



Government response to the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's *Review of connecting and collaborating with the private sector and community organisations*

The Victorian Government welcomes the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's (IGEM) *Review of connecting and collaborating with the private sector and community organisations* (the Review) and acknowledges the observations made by the IGEM.

Our effectiveness at connecting and collaborating with businesses and community organisations is critical to the successful implementation of the sector's ambitious reform agenda. This reform is focussed on community and based on government, agencies, business, industry and the community 'working as one', to build community resilience and encourage the principle of 'shared responsibility'.

The sector's ability to connect and collaborate with the private sector and community organisations at municipal, regional and state levels has its challenges. These range from different capabilities, organisational cultures, and operating models, to varying objectives and strategies, notwithstanding, the common trait of all organisations to provide services to the community.

As the IGEM notes, there are many examples of emergency management agencies already working with private sector and community organisations to understand the value they can add, and the extent they can assist before, during and after emergencies. The awareness of these attributes is expanding, and the capability to manage these relationships, and achieve community-centric outcomes continues to improve. This is further demonstrated in the strong partnerships developed between government and industry through Victoria's critical infrastructure resilience arrangements.

The majority of Victoria's critical infrastructure assets are owned and/or operated by the private sector that have valuable information and capability to assist in an emergency management context. This has been recognised in the updates to the Australasian Inter-agency Incident Management System (AIIMS) to consider inclusion of key business and critical infrastructure operators during emergency management activities. Government and emergency management agencies will continue to work in partnership with these entities to increase the resilience of critical infrastructure for the Victorian community.

The Victorian Council of Social Services (VCOSS), the peak body for community organisations in Victoria, acknowledge the community sector is a critical stakeholder in delivering on the emergency management sector's principle of shared responsibility. Community organisations are embedded within communities, have strong local knowledge and insight and are connected to many people who may be vulnerable in an emergency.

In recent years the Emergency Management Forum, hosted by VCOSS and the Municipal Association of Victoria, have included presentations by emergency management agencies and universities. These events provide networking opportunities and share information that further strengthens the connections between community service organisations, councils, and emergency management agencies.

The phased implementation of the emergency management planning reforms will provide opportunity to better understand the broad range of capability and capacity community organisations and the private sector can provide before, during, and after emergencies. The recent changes to legislation support increased connections and greater collaboration through emergency management planning, and will provide more opportunity for private sector and community organisations to be involved during emergency management planning activities.

When connections and relationships are maintained through planning activities, benefits are realised during the response and recovery phases of an emergency. The objectives of the emergency management planning reforms will ultimately result in improved connection and integration across the emergency management sector, with community organisations and the private sector to create safer, more resilient communities.

As the review observes, sector agencies need to identify the various capabilities required to manage the many forms of relationships throughout all levels of their organisations. An example of how agencies have developed and delivered core engagement programs to boost the sector's capabilities is the Community First program of ['Safer Together'](#).

The Community First program has been designed to bring all fire agencies together, training them to better communicate and engage with communities and key stakeholders around bushfire risk. The training has been specifically tailored and developed in partnership between Country Fire Authority (CFA), Department of Environment Land Water and Planning (DELWP) and community development experts.

The aim of the training is to improve understanding and outcomes of community engagement activities, and increase agency connectivity and sharing of skills. The training is designed in three levels; Community Engagement, Community Development and Creative Facilitation and gives participants a common understanding and common language to more effectively address issues around bushfire risk.

Over 1,000 staff, from key agencies including CFA, DELWP, Parks Victoria, Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES), Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), Victoria Police, Ambulance Victoria, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Australian Red Cross and a range of other agencies, over 30 councils and a number of community organisations across the state have participated in the training.

To assist with continuing to build capability across the emergency management sector to manage complex relationships, the ['Victorian Preparedness Framework'](#) identifies 'planning' and 'building community resilience' as core capabilities for emergency management that include critical tasks related to connectivity and collaboration. The framework's planning capability assessments will be informed by experiences and observations throughout the emergency management planning reform implementation.

While the IGEM made no recommendations in the review, the emergency management sector will continue to work closely with community and private sector organisations to identify and act on continuous improvement opportunities that increase connectivity and collaboration that will lead to better outcomes for the community.