



SHIRE OF
HARVEY



Local Emergency Management Committee

Attachments

Monday 14 March 2022
Electronic Meeting
2pm

Local Emergency management Committee Meeting Attachments

- 3. Confirmation of Minutes - 13 December 2021**

- 5. Business in accordance with the requirements of the *Emergency Management Act 2005***
 - 5.6 Review Business Plan Strategies and Record Achievements Page 3

- 6. General Business**
 - 6.2 DFES District Emergency Management Advisory Mr Vik Cheema Page 10



SHIRE OF
HARVEY

A Breath of Fresh Air

Local Emergency Management Committee **Minutes**

Harvey Shire Council Chamber
Monday, 13 December 2021
2.00pm

Shire of Harvey

Local Emergency Management Committee Meeting

Minutes of the meeting of the Local Emergency Management Committee held on Monday 13 December 2021, at Harvey Shire, commencing at 2.05pm.

1. Official Opening

The Acting Presiding Member, Cr. Campbell opened the meeting at 2.05pm.

2. Record of Attendance/Apology

Committee Membership - Voting

Deputy Shire President/ Acting Presiding Officer	Cr.	M.	Campbell
Chief Bush Fire Control Officer	Mr.	M.	Papalia
Community Emergency Services Manager	Mr.	J.	Maddern
Harvey Police	Sgt.	S.	Gillis
Australind SES – Nominee (or delegate)	Mr.	M.	Redmond
VFRS – Brunswick	Mr.	C.	Keys
VFRS – Eaton/Australind	Mr.	D.	Townsend
Harvey St John Ambulance	Mr.	P.	Beech
Department of Communities	Ms.	M.	Duxbury

Committee Membership – Non-Voting

Chief Executive Officer – Shire of Harvey	Ms.	A.	Riordan
Director Community and Lifestyle	Mrs.	A.	Pitts
Manager Waste & Safety Services/Local Recovery	Mr.	H.	Jones
Coordinator – Shire of Harvey			
DFES	Mr.	J.	Carter
Hocart Lodge	Ms.	C.	Lodder
Southern Seawater Alliance	Mr.	R.	Luscombe
Water Corporation	Mr.	J.	Wade

Observer

Acting Community Emergency Services Manager	Mr.	R.	Bulluss
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Apologies

Cr. Paul Gillett, Shire President/Presiding Officer
 Sgt. Wayne Byram, Yarloop Police Station
 Ms. Kirstie Davis, Director Community and Lifestyle
 Mr. Rick Lotznicker, Director Infrastructure Services
 Mr. Andrew Grono, Education Department
 Mr. David Marshall, Harvey Recreation and Cultural Centre
 Mr. Richard Duke, Leschenault Leisure Centre

Mr. Mike Donaghy, Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development
Mr. Vik Cheema, DFES District Emergency Management Advisor
Mr. Scott Britza, VFRS Harvey
Mr. Kirk McDonald, Dampier to Bunbury Gas Pipeline
Sgt. Luke Fowler, Australind Police Station
Mr. Brett Finlay, DFES
Mr. Stephen Cook, Harvey Water
Mr. Richard Yates, Harvey Water
Mr. Chris Bouteloup, Tronox
Mr. Matthew Cooper, DBCA

3. Confirmation of Previous Minutes 13 September 2021

The Minutes of the Local Emergency Management Committee Meeting (LEMC) held on Monday 13 September 2021, are attached hereto.

Recommendation

That the Minutes of the Local Emergency Management Committee meeting held on Monday 13 September 2021 as attached, be confirmed.

Moved: M. Papalia

Seconded: M. Campbell

That the Minutes of the meeting held on Monday 13 September 2021, as attached, be confirmed as a true and correct record.

LEMC 21/04 CARRIED 9/9

4. Presentations/Deputations

Nil.

5. Business in accordance with the requirements of the *Emergency Management Act, 2005* (Every Meeting).

5.1 Confirmation of Local Emergency Contract Details

Attached to the minutes is the current list of Emergency Contact Details. Please advise Mr. Maddern of any updates required (*Refer to Confidential Attachment No. 5.1*).

5.2 Review any Post - Incident Reports and/or Post-Exercise Reports

Nil.

5.3 Funding Nominations and Applications Progress

Mr. Jones advised that there will be Emergency Management funding available in the near future.

5.4 Emergency Risk Management (ERM)/Treatment Strategies Progress

Mr. Jones advised that Bush Fire Risk Management for mitigation had been approved throughout the year and mitigation works are currently being carried out within the Shire reserves.

5.5 Review of Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA)

The Shire of Harvey Local Emergency Management Arrangements are due to be reviewed in 2022 which is to include a local welfare and animal welfare plans.

5.6 Review Business Plan Strategies and Record Key Achievements

5.7 Second Quarter Meeting

5.7.1 Local Government Exercise Schedule

Mr. Maddern proposed to carry out an exercise at the March 2022 meeting, trialling the Shire of Harvey's Emergency Arrangements. He proposed that a previous exercise that was carried out on Treasure Road, Wellesley be repeated.

Mr. Bulluss to work with Mr. John Carter and Mr. Michael Papalia in relation to the above.

5.7.2 Seasonal review – post storm season and early fire season preparedness

In Mr. Finlay's absence, Mr. John Carter updated the Committee on the post storm and fire season.

6. General Business

6.1 DFES Report

In Mr. Finlay's absence, Mr. John Carter, DFES, reported that all DFES employees were to have received their first Covid-19 injection by 1 December 2021 and volunteers will be required to have had their first vaccination by 31 December and fully vaccinated by 31 January 2022.

Mr. Jones advised that advice had been sent to all of the Volunteer Bushfire Brigade Captains and Secretaries advising of the above requirements.

6.2 DFES District Emergency Management Advisor – Mr. V. Cheema

Mr Vik Cheema has provided updated copies (*refer to Confidential Attachment No. 6.2.1*).

- i) South West Local Emergency Management Contact List, December 2021, Calendar 2022 and South West District Emergency Management Committee.

Mr. Cheema was an apology for the meeting.

Mr. Carter advised that DFES were in the process of arranging a “flood exercise” hoping to take place in April, 2022.

6.3 Department of Communities – Ms. M. Duxbury (refer to Confidential Attachment 6.3)

Ms. Duxbury reported that currently the Welfare Plan is being updated which will include the Shire of Harvey and surrounding local governments amalgamated into one document.

Department of Communities held an Evacuation Workshop 13 December 2021. Vaccination mandate of volunteers assisting at evacuation centres will need to be adhered to by the organisations/agencies supplying the volunteers. Mr. Haydn Jones, Mr. David Marshall, Mr. Richard Duke and Ms. Kirstie Davis were in attendance at the Workshop.

6.4 Harvey St John Ambulance – Mr. P. Beech

Mr. Beech reported on Care Flights that will be available from January, 2022. A Care Flights consists of helicopter availability to townsites/areas that do not have an airstrip.

Mr. Beech also advised that the Premier, Mark McGowan has announced at 2.00pm today that the Western Australian borders will open on 5 February 2021.

6.5 Harvey Police Station - Sgt. Scott Gillis

Sgt. Gillis expressed his appreciation to volunteers for their assistance at recent incidents, particularly the recent tragic double fatality on Clifton Road, Brunswick.

6.6 Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Mr. M. Papalia

Mr. Papalia reported on the recent fire located on Marine Drive, Leschenault; the fire was luckily contained due to favourable winds on the day. It was a reminder of the importance that verge/hazard management works are carried out.

Mr. Papalia extended his appreciation to Mr. David Townsend for his assistance in acquiring a new Honda pump.

6.7 DFES – Mr. J. Carter

Mr. Carter advised that the South West Response Zone commenced on 4 December 2021 and will conclude early March 2022. Mr. Carter stated that with the recent Boranup Fire that the formation of the ISG was quick and the development of the impact statement was ongoing with input from a number of agencies.

6.8 CESM – Mr. J. Maddern

Mr. Maddern reported that a number of Shire of Harvey Bushfire Brigade Volunteers had been deployed to the Boranup Fire in the Shire of Augusta - Margaret River over the past week.

Mr. Maddern has invited Mr. Adam Jasper (CESM from Shire of Augusta – Margaret River) to a future meeting of LEMC to discuss some updated practices instigated to assist in the fight of the recent Boranup Fire.

Ms. Riordan expressed interest in the live stream of community meetings held throughout the incident.

6.9 Mr. R. Luscombe – Southern Seawater Alliance

Mr. Luscombe advised of the following: -

- A bushfire mitigation assessment has been carried out at the Desalination Plant and the team has undertaken improvements as a result of the assessment.
- Production target is lower due to late season rain.
- Three new trainees have been employed.

6.10 CEO – Ms. A. Riordan – Collation and Registration of Covid-19 Vaccination Certificates

Ms. Riordan enquired as to how the volunteer vaccinations were rolling out and whether registration of the certificates would be controlled by DFES or the Shire of Harvey.

Mr. Maddern advised that he had received an e-mail from Ms. Michelle Wells, DFES, advising the Shire of Harvey to collate the certificates which can then be forwarded to DFES. He advised that all personal information is treated as confidential.

7. Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Local Emergency Management Committee is to be held on 14 March 2022, at the Harvey Council Chamber, Young Street, Harvey commencing at 2pm.

8. Closure of Meeting



There being no further business to discuss, the meeting was declared closed at 2.41 pm.

Local Emergency Management Committee Business Plan 2022-2023


Shire of Harvey

<p>SEMC VISION</p>	<p>A better prepared, more resilient and safer state</p>
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
SEMC Strategic Plan	LEMC Action	Status	Comment
Effective Governance			
<p>Contemporary and integrated EM framework with well-defined roles and responsibilities maintained by rigorous oversight.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Emergency Management Arrangements (LEMA) are established, maintained and reviewed in accordance with State Emergency Management (EM) Procedure 7. 	○	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) Chair and Executive Officer is appointed from local government in accordance with State EM Procedure 7. 	○	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC meetings business is administered in accordance with State EM Procedure 7. 	○	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC Executive Officer provides the Annual Report and Business Plan to the District Emergency Management Committee (DEMC) executive officer in accordance with State EM Procedure 7. 	○	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC contact details are validated quarterly and resource register are validated annually as a minimum. 	○	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) for EM district assistance is considered. 	○	

 <p>On Track</p>	 <p>Off track Minor Issue</p>	 <p>Significant Issues Action Required</p>	 <p>Not yet started</p>
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

SEMC Strategic Plan	LEMC Action	Status	Comment
Effective Governance			
Information about Hazards, risks and consequences is widely accessed, trusted and applied.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A local risk assessment is completed, with a risk register incorporated in the LEMA in accordance with State EM Procedure 8. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local risk treatments are identified and reported to the DEMC. 	<input type="radio"/>	
Strengthened engagement around Critical Infrastructure*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Critical infrastructure is captured in the LEMA where practical. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Potential local government strategies to maintain service continuity in the event of an emergency are included in Business Continuity Planning arrangements. 	<input type="radio"/>	
*key transport infrastructure and utilities required for community health, economic production and effective management of emergencies			

 On Track	 Off track Minor Issue	 Significant Issues Action Required	 Not yet started
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SEMC Strategic Plan	LEMC Action	Status	Comment
Resilient Community			
Strong Relationships enable informed decision-making and local leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC membership is contemporary and reflects the demographics of the community, including diversity in the social, environmental, economic and vulnerable elements in the community in accordance with State EM Procedure 7. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC corresponds with DEMC on emerging and current issues in emergency management. 	<input type="radio"/>	
Collaborative and coordinated arrangements support locally led recovery and adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A local recovery plan is established, maintained and exercised in accordance with State EM Procedure 8. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Local Recovery Coordinator is identified, trained and where possible experienced in accordance with State EM Procedure 8. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A recovery resource MOU is considered between local governments within an EM district. 	<input type="radio"/>	
Reduce vulnerability and build resilience to cope with and adapt to consequences of hazards.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate emergency management funding opportunities to improve resilience in communities. 	<input type="radio"/>	
Understand risk and have plans to maintain service delivery to the community.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New and emerging risks are established at LEMC meetings and incorporated in LEMA where possible. 	<input type="radio"/>	





 On Track	 Off track Minor Issue	 Significant Issues Action Required	 Not yet started
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SEMC Strategic Plan	LEMC Action	Status	Comment
Capable Sector			
Capability to respond to our risks and vulnerabilities across the state is strengthened.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC members participate in district or state level multi-agency exercises where possible. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capability data is reported annually for the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) state emergency management capability survey. 	<input type="radio"/>	
Public communications systems and technologies are optimised for risk and context.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local communication strategies are incorporated in the LEMA where appropriate. 	<input type="radio"/>	
The EM sector exercises and learns in order to continually improve	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The LEMC exercises annually in accordance with State EM Policy 4.8.3 and the Western Australia Managing Exercises Guideline. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Exercise schedules to be submitted to the DEMC prior to the start of the financial year in accordance with State EM Policy 4.10. 	<input type="radio"/>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a post-exercise report following all exercises in consultation with participants and submit to the DEMC as soon as practicable after the exercise. 	<input type="radio"/>	
Knowledge and networks are built through regular sector-wide training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LEMC members attend regular emergency management training and professional development opportunities where possible. 	<input type="radio"/>	

 On Track	 Off track Minor Issue	 Significant Issues Action Required	 Not yet started
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Local Emergency Management Committee Projects and Initiatives

Project Name	Host Agency	Project Description	Status	Comments
			○	
			○	

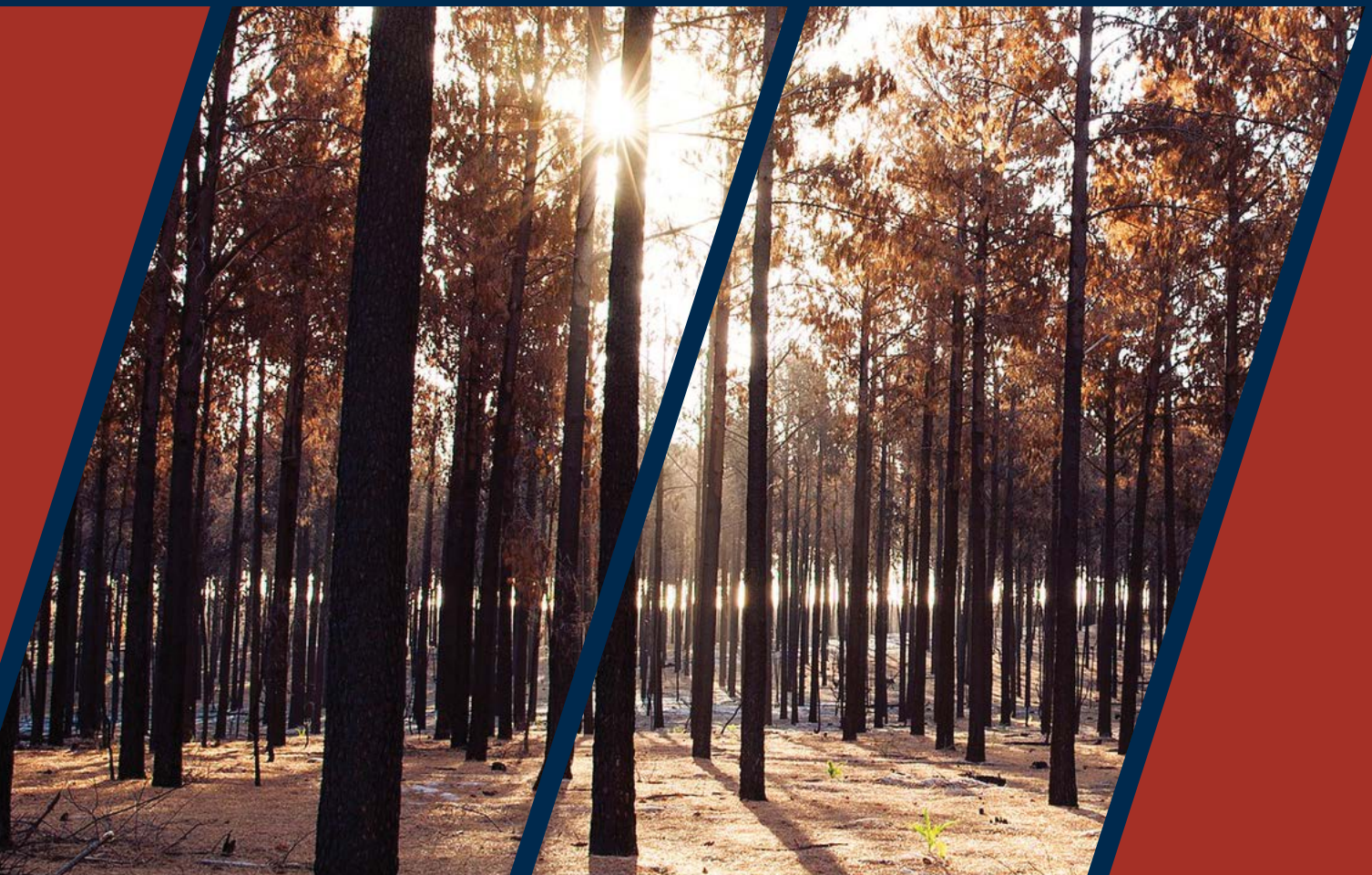
 On Track	 Off track Minor Issue	 Significant Issues Action Required	 Not yet started
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FOR A SAFER STATE

Long-Tail Recovery: a local government case study

Reflections and perspectives on long tail recovery from the
Shire of Harvey – following the 2016 Waroona Complex fire.





The smoke plume as seen from the Harvey oval. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

Contents

1. Executive summary	3
2. Background	7
3. Case study approach	9
4. Observations and reflections	10
5. Considerations for local governments	22
6. Appendix 1: Summary of Shire observations during recovery	31

Front cover: Sunlight through the fire-scarred pine plantation. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

1. Executive summary

The Waroona Complex Fire in January 2016 had a devastating impact on the town of Yarloop and surrounding areas in the south west of Western Australia. The Shire of Harvey was responsible for the recovery program for the Yarloop community and nearby impacted landowners.

The Fire resulted in the tragic loss of two lives and 181 residential properties and businesses across 69,000 hectares, and a comprehensive program of recovery activities over a two-year period. For some community members, recovery remains an ongoing process.

This case study has been prepared to highlight key observations and reflections by the Shire of Harvey with respect to the way it organised its own people, resources, governance, systems and processes to manage the recovery program. The case study aims to provide other local government authorities with insights into the complexities of recovery following a significant emergency incident and to encourage preparation and planning by those local governments for their own areas.



Significant sign of the fire. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

The most prominent themes that emerged include:

- **Recovery is a long term process** and local governments need to be well-prepared for the potential reallocation of staff and resources for long periods of time. Forward planning is needed for additional human resources and ensuring clarity of understanding about the recovery role for local government staff and Councillors.
- **Local knowledge from staff and community is invaluable for recovery efforts** and is critical in understanding the intricacies of how impacted communities communicate, are connected, might respond to the incident, and are likely to engage with the local government. Informal and formal community leaders emerge in times of crisis and are vital contributors to recovery efforts. A welcoming and supportive setting must be created to enable inclusion of this local knowledge.
- **Recovery efforts are high intensity in the first few weeks**, often involving a major disruption to business-as-usual (BAU) activities and placing significant demands on staff, Councillors and community members. Immediate appointment of a Local Recovery Coordinator (LRC) will assist in a coordinated recovery effort. Where appropriate, an independent LRC may be a valuable additional resource.
- **Council–Executive relationships must be positive and constructive** to ensure that the Council and local government administration are coordinated, have a united voice and can communicate clearly with the impacted community. Clarity of roles and responsibilities for Councillors and senior staff during recovery must form part of any forward planning.
- **Accept relevant external help and expertise**, particularly in the early days of recovery. Drawing on experience and assistance available from other local governments – through formal or informal arrangements – and offers of help from the community and businesses, can assist in the delivery of a comprehensive recovery program. The State Government’s ‘Cadre’ of experienced personnel can also assist impacted local governments through the short-term provision of additional skilled staff.
- **Timely and clear communication with the community and within the organisation is critical** given the confusion, stress and devastation that can be experienced by communities following a major event. Local governments must have a united voice with relevant, clear and targeted messages delivered through a wide range of communication channels including meetings, online and via the media. Regular briefings of staff and Councillors ensure all representatives from the local government are accurately informed of progress and can pass this information on to the community.
- **Activate the Local Recovery Coordination Group and establish Recovery subcommittees as soon as possible.** The Local Recovery Coordination Group (LRCG), commonly referred to as the Recovery Committee, should comprise of representatives from the local government, relevant state government agencies, local community and local businesses. Following the emergency management arrangements for the area, local governments should also set up Recovery subcommittees, comprising Council and community members as relevant, to focus on specific aspects of recovery.



Post-fire remains of the historic Yarloop Railway Workshops. Photo courtesy of the Shire of Harvey



Photo courtesy of Julie-Ann Ford

- **Set up a dedicated Recovery Centre as a one-stop shop**, which can provide information, emergency relief payments, support services and counselling in one, easily accessible location for impacted residents. Potential venues for use as a Recovery Centre should be identified in advance as part of the local government’s recovery planning and be appropriately equipped or able to be quickly adapted if needed.
- **Establish robust systems to manage expenditure, donations and grants.** The task of managing income and expenses associated with a major event and subsequent recovery program, can be extensive. Dedicated cost centres and Working Groups can help in tracking donations and grants, relief payments, and clean-up costs, including the determination of categories and eligibility for distribution of funds to impacted residents.

Information in this case study has been compiled from conversations, interviews and feedback from current and former Shire of Harvey staff and Councillors and others directly involved in support the Shire with its recovery efforts. The structure of the content aligns the participants’ insights with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery and provides a summarised overview of the key themes based on the core elements of the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework.



Sunlight through the fire-scarred pine plantation.
Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

2. Background

On 6 January 2016 the Waroona Complex bushfire (Fire) started, causing significant damage in the Shires of Harvey and Waroona and burned for almost three weeks. The Fire caused the death of two Yarloop residents and the destruction of 181 residential properties, significant impact to power and water infrastructure and businesses across a 69,000ha area. Most of the substantial fire damage occurred in Yarloop where much of the townsite was destroyed.

The town of Yarloop had little to no warning of the speed or ferocity with which fire was bearing down on the town. Many residents evacuated earlier when the Fire was uncontrolled in the forest areas some distance to the north east, however many remained in the Yarloop town and sought refuge in their homes or on the town oval as a place of last resort.

The emergency response was managed by the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) as a Level 3 incident. Once controlled and contained, management of the incident was transferred to the local government authority – the Shire of Harvey.

The Shire of Harvey (Shire) is located in the South West region of Western Australia, approximately 140km south of Perth. The Shire covers an area of 1,766km² and includes 17 towns and localities. Shire administration offices are located in the towns of Harvey and Australind. The main industries in the area include dairy and beef farming, horticulture, bauxite mining and refining and timber milling.

In 2016, the population of the Shire was estimated at 27,723. The town of Yarloop, located in the northern portion of the Shire, had an estimated population of 398 with 197 dwellings. To the north, is the adjoining local government area – the Shire of Waroona. Landowners within the Shire of Waroona were also impacted, including some residing in the Wagerup townsite along with farming properties from Waroona across to the coast at Lake Clifton and Preston Beach.

In recognition of the complex challenges in coordinating the recovery effort for the bushfire, the State Government, with Shire agreement, took responsibility for project management of the physical clean-up of fire-affected areas, amongst other tasks. However, the Shire had overall responsibility for managing recovery. For the two years that followed the incident, the Shire undertook the lead role in coordinating the recovery activities.

This case study refers to the way in which the Shire of Harvey organised its work and organisational structure and resources in order to coordinate and deliver the recovery program, primarily focussed on Yarloop.

Remaining chimneys became an iconic image of the fire. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones



3. Case study approach

Preparation of this case study utilised a combination of approaches to obtain insights into the Shire's activities and functions during the coordination of recovery efforts. These included in-person interviews with current and former Councillors, executive managers and senior staff members and a questionnaire completed by key staff involved in the on-ground recovery activities.

Participants who contributed to this case study were identified by the DFES State Recovery Team within State Recovery and included:

In-person interviews –

- Executive and senior Shire staff (current and former),
- Shire Councillors including those holding the positions of Shire President and Deputy Shire President at the time of the Fire,
- Recovery Coordinator and Recovery Communications Officer, and
- Clean Up Coordinator and Assistant.

Each of these interviews was conducted over a period of one to two hours to enable a detailed discussion about the Shire's management of its interim organisational structure and recovery response.

Questionnaire respondents –

- Shire staff members (current and former) directly involved in the recovery activities across community development, finance, building, waste and library services.

State Recovery, together with the author of this case study, are particularly appreciative of the time and thought given by each of the participants who provided insights for inclusion in this study. It is acknowledged that more than five years have passed since the Fire, but for some the work involved in the recovery program continued for several of those years. The incident took a personal toll on those directly and indirectly impacted, including individuals who committed

significant personal and professional time and energy to the community recovery.

Re-telling the story of the Fire, the aftermath and the hard work involved in recovery is sometimes exhausting. We are most appreciative of the insights and reflections provided by those who participated in the interviews and completed the questionnaire. Some former staff and Councillors invited to participate in this study understandably declined. We thank them for their consideration of being included.

No comments stated in this case study have been personally attributed to participants without their permission.



In the intense heat, aluminium parts of cars melted. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

4. Observations and reflections

Getting the recovery program underway

Following the catastrophic impact of the Fire on the town of Yarloop, and as its severity became more apparent, the Shire of Harvey's recovery efforts were initiated with immediate effect. The Shire President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) were key leaders and decision-makers in the arrangements put in place for the local recovery program and associated organisational structures. A positive relationship between the Shire President and CEO was critical to ensuring that there was a balance of the workload, regular communication and clear delineation of responsibilities.

“We are very different people, and did not agree on everything, but we worked well as a team. We are still friends five years later.”

The Shire President undertook most of the initial media interviews, chaired frequent community meetings and became the public face of the Shire's recovery activities. The CEO liaised with the State Recovery Coordination Group, Department of the Premier and Cabinet, DFES and the numerous government agencies involved in the initial incident response and subsequent recovery work.

At the same time, the CEO led the staff team and assigned responsibility to the executive managers to oversee the work needed from each of their respective portfolios within the Shire including emergency services, finance, infrastructure and works, community development, waste management and customer services.

“In those first weeks, there was no time to attend to business-as-usual – it was all about the emergency and recovery.”

Shire staff members were instrumental in recognising the immediate community needs and stepping up to carry an extremely heavy workload in the initial weeks of the recovery. There were

resourcing impacts across the whole organisation and for many staff, work days were very long with no day off for almost three weeks following the loss of Yarloop. For many staff, the focus on recovery work continued for almost two years.

“Smaller shires would struggle with the workload and resourcing.”

The team's knowledge and commitment to the local community was invaluable in establishing systems and compiling data that later supported the extended recovery program. Long-serving staff knew many people in the Yarloop area, as well as having a good understanding of local housing, buildings, roads, farms and physical infrastructure.

“We had a very stable staff, many of whom had worked for the Shire for a long time. They were adaptable, resilient and compassionate – we could not have asked for more from the team.”

In accordance with the Shire's Local Emergency Management Arrangements, the LRCG was initiated and Recovery subcommittees established quickly. Subcommittees were comprised of Shire Councillors, Shire staff and appropriately skilled and well connected community members across the four areas of Infrastructure, Finance, Environment and Community. Two additional Working Groups were set up to focus on donations and health and wellbeing.



Rebuilding Yarloop Hall. Photo courtesy of the Shire of Harvey

Outreach to the affected community begins

An existing resource-sharing agreement with other south west local governments proved to be particularly useful and provided the Shire with immediate access to additional personnel in the early days of recovery. The increased staffing capacity, combined with the Shire's community development officers and Rangers and the Red Cross team, allowed an outreach 'doorknock' to 206 individual properties over a two-day period. This exercise enabled a welfare check on residents, an initial assessment of immediate needs, and collation of basic information into a community database, which proved vital for building an accurate picture of impacted residents and properties.

“We were worried about involving people from outside our area – they didn't know our community. However, we could never have reached that many people or properties in such a short time frame and in the end their help was crucial.”

Clear and regular communication with the community about the progress of the recovery program was essential. The Shire recognised that multiple communication channels would be required and engaged a consultant to assist in the development of a Media and Communications Plan. A facilitated workshop involving

representatives from the Shire, other agencies and the Recovery subcommittees resulted in an agreed plan for how the community and stakeholders would be kept informed, by whom and how often.

An independent local government Recovery Coordinator and Communications Officer were appointed around three months into the recovery. This enabled objective coordination of recovery efforts including extensive engagement with impacted community members. The Recovery Coordinator was in place for three months to guide the volume of work associated with getting the recovery activities substantially underway, and not be distracted by the day to day operations of the Shire's usual business.

Applying the National Principles for Disaster Recovery

In the first few months that followed the Fire, significant changes were made to the way the Shire administration operated, the allocation of resources – human, financial and physical, and the focus of Shire staff and some Councillors.

The following description of how the Shire organised its resources to deliver the recovery program has been compiled from the interviews and questionnaire responses provided by participants, and aligned with the National Principles for Disaster Recovery.

Understand the context

The Shire recognised that impacted residents were from a range of backgrounds and lifestyles. Whilst a small and mostly close-knit town, the Yarloop community was sometimes divided. Its mixed history as a former timber milling town, home to railway workers and mine workers, and a retreat for those seeking privacy or solitude, meant that the community was not always cohesive.

The community's socio-economic composition also impacted on the perceived levels of trust in, and the way individuals engaged with, authorities. Some residents were very wary of allowing Shire or DFES representatives to access their properties to conduct Rapid Damage Assessments or assess potential risks such as asbestos or other contaminants, immediately following the Fire. This resulted in delayed assessments and fragmented programs of work for clean-up activities, which created lengthy and unanticipated delays in the overall clean-up of the townsite.

“Understanding the socio-political nature of the community was really important. We needed to find different ways to engage with the residents that enabled us to build trust over time.”

Identifying the formal and informal leaders and establishing clear ways to communicate with each part of the community was key. The local community association in nearby Cookernup, along with the Shire's community development team, played a central role in bringing the Yarloop community together for various meetings, gatherings and distribution of donations in the early stages of recovery.

Farmers in surrounding areas were also impacted by the fire, however these impacts were not as visible as the collective impact on the town of Yarloop. The local knowledge and contacts of the long-serving Shire staff were excellent resources that the Recovery team was able to draw upon to ensure these farmers were not overlooked and were included in the overall recovery program.

Given the small size of the Yarloop community and the closeness of many Shire staff to families and residents in the area, it was unsurprising that some staff members were directly and indirectly impacted by the Fire. The stress from seeing the loss of houses, buildings, farms and lives affected most Shire staff and Councillors in some way, including one staff member who lost his own home in the Fire, and others who had family and friends directly impacted. In most instances, Shire staff who dealt directly with the public were able to display compassion, resilience and strength in supporting the community. For a few staff members, the stress and pressure was keenly felt.

“Staff were closely monitored to make sure they were doing ok. It was inevitable that some were impacted and we needed to make sure their work responsibilities were not adding to their stress.”

“I reckon there should have been earlier and better support to help us cope with the stress and pressure from the whole event. The wellbeing sessions were helpful but we needed them sooner.”

“Having mature staff members dealing with the community meant they had life experience to draw from and were well placed to cope with the situation.”

The initial 'doorknock' provided useful data about impacted residents and their current situation. Collation of this information into a central database formed a critical tool for providing a holistic picture of the community, briefing support workers on the local context, managing emergency relief information and enabling ongoing contact with individuals.

“If only the Shire's rates database had all the latest landowner contact details, including mobile phone numbers.”

Recognise complexity

The recovery program was multi-faceted and evolved over time in response to community needs. Initially, the Shire felt overwhelmed by the scale and gravity of the incident, but the recovery structures implemented and way the Shire team worked together, enabled a more sophisticated response to the complexity of the recovery required.

“We were in shock and disbelief and taken by surprise, but our team really stepped up – their commitment to the community was all we could ask for.”

There were impacts on resources across the organisation with competing demands. The Shire developed a Transition Strategy to help maintain efforts on continuing provision of essential services to the wider community and determining which resources would be concentrated on the recovery program. This enabled staff to get on with the jobs they had to do in their areas of responsibility and expertise.

“There was no manual to go by. But we were not a rudderless ship.”

Evacuation centres were established for residents who needed a safe place to go. Firstly set up in Harvey, and then soon after relocated to Australind, this evacuation centre saw over 1,200 registrations, served thousands of meals and remained open for almost two weeks. Initially unprepared for the demands of so many people wanting access to power, WiFi, computers and even showers with hot water, the Shire invested funds in improving the back-up power supply and equipment at the evacuation centre, as well as improvements to the Cookernup Hall to make that facility more comfortable and versatile.

“Make sure you have identified your evacuation centres in advance. Prepare these facilities with the right power supply, extension cords and power boards, communications, computers and internet access, equipment and essential supplies.”

Evacuating residents from agricultural areas presented its own challenges, with people needing to house animals and domestic pets, and refusing to leave them behind. The Agricultural Showground in nearby Brunswick worked well with facilities for animals including horses, chickens, goats, dogs and cats. The power, parking, lighting and infrastructure, along with ablutions, provided valuable refuge for many of these residents.

DFES managed the response as a Level 3 incident and then handed over to the Shire after the fire was controlled and contained. At this point, the Shire felt under-resourced to manage a significant number of physical tasks including road blocks, security, damage assessments, interagency coordination, clean up and recovery activities.

“The Shire needed to be more involved in preparation of the Impact Statement. We needed to know more detail on all the impacts we were expected to manage.”

“A more considered handover to the local government was needed. We believe that this process has improved since the Fire.”



The Aussie spirit is scorched but still standing. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

The CEO initiated negotiations with the state government to obtain appropriate resources for the recovery work. This created significant upheaval and time pressures for the Shire's executive team until sufficient support was made available.

The Department of the Premier and Cabinet provided an experienced Clean Up Coordinator and Assistant who were based locally and managed the Yarloop clean-up program over a nine-month period. Whilst a thorough and coordinated approach was delivered, despite the property access challenges, this process took far longer than imagined and created angst and frustration for impacted residents.

"We couldn't keep everyone happy all of the time, and we didn't always get it right, but we aimed to create realistic expectations of the recovery timeline and process."

The Shire soon identified that clean-up and recovery were long term processes and were going

to take time. Keeping the community informed of progress and the work being done was at the forefront of the Shire's communication program.

"People told me that recovery would take two years and I didn't believe them at the time. I thought it would take six months."

The independent Recovery Coordinator and Communications Officer provided well-needed resources to manage and juggle the issues and challenges that arose daily. These roles were key to coordinating the Recovery subcommittees, overseeing the Recovery Centre and clear communication between all agencies and non-government organisations (NGOs) working with the community. The Recovery Coordinator remained in place for three months and the Communications Officer continued at the Shire for a further 18 months enabling continuity of the knowledge and relationships established in the early stages of recovery.

Use community-led approaches

Local, regional and Western Australian communities provided tremendous support to Yarloop, with ongoing offers of help and donations. This in itself became a task to manage and the Shire found it imperative to know when to accept offers of help and when to say no.

In the first two weeks of the recovery, there was a strong push for a fundraising community concert to thank the emergency services and volunteers involved in the Fire response. Initially the Shire was very reluctant to support this event, fearing it was too soon and too much for the exhausted workers and volunteers. However, the event did proceed and was deemed a resounding success, with the Harvey community feeling as though they were doing something to help. The concert raised a significant amount of money to kick-start a fundraising appeal and lifted the spirits of the community.

"We needed to be flexible as not everything followed our plan – some things self-organised in the community and our Shire plan just gave us the framework to help guide our roles."

The volunteer efforts by local community groups have been consistently recognised by the Shire as underpinning the entire recovery program. In addition to the work of the emergency services, community groups including, but not limited to, the Cookernup Community Association, Rotary Club and Lions Club undertook countless hours of work over many months to feed volunteers, coordinate and store donated goods, host local events and gatherings, and provide a general helping hand to impacted residents.

"The monthly Farmers' Breakfasts at Cookernup were great. We got to see people who might not otherwise have come into town. We could see how they were coping and hear about help they needed."

Blaze Aid based themselves in Waroona and provided a huge volunteer effort to assist impacted landowners in the removal of burnt fences and replacement with 183km of new fences across 124 properties.

NGOs including the Yarloop Community Resource Centre (CRC), Red Cross and the Rural Counselling Service were instrumental in supporting local people. Their willingness to work collaboratively with the Shire and contribute to the coordination of the recovery program resulted in effective and streamlined services for the community.

"Partnering with local community groups and NGOs like the CRC, Red Cross and Blaze Aid was one of the best things the Shire did. Their help was outstanding."

Involving community representatives in the Recovery subcommittees assisted the Shire in understanding local needs and priorities, but also created champions for the recovery work who used their connections and networks to disseminate information and draw in other community resources.

As the focus of recovery turned to rebuilding Yarloop, the Shire worked with the community to design a development plan for the rebuilding of community assets, with support from the State Government. Community input guided the priorities which has subsequently resulted in the rebuilding of the war memorial, construction of a new bushfire brigade station and incorporation of the remaining town hall façade into a new community resource centre. These milestones were celebrated with the community as part of the town's recovery and healing process.

Other community initiatives arose during the two years that followed the Fire. Of particular note was the creation of a book, *Stories from the Fireground*, which is a compilation of personal stories of the Fire, its impact on people and properties, and the recovery efforts. The book provides some harrowing accounts of the ferocity and speed of the Fire, but also incredible stories of resilience, mateship, community and hope.

"For many people, the book provided an outlet for sharing their story, and a way to grieve and also start to heal. The Shire's support of this book was an important symbol of its commitment to the community's recovery."



The value of community events. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

Coordinate all activities

With the gravity of the Fire and its impact on Yarloop and surrounds understood, the Shire recognised the importance of getting the right governance structures in place, including:

- Systems and processes to manage costs, grants and donations associated with the incident and recovery,
- Activation of the LRCG and establishment of the Recovery subcommittees,
- Development of a Media and Communications Plan including regular briefings for the community, staff and Councillors,
- Preparation of a Transition Strategy for maintaining essential community services,
- Enaction of the resource-sharing agreement with other local governments, and
- Establishment of a dedicated Recovery Centre.

A Shire officer was assigned the responsibility of managing the donations program. This was a complex task with offers of cash and goods coming from all directions. Front counter staff were overwhelmed with offers of help that needed to be assessed and coordinated. Cash donations were far more preferable than donations of goods and services – many of which were inappropriate or the Shire did not have the capacity to store or distribute.

“We had to learn to say no. People wanted to donate cars and computers – we had no way of managing the condition of these items, or assessing their safety or suitability, let alone think about the liability issues associated with such donations.”

The local community association played a key role in receiving, storing and distributing useful materials to the community including items such as generators, irrigation pipe, water tanks and household goods. This group also stored donated clothing and consumables.

“It was great that people wanted to donate white goods and furniture but none of that was of any use to people who had just lost their homes.”

“Huge volumes of clothes were donated, including wedding dresses - of all things. I think people just wanted to give what they had or what they could.”

The Premier’s Bushfire Relief payments were available to impacted residents. Managing these requests for relief and distributing the funds was a significant undertaking with more than 270 payments administered by the Shire for local people. The Lord Mayor’s Distress Relief Fund was also made available, requiring the Shire and Donations’ Working Group to design appropriate categories for support, assess applications, and approve and distribute funds accordingly.

All expenditure and income associated with the Fire response and recovery was allocated to dedicated cost centres within the Shire’s accounting system. This enabled detailed tracking, which in turn supported future claims for the Western Australia Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements (now Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Western Australia [DRFAWA]) and reimbursement from the State Government where applicable.

“We knew the funds from government would not come straight away. The Shire was fortunate to have financial reserves so we could get on with the recovery work. A Shire with smaller reserves may not be able to cope with a similar scenario.”

Many of the Shire’s assets in Yarloop were damaged or destroyed. Fortunately, the building valuations were all current and appropriate insurance was in place. The Shire enjoyed a positive and constructive working relationship with its insurer, and using these current valuations was able to negotiate agreed payouts for destroyed Shire assets.

“Our building valuations for Yarloop had been redone only recently so we had a clear and accurate picture of the condition and value of the Shire’s facilities.”

Recovery subcommittees met regularly to review, discuss and plan recovery works and projects within the remit of each of their groups. The Infrastructure subcommittee in particular had a broad scope looking at issues such as the loss of a major bridge, power, water quality, replacement water tanks, and other impacted utilities. Recording of actions and achievements of the subcommittees needed a better ‘real time’ tracking solution.

“Discussions and project activities were captured as formal minutes which really felt like an unnecessary task. It would have been so much better to have an action-based spreadsheet that could be shared by all four subcommittees. This needed an IT solution that would enable us all to share information on progress.”

An interim Recovery Centre was established in the Harvey town centre to provide a central location for the recovery program, workers and volunteers – an important place for impacted community members to obtain information, guidance, counselling and support. The Shire first set up a temporary Recovery Centre in the Harvey Town Hall and then in the Community Resource Centre.

By mid-April, a dedicated Bushfire Recovery Centre had been established in a former community building behind the Shire offices in Harvey. This stand-alone facility was essential for relieving pressure on the Shire administration office, enabling the co-location of interagency personnel involved in the recovery program, and providing a welcoming and compassionate setting for residents – all in a one-stop shop. The Recovery Centre was also able to host small events and meetings and became a hub for many and varied activities.

“Set up a stand-alone well-resourced Recovery Centre where your partners can be part of the team.”

“The Recovery Centre building was only part of the equation. It was the people who really made it work.”

One of the challenges identified by staff and service providers operating from the

Recovery Centre, was the lack of ability to share information about impacted residents. The use of an ‘identification card’ would have enabled service providers to assist individuals without an individual having to repeatedly tell their story and provide details of their losses to each service provider or counsellor. This repetitive process increased the trauma for some impacted residents. The issues of data privacy and management, including consent from individuals to have their data shared for these specific purposes, are considerations for local governments undertaking recovery planning.

While the roles for Shire staff became clear quickly, based on their positions, knowledge, experience and skill, the role for Councillors during recovery took longer to become apparent. The Shire President had a clear role as the public face of the community, leading numerous community meetings and conducting media interviews, and the Deputy President took a lead role in two of the Recovery subcommittees. For the other Councillors, their informal role was to disseminate Shire information about the recovery process and bring community feedback to the Council and Shire staff. Once weekly briefings commenced for Council, it was easier for Councillors to provide clear messaging to their constituents, family and friends about progress.

“We should have had an emergency Council meeting at the very beginning so that everyone was on the same page and understood the severity.”

“There needed to be a clearer role for Councillors.”

“It would have been good if each Councillors’ CV was known in advance so that their skills and experience could be better used.”

Communicate effectively

Preparation of a Media and Communication Plan early in the recovery process enabled staff, Councillors and other agencies to understand and agree on how the community and other stakeholders would be kept informed of recovery activities and challenges.

The Shire identified early that clear messaging was needed, which was accurate, informative, positive and united. Importantly, communication needed to be frequent and regular so that the community could rely upon regular updates at predetermined times and through consistent methods.

The main communication channels utilised by the Shire included:

- Community meetings at the Recreation Centre held weekly (and live streamed)
- Dedicated SMS service
- Email – using information collated in the central database
- Local newspaper column each week
- Radio and TV interviews
- Social media
- Shire website
- Rural Outreach Program
- Recovery newsletter distributed fortnightly
- Staff and Council briefings

The weekly meetings at the Recreation Centre were conducted to provide regular updates to the community. During these meetings there was often heated discussion and frustration expressed by community members.

“Some meetings had a line of 12 or 13 speakers from different agencies or organisations. It was way too many and people were not absorbing all the information.”

Over time, the Shire became more adept at conducting these weekly meetings – reducing the number of speakers and providing clear and concise updates.

“Community meetings need to be chaired by someone with the skills and presence to control the room but allow attendees to have their say or ask questions. This might not always be your CEO or Shire President – you need to choose the right person.”

“Our Shire President did a fantastic job at running the community meetings and keeping them on track, even when at times it was challenging.”

The Shire recognised that not everyone was confident or willing to stand up and ask a question in a public meeting. The Recovery Coordinator and Communications Officer set up a system whereby people could ask a question or make a comment by writing it down on paper and submitting into a “questions and comments” box. These were then addressed at the next community meeting or followed up individually where required.

The Deputy Shire President felt strongly that balancing the desire to communicate everything to impacted residents, with sharing sufficient detail to keep them informed but not add to their distress, was very challenging.

“Very early in the recovery was not the time to tell people that it could take two years before they would be living in Yarloop again. We needed to be sensitive and cautious. However, I also felt that perhaps it would have been better to be more transparent and communicate everything known each step of the way, so that the community’s expectations were realistic.”

Four principles were identified to underpin messages provided at each community meeting:

1. Tell the community what we know
2. Tell the community what we don’t know
3. Tell the community what we’re going to do
4. Tell the community what they can/need to do

The use of social media was an area that the Shire has since recognised could have been used more rapidly and effectively. Informal support groups popped up on Facebook and information was regularly posted and shared. Two Shire Councillors used their strong Facebook following to disseminate information about the early stages of the Fire response which continued through the recovery program.

“The Shire should have used social media far more. It is a fast, free and easy way to get information out to a lot of people quickly. In the absence of official information on social media, lots of other pages and groups appeared, and so too, did misinformation.”

Internal communication with Shire staff was important. The team was keen to understand what was happening so they could respond to community queries and comments. Morning teas and staff briefings were held from time to time to update the staff, but also used to check in with how individuals were managing and see if anyone needed personal assistance or counselling.

“More regular staff briefings would have helped us to answer community questions on the spot.”



Bushfire Recovery Art project – mosaics of house number plaques and Yarloop’s postcode. Photo courtesy of the Shire of Harvey

Recognise and build capacity

Over the course of the recovery program, the Shire implemented a range of initiatives aimed at informing and upskilling both the community and staff. The workload and pressure placed on some staff members was concerning, despite their resilience and capabilities.

“We became unofficial counsellors and took many emotional phone calls and visits from and to impacted people. We attended suicide prevention workshops to upskill ourselves.”

Wellbeing seminars were held for Shire staff, as well as separate sessions for community members, to ensure they paused, reflected and considered their own health and stress management approaches. This was an area that Shire staff felt needed to be better addressed.

“More training and debriefing sessions with agencies like Red Cross would have helped staff cope with the emotional impact.”

However, Councillors and staff observed some really positive outcomes for the team members involved in the recovery work and those who helped backfill and support behind the scenes.

“Our CEO saw the capacity of his team unfold before his eyes. He trusted them so much more. The staff developed new skills and built confidence in their own ability to cope with a major incident like this one.”

“The relationship between the Shire and the community really strengthened. There is a whole new level of trust.”

Building capacity and knowledge in the community also formed an important part of the recovery program. With the complexity of so many houses being lost, there was a lot of focus on the clean-up, interim accommodation options, and the processes involved in rebuilding, particularly as many of the houses were old and current residents had not previously been involved in home building.

The Shire hosted a series of information sessions to inform the community about the progress of the clean-up, asbestos and contamination risks, dealing with insurers, accessing emergency relief, and building and planning considerations. These sessions helped the community to understand how to go about rebuilding their homes.

Emergency management training for Councillors, staff, local emergency services and community volunteers requires constant consideration. Keeping up with recovery training including scenario planning and exercises, is an important component of developing and retaining skills within the Shire’s own organisation as well as in the local community. Similarly for Councillors, understanding the role of local governments in recovery and how Councillors can constructively contribute should form the justification for participation in emergency management training.

“Don’t let your EM and recovery training lapse – include representatives from across all Shire departments as they are the ones that will need to be involved in a real life incident.”

The surviving façade of the Yarloop Hall.
Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones



5. Considerations for local governments

As the recovery program for the Fire unfolded and the needs and focus of the community changed, the Shire of Harvey was able to identify evolving implications for its own organisation and the way resources were deployed.

The following provides a summary of the most prominent themes discussed by participants through the case study preparation and links to correlating supporting resources and tools to assist local governments in the long-term recovery process. Some are existing resources while others have been specifically developed from lessons identified from the Fire which impacted the Yarloop community.

Recovery is a long-term process

The timeline for community recovery activities always depends on the severity and impact from an emergency incident, however the complexities resulting from a major incident require sophisticated approaches to address and resolve – which all take time. The Shire of Harvey identified the impact on its organisation’s resources, particularly the finance and community development teams and workload, was significant and enduring.

The governance structures and systems and processes outlined in a local government’s emergency management arrangements form part of the necessary management response, however prior consideration should be given to how improving Councillors and staff understanding of the role of local government in recovery, to assist them in identifying the impacts on their BAU

activities while coordinating recovery activities from a major event. Forward planning should also include how the Shire’s team can be expanded and reallocated for an extended period.

Planning for providing staff relief and leave periods for those staff involved in recovery activities over an extended period is also required, given the rate and extent of leave accrual for some staff members.

Resources:

The SEMC [Local Recovery Guidelines](#) and [Recovery Toolbox](#) developed for local governments, contain tools and templates to prepare a Local Recovery Plan and manage the recovery process in the short, medium and longer term. These tools have been developed with input from Western Australian local governments that have been impacted by large-scale events in recent years.



249 Blaze Aid volunteers, clearing 155km of fences, rebuilding 183km of fences for 124 fire-affected properties. Photo © ABC South West: Sharon Kennedy

Local knowledge from staff and community is invaluable for recovery efforts

Incorporating local knowledge into the local government recovery program ensures that the community context and dynamics is considered and understood. Staff and community members hold valuable insights into the ways that communities function and have excellent knowledge of local residents, properties, businesses and networks.

Often new emerging community leaders or ‘champions’ emerge during the recovery process. For local governments, it is important to acknowledge that these staff and community members may be from roles and professions or industry sectors that are not typically considered emergency management, and may not hold any position of authority, however their local knowledge is invaluable in assisting with recovery. Creating a supportive setting to enable their participation is important.

Inviting and welcoming input from staff and community members to help in most aspects of recovery is beneficial to both the local government and community, including management of donations; attendance at the LRCG (or

subcommittee) meetings; compilation of local intelligence and the central database of impacted residents; identifying local suppliers for recovery work; organising community events; or initiating recovery programs.

Resources:

The [National Principles for Disaster Recovery](#) provide guidance for working with communities in disaster recovery. The principles assist in holistic consideration of the dimensions of community recovery.

The [National Community Recovery Handbook](#) developed by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) provides a comprehensive guide to community recovery in Australia for use by planners, managers and those involved in working with communities to design and deliver recovery processes, services, programs and activities.

The [Toolkit 2-1 Community recovery checklists \(AIDR\)](#) are an excellent resource providing straightforward role descriptions and practical checklists for use by those directly involved in assigning roles and responsibilities and those undertaking the recovery tasks.

Recovery efforts are high intensity in the first few weeks

As the responsible organisation for recovery, a local government's business-as-usual (BAU) is interrupted immediately following a major incident. The impact on the organisation's normal operations, and anticipated timeframe, must be regularly communicated to the wider community and relevant stakeholders while the local government focusses on recovery activities. This may include delay, deferral or even cancellation of planned projects or programs – potentially for some years.

Any disruption to BAU and communication of these changes should also be considered when developing or reviewing the Local Recovery Plan. Allowing for flexibility and planning for additional resources and staff may assist in managing recovery activities and essential BAU tasks.

Appointing a suitably skilled Local Recovery Coordinator, who has been trained in the role, enables a single focus on the coordination of recovery governance structures and actions.

Some local governments may choose to appoint an independent Local Recovery Coordinator from

outside the organisation, as did the Shire of Harvey, which found that this enabled an undistracted focus on recovery without needing to manage, delegate or defer other work responsibilities. Such an appointment could be on a consultancy basis or as a secondment from another local government. A dedicated Community Liaison Officer, seconded or redeployed from a local government experienced in large-scale recovery effort, may also add value to the recovery program.

State Recovery has established a 'Cadre' of personnel able to assist local governments immediately following a major event. The Cadre consists of pre-identified and approved personnel able to fulfil various roles such as finance, project management, community liaison and communications. Local governments can request State Recovery to stand up the Cadre if additional support is required.

Resources:

The SEMC's Local Recovery Coordinator **Aide Memoire** outlines functions and responsibilities, including an action checklist with approximate timeframes for specific tasks.

Checklist 4 – Managing People – found in the **Toolkit 2-1 Community recovery checklists** (AIDR) provides a clear list of actions to help in the management of staff including activities, communications and resource considerations.

Western Australian Local Government Association (WALGA) offers a range of training programs for officers and elected members, which outline the role of local government in emergency management and recovery and will assist local governments to plan for how their organisation can manage BAU and resource the recovery effort. These courses include **Emergency Management Fundamentals** (eLearning) and **Emergency Management for Local Governments** (one-day, in Perth).

Contact **State Recovery** DFES, to stand up the Cadre.



Street view of Yarloop before the fire. Photo courtesy of the Shire of Harvey

Council – Executive relationships must be positive and constructive

The Shire of Harvey benefited greatly from a strong and balanced relationship between the Shire President and CEO. This enabled a clear delineation of responsibilities with the Shire President focussing on external communication with the community and media, and the CEO focussed on working with government agencies, NGOs and staff.

This successful arrangement was underpinned by longstanding efforts to build a collaborative working relationship built on trust and clear communication.

Clarity of the role of Councillors during recovery ensures that the knowledge and expertise of the Council is utilised for the benefit of the community, and that the Council performs the appropriate role in tandem with the operational responsibilities of the executive and staff of the local government.

Involving Councillors in the development of local emergency management arrangements and recovery planning also assists in increasing knowledge and understanding of the role of Council in recovery. Following a major event,

Councillors can provide valuable insights based on their community knowledge and networks, and can be included in a variety of constructive ways including but not limited to:

- Undertaking a 'statesperson' role for the community at events;
- Chairing or participating in LRCG subcommittees;
- Attending community recovery events;
- Assisting with communications as determined in the agreed communication plan; and
- Assisting with directing donations and communicating preferred ways the community can help.

Resources:

WALGA provides emergency management training for elected members and staff including **Emergency Management Fundamentals** (eLearning) and **Emergency Management for Local Governments** (one-day, in Perth).



Clean up crews clearing Yarloop of asbestos and PCB contamination. Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

Accept relevant external help and expertise

In the immediate period following a major event, the demands on the local government can be intense and at times, overwhelming. The Shire of Harvey benefited greatly from decisions to accept help and expertise from external sources. Whilst initially hesitant, upon reflection, the Shire was very appreciative of the additional human resources and how helpful this workforce was at the time.

A pre-existing resource-sharing arrangement with other south west local governments enabled the deployment of staff from other locations to travel to Harvey and assist in a range of tasks requiring substantial human resources, including the initial 'door knock' welfare check on over 200 properties over a two-day period. Involving people from other local governments enables a relatively smooth transition given the staff's understanding and experience with local government systems, responsibilities and procedures.

Engaging an independent and experienced Recovery Coordinator and Communications Officer enabled the Shire staff to focus on their own areas of expertise, alleviated the need for

an existing staff member to step into these roles, and ensured the organisation benefitted from the additional resources.

Similarly, forming partnerships with relevant organisations such as Red Cross, BlazeAid, local community associations and service clubs, Department for Communities, Department of the Premier and Cabinet and many other NGOs and agencies, can create a significant labour force to address the challenges of recovery over an extended period.

Resources:

WALGA's publication on **Cooperation and Shared Services** - outlines existing agreements between local governments in Western Australia including for emergency management. Example Memorandums of Understanding and other resource sharing agreements could be obtained from the local governments listed.

Examples of partnering and resource sharing agreements for the purposes of recovery include:

- Metropolitan North and East Recovery Group Partnering Agreement
- Pilbara Recovery MoU
- Mandurah-Murray-Rockingham MoU
- South West Resource Sharing MoU

Timely and clear communication with the community and within the organisation is critical

Providing information to all stakeholders on the progress and challenges associated with recovery, at each stage of the recovery efforts, should be the underpinning approach for local governments when coordinating community recovery.

In the early stages of recovery, it is critical that communication is relevant, clear, targeted and provided through multiple channels. Following the Fire, the President and CEO of the Shire of Harvey divided the various external and internal communication tasks until time was available to develop a more comprehensive communication plan.

Staff briefings should be held frequently so that all local government staff have a good understanding of the known facts, unknown matters, current activities and areas of focus. Whilst not all staff will have a role in formal external communications, invariably they will be asked by the community for information.

Communication approaches may include, but are not limited to, a combination of public meetings, email, SMS, newsletters, radio updates, social media posts, website announcements and newspaper updates.

The Shire of Harvey benefitted enormously from taking the time to develop a clear communication plan that identified all stakeholder groups, communication activities and methods, and roles and responsibilities.

Clarity and transparency of the information provided to the community, Councillors and staff is important, including advising stakeholders of:

- What is known,
- What is unknown,
- What the local government and others are doing now, and
- What community members can do themselves or to assist.

Good communication helps to build trust and confidence, even when the news is not positive or some matters remain unknown. Sensitivity and empathy in communication styles and methods are needed, particularly when informing people about damage, loss and other impacts. Consideration should be made of the ability of impacted residents to absorb and retain information during a highly stressful time, and care should be taken to provide clear, repeated and targeted information, as required.

Resources:

The SEMC **Communicating in Recovery Guidelines** provide easy to follow guidelines have been developed to support local government with recovery communications activities, at each stage of an emergency – before, during and after.

The Australian Red Cross has developed an excellent **Communicating in Recovery** resource, which provides guidance on objectives, principles, methods, challenges and inclusivity needed for effective recovery communication.



The fire-scarred shell of the Yarloop Hall.
Photo courtesy of Haydn Jones

Activate the Local Recovery Coordination Group and establish Recovery subcommittees as soon as possible

LRCG is key to leading the recovery efforts. Prompt establishment of the LRCG following a major event is vital to ensuring that recovery activities commence as soon as possible.

Prior planning for the potential composition of an LRCG, through the local government recovery planning process, supports a rapid call-to-action for the LRCG members. Typically the LRCG is comprised of representatives from local government, state government agencies, key NGOs and community representatives and is coordinated by the Local Recovery Coordinator. Contact details for potential members should be regularly updated.

The Shire of Harvey established its LRCG quickly, including subcommittees across four key areas – infrastructure, environment, community and financial. Shire Councillors chaired and participated as members of these subcommittees enabling strong local government buy-in and support to the plans and activities of the subcommittees.

An appropriately experienced Chairperson for the LRCG and subcommittees is required. These positions must be filled by people capable of managing competing demands and diverse views; aware of local community dynamics and the socio-political context of the area; and with the ability to lead sound decision-making, clear communication and tracking and reporting of progress.

Adequate human and physical resources are needed for administering the LRCG and subcommittees to ensure accurate records of decisions, actions, tasks, challenges and outcomes. Using record-keeping methods that enable the LRCG and subcommittees to easily and quickly share information and understand the actions being undertaken and completed, will assist in a coordinated recovery effort.

Where specific projects, areas of focus or complex issues require particular expertise or must work to a finite deadline, Working Groups should be established. Examples include Working Groups for managing donations or rehabilitating fire-damaged Aboriginal heritage sites.

Resources:

The roles and functions of the LRCG are detailed in the SEMC **Local Recovery Guidelines** and the **LRCG Aide Memoire** is a four-page quick reference guide which outlines the LRCG role and functions, potential membership and checklist for LRCG actions required within one week; within one month; and within 12 months or longer.

Appendix 7 to the SEMC **Local Recovery Guidelines** indicates a Potential Recovery Governance Structure for consideration by local governments.

Set up a dedicated Recovery Centre as a one-stop shop

A dedicated Recovery Centre provides the community with an accessible venue to seek information, support and services during recovery. It is likely that the Recovery Centre will need to remain open for an extended period throughout recovery, as demonstrated by the Shire of Harvey's experience with the Recovery Centre open for two years.

Establishing a separate centre enables the local government recovery team and other NGOs and agencies involved in recovery, to be collocated in the one building, which in turn creates a collaborative approach to recovery and a one-stop-shop for impacted residents. This also alleviates the local government's front reception area from the pressure of providing recovery information and support, enabling a more orderly return to BAU.

Immediately following a major event, an interim Recovery Centre may be required until a more permanent venue can be identified and appropriately equipped. The interim location may be in a community recreation centre, town hall, sports centre, however facilities such as these will need to return to their normal usage and a longer term venue for the Recovery Centre must be secured.

Identifying suitable premises for a Recovery Centre should form part of a local government's recovery planning. The venue will require workstations, meeting area/s, a private office or meeting room for counselling and confidential meetings, appropriate IT and power infrastructure and amenities for staff and visitors.

The Shire of Harvey's Recovery Centre was set up in its former Home and Community Care building, which was vacant at the time. The Centre was fitted out with the necessary IT, communications equipment and furnishings for under \$20,000 and proved an invaluable investment in supporting the local community.

The creation of a local identity card for impacted residents may assist providers of recovery programs, counselling and other services to help individuals without requiring people to repeatedly tell their stories of damage or loss.

Resources:

Within the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience **Toolkit 2-1 Community recovery checklists**, Checklist 11 outlines the likely needs for Recovery Centres including the minimum facility requirements and possible equipment and administration requirements, along with management considerations.

Examples of well-resourced recovery centres include those established by local governments in Harvey and Gidgegannup (City of Swan)

Establish robust systems to manage expenditure, donations and grants.

The management of the financial aspects of recovery following a major event can be a significant administrative responsibility for local governments. Robust systems and suitably skilled personnel, identified in advance as part of recovery planning, will assist local governments to effectively and accurately record and manage the flow of donations, grants, subsidies, expenditure and relief payments during recovery.

The Shire of Harvey identified that setting up cost and income centres within the Shire's accounting system was vital for tracking finances associated with the Fire. Future reconciliations and applications for reimbursement or federal funding were made easier by having a system that separated the cash flows from the local government general revenue.

A senior staff member was allocated the responsibility for managing administration of the donations and grants processes, guided by the donations Working Group. This work included establishing the eligibility of applicants for financial support, determining the categories for financial support available from the Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund, and managing the proceeds from corporate donations and fundraising events, as well as approving and distributing payments to eligible residents.

Local community groups and service groups assisted in coordinating management, storage, sorting and distribution of the physical donations of goods that flowed from the wider Western Australian community.

Additional assistance should be considered where needed for receiving and distributing donations. This assistance may be available from the State Recovery Cadre, volunteer organisations, Red Cross and neighbouring local governments, and could be arranged in advance through memorandum of understanding and documented in the local recovery plan.

The types of funding streams and financial considerations requiring management may include:

- Government funding such as the Premier's Bushfire Relief Payments and the Federal Government's disaster relief payments,
- Disaster Relief Funding Arrangements WA (DRFAWA),
- Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund,
- Corporate donations,
- Fundraising events proceeds,
- Donations from community and service organisations,
- Online fundraising,
- Reductions in rates for impacted residents, and
- Material donations.

Resources:

Contact the **DRFAWA** officers for assistance as early as possible to set up the correct systems

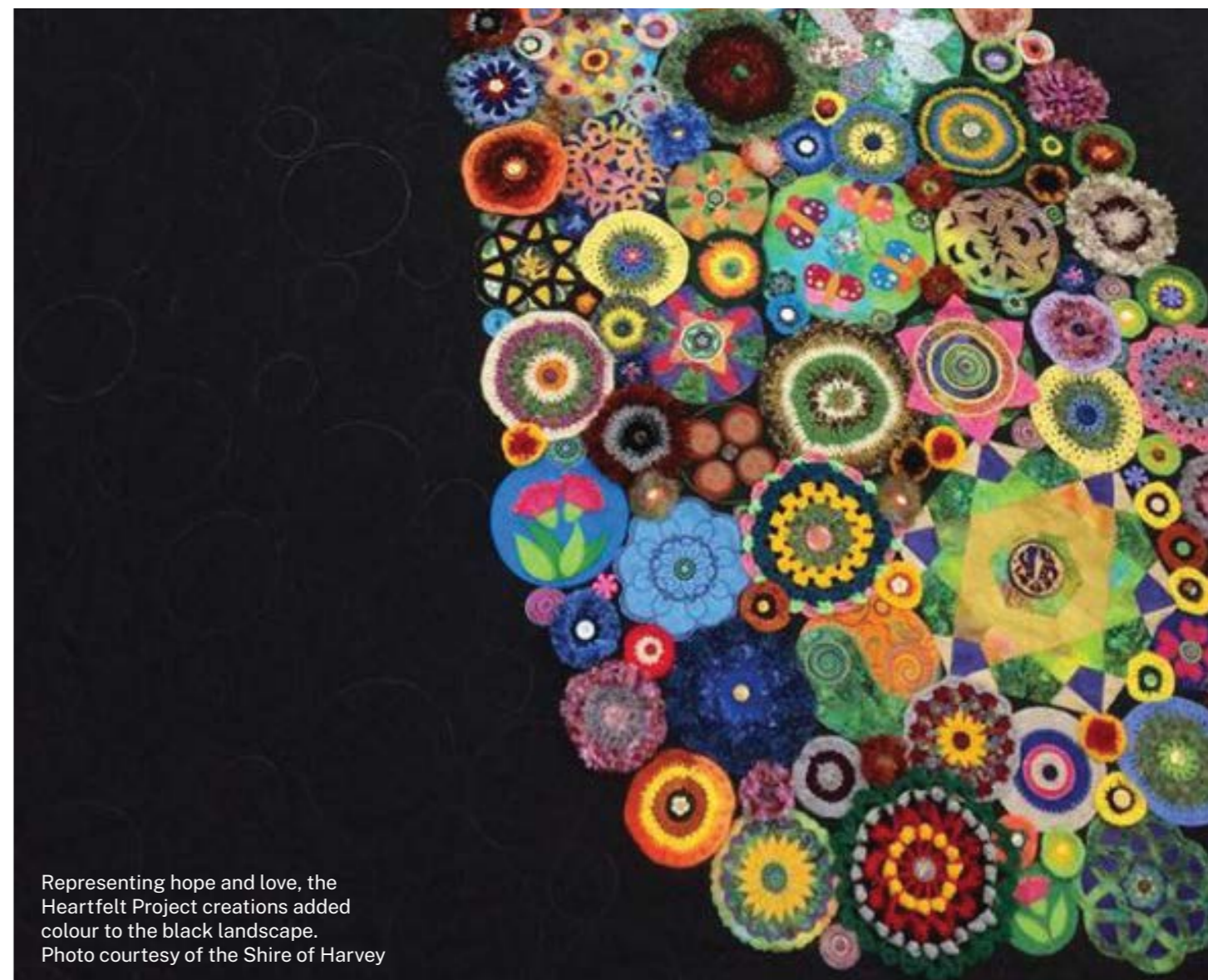
Contact **State Recovery** DFES, for assistance with management of donations or local government financial expertise from the Cadre.

Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund

The SEMC website provides an overview and links regarding **financial assistance** available for communities affected by major events.

6. Appendix 1: Summary of Shire observations during recovery

Using the core elements of the Australian Disaster Preparedness Framework, the following table provides a snapshot of the Shire's key observations over time relating to its People, Resources, Governance, and Systems and Processes.



Representing hope and love, the Heartfelt Project creations added colour to the black landscape. Photo courtesy of the Shire of Harvey

PEOPLE		
0-3 months	3-6 months	6+ months
<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> CEO and Shire President had a positive working relationship. Accepted and obtained external help - personnel with recovery expertise. Used strengths and local knowledge of team. Some staff were impacted personally - had to consider their needs. Organisation-wide impact on workload. Staff worked very long days and no weekends in initial recovery weeks. Monitored for stress and fatigue. Community development team was key to recovery coordination - had good local knowledge, contacts and communication skills. Community development team involved in wide range of tasks with impacted residents. Resource-sharing agreement with other local governments (MoU in place in advance) was invaluable. Appointed an independent Recovery Coordinator. Having mature, experienced staff in front line was important. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified and supported informal community leaders. Worked with existing strengths of community. Volunteers were integral. Encouraged involvement of local businesses. 	<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued to monitor staff including CEO and Executive Team for stress and fatigue. Counselling / self-care workshops were held - more were needed. Extensive leave accrued rapidly. Some roles returned to BAU; others were spending around 50% of time on recovery activities. Needed more recovery staff to help with workload. Team management and communication were very important - tried to keep the team well informed. Regular debriefing for the team was needed. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impacted community members went through the full range of emotions associated with trauma. Volunteers and local community groups were key to community support. Celebrated the positive achievements and wins along the way. Regular Farmers' Breakfasts hosted by service clubs were very important and well received. Community morning tea events brought people together and helped Shire hear of their needs. 	<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role changed from emergency response to 'dig in the bunkers' for the long haul. Staff acclimatised to the additional work load and community meetings. Some staff were still spending around 25% of their time on recovery. Continued to monitor wellbeing. Staff capacity and capability really grew - a noticeable increase in resilience, confidence. Shire staff became less involved as people became more comfortable with the process of recovery. Shire efforts were recognised by the community and resulted in increased trust. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened ties with the community. Psychological recovery - as the built recovery was completed, the personal recovery continued for a couple of years after the event. Some community members were still struggling (long term concern). Community projects were very important for the community healing. Community get togethers (hosted by Shire recovery team) continued for two years.

RESOURCES		
0-3 months	3-6 months	6+ months
<p>Evacuation Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identified in advance. Was not adequately equipped (e.g. power, Wi-Fi, power points, hot water systems that can cope) - additional investment was required. Agricultural showground was a good evacuation centre as it had facilities for pets and other livestock as well as space, showers, toilets, power supply distributed across the grounds. Recreation Centres were used which had an impact on the existing programming and use of the centres, resulting in a financial impact that was not planned or foreseen. <p>Recovery Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a dedicated centre in Harvey, away from front counter of Shire office, in a separate building nearby. Made it a one stop shop for all recovery activities. Would have been better to set up earlier in recovery. Shire building provided for two years. Spent ~ \$20,000 for set up. <p>Database</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created one central place to gather and store information about people and properties impacted. Identity cards or similar were needed for impacted residents to alleviate need to re-tell personal impact story. Physical resources Equipment, vehicles and machinery were reallocated from other jobs. Provided fuel to police and emergency services from the Shire depot when the town was cut off and fuel had run out at the petrol station. 	<p>Partnerships are key resources</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Red Cross, Blaze Aid, Lions Club, Rural Counselling Service, Rotary, Dept of Communities were fantastic. Counselling services, Education Dept., Yarloop and Harvey Community Resource Centres (CRC) were important. Yarloop CRC played vital role in on-ground support for impacted residents. Cookernup Community Association, Yarloop CWA, Rotary were amazing community leaders. Needed to find ways for the community to help - channel their efforts. <p>Clean-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dedicated and experienced Clean-Up Coordinator was appointed by DPC. Landfill planning and site identification was needed prior - Yarloop had 70,000 tonnes waste with limited options for disposal. Asbestos, security, access - all considerations that slowed the clean-up. <p>Recovery Centre</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept open as one-stop shop for support, information and services. Became hub for community support and recovery events. 	<p>Staff</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Role changed from emergency response to 'dig in the bunkers' for the long haul. Staff acclimatised to the additional work load and community meetings. Some staff were still spending around 25% of their time on recovery. Continued to monitor wellbeing. Staff capacity and capability really grew - a noticeable increase in resilience, confidence. Shire staff became less involved as people became more comfortable with the process of recovery. Shire efforts were recognised by the community and resulted in increased trust. <p>Community</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strengthened ties with the community. Psychological recovery - as the built recovery was completed, the personal recovery continued for a couple of years after the event. Some community members were still struggling (long term concern). Community projects were very important for the community healing. Community get togethers (hosted by Shire recovery team) continued for two years.

GOVERNANCE

0-3 months	3-6 months	6+ months
<p>Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shire President and Deputy played a lead role. Roles for other Councillors was unclear – clarification needed sooner. An emergency briefing for Council was needed asap followed by regular briefings. <p>Planning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> A current Recovery Plan was essential. Business Continuity Planning was in place. Prepared a Transition / Operational Recovery Plan. <p>Local Recovery Coordination Group (LRCG)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Followed local emergency management arrangements and established LRCG early. Diverse membership of LRCG was important. <p>Recovery subcommittees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up 4 subcommittees early, Shire Pres or Deputy as chair. Needed to track actions and share across subcommittees. Two working groups set up under subcommittees. <p>State govt. engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More thorough handover to Shire was needed – process, timing and lack of resources was very challenging. Strong participation by some state agencies. Needed to push others to participate. Need to strengthen relationships year round. <p>Staff & resource management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regular management meetings vital to ensure all dept's on same page and CEO was aware of all issues. Important for CEO to have trusted Exec. Team to whom tasks can be delegated. 	<p>Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept informed of progress and continued engagement in community meetings as appropriate. Assessed resource and financial implications of incident on other key projects within the Corporate Business Plan and made decisions about delay/defer/cancel. <p>Recovery management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement of services by the State is invariably protracted. The Shire administration system was used to procure services (with subsequent reimbursement) to ensure streamlined and timely procurement of services needed immediately. A smaller Shire may not have the capacity or systems to undertake this role. Continued to work hard for State govt agency buy-in to LRCG and subcommittees. Security of the townsite was important – including road blocks and security check points. <p>LRCG and Recovery subcommittees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focused on engaging community in decisions about recovery projects. Continued to progress tasks and meet as needed. Celebrated and shared achievements and milestones. Better communication and information sharing between subcommittees would have helped. Successfully leant on community representatives to disseminate information through their own networks. 	<p>Council</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Kept informed of progress and continued engagement in community meetings as appropriate. Involved in celebrations of milestones and achievements related to recovery. Refocussed on BAU and other stalled projects. <p>Recovery management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> After six months, Shire focus gradually moved to more long term planning. Recognised that EM and recovery training across the organisation was very beneficial. Training, scenarios and planning for emergency incidents and recovery is important to continue regularly, particularly with changing of staff and Council. <p>LRCG and Recovery subcommittees</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continued to track actions and completed projects. Celebrated and shared achievements and milestones. Wound up subcommittees once work program complete. <p>Return to Business As Usual (BAU)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shire drew the line at the two-year anniversary – bulk of intensive recovery program delivered, back to BAU. Had been working on an exit strategy for two years. Took until Year 4 to return to full BAU.

SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

0-3 months	3-6 months	6+ months
<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used a range of channels and methods. Kept a central database for details of impacted properties. Needed a regular, consistent, expected, united, one voice. Hosted weekly community meetings – keep short, concise, clear and welcoming. Maintained regular internal communication with staff. <p>Impact identification</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Needed to work more closely with DFES on the Rapid Damage Assessment and preparation of Impact Statement. Access to impacted properties was challenging, with some owners resisting. Community mistrust of authorities hindered access. Accurate GPS records for each RDA of each property were needed – this slowed us down. Rate information – must be up to date. Suggest that Shires actively appeal for mobile numbers for rates records, use local intelligence to gather data. <p>Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Complex logistical and time-consuming task. Physical donations were hard to manage, store and distribute. Cash was preferable in the early stages with donated goods and services later. Needed a dedicated person to manage cash donations. <p>Financial management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Established a dedicated cost centre. Set up a separate job number, income account for donations, grants. 	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maintained channels for as long as needed. Narrowed our communication focus to those who still needed regular updates. <p>Donations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lord Mayor's Distress Relief Fund was a huge task to manage the process and distribute funds. Ongoing efforts were needed to manage donated goods and ensure appropriate allocation to community and/or redistribution or disposal. <p>Financial management</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisted impacted farmers and property owners to apply for government funding assistance. Insurance – we had up to date valuations and were able to negotiate payouts for damaged or destroyed Shire assets. Shire's financial reserves were drawn upon before State government reimbursement. 	<p>Communication</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community communication as important as ever. People are tiring and keeping them informed remains key. Whilst frequency of updates may reduce, consistency is key. <p>Planning and rebuilding</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing help needed for home owners to plan and rebuild. Suitable, longer term accommodation options for displaced residents were needed. Shire delivered workshops to help community understand the building and planning process. Yarloop Redevelopment Plan established to identify and prioritise community infrastructure needed. Resulted in the reconstruction of the fire station, town hall and in the future, the Yarloop workshops.

