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| Emergency Preparedness and Engagement Forum 2021 |  |
| Video transcript  |  |
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**Emergency Preparedness and Engagement Forum 2021**

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: Good morning and welcome to the annual Emergency Preparedness and Engagement Forum for the North, South, East and West divisions of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

My name is Melody Bush, Director, Emergency Management West Division, and I'm representing my colleagues Cathy Cerolini, Sandy Austin and Felicia Micallef today.

I wish to start by acknowledging that I'm chairing this forum today on Wadawurrung country and pay my respects to elders past, present, and emerging and all Aboriginal attendees with us today.

Our agenda today is a combination of pre-recorded videos and presenters as indicated on the screen now. In addition, today's forum will be recorded and made available to all attendees.

[PowerPoint slide: Numbered agenda items]

And there’s our agenda, thank you very much, team.

Throughout the forum, please pop your questions into the chat on the right sidebar. We have moderators who will keep an eye on the chat and answer as many questions as possible as we progress throughout the forum, and Sophie will lead us on those questions throughout the forum today. In order to assist us to prioritize the questions, please use the like or the thumbs up to follow us, to focus on the most, to follow and allow us to focus on the most important questions and we will grab any time permitting we can to direct our questions to our guests presenters here today.

Also, we have a QR code you would have seen flash up on the screen already for participants to complete our evaluation survey. This survey helps us to continue to improve how we conduct these forums into the future, and we will place the QR code up again at the end of our forum.

Now it is with my pleasure that I introduce Brigid Monagle, our Deputy Secretary, Readiness, Response and Emergency Management with the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing to officially open our forum, Bridget over to you.

[Shot of Brigid Monagle speaking]

[Brigid Monagle speaks]: Thank you, thank you so much Melody. For those of you who don't know me, my name is Brigid Monagle, and as of yesterday I am the Deputy Secretary for relief, I always get this wrong, I'm gonna get it right. Readiness response recovery, is that right? Sorry I think so. Bear with me. And it's my absolute privilege to be able to open up this session today and thank you all for attending.

It's obviously been a humongous year and I imagine that you're all exhausted and potentially the thought of getting prepped for the emergency preparedness and engagement for the next bush fire season is probably something that it's hard to sort of conceptualize in your head and bring together, so we really value your commitment to coming today.

I would too also like to acknowledge Traditional Owners. I'm on Wurundjeri country today and I'd like to pay my respects to elders past and present. I'm very lucky to live on their land.

Now if I can since I think a few of you would have done this last year, we have, we have ‘mogged’ in government parlance so the DHHS was split in two and what was the former, I guess you'd call them community services, human services became part of the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing and also to the part, my former part of DPC, which is called Fairer Victoria also came across. And so what the department now holds is community services, which includes child protection and care, family services, disability and communities. Also Homes Victoria, so housing and disability accommodation, homelessness services, my old area of Fairer Victoria, which includes multicultural affairs, LGBTIQ+, equality, veterans, women and youth, Family Safety Victoria and also Respect Victoria as well. So it's a very big department with a massive suite of very important work, and part of that too is obviously the most important bit, is our Emergency Management Branch, which is all about preparedness, readiness and response, which you'll be hearing from Andrea later today about that, relief and recovery coordination and staff surge management.

And then we've also got of course, the COVID resilience and response centre, which has just had a huge amount of work over the past 18 months, now two years and that includes COVID prevention and preparedness, COVID relief and community support, and COVID policy, planning and engagement.

You don't have much time today, so I'm gonna leave it there. A huge welcome and thank you for your ongoing commitment, and I'll hand back to Melody now for the more important parts of the agenda. Thank you.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: Thank you Brigid for your time today and formally opening our forum. Our first session on the agenda today is two pre-recorded videos. The first from the Bureau of Meteorology with our seasonal forecast and the second from our Emergency Management Commissioner, Andrew Crisp, about seasonal preparedness. So we'll play those videos for you now. Thank you.

[Shot of BOM video, also available at: <https://youtu.be/YNz3-IKsNCc>]

[BOM voiceover speaks]: For November to January 2022, we can expect a 70% chance of La Nina developing while the negative Indian Ocean dipole is forecast to return to a neutral phase. Above average rainfall, likely across the eastern two-thirds of the mainland, and warmer than average days in the west and some other parts, but cooler in the east, warmer nights for most.

September rainfall was below average across southern and western Australia and eastern Queensland, but above average across large areas of northern and eastern Australia. Above average rainfall was observed in the first half of October, especially in western Queensland. Soil moisture was above average in parts of the southeast and the north for September.

Looking ahead, November to January is likely to be wetter than usual for the eastern two-thirds of mainland Australia tending, to neutral outlook for western Australia, and drier than average for western Tasmania. This is due to the increasing chance of La Nina in the tropical Pacific and the negative Indian Ocean dipole which will weaken in November. Near median and high stream flows are likely at most forecast locations for October to December.

November to January days are likely to be warmer than average in the west, parts of the southeast and along the northern coast, but cooler than average in the east. November to January nights are very likely to be warmer than average for most parts except southeast Western Australia. For more information, visit bom.gov.au/climate

[Shot of Andrew Crisp speaking]

[Andrew Crisp speaks]: Well it's that time of year where we talk about seasonal preparedness, and I'll come back to that piece about seasonal preparedness in a minute.

But you all heard from the Bureau what's confronting us over the over the next few months, we know it's wet out there. We know our catchments are saturated, we know we’ll have above median rainfall, so there's every chance that we will see further flooding in the state over the next couple of months. We know, though it'll get, it'll get hot, and we’ll have fires, but this seasonal preparedness piece is interesting because who would have thought we would have had the earthquake that hit us last week? Who would have thought we would have that significant flood and storm event back in June?

All those events have I have challenged us, but again our emergency services organisation and the sector more broadly have stood up really, really well. But there is, there is this seasonal piece. So we do need to focus on the next few months and what we're doing, and these briefings are very much part of that for people to reengage, to refocus on those challenges over the next few months.

Underpinning all of that is COVID, and we know it's been with us for 18 months now. It does present challenges. It presents challenges in relation to first responders, it presents challenges in relation to the way we set up our relief centres. But we've done the planning around that and up to this point, it's actually worked really, really well.

It also means that our communities are tired, and we’ve seen that. So will communities react in the same way to emergencies, those fires and floods as they have done previously? That's where community messaging and our warnings are so important for us. We know they are anyway, but we've we have to think about them again in terms of this context and where we are with COVID, you know 18 months in.

We know also the impact it's had on our people. We know people are tired, we know it's impacted on you whether you’re emergency services or other organisations, professionally and personally.

So we've got to acknowledge that, and in doing that, though, we've gotta make sure that wherever there is a possibility or chance for you to take a rest you've really got to do it. It is so, so important. And we know it's not just us as individuals, but it's also our families, and I want to take this opportunity to thank the families of our first responders, and whether they’re career or volunteer, because you are the people that support us to enable us to do what we have to do.

And again, I'm sure families have been doing it tough over the last 18 months or so, but as is always the case I know we will get through this, it is about, we focus on priorities. Just putting that one foot in front of the other, don’t get too carried away. But there’s structure in the way that we do that, and that's our plans. We've got to go back to what works for us, so planning is critical to all of this, of course we have to be flexible. We have to adapt those plans and that's what I expect people to do. But get back to basics. Look at those plans, when was the last time we tested those plans? Have we run some tabletop, some desktop exercises? They’re so important and so, so valuable for us to again focus on what will confront us over the next few months.

So again, we will get through this together and we're only as good as the team we work with, and I will always say that, I'm only as good as the great team that I have the opportunity to work with, so I look forward to getting out and about when we when we get through these COVID restrictions. And we're all double vaccinated, and I know that's become a contentious issue, but in many respects that is the way that we will get through all of this.

So please take care, look after yourselves, and take that break when you can. Thank you.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: And a little bit of technical issues along the way there but we finally got to hear all of Andrew, so thank you very much for those videos and for the team as well. Moving to our first speaker and lovely to have Andrea here in the present, I'd like to welcome Andrea Spiteri, Executive Director, Emergency Management, who will provide us with an update and an overview of their new social service sector emergency management policy and a general update. Over to you, thanks, Andrea.

[Shot of Andrea Spiteri speaking]

[Andrea Spiteri speaks]: Thanks very much, Mel and welcome everyone. I too would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which we are meeting today, I'm on the beautiful Wurundjeri country that you can see behind me, and pay my respects to elders past and present, and those that are joining us today for any Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Unfortunately we did get a little bit glitchy there with Andrew, but I think his message came through loud and clear. Emergencies can happen at any time of year and the planning and preparedness that we do and the readiness that we do together will, is the way for us to hopefully keep our clients, ourselves and our communities safe during this time. I'm just waiting for the presentation to pop up because I can't see it.

[PowerPoint slide: Machinery of Government changes, DFFH emergency management responsibilities, and emergency management – it’s everyone’s business]

There we go, excellent, so I'm going to run you through today just a little bit of information about the department, Brigid’s already covered off a little bit of that as well, and then through the main elements of the policy too.

So the context for this was the, as you know, we've had an emergency management policy for our sectors for a number of years as the previous Department of Health and Human Services. In February, the department moved to be the Department of Health and then the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing was created. Therefore we needed to go back to our policy and make sure that we had a policy that spoke to our social services sector and the numbers of different organizations that we either regulate, that we fund or even the services that we directly provide ourselves as the Department of Families, Fairness and Housing.

So our department’s emergency management responsibilities are quite broad, but the key one that is a focus of ours here today is around supporting Victorians by minimizing the impact of emergencies, and that is the aim of our preparedness, collectively. We are, that is our key focus in mitigating the impacts of emergencies, but as Brigid mentioned earlier, we also have responsibilities for relief services and coordination as well and into recovery as well, particularly social recovery services. And I know we work with a lot of you in that space too, and are still doing that from previous bush fires, and from the storms and floods as well.

Our key message here today is that emergency management is everyone's business. I know that sometimes it can feel like it's a world of new jargon. We've tried really carefully in the policy to try and strip any of that out and make sure that it's clear for everyone as possible, but it is really important that all of our organisations do do the emergency management, planning and preparedness that's needed. We do, we do come to you every year to release this policy, to talk to you through these forums, because we do head into as you know in Victoria a more heightened risk season for emergencies and this year, we look like we might have some floods to contend with in that space, according to the Bureau's briefing before, as well as potentially heat and bushfires. So it is a timely reminder at this time of year to go through that preparedness.

[PowerPoint slide: Key policy changes – scope, structure and language, guidance and leave early plans]

The purpose of the policy is really to sort of outline the roles and responsibilities of organizations subject to the policy, but also to provide you with some guidance and some support in how to go about that planning.

So the key policy changes this year, apart from it being focused in on the social services sector, is that it, we have gone back and taken the opportunity to have a look at the scope. So it does cover the services that are funded, regulated and delivered by the department, for the time being, the services or payments that are made by Fairer Victoria are out of scope at the moment, but we are going to be making sure that we revise this and keep it as contemporary as possible as the sector changes.

The second element there is the structure and language. I just mentioned before that we are trying to make it as accessible and easy to read as possible and to understand, and we certainly always welcome your feedback on that. The guidance that is included this year is there's more information about risk assessment so it is not just about bushfire, but a range of risks that your organization, your clients and services might be susceptible to.

And there is also a new template this year that is a template emergency management plan. It's not mandatory, but it is hopefully something that is really useful for you to be able to help you with your emergency management planning as well.

And with leave early plans this year, we've made some changes. Previously you may be aware that we needed a leave early plan per child that was in care, but this year we've made the change based on some feedback, to try and make that a little bit easier on carers so that foster and kinship carers only need one leave early plan that covers the children that are in their care. Next slide, thank you.

[PowerPoint slide: Unchanged policy requirements]

What hasn't changed is that we're still requiring service providers to have learn appropriate emergency management plan in place. This plan usually needs to be reviewed by the 1st of November, but obviously emergencies can happen at any time, so it is important for you to review that quite regularly. Test that plan, revisit it as well, and we also require agencies to report to the department that they have prepared for a range of emergencies as well.

The reporting this year is due by Friday the 5th of November and that is an online reporting tool that is available and will be sent out to you to make sure that you can access that reporting. It's really important for us to make sure that we're clear as to the agencies that are preparing their plans and that they've got them in place, which is fantastic.

[PowerPoint slide: Bushfire prone areas]

In bushfire prone areas such as, it's been in the previous policy as well, there is, there are additional requirements for those services or those that have clients in high-risk bushfire areas. Properties that are in those areas they may need to have a bush fire survival plan, particularly residential accommodation properties, or a leave early plan if you've got clients on site and there is a higher risk forecast. And certainly when it comes to a Code Red Day most of you will be aware that the code red is the highest level of bushfire alert in Victoria, and that really does say that there is a significant risk to life throughout some areas of Victoria and it's really important to pay attention to those warnings and to make sure you activate your plan.

So their policy does require residential and home-based care services that are located in areas of heightened bush fire risk that you do relocate the day before declared Code Red Day and we do also require you to let the department know that you've done that as well on the day. Next slide.

[PowerPoint slide: tools and resources]

We've got a range of tools and resources for you to support your planning, so there's, to accompany the policy this year there's a preparing for emergencies reference guide, so we've updated that, it has some tips, advice, and tools for you, particularly in identifying the risks that your organization, new clients and services might face. As I mentioned before, there's a template emergency management plan. Certainly welcome your feedback on that as well. There is a home-based care emergency management factsheet for foster and kinship carers and that does include the template for the leave early plan, if you haven't done that before, if that's new for you. And there's also an emergency location bush fire leaving early plan as well so the department can help you, trying to help you access those plans and all those tools that you might need to prepare your plan as well. We really need to make sure that not only your management, but your staff are aware of where the plan is particularly those that might be on overnight or when emergencies might crop up at different times of the day. But also your clients and your families of clients as well. It's really important to communicate with them that you have a plan and what that might look like for them as well. On to the next slide.

[PowerPoint slide: For more information]

There's some links there and we've got some information available on the funded agency channel as well for you to have a look at and the policy and the information has been sent out to all organisations by our wonderful operations divisions as well. I think I've got one more slide. That might be it.

[Shot of Andrea Spiteri speaking]

No, there's one more slide after that, which is just really questions, I think. So I’m happy to open that up for, I think we’ve got time for a few minutes of questions, I’m really happy to hear from you on that, thanks so much for your time.

[shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: That's lovely, thanks Andrea, and what I will do now is throw across to Sophie to just check our questions in our chat and see if we've got anything specific for Andrea and based on her update or the key changes in the policy. So over to you, Sophie.

[Shot of Andrea Spiteri]

[Sophie Vale speaks]: Thank you Melody, I will just jump in here and say we've got one question. It may or may not be answered in the policy itself, but someone’s asked what LGAs are designated as high-risk areas?

[Shot of Andrea Spiteri speaking]

[Andrea Spiteri speaks]: Thanks very much, Sophie, and thank you for asking that question. Local governments themselves are not designated as high-risk areas, but there are high, there are extreme and high-risk areas within particular local governments. These are mainly on the peri-urban fringes of metropolitan Melbourne, so all of those outer rim councils will have areas of bush fire or grassland risk and then most LGAs in regional and rural Victoria will have some areas where there is higher risk. What I would suggest to you that it's really important and in the policy, there are some links through to the CFA and also the SES for flood risk as well, to connect with them about where your services are, where your clients are and what the risk is for them particularly of those natural hazards. So I think that's a really important connection to make.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: That's great thanks. Thank you very much, Andrea and Sophie our moderator, I thank you very much for throwing those questions across. And just a reminder to all of our attendees to pop your questions in the right sidebar so that our moderators can address those questions to our guests, thank you.

Our next speaker now is Alan Arthur, Director Corporate Services, Central Highlands Rural Health. Alan is sharing with us today his organization’s experience from the June storm event, so Alan I’ll pass across to you. Thank you very much.

[Shot of Alan Arthur speaking]

[Alan Arthur speaks]: Thanks very much for inviting me to do this. Just a very quick bit of background, so I started as Director, Proper Services here in March 2020, so I've never known the health sector without pandemic and I’d also sort of preface this by saying that all the credit for the incident goes to people other than me.

[PowerPoint slide: Map of Victoria]

So we just move on, Central Highlands services Macedon Ranges Shire and Hepburn Shire, we've got hospitals in Kyneton and Daylesford, Kyneton is a 15-year-old hospital, Daylesford is a 160-year-old hospital. So we have the full the full range of history there.

It was our Trentham site that was the focus for this incident review that just want to talk through. If you can just go next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: aerial shot of a forest with all the trees blown down]

So what happened on the – [silence]

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: OK, it looks like we might have just had a little technical issue and I think Alan might have just got kicked out, unfortunately. So what we're going to do is we're just gonna wait a couple of seconds and bring Alan back in, and might just get Sophie have you, I might just check in with you to see if we've got any new questions in our chat. And while you're looking, I will just remind people that all of the policies mentioned today, we'll pop them pop the links up in the chat and everything will be provided to attendees, and I was going to mention at the end of today's forum that we will provide the live recording of the forum today through to all of our attendees. And so Sophie I'll just pop across to you and see if we've got any other questions we can address right now.

[Shot of Sophie Vale speaking]

[Sophie Vale speaks]: We have had a rather interesting question, so someone asked after they're wanting some insights. They're saying they're delivering a community-led Bush fire planning project for local government, and they’re keen to understand policy and any facilitation or partnerships that they can offer.

[Melody Bush speaks]: Beautiful so Andrea, I might just put you on the spot there and see if you can address that question. Or is it one we need to delve into with a bit more detail and get back to the questioner?

[Shot of Andrea Spiteri speaking]

[Andrea Spiteri speaks]: No, that's fine. Thanks very much for the question and I notice there are few more in the chat as well, so we might try and answer some of those questions that you have too. Look I think the best thing that you can do is firstly make sure that you've got a good connection through with your municipal emergency management planning committee. So have a chat to your local council, particularly if it's quite a localized project that you're working on. And the second one I would say, is if it's if it's broader across a region, then certainly our regional coordinators are the operations divisions, emergency management directors would be interested in that as well. We do have a project at the moment that's running in Gippsland that is focused on preparedness for people with disability and that we're hoping that will be something that will roll out more broadly in future. And we're just working our way as well as we can in a COVID environment to bring that project to fruition as well, but that's doing some really good work, and I'm also aware of the project that the CFA is running to help people with disability with their property preparedness as well.

So there is a bit going on in this space, but really encourage you initially to connect with local level or you can get in touch with Melody, Sandy, Felicia or Kathy in the north, and we can make sure that details are available from there, thanks.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: That's great, thanks Andrea. I appreciate that, and I know I've popped you on the spot there. And the team will try to answer as many questions in the chat as they can as we go along. So fantastic, we've got Allen back with us now, little technical glitch there.

So Alan, I'll just pop back to you for you to continue with your presentation. Thank you.

[Shot of Alan Arthur speaking]

[PowerPoint slide: aerial shot of a forest with all the trees blown down]

[Alan Arthur speaks]: Thanks for that, and sorry I don't know what happened there, but it demonstrates one of the things in the recommendations I’ll say about how important communications are, so I didn't do it on purpose though.

So basically the incident that occurred was storm, high winds knocked down a lot of trees, and by a lot of trees I just mean huge huge amounts of them. We’d had other big storms, but this one came from a different direction and something I've only learned recently about trees is that they put their roots down to balance where the prevailing wind is wind is coming from, and that was that was a problem here. And if we just move skips the next slide, so this is, oh no, sorry back one.

[PowerPoint slide: four emergency services workers standing with tree cutting equipment]

So these guys were out doing a hell of a job for days and days, as they were cutting down trees or cutting up trees, more trees were falling so just kind of an ongoing process that took a huge amount of time. So for us, issues, that we lost power to the site straight away, but we got a backup generator so we were able to restore that. The big impact we found originally was that all three of the roads to Trentham were blocked by trees, so we couldn't actually get anyone in or out of the area. We had power, but it was generator power And of course there's a limit to how long your tank of diesel will keep you running for. It's basically when there's no trucks able to get in. If we can move on to the next slide.

[PowerPoint slide: Image of code brown, code red, code orange, code purple, code yellow and code black]

So we declared our code yellow incident, which is an internal emergency incident, which threatens the safety of staff, patients or visitors. If we just skip on to the next slide.

[PowerPoint slide: Plan, prepare, perform]

So it's so previously our focus for preparation has been very much led by bushfires, so Trentham is one of those high-risk Bush fire areas And obviously the thoughts of evacuating elderly residents would be quite challenging, so that had been our focus. But I think this incident taught us that there were other things that can happen.

We understood our mission, protect our residents and our staff, we had enough food on site to last for several days. We had a store of portable water, we had a generator and diesel. We had set phones and we had support from other or Our campuses. Alright, if we go on to the next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: Impacts]

So to complicate things, the other providers in the area had issues too, so the water supply was put under a boil notice partly through the incident, and once the local telephone exchange generator ran out of fuel, we lost all comms to this site. Next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: map of power outages]

So this is the map of the power outages, so we certainly weren't the only people affected and it was a pretty serious issue. And of course the trees down had impacted this significantly, but trucks weren't able to get in from the power corps. Next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: image showing blocked roads]

So this just demonstrates, see Trentham just towards the centre there, and these were the roads that were cut off and made things very difficult.

In terms of the pandemic, I think we were lucky that we didn't have any COVID-affected residents. We didn't have any suspected residents and so we didn't have that extra demand on our services while we're trying to manage this incident. But we all agreed that if that had been the case it would have totally different picture, high usage of PPE, extra workload on tired staff, it really would be a challenge.

Some of the positives, though of the pandemic, staff and third parties are very comfortable now with video conferencing, so that made things a bit of, a bit easier for us, and residents families really weren't able to visit in previous periods so that didn't cause too much of a flow problem for us.

So some problems we hadn't anticipated, we hadn't anticipated the complete lack of access to the site. That obviously was just such a huge problem. We basically had the, the power was out for three or four days.

[PowerPoint slide: map of all the VicEmergency warnings]

I think we couldn't get some skilled staff to site, so for example our maintenance manager couldn't leave his own driveway to get back to site, so some of those things were challenges for us as well. Things that went in our favour, the staff and the community really stepped up to support us, which was fantastic. We had staff there who couldn't, couldn't leave, and they were working very long shifts and we had neighbouring people who came in and help us out with some diesel and other things like that. If we can just skip on, just one more, one more, there, that's it. Oh sorry back one.

[PowerPoint slide: You’re on mute]

So the big, big issue for us was communication. Once we lost communication to the site, which was kind of on the second day of the incident, it was just such a huge obstacle to everything. So that was kind of our big learning there, and we lost landlines, mobile and internet all at the same time. Because the local generator, the local telephone exchange generator ran out of diesel and Telstra couldn't get in. So what changes, can we move on to the next slide sorry?

[PowerPoint slide: Change process]

So changes that we've made or are making, more incident management training, you can never have too much of that. Trying to strike the right balance between kind of very detailed processes versus more loose guidance that helps key staff make decisions at the time. I think we learned that you can't anticipate who's going to be where, so you have to be flexible in incident response. Regular testing of communication devices is something that's really important, especially as technology moves on. And also having some documentation on sites that allows untrained people to operate some of the key equipment, so we didn’t have anyone on site who had previously refilled a diesel tank or a generator before so some of those things were obstacles for us. Just on to the next slide.

[PowerPoint slide: Advice]

So I would advise for what it's worth is take an all-hazards approach focusing on the interruption of services and not quite so much focus on the cause of the interruptions. Obviously don't lose sight of the mission, which in our case is to keep our residents and staff safe. Plan and test, plan and test you just can’t do enough of it. The other interesting learning for us, or sorry, advice from us is if you haven't already, move away from the model of forming an incident team in an incident room at a particular site with vests on and pipe wards and all those other things. The reality is that your team will be is likely to be geographically separated, so you gotta make an incident teamwork without necessarily being able to pull them all into the into the same room.

And probably the last one that was a really interesting one for us, while we were being impacted by the incident, we were victims of the incident if you like, we also had a pre-existing commitment to council for our services, so at the same time as we were trying to manage the incident, we were also being asked to feed and water the relief centre in those sort of things.

[PowerPoint slide: Central Highlands Rural Health]

So that that's pretty much the end of the presentation, happy to take any questions.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: That's great, thanks so much Alan for sharing your presentation. And of course those initial pictures you popped up of the trees and the work crew cleaning up the roads is more powerful than any words can present, really. So we'll get you to stay with us, Alan and I'll just cut across to Sophie our moderator to check to see whether we've got any questions for Alan right now.

[Shot of Sophie Vale speaking]

[Sophie Vale speaks]: We don't have any questions from the audience, but if I might be so bold I have a question of my own and I would like to ask Alan how a couple of months down the track now, how are things looking in your neck of the woods and how is the response kind of being coordinated over the last few months through the tail end?

[Shot of Alan Arthur speaking]

[Alan Arthur speaks]: Yeah, look at it definitely has been an ongoing a piece of work for us. I mean, I mean driving around the area, there's still some felled trees in dubious places, and certain roads don't look quite as safe as they used to.

We'd also, we've done our debrief so we're putting in place some of the lessons learned from this. Our community health team are dealing with a huge uptick in demand in that area for a whole load of different services with different causes that traced back to that incident. And I know that they did a great job getting out there and helping people but as a rural area, the temptation is to fall into the trap of, the roads are open, the powers back on, great, but the power might not be back on for someone who lives in a rural property where the power poles only serviced then, so they weren't key stakeholder for the power company to get resolved. So it's quite a long tail of those sort of things.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: Brilliant thank you Sophie and thank you Alan, and I know the many phone conversations between yourself and myself around the time, and one of the key things was of course how you managed to get a local farmer to come in and not only provide the fuel, some diesel for the generator, but also topped it up, kept it topped up and made sure it was running smoothly to support your organization out there, so very innovative and creative options along the way, so well done, Alan. I think the biggest trick of course was the staffing and the staff obviously couldn't leave and new staff couldn't come in. And so how your staff worked, sort of trapped in that environment during that time was amazing and credit to them and your organization, Alan, thank you.

Well now I’d like to invite our final speaker today, Kym Mallamaci, who's the Emergency Management Coordinator at Yarra Ranges Council. And Kym is going to share with us today the impact, response and reflections, again from the June storm event but from a very different part of Victoria. So I’ll cross over to you now, thank you Kym.

[Shot of Kym Mallamaci speaking]

[Kym Mallamaci speaks]: Thanks, Melody and thanks very much for the invitation to present today.

[PowerPoint slide: Severe Weather Event, 9 June 2021 – Doon Caravan Park Evacuation]

Many of the things Alan you've said totally ring true for us as a different organization in a different part of the state, but impacted in very similar ways from the same storm event.

Before I start, I'd also like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners, the Wurundjeri people, as the custodians of the land that I'm on and coming to you from, and pay my respects to all Aboriginal community elders past, present and emerging, which have resided in the area have been such an integral part history of the region in Yarra Ranges.

So on the 9th of June I've been told by the SES it's the worst storm that they've ever had to deal with in their history, in Victoria, and when I reflect on it, it was, we were probably dealing at the time with four or five separate emergencies. So one being the storm, we were also affected by flooding, widespread power and telecommunications outages. And of course COVID as the overlay that we had to work within.

We operated as I guess, an incident management team from our municipal emergency coordination centre over a five-week period. Over that time we had over 370 of our own staff working at any, over the course of the five weeks, we also had 60 people from other councils supporting us. Countless numbers of contractors helping with road and tree clean-up, and of course, assistance from 15 plus different agencies including Red Cross, Victorian Council of Churches, Emergency ministries of Salvos, Inspiro, Anglicare and of course DFFH.

So it was it was a huge event, I've only got a short period of time, so what I thought I'd do is just cover some of pre planning and response to just one aspect of what we did and that and that was in relation to the evacuation of residents from a from a caravan park. Next slide please.

[PowerPoint slide: Pre-planning, Dec 2020]

So just to go back in time a little, back in December 2020 Yarra Ranges along with probably every council in the state revisited its emergency relief centre plan. So for those that don't know, councils responsible for opening and managing ERCs, emergency relief centres, and we reviewed those plans just to ensure we had an adequate amount of COVID safety if we ever needed to activate.

In terms of developing those plans, we had a lot of guidance from DFFH and Red Cross and other councils paved the way in terms of bottles that could work, so we were able to sort of steal from each other and developing those plans. In short, our approach was to triage people at an ERC site, either primary or secondary site, with the intention of accommodating people in local motels, but only if they didn't have support from family or friends. As part of this planning, we also developed an extensive list of accommodation providers with COVID-safe plans across the Eastern metro region, so working in partnership with the other councils, we developed the list and that included information around capacity, ability to accommodate people with disabilities, and motels that were also pet friendly. So that was some work that was done last year and absolutely held us in good stead when we're asked to support the evacuation. Next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: Transport and triage]

So if we fast forward to June 10th, the storm was on the 9th, on the 10th we were asked to assist the evacuation of the Doon Reserve Caravan Park as a result of flooding. So our objective was to coordinate and provide relief with an emphasis on shelter, food, material aid, information and any other support that was needed by the residents. They were evacuated from the site by boat to the entrance of the property, and from there, council basically took over their care, so buses were arranged to transport residents from the site to the SES unit at Wesburn, we couldn't actually use our pre-identified relief centre sites due to the power outage, so the SES site was put up as an option because there was a generator and a bit of power to keep it to get us through.

The other issue we faced was we were scratching around for staff due to the phone outage. So about 70 of Yarra Ranges staff live in Yarra Ranges so we're really restricted in our ability to contact and activate staff, but we did end up with a triage team of two who had a wonderful mix of understanding of the role that they had to play, and also a great mix of assertiveness, adaptability and empathy for the residents. So the assertiveness was needed in relation to working with other agencies on site, the adaptability was absolutely needed in the sense that comms were so bad, and they had to wing it a little bit, and the empathy was for those residents who needed support, many of whom had our pre-existing vulnerabilities and disadvantages. So there was a wonderful team.

They collected details from the residents and put them on the buses and taxis to suitable motels, motels that fell outside of Yarra Ranges is due to the power outage, which was why that list became so critical for us.

So what went well? As I mentioned the list, the lessons, the SES site had power, but it was far too busy. So as a result of that, we’ll be looking at the resilience of our own sites. Some of that is sort of short term work we can do, but others obviously requires longer term planning and investment in terms of alternative energy sources. In terms of our triage team, we need at minimum three people. The process took several hours. It wasn't a matter of getting people on a bus from the caravan park to the triage site, collecting a few details and sending them on. They came in sort of phases, so they were out there for several hours and we needed logistic support on site as well. And the other thing that we planned for was psychological first aid at the motel where people attend. But we really needed that support at the triage side as well. So another lesson for us is to activate the likes of Red Cross or VCC to assist it to assist us at the triage site. Next slide please.

[PowerPoint slide: Relief and reassurance]

So once the residents were on the bus, they were taken to one of a couple of hotels, and the main one was the Rowville motel, and from there the relief team coordinated information. Meals were provided by the Salvation Army, and things like access to medications and shopping was coordinated from that site by that team over several days. People didn't come with cars, and I guess that was that was a bit of a shift in terms of the planning that we had done. So we supported with buses and the like to get people around to do what they needed to do to support themselves. The Salvos as I said, provided meals and the Red Cross attended to provide psychological support and I think DFFH may have also attended in terms of financial assistance.

Initially our planning really didn't take account of the need to have a team on site for the duration, but I think as I said with this particular cohort, that was really important so that their needs could be monitored, and we could meet those needs as they changed over time. So a remote model of providing liaison with management and remote support to residents wouldn't have worked in this situation. We needed to resource a team on site. And we were really fortunate that the team that we had, consisted of someone with an environmental health background and someone who was fantastic on the logistics front, so they were able to manage people really and including those COVID safety aspects. Next slide please.

[PowerPoint slide: Clean up and safety checks]

So whilst the residents were at the motel, councils property team and an environmental health officer worked with the caravan park manager to support site clean-up, and just do this utility and safety checks that were needed. And when the all clear was given, residents returned and we supported that through transport and a supply of, provided them with a supply of donated long-life food. Residents who weren't able to return as a result of the damage were then linked in with Anchor who provided accommodation support, we have a pre-existing MOU with Anchor and other housing agencies in this sub metro region. What was different this time around was it was just applied in a different setting. Next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: Recovery]

So once residents were back, further welfare checks were conducted by Red Cross and DFFH followed up again with financial assistance or supporting people access financial assistance. And on the 15th of July an informal lunch was held with staff and several supporting agencies, and those agencies continue to meet frequently to discuss the needs of the residents out there. Next slide, please.

[PowerPoint slide: Never waste a good emergency – lessons and opportunities]

So a colleague of mine said to me not long ago, never waste a good emergency, and we're absolutely taking advantage of the involvement of a whole range of staff that have never been involved in emergency management or responding to an emergency before, so getting them roped into the formal emergency management workforce and providing them with training. In terms of other things we've learned though, we've got great people and really solid partnerships, and the planning that we did got us part of the way, and I think referencing back to some of what Alan said, it was the people that actually made the plans work, particularly where the gaps emerged, and that failure of comms was a massive gap for us in so many ways. So investing more time in building awareness of solid plans and sharing experiences and wisdom needs to be a greater focus for me and my team. And that's what we're actively working on now as opposed to creating plans for what just happened because next time it will be different again. So just that solid base is so important and then building those opportunities for people to test their knowledge and adapt what they know in other settings is so important.

On a personal front, and as the municipal emergency manager that oversaw a large part of our operation, I think on reflection, one of the things I take away is that reacting to the needs of the caravan park on the day after the storm set the tone and I really feel as though we were in reactive mode for five weeks. I'd ask myself what are we missing? What else could we be doing? Should we be doing things differently? And I'd ask the team the same thing, but I think we're all just in that reactive mode so I think for an event of this size I personally would have benefited from an independent and trusted observer just to check in on us and our strategies and our approach and get us to physically stop and think and reflect and then move forward again. That is something that I would absolutely have asked for, would ask for if I had my time again.

And the other thing I’d do is bolt admin support to my side next time around, can never not have enough admin support. And then the last thing I’d just like to mention, that in terms of this community, they're often spoken of as a resilient bunch, but as a community they, that lives at a site that is one of the first to be impacted by floods, they weren't very prepared in terms of evacuation. We now have a very different relationship with the residents there now and there's an opportunity for us to have a different type of discussion with them that's not just about personal planning, but also how we can work together to make an evacuation more efficient if it's needed again. And that's where I’ll leave it. Thanks very much and I hope that was useful.

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: Kym, thank you so much for those reflections and insights and it sounds like you've already been able to compile a few learnings and lessons along the way so thank you. I would now like to just cross back to Sophie. We have some questions, and Alan I'm just going to invite you back in if that's OK and we'll keep Kym here as well and Sophie, moderator, we're just going to go to a few questions. We've got some late questions for Alan and we'll cross to some questions for Kym if any pop up, and if we have time, we’ll also pop back to Andrea as well. So across to you Sophie.

[Shot of Sophie Vale speaking]

[Sophie Vale speaks]: Thanks very much. So Alan, we've had a couple of late questions come in, so one of them is given the wide impact to the telecommunications infrastructure like landline, mobile and internet, what options have you considered as a backup option for future events?

[Shot of Alan Arthur speaking]

[Alan Arthur speaks]: Yeah, it's a great question. So we, our main data service which supports our phones as well is on a hard cable in the ground, and we also have a backup 4G network connection, but of course when the local exchange goes out, you lose all of those. So we're looking at SAT phones, base station type style SAT phones with antennas on the roof. We also do have some limited access to SMR radios, the government radio network. The problem with those was no one had tested them for a while, no one was particularly familiar with them, and as we discovered, we were limited to only being able to contact other hospitals on them, which wasn't something we really need to be able to do. And so we're looking at what options are there in the future for radio, but we'll probably end up with multiple options in the hope that kind of gives us a good protection against future incidents.

[Shot of Sophie Vale speaking]

[Sophie Vale speaks]: Thanks Alan, and there's been one more question for you. How long were you solo or isolated during the event and when were you contacted by external agencies offering support, in the next few hours or days following the impact of the event?

[Shot of Alan Arthur speaking]

[Alan Arthur speaks]: So we established conversations with the department and the local council very quickly, and so we had, were having kind of useful conversations with them very near the beginning. I think the lines of communication weren’t clear and that was one of the lessons learned when we did the incident review, was that there were people having conversations at all different levels with the best intent in the world, but it meant that the incident controller wasn't necessarily across everything that was happening and so I think better controlling that flow of information would be a big improvement for future incidents.

[Shot of Sophie Vale speaking]

[Sophie Vale speaks]: Wonderful thanks again, Alan, and one final question, Kym, I'm going to direct this to you, maybe you will be able to, I'd be interested in your opinion. So someone said the examples that have been provided that we've talked about today are quite large scale, and they've asked how does an organization that is much smaller prepare for emergencies, and what kind of contacts should they have kind of ready to hand in the event of emergencies?

[Shot of Kym Mallamaci speaking]

[Kym Mallamaci speaks]: Good question, I think, I think the fundamentals of planning it are the same regardless of the scale, and if you think about it like with council, we’ll respond to a single house fire, and provide a similar level of service in a different way and it's really just about scaling up when things get bigger, so for us it's having an understanding of what our role is and planning for things to be scaled up and for our municipal recovery managers, for example with dealing with single incidents, the lesson for them in terms of scaling up was this wasn't about managing 1,000 single incidents, it was about them stepping out of that role and having oversight for the range of things that included 1,000 cases for example, amongst their remit. So I think the principles are exactly the same.

In terms of key contacts, and again councils have municipal recovery managers, which is a key contact I think in Emergency Management plans. Or at the very least, the council 1300 number or the like that enables people to connect in with council and services regardless of the scale of the emergency, so that's a key one for me in terms of advice to people developing site plans for example, and then all the usual, the typical emergency service numbers need to be in that plan as well

[Shot of Melody Bush speaking]

[Melody Bush speaks]: That's great, thank you very much, Kym and Alan and also Sophie for moderating as well. That concludes our speakers and our forum today, as mentioned at the start of our forum, we will ensure that all the questions in the chat have been responded to and I just wanna call out to both Sophie and Tim for doing that throughout our forum. We'll get all that information out to you, we'll find a way if it's not by email we'll certainly find a way to get that out to everyone, and we'll make sure there's a connection with our guest speakers in particular, both Kym and Alan as well for any follow-ups.

Our session today has been recorded, and again we'll be able to share that with you as well, and I think the team have put a link up in the chat so that people can find where to access that recording. A reminder, our QR code is on the screen now for the survey to be accessed, and if people could fill that survey in that, we would really appreciate that. And as I mentioned earlier, that provides us with feedback.

Thank you very much for all of our guest speakers today, to all of our attendees for taking the time out of your busy day, to all of our staff across the four divisions, and our central colleagues as well. And a big thank you to our working group members for pulling today's event together. But a particular shout out to Alana and her team for their IT support which has meant a smooth and successful session. A couple of little glitches along the way but we’ll seek your forgiveness on that, so thank you everyone, that concludes our forum. Best wishes, and bye for now. Thank you.