



Photo courtesy of Barry Davies

PART F – TRANSITION FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY

The Inquiry is required to report on the adequacy of the 'transition to recovery in the week following 4 January 2013'. In some respects 'transition' is an inappropriate word to use in conjunction with recovery in emergency management, as immediate recovery activities should start contemporaneously and run in parallel with the emergency response. Moreover, response activities will frequently have a recovery dimension. The Inquiry has taken this aspect of its terms of reference to mean the transition in this period from immediate recovery to longer-term recovery.

In this context, it should be noted that from 5 January, as there was an indication that a state level recovery program would be established, the Southern Region Emergency Management Committee (SREMC) focussed on immediate needs.¹

The Tasmanian Bushfire Recovery Taskforce was established and began on 11 January 2013. This Taskforce is independent, but is complemented by a Bushfire Recovery Unit in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, a Multi-Agency Recovery Committee, and a Bushfire Appeals Distribution Committee.

It is not within the Inquiry's terms of reference to consider any matters within the purview of these arrangements. Many submissions to the Inquiry do relate to issues under this longer-term recovery process and they have not been examined by the Inquiry.

The Inquiry has also construed its terms of reference to not include an examination of the prevention dimension of recovery, in particular the development of 'resilient communities'. Building resilient communities is a key policy position of governments in Australia and the Council of Australian Governments has approved a National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

¹ Submission No. 78, at p. 10.

The concept of resilient communities is broader than recovery, but is reflected in the extent and speed of recovery in communities after an emergency. The Inquiry will comment on community resilience later in this part.

Another qualification on the breadth of the Inquiry is in respect to leadership. Effective leadership, within communities and governments, is an important part of the recovery process for communities. Providing messages of direction, purpose, support and reassurance are of great significance to the community in an emergency. The community needs to be assured that the seriousness of an emergency situation and its impact on people is recognised, all that can be done is being done; and action is being taken to restore the damage.

It is beyond the scope of this Inquiry to assess this aspect of leadership. In addition, in this context, judgements on leadership are often subjective and political in nature. For these reasons, a limited comment will be made on public information availability in the immediate recovery process.

Emergency Management Arrangements

Background

Social recovery refers to the emotional, social and physical well-being needs of emergency affected people. The Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) delivers these services, either directly or through arrangements in place.

State Level

There is a State Recovery Sub-Committee reporting to the Security and Emergency Management Advisory Group (SEMAG).

A State Special Emergency Management Plan–Recovery was approved in November 2012 but had not been fully tested.

The State Recovery Sub-Committee is chaired by a Department of Premier and Cabinet representative. Its role is to:

- maintain the State Special Emergency Management Plan–Recovery
- promote a consistent level of recovery awareness by all agencies in Tasmania
- provide policy advice to the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) and SEMAG
- build relationships with the non-government sector
- agree on an annual work plan
- support the preparedness of Regional and Municipal Recovery Committees
- liaise with other functional response and recovery organisations
- provide a forum for whole-of-government input into recovery policy issues.²

From this statement, it appears there were no state level operational arrangements for recovery.

2 State Special Emergency Management Plan - Recovery, at p. 15.

Regional Level

To assist in recovery issues, each government agency provides a liaison officer to the Southern Region Emergency Management Committee (SREMC). There is a Social Recovery Sub-Committee (SRSC) established to plan and coordinate the delivery of social recovery services.³ Recovery Committees may also be set up at the municipal level. If recovery management is beyond the capacity of a council, it may make a request to the Regional Controller for assistance.

Events

The SREMC convened at 12.00pm and later at 6.00pm on 4 January (an attempt to have a meeting at 8.30am was not effective as insufficient members were able to attend). It should be noted that there are no minutes of either the midday or 6.00pm meetings on 4 January. Much of the work of the SREMC from this point related to recovery activity.⁴ No Northern Region Emergency Management Committee meetings were held, though that region was managing the Bicheno fire.

The SRSC met at 1.30pm on 4 January. An officer from the DHHS chaired the meeting and was the Coordinator for social recovery activities. He told the Inquiry that he began to prepare for the possibility of an emergency on 2 January by identifying and communicating with vulnerable DHHS clients. On 3 January, he notified partner non-government organisations, such as the Australian Red Cross and The Salvation Army, to be on stand-by.

The Inquiry was also told that the SRSC met nearly every day after 4 January and that it was more of an information-sharing arrangement as the representatives on the SRSC were responsible for performing their functions, and the meetings were not well attended for the same reason. This highlights a previous comment by the Inquiry in PART E; that committee meetings are not the best structure for managing operational responsibilities.

In terms of medium to long-term recovery management, the State Special Emergency Management Plan—Recovery specifies that:

- Regional Controllers will identify appropriate arrangements
- the State Controller has a number of options for handing over responsibility to other groups, including any Affected Area Recovery Committee formed.⁵

These arrangements are hardly sufficient for ensuring a timely and effective transition from immediate recovery to medium to long-term recovery operations.

Affected Area Recovery Committees are required to develop a plan and engage the community during the recovery process. Guidance is provided in the State Special Emergency Management Plan—Recovery on what matters to consider.⁶

The regional arrangement, through the SREMC and the SRSC, was primarily responsible for immediate recovery activities, with the SRSC coordinator actively involved in much of it.

3 State Special Emergency Management Plan - Recovery, at p. 16.

4 Submission No. 78, at p. 10.

5 State Special Emergency Management Plan - Recovery, at p. 25.

6 State Special Emergency Management Plan - Recovery, at p. 30.

As with response operations, questions arise about:

- the structure of the emergency management arrangements, in that it would be expected this emergency would be handled at a state level
- whether there was sufficient emphasis at a state level on social recovery.

Recommendation 48 – that the state level structural arrangements for managing recovery operations are reviewed.

Recommendation 49 – that a standing plan is developed to manage the transition from immediate recovery to medium and long-term recovery, and arrangements are made to ensure this plan can be effectively implemented in a timely way.

Recommendation 50 – that the State Special Emergency Management Plan—Recovery and the emergency management structure for recovery be reviewed.

Ongoing Response Operations

It is important to appreciate that response operations were continuing, especially in the Forcett fire. This was not an emergency where an event of a short duration has occurred and then recovery operations were initiated. The fire emergency continued over the 'transition' period, which limited some recovery action and caused ongoing impact on the community. During this time, Tasmania Fire Service (TFS) reported that there were conflicting priorities between response and recovery agencies, which were managed through liaison.⁷ Providing a safe working environment, for both response and recovery personnel, was also an issue to be considered.⁸

Road closures were a significant issue and this matter has been examined in PART E. Isolation of some communities and people because of a lack of access caused recovery issues and hampered recovery efforts. Minimising the locations affected by road closures and reopening the roads quickly were key issues. Certainly the reopening of the roads was a matter listed as a priority early by the Southern Regional Controller and the SEMAG, but it is not clear whether minimising the locations affected was a high priority.

In managing this use of road closures and the area and time communities were affected, it appears to the Inquiry that greater innovation and initiative may have reduced the impact. For example, more emphasis on a staged or phased approach to opening roads may have been beneficial. The Inquiry questions whether there was sufficient integration of the effect on the community and recovery issues into the approach taken to road closures.

Having experienced the significance of road closures in this emergency, police and other organisations involved in emergency management should place appropriate emphasis on minimising the locations and period of time roads are affected, and make plans accordingly.

⁷ Submission No. 60, at para. 3.2.

⁸ Submission, No. 69, at p. 4.

Refer to the section on road closures in the PART E for further discussion and recommendations on road closures.

Recommendation 51 – that appropriate plans are made to mobilise resources quickly to re-open roads affected by emergencies.

Communications and Public Information

Communications and public information were significant issues, as is usually the case for major emergencies. Often there will be initial confusion, poor information flows, and a lack of certainty. Effective recovery operations need to not only manage communications issues, but also to inform the community in a way that contributes positively to a recovery process for those who have been affected by the emergency. Leadership is an important aspect of immediate recovery and reference has been made to this in the introductory remarks for this part, with a qualification on the extent to which the Inquiry can comment.

Public information will be dealt with generally in PART G and only matters directly relevant to recovery will be considered in this part.

Communications between agencies and organisations handling recovery issues was raised in a number of submissions.⁹ This is an issue which should be specifically included in the review of recovery operations and a recommendation has been made below on the subject.

Public information on recovery is the primary area considered in this section. The Tasmanian Farmers and Graziers Association were critical of the lack of information and the coordination of information across government. It told the Inquiry there was no immediate response and there was no 'master plan' that brought together the main players. It also told the Inquiry there was no response by the Government until 7 January. A more immediate response, it submitted, was expected by its members.

The Social Recovery Coordinator told the Inquiry that he received a feeling of negativity, that government was not doing enough to help, and that in the future he would be more visible in providing government assistance.

During the immediate recovery phase, the Southern Regional Controller provided public comment on recovery operations.

The Government issued a number of media releases:

- 5 January: the DHHS urged people needing help to contact their local refuge centre
- 6 January: the Acting Premier announced details of the initial assistance available to those affected by the fires
- 6 January: the Acting Premier advised that Cabinet would meet on 7 January to plan recovery action
- 7 January: the Premier visited affected areas and said the Government would stand with victims as they rebuilt their communities

⁹ For example, the Local Government Association of Tasmania, Submission No. 82a

- 7 January: the Minister for Education and Skills said the Dunalley Primary School would be rebuilt
- 8 January: the Premier announced the formation of an interim committee to oversee the recovery phase
- 8 January: the Attorney-General announced free legal assistance for those affected by the bushfires
- 12 January: the Premier announced the Government had engaged a clean-up contractor for the fires.

Public information for those directly affected by the fires was difficult to manage because of road closures, loss of power and communications technology, isolation and ongoing response operations. There are comments in this part on how important public information was in the refuges, evacuation and recovery centres, especially from police sources. Community reassurance was also acknowledged in the visible police patrolling, notably in the Lake Repulse Fire.

One initiative in this area introduced by Tasmania Police (TASPOL) and other agencies beginning on 9 January was to conduct public information sessions at recovery centres, to reassure the community and dispel rumours. These sessions were mainly conducted at centres on the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas and continued over the following 11 days. They were reportedly well received.

Public information arrangements should explicitly address recovery issues. Suggestions have been made in a number of submissions.

Recommendation 52 – that a public information plan be developed as a part of the State Special Emergency Plan – Recovery, for implementation in the immediate recovery phase.



Photo courtesy of Workplace Standards Tasmania

Assembly, Evacuation, Information and Recovery Centres

Councils are responsible under the State Special Emergency Management Plan—Recovery for the management of the following types of centres:

- assembly centres: established for a short time to meet immediate personal needs
- evacuation centres: where people affected can be temporarily accommodated
- information centres: listed but not described in the State Special Emergency Management Plan—Recovery
- recovery centres: a one-stop-shop arrangement that centralises a range of services.¹⁰

A number of difficulties arose with the management of these centres, which varied depending on the scale and complexity of the problems councils were facing. The centres for the Forcett fire are sufficient to illustrate the issues.

In its submission to the Inquiry, the Local Government Association of Tasmania:

- indicated there seemed to be confusion over the various types of centres and what services would be provided at each (coupled with Community Fire Refuges (CFRs) and Nearby Safer Places)
- highlighted the need for expertise to manage the various centres
- said there were transition issues as evacuation centres became recovery centres, for example, as a broader range of services arrived to be provided (as from a recovery centre) while the space was still being used as an evacuation centre.¹¹

An important function of the State Emergency Services (SES) during the fires was to support the various centres, and in its submission to the Inquiry, it endorsed the ability of CFRs to transition into recovery centres. A further consideration was that because CFR planning was still underway, CFRs in all affected areas had not been identified and previously identified recovery centres were selected for use.¹²

Sorell Council opened a CFR in its Memorial Hall on 4 January. Not long after this, demand was such that the CFR transformed into an evacuation and information centre. Bedding was provided and from 5 to 6 January, Housing Tasmania found accommodation for all of those who required it. On 7 January, the centre again transformed into a recovery centre, and a range of organisations provided services from it. As the centre moved from one form to another, the need for management, staffing, sourcing material and storage increased. Apart from these logistics, centre-related issues of note were:

- spontaneous volunteers started to come forward very soon after the fires on 4 January
- social media was positive in helping to organise support options quickly, but created severe logistics problems (for example, generating a large volume of unanticipated donated goods) and considerable confusion
- information requirements were mainly satisfied from websites, however there were some issues in obtaining specific information from the emergency agencies down

¹⁰ Tasmanian Emergency Management Plan (TEMP) Issue 6 2009, at p. 31.

¹¹ Submission No. 82a, at p. 6.

¹² Submission No. 63, at p. 9.

the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas. There was also privacy issues, with the media wanting to film inside the centre, which was declined

- displaced livestock was not planned for, but satisfactory arrangements were made
- communications with the Regional Recovery Coordinator was difficult and frustrating.¹³

Port Arthur Historic Site was activated as an evacuation centre under the Tasman Municipal Emergency Plan in the afternoon of 4 January. Approximately 700 people were at the Site when the Arthur Highway was closed. Approximately 500 remained at the Site as an evacuation centre, after many relocated to Nubeena. Food was available at the Site, but the loss of power to the centre had a significant effect, as the wastewater treatment plant and supply of water were dependent on power. This problem was mitigated by the presence of an electrical contractor.

Information and communications also became a problem with the loss of power, and this issue has been discussed elsewhere in the Report. In the context of the evacuation centre, it made people dependent on accurate verbal information from other sources, such as police. Frustrations were experienced with different police providing contradictory information, especially about the prospect of the highway reopening.

At Nubeena similar experiences occurred, compounded by the number of people — approximately 3–4 000 people — requiring support. The General Manager of the Tasman Council described Nubeena as being inundated with people. This was clearly beyond the capacity of any pre-planning and the facilities available.



Photo courtesy of Bernard Plumpton

¹³ Submission No. 24.

The Tasman Civic Centre at Nubeena was used as the evacuation centre. Action to open the centre had begun early in the afternoon on 4 January following a message from local police. A Tasman Emergency Recovery Management Committee (TERMC), chaired by the Tasman Council General Manager was established. In its submission to the Inquiry on the evacuation centre, TERMC commented:

The period of road closure and power outage were significant contributory factors due to the reliance of these for survival basics of water, food and essentials including fuel. The abrupt road closure separated families, people were separated from dependent livestock and those with property in the fire area were unable to determine how they fared. This was contributory to the levels of anxiety which overlayed the direct impact of the emergency.¹⁴

During the afternoon on 4 January, with the impact of the fire, compounded by the highway closure and the failure of power and communications, the Social Recovery Coordinator could not obtain accurate information on the situation in Nubeena or Dunalley. He indicated to the Inquiry that the Council was responsible for handling the situation, with the SRSC only stepping in if asked.

By evening on 4 January, the Social Recovery Coordinator began to obtain information on the situation in Nubeena; people were beginning to congregate at the Tasman Civic Centre and were struggling with food. Details on the initial arrangements made through the Social Recovery Coordinator will be provided in the section on recovery activities.

At a meeting of the SREMC on the morning of 5 January, the Tasman Municipal Coordinator was included by teleconference and he informed the meeting that they were coping. However, the Regional Controller and the Social Recovery Coordinator were concerned that the Centre may be getting overwhelmed. The Social Recovery Coordinator advised the Inquiry that in the afternoon of 5 January, he spoke to the Nubeena Health Centre manager who described the situation in Nubeena as having descended into chaos and no-one was in charge. He said there was no obvious recovery leadership on site and he was concerned about public health issues. On the morning of 6 January, the Social Recovery Coordinator spoke to the Regional Controller and, based on the unofficial reports, they decided to take control of the situation at Nubeena.

In its submission to the Inquiry, the TERMC focussed on improvements for the future and particular relevant issues for the operation of centres for the Tasman Council include:

- communications and information were significant problems. Briefings from police were highly valued, but people were distressed when they were delayed, re-scheduled or cancelled without notice. There appear to have been coordination issues as police were not always aware that a briefing was scheduled. As with Port Arthur, inconsistent advice from police was a problem. A number of suggestions are made about various forms of access to information.
- back-up power generation, water supplies and notice board/communications equipment are needed. Some local generators were located for a number of the power problems occurring (for example, to pump fuel). Power outages meant many basic functions for an evacuation centre could be affected, such as pumping water and sewerage

¹⁴ Submission No. 43, at p.1.

- an Evacuation Centre Coordinator with suitable expertise should be appointed when a centre is opened
- the role of a centre in communicating with the broader community should be clarified, particularly where there is a failure of power and telecommunications
- donated goods need to be managed. Initially bedding, clothes and food were needed, but the Centre then became flooded by donations organised through social media. 'The unloading (from boats), sorting, storing and distribution of the goods caused an enormous amount of work and angst... Very sadly most of what was donated was not actually needed – simply because there was so much donated.' A more coordinated approach, with one organisation coordinating what is required and getting it dispatched to where it is necessary, would be the ideal.¹⁵

The large number of people stranded in the area of Nubeena — many of them tourists, including international travellers and those with hired vehicles — complicated the situation. Boats were organised to ferry those who wanted to leave to Hobart. This occurred reasonably quickly with the first departing Nubeena at about 11.30pm on 4 January. It was intended to register people; however, plans to do this were frustrated by people moving en masse onto the first boat. Ferrying proceeded during the night and an estimate by the local police officer was that 800–1 000 people were ferried out that night, though other estimates put the number at 1 000 people by early on 6 January.¹⁶ Overall the local officer estimated that more than 4 000 people moved out of Nubeena on ferries. There are various other reports on the number of people requiring transport out of Nubeena by ferry. Notes kept by the Social Recovery Coordinator on the night of 4 January indicate there were about 3 000 people requiring assistance at Nubeena (some may have already left on ferries). For the purpose of the Inquiry, the precise number is not material.

A centre was set up in Hobart's City Hall at midday on 5 January to receive people from the ferries. It was open for seven days and there was liaison between the SREMC and the SRSC on what was required. There were no major difficulties reported with its operation, apart from the 'perennial' communications issues.

Municipal Emergency Management Plans designate the responsibility for recording the names of people in the centres to councils. TASPOL informed the Inquiry that on the evening of 4 January this was not a priority, and many of the assembly points were CFRs or impromptu arrangements. Other displaced persons did not attend the centres. TASPOL advised that initially there was only ad hoc recording and the tracing of people was going to be problematic.

In addition to the recording needs in centres, police have a responsibility for missing persons and, as part of that, determining whether there were any fatalities. These are normally response functions, but are clearly linked to recovery, hence the discussion of this aspect in this part.

TASPOL made a formal request on 5 January for the assistance of the Australian Red Cross.¹⁷ Red Cross maintains a National Registration and Inquiry System (NRIS). This was the first time the NRIS had been activated in Tasmania. Victoria Police provided assistance in processing the information on the NRIS.

¹⁵ Submission No. 43, at p. 7.

¹⁶ Submission No. 77, at p.11.

¹⁷ Submission No. 78, at p. 12.

Red Cross also manages a large number of volunteers, who can help provide personal support to people in evacuation centres, and conduct door-to-door welfare checks. It also has outreach teams that can visit affected communities.

Red Cross had a significant involvement in a number of aspects of recovery operations. In its submission to the Inquiry, it made a number of observations:

- in its experience and considering the infrequent occurrence of large scale disaster events, the overall coordination of hazard response and relief services appeared to be generally well handled
- the NRIS was established from 5 January and operated through a State Inquiry Centre in Victoria for phone and web-based inquiries. It closed on 12 January. During its operation, it dealt with 3 420 inquiry transactions (1 850 registrations and 1 570 inquiries)
- despite deploying teams to field locations, the support for its registration operations was limited. For example, teams could not get in to the evacuation staging area at Nubeena and most people dispersed directly from the ferries when they arrived at Hobart. It was estimated that only one in ten people came to the centre at Hobart. At the time of the fires, a Red Cross volunteer at Nubeena introduced himself to the council management offering registration services, but was told it wasn't required. Volunteers reporting to a centre were told they weren't required as there were enough volunteers
- police liaison for the NRIS was effective and they played an active role in processing the information
- there is generally a poor understanding of the role of registration as a tool; the TEMP has inconsistencies and lack of clarity around the role of Red Cross; and there is limited reference to Red Cross in the recovery plan
- there is a lack of clarity around the naming of centres.¹⁸

As explained above, to manage the recovery process for the Council, a TERMC was established and on 11 January a joint Sorell/Tasman Affected Area Committee was arranged. Given the date on which the latter occurred, the Inquiry has not included it within its terms of reference, other than to note it is an important aspect of the transition to recovery.

Recommendation 53 – that evacuation centres and other centres have plans and arrangements for electrical power redundancy.

Recommendation 54 – that evacuation centres and other centres have a standard operating procedure for communications.

Recommendation 55 – that the role of Red Cross in emergency management plans and procedures for the activation of Red Cross be reviewed.

¹⁸ Submission No. 77.

Power, Telecommunications and Road Infrastructure

Power, telecommunications and road infrastructure were all seriously affected and had a significant impact on the community. A high priority was to re-establish services as soon as possible.

Other parts of this Report have discussed road closures and the associated issues. Power lines and poles on the roads was a contributing factor to the closures and these will be discussed below. Fallen trees, both on the roads and those at risk of falling were also part of the safety issues associated with road closures, along with damage to the roads.

The Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources (DIER) has responsibility for Arthur Highway and made a submission to the Inquiry.¹⁹

DIER was actively involved in preparing for the fire risk on 4 January and that evening it arranged a crew of contractors to clear the highway of any trees. Checking and ensuring that bridges were safe and functioning was an issue over the following days, but clearing the roads was the most problematic issue. There were trees on the highway and there was a further risk from damaged trees (including those on private land) falling.

Clearing the roads of fallen and dangerous trees was carried out by contractors. There were a number of crews engaged. DIER informed the Inquiry that the cost of tree removal over a five week period was \$450 000. Considering the effect of road closures on the community, the Inquiry is not able to determine whether sufficient resources and action was taken to make the highway safe as quickly as possible.

Loss of power was a problem for the Lake Repulse and Forcett fires. Electrical power asset damage for both fires was significant, as is indicated by the loss of 80 transformers and over 700 power poles, and approximately 100 kilometres of power lines being on the ground. Many poles and power lines were on roads. Aurora Energy (Aurora), which owns the power network and is responsible for its maintenance, received 1 177 fault calls on 4 January and 3 000 of its customers were without power. Most of the impact was in the Forcett fire. Aurora indicated to the Inquiry that continuity of power supply was a high priority, though there was little included in the way of inbuilt redundancy.

An Aurora employee was in the TFS Southern Regional Incident Control Centre as a liaison officer on 4 January, and action was taken immediately to isolate power problems and begin restoration of power. Given the scale of the task in restoring power, there has been much favourable comment on the speed at which this occurred.

Following the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, there has been an emphasis on power line safety and Aurora has been actively involved in this field, including the prevention of fires. In 2012, Aurora's Bushfire Mitigation Strategy was reviewed and changes approved. Immediately following the January 2013 fires, an audit and review of Aurora's Strategy was undertaken and a case study of their response was prepared. All these documents have been provided to the Inquiry with Aurora's submission.²⁰ Power was restored outside the period of the Inquiry's terms of reference; however, it is noted that one of the two high voltage feeder lines was restored in two weeks.

¹⁹ Submission No. 66.

²⁰ Submission No. 95.

It has not been possible to evaluate the Aurora strategy in the period available to the Inquiry, and the Inquiry is not able to comment on this aspect except to say that it is important for DIER to be satisfied these arrangements are sound.

However there is one area the Inquiry wishes to mention. The loss of wooden poles in a fire and the obstruction of roads are predictable. Aurora indicates that 60% of its overhead distribution network is in very high bushfire risk areas. The poles damaged in the fires have been replaced with wooden poles. Consequently, this form of network poses a significant risk for future response and recovery operations, in which the State should have an interest.

Information was provided to the Inquiry by Aurora personnel that wooden poles don't perform well in fires, but they are an economically-preferred option. Underground power increases the cost by four to five times. Apparently it is intended to use concrete poles for the second line through to the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas. Aurora has engaged a consultant to review the use of wooden poles.

There are many references in this Report to communications difficulties and the loss of power was a significant aspect of that problem. Telecommunications, particularly mobile communications and internet access, are integral features of community life today, and as the primary telecommunications carrier in this area, the effect on Telstra's services and the restoration of normal services was an important part of the recovery process.

In its submission to the Inquiry, Telstra indicated that its network remained reasonably resilient; no mobile towers or exchanges were destroyed and there was only some minor damage to cabling at Eaglehawk Neck. Several exchanges and mobile sites failed after the loss of mains power and the depletion of the back-up batteries. Some equipment was also switched off for a period at Murdunna, due to mains power issues damaging equipment. The areas most affected were in the areas of the Forcett and Bicheno fires.²¹

The following extracts from Telstra's submission outline action taken and the issues for a speedy recovery:

Telstra assets in Dunalley, Nubeena, Elbow Hill, Big Blue Hill and Koonya had power generators connected due to loss of mains power. We have standing arrangements to have generators ready to deploy in the event we need to power sites that have lost mains power. These arrangements were put in place quickly, however due to the isolated location and restrictions implemented by the emergency services we weren't able to immediately deploy these generators. ...

In the Victorian Black Saturday bushfires the largest impact to Telstra's network was as a result of loss of power – once power was restored most our network also came back on-line. ...

Our Emergency Services Liaison Officers (ESLO) were engaged with the Southern Region Emergency Management Committee to prioritise restoration in consultation with emergency services. Due to some access issues, in some cases this work was carried out by boat and helicopter. Along with other organisations in the State, Telstra found it difficult to access helicopters. ...

21 Submission No. 89, at p. 1.

There were times during the fires where despite being willing and able to refuel Telstra was not able to get to sites on the advice of emergency service personnel. We understand the many calls on the time of emergency service organisations and their desire, once it was safe to do so, to have escorted conveyances into fire affected areas. Telstra participated in these however the queuing and marshalling contributed to a slow journey in and out. This slowed down the ability of our technicians and contractors to check in on infrastructure, refuel it where necessary and get it back online. Once these delays were raised with the Police Telstra was able to speed up our restoration through more efficient arrangements as typically occurs in other States and Territories across the nation. ...

Given the role of telecommunications as an essential service Telstra believes that as a critical infrastructure provider we should be afforded a degree of priority to access areas when safe to do so. Telstra technicians and contractors are experienced and skilled at restoring services in difficult terrain and at times of extreme weather. Indeed many Telstra staff in Tasmania are also volunteer fire fighters or members of the State Emergency Service. We respectfully request the Inquiry investigate a means by which Critical Infrastructure Providers such as Telstra, may be given priority access to an impacted area when safe to do so. This may assist in the reduction it takes for the telecommunications network and community to recover.²²

Telstra makes the point that it is 'best not to rely on a mobile as the only way to communicate in an emergency'. Effectiveness of this form of communication can be influenced by network capacity, topography, climate and the number of users. Unfortunately the community has become quite dependent on mobile phone communications.

Telstra takes a commercial approach to the network it provides for mobile phone coverage, and argues that because of the geography and topography of Tasmania, universal mobile coverage is extremely difficult and beyond what is justified by a private company.²³ In areas such as the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas, which may become isolated by emergency events, an improved network coverage and greater redundancy is probably desirable, with redundancy power available for a longer period than is currently the case. This is a matter for the Government and Telstra to determine.

The Inquiry is also aware that this matter is a national issue which has been discussed at both the Standing Council for Police and Emergency Management and the Council of Australian Governments.

There is further comment on the importance of mobile phones for alert and warning messages in an emergency in PART G.

Recommendation 56 – that the Department of Infrastructure Energy and Resources consult Aurora Energy on the use of wooden poles for overhead infrastructure with a view to mitigating the risk in bushfires.

22 Submission No. 89, at p. 2.

23 Submission No. 89, at p. 7.

Recommendation 57 – that the Government consider whether it should discuss options for greater phone coverage and redundancy in areas of high risk in emergency situations where there are presently telecommunications limits.

Recommendation 58 – that emergency management plans recognise the need to provide priority access to areas of emergency operations for critical infrastructure providers.



Photo courtesy of Warren Frey

Recovery Activities

The number of recovery activities was substantial and much of it was coordinated through the SREMC and the SRSC, and later the SEMAG. Some dimensions of recovery have been referred to above and in PART E (for example, the Rapid Impact Assessment process). It is not possible to itemise all activities and do them justice. An illustration of the activities will be provided. As with the response, people should not underestimate the scale and complexity of recovery operations, and many people made extremely generous commitments of time and energy to help others, including those managing the process.

Recovery arrangements began at Government level on 6 January, with a meeting of senior officials to scope out the requirements. Cabinet was briefed on 7 January and a Ministerial Committee chaired by the Premier met on 8 January. That Committee formed the Interim Recovery Committee and it was planned to establish a State Recovery Task Force and appoint a Recovery Coordinator as a priority. A Multi-Agency Recovery Committee of senior public sector officials was formed and met on 8 January, and began planning for the immediate, short-term (2 to 3 weeks) and longer-term recovery priorities. Advice on the recovery arrangement following the Victoria Bush Fires in 2009 was available. These committees initially met daily.²⁴

The Tasmanian Relief and Recovery Arrangements and the Personal Hardship and Distress Assistance Policy were activated by the Acting Premier on 6 January. This assistance was provided to affected people from 9 January. Other relief arrangements were also established and these are outlined in the Department of Premier and Cabinet's submission to the Inquiry.²⁵

A range of government agencies were directly involved in providing recovery services in addition to managing recovery operations. The submissions made by the relevant government departments should be referred to.²⁶

Social recovery was an important aspect and this was largely managed and coordinated by the SRSC. It should be noted that the SRSC was primarily involved in providing for the emergency immediate social recovery needs of people. There is comment below on some difficulties experienced in implementing these services and suggestions for improvement. The SRSC continued its operations for two weeks until the longer-term recovery was handed over to the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

When the Social Recovery Coordinator became aware that the Nubeena Civic Centre was struggling for food, he began to make arrangements for assistance. Transport was not immediately available to take food into the centre. He was able to send some supplies of food, water, diesel fuel and lanterns by police boat to the Nubeena Health Centre, but was unable to send two hospital technicians he had arranged to help. The goods he sent arrived at 2.00am on 5 January. He sent more food and water later this day.

On becoming concerned about the leadership and control of recovery in Nubeena on 6 January, the Social Recovery Coordinator took more control and sent food and medical supplies; two emergency service nurses; and a former Australian Defence Force nurse with overseas experience (to ensure the Centre was operating effectively). He also sent two senior

24 Submission No. 84, at pp. 23 - 29.

25 Submission No. 84, at pp. 21 -28.

26 Submissions Nos. 49, 66, 69, 83 and 85a in particular.

social workers to Dunalley, to assist where they could and to also advise the Social Recovery Coordinator on what needed to be done.

On 6 January, mixed messages were being received about the needs in Dunalley. By 7 January, there was a better understanding of what was required in Dunalley. During the next few days, a number of support services were sent into Dunalley, including Centrelink, the Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul Society and Red Cross. A GP clinic was also established.

The Social Recovery Coordinator described the Dunalley community as starting to support itself by 8 January. However, this does not suggest that there was not a lot more to be done to support the local community.

Animal welfare was an issue raised in a number of submissions. The International Fund for Animal Welfare recommended that animal welfare be included in emergency planning and arrangements are established with the Australian Veterinary Association on services it can provide, such as a triage centre established close to the site of a fire.²⁷

During the fires, SREMC made a request to the Department of Primary Industries, Parks, Water and Environment (DPIPWE) for assistance on animal welfare. Until these fires DPIPWE was mainly concerned with animal welfare by providing advice for managing burnt livestock and wildlife, and coordinating the care for injured wildlife. Following the SREMC's request, DPIPWE deployed stock officers to assist.

A triage centre was established at Dunalley staffed by private veterinarians.²⁸

These highlight the learning which should be captured from these events. Most agencies and organisations will have debriefing procedures after major events, including the emergency services, and should have undertaken this process. However, the Inquiry is concerned (and this will be addressed in detail in PART H) that plans are set at an over-arching level without sufficient detail to be ready for implementation. If done this way, the detail of lessons learned may be lost.

Many recovery activities were also initiated and undertaken by members of the community, and these will be discussed below in the section on Community Resilience.

It should be noted that there were some issues with the clean-up contract, but as implementation of the contract was later than 11 January, it is outside the terms of reference.

Recommendation 59 – that the State Emergency Management Committee ensures that a program of debriefing on recovery issues is completed by all relevant agencies and organisations, and detailed plans and operating procedures are established ready for implementation.

²⁷ Submission No. 57.

²⁸ Submission No. 69.

Social Recovery Strategic Direction and Coordination

In its submission to the Inquiry, the DHHS commented on the immediate social recovery activities. The following relevant points are made:

- as the fire threat was continuing, the primary focus in the first week was on emergency response activities and attempting to meet the immediate physical and social needs of the community
- initially it was difficult to get an accurate assessment of the situation and support requirements in the Dunalley and Tasman Peninsula areas for the first few days
- this meant that many of the processes underpinning community support structures were set up by the community members themselves
- a lesson learnt was to get appropriate staff into the affected area early to commence community engagement and needs assessment activities
- while staff did an excellent job, their efforts would be enhanced by regular training and by developing systems and written procedures that would enable these staff to 'hit the ground running'
- development of the Major Incident Support System (a client registration and case management database) will be a valuable tool for future emergencies. This system is still in the development phase and is modified from the Victorian bushfire recovery program.²⁹

As outlined in various parts above, the Social Recovery Coordinator had concerns about leadership and management in the first few days following 4 January in Nubeena, and the lack of clarity about the situation in both Nubeena and Dunalley over this time.

The Social Recovery Coordinator also observed that the transition point from immediate to longer-term recovery varied as people were at different stages. Overall it took longer than the first week after the emergency began to transition to the Recovery Taskforce. The Taskforce took a short period to establish itself and the SRSC had to continue over that period.

A number of other points the Social Recovery Coordinator made are of substance. Once the roads were re-opened, the Southern Regional Controller advised him that he was no longer continuing in charge of the emergency; however, the Social Recovery Coordinator believed he had to continue as the Taskforce was not yet established. This caused him some concern about the legal basis for his work. The Inquiry expects that the ongoing recovery activities the Social Recovery Coordinator was involved in would most likely be covered by the normal machinery of government, and has not been able to examine this issue. It is a matter the State Emergency Management Committee can satisfy itself on.

In implementing the recovery plan, he had some dated procedures applicable before a recent restructuring of the DHHS. He had only taken up this position in April 2012 and advised the Inquiry that, while they had some procedures developed for what services would do in emergencies, they did not have governance arrangements, which were especially important given the restructuring of DHHS involved decentralisation.

The Social Recovery Coordinator said that because the State Special Emergency Management

²⁹ Submission No. 85a, at p. 4.

Plan–Recovery was a new plan, there were gaps, and they did things outside their normal scope because they could see what was needed.

Finally, the Social Recovery Coordinator told the Inquiry that input from the community on what it needed was difficult to obtain, because people were shell-shocked. He felt they asked people too many questions and instead should have been more direct in their support; that is, simply helped people to access services rather than just offer them support. Members of the community also kept asking the Social Recovery Coordinator if he could stop people approaching them wanting to help.

Red Cross made further observations on the ‘transition from relief provision (immediate food and shelter provision) to recovery support’, emphasising there was an ‘absence of strategic or operational coordination’. On checking on people for their wellbeing or provision of relief services, Red Cross suggested a well-managed program will typically:

- have a single lead agency to set objectives and strategies, and coordinate operations
- identify target properties
- define the competencies and performance requirements
- use a data mapping system
- have a formalised referral system for requests for specialist services
- integrate site visit information into multi-agency support operational planning
- have a specific communications plan.³⁰

Red Cross commented that little of the above appeared to be in place, resulting in a wide variety of experiences for people. Negative feedback was received from over-visited homes and outreach support ceased before it had reached a number of potentially impacted communities. There were examples provided to the Inquiry of people isolated in their homes who did not receive any contact from service providers.

The period of time over which this occurred is not clear, and it could be outside the period of the Inquiry’s terms of reference. However, whether observations were made outside this period or not is probably not relevant, as the cause is likely to be within that period.

In this regard, Red Cross indicated that contributing factors were within the state planning arrangements. For the past two years there has not been an equivalent to the regional social recovery committees. The SRSC began operations immediately, but in the view of Red Cross, was concentrating on short-term relief services, and did not plan for coordination with new appointments being made for the long-term recovery. It was also expected that a system from Victoria would be used, so data management appeared to be on hold pending the commissioning of the new system.

A TASPOL Inspector appointed to provide information to and reassure the affected communities was critical of the coordination of the immediate recovery. His comments include:

- no management structure was established to ensure a strategic approach was taken to community support services

30 Submission No. 77, at pp. 8-10.

- the immediate recovery was not as well coordinated as it could have been
- qualifications for the people providing assistance were not known; organisations could turn-up and their personnel would be deployed without question
- some residences received multiple visits and others were not visited at all
- the turn-over of support personnel meant there was no ongoing knowledge of what had been done.
- he raised this at the daily Agency Coordinators meeting and, although it gained some traction, there was no training management team and insufficient resources allocated for it.
- the absence of an appropriate structure and management regime could have been dealt with through the establishment of an Operations Centre, similar to that which occurred with the Port Arthur shooting in 1996.

In summary, the Inspector told the Inquiry that recovery would have benefitted from:

- validation of the credentials of persons assisting
- a structured business process (templates, databases, IT etc.)
- a strategic approach to welfare provision
- clear business rules (surrounding confidentiality, logbooks, note taking) and a negotiated approach among all service providers, including DHHS, Red Cross, various pastoral care organisations.

These issues indicate that the arrangements in place were not sufficient to ensure effective control and coordination of immediate recovery operations.

Recommendation 60 – that the State Emergency Management Committee examine whether there are any legal issues associated with continuing recovery operations where the overarching emergency management arrangements have ceased.

Recommendation 61 – that the plans for social recovery be reviewed, and plans and procedures are established ready for implementation.

Recommendation 62 – that suitable facilities are established from which to effectively control and coordinate immediate recovery operations.

Community Resilience

Community resilience is a key policy position for governments and the Inquiry wishes to refer to this without providing a detailed analysis.

An appreciation of what community resilience means and how recovery may relate to it can be derived from the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience:

Communities that possess resilient characteristics can also arrive at the other side of a crisis in a stronger position than pre-event. For example:

- *A community with well-rehearsed emergency plans*
- *Superior fire mitigation processes in cooler months*
- *Appropriate building controls, suitable to local hazards and risks*
- *Widely adopted personal and business financial mitigation measures (e.g. insurance suitable to the risks)*

Is likely to suffer less during an extreme fire event and is likely to recover quickly; financially, physically and as a community.³¹

It is often said that a crisis 'brings out the best in people' and the January 2013 fires are no exception. The concern and support from the wider community, and the communities involved in the events, would have sent a heart-warming message to those affected, and the direct assistance was extraordinary and began immediately. This is what we have come to expect from Australian communities.

In some cases the help, though well intentioned, exceeded what was required and caused difficulties for those involved in response and recovery operations. The lesson here is not so much to discourage assistance, but to focus and coordinate it in the most beneficial way.

One high-profile example involved Ms Mel Irons and the use of social media on a 'Tassie Fires We Can Help' Facebook page. This case will be dealt with in the PART G. Two other cases illustrate the value of building resilient communities.

The Dunalley Tasman Neighbourhood House (DTNH) is a community not-for-profit organisation operating from centres in Nubeena and Dunalley. A diverse range of community programs are provided, including a venue for visiting health professionals and referrals for community members to appropriate services. There are 25 volunteers who help operate the centres. After the fires, the relevant role of the centres was described as '... recovery from a social and community cohesion perspective'.³²

In Nubeena, the Tasman Community House is located close to the evacuation centre and it was opened during the emergency. A personal generator was used for power to restore communications, which was vital in what was detailed as an 'extremely confusing, overwhelming and stressful time' for people. Many people who lived locally had been

31 Attributed to the Insurance Council of Australia 2008, Improving Community Resilience to Extreme Weather Events. See the Strategy for a number of strategic priorities.

32 Submission No. 67.

evacuated, and wanted to find friends and relatives and determine if their property had been damaged. Stranded tourists also needed to change booking arrangements.

The Dunalley Neighbourhood House was opened on 8 January as soon as the coordinator could join a police convoy. Similar services to those in Nubeena were provided and it was reported that 80 people a day came to the House. In the transition from emergency to recovery, the Dunalley House was the only place many people could access communication facilities to manage lost documents, insurance claims and work demands.

Financial donations received by the DTNH have been put into a Revegetation and Garden Restoration program and 200 local households have registered for assistance.

The coordinator of this program commended the desire to have a 'community led' recovery. Recommendations include recognising the role of these programs and the assistance they can provide in recovery. To that extent the community should be involved in planning for emergencies.

In another example, a fodder relief program was established.³³ This began on 6 January and was based at the Pembroke Park Pony Club grounds at Sorell. The person who initiated this program was previously the Tasmanian Coordinator for Aussie Helpers, a drought support charity. Very significant donations of fodder were received from throughout the state, and was distributed to the Tasman Peninsula and the Ellendale areas. The coordinator said that the demand was so great that 'every time she hung up the phone there were 10 missed calls'. There was a major problem in delivering the fodder with the road closures, and they had to join police convoys, which caused significant loss of time. It is reported that hundreds of volunteers arrived to assist the program and the response to help was 'overwhelming' (care also needed to be taken with this form of program so there were no unintended consequences, such as cross-contamination of noxious weeds).

The program continued well past the period of the Inquiry's terms of reference and there were difficulties indicated in the program's submission to the Inquiry, which the Inquiry cannot deal with.

These examples also highlight the importance of using volunteers constructively in an emergency. Volunteers Tasmania is a state wide peak body for volunteering and it is acknowledged that there is a gap in 'responding to and communicating with spontaneous volunteers', and that they can help in managing volunteers in an emergency.³⁴ From 7 January Volunteers Tasmania did undertake the registration of volunteers.

Volunteers Tasmania found the 'Tassie Fires We Can Help' Facebook page challenging as it provided an avenue for 'spontaneous volunteers to be immediately activated without the assurance of safety, insurance or communication with the agencies involved in the response and recovery efforts'.³⁵ A process of matching volunteers under these conditions is used by Volunteers Tasmania. Again, it recommended becoming involved in emergency planning; specifically that:

- Volunteers Tasmania becomes a member of the State Emergency Management

33 Submission No. 73.

34 Submission No. 68, at p. 1.

35 Submission No. 68, at p. 2.

Committee and the use of volunteers is recognised and planned for

- protocols for communicating accurately to prospective volunteers are established
- education is provided across government to identify roles/tasks for volunteers.

While recognising the importance of community resilience, care should be taken in emergency management not to neglect appropriate service provision in an emergency by assuming the community will satisfy its own needs or by relying on the community where it is more appropriate for services to be provided by state or local governments. Service providers should also be aware of transition delays caused by not acting until it is determined communities aren't self-reliant.

A recommendation was made on engaging with local communities and using community resources in the section in PART E on evacuations. This recommendation is relevant to this section as well and is repeated.



Photo courtesy of Workplace Standards Tasmania

Recommendation 63 – that emergency management plans specifically include processes and resources for effectively engaging with and using local communities, including volunteers.

The Effectiveness of the Transition Recovery Arrangements and Operations

Clear measures for judging the effectiveness of the transition to recovery are not available. To some extent the State Special Emergency Management Plan–Recovery would be a method of doing this; however, for this emergency, this is not a suitable approach. Both general and individual circumstances were so varied and complicated by the way the emergency unfolded, and so prevent definitive conclusions. The emergency would also have likely tested better arrangements.

Generally, although some aspects occurred reasonably quickly (such as the first ferries arriving at Nubeena), the immediate recovery was slow to get started and not initially well focussed and coordinated.

This was partially due to the challenging circumstances: the scale and complexity of the events, poor initial information, ongoing response operations, road closures, loss of power and communications, and the isolation of the Tasman and Forestier Peninsulas.

In some cases those responsible for recovery operations were overwhelmed by the events. That may be so, but the situation would have been better managed and problems overcome quicker if there were suitable plans, facilities, and systems.

Problems in immediate recovery and transition to longer-term recovery were also caused by the emergency management arrangements in place:

- this was a state level emergency, but there were no suitable state level arrangements to manage recovery: responsibilities, structures, facilities or systems
- there was no plan for transition from immediate recovery to medium to long-term recovery
- what arrangements there were not sufficiently ready to be implemented; for example, plans were not detailed
- there was a reliance on committees and there were no suitable facilities for control and coordination available
- there was a transition delay in moving recovery from the municipal level to include regional operations

Further comment will be made in PART J on how the emergency arrangements might be improved.