

Executive Summary

Backburn
in Big Desert
December 2002
- DSE



Executive Summary

The Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires was established to look into all aspects of the preparations for, and response to the fires, and in particular to identify opportunities to learn from them and further improve Victoria's fire management capability - prevention, mitigation and response.

There will be some who attempt to use this report and its recommendations to apportion blame, and to advance their own agendas.

We believe that the overwhelming majority of Victorians including those who contributed in some way to the Inquiry, are more interested in ensuring that their views are appropriately included in the process of better understanding these fires - what worked well, what needs to be improved and what can be done to mitigate the risk of fires like these occurring again.

It is easy to look back at emergencies with the benefit of hindsight, and identify areas that could have been managed differently or handled better. The report of this Inquiry is no different. We have made many recommendations intended to create a more seamless, and a stronger approach to fire management planning on both private and public land, and to improve the effectiveness of mitigation and prevention programs on public land. We have also looked at possible improvements to fire management operational systems and organisational arrangements.

This report may appear critical to some, but in focusing on opportunities for improvement, it is inevitable that more analysis will be devoted to what can be improved, rather than to list what went well.

In comparing the conditions leading up to the Black Friday Fires of 1939, and the fires of 2002-2003, the similarities are very apparent. The area of land burnt is also similar. What is substantially and starkly different is the number of deaths and injuries, and the property loss associated with the fires.

We believe the fires were, generally, well managed and analysis of the losses, *and* saves, during the fires supports this conclusion. There has been very significant improvement since 1939, and even since the Ash Wednesday Fires of 1983. However, the expectations of the Victorian community are much higher now than in 1939, and we have identified opportunities to further strengthen our arrangements, and a strong community demand that this be done.

Finally, the Inquiry would like to restate its respect for the commitment and professional way the many firefighters and support staff - paid and especially volunteer - fought the fires of 2002-2003. We have nothing but praise for their efforts.

Part A

Setting the Scene

Overview

The Inquiry was presented with many passionately held views on a broad range of topics relating to bushfires (or ‘unplanned’ fires) in Victoria. Submissions and discussions ranged from Victoria’s history, climate, weather, geography, topography and the introduction of Europeans into Victoria; past and present land management policies and practices; previous reports and inquiries and the command and control system employed to manage unplanned fires today. Much of the debate was informed; some was not.

To effectively respond to the Terms of Reference we thought it necessary to explore the background and history of many of these issues to provide a common platform for future debate and to place the recommendations of this Report in perspective. These explorations are in Part A. How they impacted on the fire and the fire response itself are in Parts B to E.

Finally, in preparing this Report we were not able to investigate and analyse every anecdote and incident brought to our attention; rather we addressed the broad themes and issues. However there were 5 events that warranted scrutiny and these are considered as case studies and are analysed in Parts C and D.

Chapter 1 Introduction

The Victorian summer of 2002-2003 saw bushfires burn the greatest expanse of land (1.3 million hectares) since the 1939 fires (estimated at 1.5-2.0 million hectares). As in 1939 and 1983 the fire season followed prolonged drought.

The scale and duration of the fires across the State tested the capacity of fire agencies and the community. Response to the bushfires ranged from relief that there was not greater loss, given the potential of the fires, through to anger and criticism of Victoria’s public land management and the way the fires were fought.

The Inquiry into the 2002-2003 Victorian Bushfires was established to examine the effectiveness of the preparedness for the season and the response to the bushfires, as well as to provide recommendations for the future.

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Chapter 2 The Changing Victorian Environment

Victoria has one of the most fire-prone environments in the world due to the combination of its landscape, vegetation, climate and weather conditions. Change in the vegetative cover, land use and management, and population distribution across the State have influenced the fire risk. Victoria’s high population density and increasing permanent and weekend communities in areas of high landscape value are often also at high risk of bushfires.

Victorians have responded to fire events and the threat of bushfire by progressively building a sophisticated fire management system based on organisational advances, legislative change, the application of technology and co-operative management models. We should not be complacent.

That change is constant is evident in our climate and we explored the pattern of extreme fire weather associated with El-Niño-Southern Oscillation events. This examination revealed possible increases in fire risk for Victoria as the climate warms, supporting the need for adaptable systems.

Recommendation

- 2.61** That DSE and CFA as part of their long term planning, and in conjunction with the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology, consider ways in which evidence for climate change and El Niño–Southern Oscillation cycle impacts on the likelihood of unplanned fire, can be better incorporated into preparedness and response planning.

Chapter 3 Current Legislation and Co-operative Arrangements

Current Victorian legislative and regulatory arrangements relating to planning and mitigation for unplanned fires, are complex, requiring a high level of co-operation and communication between the many agencies and organisations involved, and do not effectively cover all agencies and utilities in terms of broader regional planning.

The Legislation for suppression of fires is clearer, as it is for the response to, and management of, other emergencies. The three agencies that respond directly to fires: the Metropolitan Fire and Emergencies Services Board (MFESB), the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) have clear legislative accountabilities.

The analysis here is a critical input into development of the proposed new Municipal Fire Management Plan recommended in Chapter 14.

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Chapter 4 The Story of the 2002-2003 Victorian Fires

The 'story of the fire' describes the fire event and acknowledges the efforts of the fire agencies, crews and volunteers, those communities affected and Victorians as a whole. We provide an analysis of events, locations, and immediate impacts and begin to address the longer-term effects. This later theme is progressed in Chapter 24.

Overnight on 7 and 8 January, a dry storm ignited over 80 fires in the North East and Gippsland. Location of, and response to, so many fires was a complex task, but by the second day 40 fires were contained or under control. By 14 January, however, a small number of fires, mostly in steep inaccessible forest continued to burn. There have been criticisms of the initial response to the fire suppression effort and these are explored in detail in Chapter 17.

Towards the end of January, deteriorating fire weather saw the fires begin to join up and the area affected by the fires increase exponentially. January 25 and 30 were days of extreme weather, producing intense and erratic fire behaviour and spread. During February the weather was milder, reducing fire activity and enabling gradual control of the fires. On March 7 the fires were declared officially contained.

The North East and Gippsland fires burnt 1.12 million hectares of land, including over 108,000 hectares of private land. No lives were lost as a direct result of these fires. The next largest fire over the 2002-2003 fire season, burnt approximately 181,400 hectares in the Big Desert in the State's North West during December 2002.

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Chapter 5 Submissions and Community Consultation

The Inquiry received 273 submissions and consultations occurred with over 400 individuals and representative groups throughout the State. When the community was asked to recommend improvements to the State's fire management arrangements, as expected, the process elicited more negative comments than positive. However, the issues raised and matters of concern were surprisingly uniform from the North West of Victoria to far East Gippsland.

Principal areas of concern included;

- Land management preparedness, principally fuel reduction on public land;
- Agency preparedness;
- Response issues, that is how the fire was fought;
- Management of resources in the fighting of the fires; and
- Recovery issues.

These issues, and their subsets, are detailed within the Chapter. We respond to the matters raised with us in detail throughout the Report with Part B concentrating on land management and Parts C and D on the remaining matters.

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Chapter 6 Weather Conditions Before and During the Fires of 2002-2003

Weather and climatic patterns play a significant part in assessing fire risk and in fire suppression. We explored the impact of weather conditions, including drought, leading to the 2002-2003 fire season and those over the last 20 years. The opinion that the summer's weather was 'benign' is not supported by evidence. We conclude that the weather pattern was similar to that of 1983 before and during the fires.

We note one significant difference. In the North East there was no rainfall >5 mm on any day within the 2002-2003 fire period until February 22 (a period of more than 40 days from the commencement of the fires).

Between 1986 and 2002, Victoria experienced a period of very low area burnt by unplanned fires per year with an average to 26,000 hectares per year between 1988 and 1998 compared with the long-term average of around 120,000 hectares. During this time there was an increase in the actual number of fires, particularly in several high fire risk years. Reviewing all relevant parameters, we conclude that successful fire suppression by DSE and CFA is more likely than benign weather as an explanation for this pattern of low burn area years.

Recommendations

- 6.38 That DSE institute additional routine data storage and analysis to supplement current climate records with at least daily 3 pm values for the Grassland and Forest Fire Danger Index, and Keetch-Byram Drought Index, for selected high quality stations representing a cross-section of environments throughout Victoria.
- 6.39 That DSE and CFA, recognising that the Bureau of Meteorology does not routinely store all variables required to produce the calculations and indices necessary for research and planning into fire occurrence and behaviour, develop appropriate systems to ensure that such current and historical information is readily available and accessible.

Part B

Term of Reference One: Fire and Public Land

Overview

Part B explores the technology and science behind the prescribed burning debate, however, it is really a subset of the complex matter of fire and land management. This topic elicits passionate views and this is evident from the submissions and consultations. Part B was written to demonstrate the complex nature of fire and land management issues and in a limited sense, informs the reader of the scientific basis for choices made in the past, in the present system of public land management, and in relation to recommendations for the future.

Managing public and private land to mitigate the threat and impact of fire requires understanding of the inter-relationships between climate, topography, aspect, weather, as well as vegetation, fuel load and fuel moisture content, land use and the proximity of public land relative to that of private landholders and urban developments.

Public land management, as for private, is complicated because reduction in fire proneness and intensity is not a solitary, independent, land management objective. Other objectives concern water quality and quantity, flora and fauna, agriculture, tourism and other commercial enterprises and fires affect them all.

The Inquiry found that Victorian agencies had a growing understanding of the science of fire behaviour, prescribed burning and other fuel management strategies but were hampered by both incomplete and inadequate data holdings, and lack of rigor in ground observations, necessary to best advantage this understanding for future management purposes. Recommendations are made in respect of these issues.

The Chapters of Part B are quite theoretical, however, the prescribed burning debate has been, at times, ill informed and peppered with gross exaggerations and the view by some that 'one size fits all'. These Chapters seek to provide a more objective consideration of the prescribed burning debate and in so doing dispel the myths.

Chapter 7 Background To Prescribed Burning In Forests

'Prescribed burning' is the term used to describe deliberately lighting fires under safe conditions for a variety of land management purposes. Factors that affect prescribed burning are; forest or other vegetation type; fuel types, loads and condition, fire behaviour, climate and weather, the interval between burns, assessment of risk, and availability of trained and qualified crews to manage the event. A number of these factors are explained in detail in this Chapter.

DSE has developed five 'Fuel Management Zones' to deliver a strategic approach to fuel management on public land. The focus of these zones ranges from the Asset Protection (Zone 1) to the Exclusion of Prescribed Burning (Zone 5). These zones provide the framework for decision-making regarding the prescribed use of fire.

Tracks are an important tool for the management of prescribed burning as well as for firefighting. Tracks provide an edge against which ignition for burning out areas of fuel can take place. They define blocks for prescribed burning, as well as providing access for ground crews for ignition or suppression purposes. Submissions to the Inquiry identified tracks and access to public land as a significant issue. Comments to the Inquiry noted that unless essential tracks are well maintained and mapped accurately their usefulness cannot be maximised in suppression activities. The issue of tracks is addressed again in Part C, Chapter 15

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Chapter 8 Fuel Management In The High Country

Cattle grazing in the High Country has a long tradition. The practice generates strong and passionate views on the cultural, community and heritage values of grazing and with the value of cattle grazing for fuel reduction. Whether or not grazing should continue at all, or at reduced levels, is outside the scope of our deliberations.

Any approval for High Country grazing should not be based on any effect they may have on unplanned fires.

Burning of the sub-alpine forests by early European settlers to encourage the proliferation of grasses for grazing, appears to have led instead to replacement of grasses by an understory of flammable shrubs. Grazing by cattle on High Country grasslands and herbfields, an evolutionary novelty, does not reduce the flammability of associated shrubs – the most fire prone vegetation - nor appear to prevent the spread of fire above that of ungrazed land.

Recommendation

- 8.25** That, according to available scientific evidence, a decision regarding cattle grazing in the High Country should not be based on the argument that ‘grazing prevents blazing.’

Chapter 9 Fuel Management in ‘Mallee’: Techniques and Approaches

The nature of the vegetation, its distribution and accumulation in mallee and associated non-eucalypt shrublands requires substantially different approaches to fuel reduction practices for fire mitigation than those used for the forested areas of Victoria.

DSE, through mechanisms such as the Draft Mildura Fire Protection Plan, has formalised fire mitigation practices and activities for the mallee. Relatively new practices such as ‘chaining plus burning’ need to be monitored and evaluated. The practice could replace that used to create ‘link burns’ between patches caused by recent unplanned fires.

Recommendations

- 9.30** That if ‘link’ burns continue to be used, then on-site weather sequences and fuel conditions marking successful (‘within explicit prescription’) and unsuccessful burns be documented.
- 9.31** That the success of current buffers in terms of assisting suppression operations be continually reviewed, evaluated and documented.

- 9.32** That the creation of buffers by chaining and then burning swaths of mallee be explicitly monitored for:

- The risk of fire escapes during their establishment;
- Their effectiveness as a barrier to unplanned fire under various weather and fuel conditions; and
- Any adverse environmental effects such as soil mobilisation and loss of biodiversity.

- 9.33** That, as a result of this monitoring, weather conditions for the safe conduct of burning in such operations should be defined.

Chapter 10 Constraints On Prescribed Burning in Forests

The number of days that meet the weather prescriptions for fuel reduction burning are few; around 10 on average per year. Therefore everything should be done to maximise the opportunities that those days present including burning on weekends, and investigation of the plausibility of burning in Spring.

A range of variables, apart from weather, can be used to advantage to extend the number of days on which fuel reduction burning can safely take place. Such variables include; terrain, fuel load and condition, time of day and ignition pattern.

DSE gives priority to regeneration or slash burns (following timber harvesting) over burning for fuel reduction or ecological purposes. In Gippsland and the North East around 63% of the 4295 planned fires are regeneration burns, while 33% are for fuel reduction and the remainder are ecological burns. However, prescribed burns account for more than 90% of the area burnt.

In recent years, areas that have been prescribed burned in the North East and Gippsland (regardless of fuel management zone) are below rates likely to be satisfactory either for fuel reduction for purposes of asset protection, or for the ecological needs of plant communities.

Recommendations

- 10.65** That a review of the fuel management zones be implemented with a view to reducing the number of zones so as to focus clearly on (i) asset protection (especially at the Public/Private land interface), and (ii) ecological burns.
- 10.66** That an explicit formulation of the interactions between terrain, fuel, ignition pattern, time of day and weather be created to better define those days suited to prescribed burning.
- 10.67** That evidence of the rekindling or otherwise of spring prescribed burns in forests be assembled and a model constructed and tested to see whether or not some days in spring could be used for prescribed burning in certain circumstances and places, especially in Zone 1.

Chapter 11 Measuring the Effectiveness of Prescribed Burning

There is no current body of opinion that allows unequivocal or immediate choice of an appropriate measure for the effectiveness of prescribed burning. As the influencing factors of climates, landscapes, technology and social conditions change, so do the most appropriate levels and types of fuel modification in different environments.

Prescribed burning reduces fuel quantities and changes the status of fuels, which by definition reduces potential fire intensity. This mitigates the effects of unplanned fires, improves the chance of control and therefore reduces the risks to life, property and other values.

Prescribed fires may reduce the potential risk from unplanned fires but they may escape and become unplanned fires themselves. Prescribed fires generate smoke and other offsite impacts. The community and agencies will have to work together to minimise undesirable impacts.

Setting an annual optimum area for prescribed burning is a difficult yet primary task for fire managers. To improve decision-making and establish appropriate burn areas, greater collection and use of targeted data is required. Getting this right is pivotal to effective public land management in Victoria.

Recommendations

- 11.71** That DSE:
- Provide further training and/or field staff for the routine acquisition and reporting of geographic data (maps of fire extent for prescribed and unplanned fires) and fuel-array data (quantity, type, condition and arrangement before and after fire as in the Overall Fuel Hazard Guide).
 - Routinely and explicitly report on measures of the effectiveness of the prescribed burning program.
 - Measure the total area subject to prescribed burning treatment in each Fire Management Zone each year along with the average proportion of that area successfully burned.
 - Develop an explicit, routine system of evaluation, analysis and reporting of the effects of prescribed burning in relation to environmental outcomes such as conservation of flora and fauna and water quality.
 - Train more crews, use Project Firefighters more extensively (and CFA members or MFESB firefighters where appropriate), to undertake prescribed burning.
- 11.72** That DSE undertake a formal study of the level of prescribed burning in south western Australia for its possible application in Victoria by comparing respective fuel arrays, terrain, weather, ground access, staff, prescribed burning days, areas conducive to prescribed burning and fire response systems.
- 11.73** That DSE and CFA map all unplanned fires greater than four hectares on public and private land in order to further develop an understanding of the risk to rural Victoria from unplanned fires.

Chapter 12

Traditional Burning Practices of Aboriginal People and the Prescribed Burning Debate in Victoria

A particular line of reasoning suggests that if we burned the landscape in the same way as the Aboriginal people did in the pre-European period then we would not have the problems we have today with unplanned fires and with conservation of native flora and fauna. To many, this is a highly attractive philosophy. However, to apply this philosophy we would need to know the details of past 'Aboriginal' fire regimes so we could attempt to recreate them.

Historical accounts from southern Australia, and direct evidence from central and northern Australia, support the argument that Aborigines used fire as a land management tool. Evidence also suggests that some areas of Australia may not have been subjected to this managed fire because of low human population density and resource availability. Other areas were not burned due to their cultural significance or because they were difficult to burn.

After reviewing the evidence, the Inquiry concludes that we do not know enough about traditional burning in southern Australia to be able to re-create an Aboriginal burning regime. Knowledge has been lost, or is fragmentary, and any use of a 'traditional Aboriginal burning regime' in southern Australia would be an experiment in land management and should be recognised as such.

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Part C

Term of Reference One: Community and Agency Preparedness

Overview

In Part C, we determine whether Victoria and Victorians were prepared for the fire season of 2002-2003 and the events that followed. We conclude that they were but more could have been done in a number of areas, particularly holistic fire prevention planning.

We investigate, comment on, and make recommendations in respect to community knowledge and engagement, the preplanning by the emergency management agencies and the fire agencies in particular, and the public and private land based fire prevention planning models.

We conclude that within the parameters of current legislation, policy and procedures what could be done prior to the event was done. If the rules were changed could we have done better - yes. Would the fires still have occurred - yes. Would they have been as extensive - we do not know and are unlikely to ever know.

If our recommendations are accepted and implemented, the Victorian community would share an appropriate level of responsibility for fire risk and be partners in the decisions that are taken on their behalf to protect their communities, rather than simply the recipient of those decisions. Community agreement on personal and community assets and values will be planned, as will fire suppression strategies and the tactics to be employed.

Chapter 13 Public Awareness And Preparedness

Since the Ash Wednesday fires of 1983 there has been significant and continuing effort by the Government and the fire agencies in preparing the Victorian population for unplanned fires and empowering them to make informed decisions. The outcomes of the 2002-2003 fires show the success of this endeavour. There were no deaths in Victoria as a direct result of the fires.

Victorian fire agencies cannot suppress fires without the assistance and commitment of the public; as a volunteer or as an informed and active landowner and/or community member. Also, as was evident last summer, in extreme fires, the fire services are not resourced to be at every property threatened by fire on every occasion. Fire prevention, mitigation and suppression is a partnership and this partnership, in general, worked well last summer.

However, in some cases the public were not prepared for the self-help role required of them and alternative fire suppression models must be developed to assist small, isolated communities. Overall, there needs to be a more flexible approach to providing a broader suite of fire readiness and management strategies for Victorians.

There are lessons to be learnt from the 2002-2003 fires and they include greater clarity in terminology and language used when engaging the public.

Recommendations

Understanding Bushfire Options: The Decision to Stay or Go?

- 13.23** That CFA further develops the information supporting the decision to stay or go, to incorporate a better understanding of both the likely consequences of leaving home at inappropriate times, and the conditions and emotional impacts likely to be experienced during the passage of the fire front.

Community Education and Information Program

- 13.53** That the three fire agencies (CFA, DSE and MFESB) develop and implement a joint Statewide fire awareness education and information program aimed at encouraging a higher degree of personal and household self-reliance.
- 13.54** That CFA should remain the lead agency in delivering the community education and information program to rural Victoria.
- 13.55** That CFA and MFESB:
- Conduct an annual survey of households to test the level of awareness and acceptance of fire knowledge amongst Victorians; and
 - Regularly measure whether access to information leads to safe behaviours.
- 13.56** That the Co-ordinator-in-Chief of Emergency Management directs that all emergency management agencies review, by June 2004, terminology and language in current communication and public education material to ensure it is clear, easily understood and consistent, particularly with regard to fire.
- 13.57** That CFA and MFESB encourage householders to review their fire safety plan annually.

Community Fireguard

- 13.75 That CFA, in conjunction with isolated small communities, develop and promote a suite of appropriate fire readiness and fire management strategies to meet their needs.
- 13.76 That CFA reports to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on recommended solutions and implementation strategies for isolated small communities by June 2004.
- 13.77 That CFA clarifies and restates the roles and function of existing Community Fireguard Groups (including their relationship to the Municipal Fire Prevention Plan) to members, co-ordinators, Incident Controllers and Municipal Emergency Resource Officers, prior to the 2003-2004 fire season.
- 13.78 That Community Fireguard Group co-ordinators' names are supplied to their local municipality for the 2003-2004 fire season, and are updated annually for use in information exchange should a Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centre or Incident Control Centre be established.
- 13.79 That CFA provides technical advice to Community Fireguard Groups in the selection and purchase of appropriate equipment and protective clothing for use on their own land.
- 13.80 That CFA, recognising the value of the Community Fireguard Group program, undertake a review by June 2004 to identify opportunities to further develop the program to ensure its continuing appropriateness in preparing communities for fire into the future.

Public Awareness Communication Systems

- 13.93 That the Co-ordinator-in-Chief of Emergency Management directs the Media sub-committee of the State Emergency Response Committee to review the use of the Standard Emergency Warning Signal and its accompanying message.
- 13.97 That Victoria include an agenda item for both the National Emergency Management Committee and the National Meeting of Emergency Services Ministers recommending that the Australian Communications Authority review both the Commercial Radio Codes of Practice and Guidelines, and Community Broadcasting Codes of Practice, to ensure they provide necessary guidance and obligations on radio stations during emergencies and in relation to emergency warnings.

Insurance as a Preparedness Measure

- 13.103 That CFA, in their education and information packages, encourage appropriate insurance cover, and ensure that insurance becomes a part of the householder's annual checklist.
- 13.104 That Government work with the insurance industry to explore options for incentives such as a reduction in premiums for those who take appropriate self-protection measures on their properties, similar to incentives for anti-theft home security.

Chapter 14 Planning for Fire – An Holistic Approach

This Chapter builds on the review of legislation in Chapter 3 and explores in detail the role of all parties: public and private landowners and managers, utility providers and Municipal Councils in fire prevention planning and mitigation and determines that there is a better way, and recommends the establishment of a Municipal Fire Management Plan.

Good faith participation is the key to the development of an effective Municipal Fire Management Plan and we talk about the parties who should be involved and their role in its development. Fire does not respect boundaries; we must therefore move forward from the traditional model of fire prevention planning based on land type.

We found that utilities and plantation companies are generally well prepared to protect their own assets, however, their broader role in regional preparedness needs to be strengthened. They have a range of disparate reporting arrangements that do not 'mesh' or nest these planning functions regionally. This may require legislation to ensure appropriate 'community safety provisions'.

Fully audited Municipal Fire Management Plans should replace the current arrangements, and capture all public and private land, and all regional assets whether 'built' or natural.

Recommendations

Municipal Fire Prevention Plan

- 14.46 That, following the review of Forest Industry Brigades, the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* be amended to ensure that the Forest Industry Brigades, which are acting in an approved manner, have the same powers and rights as other Brigades when attending fires on public land or interstate.
- 14.47 That CFA should not be given the power to direct Forest Industry Brigades to engage in fire prevention and suppression activities off their land and that decision should remain the responsibility of the plantation company.
- 14.57 That CFA and the Plantation Industry jointly develop and agree on Fire Prevention Guidelines for Plantations by June 2004, to be then promoted and distributed by the Industry.
- 14.58 That Municipal Councils:
- Ensure consistent approaches to planning for fire prevention and protection; and
 - Consider existing rights of neighbours in planning development applications.

A New Approach to Municipal Planning

- 14.91 That Government review legislation for utilities operating within the State to ensure their involvement in regional fire preparedness and mitigation planning.
- 14.92 That the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* be amended to:
- Replace the current Municipal Fire Prevention Plan and the requirement for a Fire Prevention Committee with a Municipal Fire Management Plan, and Municipal Fire Management Committee; and
 - Bring together all stakeholders with an involvement in fire management for both private and public land within the municipality.
- 14.93 That the Victoria Emergency Management Council establish a sub-committee by June 2004 to ensure an all-agency and appropriate industries' policy framework is developed and agreed in respect to the planning for fire prevention, mitigation and suppression.
- 14.94 That the new Municipal Fire Management Plan is informed by the policy directions of the subcommittee of the Victoria Emergency Management Council.
- 14.95 That the Municipal Fire Management Plan amendment includes appropriate provisions for the audit of the plans including:
- Content;
 - Process of development and implementation; and
 - Compliance reporting to the Victoria Emergency Management Council.
- 14.96 That the Government identifies an appropriate body, or bodies, to undertake the audit of the Municipal Fire Management Plans.

Chapter 15 Agency Preparedness

The Inquiry assessed that CFA and DSE were appropriately prepared for the 2002-2003 fire season. They are recognised as leading firefighting agencies throughout Australia and overseas, however, there were many issues which had a significant impact on CFA and DSE prior to the fire season. All emergency services in Victoria, including CFA were assessing their capability to deal with the consequences of a terrorist attack. CFA and DSE had already provided firefighters to fires interstate and internationally and both were still involved in implementing the out workings of the Linton Coronal Inquest.

Despite changes in government organisational arrangements, an array of co-operative agreements between agencies, levels of government and interstate fire agencies, goodwill and personalities promoted sound co-operation between the various fire agencies.

The appropriate preparation of public land to mitigate fire was canvassed in Part B. Here we note that the costs associated with fuel reduction burning need to be more objectively analysed, and more flexible arrangements put in place to meet regional fuel management schedules on public land on an ongoing basis.

Finally, we note that there has been a high level of acceptance of AIMS-ICS as the Incident Management System for the management of unplanned fires and other incidents requiring emergency response and we recommend concerted effort by CFA for full implementation across all its regions and groups. Chapter 19 recommends modifications to the application of AIMS-ICS.

Recommendations

External Influences on Fire Agencies Prior to the 2002-2003 Fire Season

- 15.11 That DSE and the Department of Primary Industries formalise an agreement by the 2003-2004 fire season documenting the policies, procedures and financial arrangements relating to the availability of Department of Primary Industries staff to be trained and released for fire prevention and suppression activities on public land.

- 15.12 That DSE investigates whether such agreements should exist with other government Departments and agencies, particularly those with officers located in rural Victoria who may be involved in fire response and support operations in the future, based on their expertise and experience.

- 15.13 That DSE commences discussion with the Victorian WorkCover Authority in respect to employer liability for those staff being released to, and directed, by another agency in fire prevention and suppression activities.

Impact of the Drought on Water Availability for Firefighting

- 15.23 That Government in the development of its statewide water policy includes appropriate consideration of access to water for firefighting.

- 15.24 That communities, public land managers, Water Authorities and Catchment Management Authorities jointly identify and implement local and environmentally sound solutions to improve the availability of water for firefighting through the Municipal Fire Management Planning process.

- 15.25 That the fire agencies develop contingency plans in relation to access to water for firefighting, including where appropriate, the use of static, large volume water tanks.

Agency Resources

- 15.40 That DSE and CFA review selection and training programs for Incident Controllers and Incident Management Team members to ensure that they include all necessary competencies in recognition that technical skills are only one component of the required attributes.

Agreements and Memoranda of Understanding

- 15.54 That the Statewide Fire Control Priorities:
- Be developed annually by CFA and DSE;
 - Be endorsed by the Victoria Emergency Management Council;
 - Be incorporated into the co-operative agreement between DSE and CFA; and
 - Inform the Fire Control Priorities in the Municipal Fire Management Plans.

- 15.67 That CFA continues to work with its Brigades to complete the integration of AIIMS-ICS with the Group Structure for full implementation by the 2004-2005 fire season.
- 15.76 That the Victorian fire agencies negotiate with their counterparts in New South Wales and South Australia to put in place agreements for mutual aid and the development of cross border strategy for the management of fires burning in the vicinity of, or across, State borders, and these agreements are reviewed annually.
- 15.77 That any local level agreements developed to address geographically specific risks or issues must be consistent with State-level arrangements.

Information Management

- 15.87 That Government supports the immediate development of financial models to analyse and determine the appropriate level of investment in fire management planning, preparedness and suppression on public land.
- 15.88 That the financial models incorporate changes in public land use, particularly 'Our Forests Our Future', and the subsequent changes in fire management priorities.
- 15.89 That the financial arrangements incorporate full cost recovery for prescribed burning to be undertaken over a number of weekends utilising Project Firefighters, CFA volunteers and MFESB members.
- 15.90 That Government reviews the funding for DSE for the 2004-2005 fire season to ensure that appropriate resources are available for fire prevention planning and preparedness.

Roads and Access Tracks

- 15.105 That DSE assesses the environmental and monetary cost of establishment and rehabilitation of temporary tracks, per 100 km, constructed during firefighting operations, and compare this with the recurrent costs of a program of maintaining existing tracks.
- 15.106 That DSE includes the cost of tracks, as above, in the development of financial models to analyse and determine the appropriate level of investment in fire management planning, preparedness and suppression on public land.
- 15.107 That DSE undertake community consultation on policies relating to roads and access tracks on public land, particularly in respect to fire management.

Chapter 16 Emergency Services Preparedness

Victoria's emergency management arrangements are constantly monitored and tested, both operationally and in redefining relationships.

The Co-ordinator-in-Chief, Emergency Services and the Victorian Government were fully informed of the level of preparation put in place by the fire agencies for the 2002-2003 fire season. A comprehensive risk assessment was carried out and detailed and appropriate pre season planning completed.

We note there has been very significant improvement in the integrated operation of the three fire agencies: CFA, DSE and MFESB. Opportunities for even closer collaboration are explored in Part E.

However, no emergency management arrangements are ever perfect, and living in a fire-prone environment in Victoria will always bring with it a degree of risk, and reviews following emergency events will always identify opportunities to strengthen the system or arrangements.

There are no recommendations in this Chapter.

Part D

Term of Reference Two: Response and Recovery

Overview

The Inquiry spent considerable time investigating the effectiveness of the response by the fire agencies to the fires. This was a pivotal issue for many in our community and elicited emotional, but considered, submissions and recommendations.

We fully explore the initial response to the fire outbreaks, the use of aircraft, the control and management of resources and the strategies and tactics employed over the 6 week campaign. We found no evidence of substantial organisational or systemic failure. We did however find room for improvement in the areas of application of AIIMS-ICS, integration of local knowledge into the development of strategies and tactics, and clarity in the emergency management arrangements as they relate to regional operations and partnership with the Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centres.

We explored recovery processes and concluded that more certainty and flexibility is required in policies and processes.

Finally, we commissioned an independent assessment of the management of aircraft and the State Aircraft Unit, policies and procedures and present the findings in Chapter 22 with the full report at Appendix VII.

Chapter 17 Initial Response to the Fires

The Inquiry concluded that given the number, location and accessibility of fires caused by lightning strikes, the fuel load available to support fire, the prevailing weather conditions and the suppression resources available, all reasonable efforts were made by DSE and CFA to contain the fires as quickly as possible.

Aerial resources can play a crucial role in direct attack on small fires in remote and difficult terrain, and in holding fires in the early stages until firefighters are available for direct, ground attack. The National Aerial Fire Fighting Strategy proposed by the Federal Government in 2001-2002, had not been approved by the 2002-2003 fire season. The Inquiry believes this Strategy is urgently required.

While there have been suggestions that alternative strategies or priorities should have been established including more aircraft deployed to firebombing rather than reconnaissance in the initial stages, it is not possible to conclusively quantify what difference additional aircraft, or any other changed strategic response, would have made once the fires started.

There are opportunities for improvement in the way in which DSE and CFA fight fires and these are addressed in recommendations in this and the remaining Chapters of Part C.

Recommendation

- 17.51** That an appropriately resourced, national aerial firefighting strategy is urgently required, and that the Victorian Government make representations to the Commonwealth to support the Australasian Fire Authorities Council recommendations.

Chapter 18 The State's Emergency Management Arrangements In Action

The principles underpinning the Victorian emergency management arrangements are sound, and have been assessed as comparable with international best practice. They provide the appropriate guidance to those agencies involved in the planning for, response to and recovery from, emergencies in Victoria.

There is a need for some agencies to improve their understanding of, integration with, and application of these arrangements to ensure that their response to emergencies is effectively co-ordinated and meets the needs of all communities affected.

The level of co-operation between all agencies, particularly DSE and CFA during response to the 2002-2003 fires is acknowledged as being a significant improvement on that displayed in the past.

Recommendations

Municipal Emergency Co-ordination

- 18.12 That Incident Control Centres and Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centres be collocated, wherever practicable.
- 18.13 That DSE and CFA ensure that:
- When a Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centre is established in response to a fire, an appropriately experienced, trained and briefed officer of the control agency is appointed as liaison between the Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centre and the Incident Control Centre; and
 - There are appropriate training regimes in place to provide officers with the skills necessary to perform the role of Emergency Services Liaison Officer in the Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centre.
- 18.14 That DSE and CFA work in co-operation with the Municipal Emergency Response Co-ordinators to develop and conduct joint exercises that practise the skills and test procedures for operations of the Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centre, Municipal Recovery Centre and Incident Control Centres.

Evacuation

- 18.21 That Victoria Police ensure all police members understand the Victorian legislation in relation to evacuation, and that any decision to recommend evacuation remains with the Incident Controller.

Divisional Emergency Co-ordination

- 18.30 That existing DSE and CFA regional co-ordination arrangements be reviewed and any changes, such as the continued use of Integrated Multi-Agency Co-ordination Centres, be reflected in the Victorian emergency management arrangements.
- 18.31 That Victoria Police, CFA and DSE review the relationship between fire service regional co-ordination arrangements and Divisional Emergency Response Plans and that any changes be formalised in the emergency management arrangements.

State Level Co-ordination of Emergency Response

- 18.42 That a single state-of-the-art all hazards State Emergency Operations Centre be established for Victoria. This could, if necessary, be implemented in stages, initially incorporating DSE, CFA, MFESB and the State Aircraft Unit.
- 18.43 That the options of collocating the State Emergency Response Co-ordination Centre with the new State Emergency Operations Centre be explored.
- 18.44 That the State Emergency Operations Centre develop and maintain strong and close links with the State Emergency Response Co-ordination Centre, if collocation is not possible.

Co-operation Between Agencies

- 18.52 That the *Emergency Management Act 1986* be amended to require the development of agreements that describe joint operational arrangements between emergency response agencies.
- 18.53 That, wherever possible, Incident Management Team members from DSE, CFA and MFESB who are likely to be deployed together to manage fire, should train and exercise together.

Deployment of Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Service Board Personnel

- 18.57 That the MFESB continue to give priority to appropriate bushfire training for its firefighters.

Deployment of Victoria State Emergency Service Personnel

- 18.61 That VICSES, with the support of the CFA, includes basic fire safety training as one of the competencies for the VICSES Volunteers.

Chapter 19 Did the Incident Control System Work?

The Inquiry supports the continued use of AIIIMS-ICS by emergency response agencies in Victoria. However, we note that the way in which DSE and CFA applied AIIIMS-ICS during the 2002-2003 fires, and the process and procedures supporting the system were, at times, inflexible and restrictive.

The principal criticism - failure to effectively incorporate the knowledge of local personnel may have resulted in missed opportunities to undertake a more aggressive attack on the fires in some locations.

The Inquiry believes that DSE and CFA officers appointed as Incident Controllers must have a deeper understanding of the Victorian emergency management arrangements and the Municipal Fire Management Plan in addition to formal qualifications in Incident Management.

Recommendations

Regional Emergency Co-ordination

- 19.6** That the emergency management arrangements be amended to require Police Divisional Emergency Response Co-ordinators, in consultation with other response agencies, to establish and document procedures and structures at regional level in order to ensure there is:
- Effective monitoring of Incident Management Teams;
 - Effective strategic management of resources;
 - Efficient management of information flow within and between agencies, and between the agencies and the community; and
 - Liaison between the control agency and divisional and municipal emergency response co-ordinators.

Structure of Incident Management Teams

- 19.13** That the practice of appointing Deputy Planning Officer, Deputy Operations Officer and Deputy Logistics Officer in an Incident Management Team be abandoned. This recommendation acknowledges the benefits of retaining a Deputy Incident Controller from the support agency (in accordance with section 4.2.6 of the Emergency Management Manual Victoria), to ensure that the command structure of that agency is preserved.

Qualifications for Incident Management Team Members

- 19.17** That the person appointed by DSE or CFA as Incident Controller for any incident should have formal qualifications and accreditation in the Incident Control System, be fully aware of the Victorian emergency management arrangements and have access to local fire prevention and response planning, including the Municipal Fire Management Plan.
- 19.18** That CFA and DSE provide media training to all Level 2 and Level 3 Incident Controllers.

Incident Control Centres

- 19.23** That in the review of Incident Control Centre locations, DSE and CFA give due consideration to:
- Existing public infrastructure that may provide suitable facilities; and
 - Opportunities for collocation with Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centres.
- 19.24** That DSE and CFA review their joint planning for Incident Control Centres to ensure that, wherever safe and practicable, those Centres are located close to the fire area.

Transferring Control from One Incident Control Centre to Another

- 19.29** That DSE and CFA develop an agreed process for the effective transfer of control from one Incident Control Centre to another, including processes for communicating this change to fire ground supervisors and local communities.

Chapter 20 Development And Implementation of Fire Control Strategies

The Inquiry has formed the view that, overall, the strategies and tactics applied by the agencies responding to the fires were appropriate. They achieved the objective of containing the fire as effectively and safely as possible, with no loss of life directly related to the fire, no significant injuries and limited loss of private assets and damage to property when compared to the scale of the fires.

The Inquiry is less convinced that the tactics developed to implement the strategies were flexible and responsive enough to the changing conditions on the fire ground and, as such, opportunities were missed to more aggressively, and safely attack the fire.

DSE and CFA must ensure that when determining strategies for firefighting they take into account the input of local fire officers and fire ground commanders. They must also ensure that when they are communicating these strategies to firefighters and fire ground commanders they ensure that the reasons for adopting a strategy are clearly explained.

Recommendations

Application of the Fire Control Priorities to Incident Action Planning

- 20.12 That CFA and DSE include agreed Fire Control Priorities in community awareness and education material provided to the community before each fire season.
- 20.13 That the fire agencies ensure that Incident Action Plans developed by Incident Management Teams are consistent with, and built on, the agreed Fire Control Priorities.

Aggressiveness of Firefighting

- 20.26 That DSE and CFA continue to stress firefighter safety as their highest priority for incident managers and fire ground supervisors.
- 20.27 That DSE and CFA ensure that agreed strategy and tactics, and the rationale, be communicated to personnel involved in the fire fight and be included in briefings for fire line personnel.
- 20.28 That personnel assigned the roles of Division Commander, Sector Commander and Strike Team Leader on the fire ground are actively encouraged to provide input into the selection of strategies and tactics.
- 20.29 That personnel assigned the roles of Division Commander, Sector Commander and Strike Team Leader be given flexibility to alter tactics to take advantage of changed conditions on the fire ground.

Consistency of Strategy

- 20.38 That when Incident Management Teams implement significant changes to objectives and strategies, these are effectively communicated to firefighters, fire ground supervisors and affected communities, and are incorporated into the broader organisational planning.
- 20.39 That the 'Incident Objectives' established for any response should reflect the endorsed Statewide 'Fire Control Priorities', and the relevant Municipal Fire Management Plan.
- 20.40 That CFA and DSE jointly develop procedures to ensure that a more consistent strategic approach can be maintained at shift and tour of duty changes.

Use of Local Knowledge

Recommendation 2 from Interim Report

That in preparation for the coming fire season, the CFA:

- *Modifies its operational procedures to ensure that local knowledge is flexibly and appropriately incorporated into tactical and strategic fire management.*
- *Modifies its operational procedures to allow for more flexible management of strike teams.*
- *Continues to work with its Brigades to complete the integration of AllMS-ICS with the group structure.*

Recommendation 3 from Interim Report

That DSE reviews procedures to ensure that all Incident Controllers and Incident Management Teams have full access to those Departmental, Parks Victoria or appropriately experienced and qualified community members who can provide local knowledge and expertise in the development of fire suppression strategies and that advice from the fire ground is incorporated into decision making.

Information Gathering

- 20.54 That DSE and CFA review methods of gathering and processing fire information to ensure all methods are pursued to greatest effect.

Briefings

- 20.61 That DSE and CFA review the standards and protocols for documentation, including mapping, provided to fire line managers as part of their briefing notes, to ensure these are concise and appropriate.
- 20.62 That operational briefings in multi-agency fires should, wherever possible, be joint briefings of all agencies involved.

'No Go Zones'

- 20.67 That DSE and CFA ensure that:
- A clear process is established for determining whether a specific location is, or is no longer, a 'no go zone' or an area into which it is too dangerous to deploy resources, and that affected communities are advised as soon as possible of the determination, the reasons for such determination and what actions they should take as a result; and
 - Where the Incident Management Team, Division Commander, Sector Commander and/or Strike Team Leader identify an area as a 'no go zone' or an area into which it is too dangerous to deploy resources, the reasons for that designation are recorded by the Incident Management Team in the incident log.

Use of Bulldozers

- 20.71 That DSE and CFA work co-operatively to review the management and application of bulldozers in fire suppression operations to ensure that they are used effectively, appropriately and are adequately supervised.
- 20.72 That quality control or performance assessments are routinely completed post fire season, to ensure that contractors who have not performed to an agreed standard are not re-engaged for the consequential rehabilitation works.

Chapter 21 Other Response Issues

DSE and CFA have made significant progress over recent years in resolving many of the problems experienced in the past, particularly with fire ground communications and the performance of firefighting equipment and vehicles. Therefore many of the major concerns raised with previous Inquiries in relation to firefighting operations were not seen as significant issues or problems during the 2002-2003 fires.

There is however, scope for improvement in a number of systems and processes used by DSE and CFA, such as protocols for managing firefighting resources. Opportunities for development and refinement of these systems and processes to ensure more effective management of the fire ground are addressed within this Chapter.

Recommendations

Keeping Track of Firefighting Resources

- 21.8 That DSE, CFA, MFESB and VICSES work co-operatively to establish a common system for resource tracking during major fires and incidents.

Management of Firefighting Resources in the Field

- 21.14 That DSE and CFA review the management of personnel deployed ensuring that:
- Shift changeovers of fire line personnel and fire line supervisors are conducted in such a way that the fire line is not left inappropriately unattended;
 - Management protocols for Strike Teams are made more flexible; and
 - Strike Team Leaders and Task Force Leaders undertake refresher training in the management of resources under their control

Management of Privately-Owned Firefighting Resources

- 21.19 That, as a matter of urgency and in consultation with stakeholders, CFA and DSE develop and communicate clear guidelines on how and when privately owned firefighting equipment should be integrated into the fire response.

Firefighting Vehicles

- 21.21 That CFA, having regard to terrain, continue to review the mix of firefighting appliances currently in service. In particular, consideration should be given to the number and distribution of smaller 'slip-on' type equipment.

Communications Facilities

- 21.31 That DSE and CFA work with the Bureau of Emergency Services Telecommunications to ensure that rural communication issues are appropriately addressed in the Statewide Integrated Public Safety and Communications Strategy, and that priorities and business cases are agreed for critical issues.
- 21.32 That CFA develop protocols to integrate Ultra High Frequency and Citizen Band radios into their communication structures.

Chapter 22 Aircraft Operations And The State Aircraft Unit

Aircraft are an important element of the mix of resources used to suppress unplanned fires. They do not replace on-ground firefighters, but rather, complement ground attack. However limitations affect their operation including weather conditions, visibility and the terrain in which the fire is burning.

The conduct of aerial firefighting in Victoria is generally well structured – and has no peer in Australia. The State Aircraft Unit business protocols are generally soundly based, especially the contractual arrangements with aircraft operators.

The numbers and mix of aircraft engaged by DSE and the CFA for the 2002-2003 fire season was reasonable given the assessed threat, budget constraints and contractual obligations to aircraft operators.

Recommendations

- 22.60 That the joint agencies introduce a system of performance measures for reporting the effectiveness of aircraft in firefighting operations.
- 22.61 That instances where demand for air support outstrips the supply of State Fleet Aircraft available are recorded.
- 22.62 That after each fire season, measures of the effectiveness of aerial firefighting be collated, analysed and used for the assessment of the State Aircraft Fleet composition and the adequacy of Training and Accreditation programs.
- 22.63 That a systematic performance audit of State Aircraft Fleet contractors be conducted jointly by agency and SAU personnel.
- 22.64 That aviation contractors be required to submit a copy of their annual independent regulatory compliance audit prepared for Civil Aviation Safety Authority to the State Aircraft Unit.
- 22.65 That training and competency programs for Incident Controllers should include aircraft firefighting capability training.
- 22.66 That more emphasis should be given to communication and discussion in regard to State Aircraft Unit's roles, responsibilities, practices and procedures.

Chapter 23 Communication With The Community

The efforts of DSE and CFA to keep the community informed of the progress of the fires and actions to be taken to prepare themselves for the passage of fire established a new standard in emergency response in Victoria.

Despite a generally very positive assessment, comments included in some submissions to the Inquiry and during public meetings from community members were critical of the lack of information provided and the timeliness and accuracy of information. This suggests there is scope for further improvement in the way in which the fire services communicate with the community before, during and after fires.

ABC Local Radio was particularly effective in keeping affected communities informed of the progress of the fires and the actions that they need to take to prepare themselves for the passage of the fire. ABC should be complimented for the role it played.

Recommendations

The Challenge: Maintaining Communication with All Fire-Affected Communities

- 23.21** That in relation to the provision of information to communities affected by fires and other emergencies, DSE and CFA ensure that:
- Incident Management Teams understand that one of their primary responsibilities, in co-operation with the Municipal Emergency Response Co-ordinator, is to keep the community informed as to where the fire is and its likely path, what is being done to combat the fire and any preparations the community should undertake;
 - Community Information Units are effectively integrated into the Incident Management Teams; and
 - They continue to develop a joint Internet-based communications tool to provide information and advice to both affected and broader communities during fires.
- 23.22** That the model of community engagement developed by DSE and CFA and applied during the 2002-2003 fires is further developed and refined, particularly in regard to short-duration, rapidly escalating incidents.
- 23.23** That relevant Government agencies including Emergency Communications Victoria, the Bureau of Emergency Services Telecommunications and the Victoria Police Media Unit, evaluate the proposals put forward by the Australian Communications Authority with respect to the hearing impaired.

Radio Coverage in Rural Victoria

- 23.30** That consideration be given to formalising Australian Broadcasting Corporation Local Radio as the official emergency radio station for Victoria, given it is the only radio station that can cover the whole of the State.
- 23.31** That Victoria Police Media Unit co-ordinate work with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and the emergency service agencies to implement this arrangement.

23.32 That CFA and DSE work with Australian Broadcasting Corporation Local Radio to identify black spots, and explore opportunities to further improve coverage for broadcasting emergency information.

23.33 That opportunities be explored to use community radio to complement other methods of communication with isolated communities.

23.34 That Interstate Agreements prepared by the fire agencies be reviewed to include protocols for the joint release of consistent and appropriate information relating to fires burning across State borders.

Chapter 24 Social, Business And Environmental Recovery

Recovery must commence when response to an emergency commences. They are not sequential events but should operate in parallel, or preferably in an integrated way. We note that infrastructure, such as telecommunications, was enhanced during response but quickly dismantled after the fire threat had passed. Such enhanced infrastructure is also needed for recovery.

Government policy in relation to support for communities and individuals recovering from an emergency must reflect the principles of predictability, equity and consistency. Rules and entitlements must be known prior to an emergency event so individuals and businesses can effectively plan. Such support is not a replacement for prudent risk management.

We recommend a case management approach to assisting those requiring support. Those requiring support should not have to 'tell their story' more than once. Finally, front line community development officers and Municipal Councils must be provided with flexible support options to assist the community.

Recommendations

Overview of the Recovery Process

- 24.29 That Municipal Emergency Resource Officers develop registers of volunteers willing and available to provide assistance and support during the response to, and recovery from, emergency incidents.
- 24.30 That DPI actively promote as widely as possible within the community, the agricultural recovery service available during emergencies to ensure that all farmers are aware of the services provided.
- 24.31 That VicRoads and Municipal Councils review procedures and processes to ensure that the identification and delivery of remedial works on State and Council roads following emergency events are as efficient as possible.
- 24.32 That the Victorian Government recommend to the Commonwealth Government that it reviews eligibility for those without employment who may or may not be engaged in an emergency response, and are unable to access the appropriate infrastructure to register for financial assistance.
- 24.33 That Government funding for Community Development Officers engaged in community support and rebuilding incorporates flexible resources to enable the purchase of services from a range of providers to ensure choice for those requiring support.
- 24.34 That the *Emergency Management Act 1986* be amended to include a provision that, on the recommendation of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services as Co-ordinator-in-Chief of Emergency Management, or of another Minister, the Premier establish a Ministerial Task Force to oversee recovery in situations of extreme natural disaster or other emergency events.

Response and Recovery:

Two Sides of the Same Coin

- 24.47 That recovery is recognised as commencing at the same time as response and that recovery planning and delivery is an integral part of the operations of the Municipal Emergency Co-ordination Centres.
- 24.48 That all Departments, statutory authorities, utility providers and Local Governments be made aware of the need to develop contingency plans for recovery activities, and that such plans, and the associated public education and information strategies, are included in the Municipal Emergency Management Plans.

- 24.49 That all agencies engaged in recovery participate in community briefings prior to and during emergency events, to ensure recovery issues are reinforced and communities are informed of the processes established to assist individuals – including matters that are not the responsibility of Victoria, such as Centrelink payments.

Relief and Recovery - Predictable, Equitable, Consistent

- 24.67 That Government review the emergency relief and financial assistance policy, and develop and communicate a predictable, consistent and equitable policy designed to assist the community to recover from emergencies, including natural disasters.

A Case Management Approach To Recovery

- 24.76 That DHS, in conjunction with Local Government, Government departments and the non-government sector, modify recovery planning at all levels to include a case management approach supported by an appropriate information system to be activated at the time of an emergency.
- 24.77 That the Privacy Commissioner be asked for advice in the development of this model.
- 24.78 That the State Emergency Recovery Committee explore opportunities to establish a 'one-stop-shop' approach wherever practicable following emergencies, including a single telephone number to connect a person to all agencies involved in the recovery process.

Fencing And Rehabilitation Private Land Damage Following Fire Suppression Works

Recommendation 4 from Interim Report

That Government initiates a review of the fencing policy for boundary and internal fences damaged as a result of a fire.

Recommendation 5 from Interim Report

That Government develops a consistent policy for the rehabilitation/restoration of private assets damaged or consumed in authorised fire suppression activity.

Part E

The Way forward

Overview

The Stretton Royal Commissions of 1939 and 1944 and the Miller Inquiry into the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires were pivotal in shaping the way Victoria prepares for and suppresses unplanned fires. These Inquiries followed failure. This Inquiry did not follow a failure. Rather, the effectiveness of the preparation and response is a result of a continuous improvement approach to emergency management in which the involved agencies review performance after all emergencies to learn for future events.

Part E discusses the next development in the State's emergency services capability, applying modern organisational thought to individual services.

We recommend an 'all hazards – all agencies' capability within the State to eliminate duplication and streamline decision-making and reporting.

Chapter 25

The Way Forward: Planning

Effective delivery requires quality information management systems and certainty in resources. Here we recommend improvements in both certainty of resourcing for DSE in public land management and enhanced analytical tools to support fire agency decision-making.

We note the complexity in the legislation in respect to public land, flora, fauna and native vegetation, and support any initiatives that will assist those charged with fire prevention planning to work within its boundaries and principles.

Finally, we express our concern in relation to the long-term viability of the current model of paid, volunteer and seasonal firefighting capability given organisational changes within government and agencies and the changing demographics of Victoria. We make recommendations in relation to the need to develop more creative approaches to human resource management.

Recommendations

The Balance Between Prevention/Mitigation and Response for Public Land

- 25.23** That DSE, with adequate resourcing, moves to a 12-month cycle of fire management to establish and maintain a more appropriate and balanced work program of prevention/mitigation and suppression.

- 25.24** When the research into prescribed burning and optimum fire protection described in Chapter 11, and the financial analysis of appropriate funding levels for prevention and suppression recommended in Chapter 15, are completed, DSE should develop a business case with Department of Treasury and Finance for assured funding to an agreed level over a three-year rolling cycle.

Managing Information

- 25.37** That all emergency service agencies, CFA and DSE in particular, give greater priority to information management – especially the collection, maintenance and quality control of base data sets necessary for planning, operations and program evaluation.
- 25.38** That Government acknowledge the importance of spatial information as a key element of planning, operations and program evaluation, and support the Geospatial Emergency Information Network as a means of ensuring integrated and co-ordinated information management on a whole-of-Government basis.

Model of Fire Cover - 'Fire Safety Victoria' Strategy

- 25.55** That Government confirms that the Model of Fire Cover/Fire Safety Victoria strategy should be a seamless model for the whole of the State and include both private and public land.
- 25.56** That DSE commits appropriate resources to work with OESC in developing the bushfire component of the model.

Planning For Emergencies at the Local Level

- 25.88** That CFA, DSE, MFESB, VICSES, Victoria Police and OESC, in consultation with the Municipal Association of Victoria, consult on the proposal to combine Municipal Councils' current responsibilities for the development of an emergency management plan/committee, as required by the *Emergency Management Act 1986* and a fire prevention plan/committee as required by the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958*.

25.89 That this group reports to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services on proposed legislative amendments to the *Emergency Management Act 1986*, the *Country Fire Authority Act 1958* and any associated legislation by June 2004.

25.90 That CFA, DSE and MFESB continue to develop the partnership approach for fire safety with Local Government, industry and communities.

Human Resources

25.114 That, as a matter of urgency, CFA and DSE:

- Develop strategies to provide adequate and sustainable firefighting resources, suitably-trained and experienced; and
- Advise Government of these strategies.

25.115 That all fire agencies include a formal mentoring scheme as part of their workforce development programs; and that consideration be given to the use of suitably competent and experienced individuals (such as retired staff), to act as coaches or mentors with inexperienced Incident Controllers.

25.116 That CFA, VICSES and other volunteer-based emergency service organisations develop proposals in support of the strategies for sustainable volunteerism, and that the State Government advocate these initiatives to the Federal Government.

Chapter 26 The Way Forward: Unified Command and Control

The Inquiry does not support the model proposed by the CFA to integrate the Fire Management Branch, DSE - and related regional operations - into the CFA. Rather we support a more integrated, or unified, command and control model of fire service agencies.

We recommend that DSE be made a 'prescribed agency' under the *Emergency Management Act 1986* joining the other two fire agencies.

We note that the State can no longer support different resource management systems and different Operations Centres for all three fire agencies and argue for one 'all hazards - all agencies' combined State Operations Centre.

Recommendations

Response to the CFA Proposal

26.52 That CFA, DSE, MFESB and Victoria Police jointly develop a unified command and control system that better integrates with the State's emergency management arrangements, and that this be endorsed by the Victoria Emergency Management Council by July 2004.

26.53 That this unified system include recommendations for the appointment of one person or agency to be responsible for overall control of fire suppression activity in country Victoria, including for any legislative reform considered necessary.

26.54 That a State Emergency Operations Centre be established to replace the existing separate fire agency centres. This could, if necessary, be initially confined to being a State Fire Operations Centre as recommended in Chapter 18, Part D.

26.55 That the Review of emergency operations centres by the Departments of Premier and Cabinet and Treasury and Finance and the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner:

- Explore opportunities to significantly reduce the number of regional emergency operations centres; and
- Evaluate opportunities to pre plan and establish 'all hazards-all agencies' emergency operations centres at the regional or district level.

26.56 That in doing so, this Review must consult with the agencies mentioned above, and others such as VICSES and the Departments of Human Services and Primary Industries.

26.57 That the Fire Management Branch of DSE be prescribed as an 'emergency service agency' for the purposes of s21C (1)(a) of the *Emergency Management Act 1986*.

26.58 That the fire agencies develop a program to significantly increase the amount of joint training and exercises undertaken.

Conclusion

26.64 That OESC work with the fire agencies in developing implementation strategies for recommendations agreed by Government.