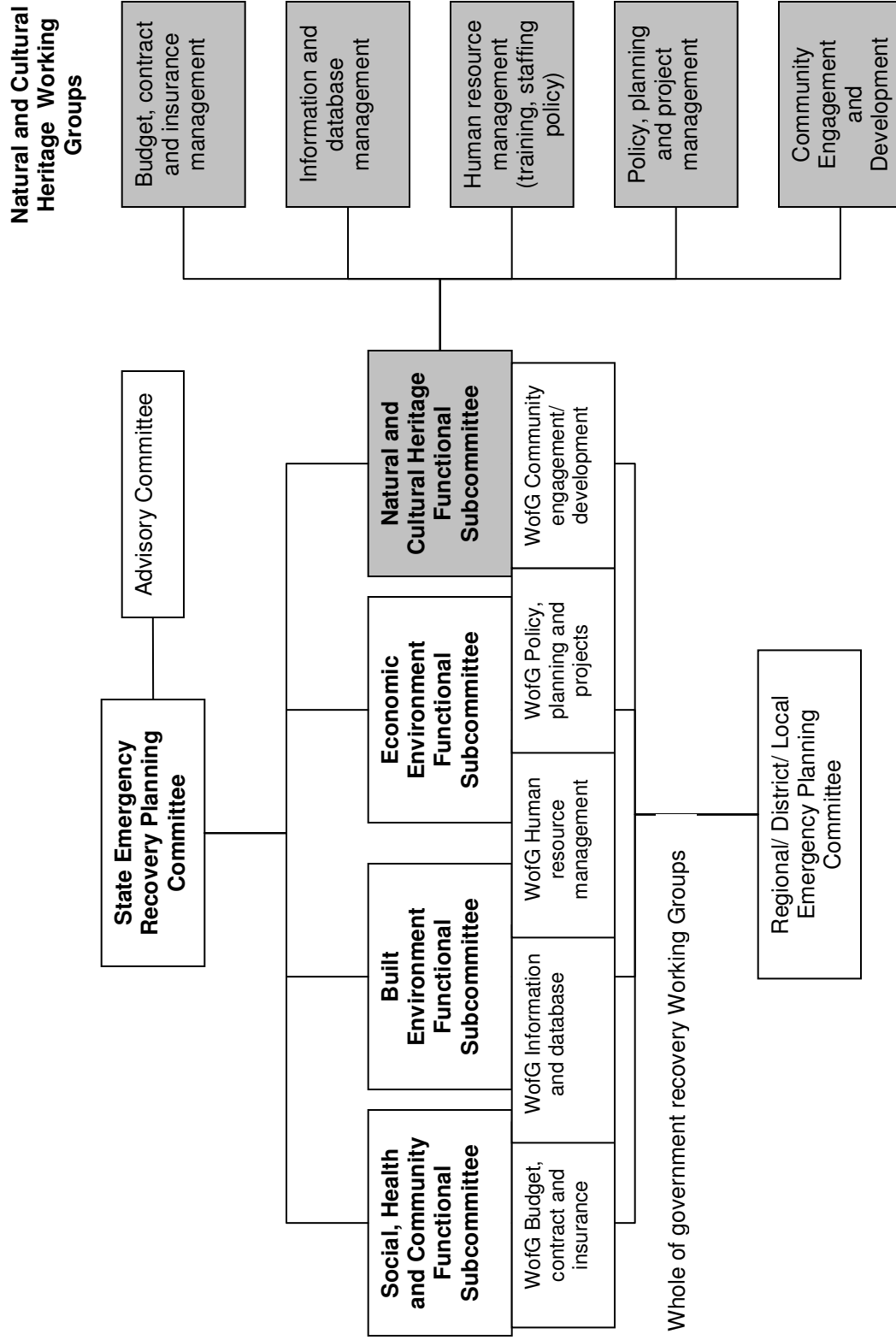


Figure 3. Proposed organisational structure for Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Sub-Committee (recovery planning)

10. Proposed Bushfire Recovery implementation Structure

The proposed Bushfire Recovery implementation structure builds upon the structure utilised for the 2003 Alpine Fires. For a fire of significant scale the establishment of a Ministerial Taskforce and Project Team are still proposed, as is a body acting in the capacity of the Steering Committee (we suggest this should be the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee - SERPC). The role of Regional Fire Recovery Manager already exists in effect. The Municipal Emergency Recovery Centres also already exist, although it is suggested that DSE better integrate with this body and the Manger (Recovery) from the Department of Human Services suggests a longer term role for this Centre than just the immediate recovery phase.

The revised emergency recovery planning arrangements outlined above underpin the following proposed structure for recovery in Victoria if, and when, another major recovery effort is required. As one stakeholder put it, there is a need for 'an agreed default governance model to use where ever Whole of Government initiatives such as this are in need of being implemented'.

10.1. General principles and issues guiding bushfire recovery

Using the findings from this evaluation into bushfire recovery and other literature relating to disaster recovery more generally, the following general principles are proposed to underpin the re-structure of bushfire recovery operations. Some of these principles have already been mentioned above, and some already have institutional commitment (such as adopting a whole of government approach to recovery), but they are nevertheless reiterated as important elements to note for recovery planning and delivery. These principles were also agreed to at a workshop involving DSE, DPI and Parks Victoria staff involved with recovery from the 2003 Alpine Fires.

State level

- Recovery should flow smoothly from response and suppression phase.
- Interagency, cross tenure, whole of government response to recovery is vital.
- Clear leadership and lines of accountability (for reporting and monitoring) during the recovery are required.
- Clear understanding of the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders (perhaps through memoranda of understanding or other strategic documents). This needs to include DHS, local government and other relevant organisations.
- Funding for recovery needs to be provided swiftly – this may not always sit easily with normal government functions.
- Funding may need to be longer term in nature, depending on the crisis.
- Communication to landholders by individuals with appropriate skills both directly and through the media is important – need a dedicated team responsible for this. This is at a statewide and regional/ local level.

- Effective information/ data management systems are also crucial in recovery – this is particularly so in light of the whole of government approach.
- An established structure and processes for recovery need to be in place beforehand (see below), but given the nature of disasters and the fact that each situation will vary, a degree of flexibility will be required.
- Someone (or a group) needs to be responsible for planning for recovery in this interim phase – this appears likely to be effective through the State Emergency Recovery Unit structure as long as this structure is active and not passive (that is, it plans, develops policy and exchanges memoranda of understanding and not just shares information).
- Clear policy needs to be developed (through the subcommittees of the SERPC) well beforehand as to the entitlements of fire affected individuals.
- Budget management and accountability for projects is an important area which needs to be coordinated by the lead agency.
- Whole of government evaluation procedures should also be developed.

Regional level

- Community engagement needs to be a significant part of bushfire suppression and recovery.
- Developing partnerships among stakeholders is important in developing and delivering projects. A network of partners also improves communication channels with the community and between organisations.
- A case management approach to dealing with fire affected individuals could be explored during the interim emergency planning phase (this requires adequate information management systems and cooperation between agencies). Case management is where affected individuals are assigned one person (where relevant) to deal with their issues and that person is assigned when they first make contact.
- A cross tenure approach should be used where relevant.

Project level

- Use lessons learnt from projects developed in response to the 2003 fires as guidance for developing future projects. The scientific knowledge generated needs to be built upon.
- Developing partnerships among stakeholders is important in developing and delivering projects.
- Staff need to be appropriately skilled. Training for bushfire suppression and recovery (to include communication) may need to be factored into the roles of DSE project staff. The specialist teams approach worked well in Victoria and should be retained for future recovery efforts.
- Staff need to be dedicated to the recovery effort and not be required to fulfil their regular duties whilst involved. There needs to be acknowledgment of this at management level.
- Recovery staff need to be well supported – there is a high potential for burnout.
- Recovery teams need to include (or have access to) someone who can provide support to traumatised individuals. Access to counselling services also needs to be provided where necessary.

10.2. Recovery implementation structure

10.2.1. Building on Incident Management Teams

The recovery implementation structure proposed below builds on the Australian Inter-service Incident Management System – Incident Control System (as depicted in a simplified manner in Figure 1) and the work done by the State Emergency Recovery Unit (see Figure 3). As noted above, the Incident Control System during suppression works is considered to be successful because there are clear lines of accountability and roles and responsibilities are clearly articulated. The Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian bushfires held that ‘the approach to incident management in Victoria is consistent with world’s best practice’ (Esplin et al. 2003: 189) and the structure proposed for recovery attempts to capitalise on this. The comments below also support this approach:

The need for integrated reporting of whole-of-program outcomes to the Minister required a more complex governance and management structure than necessary. Maintaining a cross-organisational recovery structure (similar to fire suppression) may have resulted in more efficient project management. This should be seriously considered in the revised Code of Practice for Fire Management on Public Land.

10.2.2. Changes to the Bushfire Recovery implementation structure

The main changes to the recovery implementation structure suggested by this evaluation are:

- The implementation is supported by the proposed planning structure.
- Fire Recovery Officers nominated to suppression Incident Management Teams (planning section and this to be made formal).
- Greater involvement of the lead agency’s corporate finance division in budget management and accountability.
- The Steering Committee – DSE liaise with the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee.
- Establishment of Regional Recovery Committees chaired by DHS.
- Greater DSE involvement in Municipal Emergency Recovery Centres and vice versa (co-location of the Integrated Multi-Agency Centre [which continues from suppression to recovery] and the MERC to occur where possible).

Recommendation: That the structure as presented (or something similar) be accepted to ensure that there is a smooth transition between suppression (crisis) and recovery (see Figure 4).

Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager

The Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager, who is responsible for planning for recovery, also becomes a significant part of the implementation of recovery initiatives following an emergency. The Recovery Manager should be involved with the Emergency Coordination Centre during suppression and then during recovery liaise with the following stakeholders:

- Project team (if in existence or s/he may need to convene such)
- Fire Recovery Officer
- Regional Fire Recovery Manager
- State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee

Recommendation: That the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager convene a project team immediately a crisis emerges to develop a comprehensive planning document. This team needs to be made up of individuals with the most relevant skills that relate to the current crisis. They should also be individuals with high level interpersonal skills who can work cooperatively in a period of great stress.

Project team

The Project Team, which is called into action depending on the scale of an event, can be comprised of select members of the Natural and Cultural Heritage Functional Recovery Functional Subcommittee and other members co-opted as necessary. As noted by one stakeholder:

The project team needs policy and operational skills to put together a package. The content aspects can be put together by the chairs of the sub groups [policy and planning teams].

The policy and planning teams in operation during the 2003 Alpine Fires Recovery Initiative can inform future teams, which are to be embedded within the Project Team where a disaster is of sufficient scale.

The Recovery Manager should also be in a position to co-opt relevant staff as necessary, either to support his or her position, or to become involved in the specialist Project Team.

Recommendation: The project team is guided by the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee of which the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager is already a part.

Fire Recovery Officer

The new structure also depends on the nomination of Fire Recovery Officers to each of the fire districts. The Fire Recovery Officer becomes a part of Incident Management Teams and is responsible for coordinating recovery works most likely within the Planning Section of the AIIMS-ICS. The Fire Recovery Officer should also have strong link with the Municipal Emergency Recovery Centre. There is more on the role of Fire Recovery Officers in the section above, 'Moving smoothly from suppression to recovery'.

Recommendation: That a designated Fire Recovery Officer be nominated as part of the suppression Incident Management Teams and have authority to manage the initial stages of recovery. This will involve identifying the areas that will require attention during the recovery and either designing projects to address these areas or co-opting skilled and experienced personnel from around the State who can undertake this task.

That Recovery Officers need to be nominated in advance and undergo training in recovery planning and practice. It is likely that Emergency Management Australia can provide assistance in this regard.

Regional Fire Recovery Manager

The position of Regional Fire Recovery Manager already exists (this person will already be heavily involved in the management of suppression activities). They will be the point of contact between the Natural and Cultural Heritage Recovery Manager and Fire Recovery Officers. It is likely they will have a significant role to play in the Regional Recovery Centres (to be coordinated by DHS).

Recommendation: That the role and responsibilities of Regional Recovery Manager be clarified now with regard to recovery but that they only become operational at the time of a crisis and will then have responsibilities to coordinate the recovery effort and to report to the Regional Recovery Committee.

State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee

In the proposed structure, the State Emergency Recovery Planning Committee (which is likely to be made up of representatives from DHS, Department of Infrastructure, Department of Innovation Industry and Regional Development, and DSE) now plays a greater role with Steering Committee. This is in line with calls for greater diversity in representation available to the Steering Committee.

Regional Recovery Committee

The new structure for bushfire recovery also requires a significant commitment from DHS and other agencies to become involved with recovery planning and implementation. This is at both a statewide and regional level.

The proposed Regional Recovery Committees, to be coordinated by DHS, requires some planning work and it is understood that this process is already in train (being led by the State Emergency Recovery Manager within DHS's Emergency Management branch). However, it is recognised that much of the work carried by DSE (such as the restoration of natural and cultural heritage and assets) will not involve DHS.

Recommendation: That a Regional Recovery Committee, chaired by the Department of Human Services, be convened at the time of the outbreak of the crisis and that it relate to the project team and the Municipal Emergency Recovery Centre while ever these are involved in the recovery phase.

Municipal Emergency Recovery Centres

There is also to be a stronger relationship developed between Municipal Emergency Recovery Committees (MERCs) and agency Fire Recovery Officers. In this proposed structure the MERCs are seen to take a greater role in recovery operations. Ensuring that local governments have planned for this role and are willing to take it on is a matter for the State Emergency Recovery Unit and Planning Committee, and it is understood that this is something they are already looking at.

Recommendation: That for future recovery events there be one central point within each affected region where all the information and personnel are housed (one stop shop) so that community members and others have easy access to information. This logically should be the Municipal Emergency Recovery Centre.

Communications unit

Given the issues that arose with regard to the 2002/2003 fires it seems important that a central communications unit be established to deal with all matters of communications. This includes the management of the political environment, the needs of government officers and the community. A suggestion was made that a case management approach be adopted to dealing with fire affected landholders so that they only have to provide details about their situation once and one person knows their case history and that communications officers are skilled to deal with a traumatised community.

Recommendation: That a communications plan be developed as part of the recovery plan so that the needs of government, affected communities, the public and the media are accounted for effectively.

Recommendation: That a communications unit headed by a spokesperson who can speak for the whole recovery effort (the Regional Fire Recovery Manager or the chair of the Regional Recovery Committee) be put in place at the time of suppression and move from reporting about suppression to reporting about recovery.

Recommendation: That the development of a case management approach to disaster recovery for affected individuals continues to be explored.

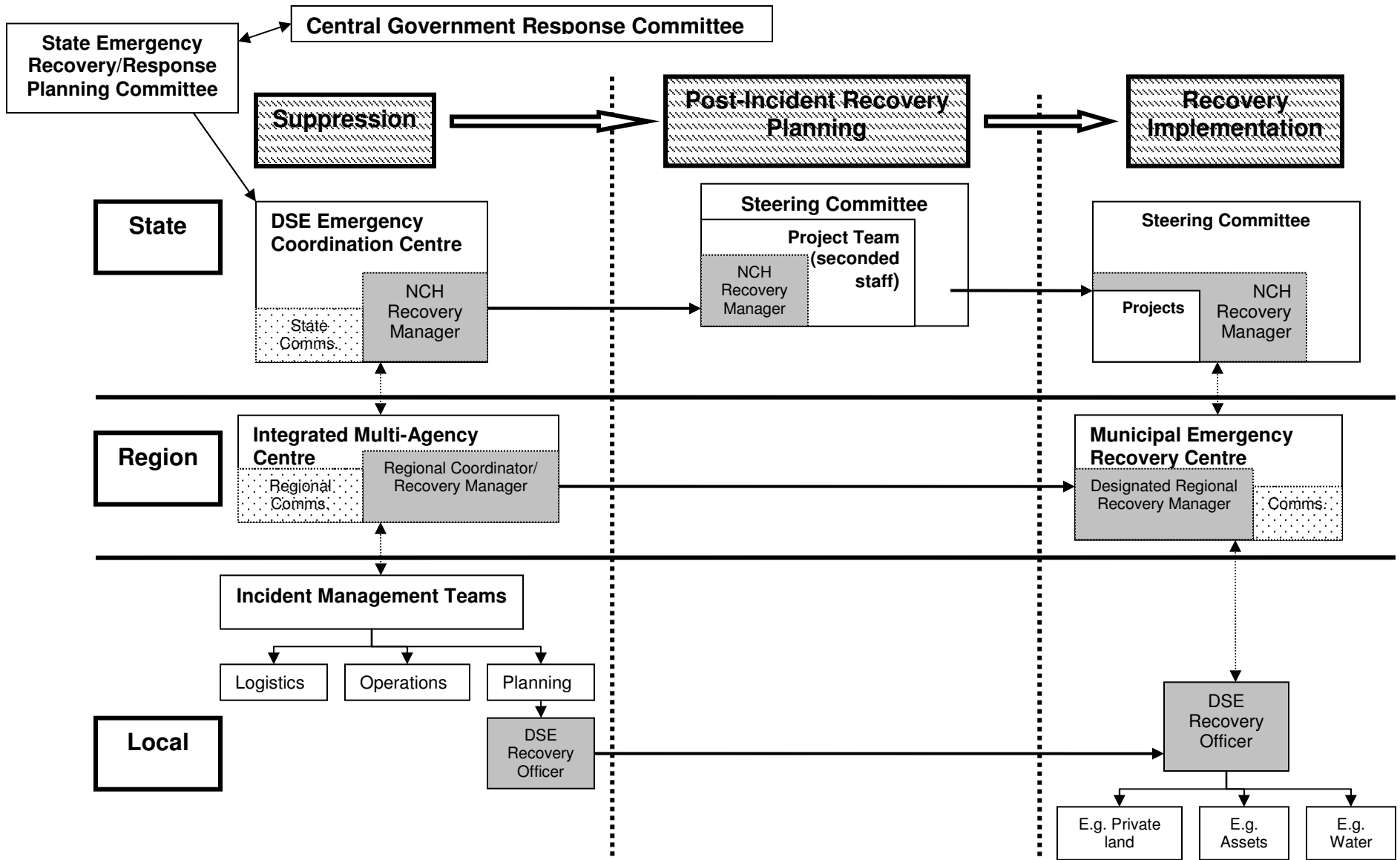


Figure 4. Recovery Implementation for future events

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