

nous group

# Review of the Wye River and Separation Creek Fire Recovery

Emergency Management Victoria

2 June 2017





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# 1 Executive summary

Emergency management in Victoria is in a period of reform. To date, reforms have focused on developing a more comprehensive and integrated approach to emergency preparedness and response, with comparatively less attention on recovery. To address this, the state is currently undergoing reform to relief and recovery, aimed at developing a more community-centred approach to managing recovery from incidents. Key lessons from recovery management of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire that occurred on Christmas Day 2015 will be integral for informing this reform.

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) engaged the Nous Group (Nous) to conduct an independent review of the recovery from the Wye River and Separation Creek fire. At the time of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire, EMV had recently taken over responsibility for coordinating recovery for state-level incidents, making this event the first opportunity for EMV to lead recovery. In this recovery, EMV implemented an approach that aimed to be community-focused and responsive.

This review documents the key elements of the recovery and evaluates how well it was managed, providing key insights for the management of recovery of future incidents. The review was informed by document review, interviews with a wide range of community, agency and industry stakeholders, a community survey, and a community forum. This review documents recovery over the 15-month period from the day after the fire in December 2015 to March 2017, during which time Wye River and Separation Creek experienced a second incident – major landslips.

The recovery approach had several distinct features designed to enable more community-focused delivery. This included:

- extensive efforts focused on communications and engagement
- new governance arrangements including a Leadership Group of senior decision-makers, a Program Office for coordination, and a Community Resilience Committee for community representation
- conscious efforts to fast-track and streamline processes wherever possible.

The new model successfully generated dialogue with the community; however, there were a number of key ways in which it could be adjusted for more effective community focus and greater sustainability. Specifically, this review highlights three key findings:

1

**Key finding 1: While communications were generally well managed, occasionally agencies made decisions without appropriate engagement.** The community was generally satisfied with communications tools, community meetings, and the one-on-one interactions with the clean-up contractor, Grocon. However there were times when agencies did not adequately communicate with the community, did not consider the longer-term impacts of decisions, or created expectations that could not be met. This caused immense frustration for the community at times, as demonstrated through the community's experiences with tree removal, Bushfire Attack Levels and Asset Protection Zone investigations, and communications during the landslide.

**There is scope for more 'expert' community engagement.** It is recommended that agencies:

- invest in developing a more nuanced and flexible approach to community engagement to determine the most appropriate consultation approach in any given circumstance
- consider their governance and culture to ensure organisational structures can accommodate concurrent demands of response and recovery without compromising delivery of recovery services.

2

**Key finding 2: There remain very different views on the value of the community-centred governance model.** Some parties involved in the recovery were strong advocates for the Community Resilience Committee (CRC), since it enabled active community involvement and advocacy in recovery decisions. Others identified challenges with achieving balanced representation and perceived inefficiencies.

**It is important to have a common understanding of the community-centred governance model to best leverage community involvement.** It is recommended that agencies:

- acknowledge the reliance of the model on, and provide support to, community volunteers
- clearly define the key elements of a community-centred recovery group, including who it represents, its purpose, process for appointment, and support mechanisms
- ensure the model is flexible enough to accommodate variation in community capacity.

3

**Key finding 3: The commitment of government leaders, departments and agencies to the recovery is appreciated but may not be sustainable.** This recovery included substantial commitment by senior state and local government staff in agency meetings, community meetings, and informal interactions with the community. This level of senior commitment may not be sustainable during multiple concurrent events with large numbers of communities.

**Increased support and involvement of local government will help to increase the sustainability of recovery efforts.** It may be appropriate to devolve responsibility from state agencies to local government for certain functions where these are best led locally. It is recommended that agencies:

- recognise that local government may be better placed to lead aspects of recovery given their established knowledge and connection with the community
- continue to invest in activities that build the capacity of local government in emergency management
- ensure that an updated recovery model incorporates knowledge transfer from the start of an event through the early recovery phase when local governments may need the greatest support.



## 2 Project scope

Emergency Management Victoria engaged Nous to conduct an independent review of the recovery phase of the Wye River and Separation Creek bushfire that occurred December 2015-January 2016. The review included all recovery efforts from the day of the fire to March 2017, when the review's interviews and survey took place.

The Wye River and Separation Creek fire became the first opportunity for EMV to implement a new model for managing recovery that focused on being highly responsive to community needs. This new model included modified governance arrangements and other elements intended to improve the community-focus of delivery.

The broad objective of this review is:

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*To identify, and better understand, the key lessons and insights from the experience of the recovery phase of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire, and the specific implications for the management of the recovery phase of other incidents.*

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The review focuses on the following key questions:

### What were the key elements of the recovery from the Wye River and Separation Creek fire?

What roles and responsibilities did people and organisations undertake during the recovery?

How did these roles and responsibilities change over time?

What specific activities did people and organisations undertake during the recovery?

What was achieved? What were the unintended outcomes?

### How effective was the management of the recovery following the Wye River and Separation Creek fire?

What worked well?

What didn't work so well? Why?

What were the key lessons or insights?

### What are the implications for the recovery of other incidents?

What lessons and insights from the Wye River and Separation Creek recovery could be used in future recovery efforts?

Under what circumstances?

What is the best way to capture these lessons and insights for future use?

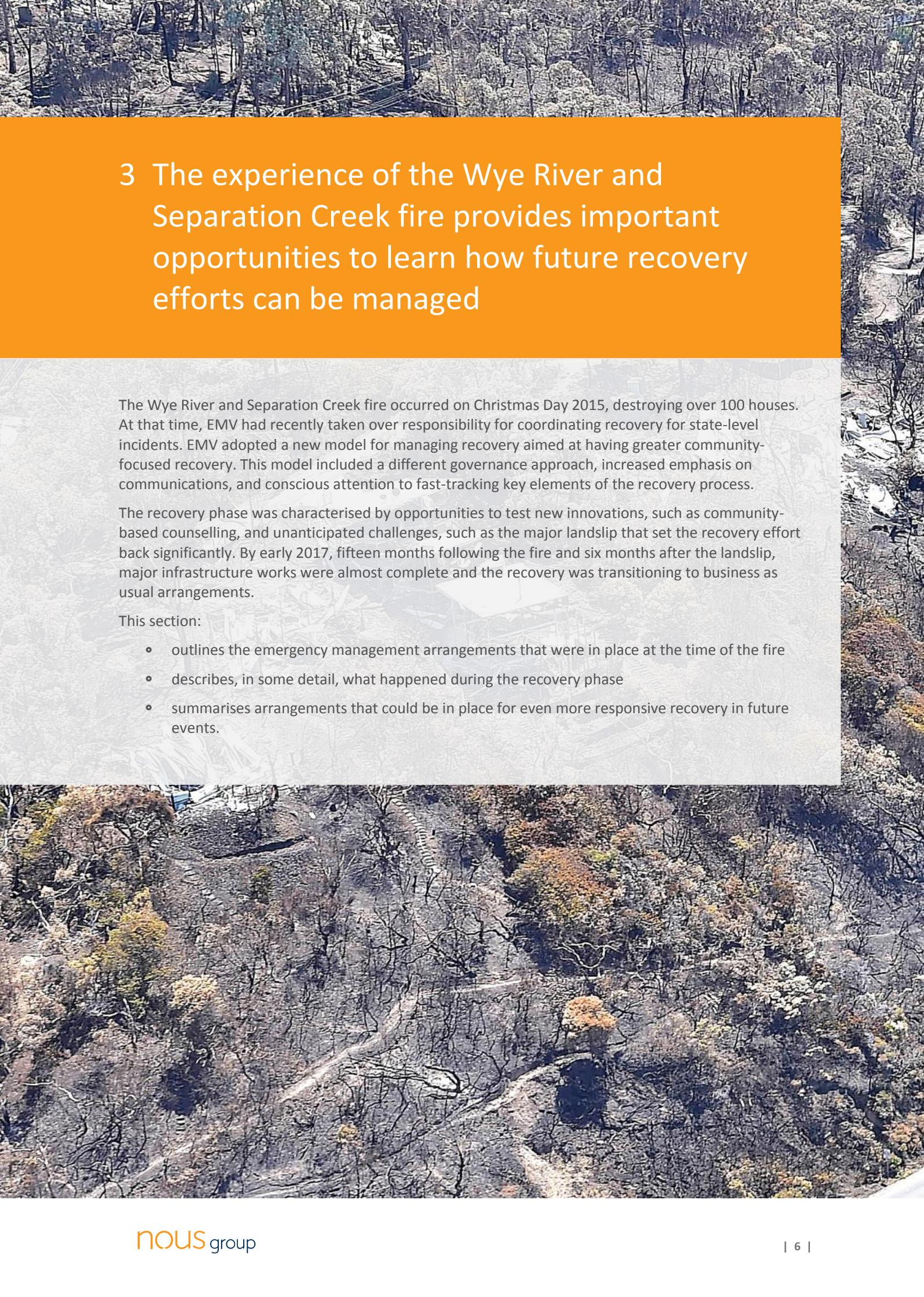
The review focuses on the experiences of residents, local business owners, community organisations, and local and state government agencies involved in the recovery. This includes the Community Resilience Committee (CRC), Country Fire Authority (CFA), Progress Association, Wye River and Separation Creek Surf Life Saving Club, Lorne Community Hospital, Colac Otway Shire (COS), Grocon, and

state departments and agencies (EMV, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP), Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), Environment Protection Authority (EPA), and VicRoads).

The review used a variety of qualitative research methods, as outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Information sources for the review

Source	Description
 <b>Document review</b>	<p>The review examined a wide range of reports, minutes, and plans, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• state-level policy documents and reviews</li> <li>• the Resettlement Plan and Renewal Plan</li> <li>• Terms of Reference for the CRC and its Work Groups</li> <li>• community meeting summaries and news posts on the community recovery website, Wye Sep Connect</li> <li>• assessment reports specific to this recovery (e.g. BAL assessment).</li> </ul>
 <b>Interviews</b>	<p>The review included interviews with 38 key stakeholders from across the community and organisations listed above. There were 27 individual interviews and four group interviews with 2-3 people from the same organisation. A summary of interviews by broad categories and organisations is provided in Appendix A.</p>
 <b>Community survey</b>	<p>The review included an online community survey to gain broad insight from across the community. The community survey remained open for 33 days from mid-March to mid-April 2017. The survey asked ranking questions designed to assess community satisfaction with key elements of the recovery (e.g. communications and community governance), and included one comment box for open text responses. There were 57 responses to almost all the ranking questions and 55 responses to the open text question.</p>
 <b>Community forum</b>	<p>Nous tested preliminary insights from the document review, interviews, and initial survey analysis with the community through a community forum in early April 2017. The presentation from the forum was posted online after the event, and written feedback from community members were received over the following week.</p>



### 3 The experience of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire provides important opportunities to learn how future recovery efforts can be managed

The Wye River and Separation Creek fire occurred on Christmas Day 2015, destroying over 100 houses. At that time, EMV had recently taken over responsibility for coordinating recovery for state-level incidents. EMV adopted a new model for managing recovery aimed at having greater community-focused recovery. This model included a different governance approach, increased emphasis on communications, and conscious attention to fast-tracking key elements of the recovery process.

The recovery phase was characterised by opportunities to test new innovations, such as community-based counselling, and unanticipated challenges, such as the major landslip that set the recovery effort back significantly. By early 2017, fifteen months following the fire and six months after the landslip, major infrastructure works were almost complete and the recovery was transitioning to business as usual arrangements.

This section:

- outlines the emergency management arrangements that were in place at the time of the fire
- describes, in some detail, what happened during the recovery phase
- summarises arrangements that could be in place for even more responsive recovery in future events.

### 3.1 State emergency management arrangements have changed substantially in recent years

**The experience of the Black Saturday fires, and the subsequent Royal Commission, has significantly shaped Victoria's emergency management arrangements.**

Victoria's emergency management has been in a period of reform. The *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission*<sup>1</sup> and the *Victorian Floods Review*<sup>2</sup> highlighted the need for a more comprehensive and integrated approach to emergency management to reduce the impact of future events on communities, infrastructure, the natural environment and the economy. This became known as the 'all hazards, all agencies' approach and has recently evolved to 'all communities, all emergencies'. These reviews found that, in the absence of an overarching policy framework or centralised operational control, agencies were working in silos that were unable to cope with large scale emergencies. Discussions in regard to system reform were stimulated through the *2011 Green Paper: Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria*<sup>3</sup>, with updated arrangements put forth in the *2012 White Paper: Victorian Emergency Management Reform*<sup>4</sup>. The new arrangements were formalised through the *Emergency Management Act 2013* (Vic), which amends the *Emergency Management Act 1986* (Vic).

**A key feature of the emergency management reforms has been the focus on much stronger coordination of agency responses to emergencies.**

Emergency Management Victoria was formed in July 2014 in order to provide centralised operational control. EMV became the responsible agency for coordinating implementation of the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan on behalf of the State Crisis and Resilience Council. The Emergency Management Manual Victoria, created in February 2015, described the updated coordination arrangements under the amended Act<sup>5</sup>. At this time, EMV became responsible for leading state-level coordination of emergency response to incidents but not recovery following incidents. Responsibility for coordinating recovery remained with municipal councils for local-level incidents, and DHHS for regional and state level incidents.

**In September 2015, responsibility for the coordination of the recovery phase of a state-level emergency shifted to EMV.**

Shortly before the Wye River and Separation Creek fire, EMV assumed responsibility for coordinating recovery for state-level incidents, while arrangements for local and regional level incidents remained with municipal councils and DHHS, respectively<sup>6</sup>. While the emergency management reforms over the preceding five years had focused extensively on improving response to emergencies, there had been comparatively less focus on improving recovery management. The *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission* had not assessed medium- and long-term recovery so did not make any specific recommendations relevant to recovery. Recovery following the Black Saturday bushfires had been managed by the Victorian Bushfires Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), an agency created

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<sup>1</sup> Parliament of Victoria, *2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission*, July 2010.

<sup>2</sup> State of Victoria, *Review of the 2010-11 Flood Warnings & Response*, Dec 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet, *Green Paper: Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria*, September 2011.

<sup>4</sup> Department of Premier and Cabinet, *White Paper: Victorian Emergency Management Reform*, December 2012.

<sup>5</sup> Emergency Management Victoria, *Emergency Management Manual Victoria*, February 2015.

<sup>6</sup> Emergency Management Victoria, *State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan*, Part 4: Emergency Management Manual Victoria, December 2015.

to focus exclusively on the recovery. While VBARRA recorded its work in a legacy report, this was not a review and did not make any recommendations regarding future recovery management<sup>7</sup>.

Nonetheless, senior state leaders, including Minister Lisa Neville (Minister for Water and Minister for Police)<sup>8</sup>, the Emergency Management Commissioner, Craig Lapsley (the Commissioner), and agency staff who had been involved in the Black Saturday response and recovery carried agency knowledge regarding lessons learned. There was recognition of the need to be more community-focused and for recovery management to become more responsive and flexible.

The importance of this community focus was reinforced in October 2015 by the experience of the Lancefield-Cobaw fire in which a DELWP controlled burn broke containment lines, burning 3,000 ha and destroying several homes<sup>9</sup>. The independent review of the Lancefield-Cobaw fire highlighted the inadequacy of communications with the community both before and after the incident<sup>10</sup>. In response to this, and an Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) report from earlier in the year<sup>11</sup>, DELWP committed to restoring relationships with communities to rebuild trust through increased community engagement, consultations, and community-focused service delivery<sup>12</sup>.

In December 2015, the Wye River and Separation Creek fire occurred, four months after EMV had assumed responsibility for recovery management of state-level incidents and less than three months after the Lancefield-Cobaw fire. This recovery represented the first opportunity for this relatively new agency to lead recovery coordination.

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<sup>7</sup> Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, *Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority: Legacy Report*, June 2011.

<sup>8</sup> Previous appointments during the Wye River and Separation Creek Fire or Black Saturday bushfires include: Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water (December 2014- May 2016); and Minister for Community Services (Aug 2007-Dec 2010).

<sup>9</sup> Emergency Management Victoria, *Lancefield-Cobaw Fire – October 2015: Report of Community Observations and Response to Independent Investigation Auxiliary Report*, January 2016.

<sup>10</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Independent investigation of the Lancefield-Cobaw fire*, State of Victoria, 2015.

<sup>11</sup> IGEM, *Review of performance targets for bushfire fuel management on public land*, State of Victoria, May 2015.

<sup>12</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Independent investigation into the Lancefield-Cobaw fire: What will change*, November 2015.



### 3.2 The Wye River and Separation Creek fire response and recovery phases were significant in their complexity

**This forest and beachside community was transformed by a fire that swept through on Christmas Day 2015, destroying over 100 homes.**

The community of Wye River and Separation Creek is nestled between forests and beaches in the Otway Ranges, 160 km southwest of Melbourne, along the Great Ocean Road between Lorne and Apollo Bay. The community is split by a creek and valley, with Separation Creek north and Wye River to the south.

The community is a diverse mix of full-time residents, part-time residents, and a visitor population. Prior to the fires, there were an estimated 100-200 permanent residents<sup>13</sup>. The part-time resident population includes those with a second home or a caravan in Wye River and Separation Creek, many of whom have their primary residence in Melbourne. There are also property owners with investment properties in Wye River and Separation Creek.

The economy of Wye River and Separation Creek is highly dependent on tourism. It is estimated that the town population swells to several thousand people at high tourist times such as the summer<sup>14</sup>. In 2013-2014, prior to the fire, tourism was estimated to contribute \$1.9 billion to the broader Great Ocean Road economy<sup>15</sup>.

In the summer of 2015, dry conditions across the state led to a series of fires in mid-December<sup>16</sup>, including several in the Otways. On 19 December 2015, lightning strikes ignited two fires in the Otway area at Jamieson Track and Delaneys Road, the first of which spread to Wye River and Separation Creek<sup>17</sup>. The fire escalated over the coming week, despite extensive state-led fire-fighting efforts<sup>18</sup>. On

<sup>13</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Wye River & Separation Creek Resettlement Plan; Initial Plan*, April 2016.

<sup>14</sup> Community Resilience Committee, *Renewal Plan for Wye River and Separation Creek: March 2017-March 2018*. March 2017.

<sup>15</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Wye River & Separation Creek Resettlement Plan; Initial Plan*, April 2016.

<sup>16</sup> IGEM, *Review of the initial response to the 2015 Wye River – Jamieson Track fire*, State of Victoria, 2016.

<sup>17</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Wye River & Separation Creek Resettlement Plan; Initial Plan*, April 2016.

25 December, at around 11am, strong northerly winds caused spot fires to break out beyond containment lines, and then advance on Wye River and Separation Creek<sup>19</sup> (see Figure 1).

Within an hour, the communities of Wye River, Separation Creek, and nearby Kennett River were evacuated and the Great Ocean Road closed between Lorne and Skene’s Creek. Evacuation was led by Victoria Police, and was complete within about 2 hours (see Figure 1).

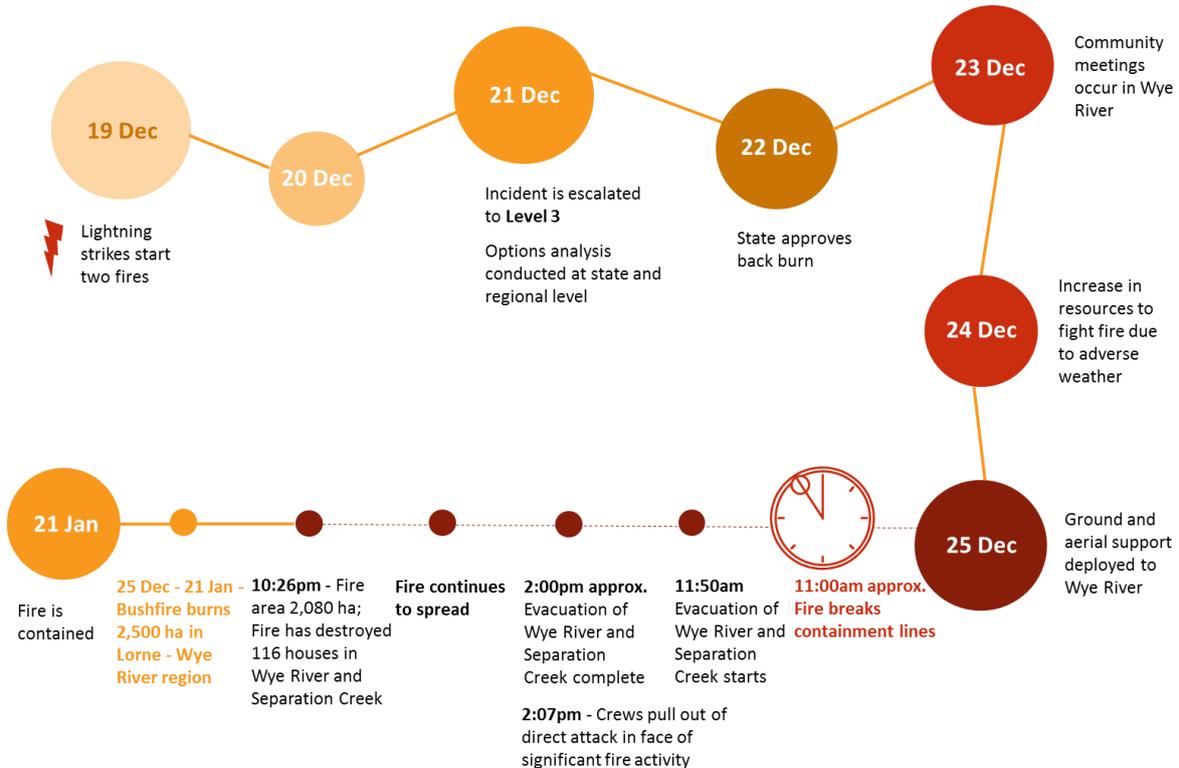
*“My wife and I packed up ourselves and our 13 year old dog and headed out to Apollo Bay, leaving \$500 of food on the table.”*

A small group of community members stayed to help fight the fire or provide associated support, and took shelter in the Surf Life Saving Club. This was enabled in part by the well-developed Community Volunteer model that the Wye River CFA already had in place.

Community members credited the rapid and complete evacuation for the fact that no lives were lost. Two factors contributed to this. First, the timing of the fire was in some ways fortunate. It meant that when the evacuation occurred on Christmas Day, there were only several hundred people present in the community, rather than the several thousand expected to be present only a few days later. This smaller population facilitated a quick and thorough evacuation.

Second, community preparedness was high. In November 2015, a month before the fire, the Wye River CFA had convened a community meeting where the Phoenix fire simulation tool was used to facilitate a discussion about how best to respond. Community members credited this event with helping to change their mindset from staying to evacuating in the event of a major fire.

Figure 1: The timeline of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire



<sup>18</sup> IGEM, *Review of the initial response to the 2015 Wye River – Jamieson Track fire*, State of Victoria, 2016.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

*“The [simulated fire] was almost this fire coming from the opposite way. In that meeting was the first I saw people sway from being adamant to staying in Wye River to saying ‘Look we’re going to get the hell out of here’.”*

Further, there had been a community meeting on 23 December 2015 to discuss the nearby Jamieson Track fire and community preparedness.

*“People staying in town were well and truly informed about the risks because there was the sleeping giant sitting there for a week.”*

Between 2:07pm and 10:26pm on Christmas Day the fire area increased from 600 ha to 2,080 ha<sup>20</sup>. By the end of Christmas Day, the fire had destroyed 116 houses – 98 in Wye River and 18 in Separation Creek<sup>21</sup>.

In addition to the private property damage, there was extensive public property damage, including to roads, retaining walls, bridges, culverts, signs and guide posts, and water tanks<sup>22</sup>. Business and tourism were impacted through the closure of the Great Ocean Road from 25 December to 5 January, as well as a reduction in visitors in the months immediately following the fire<sup>23</sup>. The closure of the Great Ocean Road resulted in an estimated \$12 million loss or 1% of the annual Great Ocean Road tourism revenue<sup>24</sup>.

The Delaneys Road fire was contained by 7 January 2016 and the Jamieson Track fire contained on 21 January 2016, 34 days after it had commenced. In total, the Jamieson Track fire burnt 2,500 ha of public and private land<sup>25</sup>.

#### **The experience of the recovery that followed can be described in a number of phases.**

These phases are outlined in Figure 2 and detailed below:

- the initial response (December 2015-February 2016)
- the clean-up (March 2016-August 2016)
- the setback caused by landslips and the subsequent recovery (September 2016-December 2016)
- towards transition (January 2017-present).

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<sup>20</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Wye River & Separation Creek Resettlement Plan; Initial Plan*, April 2016.

<sup>21</sup> IGEM, *Review of the initial response to the 2015 Wye River – Jamieson Track fire*, State of Victoria, 2016.

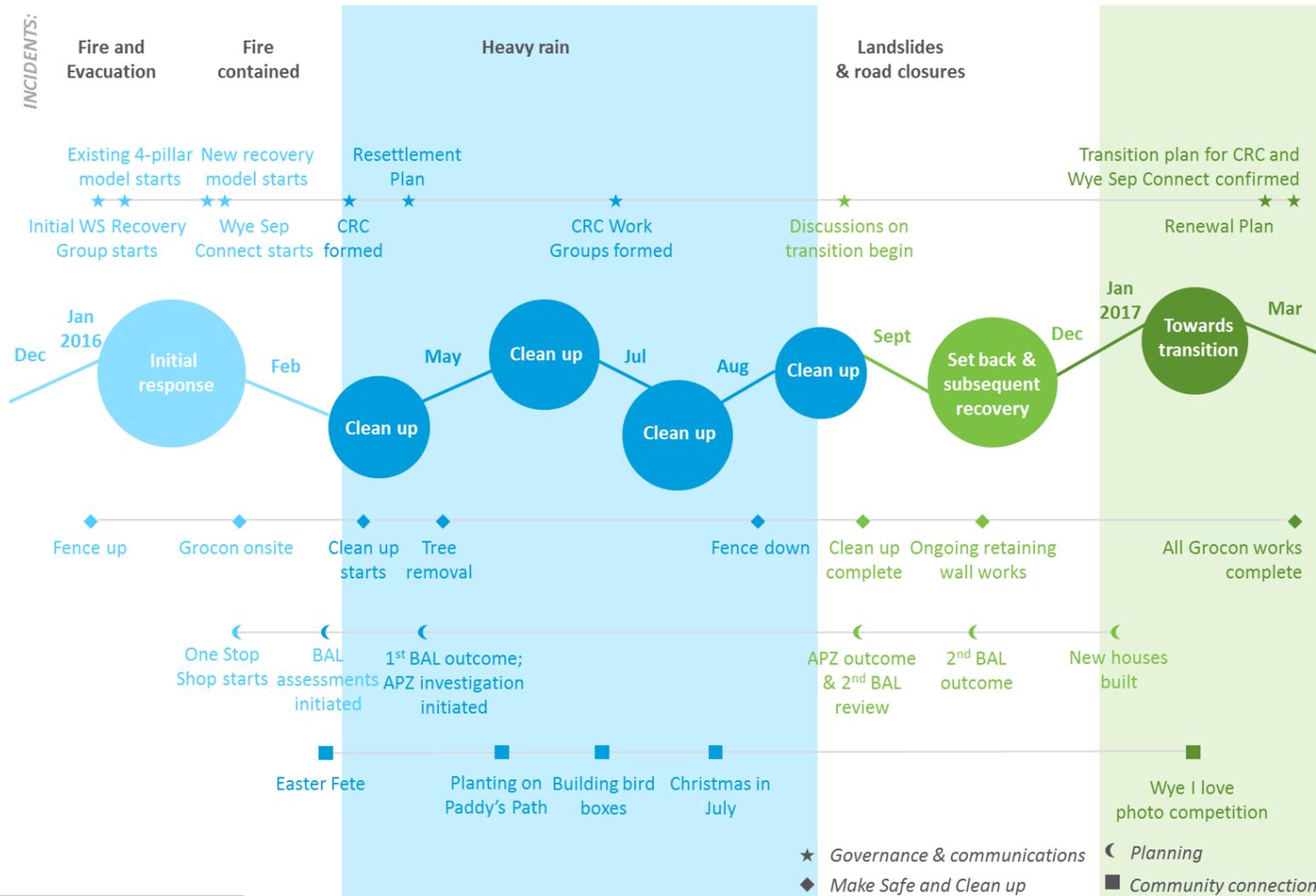
<sup>22</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Wye River & Separation Creek Resettlement Plan; Initial Plan*, April 2016.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> IGEM, *Review of the initial response to the 2015 Wye River – Jamieson Track fire*, State of Victoria, 2016.

Figure 2: Timeline of major events in the Wye River and Separation Creek Fire recovery<sup>26</sup>



<sup>26</sup> Acronyms include: WS – Wye River and Separation Creek; CRC – Community Recovery Committee; BAL – Bushfire Attack Levels; APZ – Asset Protection Zone.



### 3.2.1 The initial response was characterised by start-up initiatives and evolving coordination

**Within the first week, the focus was on responding to immediate community needs and facilitating early agency efforts.**

In the first few days following the fire, the Surf Life Saving Club became the headquarters for both recovery and ongoing response. Staff from agencies and support organisations poured into Wye River and Separation Creek. Community members who had stayed during the fire helped to coordinate these groups, providing logistical support and local knowledge. The Prime Minister, Premier and Commissioner all flew in, accompanied by extensive national media.

*“I was amazed at the organisation that started on Boxing Day. People were there, experienced, and ready to help.”*

*“Things worked well for us post-fire because we weren’t set on a structure — it was really flexible and we had to continue to adapt.”*

*“Straight after the fire, there were a few community members [around]. There were 200 fires in the caravan park and my wife and I were working 12 hours a day, lugging meals up and down the stairs [of the Surf Life Saving Club]. There were at least 8 of us [community members]. All the food was coming in from Colac... Everyone was exhausted after a few weeks. It was a shocking way for the locals to start. But we didn’t think about it at the time.”*

*“The ICC was still running the whole time in Colac. Was this the recovery phase? We were still fighting the fire. It was still a danger for another couple of weeks.”*

Communication with community members outside of Wye River and Separation Creek was particularly poor in the first few days after the fire, with many residents learning about the fate of their homes through their personal networks and/or media rather than from agencies. There was no way for COS to contact community members in these circumstances without their mobile numbers on file.

*“I found out [that my house burnt down] two days later when bussed back in and brigade members said, ‘Sorry about your house’.”*

**There was emphasis on getting the town re-opened for the benefit of the community.**

Making the town safe and re-opening the town to residents and businesses was the first priority. This required first addressing asbestos exposure in and around the fire-affected homes. The state coordinated asbestos clean-up, which was initiated within days of the fire. In order to mitigate risk of asbestos exposure to the public or staff without appropriate safety equipment, a fence was erected around the fire-affected area. The area ‘behind the fence’ included fire-affected homes as well as undamaged homes in close proximity. Agency staff considered the fence necessary but acknowledged it was controversial.

*“Once you put a fence through a community, you are dividing the community. Government caused part of that by opening the [Great Ocean] Road; people could walk back in, so then there needed to be a fence.”*

In the first week following the fire, the town remained closed. The state coordinated visits for community members, enabling them to come back into town to see and assess the impact of the fire to their homes and the town. Those returning on visits were met by their fellow community members who had chosen to stay during the fire. Residents could be escorted ‘behind the fence’ by a DELWP officer to view their properties.

*“It was very good to have the faces [of those of us who stayed] there at the front of the fire station, so that when people came back to see their houses, they could talk to us, asking what was it like when it came through. I think it’s important to have that presence of somebody that people recognise. Not just somebody in yellow but someone from Wye River.”*

By 6 January 2016, 12 days after the fire, the town, local businesses, and the Great Ocean Road were re-opened<sup>27</sup>. Re-opening the town required authorities to address critical lifeline considerations, including the availability of water for drinking and commercial use. Since the river was dry, there was no water available for local businesses that would normally draw upon this source, necessitating the purchase of supplementary water in 22,000-litre tanks. Drinking water contamination was also a concern given the potential for fire retardant and soot on roofs to be washed into tanks when it rained. To accommodate this, the state arranged for Barwon Water to provide water to residents. Further, Barwon Water engaged a local contractor to clean roofs and household water tanks, and to refill tanks.

**An initial community recovery group was set up to address the pressing needs for accommodation and financial support.**

Within days, community members self-organised into the Wye River and Separation Creek Recovery Group (WSRG), with the encouragement of the Commissioner. Community leaders with Black Saturday experience contacted the group and provided mentorship. The primary focus of this group was to meet the shelter requirements of the community, manage donations and understand the community’s perspective on recovery priorities.

<sup>27</sup> IGEN, *Review of the initial response to the 2015 Wye River – Jamieson Track fire*, State of Victoria, 2016.

The WSRG coordinated alternative accommodation offers for residents who had lost their homes. While there were offers of short-term housing, the committee initially struggled to match residents in need with those offering support since they lacked resident contact information. Privacy laws restricted COS from sharing this information with the WSRG, who instead relied on the existing email lists of the Progress Association, Surf Life Saving Club, and CFA.

The WSRG became the central point of contact for funding coordination. The WSRG chose to use the Spirit Foundation in Lorne for managing donations since that fund had already begun to receive donations. The WSRG also coordinated significant donations made by the Red Cross, the Lions Club Lorne and the Lorne Op Shop. Using the Spirit Foundation for managing funds later presented a challenge since the Foundation terms required that donations go to individuals rather than to the community at large. To accommodate this, the WSRG drew up specific criteria, based largely on the criteria for funds distribution used in Marysville following the Black Saturday fires, and distributed funds to all residents who qualified under these criteria. Nonetheless, the distribution of funds was contentious.

The WSRG also conducted a community survey to identify community priorities for immediate recovery projects<sup>28</sup>. The responses from this survey helped guide the community recovery activities that followed.

*“[The initial recovery group] was the voice of that time.”*

#### **There was early attention to making counselling support available to community members.**

Agencies and the local hospital identified the importance of counselling support for residents from the outset. DHHS provided a case support program right away in which case workers contacted residents to assess how they were doing and to link them with support if needed.

EMV engaged Dr Rob Gordon, a clinical psychologist with extensive experience in working with disaster-affected individuals. EMV consulted with Dr Gordon on how to approach key issues throughout the recovery, such as whether it was advisable for community member’s mental health to bring them back into town so shortly after the event. In addition, Dr Gordon provided sessions and spoke at community meetings on the mental health challenges community members may face.

In early January, Lorne Community Hospital (hereafter referred to as Lorne Hospital) began organising for the secondment of a clinical psychologist who could be embedded in the community. Understanding the need for this support, the Lorne Hospital Board decided to move forward with the appointment without confirmed funding. Funding support from DHHS for the position then came through within a few months. In addition to the clinical psychologist, Lorne Hospital embedded a health promotion coordinator in the community. This innovative approach enabled these support workers to gain the trust of the community through their participation in community events, and to be more accessible to community members for dialogue.

The support workers were particularly attentive to community needs. For example, when the landslips happened and the road was closed, some residents were concerned that they wouldn’t be able to get to pharmacies to access their scripts. The psychologist organised with VicRoads and the CFA to have the scripts delivered. This support was invaluable to community members.

*“The two women [from Lorne Hospital] basically became members of the community... It helped some people who were really suffering.”*

Agencies worked to ensure all community members had access to wellbeing support. Recognising that Melbourne-based community members could not benefit from the support provided by Lorne Hospital

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<sup>28</sup> Wye River and Separation Creek Recovery Group, *Recovery Survey Report*, March 2016.

staff in Wye River and Separation Creek, DHHS sent information to GPs in Melbourne with practices in the same postcodes as Melbourne-based community-members. This material informed these GPs that there would be people in their communities affected by the fire who would not be able to access the support provided in Wye River and Separation Creek.

Further, in order to address the barriers to the uptake of counselling services, Lorne Hospital encouraged people to visit GPs for other reasons, during which time the GPs could assess how they were doing. Examples included encouraging people to come in for a comprehensive health assessment and/or to get flu shots.

*“Mental health, and safety and wellbeing were the most important things after this event. They were handled reasonably well.”*

### **Agencies quickly initiated their risk assessment and recovery coordination procedures.**

Shortly after the fire, DELWP commissioned a Portfolio Risk Assessment Report to identify risks and relevant mitigation actions associated with the post-fire environment. This risk assessment helped DELWP to determine and cost its recovery priorities, organised into a number of work streams. The assessment later assisted in managing transition by outlining the conditions under which DELWP work would be considered complete.

Within the first week, COS created a separate bushfire recovery division. The division was initially set up through temporary secondments from across COS and other councils, but became more established through recruitment. At its maximum, the division had about 20 staff, including a General Manager Bushfire Recovery with broad responsibilities for recovery, a team and manager dedicated to supporting people in rebuilding, two part-time staff dedicated to supporting the community, and a communications specialist.

Within the first month, state agencies activated the conventional model for recovery management laid out in the State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan<sup>29</sup>. In this model, recovery activities are organised into four pillars: social, natural environment, economic and built, each of which is led by a state agency, as shown in Figure 3. Overall coordination is provided by DHHS for regional-level recovery and by EMV for state-level recovery. The Wye River and Separation Creek recovery began as a regional-level recovery in January 2016 with DHHS assuming the coordinating role.

In February 2016, the recovery coordination transitioned to state-level with EMV leading. By this time, it was clear that this recovery required state-level coordination given:

- the significance of the Great Ocean Road as a major state tourism asset
- the major clean-up contract managed through EMV
- the involvement of the Premier, Ministers, and multiple state departments at the CEO level.

Rather than implementing the conventional state-coordinated recovery model, EMV adopted a new model. This model was intended to enable recovery activities to be more community-focused, drawing on the lessons from the Black Saturday recovery and the Lancefield-Cobaw experience. While community-focused recovery had featured in previous recovery efforts, this model brought about new structural arrangements.

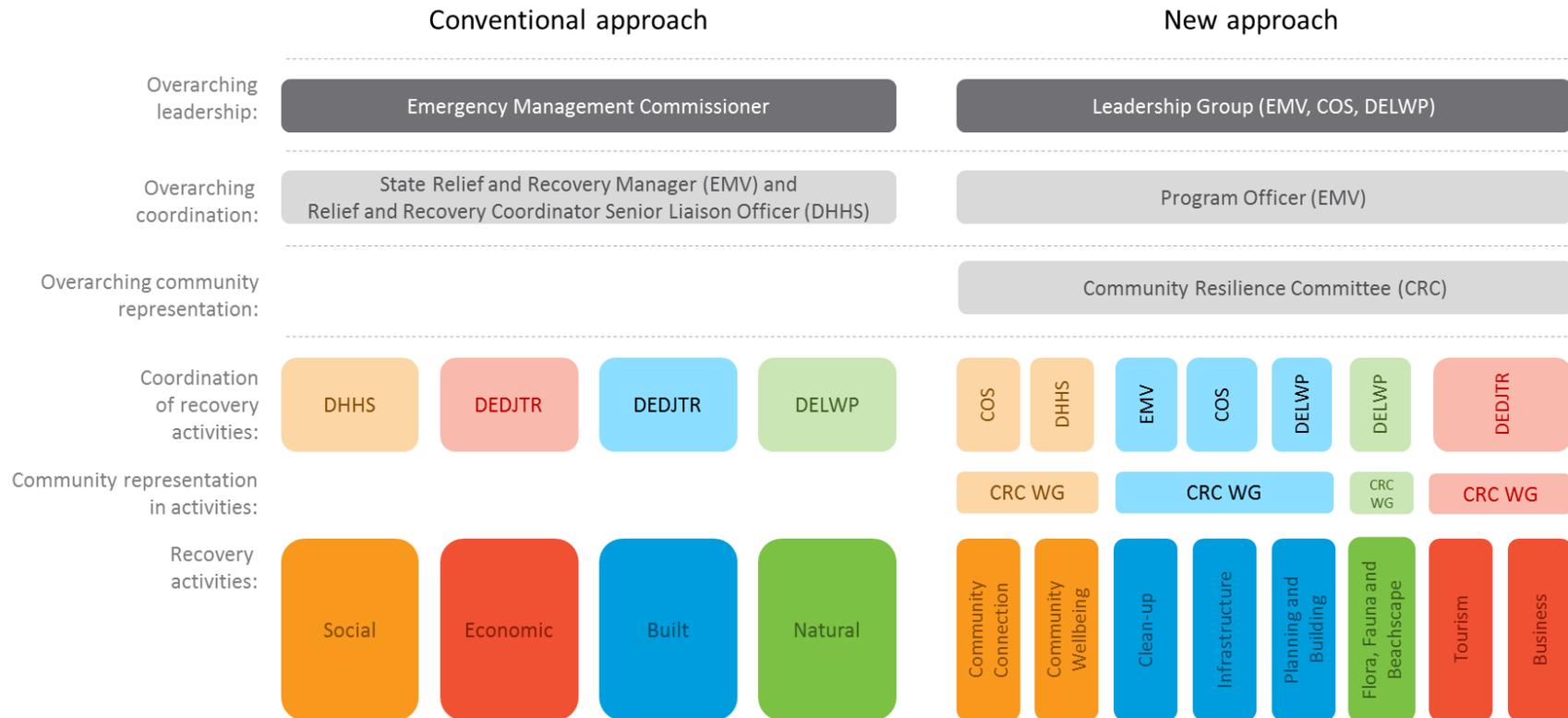
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<sup>29</sup> Emergency Management Victoria, *State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan, Part 4: Emergency Management Manual Victoria*, December 2015.

The new model had recovery activities organised in eight 'streams' rather than four pillars, although encompassing the same range of activities. As shown in Figure 3, the new model had the following structural differences from the conventional state-led model:

- a Leadership Group that included the most senior members of EMV, COS, and DELWP provided overarching leadership, rather than the Emergency Management Commissioner
- a Program Officer in EMV actively coordinated recovery planning across departments and agencies, rather than the EMV State Relief and Recovery Manager and the DHHS Relief and Recovery Coordinating Senior Liaison Officer
- an integrated approach across state, regional and local government agencies was adopted to lead recovery activities, rather than regional offices of DHHS, DELWP and DEDJTR
- a Community Resilience Committee and Work Groups provided community representation.

Figure 3: Arrangements under the conventional recovery model and new state model



In association with the state-led coordination, EMV initiated a comprehensive communications plan, seeking advice from a public relations consultant on how to best meet the needs of this geographically dispersed community. This led to the creation of the Wye Sep Connect website and Facebook page, which launched in February 2016 as the central source for all information regarding the recovery. The Wye Sep Connect website was developed by a third party contractor, with all content managed by EMV. Meanwhile, the community established other communications platforms, including a community Facebook page (Wye-Sep-Kennett in the Loop), and community email lists with up to 100 members.

**The state initiated clean-up plans immediately and COS implemented planning support for rebuilding.**

The state began discussions with Grocon on clean-up arrangements within days of the fire but these took several months to finalise. This involved getting a memorandum of understanding signed between the state, Grocon and the Insurance Council of Australia, putting a managing contractor agreement in place, and securing approvals from WorkSafe Victoria and the EPA for the transportation and disposal of hazardous materials.

COS identified that the complexity of rebuilding would be a challenge in an already stressful time, and sought to address this in several ways. COS created the 'One Stop Shop' to provide a central location for all information related to planning and rebuilding. One Stop Shops operated in Wye River and Melbourne once a week, and in Apollo Bay three times a week. They included staff from across relevant COS departments to provide coordinated, comprehensive advice to people on rebuilding. Additionally, COS streamlined its planning processes to enable faster processing of rebuilding applications. Changes included removing third party appeal rights, changing the approvals to sit with the CEO of COS rather than Council, and enabling all layers of an application to be considered simultaneously for decision (rather than going through a round of approvals for each layer).

*“The One Stop Shop approach worked really well [by] involving agencies in collaborating.”*

*“The One Stop Shop gave people confidence they didn’t need to bring up concerns at public community meetings—[they] could have private discussions for their needs.”*

To support rebuilding, the state commissioned landscape-level assessments of Bushfire Attack Levels (BAL) so that property owners did not need to do these themselves. BAL ratings indicate the bushfire intensity level that a home may experience (6 levels) as determined by the property’s location, onsite vegetation, proximity to other vegetation types, and slope. DELWP commissioned a private contractor, Terramatrix, to determine ongoing vegetation management and the associated Bushfire Attack Levels for fire-affected homes<sup>30</sup>.

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<sup>30</sup> Terramatrix, *Wye River and Separation Creek BAL Assessment Study – Report*, April 2016.



### 3.2.2 The clean-up phase was characterised by a rhythm of meetings, consultations and activities

**The new governance arrangements were finalised and implemented through the Resettlement Plan.**

The new recovery model was taking shape with the Leadership Group, Program Office, and CRC formed by March 2016, and the CRC Terms of Reference finalised by mid-April 2016. Agency staff found the transition from the conventional model to the new model challenging to implement during the course of the recovery, but reflected on its overall merits of community focus.

*“The value in change of approach was about giving the community a stronger role, bespoke to the needs of the community.”*

*“For a sector usually quite regimented and structured, this was quite anomalous. I could see [agency staff] were struggling for a while.”*

The Leadership Group provided overarching leadership in the new model and included the Commissioner, the CEO of COS, and the Secretary of DELWP. This spread decision-making responsibility across these three agencies. This group initially met weekly and later fortnightly to coordinate efforts. In addition to these three individuals, around 15 staff from participating agencies would attend Leadership Group meetings. The Leadership Group functioned as the decision-making body for the recovery – agencies would bring forward papers and decisions to be actioned there. The opportunity to coordinate efforts and share insights assisted in efficient collaboration between state agencies and state and local government.

*“[The Leadership Group] worked well because the three heads of the agencies doing the bulk of the work had line of sight with each other.”*

The Program Office provided overarching coordination in the new model, and the management of the Grocon contract. The office was located within EMV and staffed with an officer from Major Projects Victoria and, for a period of time, an officer from DELWP. The Program Office liaised between the Leadership Group, the CRC, and the agency staff leading recovery activities i.e. the Program Leads. The Program Office held regular Program Leads meetings for agencies involved in the recovery to test ideas and share information.

*“Now all the agencies are talking, which is a big deal and they all do it together.”*

*“The whole thing comes together because of relationships — if relationships aren’t strong it won’t matter.”*

The CRC was established to lead community involvement in the recovery. EMV and COS identified the need for a community committee and sought expressions of interest for its members. Eight community members were chosen by EMV and COS, which became seven members when one left. Of the seven community representatives active on the CRC throughout the recovery:

- all seven had been connected to Wye River and Separation Creek for over 20 years through their part-time residence, full-time residence, regular visiting, or work
- one lived full-time in Wye River and Separation Creek
- one had lost a home in the fire.

EMV and COS created the CRC as a committee of COS, and intended that it be chaired by the Mayor. At the first CRC meeting, community members advocated for a community co-chair, which was agreed. In addition to the Mayor and community co-chairs and the other CRC representatives, CRC membership included the CEO of COS, the Commissioner, the COS Bushfire Recovery Manager and the EMV Program Officer.

The CRC’s central role, as described in the Terms of Reference, was to provide for a two-way information exchange between the community and agencies to help represent the community’s needs to decision-makers and agency activities to the community (see Appendix B). In practice, the CRC acted as:

- an advocate for community interests (e.g. through regular meetings with the Minister’s office)
- a two-way conduit to support information exchange between the community and agencies
- a mechanism to more actively involve community members in the recovery process.

The CRC met fortnightly for its first two months and then monthly. CRC meetings would generally occur in Wye River on a Saturday following community meetings.

The new governance arrangements and recovery plan were formalised in the Resettlement Plan that the Leadership Group put forward<sup>31</sup>. While the CRC was not involved in the initial creation of the Resettlement Plan, they advocated for their involvement in its development. They then consulted on the Resettlement Plan to ensure that it met the needs of the community.

The Resettlement Plan set out specific recovery activities within eight streams, outlining the purpose, scope, project deliverables, dependencies and delivery responsibilities for each stream. The Resettlement Plan allocated responsibility for each of the streams among state agencies and COS (see Figure 3). A key element of the Resettlement Plan was that it encompassed activities led at the state, regional and local level.

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<sup>31</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Wye River & Separation Creek Resettlement Plan; Initial Plan*, April 2016.

To assist in the implementation of the Resettlement Plan, CRC Work Groups were also developed. Four CRC Work Groups were created to encompass the range of recovery activities (see Figure 3):

- Community Connection and Wellbeing
- Flora, Fauna and Beachscape
- Planning, Building and Fire
- Business and Tourism.

The Work Groups were tasked with supporting the CRC and the implementation of the Resettlement Plan. Specifically, the Work Group Terms of Reference define their role to “assist the CRC to develop a better understanding of community issues and facilitate the community’s understanding of the WRSC Interim Resettlement Plan, the progress of its implementation, the challenges and the opportunities”<sup>32</sup>. Each Work Group included a Chair (one of the CRC representatives), community members with an understanding of the subject area, and representatives from key agencies<sup>33</sup>. The CRC Work Groups were operational by June 2016 and met monthly to coordinate and facilitate community activities and input into each of the recovery streams.

#### **Regular meetings with the community, CRC and senior decision-makers provided opportunity for dialogue.**

There was a rhythm of community meetings underway by March, with monthly meetings in Wye River at the Surf Life Saving Club and in Melbourne at the Treasury Theatre or Richmond Town Hall. The community meetings were chaired by the CEO of COS, and included presentations by agencies on the progress of recovery activities, a group question and answer session, and informal individual interactions between agency staff and community members after the meeting.

*“People wanted face-to-face [interactions] in [community] meetings. In those emergency situations where people are hurting, they want to be heard. They don’t want someone else to be their mouthpiece. In [community] meetings, sometimes people weren’t after a solution. They just wanted someone to talk to.”*

Initially the community meetings were the only setting for interaction between high-level agency staff and the community. Relatively early in the recovery, DELWP initiated separate monthly meetings for the CRC representatives, Minister’s office, and Deputy Secretary of Forest, Fire and Regions in order to have a platform for direct dialogue between the community representatives and senior decision-makers. This direct connection between the CRC and the Minister’s office was mutually beneficial. For the CRC, these meetings with the Minister’s office were necessary for community voices to be heard since there were no community members on the Leadership Group. The CRC used these meetings in part to provide feedback to the Minister’s office on how the state was progressing with the management of the recovery, and in doing so, helped hold the state accountable. The state benefited from these meetings because it enabled them to get the work done more quickly. While this process may have improved consultation and decision-making between the state and CRC, it did not include COS.

#### **Make-safe and rebuilding support involved assessments and consultations to address community concerns.**

By March 2016, all clean-up arrangements were in place and Grocon was onsite beginning works. Clean up works began with the removal of damaged homes due to the risk to public safety caused by asbestos.

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<sup>32</sup> Colac Otway Shire and State Government of Victoria, *Terms of Reference: Wye River & Separation Creek Community Resilience Committee Work Groups*. July 2016.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

Grocon also constructed retaining walls to replace ones burnt in the fire and to mitigate land stability issues that arose in the fire-affected landscape.

After the asbestos-related clean-up works were complete, the focus shifted to removing trees identified as dangerous, as a part of making the environment safe for the community and workers. The original consent deed that property owners signed for clean-up works included the removal of trees that were considered to present an imminent risk. Concurrently, there was also a need to address trees considered dangerous but not an immediate risk. At the request of the community, the state engaged two rounds of independent arborist assessments to recommend further tree removals, and Grocon conducted the tree removals. Property owners were consulted and given the opportunity to approve the trees to be removed from their land. There were reported cases of trees being removed without consultation, which may have related to trees considered imminent risk under the original consent deed. Altogether, this process led to the removal of a large number of trees in the fire-affected area, which caused immense stress for the community. A case study on the tree removal is included in Section 5.2.

In April 2016, Terramatrix released the BAL assessments. Many properties had been assessed as the highest level, Flame Zone, which would make rebuilding costs extremely high. Property owners asked that DELWP investigate the possibility of creating an Asset Protection Zone (APZ) as a fuel break around the town perimeter, which had the potential to reduce the BAL levels. DELWP led extensive community engagements associated with the APZ investigation, including discussions with experts, neighbourhood cluster meetings, and an online survey to capture community opinions. Further details on the BAL and APZ assessment are provided in a case study in Section 5.2.

#### **A diversity of community activities and gatherings were organised throughout the winter.**

Throughout the recovery, the community was focused on personal and community wellbeing, supported by DHHS, Lorne Hospital staff and the CRC Community Connection and Wellbeing Work Group along with other Work Groups. Many community activities were organised ranging from those that sought to actively involve people in restoration activities (e.g. replanting native vegetation on Paddy's Path [the land that connects Wye River and Separation Creek], building bird boxes, and consulting on the new playground design) to social events (e.g. Easter Fete and Christmas in July).

*“It's important to get people together so they can talk and reconnect. People just want to get together and have a reason to.”*



### 3.2.3 Following heavy rains in winter, landslips occurred, creating a second incident

By early September 2016, Grocon had completed the clean-up and agencies began to discuss plans for transitioning to business as usual. The Leadership Group endorsed a plan for transition on 9 September 2016.

On 18 September 2016, another incident occurred that put Wye River and Separation Creek back into emergency response mode. The 2016 winter had been particularly wet with higher than average rainfall. The combination of high rainfall, steep terrain, and a bare landscape led to major landslips at Wye River and Separation Creek. In mid-September, a large landslip occurred just east of Separation Creek, an area overlooking the Great Ocean Road. VicRoads closed the Great Ocean Road in response, and began immediate engineering works. The road was closed between Separation Creek and Wye River from 18 September to 8 October 2016, reopened, and then closed again from 17-18 October 2016 following further movement on the slopes at the same site. During this time, EMV organised a shuttle service for community members to travel between the two communities, however this was not as widely publicised as the closure of the road. As a result, some community members resident in Melbourne thought that they were unable to reach Wye River.

Victoria Police and the State Emergency Service (SES) led the response to the landslips through the establishment of an Incident Management Team. Although the landslip was a regional-level event, EMV led the communications since it had an existing relationship with the community. The communication mechanisms for the response differed from those associated with the recovery. All communication regarding the incident response was posted on the Vic Emergency app as per state policy, with a note on the Wye Sep Connect website and Facebook page notifying the community.

The landslip put strain on local businesses due to the uncertainty over road access for tourists and visitors. Further, since supplier trucks could not come through Wye River and Separation Creek, local

businesses needed to drive a lengthy alternative route to Apollo Bay to collect supplies, which resulted in increased time and transportation costs.

After the heavy rains had subsided, Grocon continued works on retaining walls. Agencies consulted the community on decisions regarding these retaining walls, where possible, such as the colour of the stone.

In October 2016, DELWP released the outcome of the APZ investigation, with a decision not to implement an APZ based on design limitations and its limited ability to minimise bushfire risk from long-range ember attack (i.e. greater than 3 km). Detailed and site-specific information collected as part of the APZ investigation allowed DELWP to reassess the BAL rating that Terramatrix had released in April 2016. This reassessment led to greater siting flexibility for many properties although in most cases only minimal reductions in the extent of the Flame Zone.

By November 2016, agencies began discussing transition arrangements again. Community projects continued, and the new community playground was completed and opened in December 2016.

### 3.2.4 Starting 2017, the recovery phase began to transition towards long-term recovery

One year after the fire, and four months after the landslip, major infrastructure works were nearing completion and discussions were underway about how local and state government would transition activities to 'business as usual'.

To bring focus to community activities that would occur beyond the Resettlement Plan, the CRC led a consultation process and drew up a Renewal Plan. The Renewal Plan was finalised in March 2017. It details initiatives and implementation plans for activities under each of the CRC Work Groups that will enable the community to achieve its vision described in the community statement.

#### **Wye River and Separation Creek Community Statement**

##### ***Values and Principles***

***Wye River and Separation Creek is a small, inclusive and respectful community in a place of great natural beauty that highly values the forest, beach and natural landscape, and works to preserve and sustain them***

- *All community voices are valued and respected*
- *Natural beauty is enhanced by small scale and informal facilities*
- *Regeneration of indigenous flora and fauna has the highest priority*
- *Development is sympathetic to the environment and of minimal impact*
- *Risk is managed to balance amenity, public health and safety<sup>34</sup>.*

Government transition arrangements focused on infrastructure works and new community engagement structures such as Wye Sep Connect and the CRC. Grocon work was completed during the first quarter of 2017, and COS increased its presence as it led the delivery of construction projects (e.g. retaining walls and drainage schemes), road reconstruction and maintenance, and erosion control temporary measures<sup>35</sup>. Wye Sep Connect transitioned from EMV to COS to manage, and the CRC continues in its current form.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Community Resilience Committee, *Renewal Plan for Wye River and Separation Creek: March 2017-March 2018*. March 2017.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*



### 3.3 There are arrangements that can be put in place ahead of an event that will enable even more responsive recovery

Increased preparedness for recovery, in terms of support structures, governance models, and capacity, would enable even more responsive recovery for the benefit of the community, and would increase efficiency for the benefit of the state. The ideas listed below are derived directly from interviews, community survey comments, or analysis, some of which the state is already working towards, as noted.

**A panel of pre-qualified contractors could be under agreement to enable an earlier start on the clean-up.**

There could be an existing contract in place that only needs the specified scope of works added. While authorisations for handling hazardous material would need to be sought, having a contractor panel in place would remove the contractual negotiation stage, which has been estimated to delay the recovery process by weeks. EMV is currently working on establishing a standing panel with a number of existing providers so that when an event occurs, they can engage providers more quickly for clean-up.

*“The legal side of things need to be streamlined. Everyone is protecting their side but meanwhile land is not getting cleaned up.”*

**Experts for support and mentorship for disaster-affected communities could be pre-identified and under agreement.**

Community members on the initial Wye Sep Recovery Group felt they benefited greatly from mentoring by a CRC chair associated with the Black Saturday fires. In acknowledging the lessons they learned along the way, several community members offered to provide a mentoring role to disaster-affected

communities in the future. Further, there could be formal arrangements by which recovery experts and counsellors are available to be quickly sent to disaster-affected communities.

**There are various structures that could be in place for immediate activation when an incident occurs.**

Communication tools such as websites and hotlines, funds for managing donations with the appropriate scope for community needs, and surveys for understanding community needs could all be in place in advance. The VicEmergency hotline provides information during and after major bushfires. In addition, EMV is currently working towards building partnerships with experienced community fund managers, as demonstrated through a recently signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Bendigo Bank. The MOU enables locally facilitated community fundraising, where Bendigo Bank would work with local recovery committees and make decisions with the community about how the donations would be used.

*“It would be great to have a foundation ready, so that if there’s a fire, that night, there’s a phone number and bank account on the TV.”*

**Contact information could be kept on file with permission to use in case of emergency.**

Contacting residents immediately following the event was difficult based on the information COS had on file and privacy restrictions. A database of contact information could be securely held, in which residents voluntarily give permission for their information to be used in emergencies. Opt-in procedures consistent with privacy laws could be developed to accommodate these extenuating circumstances.

*“Other disasters may befall our Shire. It would be useful if, perhaps on a voluntary basis, mobile phone numbers could be attached to ratepayer information, but hidden and confidential except in emergency situations.”*

**A clear model for community, local government, and state government roles in community-centred recovery could be in place.**

It would be beneficial to have a clear but flexible model for community-centred governance ahead of an event. This model could include:

- transparent and objective processes for assembling community representation
- the respective roles and responsibilities of a community recovery committee, local government, and each state agency involved
- a mechanism for determining the funding to be associated with the recovery.

Through the reform to relief and recovery, EMV is currently evaluating the approach to community-led recovery, seeking to develop a more flexible and adaptable model<sup>37</sup>. This reform, currently outlined the Resilient Recovery Discussion Paper will lead to a strategic plan for relief and recovery in Victoria to be implemented and evaluated over a three to five year period<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>37</sup> Emergency Management Victoria, *Resilient Recovery Discussion Paper*, 2017.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*



## 4 The new approach to community-centred recovery had a number of distinctive elements

The new recovery model developed and implemented in Wye River and Separation Creek had several unique elements aimed specifically at being more community focused. This included a focus on communication and engagement, appropriate governance arrangements, and efforts to fast-track processes. These elements are outlined below and detailed in the key findings that follow.

## 4.1 Substantial effort and resources were invested in communications and engagement

The bespoke communications plan that EMV developed for this community featured a range of online and face-to-face communications. These included:

- monthly community meetings in Wye River and Melbourne
- the Wye Sep Connect website and Facebook page
- the COS Community Recovery Newsletter.

The monthly community meetings occurred in both Wye River and Melbourne to accommodate the vast majority of the Wye River and Separation Creek community with a primary residence in one of these locations. The same meeting would be run in each location, both attended by agency staff presenting information on the status of recovery activities.

The Wye Sep Connect website and Facebook page became the centralised online location for all information related to the recovery. Important content posted on Wye Sep Connect would include:

- presentations and videos from the community meetings
- minutes from the CRC meetings
- news regarding the clean-up, assessment reports, or community activities.

COS provided a newsletter specific to the recovery, which was emailed to community members in Wye River and Separation Creek.

*“There was an emphasis on communication. Sometimes too much communication isn’t enough for some [people]. [The agencies] recognised that it was an important part of community involvement.”*

## 4.2 Governance arrangements in the new model were designed to be more responsive to community needs

The state’s new recovery model included new structures for leadership and coordination, including the Leadership Group, the Program Office, and the Community Resilience Committee. All recovery activities were coordinated through these groups. In short:

- The Leadership Group was created to enable more effective and responsive decision-making through coordination and information exchange of senior leaders.
- The Program Office was created to coordinate agency efforts for more streamlined delivery of the Resettlement Plan and the administration of the Grocon contract.
- The Community Resilience Committee was created to represent community interests and liaise between the community and agencies.



### 4.3 Conscious efforts were made to fast-track and streamline key elements of the recovery process

Throughout the recovery, senior leaders made a significant commitment to understand community concerns and respond quickly to problems. This included the formalised weekly CRC meetings with Minister Neville’s office as well as informal personal interactions with senior staff in EMV and Minister Neville. Minister Neville and the Commissioner’s authority enabled them to quickly execute important decisions without needing to work through various levels of bureaucracy.

*“EMV was able to cut through red tape, get to [the] heart of [the] issue and make things happen.”*

Further, state agencies and COS hired or seconded staff specifically to address the recovery effort. In most cases, these were short-term appointments of 6 to 15 months. Strong collaboration and the initiative of program staff facilitated efficient action.

*“I sat in meetings as [an agency] working group. It was not about, ‘Is this in my scope?’ But about ‘Who is best placed to address this action?’”*

Examples where agencies fast-tracked processes in the recovery with a goal of meeting community needs include the following, each of which is described in detail in the preceding Section 3.2:

- an early focus on reopening the Great Ocean Road
- coordinated landscape management of key make-safe and planning processes (e.g. BAL assessments)
- One Stop Shop and streamlined planning processes.



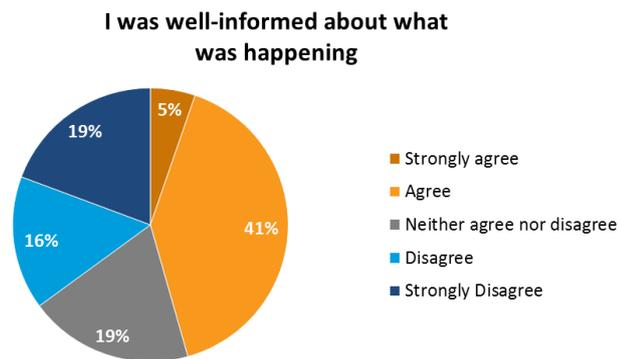
## 5 Key finding #1: While communications were generally well managed, occasionally agencies made decisions without appropriate engagement, highlighting the need to build capacity in engagement

Community members valued the substantial effort in communications and engagement by all agencies and organisations involved in the recovery phase. Nonetheless, there were times when agencies did not engage sufficiently in an effort to make decisions quickly and other times when they engaged on issues that had minimal capacity for community input, thereby raising expectations. This mismatch in engagement technique with the issue at hand frustrated the community and eroded trust. Increased focus on developing a more nuanced approach to community engagement that considers the values of the community, characteristics of the issue, and agency culture will assist in delivering genuine community-centred recovery.

## 5.1 The communication and engagement initiatives were extensive and generally appreciated

Communication is very important to this community. The online communication tools and community meetings generally provided timely access to detailed information. Nonetheless, in the recent community survey, community members reported mixed perspectives on the extent to which they felt informed (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Community responses regarding availability of information<sup>39</sup>

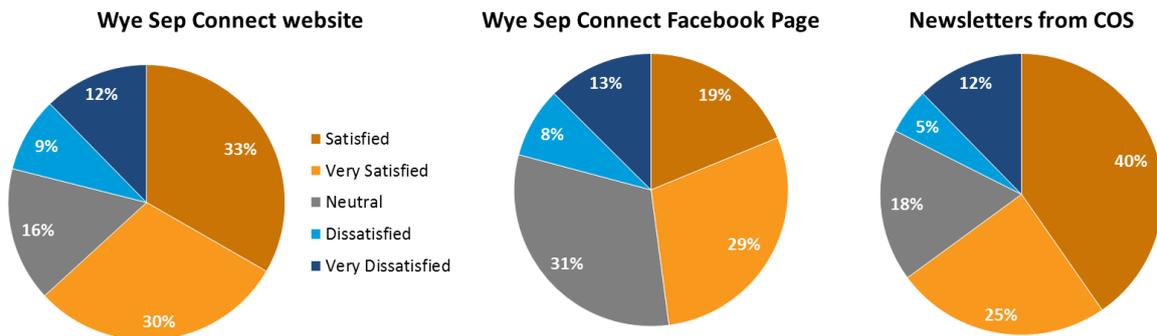


### There was high satisfaction with written communication tools.

Clear, transparent and frequent communication was critical for informing and engaging the community on decisions directly affecting them. Community members tended to appreciate written communication tools, and particularly the Wye Sep Connect website and COS Newsletter, as indicated in Figure 5. Nonetheless, community members recommended that agencies additionally invest in printed communications to complement the use of online media.

*“Wye Sep Connect was very important for dissemination – very important.”*

Figure 5: Community satisfaction regarding written communication tools<sup>40</sup>



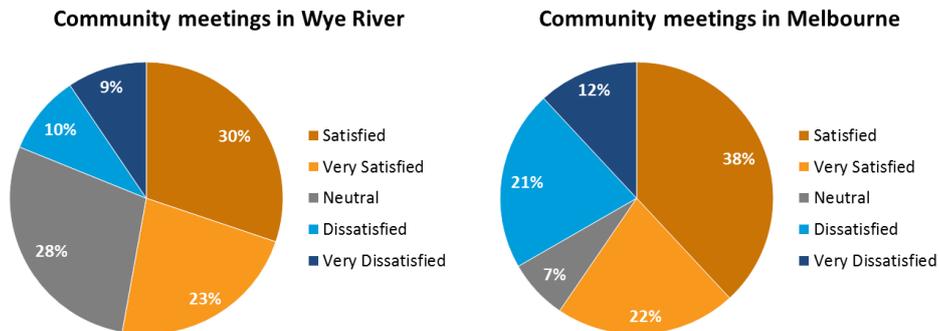
<sup>39</sup> Data from community survey conducted by Nous Group, March-April 2017.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

### The community highly valued the community meetings.

Community meetings, replicated in Wye River and Melbourne, gave opportunity for two-way dialogue between agencies and the community, which was otherwise a challenge. Community members were generally satisfied with these meetings, as reflected in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Community satisfaction with community meetings<sup>41</sup>



Community members felt meetings were valuable for information flow, allowing them to learn about the progress of recovery activities and to voice their concerns. The meetings were generally well attended by community members, with 80 people at the Melbourne meetings and 30 at the Wye River meetings at times when particularly important issues were being discussed. The meetings were attended by senior staff across all participating agencies, including Minister Neville and the Commissioner. This senior commitment helped community members feel their needs were valued.

*“Probably the biggest problem we had was communication – in both directions. Meetings opened up communication.”*

*“The community forums ... [were] excellent.”*

*“That these meetings have occurred has been fantastic.”*

### Community members highly valued Grocon’s approach to working with fire-affected home owners.

The community consistently described Grocon as being particularly customer-focused, responsive and sensitive to their needs. In the community survey, 80% of respondents reported being satisfied or very satisfied with the clean-up<sup>42</sup>. Grocon provided tailored one-on-one customer service, such as:

- coordinating onsite visits from the Melbourne office for home owners to be walked through their property with a Grocon employee and have their specific needs discussed
- asking property owners if there was anything in particular they wanted the Grocon workers to look out for and collect from their homes when conducting the clean-up.

Grocon’s approach to supporting property owners in the clean-up reflects well on the company’s experience, people and values (a commitment to community is a core corporate value of Grocon). Key individuals at Grocon, including the onsite Project Manager, had worked on the Black Saturday clean-up, bringing important knowledge to the recovery phase of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire.

*“Grocon were very sensitive to everybody’s needs. [If] anybody came to them with any kind of query, they’d check it out.”*

*“The best thing EMV did apart from putting out the fire was to bring Grocon in.”*

<sup>41</sup> Data from community survey conducted by Nous Group, March-April 2017

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*



## 5.2 At times communications ‘broke down’, leading to substantial frustration

Despite the extensive attention to communications and engagement, there were times when it failed to meet the needs and expectations of the community. This is illustrated by three case studies.

### **Case study: Removal of identified dangerous trees**

**Context:** Once the clean-up of damaged properties began, there was a need to address the management of fire-affected trees in order to make the environment safe for the community and workers. Trees that posed an imminent risk to safety could be removed under the consent deed that property owners had signed for the clean-up. Meanwhile, all other trees were assessed by arborists to determine their required level of management.

**Events:** The state organised for Grocon to subcontract an arborist to assess all trees in the fire-affected area, after which property owners were to be consulted and given the opportunity to approve trees to be removed on their land. Community members reported mixed experiences on the extent of consultations. Some property owners reported that they were not consulted at all, whereas others reported that they had been given the opportunity to approve the trees to be removed on their land from a photo on which the trees had been identified. It is possible that trees may have been removed without consultation if they were deemed to pose imminent risk, falling under the initial consent deed.

In making decisions regarding their trees, property owners were advised they would be liable for any damages caused by trees left standing. Property owners considered the first arborist assessment unduly strict, and so a second round of independent arborist assessments was





conducted. In this second round, Grocon organised for three independent arborists to review the initial assessment and make their own. The second round of assessments was to be final.

The second round of arborists concluded that the first assessment had been overly conservative and they recommended more trees be removed than the first assessment. Assessments differed between arborists, with some assessments recommending pruning, structural support or a 12-month review, although these ongoing costs for maintenance would not have been covered by the government.

The state arranged for Grocon to conduct the tree removal as per the recommendations of the arborists and the decisions of property owners. Most property owners chose to have the identified dangerous trees removed on their land, which resulted in the removal of a large number of trees across the fire-affected area.

In later addressing trees on public land, DELWP and COS took a different approach, setting up long-term management plans to monitor identified hazardous trees. This approach differed due to the decreased risk and different ownership of risk. The trees on public land presented less risk since they were not in a populated area and were less severely fire-impacted. In addition, the government owned the risk rather than private property owners.

Key issue: A large number of the trees in the fire-affected area were removed.

Community perspectives: Community members were shocked by the resultant bare landscape, describing it as a second trauma. They were angry that so many trees had been removed, feeling that many of the trees removed were healthy and presented no risk. Further, they were angry by a perceived double standard between the management of trees on public land versus private land.

*“For people here, the trees are Wye River.”*

*“Once the trees started to go, the place started to look so different. It was really traumatic for people. It was like a second fire. For some people, they are deciding whether they’ll rebuild because it’s just too traumatic.”*

*“I saw people breaking down at the meeting in Melbourne over the loss of trees.”*

*“I still get a shock every morning when I look up there – it’s just bald.”*

*“The tree issue caused incredible suffering among some people. And a feeling the authorities did not understand that at all.”*

Agency perspectives: Agencies approached the tree removal from a risk management perspective focused on ensuring overall long-term community safety.

*“We looked at it from a safety perspective... You’ve got to make the place safe.”*

In addition, there were a range of community expectations on the removal of trees. Agencies reported that some community members wanted damaged trees on their property removed to facilitate rebuilding; some didn’t want trees that could potentially fall on their properties, while others wanted to keep the trees so the town would look and feel the same.



### Case study: Communications during the landslide

Context: EMV had been managing all communications regarding the recovery, including the content posted on Wye Sep Connect and the community meetings held in Wye River and Melbourne. When the landslide occurred, they additionally took on managing the landslide communications. However, EMV was not involved in managing the landslide response – this was managed by VicPol and then SES<sup>43</sup>.

Events: For several weeks following the landslide in September 2016, the Great Ocean Road was closed between Wye River and Separation Creek. During this time, EMV organised a shuttle service to run between Wye River and Separation Creek that used access roads Grocon had created as part of the clean-up. Community members could then travel as needed. Meanwhile, widespread communication in print and online media informed the public that the Great Ocean Road was closed.

At this time, community members who were in Melbourne felt disconnected from Wye River and Separation Creek. They thought they were unable to access the community since the Road was closed, not realising the shuttle was available to community members to accommodate the closed section.

In addition, communication differed during the landslide response from that of the fire recovery. In accordance with state policies, all communications regarding the incident were posted on the Vic Emergency app. Community members were advised through posts on the Wye Sep Connect website and Facebook page to check the Vic Emergency app for updates on the landslide.

The information on the Vic Emergency app focused on the landslide risk to the community and not specific properties. To communicate risks to individuals, COS, EMV and VicRoads contacted all property owners who were directly affected by the landslide. Meanwhile, community members resident in Melbourne who had not been contacted were concerned about their properties and felt unable to access information. They felt there wasn't enough information posted on Wye Sep Connect at the time, and believed they could not attend IMT meetings held in Wye River and Separation Creek due to the Great Ocean Road closure.

Key issue: Community members based in Melbourne felt poorly informed about what was happening during the landslide.

Community perspectives: Community members based in Melbourne were anxious about the status of their properties for what was, effectively, no reason.

***“There were fears of people in Melbourne. They had lost their house and now they were concerned they were going to lose their land because of it slipping away... but they had no reason to be concerned.”***

Community members reported that they tried to get content onto Wye Sep Connect to increase communications among the community but were unsuccessful.

***“When the landslide happened, we wanted to put content up [on Wye Sep Connect] and were told ‘EMV is busy with other things. We’re in command and control mode’.”***

Agency perspectives: Agency staff acknowledged the challenge of managing the fire recovery at the same time as another incident and its recovery, and the impact it had on communications.

***“Once the landslide happened, it went back to standard state-control methodology and didn’t pick up on what was in place [for communications].”***

<sup>43</sup> Wye Sep Connect, *SES to manage landslide incidents*, September 2016. Retrieved from: <http://wyesepconnect.info/ses-manage-landslide-incidents/>



## Case study: Investigations of Bushfire Attack Level ratings and the Asset Protection Zone

**Context:** Following the fire, there was a need to assess Bushfire Attack Level (BAL) ratings for the fire-affected region. The BAL ratings would dictate the extent of fire risk for a given property, which would in turn alter rebuilding requirements. The state organised landscape-scale assessments of the BAL ratings for faster assessment and to relieve individual property owners of the responsibility for completing the assessments.

**Events:** In February 2016, DELWP commissioned Terramatrix to conduct the BAL assessments. Terramatrix released their report in April 2016, specifying BAL ratings for all homes, as influenced by different vegetation management scenarios. Many homes were given the highest rating of flame zone (FZ) under the status-quo vegetation management scenario<sup>44</sup>. The assessment concluded that an Asset Protection Zone (APZ) of intensively managed vegetation around the perimeter of the township would not be an effective approach for reducing BAL rating for forest-adjacent properties<sup>45</sup>.

Following the conclusion that an APZ would not work, the community asserted that an APZ had not been properly investigated. DELWP then agreed to investigate the possibility and effectiveness of an APZ, repeating assessments that had been done several years prior that had concluded it would not be possible. DELWP led extensive community engagement associated with the APZ, including neighbourhood cluster meetings and discussions with experts. Following reassessment in 2016, the state decided it would not implement an APZ, since it was limited by various environmental factors, would incur significant financial costs, and would not mitigate the risk from long-range ember attack<sup>46</sup>.

Meanwhile, the APZ assessments contributed more detailed and site-specific information. Using this new data, DELWP refined the BAL ratings that Terramatrix had published several months prior. The results of the refined BAL assessment led to greater siting flexibility for 93 properties although in most cases only minimal reductions in the FZ extent were possible. These results were released in October 2016, and there were no appeal processes permitted.

**Key Issue:** The state committed to investigating the APZ and a second BAL assessment, raising expectations of more favourable outcome to property owners.

**Community perspectives:** Community members were extremely frustrated by the state's management of the assessments and the lack of appeal opportunity. Many property owners had held off on making decisions on rebuilding until these outcomes had come through, which in the end delayed their rebuild by 3-4 months for no perceived benefit. Further, community members felt this was not appropriately communicated and that the state had simply neglected to report back on the APZ decision. In a community survey conducted in May 2016, BAL ratings came forward as one of the two main reasons (along with financial issues) that owners would choose not to rebuild<sup>47</sup>.

***"BAL ratings were just done and there was no appeal. That was really unfair."***

***"It gives us the feeling that those of us who have suffered most need to now deal with enormously, especially strict regulations... We've been forced into a situation that no one else would have to deal with, and a situation that arguably puts us in a worse situation."***

***"The APZ came out and it was going to be a fire break round the town. There were numerous meetings about that... Then it got dropped. It just fell off."***

<sup>44</sup> Terramatrix, *Wye River and Separation Creek BAL Assessment Study – Report*, April 2016.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>46</sup> Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, *Asset Protection Zone Project- Wye River and Separation Creek*, 2016.

<sup>47</sup> Wye Sept Resettlement Priorities Survey Results, May 2016. Available on Wye Sep Connect.



Agency perspectives: Agencies felt that it was important to follow up on community concerns, and yet recognised the problems of doing so when geotechnical or legislative requirements made it unlikely that the outcome would change.

*“At that time [of the BAL review], most people were still in shock and angry at government for the fire happening in the first place. Any conversation at that time was in the context of absolute anger.”*

*“We can genuinely say that the community raised an issue and we took it seriously and addressed it. We didn’t give them the answer they wanted.”*

*“If the primary mission is to enable people to rebuild, then the sooner government is clear about the ground rules, then sooner people can make decisions on that.”*

**These examples illustrate how there were multiple ways in which communications broke down.**

At times, agencies failed to appreciate the long-term consequences and/or alternative options of decisions.

In an effort to keep processes moving quickly and to prioritise safety, agencies sometimes made decisions with a short-term focus without thoroughly exploring alternatives. This caused immense stress among community members, most evident in the removal of identified dangerous trees.

Rather than a failure to consult, the tree issue represented a failure of the agencies to consult in a way that was sensitive to community values.

Had agencies understood the importance of the trees to the community *and* acknowledged the long-term consequences of all landholders opting for removal, they could have helped the community to prepare for this impact.

Further, this issue demonstrated the fundamentally different perspectives to risk management between agencies and the community.

*“We did say – if the trees are dangerous, cut them down – but no one said that if you all say that, this is what it will look like. Did we know the impact of what it would look like? No.”*

*“This is not a suburban landscape and you cannot remove all the risks from this environment. That is one reason why people love it!”*

Lastly, alternative options were not thoroughly explored for the tree removal. While alternative management options were presented in some of the arborist assessments, the overall approach was risk averse and did not give sufficient consideration to managing trees over the longer term. Meanwhile, the long-term management of fire-affected trees on public land created the impression that these alternative options for tree management had been overlooked.

*“Agencies spent time on engagement in the meetings, but not enough thinking ‘Have we thought of all the alternatives and are we doing the right thing [for tree removal on private land]?’”*

At times, agencies did not adequately communicate with the community.

The community had become accustomed to frequent and detailed information. Times of reduced quality or quantity of information were then very apparent.

The core issue with the landslip communication was the variation in the communication mechanisms and styles between response and recovery communications. Response



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communications posted on the Vic Emergency app were concise and focused on the incident compared to the recovery communications on Wye Sep Connect that were longer and adopted more of a community lens. This left the community feeling poorly informed, anxious and overlooked.

The community also felt communication had been inadequate more recently in March 2017. An access road was put in that went through private property, for which the property owner was consulted but the community was not. The community felt they should have been informed about the road prior to its creation.

*“As soon as communication stops, people get upset.”*

*“Because of the fire and subsequent landslip, people in the community felt a loss of control –powerless... If you impose on that a process where things are done to their personal world that they don’t have a say in, it continues the sense of powerlessness and loss of control.”*

At times agencies made commitments that could not be met.

In an effort to be responsive, Government sometimes made statements that created expectations in the community. The investigations of BAL rating and the APZ are both examples of agencies keen to follow up on community concerns. Nonetheless, these commitments overlooked the full implications for community members and the costs and benefits of alternative approaches. The agency investment in investigating these issues could have been reallocated to more effective community engagement.



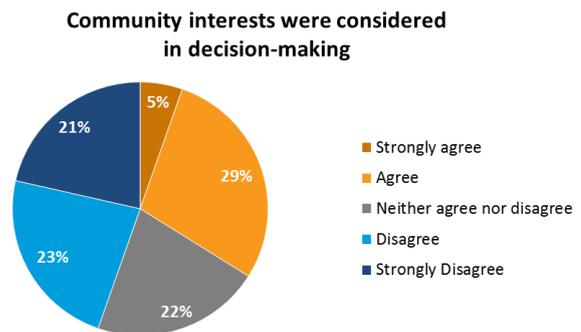
### 5.3 There is scope for more ‘expert’ community engagement

**There is nuance in the appropriate community role in decision-making that should inform engagement strategies.**

While community engagement is vital for all recovery activities, different types of engagement are appropriate for different activities. In the recent community survey, community members reported mixed perspectives on the extent to which community interests were considered in decision making (Figure 7), reflecting diverse experiences.

Figure 7: Community responses regarding decisions<sup>48</sup>

The International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) has guidelines for community engagement specific to disaster recovery<sup>49</sup>. These guidelines consider community wellbeing and needs during these times of stress and provide agencies with specific guiding principles for more sensitive engagement. This includes the following:



#### IAP Guidelines for Engagement in Disaster Recovery:

**Principle #1 – Any emergency management process should begin with a thorough understanding of the drivers and values of a community<sup>50</sup>.**

<sup>48</sup> Data from community survey conducted by Nous Group, March-April 2017

<sup>49</sup> International Association for Public Participation, *A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery*, 2015.

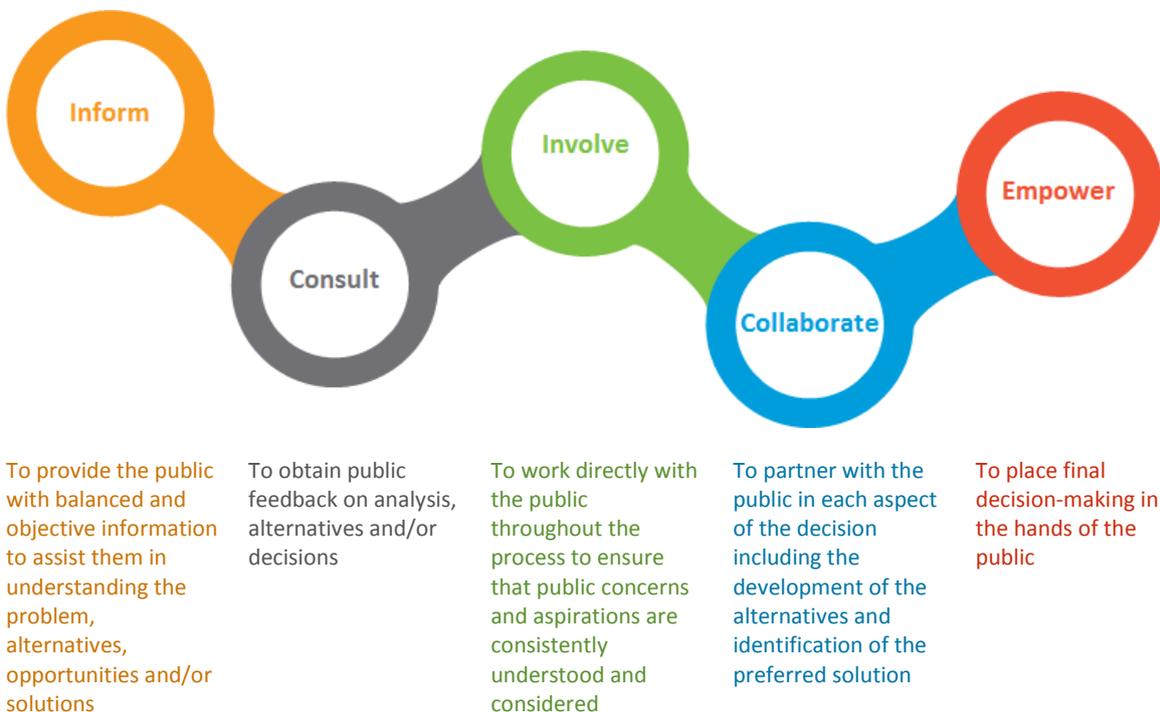
<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

An understanding of the community’s dynamics and values is fundamental to effective engagement and can help avoid some of the frustrations referenced in the examples above. Overlooking community values can lead to insensitive communications that erode trust. The ‘trust equation’ describes the factors that build trust (e.g. credibility, reliability and intimacy) and factors that erode trust (i.e. behaviours indicating self-orientation)<sup>51</sup>. When agencies make decisions that reduce reliability (e.g. over-promising) or increase self-orientation (e.g. not informing), community members become angry and frustrated and trust declines. The ability to regain this trust lies in demonstrating learning and adjusting future decisions accordingly.

*“The retaining walls [were] done a lot better [than the tree consultations]. People got to vote on the finish of the retaining walls. There’s been much less angst with the retaining walls. This demonstrates that learning happened. But that will need to be learned for every disaster — what are the key issues that will create angst for people?”*

An improved understanding of the community, as well as an understanding of when each type of consultation may be most appropriate, would result in improved engagement. The International Association of Public Participation provides guidance on different types of community engagement in their Public Participation Spectrum (Figure 8)<sup>52</sup>. The government can use the IAP2 Spectrum to clearly articulate the objective of engagement for any given activity prior to undertaking it. While it is important that the community communicate their needs and concerns to government, they need to acknowledge that not all issues may have scope for extensive consultation based on pressing considerations such as safety. Government can help create positive, respectful dialogue from the start by being transparent and objective with decision-making and carefully managing expectations.

Figure 8: IAP2 Public Participation Spectrum<sup>53</sup>



<sup>51</sup> D Maister, CH Green, and RM Galford, *The Trusted Advisor*, Free Press, New York, 2000.

<sup>52</sup> IAP2 Australasia, *Public Participation Spectrum*, 2016.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

Similarly, time constraints can mean that engagement methods are tailored to the specific problem at hand. For example, issues of public safety may need to be quickly addressed, will depend on expert assessment and may not leave much room for community input. However when public safety issues relate to highly-valued community assets, like trees, agencies have greater responsibility to engage, as per Principle 1 above.

A best-practice engagement model that takes into account risk and value can be developed by integrating the Spectrum for Public Participation with Principle 1 of the Guidelines for Engagement in Disaster Recovery (Figure 9). In consideration of the time and financial cost of engagement, the model proposes increasing levels of engagement as issues move from the bottom right (issues of high relative importance to public safety and low relative importance to the community) to the top left (issues of low importance to public safety and high relative importance to the community). In short, this model highlights that there are multiple factors that influence best practice community engagement.

*“When it’s complex like this, you need to take the time to understand it.”*

Figure 9: Variation on IAP2 spectrum according to speed of decisions and value to community



**Managing community engagement in recovery requires a particular set of mindsets and skills**

Governance and culture may have led to perceived communication failures. First, most agencies involved in community engagement following the fires had dual responsibilities for response and recovery, which can present a challenge when there are concurrent response and recovery needs. Second, emergency response and recovery management require different engagement approaches. Emergency management requires executive decisions, whereas recovery management typically requires more considered and collaborative decision-making. Community members felt that consultation was sometimes overlooked because of top-down decision-making generally associated with emergency management. It is important that all agencies with responsibility for recovery have the mindset and expertise for the engagement required of the recovery phase.

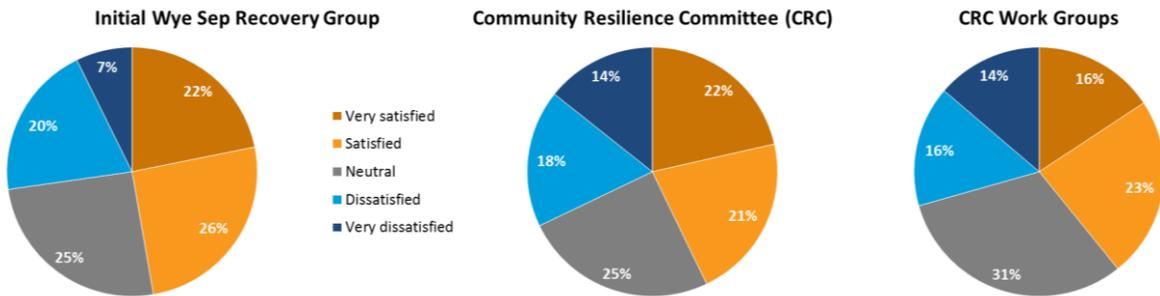


## 6 Key finding #2: There remain very different views on the value of the community-centred governance model – ensuring a common understanding of the model is important

Research supports the importance of involving communities in their own recovery. In the Wye River and Separation Creek recovery, this was accomplished in two ways: through community engagement in consultations and activities and through engagement of community members in recovery structures (i.e. the Wye Sep Recovery Group, Community Resilience Committee and CRC Work Groups).

The recent community survey indicated mixed community support for the community recovery committees and Work Groups, as outlined in Figure 10. The drivers of differing perspectives among community members and agencies on the value of a community recovery group are outlined below. The discussion that follows focuses on the Community Resilience Committee and its Work Groups, rather than the initial Wye Sep Recovery Group, since the former were the active groups for most of the recovery to date.

Figure 10: Community satisfaction with different groups for community representation<sup>54</sup>



<sup>54</sup> Data from community survey conducted by Nous Group, March-April 2017.

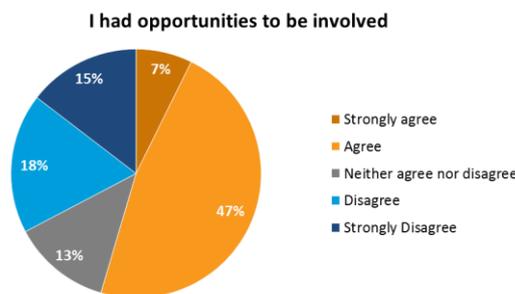
## 6.1 Some strongly support the CRC and its Work Groups as a model for community-centred governance

Strong support for a community recovery committee, and specifically the CRC, centred on the importance of community involvement and representation in recovery decision-making, as outlined in each section below.

### The CRC provided a mechanism for active involvement of community members in the recovery.

Research indicates that community members' personal recovery benefits from active involvement in recovery, as this helps them to move beyond the disaster and think about the future<sup>55,56</sup>. In a recent survey, many community members indicated that they had opportunities to be involved in the recovery (Figure 11).

Figure 11: Community responses regarding extent of involvement<sup>57</sup>



*“Positive community outcomes refocus people from their trauma.”*

*“I had been at a working bee along Paddy’s Path [planting native vegetation]. People so appreciated it. It just empowered people. We had 70 year olds and 16 year olds. It was just a happy occasion.”*

The Renewal Plan was a key example of actively involving the community in decisions regarding their future. The community consultation process associated with developing the Renewal Plan enabled community members to develop a shared vision for their community going forward.

*“The Renewal Plan is about empowering and taking control of the future. How can you criticise it when you’ve created the plan?”*

On the other hand, participation in a community committee or leadership group can result in a lot of responsibility being placed on an individual when they are already coping with their own personal recovery from the incident. Recent research suggests a curvilinear relationship between group involvement and mental health, i.e. at a certain point, membership in additional groups overloads individuals and becomes detrimental to their wellbeing<sup>58</sup>. A community governance model should therefore enable community leadership and involvement without overburdening community members at an already difficult time.

<sup>55</sup> G Winkworth, C Healy, M Woodward & P Camilleri, *Community capacity building: Learning from the 2003 Canberra bushfires*. The Australian Journal of Emergency Management, vol. 24, p. 5-12, 2009.

<sup>56</sup> L Gibbs et al. *Beyond Bushfires: Community Resilience and Recovery Final Report*, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2016.

<sup>57</sup> Data from community survey conducted by Nous Group, March-April 2017

<sup>58</sup> L Gibbs et al. *Beyond Bushfires: Community Resilience and Recovery Final Report*, University of Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 2016.

*“[When you] have a community that’s traumatised, to put them in charge of their recovery is almost like a burden too much on them.”*

**The CRC played an important role as an advocate for the community and conduit for information.**

Community members felt that the CRC helped hold agencies to account through their regular meetings with the Minister’s office. Additionally, community members felt that the CRC was a trusted source of information and a valuable vehicle for information exchange.

*“[The CRC reps] listened to people and allowed people to have their say.”*

*“People trusted [CRC] reps and came to them with a pile of stuff to take forward.”*

The CRC was co-chaired by a community member and the Mayor. The CRC saw co-chair arrangements as a necessary first step for effective advocacy and leadership on community issues.

*“A co-chair is important because it signals that it won’t be fully government-led and is recognition of people’s status on it.”*

*“Having a community co-chair made the community accountable and sent a message to the community that their members are being treated as equal.”*

**The CRC members had skills and expertise that they were able to apply to the recovery.**

Community members greatly appreciated the diversity of skills and professional expertise that the CRC representatives brought to the recovery effort. Community members outside the CRC thought these skills were beneficial in navigating the high-level issues that arose in working with agencies and the Minister’s office.

*“You need really skilled, respected people to deal with really high-level issues.”*

*“[The CRC] was a must-have and you’ve got to have a broad range of people.”*

## 6.2 Some propose that agencies can deliver a community-centred recovery more efficiently without a community recovery committee

In contrast, others did not support the community recovery group model based on challenges with efficiency and effective engagement, as outlined in each section below. This view focused on the role of the CRC for information exchange, which overlooked the CRC’s roles as an advocate and mechanism for involvement.

**Extensive time and energy is required to support a community recovery group when community engagement could be achieved more efficiently in other ways.**

Some individuals involved in the recovery argued that having the CRC and its Work Groups was quite inefficient since it consumed extensive agency time and resources unnecessarily. They felt that agencies could have solved problems more quickly because they had the experience and the resources could have been used on more productive investments. Overall, some felt the same outcomes could have been achieved, more efficiently, through agency-led coordination.

*“The Renewal Plan is quite good. But it could’ve been created in one day in a [community] meeting with an appropriate facilitator. We complicate things too much.”*

First, some individuals proposed that alternative measures to a community recovery group are available for community engagement. They suggested that the opportunity for dialogue already exists in whole-

of-community meetings and could be more effectively leveraged by refining the manner in which community meetings are conducted. Community meetings have the benefit of providing a more democratic decision-making platform by having the whole community in the room at the same time.

*“If a little more work could be put into the community meetings, you could have all people in the same place at the same time to deal with issues.”*

*“It’s always difficult to represent everyone in the room unless they’re there.”*

EMV has demonstrated commitment to developing the community-led recovery model through the Resilient Recovery Discussion Paper, including opportunities for community governance, such as a community recovery group. Community meetings are unlikely to be the sole mechanism for engaging communities going forward. Nonetheless, meetings could be adapted for increased quality of engagement.

Second, some individuals proposed that regional and local agencies can better engage and serve the whole community. Regional agency staff understand the provision of services to the community, have expertise in both recovery and community engagement, and may be able to apply a more objective perspective than that of community members. Further, some proposed agencies could more effectively consult with the wider community than community members could, whose ability to consult may be impacted by their own trauma from the incident, interpersonal relationships within the community, or lack of understanding of engagement techniques.

*“The community-led nature meant priority setting was a little ad hoc and agenda-driven.”*

#### **Achieving appropriate representativeness may be a challenge for a community recovery group.**

Some felt that the CRC did not use all engagement pathways available to them and therefore missed hearing perspectives of some parts of the community. This contributed to a sense of disconnect for some community members. In addition, community members had varying understandings about who the CRC represented (e.g. the whole community or only the people who had lost their homes). This led to some community members not approaching them for advocacy and assistance when needed.

*“It didn’t have enough local people involved in it.”*

*“The CRC did a fairly good job but there were times when members lapsed into forgetting their role to represent wider community. This may have been because they were over-stretched with their own recovery, and yet also could’ve been better supported through community engagement techniques such as websites or online survey tools.”*

#### **Community groups already exist who can work with agencies.**

Given that there are existing community groups, the necessity of creating a dedicated new group can be questioned. Some argued that existing groups such as the Progress Association, Surf Life Saving Club or the CFA could have filled the role of a community recovery group. These groups already include trusted leaders in the community. Further, using an existing group for community representation would ease transition to business as usual since they are not a new structure.

*“If there’s a network in there, use your trusted leaders.”*

However, agencies should not assume existing groups have the interest or capacity to take on what is a significant role. Community members from existing community groups asserted that they did not have the capacity to take on this large responsibility. Further, each existing group has its own membership, some of which represent different sections of the community, and therefore choosing one group could itself lead to concerns about wider representativeness. Additionally, existing groups may have their own internal history and politics that would risk impacting community recovery.

*“You need a new group. People get overloaded.”*



### 6.3 It is important to have a common understanding of the community-centred governance model to best leverage community involvement

**Community involvement is a central component of a community-governance model.**

Community members invest substantial time and energy in recovery activities – channelling that significant investment effectively can be beneficial. A community recovery committee creates a unique opportunity to leverage the strong commitment of community members to their own recovery, for the benefit of their community. While recovery is driven substantially by agency expertise and contractors, an enormous amount of work will be undertaken by the people most directly impacted and invested in the outcomes – community members.

*“You can’t believe how much time you commit — it’s still going on now. For me it’s quite easy because I’m self-employed so I have all this free time during the day when I can commit to doing these things. If I was back in [my old job], could I afford all the time I’ve spent on this? No.”*

*“Someone... said, ‘You’re basically working part time on this.’”*

*“Create the resources around people to ensure they’re open to doing those sorts of things.”*

At times, community members felt that their contributions to, and roles in, the recovery were not adequately acknowledged. It is therefore necessary for agencies to fully recognise the dependency of the community-centred recovery model on volunteer contribution and to support and enable the community in this work.

*“When the agencies came in [after the fire] — the people who had been involved already were dismissed in a way: ‘Thanks for your help, we’ll take over now. We’ll give you a call if we need you’. And then they bring some of these people back in. People management is key.”*

*“The Wye Sep Recovery Group did a fantastic job and I’m not sure their contribution was appropriately acknowledged when we transferred to the CRC. I think it’s important that the agencies go out of their way to acknowledge the previous group down the track.”*

*“[There needs to be] greater acknowledgement of enormous amount of unrecognised volunteer work done across the community by community members – this was disregarded and treated with arrogance at times. Community effort at least equalled those who were paid for their efforts.”*

**It is important to clarify the key elements of community recovery groups in the community-centred governance model.**

#### Who represents the community?

It is important to ensure that a community recovery group is representative of the community as a whole. Community-centred recovery must therefore first start with a clear understanding of who the community is and its diversity. This understanding needs to be shared amongst community members, and also between the community and agencies.

Some Wye River and Separation Creek community members were continually frustrated by the distinction between ‘permanent residents’ and ‘holiday home owners’ as they felt this overlooked the importance of place to them. Many people with ‘holiday homes’ had owned those properties for over 20 years, had been active members of local community groups and had significant memories attached to the area.

Nonetheless, there were ways in which the experiences of the recovery differed between those with primary and secondary residences in Wye River and Separation Creek, and between those who lost homes in the fire and those who did not.

*“Those of us who have lived [in Wye River] have gone on this journey – the journey of our township. We were here. We were able to watch the loss of our trees and the bare landscape. But we’ve also been able to experience the regeneration of our landscape. People that weren’t here dread it — they dread what they’re going to see when they come down. You think, how can they feel that way? They get to go home and sleep in their own beds. It’s a different sense of loss and no less valid for that reason.”*

*“As our house was a second home to us, it’s been very hard to stay connected to the Wye community as we have no base to come down to and return day trips from Melbourne are very long. For those of us in this situation, the recovery effort has provided little.”*

*“In a sense, Wye is two towns now – people who’ve lost their homes and people who haven’t. How do you get the people who did lose homes to not feel resentful to those who didn’t? And how do you bring those who didn’t lose homes into the recovery effort?”*

The recent community survey highlighted the different community experiences of the recovery. Those who had lost homes in the fire responded less positively to the statements ‘Community interests were considered in decision-making’ and ‘Government managed the recovery well’ than those who had not lost homes (See Appendix C).

Although it may be difficult to satisfy all groups in a community with any given decision, the experiences in Wye River and Separation Creek highlight the importance of ensuring a community recovery group is broadly representative of the diversity of experiences within disaster-affected communities.

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#### How will the community recovery group be appointed?

It may be important to empower the community to define itself and its leaders rather than imposing an outside understanding. That the CRC representatives were chosen by agencies and not the community was perceived negatively from the outset, contributing to a ‘trust deficit’ within the wider community.

Enabling community members to vote on their own representatives would contribute to greater buy-in and accountability from both the representatives and those who voted them into the role. However, this can create divisions within communities as well.

*“The local resilience committee needs to be reflective of [the] local community. Let [the community] work that out.”*

There are several potential models for creating a community recovery group, including:

- a new group that is a collection of individuals, such as the CRC, assembled through volunteer application or nomination
- a new group that is a council of existing groups (or representatives from existing groups)
- an existing group, such as the Progress Association (understanding the benefits and drawbacks outlined in Sections 6.2 above).

Leadership within the community recovery group is also a relevant consideration. For example, the CRC felt that having a community member as chair rather than co-chair of the CRC is important.

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#### What is the purpose of the community recovery group?

It is important to define the purpose of a community recovery group in the wider community-centred recovery model. Community recovery groups can play a number of different roles during recovery – key amongst these are advocacy of community interests, information sharing and community engagement, and driving community involvement in recovery activities.

In order to maximise the potential of a community-centred recovery model, it is important to explore what role the community recovery group will play. For example, the CRC felt that it should have played a role in the decision-making for recovery but felt removed from this process due to its exclusion from the Leadership Group.

In some cases, it may be appropriate or effective for elements of the recovery to be handled by other parties. In this regard, a number of approaches have proven to be successful. For example:

- **Advocacy role:** NSW and Queensland have a model where an individual government staff member is appointed by the government to act as a representative and advocate for the community<sup>59,60</sup>. This individual (Recovery Coordinator in NSW, State Recovery Policy and Planning Coordinator in Queensland) provides a link between the community and government, addressing issues at a strategic level.
- **Information sharing and engagement role:** Effective, sustainable engagement of the community in recovery may be best facilitated through external non-community facilitators. Experience with bushfires in other Victorian communities indicates that external, expert facilitators may be best placed to navigate difficult discussions with the community<sup>61</sup>. Having community members lead these discussions enables involvement but can contribute to burn out for these individuals.

In addition, the role of the community recovery group may change as the needs of the community transition through the phases of recovery, from its early stages to ongoing community development.

Since the aim of recovery is to build resilient communities, it will be important to ensure a community recovery group can be self-sustaining in the long-term. This may require a formal transition from being

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<sup>59</sup> *New South Wales State Emergency Management Plan*, NSW Government, 2012.

<sup>60</sup> *Queensland State Disaster Management Plan*, Queensland Government, 2016.

<sup>61</sup> IGEM, *Review of community recovery following the 2013–14 Victorian bushfires*, State of Victoria, 2016.

supported by government to become a stand-alone community organisation in the long-term that has full control over its direction, longevity, and finances.

The nature of this end state and any transition arrangements should be mapped from the outset. However, the actual timing of the transition should be determined by reaching specific milestones rather than fixed dates, given the progress of each recovery will vary on a case-by-case basis.

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How will the community recovery group be supported in carrying out its role?

A community recovery group will only be as successful in performing its role and meeting the needs of the community as it is in accurately understanding and representing those needs. To enable this, agencies and the community can agree to mechanisms for community engagement, and agencies can ensure the community recovery group is equipped with the necessary tools for engaging broadly with the community (e.g. surveys).

*“There needs to be a handbook for these [community] representatives... outlining ‘these are the things that are going to happen to you. How do you just represent without saying yes or no?’”*

On the other hand, there is also a need to strike the right balance between community independence and agency support. Having agencies participate in the Work Groups was considered necessary for ensuring community ideas would be able to be practically delivered, particularly given the agencies would be delivering many of the project streams.

Similarly, support from council may be important. For example, a community recovery group could be supported by council (e.g. receive administrative support) without being a committee of council (e.g. be separated from council governance). This would give both the community recovery group and council greater flexibility and independence.

*“The intention is to build resilience here... What is the right level of government intervention in recovery? Where do you push hard and where do you go hands off?”*

**A new community-led recovery model needs flexibility to be tailored to the particular characteristics of a community and the requirements of the recovery event.**

The demographics of communities and the impacts of incidents will vary and require different levels of support. Further, optimal levels of community governance may change through the recovery process as the community moves from dependence during the initial response, to independence in early recovery, to interdependence once resilience is restored. A new model must balance this clarity and flexibility.

*“I’m not sure there’s one model. It’s about understanding the community.”*



## 7 Key finding #3: The commitment of government leaders, departments and agencies to the recovery is appreciated but may not be sustainable, requiring a rethink on respective roles and transition arrangements

The new arrangements that were applied to this recovery resulted in significant investment by government leaders, departments and agencies raising concerns about the sustainability of the model. Increased involvement of local governments can alleviate pressure on the state, allowing the state to manage multiple incidents if needed. Concurrently, limitations on local government capacity require that appropriate support measures are put in place to enable effective knowledge and resource transfer.

## 7.1 The commitment of government leaders, departments and agencies to the recovery was highly valued

**The Wye River and Separation Creek community was grateful for the support of government.**

The recovery involved substantial commitment by leaders, departments and agencies at the state and local government level. The community acknowledged and greatly appreciated this investment.

*“I was amazed at... the state government, the way they stepped in and provided the necessary money... we got to know [the senior leaders] and they got to know us. The trouble, the expertise, and the wise decision-making they made on our behalf.”*

In particular, there was notable investment by senior leaders in the recovery. Community members noted the commitment displayed by Minister Neville, the Commissioner, the CEO of COS, the Mayor and other senior state and council staff members as core to their recovery experience. This senior commitment signalled to the community that their experiences and recovery was important and helped them feel valued.

*“Weekly meetings with the Minister’s office made such a difference to the community. They felt like their voices were being heard and that their representatives were being taken seriously.”*

*“Having [close contact with senior staff at EMV] was incredibly reassuring to me and others in the community. If you have issues and can’t get through, it just increases your stress levels.”*

*“COS was fantastic and very sympathetic, such as setting up call centres on Christmas Day and bringing people back from leave. The CEO had only been in place a few months.”*

*“The Mayor was very involved and that gave him a lot of credit with the community.”*

The high level of commitment of senior leaders was driven by a number of factors.

- **Personal interest:** Leaders were personally committed to the smooth recovery of the Wye River and Separation Creek community.
- **Learning experience:** This recovery was the first opportunity for EMV to lead state-level recovery, and therefore was an opportunity to learn.
- **The new governance model:** The collaborative decision-making required of the Leadership Group (i.e. the senior leaders of EMV, DELWP and COS) necessitated greater senior involvement than the conventional model (see Section 3.2.2). Working with the CRC also required much more of senior leaders.
- **The ambition to fast-track decision-making:** Responding quickly to issues, and fast-tracking decisions, depended on highly-engaged senior leaders to take calls and make executive orders.

## 7.2 This level of investment may not be sustainable, as brought into sharp relief by the challenges of managing transition

**The Wye River and Separation Creek recovery was significant in terms of agency commitment.**

The new recovery model’s commitment to community engagement and collaboration required extensive agency investment. For example, to date there have been an estimated 17 organisations involved and over 80 community meetings. Financial costs associated with the recovery include:

- clean-up and associated works (e.g. Grocon clean-up contract, public land repair projects, drainage works)

- rebuilding support, including investigations (e.g. establishment of One Stop Shop, water and bushfire studies, APZ investigation)
- grants and supporting funding to tourism
- costs of hiring new staff and staff time in engagement across multiple agencies.

While some of these costs will be common to all recoveries (e.g. staffing costs), others may be attributable to this recovery event (e.g. One Stop Shop or BAL and APZ investigations).

*“The state has been remarkable and the community is so lucky for that level of investment.”*

*“Our organisation is exhausted. If there had been another fire this summer, I don’t know if we could’ve made it through.”*

*“The level of investment in this recovery — I’m not sure how [EMV] can sustain it in future — EMV looks like a huge organisation but they’re not.”*

*“What is the legacy, what are the expectations we’re creating, and how will we sustain this in future?”*

Despite the high investment in the recovery phase, the community response to survey questions on the effectiveness and responsiveness of government’s management of the recovery phase was mixed, as indicated in Figure 12.

Figure 12: Community responses regarding overall recovery management<sup>62</sup>



### Timing contributed to the high investment associated with this recovery.

The significant investment in this recovery occurred in the context of no other bushfires requiring state level coordination over the period from December 2015 to April 2017. Had other major fires or incidents required state-level coordination during this period, there would have been substantially less resources available for the Wye River and Separation Creek recovery.

This lack of other competing incidents was acknowledged by both community members and agency staff. Specifically, community members were highly aware that there would be a temporary window in which the focus would be on their recovery and so they wanted to maximise investment during this period. It is acknowledged that a much larger event, or a number of events, would have put enormous pressure on the recovery model developed for Wye River and Separation Creek.

*“There had never been a moment where EMV had exited stage right... In the early days, that was expected — that EMV would move on and deal with the next emergency.”*

<sup>62</sup> Data from community survey conducted by Nous Group, March-April 2017.

### **The challenges of managing transition now bring the sustainability of the model into question.**

New structures such as Wye Sep Connect and the CRC were created for the recovery, and continue to have a role as the community moves into the next phase of long-term recovery. As the role of agencies in coordinating the recovery transitions from state to local government, so do these structures for their ongoing support, as described in Section 3.2.4.

*“The knowledge transfer needs to happen in a way that it isn’t lost. It also has to be respectful.”*

*“There needs to be an awareness that as you transition... there will be some legacy stuff and you need to know what the supports may be.”*

Further, community members have become reliant on senior leaders for addressing a wide range of concerns. Agencies acknowledge they’ll need to manage community member expectations on the level of service they will receive, and provide them with clear guidance on how to escalate any problem they may have to the appropriate individual or authority.

*“There have been a lot of senior people dealing with minor issues. There’s been no hierarchy of issues.”*

## **7.3 Increased support and involvement of local government will help to increase the sustainability of recovery efforts**

### **Local governments have a closer connection to the community that can be leveraged in community-based recovery.**

Local governments have a longer-standing relationship with local communities than state government, and therefore generally have a better understanding of the needs of those communities. Therefore, local governments are well-placed to provide a leadership role throughout recovery. Further, local governments may inherit the new structures created in recovery (e.g. community website or recovery groups), requiring consideration of transition arrangements and longer-term capacity from the start. Increased local government engagement and empowerment in state-led recoveries from their outset will assist in smoother transition towards business as usual for the state, local government and the community.

*“Council knows the key players [in the community]. It has a relationship with the community prior to the fire.”*

*“The state has the resources, but [should] use the local government networks and support local government to use them.”*

### **Resources and capacity constrain local government in managing the recovery effort and its resulting structures.**

Local governments across the state vary widely in size, capacity, resourcing and, as a result, their ability to manage recovery from incidents. Managing a recovery may require more staff, specific expertise and extra funding, which means that many local governments may be highly constrained at the start of recovery, or may become constrained later in recovery.

*“There was real fear in the early days that EMV was just going to walk away and hand [COS] this recovery.”*

*“Council did and still do a terrific job. [This is] a rebuttal to notion that they didn’t have the resources. They worked hard.”*

**A model that features increased local government coordination of recovery, with appropriate support from the state, may best increase sustainability of recovery.**

It is important for the state to support local governments to develop expertise, to allow for effective long-term recovery management and eventual transition to business as usual. Given EMV's statutory responsibility for coordinating state-level recovery, it is necessary to develop a model that blends this responsibility for coordination with devolved implementation. This blended model reflects the shared responsibility of state and local agencies in recovery and the unique contribution that each can make.

*“These types of things require state and local partnerships. I would never advocate for the state to not be involved.”*

*“[The state] is where the money, the grunt, and the experience comes from.”*

A system stewardship approach can provide guidance on developing such a model. Systems stewardship describes the recent shift in our understanding of the role of central government in policy making, taking into consideration the appropriate levels of devolution and oversight by central government<sup>63</sup>. The principles of this model can be applied to EMV's centralised management of the recovery system to guide how best to devolve responsibility to local governments.

System stewardship considers four criteria that can be used for judging the level of devolution most appropriate for a given recovery activity.

These include:

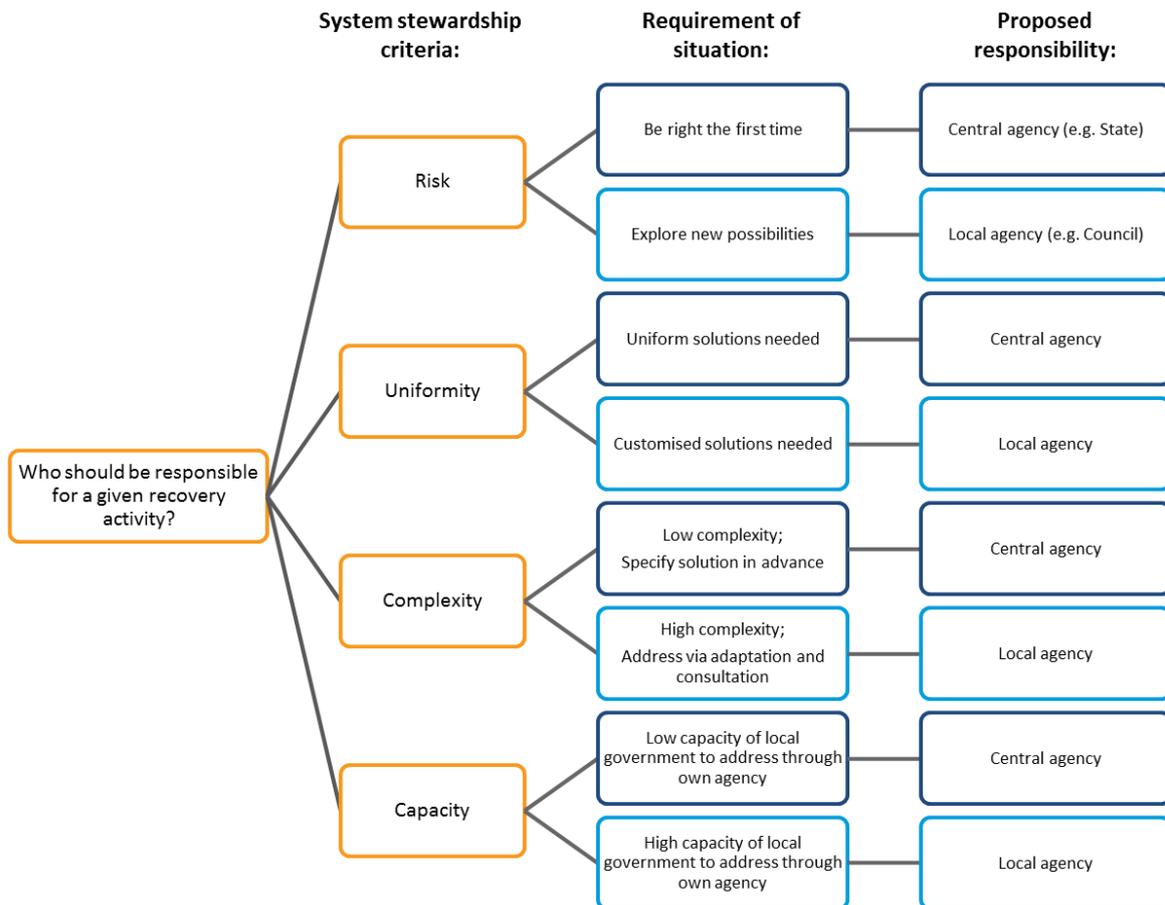
- **Risk:** Does the government action need to be ‘right the first time’? Is the priority to achieve a specific goal as efficiently as possible, or to explore new possibilities?
- **Uniformity:** What is the appetite for variety and divergence in service provision?
- **Complexity:** Is the issue so complex that it is better for the system of actors to address it through adaptation, rather than specifying a solution in advance? Even if a central agency wanted to, how likely is it that central direction will be able to control the actors responsible for realising the solution?
- **Capacity:** What is the capacity of the actors in the system to address the policy issue through their own agency? Is a central agency able to intervene to build such capacity? To what extent is guidance or direction being requested?<sup>64</sup>

These criteria form part of a framework that can be used to decide which recovery issues and activities are most appropriately managed centrally, i.e. by EMV, and which are best managed locally (Figure 13).

<sup>63</sup> M Hallsworth, 2011, *System Stewardship: The future of policy making? Working paper*, Institute for Government, UK.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

Figure 13: Decision tree for when to devolve responsibility based on system stewardship criteria



As this framework suggests, local government, with its closer connection to community, is better placed to manage complex issues that require exploration of new possibilities and customised solutions with the community. However, capacity constraints of local governments can limit their effectiveness here.

The emergency management sector recognises this need to build capacity in local governments, and is working towards solutions through the Municipal Emergency Management Enhancement Group (MEMEG)<sup>65</sup> and the Councils and Emergencies Project. These aim to enhance the emergency management capability and capacity of Victoria's 79 councils. The project is taking a three phased approach, starting by defining the responsibilities of councils, assessing each council's capability and capacity to meet these responsibilities, before developing strategies to address gaps to improve councils' performance in managing local recovery efforts.

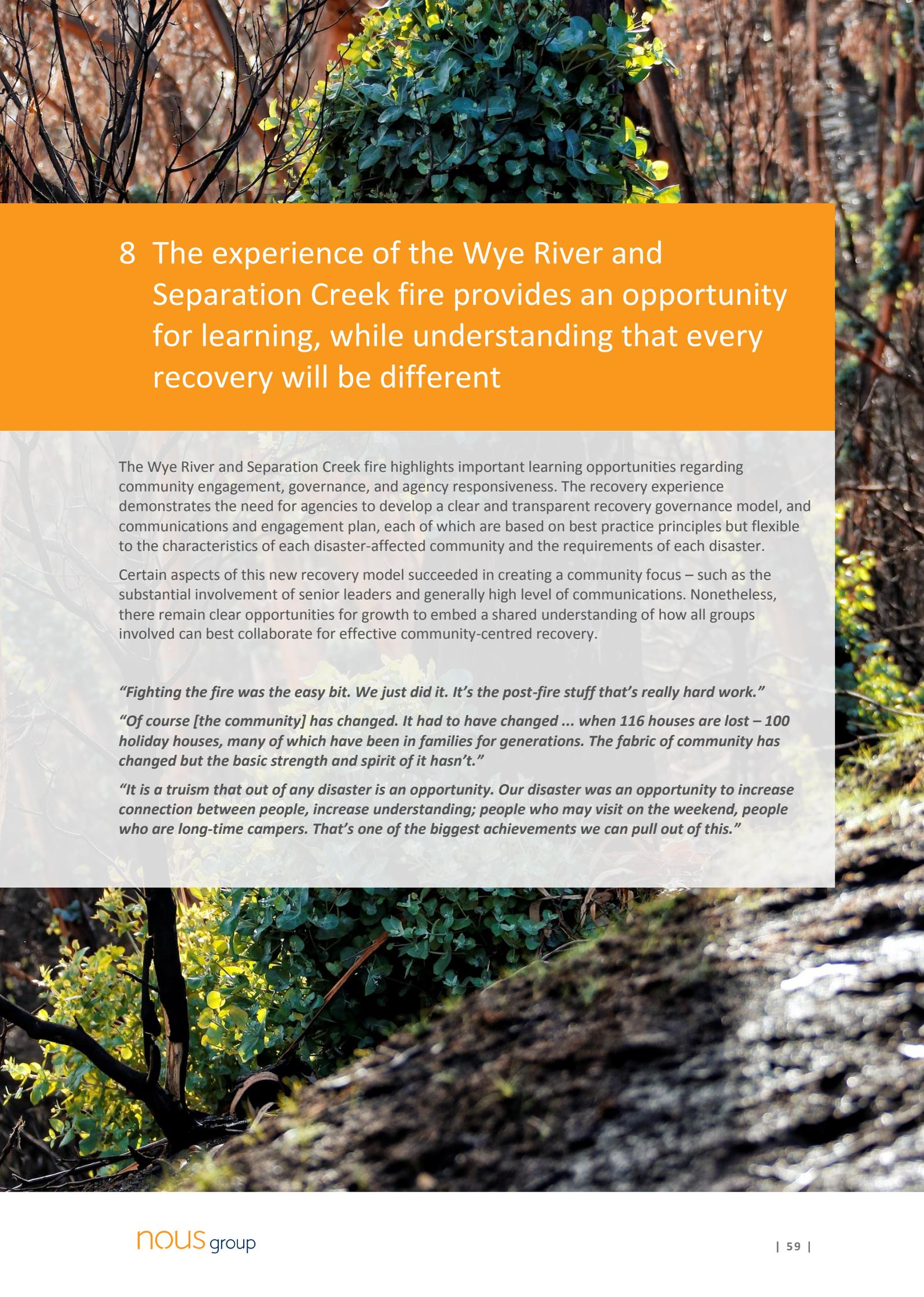
In addition, there needs to be attention to building capacity in the course of a recovery event. Initiating state-local government collaboration from the outset would assist in a dual knowledge transfer of:

- expertise in recovery management (from state agencies to local government)
- the history and needs of the impacted community (from local government to state agencies).

<sup>65</sup> MEMEG is a state-level committee for local government and other emergency management agencies that supports, advises, and advocates for local government emergency management practitioners and builds capability.

Overall, it will be necessary to clearly delineate the roles in recovery for EMV, other state agencies, and local government, and how each will be supported. For example, the role of the state could be to lead make-safe efforts – the extent of which may differ according to the scale of the event and the specific characteristics of the community (e.g. land stabilisation works may be required as part of the make-safe arrangements where there are steep slopes). After this, the state could handover and support local government to coordinate recovery.

It will be important to clarify funding arrangements in an updated state-local government collaborative model. While COS highly valued the funding support the state provided, the arrangements were a challenge for all involved. Increased transparency and clarity around the funding available from the start would enable all involved to make decisions regarding potential trade-offs.



## 8 The experience of the Wye River and Separation Creek fire provides an opportunity for learning, while understanding that every recovery will be different

The Wye River and Separation Creek fire highlights important learning opportunities regarding community engagement, governance, and agency responsiveness. The recovery experience demonstrates the need for agencies to develop a clear and transparent recovery governance model, and communications and engagement plan, each of which are based on best practice principles but flexible to the characteristics of each disaster-affected community and the requirements of each disaster.

Certain aspects of this new recovery model succeeded in creating a community focus – such as the substantial involvement of senior leaders and generally high level of communications. Nonetheless, there remain clear opportunities for growth to embed a shared understanding of how all groups involved can best collaborate for effective community-centred recovery.

*“Fighting the fire was the easy bit. We just did it. It’s the post-fire stuff that’s really hard work.”*

*“Of course [the community] has changed. It had to have changed ... when 116 houses are lost – 100 holiday houses, many of which have been in families for generations. The fabric of community has changed but the basic strength and spirit of it hasn’t.”*

*“It is a truism that out of any disaster is an opportunity. Our disaster was an opportunity to increase connection between people, increase understanding; people who may visit on the weekend, people who are long-time campers. That’s one of the biggest achievements we can pull out of this.”*

## Appendix A Interview breakdown

This review was based on interviews with community members, agency staff and private industry. The following demonstrates the break-down of interviewees by broad category.

### Community members and local business owners: 14 total

- Residency breakdown:
  - 7 full-time residents in Wye River and Separation Creek or nearby communities
  - 7 part-time residents in Wye River and Separation Creek
- Fire loss breakdown:
  - 4 interviewees lost homes in the fire
  - 1 interviewee's home was severely damaged by the fire
  - 9 interviewees either had homes that were unaffected by the fire or they did not disclose.

### Agency interviewees:

- EMV: 5
- DELWP: 5
- COS: 5
- DHHS: 2
- EPA: 2
- VicRoads: 1.

### Organisations and industry:

- Lorne Community Hospital: 1
- Grocon: 3.

## Appendix B CRC Terms of Reference

The specific functions of the CRC are to:

- inform the development of Resettlement Project Plans that identify all actions necessary to ensure recovery is undertaken in a systematic, effective and timely manner
- provide comment on the implementation of the Resettlement Project Plans
- receive regular reports on the progress and on-going developments arising through the resettlement process
- ensure actions are flexible and responsive to emerging community needs, trends and relevant issues
- highlight areas of need for any additional resources or actions to assist with recovery across all areas
- inform the community of progress on recovery and major initiatives and achievements.

In addition to the functions outlined above, Community members of the Committee will play an important role in:

- providing an additional mechanism for communicating and receiving information between the Community Recovery Committee and fire affected communities
- informing communities and stakeholders about the progress of Recovery Action Plans, and gain feedback through members' networks, contacts and associated organisations
- bringing diverse community opinions and concerns from fire affected communities to the attention of the Community Resilience Committee in a structured and constructive manner
- providing valuable knowledge on local issues and initiatives and generating creative ideas and solutions to assist community recovery
- identifying mechanisms to assist the Community Resilience Committee with the implementation of Recovery Action Plans.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Colac Otway Shire, *Community Resilience Committee- Terms of Reference*, 2016.

## Appendix C Community survey analysis

Reponses to community survey questions were analysed to explore potential differences in community members' recovery experiences based on how the fire impacted their property. Due to sample size considerations, responses were analysed according to the following two groups: property lost in the fire and property not lost in the fire. The latter group included those with property damaged but not lost.

The Likert-type scale used in the survey was converted to numerical responses, as represented below:

- Very dissatisfied = 1
- Dissatisfied = 2
- Neutral = 3
- Satisfied = 4
- Very satisfied = 5

This ordinal data was analysed using Wilcoxon rank sum tests. All tests were run in R (version 3.1). All test results are reported with statistically significant (at  $P < 0.05$ ) results indicated with an asterisk.

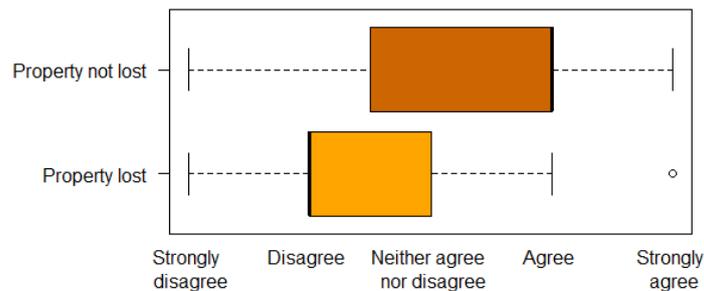
The graphs that follow each summary are boxplots that show the distribution of the responses for each survey question by the groups analysed. The coloured box delineates the middle 50% of responses (e.g. between the first quartile and third quartile) and the heavy vertical line inside the box indicates the median score. The 'whiskers' extending on either side of the box represent the higher and lower scores outside of the middle 50%, and open circles beyond the whiskers indicate outlying responses.

### Community interests were considered in decision-making.

Community members who had lost property responded less positively to the statement, 'Community interests were considered in decision-making' (Wilcox rank sum test results:  $W=133$ ;  $P=0.032^*$ ).

	Number of responses	Average response	Variation in response (Standard deviation)
Property not lost	15	3.3	1.4
Property lost	29	2.4	1.1

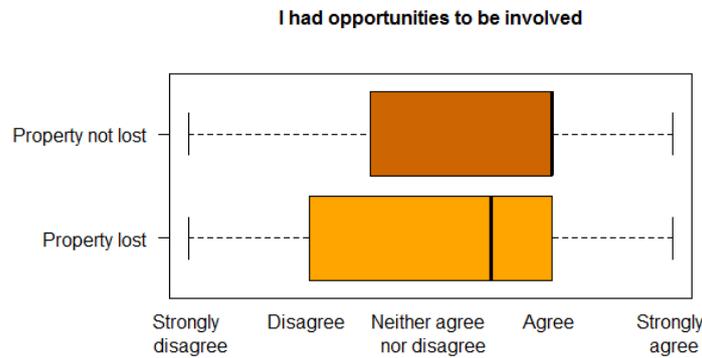
Community interests were considered in decision making



**I had opportunities to be involved.**

There was no statistically-significant difference in responses to the statement, ‘I had opportunities to be involved’, between community members who had lost property and those who hadn’t (Wilcoxon rank sum test results:  $W=171$ ;  $P=0.298$ ).

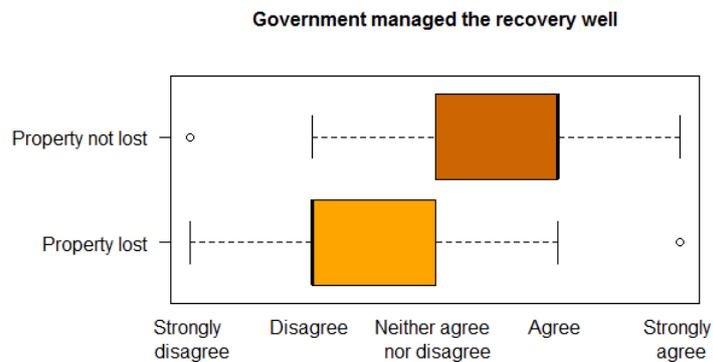
	Number of responses	Average response	Variation in response (Standard deviation)
Property not lost	15	3.4	1.5
Property lost	28	3.1	1.2



**Government managed the recovery well.**

Community members who had lost property responded less positively to the statement, ‘Government managed the recovery well’ (Wilcoxon rank sum test results:  $W=115.5$ ;  $P=0.020^*$ ).

	Number of responses	Average response	Variation in response (Standard deviation)
Property not lost	14	3.4	1.3
Property lost	29	2.4	1.2



nOUS group