

Independent Review into South Australia's 2019/20 Bushfire Season

LGA Submission

March 2020

Note: This is not an endorsed LGA Board of Directors document. It has been prepared by the LGA Secretariat for noting at the LGA Board of Directors meeting on 23 April 2020

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Summary of recommendations

The Local Government Association of South Australia (LGA) makes the following recommendations to the Review:

Recommendation 1:

That the State Government provides the following to ensure that the Local Government Functional Support Group (LGFSG) can sustain its responsibilities under the State Emergency Management Plan:

- Funding support of \$275,000 for the 2019/2020 financial year as a state contribution to the operations and maintenance of the LGFSG;
- Support for a 2020/21 budget bid for this level of funding to be allocated to the LGFSG annually for the next four years; and.
- Funding for 1.0FTE Local Government Recovery Manager for twelve months to support the effective coordination of local government recovery activities and provide support to impacted councils (\$160,000 inclusive of all on costs).

Recommendation 2:

That the State Government works with the LGA to implement a Community Ready program to support councils to further build disaster resilience within their communities.

Recommendation 3:

That the State Government undertakes activities to develop a broader understanding of the roles and responsibilities of key agencies under the arrangements of the State Emergency Management Plan.

Introduction

About the Local Government Association of South Australia

The LGA is the voice of local government in South Australia, representing all 68 councils across the state and the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara.

The South Australian *Local Government Act 1999* recognises the LGA as a public authority for the purpose of promoting and advancing the interests of local government. The LGA is also recognised in and has prescribed functions in 29 other South Australian Acts of Parliament. The LGA provides leadership, support, representation and advocacy relevant to the needs of our member councils.

The LGASA is a strong advocate for policies that achieve better outcomes for councils and the communities they represent. As such, the LGA welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to this consultation on the Review.

This submission has been informed by the LGA's Lessons Learnt process which is currently underway pursuant to the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP). This process has included consultation with a range of councils affected by or involved in the summer bushfire crisis.

Background

Role of local government in emergency management

Emergency management arrangements in South Australia are governed by the *State Emergency Management Act 2004* (*the Act*). The Act establishes the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) and lists its functions and powers. The LGA CEO, Matt Pinnegar, is a representative on the SEMC.

The State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) is prepared under section 9(1)(b) of the Act to manage all emergencies. It is a function of the SEMC to prepare and maintain the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), and to ensure arrangements reflect best practice.

The South Australian Government has primary responsibility for responding to emergencies in this State. This is achieved by a framework of legislation including the Act and other legislation covering police, fire and emergency services, public health and local government. Many local government organisations support the response to emergencies through their normal business arrangements, as well as through incident operations arrangements.

The SEMP articulates the roles and responsibilities that local government plays in State and local emergency management planning, preparedness, response and recovery. The SEMP establishes the Local Government Functional Support Group (LGFSG) and specifies that the LGFSG is responsible for:

“Coordinating the Response from Local Government during an emergency”.

The LGA is charged with the oversight and management of the LGFSG for and on behalf of the local government sector across the State.

The LGA’s role in emergency management

The LGA has invested heavily in supporting councils with emergency management. Through the i-Responda operating platform, the Local Government Functional Support Group and the Council Ready program, our sector has demonstrated our ability to work together to drive a coordinated approach to emergency management.

The LGASA’s role in emergency management is explained in its Emergency Management Framework.¹

Our vision for emergency management is that:

*Communities are disaster resilient because emergency risks are understood across the community, mitigated wherever possible, and there are effective systems to ensure community safety and wellbeing when emergencies occur.*²

1

https://www.lga.sa.gov.au/webdata/resources/files/ECM_672733_v18_Local%20Government%20Emergency%20Management%20Framework%202019%20update.pdf

2

https://www.lga.sa.gov.au/sitedata/unity/resources/files/ECM_672733_v18_Local%20Government%20Emergency%20Management%20Framework%202019%20update.pdf

This framework reflects the evolving role of local government in emergency management. It emphasises the critical role that councils play in reducing disaster risks before emergencies happen, and in the recovery process after the emergency has passed. These roles complement the long-standing functions of councils supporting communities and emergency services when emergencies occur.

The LGA has policies in place that support local government to meet its obligation under section 7 (d) of the Local Government Act 1999 to:

"take measures to protect their area from natural and other hazards and to mitigate the effects of such hazards".

The LGA Policy Manual 4.1.6 'Bushfire Management' states:

"Local government supports a balance between the protection of native vegetation and the necessity to develop bushfire prevention strategies that may include back-burning or cold burns. Councils shall ensure that clear evidence is developed to support back-burning/cold burning proposals and ensure vegetation is only disturbed when vital to the protection of communities."

Councils have a long history of supporting communities when emergencies occur. Local government emergency management has historically focussed on the operational support that councils provide when emergencies occur. Local government also makes a significant contribution through reducing disaster risks, strengthening community resilience, and leadership, coordination and restoration of community assets in recovery.

This is the context in which this submission is made. The 68 councils represented by the LGA may make their own submissions. This submission represents the concerns of the LGA arising from the recent bushfire crisis, based on the experiences of a range of local government personnel involved, either representing their own councils or the LGFSG.

During the recent bushfire crisis, many council personnel supported the affected councils. The coordination offered has seen support from 220 council employees and 68 units of plant and equipment from 34 councils provided on the ground in bushfire affected areas. Many of these councils provided support to multiple events. For example, twenty-three councils supported Kangaroo Island Council during that bushfire, and nine councils supported the four councils affected by the Cudlee Creek fire.

These contributions involved plant and equipment as well as human resources and sent a powerful message about the connectedness of the sector and the ability to respond flexibly in a crisis.

The Lessons Management Framework

The *South Australian Lessons Management Framework* ('the Framework') supports the LGASA's Lessons Management process.³ The Framework requires agencies to undertake debriefs following an incident, which are then supplied to SEMC to incorporate lessons learned in its work plan and ensure implementation in the State's emergency management arrangements.

Numerous councils and the LGFSG became directly and indirectly involved in responding to and supporting the response to multiple incidents across South Australia, from mid-November 2019 through to late January 2020.

³ file:///L:/Emergency%20Management/Emergency-Management-Lessons-Management-Framework(1).pdf

As a result of the extensive and extended support provided by many councils (and the LGFSG in a coordination role), during the recent summer bushfire crisis, the LGFSG has engaged an external consultant to coordinate a comprehensive Lessons Learned (Debrief) process to capture and articulate the lessons that should be learned from this critical bushfire period.

This process is underway but is not yet complete. While it has been delayed due to the recent Covid-19 public health emergency, it is nonetheless an important and lengthy process which the LGASA takes very seriously.

The intent of the debrief process is to capture all observations and insights made in relation to the performance of the LGFSG during this period and to identify lessons that will result in a range of necessary improvements to the LGFSG Doctrine and systems of work.

The Framework sets out the following steps leading to the development of *'Treatment Options'* and/or *'Recommendations'* for improvements:

- Gathering *'Observations'*;
- Categorise Observations in accordance with the National *'Thematic Coding Themes'*;
- Developing *'Insights'*;
- Identify *'Lessons'*;
- Develop *'Treatment Options'* and/or *'Recommendations'*.

To date the consultant coordinating the lessons learned (debrief) process has spoken to almost 100 individuals and has either attended multiple debriefs or obtained notes from many debrief run across the State by multiple organisations. At the time of writing this report the consultant has gather just over 800 individual observations (there may be more than one observation from each individual).

These observations have been categorised in accordance with the Framework's National Thematic Coding Themes as follows:

	Code	Category – Thematic Themes	Number of observations gathered
	0	Successes - <i>Systems or Processes that worked well</i>	72
National Lessons Management Thematic Themes	1	People - <i>Relationships, Human Factors, Culture</i>	23
	2	Operations - <i>Interoperability, Agency Specific Issues</i>	97
	3	Command / Control / Coordination - <i>Incident Management</i>	68
	4	Communication - <i>Public Information, Media, Internal Comms'</i>	42
	5	Communities - <i>Engagement, Preparedness, Recovery</i>	10
	6	Resources - <i>Equipment, Technology, Capacity, Facilities</i>	199
	7	Capability Development - <i>Training & Development</i>	121
	8	Governance / Strategy / Planning - <i>Policy, Doctrine, Structure</i>	128

	9	Immaterial - Unconnected or Unrelated Observations	48
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As can be seen for the table above, most of the Observations fall into the following four (4) categories:

- Resources 199 (25%);
- Governance 128 (16%);
- Capability Development 121 (15%);
- Operations 97 (15%).

The LGA is also pleased to note that there was a relatively strong number (72) (9%) of Observations that relate to ‘Successes’ (systems or processes that worked well). These systems and processes will be reviewed to ensure they are further developed and sustained.

This submission has been prepared based on these Observations.

Terms of Reference of the Review

In addition to its role in the SEMP, the LGA is active in many aspects of emergency management relating to the State Government and identified in the Terms of Reference of the Review⁴. This is explained in the table below, demonstrating the importance of the contribution of the local government sector to emergency management in this State.

The scope of the Review⁵ refers to the role of agencies, the SEMP and emergency management communications and collaboration. Local government and the role of the LGFSG is not referred to although it is a major contributor to the response efforts.

Area of Focus from the Terms of Reference	LGA Activity
Prevention	
1. Reducing Bushfire ignitions	LGA representative on the Fire Prevention Strategic Alliance Committee (SAPOL Committee which manages Operation NOMAD)
2. Community Preparation and resilience	<p>The LGA’s Council Ready program has proven to be a highly effective model for building emergency management capacity and capability at a local scale.</p> <p>The LGA supports local government community education programs through its training and website resources.</p> <p>The LGA provides support for councils through risk reduction activities such as the development and implementation of risk registers, asset management plans and other strategic planning processes.</p>

⁴https://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/site/independent_review_into_south_australias_201920_bushfire_season.jsp

⁵https://safecom-files.s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/current/docs/Terms%20of%20Reference%20-%20Review%20of%20the%202019-2020%20Bushfire%20Season%20-%20FINAL.pdf?response-content-disposition=inline%3B%20filename%3DTerms%20of%20Reference%20-%20Review%20of%20the%202019-2020%20Bushfire%20Season%20-%20FINAL.pdf&X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Date=20200324T053218Z&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Expires=900&X-Amz-Credential=AKIAJQ4Q62CAG0AFH3RA%2F20200324%2Fap-southeast-2%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Signature=ac0dd91bd1ccf0889c140418c178a9383b18e970ccb80e1fc1e0b0df35ee659b

Area of Focus from the Terms of Reference	LGA Activity
Preparation	
3. State Bushfire Plan and State Bushfire Coordinating Committee	The LGA has a representative on the State Bushfire Coordination Committee (SBCC), established under the <i>Fire and Emergency Services Act 2005</i> and administered by the CFS with a range of functions to support the Minister in discharging his/her responsibilities in bushfire management.
4. State Emergency Management Plan including Extreme Heat Planning	<p>The LGA CEO represents the local government sector on the SEMC, which is supported by a range of subcommittees. A representative of the LGA sits on each:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Capability and Capacity Subcommittee; • Strategic Advice and Coordination Subcommittee; and • Resilience, Recovery and Engagement Subcommittee. <p>In Extreme Heat Planning, the LGA has received funding under the South Australian Disaster Resilience Grant fund to undertake an <i>Extreme Heat Guide for Local Government</i>, which is near completion.</p>
5. State Development and Control planning	-
Response	
6. Call taking and dispatch	-
7. Equipment and resources	The LGFSG is established under the SEMP and is responsible for coordinating responses from local government during emergencies. It supports councils with access to equipment and resources.
8. Incident management and emergency coordination	<p>The LGFSG coordinates the local government response involved in creating fire breaks, tree clearance, water supply, carcass disposal, infrastructure assessment, community messaging and more.</p> <p>The LGFSG provides staff and liaison officers at the State Emergency Centre, Zone Emergency Support teams and CFS Incident Command Centre.</p>
9. Public Information and Warnings	-
10. Interstate Deployments	-

Area of Focus from the Terms of Reference	LGA Activity
Recovery	
11. Rapid Damage Assessment	-
12. Transitional arrangements to recovery	The LGFSG supports the recovery efforts, through Representation on the State Recovery Operations Group and multiple subcommittees.

LGA Submission on the Review

While the LGA is involved in many aspects of emergency management, this submission focuses on two main aspects:

1. **Resourcing the LGFSG** to enable it to adequately supply and coordinate human resources, plant and equipment, technology and a coordination role to meet the legislative obligations of the local government sector;
2. **Implementing a Community Ready program** to support councils to further build disaster resilience within their communities, to be developed with the State Government; and
3. **Broad implementation of emergency management arrangements** established under the SEMP to ensure operations run effectively.

While the feedback received so far explains supports this Submission, it should be noted that reporting of Observations through the Lessons Management process is initial only.

1. Resourcing the Local Government Functional Support Group

Role of the LGFSG

The role of the LGA and LGFSG during the recent bushfire crisis is explained above.

The detailed debrief on the recent activities of the LGFSG which is currently underway will include further analysis of the time and financial costs of operating the LGFSG. It is estimated that 17 LGA Staff (40%) spent 792 hours on LGFSG activities, and costs of \$48,000 have been incurred that are not recoverable from other sources. This is on top of the LGA's annual budget allocation for the LGFSG of \$204,000 for a 1FTE LGFSG Coordinator, training for around 2,000 council employees per year, equipment, maintenance of documentation and participation in committees and working groups.

On 12 February 2020, the LGA wrote to the Department of Treasury and Finance seeking funding support for the LGFSG and that letter is reflected in this submission.

Supporting councils to lead in recovery

The expectations on the LGA and councils increase as recovery efforts quickly scale up. Whilst councils are providing excellent leadership on the ground in partnership with Local Recovery Committees, the scale of recovery activities across the state necessitates stronger coordination between impacted councils, State Government and other agencies involved. With the passing of time, it will also be important that recovery efforts build resilience for future emergencies, an area where the local government sector can provide leadership.

The LGA is well placed to provide coordination of local government recovery as an extension of traditional LGFSG activities and can access a suitable resource through secondment of a recovery manager with knowledge of the local government sector. Councils are natural partners in resilience building and the events of this summer have reminded communities, businesses and governments that more needs to be done to build resilience for emergency events.

As the level of government closest to communities and trusted sources of information before, during and after emergencies, councils are well placed to work with other levels of government to strengthen community resilience. In addition to any resilience building activities delivered through formal recovery programs, there are opportunities to leverage the successful and independently evaluated LGA Council Ready program to build disaster resilience across South Australian communities at scale.

Observations regarding the LGFSG

While the Lessons Management process is still underway, some initial Observations about the LGFSG can be reported. Many of these Observations were positive, supporting the need for ongoing support of the LGFSG in order to fulfill local government responsibilities.

Some of these Observations are as follows:

- LGFSG coordinator “*very good – kept in touch – offered assistance on several occasions*”;
- “*Successful because of the involvement of the LGFSG*”;
- “*Excellent working relationship with LGFSG, good understanding of shared roles*”;
- “*The LGFSG is adding value to the role of the Sector*”;
- “*Information from LGFSG was very good*”;
- LGFSG coordinator “*called regularly and offered lots of support*”;
- “*Unprecedented series of incidents across the state, yet everyone came together to achieve the goal*”; and
- “*Interactions with agencies was brilliant*”

No access to State Government funding mechanisms

While the LGA is recognised in the SEMP as a lead agency, it does not have access to the same direct mechanisms for seeking funding that are available to State Government agencies. It is important that the role of the LGFSG is not forgotten when the State is allocating funding to agencies involved in the State’s emergency management arrangements.

Recommendation 1:

That the State Government provides the following to ensure that the Local Government Functional Support Group (LGFSG) can sustain its responsibilities under the State Emergency Management Plan:

- *Funding support of \$275,000 for the 2019/2020 financial year as a state contribution to the operations and maintenance of the LGFSG;*
- *Support for a 2020/21 budget bid for this level of funding to be allocated to the LGFSG annually for the next four years; and.*
- *Funding for 1.0FTE Local Government Recovery Manager for twelve months to support the effective coordination of local government recovery activities and provide support to impacted councils (\$160,000 inclusive of all on costs).*

2. Community Ready resilience partnership

Through the Council Ready program⁶, the LGA has assisted councils around the state to develop and implement new emergency management policies, plans and operational procedures, and recovery arrangements. This program has been critical to building capacity and improving role clarity with regards to all facets of emergency management.

⁶ <https://www.lga.sa.gov.au/page.aspx?u=6678>

The LGA is eager to partner with State Government to implement a currently un-funded third stage of the program, Community Ready, which aims to support councils to play a bigger role in strengthening community and business resilience.

Recommendation 2:

That the State Government works with the LGA to implement a Community Ready program to support councils to further build disaster resilience within their communities.

3. Broader understanding of emergency management arrangements

The emergency management arrangements established through the SEMP include the roles of key agencies and lines of responsibility. While these arrangements are well-established, it was evident through the recent bushfire crisis that this understanding was not well understood by many involved in the response and recovery efforts.

It is expected that details around this will emerge through the Lessons Management process, but initial feedback from numerous participants is that this lack of understanding led to duplications and omissions in activity, as well as unnecessary confusion and stress.

Some of these Observations are as follows:

- *“Seemed to be some confusion regarding CFS role in coordinating recovery activities such as water replenishment and road damage”;*
- *“Role of agencies to be better defined (SEC) so there is clarity of contact for specific issues”;*
- *“The same request came from several different people in the room – didn’t seem to come from the logistics people”;*
- *“The structure became too complex”;*
- *Need a “Review of EOC leadership structure”;* and
- *“There was a lack of division of responsibility for some IMT functional roles, where council staff were performing in an emergency services voluntary role... resulted in some communication and tasking challenges”.*

Recommendation 3:

That the State Government undertakes activities to develop a broader understanding of the roles and responsibilities of key agencies under the arrangements of the State Emergency Management Plan.

Conclusion

The LGA notes that the *“Review will be broad and cover twelve factors across Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR) that all impact positively on reducing the impact of bushfire and keeping communities safer.”* The LGA encourages the Review to consider the matters raised in the LGA Submission relating to:

- Resourcing the Local Government Functional Support Group;
- Partnering in a Community Ready resilience program; and
- Broad implementation of emergency management arrangements.

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