



HUON VALLEY COUNCIL

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AFAC Review

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Attention: Dr Felicity Novy

Via Email: afac.reveiw@dpfem.tas.gov.au

Review of the Management of Bushfires during the 2018-19 Fire Season

Thank you for the opportunity to lodge a submission for the Review of the Management of Bushfires during the 2018-19 Fire Season. The Huon Valley Council played a key role in the response to the Riveaux Road Fire. We provide the following comments in relation to points 2, 5 and 8 of the Review Terms of Reference:

2) The effectiveness of community messaging and warnings

- The high level attendance of Senior Tasmanian Fire Service (TFS) Incident Controllers at the Evacuation Centre was appreciated by all and was highly effective as it shut down any miscommunication within the community. Evacuees were satisfied they were being told the truth and had as much updated information as possible.
- Council was able to build upon this by Live Streaming via Facebook the sessions to the wider community with a total of 8,325 people watching 95% of each of the Live Stream Facebook Videos during the Bushfire period. The videos were viewed over 50,000 times.
- Council has heard no criticism of TFS or Council that the community didn't know what was going on during the event. The TFS willingness to participate showed commitment to the community to keep them informed and address any concerns they may have in question time.
- The briefing sessions facilitated by the TFS Community Liaison Officers leading up to the main event were effective and enabled the community to mentally prepare, seek information on preparing their homes and how to safely evacuate. The

Council are supportive of these measures and would like to continue to work in partnership with TFS to support the community education further.

- Whilst Council acknowledges the TFS website at times was confusing, an example being the 'red area' on the website as the fire path encompassing Dover Beach, which created panic. The response from TFS to rectify this on their website and then address this concern at briefings was timely and well done. The TFS attendance at the Evacuation Centre by liaison staff who were willing to engage with evacuees and address concerns one on one was welcomed and very much appreciated. TFS presence created confidence in the evacuees and ensured they were getting their information for a reliable source.
- Strong messaging was used by TFS during the township meetings (held in conjunction with the Public Health, Tasmania Police and the Huon Valley Council) which prompted evacuations by community members to the centre, but this was warranted at the time. Having all agencies at briefings gave confidence to the community that the agencies were working together and on the same page.
- The activation of the financial assistance grants came as a shock to the Municipal Emergency Management Coordinators, a discussion prior to announcing the grant would have been appreciated

The broad criteria of all Huon Valley residents being eligible which saw a dramatic increase in people presenting to the Evacuation Centre who were there only to access the grant fund. This in turn created management issues and security concerns for evacuees so the Municipal Coordinator moved the grant team to an external site.

The associated need for increased security and traffic management arrangements caused additional costs for Council.

There was not clear messaging to the community on the eligibility of the grant and this did create confusion as to who was eligible to claim at which stage.

- Reopening roads was problematic because of the involvement of a number of road authorities. The updates on the Police and TasAlerts websites were not in sync, as roads were deemed safe it took a considerable amount of time before they were reopened on the websites. This was creating confusion for evacuees who didn't think they could go home i.e. Bermuda Road.

A designated team of Road Owners was established by SES to expedite the reopening of roads process. A Council Officer was appointed to the team to coordinate Council roads. Unfortunately it still didn't work to its full potential.

5) The effectiveness of state, regional and local command, control and co-ordination arrangements, to include agency interoperability and the coordination of emergency management activities with government and NGOs

- The RECC provided one important source for the municipal coordinators to communicate and attend meetings. Clear and direct contact lines were established and information was shared both ways as and when needed.
- The invitation for the Municipal and Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator to attend the local IMT at Geeveston and Huonville strengthened the communication lines and working relationships with the Incident Controllers. It meant that the coordinators had the most up to date information that could be acted upon at the evacuation centre.

Through these meetings points of contact were established to support one another. For example, when road blocks needed to be accessed, a direct call was made enabling a police or fire escort to be arranged for the delivery of medical supplies to Dover as well as access for the General Practitioner.

- The pre-positioning of Salvation Army and St Johns Ambulance at the Evacuation Centre worked well.
- The response from agencies was overwhelmingly positive. The supply of equipment was provided timely and as needed. The coordination of agencies within the centre at the local level worked but could be improved upon. At some stages it was unclear which agencies were in the Centre and under what capacity. This has also led to financial expenditure occurring without the Council knowledge or prior approval.

Whilst these agencies were all identified in the TEMP, there are no clear MOUs in place as to guide services and financial responsibilities.

- This event has highlighted the importance of the Huon Valley Council participating on the Southern Regional Recovery Committee.
- The support the Huon Valley Council received from other Councils to manage the Evacuation Centre was extremely effective and we relied heavily on this support in order to maintain the services and Evacuation Centre for the duration of the event. As a regional Council we could not have done it without them.

8) Any other matter that the review team identifies in the course of its activities as warranting consideration.

- The resources required in maintaining an evacuation centre of this nature and duration cannot be underestimated. Hundreds of volunteers and staff were utilised during the three week period, this included the Animal Refuge Centre at

Ranelagh Recreation Ground. A total of 54 Huon Valley Council Officers worked around the clock at the Evacuation Centres over three weeks to sustain the demand.

Whilst the support from other Councils, Community Groups and organisations was welcomed the need for local staff was paramount and for a small rural council the impact on staff and the financial cost to Council has been huge.

- The need during and after the event to continue to support the recovery process has seen and continues to see an interruption to Council business and operations. The ever increasing impost on Councils in the Emergency Management arena needs to be considered and support provided from the Government.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our submission.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rebecca Bell', written in a cursive style.

REBECCA BELL

MUNICIPAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT COORDINATOR