

Government Flood Review

Department of State Growth Submission

November 2016

The Department of State Growth comments for the consideration of the Government Flood Review team focus on a number of key areas which have potential for improvements to be made which would benefit impacted communities in the future.

Resourcing in key agencies

For State Growth, the transition from response to recovery could have been better managed by having an Agency representative already identified with appropriate training in emergency management. While operational areas managed response and recovery, the importance of having dedicated resources to coordinate across a diverse range of issues facing the Agency and Government became clearer through the experience of the Flood Recovery Taskforce. State Growth is currently conducting an audit of emergency management, and further work will be done to ensure that in the transition to recovery, there are staff with appropriate skills, knowledge and experience who can be seconded quickly without impacting on the operational recovery efforts. Longer term recovery for particular sectors may involve resource intensive program delivery from agencies who do not have additional capacity to provide this. Funding or resourcing would assist agencies to deliver programs of services which are outside their normal remit.

Whole of government emergency management resourcing

When the response phase transitioned into recovery and the Flood Recovery Taskforce was established, it was estimated that the taskforce would be in place for 4-6 weeks initially. This timeframe impacted the way that the Taskforce was set up, including resourcing. In future, it may be useful to assume that if an event is of a size and nature to warrant the establishment of a Taskforce, then it is likely to need to be in place for a minimum of 3 months, likely longer in order to manage a significant event. It may also be useful to have a core of staff with capability working in this area, probably as an extension of existing Office of Security and Emergency Management staffing within the Department of Premier and Cabinet. Arrangements for staff seconded from agencies should be clarified as early as possible, including roles, funding and backfilling.

Funding

In order to adequately meet the Tasmanian Government's responsibilities for response and recovery and to assist communities to recover, it may be appropriate to set up specific funding that can be accessed quickly after an emergency is declared. This would allow high priority infrastructure works to be carried out in a timely manner, enabling communities to access essential services and recover more quickly. In particular, having a central funding pool set aside for critical infrastructure would ensure that infrastructure owners who are unable to manage extraordinary costs related to

emergencies, can access funds quickly. The process could be managed through the State Recovery Committee or a similar body to ensure appropriate oversight.

GBE/SOC arrangements

It may also be beneficial to provide early advice on funding and responsibility for recovery through continuation of services provided by Government Business Enterprises and State Owned Companies. Directors have an obligation to make decisions in the best interests of the business. During fire, flood and other emergencies these decisions may not align to the broader Tasmanian Government's interests, or to community expectations in terms of timeframes for recovery. For example, an entity may determine that a road will not be repaired as there is no operational need.

Bridging stock

State Growth currently has some temporary bridging stock which can be utilised for emergency access to isolated communities. Given requests for this to be deployed by local government after the recent floods, it may be appropriate to conduct an audit of existing temporary bridging stock within the state. State Growth has reviewed temporary bridging options and is now investigating opportunities to procure temporary bridging for State Roads. Alternative approaches could be investigated in addition to utilising existing stock for all infrastructure owners, including the potential for greater standardisation of bridge designs and contracts. A central pool of bridging stock could be purchased which can then be hired to any infrastructure owner to be deployed in an emergency. Bridge repair and construction can take several months, and having alternative options which can be deployed more quickly, would likely reduce the time that communities are isolated after an event. Setting expectations in advance around the need for coordination and prioritisation to occur for bridges and other infrastructure repair after an emergency would assist infrastructure owners to make decisions which benefit the broader community.

Infrastructure and debris

Infrastructure damage and debris management have arisen as major issues in the June 2016 floods. Clarifying responsibility for debris management in the future prior to another event occurring may assist in speeding up response times, as well as recovery and prevention of future damage. While this can be a complex area, some guidelines around responsibility may help infrastructure owners to determine an appropriate course of action early, and will assist in planning recovery works.