

**Collaboration is the key**



Lessons from the  
South Australian Government's  
recovery operation  
**Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire**  
January 2005



Government  
of South Australia

## Collaboration is the key

“The central challenge-recognised in the United States during the September 11 recovery-is the realisation that all agencies must be prepared to cooperate fully in a unified team effort to effect recovery.”

## To the Premier

On behalf of the State Recovery Committee, I am pleased to provide the report of the South Australian Government's recovery effort in the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire.

In the recovery operation, agency chief executives and their staff responded with speed and commitment to the Government's call to do all that was needed to bring immediate relief and assistance to the fire affected communities. When the operation was at its height, individual public servants worked long hours on often difficult and demanding tasks to maintain the roll out of assistance measures across many fronts. For these workers it was impossible not to be touched by the community's tragedy. As government agency staff helped to restore services and utilities, repair infrastructure, destroy livestock and clear debris, they also provided comfort and support to individuals and families.

The recovery operation was judged successful by the measure that matters most. Local people and local groups valued the Government's recovery response and praised the tireless efforts of individual public servants, the hundreds of volunteers, community service organisations and others who helped the community to recover in the first weeks after the disaster. The appointment of the on duty Minister in Port Lincoln was a tangible demonstration of the Government's commitment to the recovery operation and gave the community and recovery workers access to a decision maker at Cabinet level. This helped to ensure that workers on the ground had the support and resources they required to get assistance quickly to those in need.

In many ways, the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery effort provides a template for future recovery operations. As the first such operation instituted under the newly proclaimed Emergency Management Act 2004, it highlighted the broad scope of recovery as a core function in emergency management.

The scale of the disaster and its impact on the local community was such that no one agency could be effective alone. A wide ranging and integrated response was required. Above all else, the collaborative efforts of individuals, governments and organisations pulling together to get the job done, delivered results for the local community. The Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery operation demonstrated outstanding collaboration and cooperation between South Australian Government agencies and strong partnerships with other sectors.





"There were just so many people that came to help...now it has rained and the green is coming back, there's hope."

Vanilla resident,  
Port Lincoln Times, 12 July 2005





## Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Summary of findings</b>	5
<b>Overview</b>	9
<b>Evaluation framework</b>	16
<b>The recovery diary</b>	65
<b>Appendix</b>	81

*Report tabled in the Parliament  
of South Australia by Premier  
Mike Rann on 20 September 2005*



## Introduction

### **Scope**

*Collaboration is the Key* is the report of the State Recovery Committee. The document examines the recovery effort of the South Australian Government and public sector agencies. The role of key partners represented on the State Recovery Committee, such as the Australian Red Cross, Centrelink and the Insurance Disaster Response Organisation was significant and this contribution is acknowledged. Whilst these agencies are not the subject of the report, many of the lessons learned observations provided by these bodies are included in the document.

A preliminary draft of the report was provided to the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) on 5 August 2005. This was followed by a 2 week period for comment and feedback from State Recovery Committee members before the report was finalised.

### **Lessons learned**

Around 50 interviews were conducted to gather information for this report. It draws significantly on individual interviews and conversations with representatives of the State Recovery Committee; the Adelaide based State Recovery Centre team; members of the local West Coast Recovery Committee operating

out of Port Lincoln; other local representatives from local councils; and the South Australian Farmers Federation.

The Chair of the State Recovery Committee sponsored the report on behalf of the Committee and flagged early in the recovery process the value of documenting the lessons learned. Work commenced on information gathering for this purpose within the first 3 weeks of the recovery operation and continued over the ensuing months. Operational demands on recovery personnel made information gathering difficult in the first weeks. People interviewed for the report commented on the value of having time to reflect on the operation, once business had returned to normal. Lessons learned could often be identified more clearly several months on, rather than in the early weeks.

External assistance was engaged to compile the report and provided independent analysis and perspective. Nevertheless the document remains the result of South Australian government agencies taking a hard look at their recovery contribution and identifying areas where they can do better in the future. Although feedback from the local community on the recovery operation is reflected in the report, it was not the brief to seek direct community input to the document.

### **Document review**

As well as the interviews, an extensive document review was conducted including minutes of recovery meetings, newsletters and individual agency reports reviewing agencies' recovery efforts and lessons learned. The findings of debriefing exercises have also been incorporated, particularly the debriefings conducted by the State Recovery Committee and the leadership group of the West Coast Recovery Committee. The report highlights lessons learned that are broadly applicable to most agencies and from a whole-of-government perspective: the lessons that are important for an integrated, cross agency approach. Agency specific matters are not the subject of this report and are being addressed in the planning processes of individual agencies.

The recovery operation on the Lower Eyre Peninsula is ongoing and will be for some months to come, perhaps for the next 2-3 years as some estimates suggest. Information in this report is current at 30 June 2005.



## **Evaluating success**

In terms of what is generally considered good emergency management practice the recovery effort can be measured as a success. This is the positive base from which the report identifies those areas of the operation that could be improved. The report assesses the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery effort against broadly agreed benchmarks for such operations. These critical success factors have been identified from relevant literature such as the Australian Emergency Manual for Disaster Recovery (see appendix) and the experiences of others. From this information it is apparent that if key elements are in place, recovery efforts will be more effective and individuals, families, businesses and communities will be given the assistance they need to recover and rebuild. These elements, or principles of good recovery practice, provide a framework for evaluating the effectiveness of the Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery operation and identifying lessons for the future. It is intended that this evaluation framework is also used to guide recovery planning. The principles applied here are consistent with recovery management principles referenced Australia wide.

## **Recovery principles**

In evaluating the recovery effort, recovery is considered as:

“the coordinated process of supporting the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and the restoration of economic, physical and emotional well being. Through this process, it is preferable that individuals and communities are supported in the management of their own recovery as they know best what their needs are, and this approach is most likely to build community capacity and sustainability” .<sup>1</sup>

This aligns with the broad view of recovery as defined in the Emergency Management Act 2004 and is the context for assessing the effectiveness of the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery operation against the following 12 recovery principles:

- timely and responsive;
- leadership;
- people focus;
- locally and community driven;
- partnerships;
- coordination;
- integration and sustainability;

- fair and transparent administration;
- communication;
- information management;
- planning; and
- efficient and effective management.

The core elements of these recovery principles are outlined in the appendix.

### **Report structure**

An examination of the recovery operation against the 12 recovery principles is the body of the report. To help tell the recovery story, a diary of recovery activity from 11 January to 30 June 2005 is included in the report. The diary indicates the wide sweep of the Government's response to the emergency and the ongoing work by government agencies and others to assist the local community to rebuild. The diary has been compiled largely from situation reports or fact sheets issued by the recovery team's media officers throughout the recovery operation, as well as from other sources such as the Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Recovery Newsletter.

Identifying the lessons learned remains the main purpose of the report. The important lessons are highlighted in the sections evaluating the recovery operation. Lessons of a more operational nature have also been captured. The Office of Recovery is working with State Recovery Committee members to ensure these detailed lessons and areas for improvement are not lost by incorporating them into recovery planning and procedures.

The appendix includes a list of the acronyms used in the report.



## Summary of findings

### Key lessons

Whilst the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery operation was sustained and effective, the importance of the *Collaboration is the Key* report lies in documenting the lessons learned for the future. Improvements are already being implemented by individual agencies and the State Recovery Committee is overseeing the priority areas for action. There are two issues of particular importance.

Like the experiences of others in times of emergency or disaster, a valuable learning from Lower Eyre Peninsula is that recovery strategies in South Australia need to take into account the strong desire of people to help others when disaster strikes. This means developing sound volunteer management strategies that enable us to harness this goodwill and energy.

An improved information management capability for recovery is another area that emerged in the lessons learned work as very significant. Effective data and information management is more than an operational issue. It is fundamental to partnership arrangements and interagency collaboration; to how services are delivered to victims of disaster and their families; and to community rebuilding strategies for the future. A strong information management capability is critical to delivering on the commitment that in disaster recovery, people should only have to tell their story once.

## **Speed**

The Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfires were the worst in South Australia since Ash Wednesday in 1983. Within hours of the declaration of an 'identified major incident'<sup>2</sup> on 11 January 2005 the South Australian Government marshalled resources to assist the devastated communities and coordinate the recovery operation. The speed and immediacy of the response, driven by strong leadership from the top, meant relief and assistance measures were quickly put in place. In the first 2 weeks of the recovery operation, large numbers of government personnel were deployed to Port Lincoln, over and above emergency services personnel already on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, and almost doubled the establishment of locally based staff.

## **Collaboration**

Cooperation and collaboration were the keys to a successful recovery operation: between South Australian Government agencies, with the local community, other sectors and levels of government. The State Recovery Committee and the local West Coast Coast Recovery Committee were responsible for coordination at state and local levels. They provided the forums for information sharing, identifying issues and solutions and for targeting resources. The membership of these two groups reflected the productive partnerships that underpinned the success of the recovery effort.

## **Success stories**

The elements that worked very well included:

- the Duty Minister;
- the West Coast Recovery Committee;
- the Hotline, with 1000 calls received in the first week;
- local bushfire recovery centres where 600 people registered in the first week ; and
- use of the media in community communication.

## **Local response**

The recovery effort was responsive to the needs of local families, businesses and the community. Day-to-day operational management of the recovery operation was based in the local community and led out of Port Lincoln. Local community input was high and locally based government personnel were critical success factors because of their strong links with the community. Effective coordination was achieved at the local level through the West Coast Recovery Committee and the local leadership group designated to coordinate key functions from logistics

to grants administration and volunteer management. It was agreed that a community development resource to work with community groups needs to be brought on early in the recovery process as resilient communities are keen to start rebuilding the social fabric once the emergency dissipates.

### **Volunteers**

The response of volunteers wanting to help the bushfire affected community was remarkable. People travelled to Port Lincoln from all over the State and from other states as well. The local West Coast community rallied in hundreds to help friends, relatives and neighbours affected by the fire. With such numbers, the lesson is that volunteers need to be managed well if this resource is to be tapped to the maximum.

### **Funding and assistance**

A whole-of-government disaster funding policy is needed to achieve balance between immediate relief efforts and longer term community rebuilding. This includes agencies assessing forward capital programs to bring new works and upgrades on earlier. Under the umbrella of the proposed funding policy, grant criteria and assessment guidelines need to be further developed, building on the excellent work done in this area “on the run” at the start of the recovery operation.

A concerted effort is required, working with non-government organisations, community service organisations and the media to encourage cash donations rather than goods in public appeals for disaster victims. Disposal of unwanted goods was costly and time-consuming. Cash donations put money back into the community, help local businesses and help people manage their own recovery. This is a major area for attention in the future.

### **Information management**

The need to develop a significantly improved information management capability for recovery is one of the most important learnings and must be a priority for action. Dedication, energy, hard work and cooperation delivered the result but systems and process improvements are required that will also deliver efficiencies. Better use needs to be made of information technology and on-line capabilities for sharing of information. Recommendations for improvement include development of an on-line victims’ data base to record victim data so that people only have to tell their story once, loss assessment templates to assist verification of assistance entitlements, a volunteer management and



tasking system and an issues register to facilitate coordination and monitoring. Policies and protocols need to be established that take into account privacy and confidentiality considerations in information exchange.

### **Legislation**

The bushfire tested arrangements under South Australia's newly proclaimed Emergency Management Act 2004. The broader definition of recovery responsibilities and the scale of the bushfire impact meant expanded roles and engagement for many agencies. For example, PIRSA moved beyond its traditional role of stock destruction and disposal to providing a much wider range of support to farmers. The size of the operation has highlighted recovery as a significant emergency management function: complex, multi-faceted and protracted. In Lower Eyre Peninsula, it is expected that recovery services and assistance will be required for the longer term.

### **Template for the future**

The evaluation framework and recovery principles developed to assess the Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery operation provides the template for the development of a State Recovery Plan, other levels of recovery planning and associated policies and procedures. This is a particularly important outcome because of the need to align the Plan with the provisions of the Emergency Management Act 2004 that broadly define recovery functions. Recovery planning needs to be responsive to changing individual and community needs and capacity, as recovery and rebuilding progresses.

*"A review of the social impact of disasters in Impact of a Foot and Mouth Disease Outbreak on Australia, Productivity Commission Research Report, June 2002 (Chapter 8) highlights the serious and wide ranging individual and social impacts that communities and recovery support agencies need to cope with, and the stages through which communities go, following a natural disaster. The range and severity of disaster impacts on individuals and communities, their social, health and economic functioning, and their long-term wellbeing means that the recovery process can take one to five years."*<sup>3</sup>

A photograph showing two emus running on a wide, reddish-brown dirt road. The road is flanked by dry, brownish trees and bushes, suggesting a dry or post-fire environment. The emus are in the center of the frame, moving away from the viewer. The word "Overview" is overlaid in white text on the left side of the image.

## Overview

### **The “Black Tuesday” Fire**

On Monday 10 January 2005 a fire started near the small township of Wangary in Lower Eyre Peninsula and by the following day had broken out of its containment lines.

On Tuesday 11 January 2005 South Australia was faced with two significant bushfires, one at Mount Osmond in the Adelaide Hills and another on the Lower Eyre Peninsula, just outside Port Lincoln.

An identified major incident was declared at 4.30 pm on Tuesday 11 January 2005. “Walls of fire no one could hold back”<sup>4</sup> swept across Lower Eyre Peninsula “with a heat of more than 1000 degrees Celsius at speeds of up to 100km per hour”.<sup>5</sup> This “Black Tuesday” fire was not contained until midday the following day only 6km out of Port Lincoln, largely because of a fortuitous wind change. The fire was not completely extinguished until 20 January 2005.

The fire wreaked havoc on the local communities and was on a scale rarely seen in South Australia. It was the worst experienced in the State since the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires in the Adelaide Hills and the South East.

## **Impact**

Sadly, nine lives were lost in the Lower Eyre Peninsula fire, over 110 people were injured, some seriously, and significant property damage occurred over a vast area. The fire ravaged in excess of 82,000 hectares of land (827 square kilometres). Hardest hit districts and small towns were Wangary, North Shields, Wanilla, Poonindie, Louth Bay, White Flat, Koppio, Greenpatch and Warunda.

The impact on essential services was severe and included loss of electricity, telecommunications and water supply. Over 1000 homes were without power; water supply was affected for a number of days due to structural damage to the pipeline (35 kilometres of mains water pipeline was destroyed); and telecommunications were seriously disrupted. Government and other organisations responsible for these essential utilities worked very quickly to restore services to the public.

An estimate for total damage by the fire is more than \$100 million, including losses of:

- 79 houses completely destroyed (including caravans/buses used as permanent dwellings);
- 26 houses suffered extensive damage;
- 139 vehicles destroyed;
- 324 sheds destroyed or damaged, many containing hay and farm equipment;
- 138 farm implements destroyed;
- 6,300km of fencing damaged;
- approximately 46,500 animals lost, mostly sheep;
- one aircraft valued at \$100,000 completely destroyed; and
- tools and equipment (around 46 small businesses or contractors have made application for relief assistance for tools of trade and equipment such as shearer's tools and irrigation piping).<sup>6</sup>

This above list excludes the human impact of loss, injury, grief and dislocation- even as basic as children having to leave a familiar small rural school and be enrolled at a new school- and the loss of possessions. Many people lost everything in the fire, except the clothes on their backs. In total 1,290 people suffered directly in the fire through loss of life or property.

## **Emergency Management Act 2004**

The recovery effort on the Lower Eyre Peninsula was carried out under the auspices of the newly proclaimed Emergency Management Act 2004 (the Act) which replaced the State Disaster Act 1980.

The Act commenced on 25 November 2004 and established the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC). The Committee monitors and evaluates the implementation of the State Emergency Management Plan and the response and recovery operation taken during or following a major emergency, major incident, or a disaster declared under the Act.

The Act appoints the Commissioner of Police as the State Coordinator, with the power to declare an identified major incident or major emergency. The declaration clarifies roles and responsibilities, activates the State Emergency Management Plan and provides the State Coordinator with special powers to manage an emergency. After the declaration of an identified major incident, major emergency or disaster, the Act requires the State Coordinator to appoint an Assistant State Coordinator to exercise powers and functions in relation to recovery operations.

The Act also directs SEMC as soon as possible to establish an advisory group to advise SEMC in relation to recovery operations generally.

## **Recovery governance**

Recovery operations are defined in Section 3 of the Act as “any measure taken during or after an emergency to assist the normal pattern of life of individuals, families and communities affected by the emergency and includes:

- restoration of essential facilities and services;
- restoration of other facilities and services necessary for the normal functioning of a community;
- the provision of material and personal needs; and
- the provision of means of emotional support.”

When the State Coordinator, Police Commissioner, Mal Hyde, declared the identified major incident and major emergency he also appointed Sue Vardon, Chief Executive of the Department for Families and Communities (DFC) as the Assistant State Coordinator for Recovery to manage recovery operations for the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfires.

At an extraordinary meeting on 12 January 2005, SEMC resolved to establish a State Recovery Committee, chaired by Sue Vardon, to assist the Government in

supporting and rebuilding the affected community. As a result, the Chair had overall responsibility for conducting recovery operations under the umbrella of the legislation and the State Emergency Management Plan.

### **State Recovery Committee**

The State Recovery Committee met for the first time on 12 January 2005 and continued to meet on a weekly basis in the early stages of the recovery process. The meeting frequency was later reduced as the number of urgent matters requiring attention diminished. Its membership comprised about 30 representatives of South Australian government agencies and key partner organisations like the Australian Red Cross (ARC), Centrelink and the Local Government Association (see appendix).

The State Recovery Committee was responsible for:

- supporting the West Coast Recovery Committee and its work in the local community;
- coordinating the broad agency responses;
- providing input into the relationship with the Commonwealth Government and other jurisdictions on recovery matters; and
- advising and reporting to Cabinet.

To assist in carrying out her functions the Assistant State Coordinator (Recovery) also established:

- a State Recovery Centre in Victoria Lane, Adelaide to provide a communication, support and coordination facility for the recovery process; and
- a local recovery committee to determine local priorities and coordinate immediate relief to the affected community.

In consultation with the Premier and Minister for Emergency Services, Vince Monterola, Chief Executive Officer of SA Fire and Emergency Services was appointed as chair of the local committee.

At the same time the Premier appointed a duty Minister to be present on Eyre Peninsula as a visible sign of the Government's support to the affected community and to facilitate recovery efforts.

### **State Recovery Centre**

Ronnie Faggotter was seconded from the South Australian Housing Trust to lead the State Recovery Centre in Adelaide. The Centre was staffed by government



agency representatives to support the State Recovery Committee in its coordination role on a day-to-day basis, to assist the work of the local recovery committee and manage information flows. The State Recovery Centre was located in accommodation sourced at short notice by the Department for Administrative and Information Services (DAIS).

### **West Coast Recovery Committee (WCRC)**

The recovery operation for the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire was largely locally driven, with the priorities and needs of the local community being assessed in close consultation with the community. The West Coast Recovery Committee was the prime mechanism for local input. Like the establishment of the local recovery centres, potential local members of the Committee were identified early, before the Committee was formally convened.

Under the Chairmanship of Vince Monterola, the West Coast Recovery Committee met for the first time 2 days after the fire on 14 January 2005 and was attended by 32 people. Approximately 40 people attended subsequent weekly meetings of the Committee although this reduced over time as the urgency of the situation diminished.

Periodically South Australian Government Cabinet Ministers attended the meetings including the Premier, Minister for Emergency Services, Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Minister for Families and Communities, Minister for Health and the Minister for Industry and Trade.

### **Membership**

The West Coast Recovery Committee was a large body comprising representatives from a diverse range of organisations including South Australian government agencies; the South Australian Farmers Federation; Centrelink; the two local government bodies, Tumby Bay District Council and Lower Eyre Peninsula District Council; charitable and welfare organisations including the Salvation Army and Australian Red Cross; the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service Incorporated; the Insurance Disaster Response Organisation; the Regional Development Board and local pastoral ministries (see appendix). Membership of this committee was fluid and varied from meeting to meeting.

The primary purpose of the Committee meetings was for the regular exchange of information between the community and those people directing and carrying out recovery operations. It allowed the State Recovery Committee to receive immediate feedback on the success and usefulness of agency effort and identified

areas of the recovery process that required attention. The State Recovery Centre was a conduit for this information exchange and for helping to identify sources of assistance. The West Coast Recovery Committee had an important communication role through its locally produced newsletter and the Chair was the spokesperson with the media.

### **Leadership team**

One of the earliest decisions of the Chair of the West Coast Committee was to establish a small leadership group to ensure agency activities were directed efficiently and effectively to the priority areas of the recovery, including accommodation, farm services and grants, counselling services, welfare and grants, communication and logistics. This smaller group provided regular briefings on progress to the larger West Coast Recovery Committee. Membership of the leadership group is listed in the appendix. Each member of the leadership group was supported by assistance from local staff or resources from Adelaide and drew on local community representatives as well.

### **Roles and responsibilities**

Governance arrangements for the recovery process had the following broad elements and encouraged flexibility and responsiveness to local needs:

- the West Coast Recovery Committee identified the needs of the community and coordinated local relief in consultation with local representatives of government agencies, local government organisations and community organisations such as the SA Farmers Federation, the Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army, the St. Vincent de Paul Society and other charitable and service organisations.
- the West Coast Recovery Committee reported the identified need to the State Recovery Committee and sought appropriate resources.
- the State Recovery Committee coordinated and identified strategic issues and directions in collaboration with the local committee, tasked the relevant agencies to process requests urgently and provided resources for the local committee's work such as staff, facilities and technical support.

The Assistant State Coordinator (Recovery) is provided with extraordinary powers during the period of a declaration. Outside this declaration period, responsibility for recovery activities lies with the Chair of the State Recovery Committee under the State Emergency Management Plan. The Chair is responsible to the SEMC and collaborates with members of the SEMC on recovery matters that are the responsibility of individual portfolios.

The SEMC also has responsibility under the Act to establish an advisory group to advise SEMC in relation to all recovery operations. It has established the State Recovery Committee as a standing committee, chaired by Sue Vardon, to provide this advice. The Chair of the State Recovery Committee has ongoing responsibility for managing and coordinating the recovery process and for ensuring appropriate plans are in place. Chief executives of agencies are responsible for their own portfolio contributions to recovery under the broad umbrella of the State Recovery Plan and leadership of the Chair of the State Recovery Committee. Chief executives are represented on the SEMC and on the State Recovery Committee.

### **Effective recovery operation**

It is clear from the interviews and agency reports that the recovery operation was judged very effective. Mr John Lush, formerly President of the SA Farmers Federation noted in an interview that the Government's response was outstanding and that individual public servants went "beyond their duty" to deliver assistance to the West Coast communities.

In summary:

- The recovery operations were well managed and covered the range of individual and community concerns from immediate emergency assistance and housing, to farm services and environmental impacts to mental health services and small business support.
- The recovery process was underway very quickly and the level of cooperation between agencies was excellent.
- Government agency staff in both Adelaide and Port Lincoln worked tirelessly to ensure assistance reached those in need, services were restored and the community helped to get back on its feet.
- The South Australian Government was seen to be clearly leading from the front, dealing with the issues and demonstrating a willingness to provide all possible assistance to the local communities. A tangible demonstration of the support was the appointment of the duty Minister and the regular personal contact with affected people in the towns and on the farms.



## Evaluation framework

**Timely and responsive**

**Leadership**

**People focus**

**Locally and community driven**

**Partnerships**

**Coordination**

**Integration and sustainability**

**Fair and transparent administration**

**Communication**

**Information management**

**Planning**

**Efficient and effective management**

## Timely and responsive

*“Recovery from disaster is best achieved where the recovery process begins from the moment of disaster impact”.<sup>7</sup>*

*Disaster recovery is a discrete function of emergency management but recovery operations are inherently a part of the disaster response. Response and recovery are interlinked and, on the ground in a disaster, often occur in tandem. Recovery planning needs to ensure recovery operations are set in train as soon as a disaster strikes and an emergency is declared. An integrated response requires speedy and comprehensive assessment of impacts on individuals, families and communities across recovery functions: community and social, infrastructure, economic and environment. Phased recovery strategies for the immediate, intermediate and longer term should be responsive to evolving needs.*

### Speed

The extent of loss and devastation to the community meant a recovery operation on a large scale was needed on many fronts – and quickly.

The Government’s recovery response was immediate and effective. Following the declaration of the major incident at 4.32pm on Tuesday 11 January, the Premier convened the Emergency Management Council of Cabinet at 9pm to receive status briefings from key emergency personnel and agency chief executives. The Premier directed that relief measures were to be implemented immediately.

Within 24 hours vital recovery infrastructure, funding and management arrangements were in place:

- the Bushfire Recovery Centre at Port Lincoln High School was established;
- the Hotline operated by Centrelink was ready to receive calls from the public;
- the State Recovery Coordinator had convened the State Recovery Committee;
- personal hardship and distress grants were being provided through the Bushfire Recovery Centre;
- preparations were in train to set up the Adelaide based State Recovery Centre which became operational at 8am on 13 January; and
- funding support for the relief operation was announced by the Premier.



The State Recovery Coordinator visited Eyre Peninsula with the Premier on Thursday 13 January and commenced arrangements to establish a local community recovery committee.

On 13 January the Premier announced major relief measures and funding of \$6 million for victims. The Premier directed that a Minister be situated in Port Lincoln to give the community access to a decision maker at Cabinet level and to ensure that government workers and others on the ground had the support and resources they needed to get assistance quickly to victims and to the wider local community. The first duty Minister was the Minister for Emergency Services. Other Ministers who assisted in Port Lincoln included the Minister for Agriculture, Food and Fisheries, Minister for Industry and Trade, Minister for Education and Children's Services and the Minister for Small Business.

Chaired by Vince Monterola, the West Coast Recovery Committee met for the first time on Friday 14 January 2005.

### **Recovery activity**

At the same time there was a massive amount of recovery activity occurring on the ground to provide relief and assistance, implement safety measures and get basic services functioning again. Working alongside others, government agency staff helped to restore utilities, to distribute emergency supplies to families, provide financial assistance, support and counselling services and to destroy and dispose of livestock. Local residents and many people from throughout South Australia helped with emergency assistance for fire victims.

The recovery team coordinated and managed hundreds of volunteers and established communication mechanisms such as a local recovery newsletter and regular media reports.

The work of volunteers was complemented by low risk offenders in mobile offender work camps, managed by the Department for Correctional Services.

### **Local recovery centres**

Recovery centres for bushfire victims were established at Port Lincoln High School and Cummins Bowling Club. The centres were established early to provide immediate support to those affected by the fire and to provide a point of reference for the local community.

It is worth noting that a local manager, Martin Charman of Children, Youth and Family Services (CYFS), decided prior to the State Coordinator's declaration to set up a recovery centre to ensure as many arrangements as possible could

be made during business hours. This decision meant that the recovery centre at Port Lincoln was well established by the time people required assistance. One senior government official noted that this was an example of “great leadership”.

Government agencies were assisted in the operation of the recovery centres by many other organisations including the Australian Red Cross and the Salvation Army. The recovery centres were important as a focal point for the community to receive comfort, advice, financial assistance and counselling. Even in the short period from the Tuesday of the fire to the following Sunday, over 400 people affected by the fire had registered with the centres.

The St Joseph’s Catholic School in Port Lincoln opened its doors to accommodate response and recovery workers in the school’s dormitory accommodation. Workers were welcomed with free toiletries donated by the local community and a kitchen of food and beverages (much home made by the local community). The dormitory common room provided an opportunity for workers and volunteers to come together at the end of the day and share information, advice and support. This was a very successful initiative.

### **Relief and recovery assistance**

Following the establishment of the recovery centres, other early initiatives included:

- the development and issue of victim identification cards. Two cards were issued – a white and a green. A white card was given to those families who lost their home or their home was uninhabitable for at least two weeks. A green card was issued to all others who suffered some form of loss in the fire. The purpose of the cards was to allow victims of the fire to be readily identifiable and to assist those people providing recovery services to verify assistance entitlements;
- immediate financial grants for emergency assistance, management of applications for further assistance and the administration of grant funding;
- shipping containers made available to property owners to store materials securely following the destruction of sheds and other buildings;
- distribution of survival kits and portable toilets to property owners who had lost their principal residence. This pack consisted of a number of basic necessities such as first aid kits, hygiene essentials, sleeping bags and kitchen utensils;
- management of communications with both those affected by the fire and the media. The primary communication vehicles were the Hotline for people to call with any questions concerning the fire and the recovery, and a regular newsletter

developed by the West Coast Recovery Committee. This was initially distributed weekly to residents throughout the fire affected areas. An Eyre Peninsula bushfire web page was also established on the Service SA website;

- informal community social gatherings and information nights;
- free child care at the Tumby Bay Area School;
- mental health education and awareness programs;
- counselling services for victims;
- management and coordination of volunteers including management of volunteer crews assisting landowners with fencing and clean up work throughout the fire footprint as well as other relief measures;
- repair of infrastructure such as power lines and water supplies; and
- engagement and deployment of Australian Army personnel.

In addition to the provision of grants, meeting the needs of the community for accommodation was critical to the recovery process. The emergency accommodation needs of the community were all met – provided by family and friends, the community and the SA Housing Trust (SAHT).

### **Response and recovery interface**

The immediacy of the recovery response required ongoing communication and liaison with those involved in the incident response arm of the emergency.

Recovery agencies need to be “properly integrated into disaster management arrangements” and “recovery managers involved from initial briefings onwards” .<sup>8</sup>

The State’s newly proclaimed Emergency Management Act 2004 established the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) to provide a leadership and coordinating role for the whole-of-government in emergency management. SEMC held extraordinary meetings on 12, 14, 20 January and 2 February 2005. The State Recovery Coordinator attended meetings of the State Emergency Management Committee and the Emergency Management Council. Impact assessment information shared in these, and other forums, helped shape the recovery response.

Functional services groups were activated quickly. There was good communication and coordination between the relevant functional services agencies that, in turn, were linked into both the response and the recovery arms of the emergency. The State Emergency Management Committee and the State Recovery Committee received regular briefings from the lead functional services agencies who were also working closely with the recovery operation in Port Lincoln.

## Recovery phases

Disasters and emergencies do not necessarily fit into neat stages although in Lower Eyre Peninsula the recovery operation has been managed through three identifiable phases: immediate relief, an intermediate recovery stage and longer term recovery and rebuilding. Recovery from disasters is “a complex, dynamic and protracted process”.<sup>9</sup> Levels of recovery responses need to change as recovery proceeds in tune with the changing need of individuals and communities over time.

By 18 January, with the emergency contained and many services and utilities restored, the recovery operation moved into its second phase beyond immediate relief measures. By March, the focus of activity had changed again. Martin Breuker, the locally based SA Housing Trust Regional Manager replaced Vince Monterola as the Bushfire Recovery Coordinator in Port Lincoln. The State Recovery Centre was closed on 9 March and subsumed in the newly created Office of Recovery in DFC, following the progressive return of members of the State Recovery Centre to their home agencies over the previous weeks.

A Getting Started Workshop held at Wangary on 2 March to assist farmers to re-establish their enterprises is one example signalling a shift in recovery activity. More workshops followed in other disaster affected areas. By the end of April, the three main volunteer camps had closed with remaining and new volunteers being accommodated at the Nyroca Scout Camp until the end of June. The West Coast Recovery Centre in Port Lincoln, while continuing to assist people in managing their own recovery, also began to focus increasingly on community rebuilding initiatives.

The recovery operation has been responsive to changing needs through the stages outlined above. At the same time, by keeping local recovery staff and infrastructure in place continuity of commitment has been demonstrated.

## Learning

- *The speed, range and effectiveness of the immediate recovery response, together with community consultation, encouraged community confidence and established the foundation for recovery. Structures and processes need to support communication, collaboration and integrated action between incident response and recovery to ensure recovery operations are implemented early.*
- *Recovery planning and procedures need to recognise and be responsive to different stages in recovery, and to include appropriate transition arrangements.*

## Leadership

*Leadership that is united, decisive and moving forward delivers confidence. Credibility comes from the capacity to mobilise assistance when and where it is needed, from listening to the needs of those affected by disaster and responding with strategies that are inclusive and flexible. Collaborative leadership is the model that delivers sustained recovery.*

### **From the top**

In the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery operation, decisive and effective leadership was demonstrated at all levels. The Premier gave the strong message to agency chief executives to cut through red tape to get assistance quickly to those in need. The Emergency Management Council and SEMC were key mechanisms for oversight of the recovery effort and for ensuring that resources were adequately spread across the span of response and relief activity.

For the local community the deployment of a Duty Minister based in Port Lincoln reinforced the Government's commitment to the operation; provided first hand experience of the impact of the disaster on the community; facilitated appropriate targeting of assistance; and meant that workers on the ground had access to the decision makers. Solutions were developed quickly and implemented immediately. The West Coast community valued the Government's presence at this senior level and the Duty Minister was a very positive initiative of the recovery operation. For the future, it would be useful to define in more detail the role of the Duty Minister to ensure clarity and speed is maintained in decision making processes.

### **Collaborative leadership**

The recovery operation demonstrated the collaborative model of leadership that is essential in a multi-agency recovery operation. The State Recovery Committee brought together agency heads and senior representatives of partner organisations. Similarly the West Coast Recovery Committee represented local people drawn from government and the community.

The disaster tested the new Emergency Management Act 2004. With such new legislation there were people in government who were not fully conversant with the provisions of the Act. For example, some key people involved in the initial relief operations were not necessarily aware that the authority of the

State Recovery Committee and Assistant State Coordinator (Recovery) derived from the legislation.

Only a handful of people with the experience of Ash Wednesday were still working in government. This meant only a small number of people had the depth of experience for an operation on this scale. Sue Vardon (Assistant State Coordinator, Recovery) and Vince Monterola (Chair WCRC) both had experience in emergency management in significant and complex situations. Certain agencies acted as lead agencies in accordance with functional plans under the State Emergency Management Plan and led recovery effort in those areas, often with several partner agencies and organisations. For many chief executives the demands were significant, in particular for those responsible for agricultural services and mental health services. The recovery and rebuilding of an agricultural community and economy continues to be a major driver of effort. Recovery leaders and agency chief executives demonstrated the personal leadership qualities and visibility that are critical success factors.

### **Leadership on the ground**

Day-to-day management of the recovery operation was led by the recovery team in Port Lincoln with the support of senior staff and resources from agency head offices, in collaboration with community representatives. The Chair of the West Coast Recovery Committee who headed the local coordination effort was based in Port Lincoln for several weeks. This was important not only for management effectiveness, but also for maintaining local commitment to the recovery effort. The West Coast Recovery Committee and the functional leadership group established by the Chair kept focus on the key issues.

“To respond to a disaster of this magnitude requires a management approach and team that can respond to issues very quickly”.<sup>10</sup> Agency chief executives ensured their staff had the resources and support they needed to get the job done. Several chief executives spent time at Port Lincoln during the intense early recovery activity to support and assist staff. In the Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery effort, leadership cascaded through all levels. Locally based government agency staff displayed leadership and initiative. This was evidenced for example, in the early decision by the local CYFS manager to set up the recovery centre before the formal declaration of the emergency.

Judgement, decisiveness, flexibility and resourcefulness are some of the important core competencies in this context.



## **Learning**

- *The Duty Minister concept should be replicated in other recovery responses, with appropriate protocols clearly defined.*
- *Leadership capability and visibility is a critical success factor. Recovery benefits from having key leaders locally based to manage the operation with the community.*
- *There is a need to continue to draw on the experience of Lower Eyre Peninsula to build disaster recovery awareness and capability at all levels of government, including leadership skills and understanding of the Emergency Management Act 2004.*

## People focus

*Victims of disaster, their families and their communities are at the centre of recovery operations. People should only have to tell their story once in seeking relief and assistance. Recovery efforts must be responsive to the needs of individuals and communities and assist them to take charge of their own recovery. Assistance should recognise that adults, children, families and communities may respond differently to the impact of disaster and loss and recover at their own pace. The resilience of individuals and communities is the platform for moving forward.*

### **Recovery services**

The recovery effort responded to the range of needs of adults, children and families with flexibility and sensitivity to individual and local circumstances. The local recovery centres provided information, advice, support and assistance and were pivotal to the relief and recovery program.

In addition to the immediate comfort and support provided to those affected by the bushfire, counselling services were also available and continued beyond the first impacts. Individuals were given assistance that included financial help, accommodation, gifts of clothing and household goods and assistance to replace essential documents. The local community rallied to assist friends, neighbours, workmates and others.

Government agencies helped support this local effort. "Locals prefer to deal with other locals in times of disaster".<sup>11</sup> Staff resources from the local CYFS Office, for example, were pooled to ensure this happened in the Port Lincoln recovery centre. In Cummins the recovery centre is now run by the local community and the Port Lincoln centre is managed by DFC operating as an information service and referral point to other services. This transition from a relief centre with many agencies delivering emergency assistance directly to victims, to a referral service supporting recovery for the longer term is consistent with the role of recovery centres in other disasters such as the Canberra bushfire. The West Coast Bushfire Recovery Centre in Port Lincoln is increasingly taking on a community development role.

## **Bereavement**

Social workers attached to the Coroner's Office worked with CYFS to assist families who lost family members in the fire. A case management approach was taken and this is considered optimum. The Coroner's Office provided a single point of contact for enquiries from families: an important protocol to have in place as families need to have confidence in the accuracy of information relating to such matters as the release of bodies for burial. Early in the recovery operation it was apparent that paying funeral assistance directly to the funeral director rather than to the family (as current policy required) would be helpful in some cases where people are experiencing intense levels of stress. Future CYFS policies and procedures need to cater for this level of flexibility. In Lower Eyre Peninsula and Canberra the conclusion is the same: that "specific and individualised responses to bushfire-affected clients are the best approach"<sup>12</sup> and this is best achieved through a case management approach.

## **Bushfire victim cards**

The government recovery services were delivered with sensitivity and consideration of the individual's predicament. The intention in developing the victim card was to have a single information source so that people needed to only tell their story once in establishing their claim for assistance. This was not fully achieved because the cards were not in place at the beginning of the recovery operation but several days after the relief operation had commenced.

## **Counselling services**

In the first instance counselling services were considered not to have been well coordinated and there were reports of individuals and families receiving approaches from several different services that overlapped. The Director, Mental Health Services moved quickly to coordinate the counselling program and ensure a single and consistent approach. There was also a view that the availability of counselling services was not always promoted with clarity and sensitivity in use of language. For example, the term mental health practitioner was used rather than counsellor.

It was also suggested that the counselling program could have been more inclusive of the local pastoral ministries and drawn on these traditional community resources in offering coordinated personal counselling services.

## **Identifying needs**

The Department of Education and Children's Services (DECS) provided extensive counselling services to teachers, students and their families. This program continues to recognise the changing needs over time and has been responsive to signs of trauma reaction as they have emerged.

Appropriately, farmers were a focus of recovery operations as the farming community was very severely hit. One non-government organisation suggested that other family members may not have been given the same level of attention and support as many farmers received. Recovery operations need to consider not just issues to do with livelihood but also the impact on all family members. This means agencies working across boundaries and identifying and communicating issues to ensure the needs of all individuals are met.

It is not clear to what extent the opportunities for appropriate exchange of information about the personal situations of victims were pursued. For example, as PIRSA staff worked to assist farmers and help them with recovery strategies, they also performed a valuable role in listening to, and supporting farmers. PIRSA was well placed to identify farmers and their families who might be experiencing difficulty and refer them to support services. Appropriate input from an agency like PIRSA at the front line, to the work of CYFS and Mental Health Services, would be useful in a situation like this.

Six months on there continues to be a high demand for counselling and personal support services on Lower Eyre Peninsula.

## **Learning**

- *The principle of "locals prefer to deal with other locals in times of disaster" should be incorporated where possible in the delivery of recovery services, especially in the emergency relief phase.*
- *A case management approach is the best mechanism to achieve integrated responses tailored to the needs of individuals and families and requires interagency information exchange and collaboration.*
- *Bereavement policies and procedures should allow funeral assistance payments to be made to funeral directors rather than families, to ameliorate distress.*
- *The principle of disaster victims only having to tell their story once is fundamental. In this regard victim cards need to be in place early as the core database for victim information and confirmation of assistance entitlements.*

## Locally and community driven

*“Experience gained through a range of events from Cyclone Tracy onwards is that the recovery process is most effective when individuals and communities actively participate in the management of their own recovery. The involvement of the affected community in the recovery management process creates and supports community infrastructures and provides the resources necessary for successful recovery”.*<sup>13</sup>

*Communities affected by disaster are best placed to identify needs and priorities for assistance. Effective recovery operations establish mechanisms for community input and assist communities to manage their own recovery. Locally driven recovery efforts are the key to sustained recovery and rebuilding. Government agency personnel are part of the local community in which they live and work and are a significant resource to be tapped in recovery operations.*

### **West Coast Recovery Committee**

The West Coast Recovery Committee, incorporating as it did representatives from a range of government and community organisations, was a major conduit for community input to the recovery effort. The regular meetings of this group provided a forum for information sharing, identifying needs and developing appropriate responses. Local leaders established the recovery priorities and made decisions based on local needs. These decisions and other information were disseminated through the Committee’s newsletter which had the status of the official recovery publication. As well as providing recovery information, the newsletter had a local flavour and a personal dimension by providing an opportunity for people to share their experiences and perspectives on the impact of the disaster.

### **Family information forums**

Family information evenings were held in several locations, recognising the local identity of individual communities. This outwardly focussed approach took the recovery operation to the community rather than expecting everyone to meet in Port Lincoln for a one size fits all briefing. Combining a social event with information sharing made the family forums very successful. In some cases these occasions were the first time that neighbours had seen each other since disaster struck.

## **Local staff**

Locally based government personnel were critical success factors in the Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery operation. Living and working in the community, these government employees have strong local networks and connections. They had personal knowledge of many of the victims and their families; they knew local conditions and local sensitivities; and, as colleagues from different agencies, had met from time to time on a professional basis.

Government employees shared with the local community events that remembered those who died, celebrated survival and drew on the community's strength and resilience to move forward. This meant the Government's recovery response was interwoven with the broader community effort by local people to support each other and rebuild for the future.

In an operational sense, the local knowledge of government employees was very useful in helping to assess local capacity and identify where there might be a requirement to supplement with external resources.

The recovery operation has kept in tune with the local recovery process. The Recovery Centre at Cummins was closed after operating for just over a week following feedback from some members of the community. Others did not agree and identified an ongoing need. Local women reopened the centre as a community run facility.

## **Community development**

The appointment of a Community Development Officer in March 2005 was a response to the community's increased readiness to focus on rebuilding the social fabric. This project officer is attached to the West Coast Bushfire Recovery Centre and is supporting community activities as well as helping to bring to fruition many ideas generated by the local community. Assistance with funding submissions is part of this role. The range of activity includes: the upgrade of the Wanilla Hall and surrounding area; craft lessons organised by local Wanilla women; a project officer to commence in July 2005 for 12 months to provide a health service to work with men in fire affected areas; submissions to upgrade Koppio and White Flat community halls; home garden regeneration workshops; a two day TAFE course on operation and maintenance of chainsaws; and planting of trees provided by Trees for Life.



## **Learning**

- *Communities need to manage their own recovery and recovery leaders need to listen to community views. Recovery responses must be tailored to local communities. Mechanisms such as representative committees, community forums, a local newsletter and social events need to be put in place to ensure the full spectrum of community involvement.*
- *A dedicated community development resource was included on the recovery team after about 3 months. Recovery staff are of the view that it is important that such a resource comes on board earlier in the recovery process, to link into community networks as soon as possible, to gain an understanding of the community's situation and encourage and support community rebuilding strategies.*

## Partnerships

*Recovery efforts require a multi-faceted approach. No single agency can do it alone. There need to be strong links between those who are the first respondents to the incident and the recovery personnel. Partnerships between levels of government, the non-government sector, private and public sectors and the community bring expertise, resources and different perspectives to the recovery tasks. The energy and commitment of volunteers is an asset in disaster recovery but should not be taken for granted. Skilful deployment and management of volunteer resources is essential.*

*Collaborative partnerships and joint endeavour were central to the success of the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery effort. In the absence of sometimes clearly articulated protocols or agreements, goodwill and commitment to the recovery operation ensured these partnerships were productive and delivered the result.*

### **Sectors and levels of government**

The State Recovery Committee, in addition to representing the heads of government agencies, also included representatives from Centrelink, the Australian Red Cross, the Local Government Association and the Insurance Disaster Response Organisation. This cross government, cross sectoral collaboration also occurred at the operational level. In line with its special role internationally in registration of disaster victims, the ARC was initially responsible for registering bushfire victims and also managed the public appeal at the request of the Premier. The Salvation Army was extensively involved in the relief operation and, as well, conducted a bushfire appeal as did the St. Vincent de Paul Society and many other community service organisations. In a joint initiative with the South Australian Government, Centrelink operated the Hotline. The Australian Army provided equipment and support to the volunteer effort.

### **Collaboration**

PIRSA worked with local stock agents on farming issues and with the RSPCA on the destruction and disposal of stock. SA Water, Transport SA, ETSA Utilities and Telstra were some of the groups who worked together in reinstating infrastructure and utilities. Particularly in the first days of recovery these around the clock joint efforts were unflagging. Collaboration was the key to success across these and other areas.

Negotiations between Correctional Services at Port Lincoln and Port Augusta and the Department for Environment and Heritage (DEH) enabled the program of mobile offender work gangs, already in operation across the State, to be transferred to the Lower Eyre Peninsula. This complemented other work undertaken by the Port Lincoln Prison and supported the work of volunteers. The mobile offender work gangs removed or tidied up over 1600 damaged trees on road verges.

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) worked with local councils and other agencies on the disposal of hazardous waste such as asbestos.

Similar collaboration existed in supplying donated fence posts to farmers. Not unlike other situations, the Insurance Disaster Response Organisation reported significant levels of under and non-insurance in Lower Eyre Peninsula. Fencing was a predominant area lacking insurance protection. If insured at all, it was estimated that 50%-70% was underinsured. Approximately 85,000 fence posts were donated to assist farmers. The South Australian Farmers Federation conducted quality control checks on the posts and determined allocation, Rotary International assisted in bundling the fence posts and Supply SA arranged transport. The fence posts were then distributed and erected by volunteers and farmers.

### **Role clarification**

The Salvation Army reported that the widely held view of the 'Salvos' as a crisis response and relief organisation limited its capacity to contribute to a wider, planned recovery. Promoted as the crisis welfare provider for the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire, donations of clothing, furniture and other household goods began to pour into Salvation Army centres across the country and in Port Lincoln. Receiving truckloads of goods, unloading, finding storage and sorting out rubbish created a huge logistics problem before the goods could be distributed to victims. The Salvation Army is of the view that there needs to be a stronger recognition of the role of the Salvation Army that goes beyond crisis provider.

This is not just an issue for the Salvation Army but is an example of the sort of role clarification that needs to occur as a part of formulating and regularly reviewing the State Recovery Plan. Memoranda of Understanding between the Government and non-government organisations should reflect agreement on such roles and responsibilities. Members of the State Recovery Centre team met with non-government representatives twice during the recovery to consider issues associated with donated goods and cash.

## **Volunteers**

Management of the huge volunteer force was the responsibility of the South Australian Government (Office for Volunteers and SAFECOM). The response from people wanting to help was overwhelming. South Australians across the state and people from elsewhere responded to the disaster with generosity and willingness to contribute their time, energy and skills.

Approximately 1166 people registered as volunteers to assist with the recovery effort. There were hundreds of others in addition to the registered volunteers who also provided assistance directly to affected families on their own initiative and through religious and community groups. Volunteers came from all over the country, some in response to the national publicity given to the volunteer effort on Radio National, others because summer holidays meant they were free of work commitments. Backpackers from overseas stayed on in Port Lincoln to help. Groups of work colleagues and clubs set aside days to come and work with the local community on recovery tasks. The assistance of volunteer members of the public contributed significantly to the South Australian Government's recovery operation.

## **Contribution**

The volunteers registered with the WCRC were involved in activities that included clean up, fence building, transport of fodder, general repairs, clearing of waterways, planting trees, sorting donated goods, cleaning of houses and laundering linen.

The efforts of individual volunteers, together with the work of local service clubs and community organisations helped the relief operation and assisted the community to get back on its feet. Volunteers assisted the Salvation Army, the St. Vincent de Paul Society, Rotary, Lions and other service groups in the distribution of food, clothing and household goods. Special fundraising events were organised not only in the disaster affected region but across South Australia. Communities in other parts of the State ran a variety of activities to raise money for bushfire victims.

## **Issues**

The task of managing volunteers effectively in a recovery operation was highlighted as a significant issue, as in other jurisdictions. One of the key lessons from September 11 was the need "to plan for the strong desire by the community to do what it can at a time of crisis".<sup>14</sup> The demands on local volunteers can be considerable in a disaster, particularly in small communities where individuals

may belong to several organisations and also have important roles in the community. There may also be emotional issues of grief and loss.

### **Local volunteers**

Volunteers from outside the community bring additional assistance but without local knowledge need to be deployed strategically and with appropriate guidance. In distributing aid in the Lower Eyre Peninsula relief effort, local volunteers knew many of the victims personally and had knowledge of the extent of fire damage. The Salvation Army reported this assisted in appropriate allocation of material aid according to the level of loss. On the other hand, local volunteers were keen to help friends get back to their normal pattern of life and often did not understand the different ways victims coped with loss and grief. As a result particular assistance may not have always been the best response at a particular time and in some cases gifts have been returned. Confidentiality issues too can be especially significant when victims are known to volunteers. This highlights the need for adequate briefing of volunteers by experienced recovery operatives as volunteers are deployed.

There can be unintended consequences from the goodwill of volunteers. Some farming families felt the pressure of friends and family members arriving to assist with tasks such as repairs to fences and rebuilding sheds. For families that had already experienced substantial losses, the sense of obligation to provide meals for those helping on site made further demands on already stretched resources. Many farming families simply did not have the extra money needed to cater for volunteers and many women in particular found it distressing that they could not provide traditional hospitality. The Army provided catering and accommodation for those volunteers who registered.

### **Management and administration**

The lack of accommodation in the Port Lincoln area during the holiday season was further exacerbated by the influx of media and public servants to work on the recovery effort. In order to overcome such pressures on accommodation the assistance of the Australian Army was sought to provide tents to establish volunteer camps. As delays were experienced in the arrival of army personnel the provision of suitable accommodation was similarly delayed. The volunteer camps established on the Eyre Peninsula provided accommodation and meals for approximately 460 people. Induction packages for volunteers were prepared during the early days of the recovery effort, but were not available at commencement. The induction package outlined issues such as roles, rights, obligations and

health and safety.

There was no established system in place at the commencement of operations for accurately logging tasks, assigning them to volunteers or for tracking progress. Without a system, informal methods were used and this carried the risk that tasks were missed or their progress and completion not recorded.

In light of the above issues and with so many volunteers wanting to help on Lower Eyre Peninsula, the recovery operation needed to have a volunteer management strategy in place incorporating volunteer registration and induction; task allocation and management; and policies and protocols relating to occupational health and safety, public liability and confidentiality.

## **Learning**

- *There would be value in the State Recovery Committee meeting with representatives of non-government organisations to review the Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery operation and to clarify roles and responsibilities for the future. Memoranda of Understanding in place with key partners should be reviewed as part of recovery planning and roles and responsibilities agreed and confirmed.*
- *A volunteer management strategy needs to be developed and incorporated in the State Recovery Plan and operations manual. This should be done collaboratively with partners such as the ARC and Salvation Army and relevant SA Government agencies such as DFC, the Office for Volunteers and the emergency services agencies.*



## Coordination

*Coordination is a core function of recovery and needs to be supported with appropriate resources, structures and systems. Well defined roles and responsibilities are fundamental to individual agency responses and to effective coordination across the operation. Recovery management structures and accountabilities must enhance collaboration and cooperation at local and whole-of-government levels. Effective coordination means information gathering and exchange, agreeing priorities, targeting resources to need, monitoring and reporting progress and evaluating results.*

### **Structures**

The State Recovery Committee assisted the chair as Assistant State Coordinator (Recovery) in her responsibility for coordination of the State Government recovery operation and for the provision of advice to Government. The State Recovery Centre provided secretariat support. The Centre's team comprised representatives from key agencies and functional areas under the State Emergency Management Plan, including community services, SAPOL, SEMO, DFC media and communications, health and engineering functions. The State Recovery Centre was closed after approximately 8 weeks and the Office of Recovery established within DFC to maintain an ongoing coordination and oversight role for Eyre Peninsula and to lead recovery planning for the future.

As the coordinating body the State Recovery Committee was a clearing house for information on emerging issues and activities across the board. It identified resources available in agencies for recovery, considered issues, solutions and priorities for action and monitored whether resources were adequate to meet the need. The State Recovery Centre was a mechanism for information exchange between local action and the State Recovery Committee and across agencies. This facilitated the targeting of resources, responsiveness to local issues and the provision of back-up and support to people in the field.

### **Security and Emergency Management Office (SEMO)**

SEMO significantly enhanced the across government coordination capability of the State Recovery Coordinator and the State Recovery Committee. In its policy role, SEMO was responsible for coordination of submissions to Government on the major funding issues. This included liaison and negotiation with the Commonwealth on monies available through National Disaster Relief Arrangements.

Pursuing eligibility for funding under State/Commonwealth cost sharing arrangements for disasters is complex and ongoing and SEMO should continue in its lead agency role in this regard. SEMO provided advice on recovery governance arrangements to ensure compliance with the new Emergency Management Act 2004 and reported to Government. Executive support to EMC and SEMC is provided by SEMO.

The Ministerial briefings developed by SEMO early in the recovery operation were a valuable and consistent source of information for the State Recovery Committee and for individual agencies. The briefings were also provided to the Commonwealth.

### **Local level coordination**

Coordination activities at the State level were mirrored in Port Lincoln through the West Coast Recovery Committee. The functional leadership group designated by the Chair from within the Committee had specific coordination responsibilities for accommodation, farm services and grants, counselling services, welfare and grants, economic development, transportation and logistics, emergency services, communication and infrastructure. The leader of each functional group coordinated effort in these areas and worked with the local community and other agencies to advance recovery action.

The leadership group's debrief reported the need for a clearer distinction to be made between the operational role of the West Coast Recovery Committee and what was envisaged as a more strategic role for the State Recovery Committee.

### **Strategic focus**

Clear definition of roles and responsibilities is essential for effective coordination. It is important that the State level bodies with oversight responsibilities maintain a strategic focus and leave operational matters to the local operation. Issue identification and problem solving often benefits from more detached analysis, that is, from those that are not caught up in day-to-day matters. Facilitation at the state or central level assists delivery on the ground. This was the case in engaging the Army to assist with volunteer accommodation where the protocols associated with the engagement required liaison with the Commonwealth, a task best handled centrally.

The Lower Eyre Peninsula experience defined important strategic roles for the Assistant State Coordinator (Recovery) and the State Recovery Committee in:

- advice to Government on progress and effectiveness of the recovery operation and resource requirements;
- policy advice in such areas as funding policy;
- liaison with other sectors and governments;
- communication coordination and quality control; and
- issue identification and ongoing and future planning.

Simply keeping on top of the huge amount of information generated by a vast range of activity was a considerable task in itself for the State Recovery Committee because of the span and scale of the recovery operation. This was important, particularly for providing accurate and timely advice to Government, but it meant there were few opportunities for taking stock and planning ahead. Some duplication in the membership of the State Recovery Committee and SEMC meant agency chief executives did not always attend State Recovery Committee meetings but sent other agency representatives who provided broad operational input. There may have been value in creating a small strategic leadership group within the State Recovery Committee to focus on strategic issues as the recovery rolled out and this is a learning for the future.

### **Accountability**

A multi-agency response presents governance challenges when there is no defined chain of command structure beyond the high level described in the Emergency Management Act 2004. The Assistant State Coordinator (Recovery) is best placed to make key appointments and establish reporting lines.

This is especially important when operations are geographically dispersed.

The existence of a pre-determined administrative unit with recovery responsibilities would resolve some of the governance issues that occurred in the Lower Eyre Peninsula operation. For example, no agency had been identified initially to carry volunteer liability and these arrangements had to be set in train quickly after the recovery operation was underway. In future the Office of Recovery within DFC could provide a suitable mechanism for such administrative arrangements and be activated at the time of an event.

Recovery staff in key roles could be assigned to the Office temporarily and given financial and other delegations as required. However the Office is only funded for 18 months. The Lower Eyre Peninsula operation aside, there is value in continuing this function for the longer term to oversee ongoing recovery planning and to support the State Recovery Committee in its role of ensuring the Government's disaster recovery capability is maintained. The Office would continue to work closely with SEMO, as it has to date.

## **Learning**

- *A strategic focus enhances coordination effectiveness.  
Recovery governance structures need to provide for this capability.*
- *The State Recovery Plan should clearly define roles, responsibilities and governance structures including strategic and operational elements.*
- *There is value in having an ongoing recovery function such as the Office of Recovery to oversee recovery planning, support the work of the State Recovery Committee and provide a facility that can be activated for administrative arrangements in the event of an emergency.*

## Integration and sustainability

*“Recovery should be provided as a single product, delivered seamlessly to the community through the joint services of a range of cooperating agencies.”<sup>15</sup>*

*People, business, infrastructure and the environment require specific and also interrelated recovery responses. Opportunities for community improvements can be identified through recovery operations. Rebuilding must consider risk mitigation strategies for the future.*

### **Integrated services**

Any recovery program should consider 4 key components in supporting individuals and communities to manage their own recovery:

- community and social
- infrastructure
- economic
- environment.<sup>16</sup>

The draft Emergency Management and Protective Security Manual prepared to advise on arrangements under the Act defines recovery more broadly than previously, consistent with current recovery management practice in other states and at the national level. Economic, environmental and infrastructure impacts are considered along with community recovery. For agencies with lead roles under functional services plans prepared under the former State Disaster Act 1980, this broader scope of recovery meant expanded responsibilities. The scale of the disaster was also such that many agencies, from the first point of activation on 11 January, were caught up in the recovery operation to an extent that had not been envisaged.

### **Functional responsibilities**

Government agencies implemented recovery responses in accordance with their core business responsibilities. Existing functional plans gave guidance to lead agencies in such areas as infrastructure, utilities, community services and animal and agricultural services. Several agencies reported that the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire extended them beyond their usual brief. For example, “while PIRSA’s response began with its formal responsibilities for agriculture and animal services, focussed on animal assessment, destruction and disposal, it rapidly broadened in scope and impact beyond any prior experience”.<sup>17</sup> At least 90 additional PIRSA

staff were deployed to Port Lincoln and were engaged in the provision of support to farmers. DFC's expanded responsibilities included the requirement for the Chief Executive to chair the State Recovery Committee. The establishment of the Office of Recovery in DFC indicates an ongoing, much bigger role for the agency than previous program responsibilities. DFC is continuing to support the West Coast Bushfire Recovery Centre and coordinate the recovery operation and community rebuilding in Port Lincoln. The Department of Trade and Economic Development (DTED) had a significant role in support to business and, in particular, small business to a level that was not fully anticipated. Nevertheless the DTED response in identifying key local support people in Regional Development Boards and in formulating and administering the Small Business Grants was timely and effective. Similarly, feedback from stakeholders on PIRSA's response is overwhelmingly positive.

### **Interagency cooperation**

The level of consultation and cooperation between agencies was good but several agencies did point to the need for improved role definition. Local agency activity was well supported from central head offices and the recovery effort benefited from local employees who knew the local situation. Eyre Peninsula demonstrated that to achieve optimum result, interagency cooperation is essential. For example, SA Water needed to work closely with PIRSA in such issues as animal carcass disposal and threat to water quality. Transport SA, SA Water and local councils needed to engage productively on road clearance with the assistance of volunteers and others. Relationships between lead agencies and key partners, such as Transport SA, SA Water and local councils and others were critical in re-establishing infrastructure and utilities.

### **Sustainability**

Towards the end of the first six months of recovery the operation has a stronger emphasis on sustainability and on those projects and initiatives that will help to rebuild the community for the longer term. At the local community level there is a number of projects underway that are strengthening community capacity through shared activities and a focus on the future. These range from simple, small group activities such as craft groups and women's movie nights, to the upgrading of community halls.

In offering assistance to communities to rebuild, agencies should consider their forward capital plans and examine whether there is an opportunity to reprogram and bring on board future proposals earlier than originally intended. The need



to reconstruct and rebuild presents opportunities for fresh thinking and doing things differently.

In terms of building a sustainable future, the joint Commonwealth and State initiative, the Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-establishment Program is an important example. The program aims to encourage adoption of sustainable production practices, with a significant emphasis on natural resource management and protection.

Key elements of the Lower Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Re-establishment Program are:

- strategic planning workshops and associated technical advice;
- business planning grants;
- sustainable agriculture and biodiversity enhancement grants;
- research on the impacts of fire on soils and biodiversity; and
- pest and weed control program.

It may take some time to fully evaluate the extent of the economic impact of the bushfire on individuals and on the community. In an agricultural community there are other seasonal factors that will have an obvious impact on recovery capacity. Recovery strategies and resources need to take the long view in assisting economic rebuilding, as is the case with the Bushfire Re-establishment Program.

## **Learning**

- *Roles of functional services lead agencies in recovery need to be reviewed and clarified as part of the development of the State Recovery Plan.*
- *In developing and implementing recovery initiatives, longer term sustainability should be considered. This consideration needs to be incorporated into a broader government funding policy that outlines key principles to guide allocation of funds and ensures an appropriate balance is achieved between immediate relief measures and initiatives for the longer term.*

## Fair and transparent administration

*Assistance to recover must be fair, timely and responsive across the range of disaster impacts. In the delivery of recovery assistance there is a need to achieve the right balance between accountability and responding quickly and appropriately to those in greatest need. The administration of assistance grants, public donations and other supports must be open and transparent.*

Although final figures have still not been calculated, the SA Government has spent over \$9m on the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfires. The \$6m funding package announced by the Premier was for the provision of direct assistance to the bushfire relief. The policy of the Department of Treasury and Finance was that it would not be used by agencies to manage budget pressures as a result of the provision of recovery services. Agencies were advised to seek additional funding through the usual budget review processes and this approach needs to be taken into account in planning integrated, cross government recovery strategies for the future.

A proportion of the money expended by the South Australian Government on the bushfire and community recovery is eligible for reimbursement under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA). An application for reimbursement is being managed by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet and the Department of Treasury and Finance. Just as the full costs of the fire are still not known, the full extent of NDRA support can only be estimated.

Some long term costs associated with the SA Government's response to the Eyre Peninsula bushfire, such as the cost of repairs to infrastructure and longer term community health care costs may not be known for some time.

### **Funding policy**

Apportioning the expenditure of the central funds across the range of recovery demands could have benefited from a more strategic whole-of-government approach. The strategic leadership group proposed earlier from membership of the State Recovery Committee would provide an appropriate forum for these deliberations, for priority setting and developing funding submissions.

A funding policy is needed to provide the context for decision making on resource allocation. The Canberra Bushfire Task Force established the following funding principles:

- putting people first;
- investing now to save later;
- doing what we can to prevent re-occurrence;
- taking the opportunity to replace or restore the community assets in ways which are smarter and better;
- providing a positive legacy for the community; and
- getting the balance right between rapid response on the one hand and not pre-empting longer term decisions on the other.

A funding policy and principles such as outlined above would also provide a framework for establishing grant criteria. Administration of assistance grants to those affected by the disaster presented some challenges in the Lower Eyre Peninsula experience. Assessing eligibility for receipt of grants was particularly difficult in the case of people who had lost everything, including any documents that would verify their identity, the nature of their business and the extent of their property ownership. Staff needed to make a judgement call about the legitimacy of individuals and display compassion and generosity. These decisions were backed by managers in terms of meeting accountability requirements.

## **Grants**

The significant grants were:

- ex gratia grants administered by CYFS including Bereavement Assistance, Personal Hardship and Exceptional Circumstances (covering accommodation, household effects, funeral costs, health and special needs);
- Farm Assistance Grants; and
- Small Business Grants.

Funding assistance was also available through Centrelink and at the beginning of the school year DECS provided a back to school grant for replacement of school items.

Significant financial assistance was given to Tumby Bay and the Lower Eyre Peninsula councils and the Eastern Eyre Rural Counselling Service.

## **Criteria**

At an administrative level grant criteria and guidelines had to be developed by the relevant agencies and coordinated by the State Recovery Centre team and SEMO. Some grants were existing, for example the Personal Hardship and Distress Grants under the National Disaster Relief Arrangements which allows 50:50 Commonwealth/State cost sharing. Drawing on the relief sum of \$6m allocated by the State Government, agencies had to develop new grant policies through a process of research, discussion and consultation. This was done in a short space of time and the first grants disbursed quickly. In many cases there were few pre-established criteria for grants and when criteria were developed, they were often refined in the process of implementation. For example, in providing replacement tools of trade and equipment to small business contractors, DTED found contractors based in Port Lincoln may have had their business registered in another state and this initially made them ineligible for grant assistance.

## **Fair and reasonable**

With grant criteria and guidelines developed in a reactive mode, a further challenge for recovery operatives was to understand, articulate and implement the criteria to recipients in a way that maintained consistency and fairness.

For decision makers there needs to be a holistic approach. Specific grants cannot be seen in isolation from each other, nor from the local and economic context, and must be transparent in addressing what are sometimes seen as inequities in grant distribution. For example, farmers affected by drought may not have received the same level of assistance as those affected by the bushfire and this could be a basis for disaffection. An overarching State Government disaster funding policy would provide guidance on issues of fairness, inclusiveness and balance. Retrospective entitlement is a further issue.

## **Donations: food, clothing and goods**

The South Australian Government's efforts were supplemented by Commonwealth assistance, the work of community service agencies in the non-government sector and a huge public response that provided money and donated goods. Like other disaster situations in South Australia and elsewhere, the donation of goods was problematic on several counts. The huge volume of material in itself presented significant logistical and management challenges particularly for non-government organisations charged with the responsibility of receiving and distributing the vast array of material.

The lack of quality control of donated clothes and household items by groups who promoted appeals meant approximately 40% of all clothing and household goods was not suitable for victims.

Large amounts of food were donated by local residents who assisted the Salvation Army to package food hampers. Local church groups made up food parcels and brought them to the Salvation Army for distribution. Food donations also came from across South Australia and interstate. The estimated value of donated food handled by the Salvation Army alone is approximately \$50,000.

### **Issues**

There were issues associated with the transfer of personal information identifying victims requiring help. Exemption was required, and obtained, under the State Government's Privacy Principles before names of individuals could be released to relevant agencies and people who were assisting in disbursement of donated monies and goods to victims.

Despite requests to the media to promote the donation of monies some media outlets continued to seek donated goods. This resulted in an oversupply of many items, far in excess of need. The consequences of this media appeal were far reaching in placing unnecessary strain and financial demands on the organisation managing the donations, particularly the Salvation Army. It is estimated that costs in the order of \$50,000 were paid to transport largely unwanted goods to the Eyre Peninsula. Many of the goods were broken, damaged or unsuitable and had to be discarded.

### **Cash donations**

Allocating grants of money, rather than distributing donated goods assists individuals and communities to manage their own recovery. Cash grants encourage independence by offering a greater degree of choice and flexibility. Cash donations help local business who may be adversely affected by an influx of donor goods from outside the community.

The generosity of people everywhere to the bushfire victims produced significant cash donations. The Premier asked the Australian Red Cross to manage the appeal. The monies raised through this appeal were paid into the State Emergency Relief Fund (SERF) established under the Emergency Management Act 2004. A Committee was convened to advise on the distribution of funds, about \$1.4 million to date, with further monies still being received. Members of the SERF Committee represent the Eyre Peninsula community as well as the ARC and the South Australian government (see appendix). The Governor's Directions

to the Committee (see appendix) established the criteria for disbursement of relief funds equitably, fairly and in a culturally appropriate manner to individuals, with priority given to those in greatest need. Monies are also available through the fund for small businesses and community organisations.

Locally an Eyre Peninsula Fire Donations Allocations Committee has been established. Its membership includes local service clubs (Lions, Rotary, Apex), the Salvation Army, St. Vincent de Paul Society and the Australian Red Cross. The Chair of the local committee is a member of the SERF Committee. This group has also developed disbursement criteria and needs to ensure funds dispersed meet all necessary compliance requirements, such as those of the Australian Tax Office for example.

For the future, to avoid duplication of effort, when the scale of the disaster is such that financial donations are expected to be very significant it is recommended that the State Emergency Relief Fund be used as the primary mechanism for collection and disbursement of monies to victims. This will be in accordance with the Governor's Directions and the Emergency Management Act 2004.

## **Learning**

*- The State Government's readiness in regards to grant administration for a disaster on this scale was limited. Experience, goodwill and collaboration again produced a result. However there needs to be a set of grant policies, criteria and assessment guidelines developed and ready for future incidents.*

*The work done on the run for Lower Eyre Peninsula is a good basis for this task. At a whole-of-government level, grant administration needs to sit within a broader disaster funding policy that establishes priorities for funding against core principles and maintains fairness and transparency.*

*- Future recovery operations and planning need to incorporate a strong media campaign to discourage donations of goods by the general public, unless there is a specific request for particular items, and encourage generosity to be demonstrated in gifts of money. Such a campaign would need to be initiated with sensitivity because successful recovery operations require the support of the broader community to provide assistance in a diversity of ways. Monetary donations spent locally support local business.*

## Communication

*Consistent, accurate, timely and clear communication underpins successful recovery operations. Good communication is a fundamental obligation in recovery and requires effort and resources. Individuals and communities affected by disaster need information about how to get assistance but also to communicate their needs to the recovery operation. The information exchange needs to be two-way. Good information flows between all those involved in the recovery operation improve effectiveness. Skilful media management helps enlist the support of the wider community to the recovery effort.*

### **Single voice**

The scale of the tragedy, the loss of life and the number of people injured meant that media interest in the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire emergency was high. Strong relationships with the media and effective media management assisted the recovery effort. Media channels were the mechanism for getting information out to the community about assistance available.

Initially the Premier was the chief spokesperson on the Government's recovery strategy and made the key announcements on aid and relief measures. In the media the Government was clearly identified with the recovery operation. Locally, the Chair of the WCRC was the nominated spokesperson on State wide media.

The approach of having as much as possible a single, credible voice for recovery provided consistency, a sense of authority and the message that the situation was in good hands.

### **Media management: fact sheets**

The regular flow of information to the public helped maintain the momentum of the recovery operation and built support for the activities on the ground.

Media resources assigned to the recovery operation were stretched in supporting a consistent and coordinated approach to the media, ensuring that media protocols were observed and appropriate sign off obtained before information was disseminated. Members of the State Recovery Committee were sources for information gathering on agency activities and confirmed material before public release. With such a large scale disaster, the pressure on the media officer in the State Recovery Centre to gather, verify, coordinate and disseminate information was enormous in the first days. The existence of a news release template and established approval process would have facilitated this work.



The media officer produced daily fact sheets providing up-to-date information on the cross government recovery effort. These were circulated to Cabinet, Opposition leaders, agency chief executives and others. The fact sheets later became fortnightly (since 17 March 2005) and continued to be a significant information resource supporting the coordination of effort.

The fact sheets, which at 30 June are still produced fortnightly by the Communications Project Officer in SEMO, on behalf of the West Coast Recovery Committee in Port Lincoln, provide an invaluable record of the recovery operation. They are the prime source used to compile the recovery diary in this report.

### **Media on the ground**

Media management was also a significant pressure on the local operation. Frequent media appearances by the Chair of the WCRC were important but time-consuming. The cooperative relationship with the media was enhanced by Vince Monterola being readily available to the media and, in turn, the resources of the media could be used to promulgate recovery information to the community. Visits by the media were sometimes intrusive on victims and workers in the West Coast Bushfire Recovery Centre. This may have been alleviated if there had been the capacity to set up a media conference room. Scheduled, regular media conferences in such a facility could have streamlined the media interface and contained the demand for appearances.

Communication with the community through the media was one of the most successful aspects of the recovery operation and its importance cannot be overestimated. It was regular, accurate and effective. The appointment of a dedicated media officer to the West Coast Recovery Committee earlier would have facilitated the management of this key function.

### **Newsletter**

The Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Recovery Newsletter, still continuing, is a success story of the local recovery effort in providing timely, locally relevant and accessible information to the community. The newsletter was initially issued weekly and widely distributed throughout the region. It was also published in full in the local newspaper.

The newsletters contained a wide variety of information including:

- Federal and State Government grants;
- information on the services provided through the recovery centres;

- updates on the progress of the recovery effort;
- advice on grief, loss and trauma issues and counselling services;
- dietary information;
- accommodation and housing information; and
- general community and social information such as family information nights.

The newsletters were well received by the community and such a mechanism should form an essential part of the communication strategy for future recovery operations.

### **Hotline – “180 20 20”**

A hotline, call centre telephone service, operated by Centrelink, was established on 12 January 2005 and was operational from 9am that day and remained operational until 29 April 2005. Since then, calls have been received by the West Coast Bushfire Recovery Centre in Port Lincoln. The call centre received in excess of 2900 calls during the period it was in use. Centrelink provided a one stop shop for callers, many of whom were recipients of Commonwealth benefits and enquiring about their entitlements, as well as the State bushfire relief measures.

That the Hotline was operational so early in the relief operation was excellent and the service is a success story. There were some reports of delays in answering calls and difficulties in getting through to the service but these complaints were few. There was also a suggestion that the number itself caused confusion, as the prefix “180” is unusual, given the wider use of “1800” in the broader community. It has also been suggested that a unique and easily identifiable number be determined nationally and secured for use in future disaster situations that require a hotline facility.

During the course of the recovery operation the caller questions to Centrelink moved from being of a general nature to issue specific. Call centre operators were less well equipped to deal with agency specific questions and were required to refer the caller onto the agency responsible for the area. Although this would appear to be a reasonable response, it was reported that callers felt that the service was not meeting their needs as well as earlier in the operation.

### **Service SA**

It has also been suggested that a hotline telephone service could be provided on a permanent basis by the Department for Administrative and Information Services through Service SA and utilised for all emergencies within the State. Staff are likely to be more familiar with the services of state agencies than a body such

as Centrelink. Whilst this may be the case, this approach is not recommended. The capability and national reach of Centrelink makes it well placed for delivery of the Hotline service, particularly for disasters that spill over State boundaries. On another level, relatives and friends living outside of South Australia and enquiring about the bushfire impacts were better served by a nationally recognised enquiry point. The role of Service SA in information provision, agency referral and in facilitating replacement of key documents made a significant contribution to the recovery effort. The website established early by Service SA was part of this service: [www.service.sa.gov.au/bushfire](http://www.service.sa.gov.au/bushfire).

As the website is a page within the main Service SA website a number of people commented that the site was difficult to find. It is recommended that a separate website domain, with an easily recognised and easy to recall address, be established to facilitate access by the public.

Not only is the website a source of current information and a good starting point for enquiries at this stage in the recovery operation, it is also a resource for documenting the recovery story, including as it does copies of the Eyre Peninsula Bushfire Recovery Newsletter and all relevant SA Government media releases.

It is worth noting that CYFS ensured quality control checks were in place when information needed to be changed or updated for the Hotline and on the Service SA web page.

## **Operations**

Operational improvements suggested in the communication and media functions include:

- the need for media/communications officers to be brought on board early, with dedicated resources deployed locally as well as centrally;
- clarify media management and communication tasks and determine appropriate resources. For example, internal communication, handling general enquiries and arranging advertising are general communication tasks rather than media management functions;
- establish media monitoring from the beginning of the disaster; and
- establish and maintain a scrap book of coverage. This has been done by the West Coast Recovery Centre with articles from the Port Lincoln Times.

## **Learning**

- *Under the umbrella of the State Recovery Plan, develop a communication plan incorporating roles and responsibilities, media protocols and templates, effective communication mechanisms, such as the WCRC newsletter, systems support for information gathering and resource requirements. Individual agency plans need to demonstrate links to the State level communication plan in terms of information flows and authorisations. A media protocol specifically relating to ensuring cash donations rather than goods needs to be developed in discussion with local South Australian media representatives.*
- *Recovery training strategies should consider targeted media training for key personnel.*

## Information management

*Quality data and information are critical to planning, decision making and evaluation. Recovery operations require a commitment to information sharing across functional and other boundaries, the systems and technology capability to achieve this and policies that have due regard to privacy and confidentiality considerations. Effective management of recovery operations requires systems that capture data and information for appropriate targeting of resources and assistance. Identifying and disseminating the lessons learned is an important discipline that must be embedded in recovery operations.*

*“Information was crucial to every aspect of the World Trade Centre crisis. Its existence, availability, quality and distribution clearly affected, sometimes dramatically, the effectiveness and timeliness of the response and recovery efforts”.<sup>19</sup>*

### **Information management capability**

Collection, management and use of information was a central function in the recovery effort. The scale of the disaster meant a huge amount of data was generated and processed. A collaborative culture of information sharing amongst decision makers and people on the ground supported effective coordination particularly in the early weeks of recovery. However, generally poor data collection systems and processes meant inefficiencies.

The Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery operation demonstrated limited readiness in regard to information management capability and this is a major area for improvement in the future. Despite the collaborative approach, information sharing across agencies and sectors was hampered because appropriate protocols were not in place for information exchange. This was despite exemptions from privacy requirements being obtained on the run to enable transfer of personal information for victim assistance measures.

### **Loss and damage assessment data**

The initial assessment of loss and damage was carried out by South Australia Police officers whose primary objective was to make a broad operational assessment of the extent of damage. The information collected was subsequently used by others in the recovery effort for example, to help determine victim assistance eligibility and for deployment of volunteers.

The police assessment was not intended to be a comprehensive log of damage impacts but conducted for police purposes. In the first instance it was to confirm that all victims and survivors were accounted for and to provide a situation report. As a result, the police data did not always include the details that might have been useful to others in the recovery operation. For example, the police assessment may have simply noted that a house was damaged. It was then difficult to determine from such data whether a damaged house was the principal place of residence or not. Similarly, the address or location information of damaged properties was not always accurately recorded. It is understood that in order to gain more accurate details, staff from the recovery team needed to carry out further visual checks at damaged properties.

An agreed template for a damage assessment checklist would allow all the required information to be collected systematically and at one time without duplicated effort. The resulting data could then be collated for further use and reporting by relevant agencies. This data, matched to appropriate other victim information, would have assisted in verifying assistance entitlements.

### **Data sharing**

Once recovery operations were underway there was no single system that allowed the collation, storage and sharing of key data across agencies.

There were several different data sources managed by individual agencies, the Australian Red Cross, SAPOL, CYFS, CFS, SAHT and PIRSA, relating to each agency's business. For example the SAHT developed a data base to match offers of accommodation to needs. Each agency had part of the picture but there was no central data bank that gave the full story or the capacity to integrate these data sources. This hampered management of assistance for victims and assessment of loss. Other systems were lacking, a tasking system for volunteers was not in place or a simple financial system to monitor expenditure by the recovery teams.

Registration of victims by the ARC was the first stage of data collection on victims. At the registration point victims were given the CYFS blue card which is used to record assistance provided by individual agencies. The white and green bushfire victim cards were issued to verify victim status. A capability to integrate different data sources in a victims' data base available to recovery agencies is an example of the potential of information management improvements. Clearly information sharing and privacy protocols need to be developed as part of this approach. The availability of data on-line, with appropriate back-up, would have facilitated recovery operations.

The Department for Administrative and Information Services (DAIS) was tasked with the job of developing a database. Whilst a database was very quickly provided to the local recovery committee, informal data collection that occurred at the start of the recovery period meant that the data collected did not necessarily meet the information requirements of the system that was established.

### **Activity/issues log**

That the State Recovery Committee worked so well in keeping on top of the key issues was a result of excellent cooperation and open exchange of views. The State Recovery Centre was able to keep up-to-date by constant communication on many fronts. However there were no formal systems in place for data collection and analysis. An improved project management approach with information captured for regular monitoring and review of issues is a learning for the future. In the Canberra bushfire recovery operation an issues register was developed to log and track issues and report progress and resolution. This approach is recommended for the future and requires systems and technology support to be in place before a disaster occurs.

Project management methodologies could also be applied to assist role clarification and accountabilities, to establish milestones and maintain planning and review processes during recovery phases. There were no procedures in place for feeding information into a central data base as it came to hand. Verifying information was labour intensive because there were few established protocols for information collection and confirmation. Status reviews, situation analysis and forward planning were limited because information was fragmented and unbalanced.

### **Spatial data**

There is a broader emergency management issue relating to the accessibility and interoperability of spatial information systems across government. In November 2004 the State Emergency Management Committee agreed on the need to formulate a whole-of-government framework for the effective provision of spatial information for major emergencies. This work is already underway and needs to be taken into account in future recovery planning. The importance of agencies exchanging spatial data for recovery as well as incident response is highlighted in the recovery debrief report from SA Water:

*“SA Water is working to identify and assess the 45 or so stock burial sites based on the PIRSA burial site locations. SA Water will plot these locations of these sites in*



*the GIS. If any of these sites are found to be significant and in a ground water catchment, the details will be referred to the EPA for assessment to ensure we address any possible long term problems.”*

## **Communication**

A number of people noted that across government communication of the issues and updates on progress were sometimes patchy. Best use was not always made of the South Australian Government’s comprehensive, secure, whole-of-government messaging system (SAGEMS). It allows the simple creation of group e-mails to ensure efficient, timely and regular reporting across government. This functionality also supports speedy communication down the line from decision makers to operatives in the field.

CYFS and SAHT staff in Port Lincoln noted difficulty in obtaining accurate and timely information about the progress of the fire and the level of damage in terms of activating the emergency management plan. The significance of CFS official bushfire warnings (phase 1, 2, 3 & 4) were not generally well understood by staff who also reported this was the case for others in the community.

## **Policy**

There are also policy issues. Privacy protocols need to be established that facilitate exchange of data between agencies with due consideration to personal privacy and public interest in an emergency recovery situation.

Policies and systems must support accountability requirements and assist other enquiries that almost inevitably accompany public disasters such as enquiries by the Coroner. The obligation to maintain rigorous records management practices is a significant one, to ensure appropriate information is retained, organised and made accessible. Good records management is an important risk management consideration when the Government’s operations are subjected to scrutiny.

DAIS reported that processing transactions for lost or damaged documents for fire affected customers required negotiation by Service SA with individual agencies. This was to determine the documentation required to validate waiving fees as the Government announced for bushfire victims. The victim cards should have been sufficient proof of status and people should not have been asked to provide statutory declarations as well. This is a further example of the need for policy direction and mechanisms and processes for information exchange so people only have to tell their story once to claim benefits.

## **Evaluation**

A strong message from those involved in the recovery operation was the desirability of a standard template for debriefs.

The principle based framework developed and applied in evaluating the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery operation for this report, provides the basis of such a template. This was one of the outcomes intended from taking this approach in identifying the lessons learned.

## **Learning**

*-Critical information requirements identified in the Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery operation include:*

*- a central system for logging activities, issues and information to support a project management approach to recovery coordination;*

*- a victims' data base and templates; and*

*- a volunteer management system (registration and task allocation).*

*A detailed needs analysis should be undertaken by key agencies to specify the requirements for such systems, including on-line capabilities.*

*- The work in developing a geographic information framework for emergency management in South Australia needs to give full consideration to the needs of recovery operations.*

*- Information management policies need to be developed to facilitate information transfer between government agencies and others.*

*- The Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery evaluation framework should be applied as a template for operational debriefs and for evaluating recovery actions to ensure consistency in information gathering and management.*

## Planning

*Robust and inclusive planning processes identify risks, facilitate the implementation of mitigation strategies and build readiness for effective response and recovery. Learnings from recovery operations inform future planning and drive ongoing improvement. Planning occurs at several levels: agency, community and whole-of-government and needs to involve key partners.*

*Good recovery planning does not guarantee a good recovery operation. In a crisis, responsive and timely action is often down to the resourcefulness, capability and experience of individuals. However a good plan gives direction, focuses effort and defines accountabilities. In this way sound planning maximises recovery effectiveness.*

In the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire exercise, occurring as it did just weeks after the promulgation of the Emergency Management Act 2004, no up-to-date State Recovery Plan existed. This is now a priority for action and the work of identifying lessons learned from Eyre Peninsula is informing the development of the plan.

The planning requirements are:

- a state level recovery plan;
- individual agency recovery plans including lead agency responsibilities; and
- community based plans.

The review of recovery planning conducted by B Grear and T Culshaw in 2004 provides excellent guidance on a holistic approach to the task of formulating plans at all levels. Current functional service plans need to be reviewed, the role of Zone Committees further defined and the relationship between response and recovery in planning needs to be specified. Community input is vital to planning processes. Plans need to consider the range of recovery impacts and be responsive to the different phases of recovery.

### **Policies**

The recovery plans should also be complemented by the development of a suite of policies that reflect the experience gained by this bushfire. Policies were occasionally announced by the Government prior to the development of eligibility criteria and systems to manage implementation. Examples of policies required are:

- funeral cost assistance and payment of funds to funeral directors;

- availability of different types of grants including eligibility criteria and retrospective entitlements;
- privacy principles, particularly in regard to sharing government data and information with non-government organisations; and
- data sharing between agencies.

### **Responsive planning**

Planning processes are ongoing and there is need for regular review and realignment during recovery operations. It is recommended that a State Recovery Plan include the following elements across the range of recovery functions:

- activation;
- operation; and
- disengagement.

In the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire once the immediate relief phase had concluded, a broad plan for the next phase was developed. It aimed to focus agency activity on key goals to:

- respond to the needs of individuals and families;
- restore and assist development of communities;
- support the re-establishment of local and regional economies;
- restore and improve facilities and services; and
- support recovery of natural resources.

### **Disengagement**

At the end of June a disengagement strategy for the Eyre Peninsula recovery operation, although under discussion, had not been formulated. Whilst individual agencies will continue to work with individuals and communities on recovery and rebuilding for the longer term, a withdrawal strategy needs to be developed with the local community that:

- assesses community readiness and capability;
- establishes and communicates an appropriate withdrawal time for closing down recovery facilities;
- considers memorials to those who died;
- recognises the contributors to the recovery effort; and
- maps the way forward including funding for the future.

### **Applying the template**

The Lower Eyre Peninsula recovery evaluation framework and operating principles are applicable beyond this event and will guide future recovery planning.

The Office of Recovery is leading the development of the State Recovery Plan, scheduled for consideration by SEMC in October 2005. There has been, and will continue to be, extensive consultation throughout the process. The State Recovery Committee will oversee the work. To supplement the recovery plan an operational manual needs to be developed which includes policies, procedures and templates.

### **Learning**

*- The development of a State Recovery Plan and supporting plans needs to draw on lessons from the Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire across all recovery management functions. The recovery principles established for the evaluation framework should drive the planning process.*

## Efficient and effective management

*Recovery operations require good practices across critical management functions: planning, people, resources and information. Recovery teams need leaders and personnel with appropriate skills, personal attributes and training. The capacity to draw on expertise from specialist areas and to tap the energy and commitment of people of goodwill is important. Collaborative relationships are fundamental to effective management.*

*Valuing the people who deliver recovery services is a core principle to be reflected in human resource management practices and policies. Recovery operatives who deliver relief and recovery services are to be given appropriate support and assistance in dealing with trauma. The opportunity to debrief is an entitlement that must be inbuilt in recovery procedures.*

### People

People involved in recovery operations require appropriate skills and personal attributes. A fully integrated response can only be achieved if individual agencies are clear on their roles and responsibilities. This applies equally to individual recovery operatives. The State Recovery Plan needs to identify key competencies for recovery personnel matched to appropriate training strategies. "Disaster recovery is most effective when recovery personnel are supported by training programmes and exercises".<sup>20</sup> SA Water reported that previous joint exercises between PIRSA and Engineering Functional Services provided a wealth of information on stock disposal methods that was used during the incident.

The Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire recovery operation drew on a diversity of skills from within government and in the community. Specialists from different disciplines worked collaboratively on the job in hand. Multi-disciplinary teams delivered the result in many areas. Specialist resources were enlisted from elsewhere to advise the recovery effort. For example, Di Butcher who managed the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Centre was invited to South Australia early in the recovery process to share lessons learned from the Canberra bushfires. Dr Rob Gordon is a clinical psychologist well known across the emergency recovery field for his expertise in the impact of disasters on communities. He also visited Adelaide and advised the recovery team.

## **Policies**

There need to be human resource policies in place that cater for the provision of support and counselling to employees for stress and trauma. Appropriate back-up and back filling arrangements need to be made so that employees are not faced with unreasonable workloads. Job and person specifications for government employees need to reflect the requirement to contribute to recovery operations. This is particularly important in newer agencies that have not previously had recovery responsibilities.

During the intense recovery period the counselling needs of recovery staff may not always have been considered. This was identified in the interviews conducted to compile the lessons learned report. At least one person indicated that the interview was the first opportunity to debrief at length after his return to usual duties in Adelaide.

All staff participating in recovery operations should have equal access to quality employee support programs that deal with the impact of loss and trauma on individual operatives. Similarly staff selected for assignment to a recovery program should be briefed on the nature of the situations they will experience and methods of stress minimisation before they are deployed.

A data base needs to be developed of recovery ready government employees who can be called on and deployed across the state to support local operations in the event of a disaster. Particular skills and expertise may include financial management, media, logistics and information technology.

## **Facilities**

The Lower Eyre Peninsula bushfire tested the value of a State Recovery Centre. It was fortuitous that a physical location could be made quickly available by DAIS. The State Recovery Centre team acted as an information and coordination resource, linked to the local operation and provided extensive secretariat support to the State Recovery Coordinator and the State Recovery Committee. As mentioned previously, it is envisaged that the Office of Recovery would provide the nucleus for this role in the future.

Relevant agencies need to review suitable sites across the state for victim recovery centres. Criteria for the selection of recovery sites should be developed and include consideration of basic comfort, amenity, privacy and access to communication and other facilities. A process of regular review and updating will maintain a current list of appropriate sites.



Disasters always attract huge media interest and the layout of victim recovery centres needs to afford victims privacy from unwelcome media and other intrusions.

There are similar considerations when looking at the needs of recovery operatives for accommodation and for administrative and technical support. On Lower Eyre Peninsula in the first days of recovery many employees were sleeping on floors and working very long hours. This can have a negative impact on capacity and judgement. Suggestions for improvement to support workers include an office in a box kit providing basic administrative necessities, lap tops and mobile phones that are effective with CDMA.

These are matters that can be addressed in operational manuals. In addition to the learnings flagged in this report, agencies have identified detailed operational matters that have been collated by the Office of Recovery. These will also be incorporated into operational procedures as appropriate.

## **Learning**

- Valuing the people who deliver recovery services needs to be a core principle reflected in recovery planning and procedures, particularly in regard to counselling and support.*
- Facilities for victim recovery centres and potential sites to base recovery operations need to be identified across the State. Work has already commenced on this task.*

## Text references

- 1 **Natural disasters in Australia: reforming mitigation, relief and recovery arrangements: report to the Council of Australian Governments by a high level officials' group**, August 2002, p36.
- 2 **Emergency Management Act 2004** (S 22).
- 3 **Natural disasters in Australia**, as above.
- 4 **The Advertiser**, 12 January 2005 p2.
- 5 **Weekend Australian Magazine**, 19-20 March 2005, p 25.
- 6 Loss data gathered from agency reports.
- 7 **Australian Emergency Manual Disaster Recovery**, Emergency Management Australia, 1996.
- 8 **National Disasters in Australia**, as above.
- 9 **National Disasters in Australia**, as above.
- 10 **ACT Bushfire Recovery Task Force Report** , p19.
- 11 **CYFS Port Lincoln staff debrief**, 23/3/05.
- 12 **The Report of the Bushfire Recovery Task Force**, ACT, 2003, p.xvii.
- 13 **Australian Emergency Manual Disaster Recovery**, 1996.
- 14 **Mapping the way forward: building on the lessons from September 11 2001**, Emergency Management Australia, October 2003.
- 15 **A review of recovery planning**, Gear and Culshaw, 2004, p39.
- 16 **Community Services Ministers' Advisory Council Disaster Recovery Subcommittee 2004**, cited by Gear and Culshaw, as above, p21.
- 17 **PIRSA Agency Debrief Report**, April 2005.
- 18 **The Report of the Bushfire Recovery Task Force**, ACT, 2003
- 19 **Information, technology and coordination: lessons from the World Trade Centre response**, Centre for Technology in Government, Albany NY, 2004.
- 20 **Natural disasters in Australia**, as above.