

2011/12 Post Season Review Report



Department of
Sustainability
and Environment



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2011/2012 post season review process is just one part of the annual continual learning and improvement cycle for the Victorian fire services. This report has been produced by the State Debrief Group comprising representatives of the Country Fire Authority (CFA), the Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE), the Fire Services Commissioner Victoria, the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB) and the State Control Centre (SCC).

This report summarises the collective findings of a state-wide joint agency debriefing process which drew information from all levels of operational fire services personnel and focused on the key command and control issues relating to bushfire preparedness, response and recovery that applied during the 2011/2012 Fire Danger Period (FDP).

Climatic conditions throughout 2011 resulted in significant rainfall which contributed to the potential for an elevated grassfire risk this year. A mild summer with only a handful of extreme days resulted in fewer than anticipated major fires with most activity in the states central and north. In some parts of the state conditions resulted in no application of Total Fire Bans at anytime through the FDP. The reduced operational activity has consequently contributed to the reduced content of this year's post season review. In addition there was a considerable reduction in the introduction and implementation of new initiatives, arrangements, policy and procedures relating particularly to emergency management, and command and control than in the previous two years. This has no doubt also contributed to a reduction in feedback from Regions when compared to last year as considerable effort has been applied to embedding recent changes into day to day business and operations.

The findings in this document have been written collectively by the State Debrief Group using principles adopted last year by the State Fire and Control Team (SFCT) as an enduring process for post season reviews.

In addition to collecting any relevant issues from Regions the following themes were applied this year:

- Command and Control arrangements – Line of Control;
- Transfer of Control from the fireground;
- Joint Standard Operating Procedures (JSOPs);
- Incident Control Centres / Incident Management Team preparedness and testing;
- Pre-season briefings/Incident Controller briefings;
- Joint training activities (in particular Regional exercises);
- Information flow;
- Interoperability;
- Community Warnings;
- Evacuation arrangements.

In general there has been significant progress made in the adoption and implementation of a wide range of initiatives associated with improving fire and emergency preparedness, response and recovery in Victoria. Despite the low level of operational activity key issues and potential improvement opportunities have been identified through this year's review process.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this Post Season Review Report 2011/12 is to provide a consolidated set of findings from the 2011/12 post Fire Danger Period (FDP) debrief process for consideration and further action as required.

The review process is intended to be one part of a process of continual learning and improvement for the Victorian fire services. The purpose of the review was to capture the views of operational personnel regarding their experiences in bushfire preparedness, response and recovery during the 2010/2011 FDP, to identify key lessons and observations from the season and translate these into performance improvements for the Fire Services Commissioner Victoria, Country Fire Authority (CFA), Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) and the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (MFB).

The views and the subsequent suggestions from agency personnel have been consolidated within this report.

2011/2012 Fire Season Overview

The 2011/12 FDP was another lower than average operational year with little large scale fire activity. This activity was mostly in the state's central and north-west and outbreaks were generally controlled on the day of ignition. In other parts of the state most activity was reported to be predominantly level 1 or level 2 incidents.

Total Fire Bans were declared for parts of the state on nine days; however no state-wide ban was imposed during the FDP. On three occasions the bans were revoked due to more favourable weather conditions developing than were predicted. Some parts of the state did not see a declaration for the FDP.

Table 1 - Total Fire Bans 2011/12

Fire Ban District	Date
Mallee and Wimmera	29/11/2011
Mallee, Wimmera, South West and Central	02/01/2012
Northern Country	03/01/2012
Mallee and Wimmera	07/01/2012 revoked at 18:00
Wimmera and South West	17/01/2012
Mallee, Wimmera, South West, Northern Country, North Central and Central	05/02/2012 revoked at 18:00
Wimmera, South West and Central	25/02/2012
Wimmera and South West	26/02/2012
South West	15/03/2012 revoked at 09:00

While not as significant or widespread as in previous years fire agencies again provided support to the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) during flooding in the states north and east.

The amount of doctrinal, policy and procedural change in the lead up to the 2011/12 FDP was reduced compared to previous years, however the activity level presented few opportunities for new and existing arrangements to be fully tested.

The review process focused on preparedness, response and recovery issues in conjunction with the experiences of personnel at State and Regional level operations that were involved with bushfires during the 2011/12 FDP. State operations included the State Control Centre (SCC) and Regional operations included input from CFA Regions/Districts, DSE Regions/Districts, MFB Regions/Districts and other emergency services.

The process utilised this year replicated that introduced last year and is now established as a key activity each year which gathers information to inform continual improvement, planning and briefing for the coming FDP.

The review activities this year focused on the following key themes:

- Command and Control arrangements – Line of Control
- Transfer of Control from the fireground
- Joint Standard Operating Procedures (JSOPs)
- Incident Control Centres / Incident Management Team preparedness and testing
- Pre-season briefings/Incident Controller briefings
- Joint training activities (in particular Regional exercises)
- Information flow
- Interoperability
- Community Warnings
- Evacuation arrangements
- Other key observations and findings

The following issues were excluded from the review process:

- Any specific reviews initiated by the Fire Services Commissioner Victoria; and
- Internal issues specific to individual agencies.

PRINCIPLES

Principles for the conduct of the Post Season Review for 2011/12 were consistent with those introduced last year; being:

- The review comprised a multi agency focus (DSE, CFA, MFB, SCC and Fire Services Commissioner Victoria);
- Information from the review process was consolidated into a set of findings;
- Debriefs were conducted in every region and involved Regional Fire Control Teams (RFCT), Regional Emergency Management Teams (REMT), Regional Controllers, Incident Controllers, Agency Duty Officers and other relevant personnel;
- At a State level the debrief process included members of the State Fire Control Team (SFCT), Agency Commanders and State Duty Officers;
- Information from the field was fed upwards to State level;
- A common template for collection of data was used;
- Systemic issues, rather than internal agency issues, were considered;
- The review commenced within each Region once it had been determined the FDP had concluded. This enabled Regions to commence the review process without delay;
- The review process was aimed at performance improvement and was 'forward looking';
- A 'no-blame' approach was encouraged and used.

OVERVIEW OF GOVERNANCE AND PROCESS

The review was undertaken by the State Debrief Group which is represented by personnel from the Fire Service Commissioner Victoria, CFA, DSE, MFB and the SCC.

Governance arrangements are indicated in the following diagram.

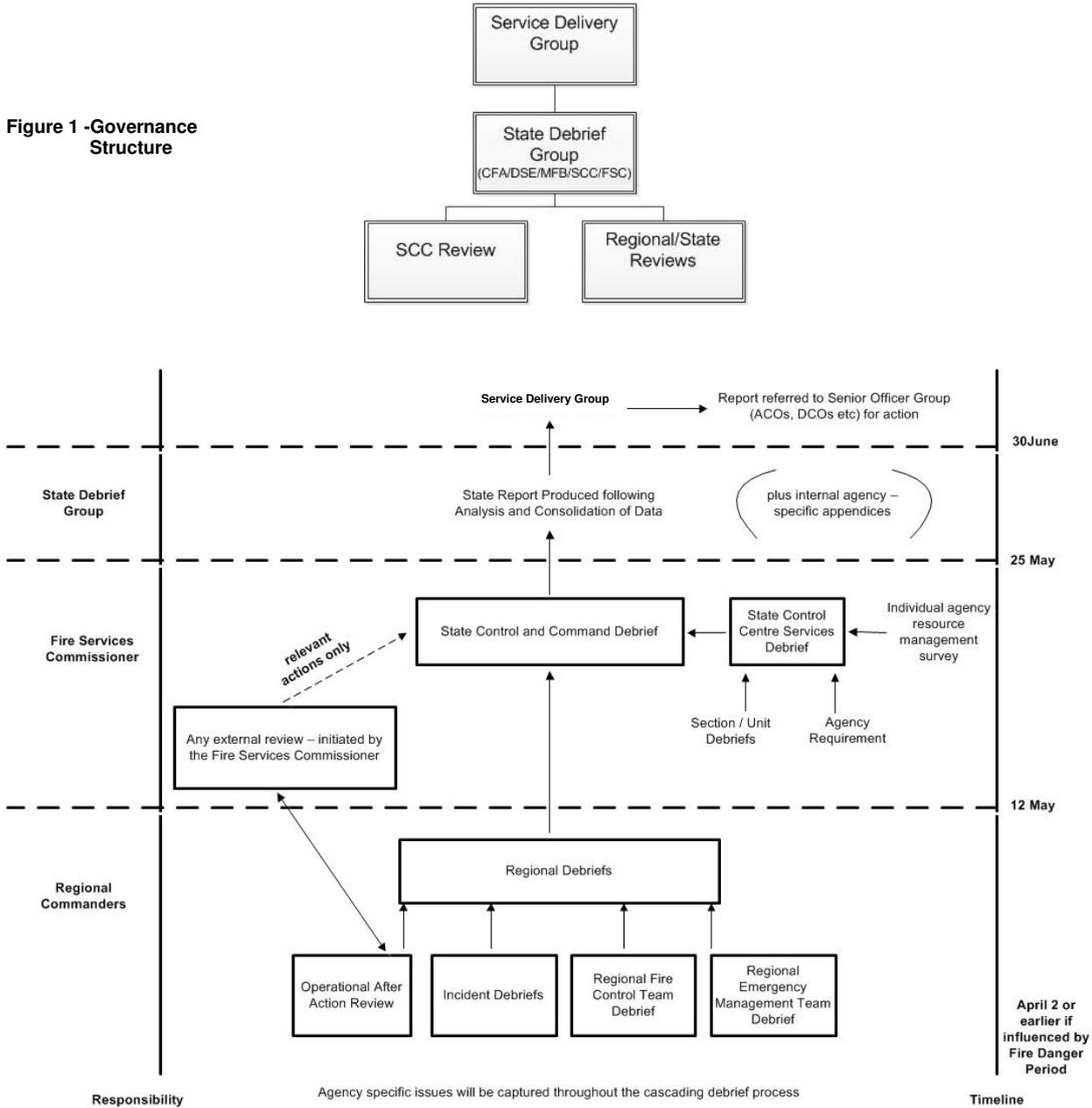


Figure 2 – Review process

The SCC Manager coordinated the state level review on behalf of the Fire Services Commissioner Victoria. The Regional level review was coordinated by the CFA Regional Commander.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

Reviews were conducted using the After Action Review (AAR) process as per the Incident Management Team Toolbox with the following approach:

1. What was planned (see list of themes below)?
2. What really happened?
 - Things that went according to plan
 - Things that did not go according to plan
3. Why did this happen?
 - Analyse the root cause for the outcome
4. What can we do next time?
 - What were the successes?
 - What can we improve next time?

In addition, any other key learning from the process were captured in order to provide an opportunity for improvement.

The State Debrief Group consolidated the results into an agreed set of findings.

FINDINGS

Note that the statements in italics were used as a ‘conversation starter’ for each topic at each debrief. The statement was written to reflect ‘what was planned’ or the ‘ideal’ situation for the particular topic.

COMMAND AND CONTROL ARRANGEMENTS – LINE OF CONTROL

“The state control and command arrangements for bushfire as outlined in the State Command and Control Arrangements for Bushfire in Victoria were implemented and effective.”

“There was a good understanding of the line-of-control and the role of the agency commanders from the incident level through to the state level.”

“During incidents, the Fire Services Commissioner’s intent was clearly communicated to key Incident Management Team personnel.”

While it is recognised there is a good understanding of the Command and Control Arrangements for Bushfire, in some regions they remain largely untested operationally due to the limited activity again this year.

Pre-season exercising continues to be viewed as an important activity to build commitment and understanding of these arrangements.

It was generally reported that when the line of control had been enacted then information flow was effective, processes were clear and worked well.

One aspect that was reported was when the line of control had not been enacted or “expired” and this created some confusion relating to the role of the Regional Controller and Regional Control Centre. This confusion has a flow-on effect to agencies. One Region reported there were days when conditions meant the arrangements should have been enacted and while at a local level this did not impact on operations or reporting, it was suggested more effective rostering be in place for the entire fire danger period.

Some Regions identified uncertainty regarding their role when they were directed to activate their Regional Control Centres (RCC) and Regional Fire Control Teams (RFCT) due to conditions in other parts of the state and this appears to be a level of uncertainty amongst some personnel regarding aspects of responsibilities associated with preparedness, readiness and demobilisation.

In general there continues to be support from Regions for the adoption of the Command and Control arrangements for Bushfire to the “all hazards” environment. In addition there is reportedly clear multiagency support and commitment to these arrangements.

TRANSFER OF CONTROL FROM THE FIREGROUND

“The application of Division Command and the transfer of control from the fireground to an ICC was achieved effectively? (If this was not practically applied is this concept clearly understood?)”

In general, this initiative, as introduced prior to this season, had little opportunity for application due to the low level of operational activity. The feeling of some regions is this presents potential for confusion and it is essential ongoing commitment to communication and training of this activity is maintained. It was recognised that transfer of control had been included in local briefings and training in readiness for the 2011/12 season.

Hume Region identified the successful application of Transfer of Control at the Glenaroua Fire in February which presents an opportunity for agencies to learn from this example. They also identified that following smaller events within the Region, After Action Reviews (AAR) were held and this has been embedded as a valuable learning experience to assist in building clarity around Transfer of Control.

Some Regions/Districts felt the SCC became involved unnecessarily at times with small outbreaks when a Fire Danger Index of 50 in that particular area was a normal summer day.

MFB recognise that current operational arrangements within the Metropolitan Fire District do not specifically align with the use of Incident Control Centres (ICC) (as is the case for CFA and DSE) and this will require changes to existing MFB doctrine to fully align to this arrangement.

JOINT STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES (JSOPs)

“JSOPs were followed during joint bushfire operations.”

Whilst recognising that MFB are not a signatory to all JSOPs at this time, the key comments from Regions relating to JSOPs was in regard to JSOP 2.03 - Incident Management Teams – Readiness Arrangements. Despite the JSOP being in place for two seasons there has been limited activity to practically apply this arrangement and it was recognised there are still challenges in resourcing expectations, particularly compliance for extended periods of operation and the management of fatigue given the number of ICCs in some Regions. It was recognised this JSOP does not call for some key roles at lower thresholds.

There is general support from Regions for a comprehensive review of JSOP 2.03 and its application in relation to ICC locations, numbers, preparedness triggers and resourcing.

Some comment has been provided in relation to JSOP3.02 - Incident Naming in that it was felt at a State level there was requirement for further detail at times in regard to incident names for locally well known locations. The use of location names with which the public are familiar was recognised as the most appropriate naming convention. The recommendation from these respondents was that locations should be recognised at Regional level and not necessarily at State level.

INCIDENT CONTROL CENTRES / INCIDENT MANAGEMENT TEAM PREPAREDNESS AND TESTING

“The Region was well prepared for dealing with incidents - with well equipped Incident Control Centres and fully prepared Incident Management Teams.”

Regions reported that facility testing and preparedness was undertaken however some identified local initiatives to improve this process in coming years. It was generally identified that due to the operational activity this year many facilities were not fully tested in this environment. It was identified that ICC footprints require regular review and state-wide coordination of this activity is necessary.

A number of observations were especially made in relation to some RCCs these include:

- Ownership of the RCC (Ownership of the RCC function – not the site)
- Locations
- Responsibility, including funding arrangements, for RCCs (Fire Service Commissioner Victoria or agencies)
- Adequacy of existing identified facilities and need for approved standards
- Expectations of RCCs – fire or all hazard
- Longer term access to redundancy facility at Box Hill (with DSE relocating soon).

While it was expressed there is clarity surrounding ICCs and the SCC, this is still required for RCCs.

In terms of Incident Management Team preparedness the new Preparedness Matrix, due to seasonal conditions in some Regions, remains untested operationally to a large extent. Inconsistent views were expressed regarding the Preparedness Matrix triggers with some preferring a state-wide standard approach compared to others supporting recognition of local conditions. In terms of preparedness it was noted that in some parts of the state a Fire Danger Index of 50 in mid January is a normal day.

Most IMT preparedness issues raised from the review process by regions related to staffing levels and application of JSOP 2.03. A summary of these comments has been addressed above (see – JSOPS).

It was identified some agencies (presumed to be support agencies) do not have sufficient personnel to cover all positions required of them when local, regional and state levels are operational.

PRE-SEASON BRIEFINGS/INCIDENT CONTROLLER BRIEFINGS

“The pre-season briefings comprehensively covered the important changes to bushfire management procedures for the 2011/12 FDP.”

Pre-season briefings again provided an opportunity to enhance relationships with other agencies. A number of observations and suggestions relating to pre-season briefings were provided. These include:

- The provision of the briefings earlier with them being undertaken no later than October and November to ensure their presentation prior to the Fire Danger Period commencement;
- Inclusion of localised content ensuring a tailored approach to respective Regions;
- Overcoming a narrow agenda which was provided to a broad audience;
- Inclusion of Tactical Exercises Without Troops (TEWTS) to reinforce the practical application of the briefing information
- Reduction in duplication between the information provided at Regional Briefings and Incident Controller Briefings.

JOINT TRAINING ACTIVITIES (IN PARTICULAR REGIONAL EXERCISES)

“The joint training activities (in particular, the Belenus Regional exercises) were useful and helped to get everyone prepared for the FDP. What other local joint activities were undertaken and how effective were they?”

Regions provided positive responses to joint training activities in the lead up to the FDP. Regional exercises were again delivered in each region through Project Belenus however a lack of feedback from these exercises was noted by some. It was recognised these opportunities continue to enhance and build stronger local relationships amongst agencies and consolidate understanding of different operational arrangements. It was also noted these activities assist in the consolidation of each agencies' roles and responsibilities in the Command and Control framework.

It was noted that opportunity exists for exercises to include Level 2 scenarios and not always just Level 3 incidents and for focus to be placed on different key aspects of Incident Control/Emergency Management each year. It was also identified there would be benefit in establishing calendars for exercising including multi-agency scenarios.

INFORMATION FLOW

“Information flow was efficient and effective during this year’s incidents with everyone receiving the information they needed to undertake their roles.”

Feedback from Regions identified that information flow principles and procedures are well understood but due to the limited operational activity this year they remain relatively untested. Examples of where communication did work effectively was within RFCTs but it was identified by some that as the lead agency for fire, more is needed to be done to ensure that communication and information flow is effective to other emergency management partners in REMTs in some Regions.

There is a continuing need to ensure that partner agencies understand their responsibility to inform the Control Agency of key contacts at various times.

INTEROPERABILITY

“Whilst retaining their separate functions, strengths and identities, there is now seamless interoperability between the fire agencies at fires.”

Feedback from Regional debriefing again recognised that effective interoperability continues to be as a result of relationships and people working effectively together despite a lack of common operating platforms, different agency infrastructure, equipment and communication systems. A simple process for determining the Incident Controller in multi-agency incidents was an issue identified in one Regional review. The MFB reported in their debriefing that while multi-agency urban operations are well established there is a need for this to extend into the bushfire environment particularly enhancing working relationships at incident level.

The establishment of the Joint Regional Control Centre in Gippsland (Traralgon) was cited as one positive step in terms of improving interoperability in this area.

Practical exercising was also identified as an important activity which improved interoperability.

COMMUNITY WARNINGS

“Warnings to the community were provided in a timely manner, with tailored and relevant information during incidents.”

Feedback from Regional reviews on Community Warnings was quite varied. While some Regions reported good systems, process and capacity in place others indicated challenges still exist particularly with personnel availability at times, limited exposure to operational dissemination of warnings and concern about the One Source One Message system in terms of speed and efficiency. The initiative introduced through the SCC of Warnings and Advice personnel now rostered as part of SCC staffing appears to have been overlooked here.

There continues to be a challenge balancing the need to provide community information as quickly as possible with the time necessary to get a suitable picture from the fireground of what

is happening. Continued work towards clarity of messaging was recognised in some Regional debriefs and an adoption of an immediate 24/7 capacity to disseminate messages was also identified.

EVACUATION ARRANGEMENTS

“Arrangements for evacuation during bushfire were well understood.”

Feedback from Regional reviews in relation to evacuation arrangements recognised the operational application of these arrangements remains untested. Despite a communicated recognition there needs to be continuing communication and training, the general response appears to indicate an understanding amongst agency personnel of evacuation arrangements.

Grampians Region reported the feeling amongst Victoria Police members present at the debrief was that evacuation plans would take *“one to two hours to produce and the planning for evacuation should occur when public warnings are being issued”*. It was further identified the Evacuation Manager needs to be located at the Incident Control Centre with the Incident Controller and provided support from Incident Management Team.

Other reviews acknowledged evacuations may not be realistic given high populations and rapid impact in the interface environment.

Opportunity to better understand the content and application of Township Protection Plans in the context of evacuation was also identified in addition to the continued need to consider vulnerable people and the demographics of particular locations.

OTHER KEY OBSERVATIONS AND FINDINGS

The current programming in FireWeb (Readiness Tab) is based on the previous version of JSOP 2.03 not the current version. The State Fire Controller (along with many others) use the information contained within the Readiness Tab to determine the levels of ICC preparedness across the State in a snap shot. Therefore it’s not an accurate reflection of arrangements; other issues/ feedback with FireWeb have been reported on previous occasions but resolution of this does not appear to have been a priority due to reprogramming restrictions in place.

Regions change their rostered Regional Fire Controller on different days leading to incorrect information at times being maintained by the State Control Centre. It was suggested that RFCs changeover at a common time.

Positive feedback was provided on the involvement of Regional Fire Controllers in the teleconference and decision making process for Total Fire Ban Declarations.

One Region suggested that weather estimates be published earlier each day (1300 to 1500 hrs), if this could be arranged with the Bureau of Meteorology, to permit increased timeframes to enable arrangements to be confirmed, particularly where these estimates differ dramatically to the “Day 1” estimates distributed the previous day.

Rapid Impact Assessment responsibilities and capacity was identified in the outer metropolitan Regional review as being an area for further development, particularly identifying opportunities to increase training, develop incident specific collection templates and be a consideration addressed in the Regional Strategic Plan.

CONCLUSION

The 2011/12 Post Season Review has demonstrated that even following a Fire Danger Period with low levels of operational activity, key observations can be made and learnings can be developed into continual improvement opportunities.

The process utilised is now in its second year and has been established as a key component of the briefing/operation/debriefing cycle.

The State Debrief Group considers it important the findings be taken within the context that debriefs form only one part in the process of continual learning and improvement for the Victorian fire services. The findings have therefore been presented so they can be considered alongside the findings of other reviews/reports, aligned to the strategic directions of the fire services and so those charged with resolving any issues raised are not limited in their options.