Place-Based and Community-Led

Specific Disaster Preparedness and Generalisable Community Resilience

Cross-Sectoral Conversations about Innovations and Struggles, Learnings and Changes in the Aftermath of the February 7 2009 Black Saturday Mega-Firestorm

A shared Inquiry among Local Government Authority officers, Community Service Organisation workers and Community Recovery Committee members hosted by CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service

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Preface

This report details findings from an interactive research project that sought views from three groups in the recovery period following the 2009 Black Saturday bushfire. These participants were from Local Government, Community Recovery Committees, and Community Service Organisations. The data was collected between June and August 2011, two years after the fires. In March 2014 a first draft only write up was completed.

CatholicCare (formally CentaCare) was a Bushfire Community Recovery Service, in the Melbourne Archdiocese of the Catholic Church. This service was in part a response to the $4 million collected from the Catholic community in Australia. The Archbishop's Charitable Appeal Bushfire Fund was established to administer and manage the funds collected. One of the Community Development activities of the Bushfire Community Recovery Service resulted in this report.

You may come to this report from any number of perspectives on 'community recovery' after major disasters. You may have been a participant in the work described on this report. You may be someone from a vulnerable community or organisation in an area 'yet to be impacted by disaster', perhaps wondering what some of the issues and struggles were in the post-Black Saturday environment. You might be in an agency and have responsibilities in various aspects of emergency management. You may be a researcher interested in research approaches, and or emergencies. You may be a program or policy writer in government. You may be a student writing an assignment.

Whoever you are, CatholicCare invites your interest, and thanks you. At the same time we warn you that the read may be overwhelming, unsatisfying, messy and partial, particularly if you are looking for easy 'answers'. We have not been tempted to strip away the ambiguities, the paradoxes, the grey, and the pain, as well as, the resilience and pleasure, expressed through the voices of those who provided their viewpoints. Together these various and at times disparate viewpoints constitute the work of this project.

The reader will find there are gaps in the portrayal of issues that one might expect to find discussed in a recovery setting. There were absent voices for example, particularly those from state government roles. We have used some secondary sources of data for some missing perspectives. There were many conversations about the difficulties faced particularly by local government and community recovery committees in implementing the policies and decisions of other levels of government. There were also many glimpses of empathy with the difficulties faced by state government staff acting within a context of intense political and election cycle pressures. In addition, conscious of facing severely affected citizens in disaster-impacted communities, with their expectations for decisive action. Add to this mix an actively engaged media and you get a sense of some of the pressures at play at the state level. Other accounts of these internal state government perspectives and pressures may be hard to come by, but these would certainly help fill some of the more obvious gaps that are apparent among the many legitimate perspectives brought forward in this report.

CatholicCare (Melbourne Archdiocese) is no stranger to the complexities encountered when offering a supportive presence to those impacted by the Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex that struck Victoria on February 7, 2009. We have much to be proud of, and we are aware of some of the balls we dropped, particularly in the latter period of our recovery work. We have adopted the view of both pride and humility, in supporting the dissemination of this report; that there is something to be gained by in the face of an event of unprecedented scale for which no one was truly prepared. Like many of the participants in this study, we

think there is much to gain in airing some of the many dilemmas associated with post-disaster recovery work.

This report is not designed to judge actions, behaviors described or experienced, but to make visible some of the underpinning dynamics and tensions that operate in a recovery environment, in this case, in the critical first few years post-disaster. We acknowledge the gap between the conduct of the study and the dissemination of our final report. We seek to be kind to ourselves by saying, ‘better late than never’. We hope you will agree.

Some say we are in the midst of a 'paradigm shift' in the thinking about emergencies. We take here the current National Strategy for Disaster Resilience as one point of reference. The Strategy recognises that disaster resilience is a shared responsibility for individuals, households, businesses and communities, as well as for governments.

This report suggests that the journey toward shared responsibility will continue to be a thorny and difficult one. One requiring more protracted cross-sectoral negotiation, with shared understanding, shared resourcing and shared empowerment, a pre-requisites for shared responsibility. Such discussions and reflections on the conduct of disaster recovery need to include disaster-impacted people to better inform responses to the question of how best to enable community-led community renewal processes. This report suggests many new opportunities for all stakeholders, (which in community safety is everyone), with a focus on the considerable resources of government to better support and enable local initiatives, local leadership, local decision-making and local responsibility-taking.

I acknowledge the commitment made by Daryl Taylor and Helen Goodman, in their efforts over the last many months, to bring this report to the surface. I acknowledge those who participated in the study, for their rich and thoughtful conversations, which form the basis of the report. I also acknowledge the St Kilda Branch of the City of Port Phillip Library, who hosted Helen and Daryl in their ‘Brown Room’ as ‘writers in residence’ for several months, free of charge. I also thank the Archbishop’s Fund for the small stipend made available to acknowledge some of the time spent by Daryl Taylor and Helen Goodman to finalise this report.

The views expressed in this report are not necessarily the views of CatholicCare, its CEO, or Board.

I hope you will find the report content as illuminating and useful for future disaster preparedness, response, recovery and renewal thinking and action as I have.

Janet Cribbes

Manager of CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service, 2009-2012.

Acknowledgements

We appreciated that participants were willing to share their views with CatholicCare.

We acknowledge the candor shown by workshop and interview participants, as well as the empathy they showed for others in different parts of the recovery system, even when those parts were sometimes sources of discomfort to them.

We acknowledge the determination held by participants to make sense of their particular situation (and the situation of others) and the wider context within which they were operating.

We thank them all for their generous approach and substantial contributions.

Table of Contents

Glossary of Terms and Concepts 1

Executive Summary 3

Section 1: Report Background 17

Introduction 17
Our Context 17
Our Region 20
CatholicCare's independence 22
Our Project 22
Broad aims *22*
Research approach *23*
Local Government Authorities (LGAs) *25*
Community Service Organisations (CSOs) *26*
Community Recovery Committees (CRCs) *27*
Summary numbers *27*
Report Uses 28
Report Scope 29
Our Disclaimers 30

Section 2: Local Government Authorities Recovery Conversations 33

Introduction 33
The Unprecedented Impact of Black Saturday 33
The impact of the fires. *33*
Precarious State-Local Government Relationships 35
Preamble *35*
The unifying experience of disrespect *36*
VBRRA – an 'unexpected' entity: disturbance in lines of authority *36*
One size fits all? *38*
Other State Government presence in recovery *39*
Need for greater recognition of others roles in recovery *40*
Arguments over Resourcing, Authority and the Media 41
Resources required for Emergency Response *41*
Political pressures between different levels of government *42*
The media in recovery *44*
The conundrum of Community Recovery Committees (CRCs) *45*
Differences in stances toward the CRCs *45*
From experience to meaning making – issues of authority *46*
The burden of shortened planning time lines *46*
Local planning and state priorities *47*
The need to pick up the pieces *48*
Renewing the commitment - task, relationship and role clarity 49
Increasing role clarity - barriers and opportunities *51*
A Stronger Commitment to Community Development 53
Community development practice and principles *53*
Local Government, Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management 56
Integrating disaster preparedness and emergency management *56*
The limits to local government *59*
Fostering Organisational and Community Resilience 60
Particular challenges - structural disadvantage, dependency and resilience *60*
Compliance with the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission *63*

Naming the Learning - Sharing the Disaster Recovery Experience 63
The Long Haul 66

Section 3: Community Service Organisations Recovery Conversations 68
Introduction 68
The Context of Vertical Contracting with State Government 68
Relevant aspects of the LGA context 69
The Imperative of Authorising Environments 70
What is an authorising environment 70
Experiences of the use of authority 71
How does 'authorisation in collaboration' actually work? 75
CSOs_focus on staff well being 76
Introduction 76
Healthy organisational and personal characteristics 77
Individual self-awareness and self-care 79
Pervasive contextual and systemic influences 81
Inter organisational networks and alliances 81
Bridging Silos in Emergency Management 82
Community Services in a Community Development Framework 84
Agency Competition and Agency Collaboration 88
Antecedents for competition and collaboration 88
'System' practices and tools and their influence on collaboration 89
Innovating and Adapting our Service Delivery Models 92
Increasing community development orientation 92
In-house clinical model or out-reach social models 93
Dependency 94
The Opportunities and Risks associated with Volunteers 96
Fostering Greater Awareness of the Local Economy 97
Community Services Sector Preparedness 99

Section 4: Community Recovery Committees Recovery Conversations 101
Introduction 101
Nothing Happens in a Vacuum – the Primacy of Context 102
Introduction 102
Geographic, social and economic variation 103
Infrastructure 103
The impact of boundaries 103
Pre-existing community capability and relations 104
Culture of communities 104
Experiences of governance and leadership 105
Perceptions of emergency services 106
Public service environment 106
Community Responsiveness 107
The coercive state 107
The blind spot - governments cannot see community 108
Communities are typically the first responders 109
The critical role played by regional hubs 110
Community creativity, self-organisation, and responsibility 111
Community perspectives on Command and Control decision making 112
Community control, self-determination, and authorising environments 113
Enabling environments - space, time, resources and autonomy 115
Negotiating power relations 115
Dissension and fracture lines 116
Small business losses and community economy development 116

The Tsunami of Agency and Government Help....117
VBRRA (Victorian Bushfire Rebuilding and Recovery Authority)....117
The influx of donations and new resources....118
The management of donations....120
The scope of funding efforts – possibilities and limitations....122
The perpetuation of structural disadvantage....122
Community Recovery Committees set up and experiences....123
Polarity of experience....123
Introduction, formation and constitution of CRCs....123
Hurdles encountered in set up and implementation....125
Strategic alliances....126
The challenges of communication....127
The relentless CRC workload....128
The question of remuneration....129
The need for administrative support....130
Community Recovery Committee achievements....130
Recovery committee succession - ongoing community structures....131
Emergency Learning, Current and Future Challenges....132
The status quo or new beginnings....132
Recovery reviews – current and future....132
Dealing with multiple emergencies....133
Sustainable support structures for future emergencies....134
Township Protection Planning – a mechanism for 'shared responsibility'?....135
Other 'protective' mechanisms and processes?....136
Unresolved issues....138

Section 5 LGA, CSO and CRC Observations and suggestions....140
Introduction....140
Part 1: Summary of core issues across the 3 conversations....140
LGA officer priorities....140
CSO worker priorities....141
CRC member priorities....141
Part 2: Some priority areas common to all three groups....142
Part 3: Detailed observations and suggestions from the three conversations....142
Observations and suggestions - Local Government Authorities....142
Observations and suggestions - Community Service Organisations....153
Observations and suggestions - Community Recovery Committees....161

Section 6: Wider system tensions....168
Introduction....168
Absent voices....168
Emergency Service volunteers....168
Other government services....171
The policy and research context - Community-led recovery....174
Community presence in Emergency Management....177
Organisational and societal dynamics - flux, discomfort and threat....179
High turnover in human systems....179
Human Systems and their (our) psychodynamics....180
Culture clashes....186
Wicked problems - learning from other sectors....187
Economies, scale, landscapes and community....190
A collective orientation....192
Slowing the pace at a time of crisis....195
Unpacking different meanings in the Emergency Management field....198

Unexplored meanings sitting between disempowerment and coercion *201*

Section 7: Distilled Learnings **203**

1. Self-organisation *205*
2. Subsidiarity *207*
3. Solidarity *209*
4. Systemicity *211*
5. Legibility *214*
6. Complexity *216*
7. Commons–public goods *218*
8. Dignity *221*
9. Non-violence *224*
10. Humility *228*

Section 8: Concluding Remarks **230**

Appendix 1: Stacey – Organisation Dynamics **238**

Appendix 2: Workshop Inquiry Questions **239**

Local Government Workshop Final Agenda 239
NGO/CSO Workshop Final Agenda 241
CRC RECOVERY REVIEW - Draft Agenda for Review 242

Appendix 3: Frameworks for Engaging with Wicked Problems **243**

Brown et al (2010) *243*
Tricket et al (2011) *243*
Kania and Kramer: Collective Impact Strategists: *244*

Appendix 4: Properties of Systems **245**

Appendix 5: 'Talking Together' Community Conversations **246**

Meg Wheatley: 12 Principles & Associated Questions 246

Appendix 6: Emergency Relief Handbook: Acknowledgements **247**

Appendix 7: About the Authors **248**

Reference List **249**

Glossary of Terms and Concepts

Adaptive Governance	Societal power-sharing arrangements that can readily adapt in the face of uncertainty and constantly changing circumstances, and that can deal with different knowledges, values, interests, perspectives and power in ways that enable effective self-organisation in the face of change (Brown et al. Institute of Land Food and Water Resources)
Authorisation	Authorisation is achieved through both representative and participative democracy. It normatively legitimises the core assumptions and aims, mechanisms of delivery and methods of measurement of a service. Citizens, normatively, are a key part of the authorising environment and must be engaged in the public value process: a process that may involve refining citizens' preferences through education, providing citizens with information, fostering mechanisms for transparent collaborative decision making and leadership that shapes, rather than just reacts to, citizens' preferences (Collins, p.25)
ATAPS	ATAPS is the Federal Government program that funds mental health services in local communities through primary health care organisations such as Divisions of General Practice.
Bushfire Community Recovery Service	The name given to the service that was developed by CatholicCare in the Melbourne Archdiocese after the 2009 Victorian bushfires, using monies from donations by the Catholic community
Bushfire CRC	Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre
CatholicCare	A community service organisation, which prior to its name change in April 2011, was known as Centacare Catholic Family Services. While CatholicCare has services across Australia, in this report, the work refers to the service offered in the geographic areas matching the Archdiocese of Melbourne.
Community Development	Community development may be conceptualised as a philosophical approach; a form of political activism (often operating outside paid employment) or as part of the community services industry (Kenny, 1996). We would widen these concepts to include community development activities as forming part of many sectors, including Local Government and Emergency Services sector.
Community Led Recovery	The policy framework for use within community recovery
Community Service Organisations	We used this term broadly in this report. Participants in the CSO workshop included government contracted health and welfare service provider organisations and neighbourhood houses

CRC	Community Recovery Committee
DHS	Department of Human Services (Victoria)
DOH	Department of Health
EMMV	Emergency Management Manual of Victoria
Green Paper	Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria: Green Paper
IAP2	IAP2 is an international member association that seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world: http://www.iap2.org.au/
Incommensurable	Having no common basis, measure, or standard of comparison
LGA	Local Government Authority
MAV	Municipal Association of Victoria
NSDR	National Strategy for Disaster Resilience
OFSC	Office of the Fire Services Commissioner
PPRR	Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (Emergency Management spectrum)
RDV	Regional Development Victoria, part of the Department of State Development, Business and Innovation, housing the Fire Recovery Unit
RMIT	Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology
Subsidiarity	The subsidiarity principle states that: '*the higher levels of government should only perform functions that cannot be effectively and efficiently undertaken by lower levels of government [or community governance]….[it] might involve a [constitutional] provision … that, unless amended by a referendum, decision making and administration should be delegated to the most local practical level*' (Lowell, 2006, p 5).
VBAF	Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund
VBCMS	Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service
VBRC	Victorian (2009) Bushfires Royal Commission
VBRRA	Victorian Bushfire Recovery and Reconstruction Authority
VLGA	Victorian Local Government Association

Executive Summary

This report documents a study carried out by CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service (BCRS), in the Melbourne Archdiocese of the Catholic Church. This service formed part of the response the Catholic Church made through the donations of $4 million from the Catholic community in Australia, following Australia's worst peace time disaster – the Victorian 2009 Black Saturday firestorms. This report arises from one of the Community Development activities of the Bushfire Community Recovery Service. The fund was managed by the Archbishops Charitable Appeal Bushfire Fund, and allowed for an independence from government. The value of such independence became a theme in this report.

The report details findings from an interactive research project that sought views from three participant groups in the Victorian 2009 bushfires recovery period, about their experiences carrying out their roles in the recovery period. Fifty-three people participated - twenty-one participants were from Local Government Authorities (LGAs), 18 from Community Service Organisations (CSOs) and 14 from Community Recovery Committees (CRCs). The data for the project was collected in the 6 months from June 2011. Data included material brought up in conversations in the workshops and other meeting formats and some written material that participants either spoke to at the workshops or forwarded before and after the contact with the researcher. Daryl Taylor collected the data from June 2011. The project report writing process stalled for a period. Daryl and Helen Goodman finalised the writing of the report between September 2013 and April 2014. Janet Cribbes provided support and facilitation to this process. The final report was launched on the 20th February, 2015.

The purpose of the three sets of conversations was to capture snapshots of the recovery effort from these three different perspectives, at the two and a half year mark: what were the experiences of these key parties, with a particular emphasis on drawing out their understanding of how the interests of 'community' had been served up to that point. It was hoped that this would be a contribution to the field in general, as well as to widen CatholicCare's thinking on community development ideas within a recovery environment.

The initial project aim was to bring the three groups together once they had read the documentation of all of the separate group discussions and conduct a final round of braiding conversations oriented towards developing shared understanding of each others roles, responsibilities, experiences, reflections and learning. While this was not able to be achieved in the course of this project, we are hopeful some of our readers might already have pursued this unmet aim.

Despite the limitations documented in the study, the content of this report is valuable for the insights it provides from the respective and shared struggles and successes, politics and uncertainties, and issues and opportunities associated with being a senior leader or manager or professional employee or elected committee member of a

- **Local Government Authority** (LGA)
- **Community Service Organisation** (CSO), or a
- **Community Recovery Committee** (CRC)

faced with the daunting task of making a difference in the aftermath of a major disaster.

We are keen to emphasise that this report is not a judgment of individuals or organisations. We also note that many changes will have occurred since these conversations took place. However, like many of the participants in this study, we think there is much to gain in airing some of the many dilemmas associated with emergency management and post-disaster

recovery and community renewal work. We also offer some approaches to future directions in an effort to give more ballast to the brave yet unsubstantiated idea of 'shared responsibility' for community safety and disaster and hazard preparedness.

The report is set out in eight sections.

The first section provides more detail of the project purpose and methods. The Melbourne Catholic Archdiocese has a boundary that roughly equates with that of the footprint of the Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex. The conditions leading to Black Saturday are described, as is the extent of destruction. Some history, socio-demographic and topographic information is provided, including particular areas of social disadvantage and some of the diminished economic, employment and transport opportunities in the region. Although 27 of the 77 LGAs were impacted by the Victorian fires (and 6 of the 8 DHS regions, as they were then), this report draws on participants from the five adjoining local government areas (straddling the metropolitan-rural divide, Kinglake National Park and the Great Diving Range) where the impact of the bushfires in terms of loss of life, property and infrastructure was most significant.

The aim of this first section is to set the scene for the many different boundary intersections across this region, as well as to develop a picture of variation in response capacity of key organisations, including local government and community service organisations. Differences, synergies and complementarities are highlighted as the report unfolds.

The second section records the content of the conversations among 21 Local Government Authority (LGA) participants, and outlines the key themes that emerged. Through their eyes, this section highlights the enormous impacts of the fires on local government as organisations, on their staff, on their communities. In one LGA for example, 14 staff members lost their homes. It emphasises the protracted periods of fire activity, and the extraordinary and stressful workloads. It highlights the variation across the five local government areas in terms of history of relationships with their communities. It also notes the ongoing impact of local government amalgamations some decades prior. A key thrust of local government officer comment was the invidious position they found themselves in, when the unexpected advent of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) made redundant long held state government policy positing local governments as the authority in relation to Emergency Management and Recovery.

For many, the key ingredient in the experience was one of feeling disrespected. They found prior rules and roles were overturned and disregarded, they often struggled to establish lines of authority, and felt inadequately resourced for the tasks they had to pursue. Vivid detail was provided of the politicisation of bushfire recovery, struggles with being insufficiently resourced to deal with the media, and feeling they bore the brunt of miscommunications. A phrase used often was of becoming the 'meat in the sandwich'. Specific comment is provided on particular state government approaches that compounded the difficulties for local government, including what was referred to as a 'one size fits all' approach; an overemphasis in the minds of some on physical infrastructure and the built environment; the setting of unworkable time lines for project delivery; and in particular, approaches that were incommensurate with or opposed to 'community development'.

Relations with their communities were often strained. Local government officers expressed considerable empathy about the pressure on communities. Some saw links from this pressure, to burnout and disengagement of community members. Some also saw community being revitalised. There were particular demands too for local government in

working with CRCs, and experiences here varied. Some saw great benefits in the development of these working relationships, for community members, for Councils, for the opportunities for community members to develop leadership. Difficulties were noted, with the shift in power relations between the community and local government as demonstrated by CRCs having 'sign off' on projects. Some believed this led to unrealistic future expectations for them as local government officers, as well as to what were seen at times as unsustainable projects that became local government responsibility to manage into the future.

Some questioned the actual capacity and willingness of community members to be more involved in Emergency Management concerns. For some there was an inverse relationship between the level of affluence of the community and the likelihood of their involvement - the higher the affluence, the lower the engagement. Some saw those community members with higher levels of education as having greater expectations of council officers, but seeming to take less personal responsibility. Others saw the most disadvantaged being disproportionately impacted by natural disasters. Many saw community as uninformed about Emergency Management at the local, state and federal level.

There were strong beliefs voiced about the need for role definition, role documentation and role negotiation at all levels. Many saw that there was insufficient articulation of authority.

While the weight of feedback in conversations had a focus on things that were difficult, there was also strength and energy to explore opportunities for new ways of working. Concern was voiced that the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission had contributed to a culture of compliance rather than flexibility and adaptability at the local government level.

Core ideas from this section:

- Reiteration of local government's status as the level of government closest to the people and communities and the leader and coordinator of disaster recovery
- Formal re-acknowledgement of local government's strategic disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery coordination roles and responsibilities
- Appropriate levels of resourcing of local government's disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery coordination roles and responsibilities
- Recognition of the pervasiveness of a culture of intergovernmental bullying, and the associated ongoing disempowerment of local government – the least powerful tier
- Establishment of clear guidelines co-produced with local governments clearly outlining and formally committing to agreed roles and responsibilities
- A desire for more autonomy in setting the direction of community and organisation disaster preparedness as several of the Royal Commission recommendations are contributing to a culture of compliance instead of responsiveness, adaptability and innovation
- An acknowledgement of the impact of major disasters and trauma on staff and local government as an organisation, and to have in place strategies to prevent organisational trauma and shock
- A need for local government to advocate for ongoing funding for ongoing community development positions in local government to support the building of flourishing, dynamic, resilient and creative disaster-ready communities
- A desire to see state government move beyond incremental, instrumental or centralizing changes and take the big leap of faith and invest in transformational shifts in power to local governments and communities

The third section sets out the results of conversations with Community Service Organisations (CSOs). Where LGAs had pre-existing authority in the recovery at least prior to the advent of VBRRA, this was not so for most of those CSOs present. Their presences were a mix of 'voluntary' involvement, as in those funded independently such as CatholicCare, and those who cobbled together other funding from within their agencies to allow a flexible response, as well as those who held contracts with the state government to deliver specified services. Some like the Victorian Council of Churches had certain specified and 'pre agreed' roles, and two programs were being staffed by community members in paid roles within CSOs. Four of the 18 CSO participants were also community residents from fire-impacted communities.

Those organisations that were tied to contractual arrangements experienced some limitations in their capacity to explore the nature of community dynamics and what this might mean for the services they were to offer. Several shared their insights into the dynamics that were generated with the VBRRA authorising of CRCs with certain tasks, while also questioning whether CSOs could have played a stronger role in assisting community to find their voice and be heard by various authorities. Several CSO participants believed they were ill-informed about Emergency Management structures and processes, and also saw that communities too were often not aware of the wider authority structures, and that this limited both the CSOs and the communities in deciding where to best invest their time and energy. Questions were raised in these conversations as in the other two groups, about the extent to which it may be consciously or unconsciously so, that we all want someone else to 'take the responsibility' for emergency management thinking and action.

Two key matters were most talked about. One was the issue of establishing 'authorising environments' – what were some of the dilemmas observed and experienced, what were the negative outcomes of blurred or absent authorising environments, and whatever authorising environments were, or should be, they needed to be as close to the ground and as local and inclusive as possible.

The second issue that occupied the most time and generated the most text in the write up of the workshop, was that of worker well being. This was discussed from many different angles, and this section of the report will be of benefit to other agencies considering playing a role in a future disaster.

Questions and comments pertained to ways to promote positive and healthy expectations for staff. There was general agreement that staff ought to be accessing some level of support. There were valuable conversations about ways to encourage staff to take the risks required, and discussions about creative ways to muster collegial support.

The demands of community development were particularly highlighted as acute. It was seen as a particularly uncomfortable space to work in, and for some, the discomfort was constant. Dilemmas were shared around needing to be very careful about boundaries while working in a more holistic way. Also, given trust was a central ingredient with community development, conversation highlighted that trust was so easily compromised in the culture that was named a 'rush rush' culture by participants. Some saw that community development was central to the task of contributing to self-reliant communities, and that it was much talked of, but often not achieved in practice.

There was a general agreement that the interconnectedness of the issue of organisational responsibilities to provide supportive and enabling environments for staff, and in particular supervision, and the personal responsibility of the worker to be open to the potentially confronting reality of this experience. This interplay between organisational and personal

responsibilities resonated with, or mirrored, some of the policy questions on shared responsibility in the emergency management field in general.

Some agency staff saw their agencies have a negative impact on communities by seeking to capture input and resources of community and in doing so diverting them from community priorities. Many saw the funding environment in community service organisations as having a negative effect on their capacity to work collaboratively. This was both in the field in general, and also specifically in the funding environment post-fires. Relationships, shared understandings and shared commitment was central to collaboration; these relationships required time, energy, good faith, knowledge, a sense of accountability, and of endeavour.

Several would have liked to offer more outreach, and some saw the need to return to a more balanced service provision model that incorporated the social model of health.

While each of the three groups discussed the issue of 'dependency' in various ways, not unsurprisingly the most nuanced conceptual understanding of the parameters of dependency came from the CSO participants. It was seen to be an underexplored concept in recovery thinking and practice, and that it is critical to understand - how dependency manifests itself, how it is experienced and lived with, how expectations it gives rise to can be managed, and how boundaries can be constructed within which the different manifestations of dependency can be understood and appropriately responded to.

While issues of local economy did not gain much workshop time in conversation, it was seen as important, and that agencies needed to be more mindful of this crucial strand of recovery, particularly in relation to the impact of gifts and donations on the local economy.

Several roles were discussed for CSOs, including advocate, mediator, interpreter, influencer, facilitator, partnership broker, social entrepreneur, and capacity builder. All were seen as needing exploration, alongside the more traditional contracted clinical service and welfare provider roles. Finding new funding streams were seen as critical to these developments.

Core ideas in this section:

- A need for CSOs to develop independent sources of income and become less dependent on government funding in order to be able to deliver more nuanced, responsive place-based programs and services
- A need to situate community services delivery programs within a wider place-based community development framework
- A need to extend practice to include wider social roles such as community process facilitation, conflict resolution, reflective sense/meaning making, alliance building and community engagement
- A need to participate in and support the shared process of proactively constituting defensible authorizing environments with disaster vulnerable communities
- A need to build capacity to support local economies, small business development and support, social entrepreneurialism and community economy development
- A need to develop and refine disaster recovery community worker wellbeing and safety policies, procedures and practices and contribute our knowledge and expertise across other domains

The fourth section outlines the issues raised by the 14 CRC members who gave their time to talk about some of their experiences. They were reluctant to highlight their achievements. What they contributed to their communities was clearly nothing short of an extraordinary service. It was perhaps inevitable that most of the conversations were around matters that posed difficulties and learnings they wished to be shared with others.

Several participants were open about their lack of knowledge of Emergency Management systems in general and recovery structures and processes in particular. Most were unaware of the history of CRCs in previous Victorian disasters. Those who participated had a wide variety of experiences and participated in, or set up, diverse structures after the fires. On the one hand Kinglake Ranges CRC was constituted after an AEC election and seen as the representative body across the small communities and settlements that make up the Kinglake Ranges. Strathewen created its own organisation, and not using the 'community recovery committee' phraseology, named itself the Strathewen Community Renewal Association.

While not explicitly stated as far as we know, the CRC structure was the embodiment of the 'community led recovery' policy. If this is the case, considerable work is required from all parties to materialise and operationalise this ideal, taking a range of factors into account.

While policy statements put 'context' as a key issue for consideration in disaster resilience, in practice, it was too big a stretch for the state to attend to. Attempts to differentiate communities by the State were seen as insufficient.

Like participants in the other two groups, CRC members talked of a range of matters that pre-dated the fires, which we called contextual factors. They influenced community–agency–government relationships, and included issues such as community structures, politics, cultures, economic resources, town planning, whether the community had identified collective structures that gave it some 'constitution', the number of boundaries that cut across the areas that made up the communities, such as health and welfare agency boundaries, emergency services boundaries, and those of all levels of government. These were further discussed as to their impact on how the disaster was responded to. CRC members believed that many of these pre-existing constitutive factors were not given adequate consideration by those in authority. It was a common theme for some that the history of local government amalgamations in the 1990's still had relevant impacts. Other contextual issues included the scale (population) and sprawl (dispersed nature) of the settlements and communities they were set up to represent.

What might be seen as more cultural factors included the difficulties of eliciting local knowledge. An over valuing of professional knowledge and institutional knowledge was one way in which local place and community knowledge was diminished. Another less direct dynamic was the difficulty experienced by professionals in holding a stance of 'not knowing'. That community members are often the 'first responders' to disasters was reinforced by CRC members, as was the passionate engagement and commitment of community members to provide ongoing service to their community after the disaster had passed. This sense or desire to serve remained for longer than the initial response period, and is a matter of key importance to identify, understand and work with this. This relates too to the issue of how community members approach risk, and how government and other agencies approach risk. There were some strong views that there are times when a 'reasonable decision' under the circumstances would and should be an adequate defense.

Issues of power and decision-making were discussed from different angles. Interestingly, community members themselves raised concerns for local government, and talked of the

shifting dynamics and partners in what was referred to by one participant as the 'CRC-VBRRA-Shire-VBAF' dance. Some of the conversations suggested a mix of changed or new relationships and with that, concerns as to whether there was a level playing field, and where that was not present (it was seldom seen as present), which parties were most at risk in this unevenness. Some participants raised questions about whether, in the guise of being 'community' and under the policy environment of 'community led', CRC members became co-opted as 'volunteers for VBRRA'. These were challenging experiences, questions and insights. If CRC members could have been anything other than volunteers, should the question of remuneration have been considered? There was some compensation offered for travel, and other costs, although there was a lot of dissatisfaction with the delivery of these resources. The wider question of how money changes relationships was a rich one and seen by several as worthy of more exploration.

There were valuable discussions about the importance of leadership, approaches to maintaining cohesiveness, and openness to the ideas that leadership will vary across time – community leaders before an event may not be the same ones who lead after an event.

Several CRC members voiced their concern at the way local government was disempowered through their relations with the State. For some this state of affairs was welcome. Others saw this as a serious deficit in system relations. All sensed the extreme tensions in and between different parts and levels of government. Some expressed what they called a 'pragmatic fatalism' – that things have always been thus; that there has always been significant 'bullying' between different levels of government, and that community gets caught in, and ultimately loses out, in these dynamics. There were several accounts of what was referred to as coercion of community members, particularly around issues such as the community needing to fit in with government time lines for planning and action. Some saw the creation of a 'whole new disaster politics' – and saw the disaster recovery space as endemically a site of competition and conflict – within communities, between communities and between various levels of government and agency bodies, and with political representatives.

Concerns were raised about the differences in perspectives on time frames. For some in government and agencies, there was a drive to 'tie things off' by a certain time. VBRRA finished in 2011, although some functions went to other state government departments. Some CRCs found themselves reporting to local government. While there was considerable discussion about the learning that had been gained in communities and through CRC processes, there was a sense for some that this was lost as committees disbanded. Those who had set up a community 'owned' structure were validated in their efforts; some were still in the process of setting up their own structures.

Participants had particular issues they wished to convey to others – that other community groups seeking to constitute themselves and sort out their ground rules and other relationships, needed their own space in which to interact, to negotiate, and not to be exposed to watchful 'outside' eyes.

Particularly stressful topics included the negative effects of working to state government imposed unreasonable time frames, when there was general acknowledgement that the recovery period after a disaster of such magnitude would be considerable. This exposed a vacuum in relation to spaces for longer-term thinking. In addition, there was a lot of strong feeling about the time that was taken, and in some views wasted, by community members involved in resourcing the management of donated goods.

Like the other two groups, the CRC participants reserved some strong feeling about adverse outcomes for those who were renting property at the time of the fires. There were some strong views too about the difficulty for landlords to rebuild and replenish the rental housing stock.

Several were frustrated with the task of communicating with their communities. Some CRC members felt that community members did not take enough responsibility for keeping themselves informed.

There was a breadth of reaction and comment on the experience of being a participant in a CRC. Several spoke vividly about the toll their participation exacted on their health, their families, and their financial situation. Some reported positive experiences of participation in a CRC, seeing that it enabled them to make a significant contribution and utilise their skills, knowledge and networks. A decided downside however was also discussed and this extended to matters of recognition, empowerment, compensation and remuneration.

As with the other two groups, some participants identified the vacuum around the question of who had responsibility or authority to incorporate learning from the impacted communities. This linked with the very grounded discussions with CRC members when they voiced their concerns about what they now knew and how this related to future disaster preparedness.

As with other conversations, several participants in this group voiced views that pointed to the underpinning of a shared responsibility agenda, in which the views on what's required to decrease the devastating impacts of community disruption after disaster were keenly expressed. Interestingly, one such view was that community members could be more proactive in helping Emergency services. There was also a strong preference among several CRCs to highlight community resilience, renewal and regeneration (rather than recovery).

Core ideas in this section included:

- Emergency management plans are too abstract, lacking local detail and engagement; resources are needed to support the development of interrelated household, neighbourhood and community preparedness plans and safety and evacuation drills

- A need to establish community-based legal entities capable of constituting authorizing environments and foster participatory and deliberative processes that enable local community decision-making autonomy

- A need to collectively prepare for multiple disasters/crises – ecological, economic, social, energy – by taking a 'whole community' approach to building/maintaining generalisable community resilience

- A need to consider disaster preparedness as a community, public or social good or a shared 'common', rather than only as a private individual or family responsibility

- A need to repeatedly advocate that shared responsibility is a good idea, but to enact it will require sharing understanding, sharing commitments, sharing resources and sharing power

- A need to call for genuine place-based and community-led disaster preparedness and responses and for professionals and institutions (and their disciplines, targets

and programs) to embrace place-based and community development informed knowledge

- A need to reinforce that preparedness for major disasters goes beyond the immediate response phase and into what communities increasingly refer to as renewal and regeneration (rather than recovery – which rightly or wrongly has in some eyes been associated with welfare, learned helplessness and dependency)

Section 5 shifts in style, allowing the voices of each of the groups to be heard in terms of specific learnings and suggestions for change. The content and issues raised here will be of interest to any group thinking about disaster preparedness or emergency management: a LGA officer or manager, a CSO worker or manager, a state official or a community member. The statements do not seek to have internal coherence – they represent the diverse views held by the participants of each group. Despite this there were many strong, shared themes.

This section levers off the statement by McLennan and Handmer (2012) about the historical propensity for communities to be seen as targets of agency-led campaigns 'rather than co-implementers or goal-setters'. We think this section can contribute by setting out in 'statement' terms, matters that if attended to could create shifts in the various sectors toward getting a clearer view on what community as co-designer and 'community as co-implementer' might look like. Do communities engage with the structures that are 'offered to them' after a disaster, such as the prescribed policy that 'Community Recovery Committees' will be set up, as set out in the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV) or can they pre-empt those structures, be recognised in other ways before a disaster, so as to be able to attend to the community perspectives in an ongoing way, strengthening those links locally? Do agencies only take up the roles they are offered after a disaster, or can they use their considerable creativity and strengths and shape their services to more of a community wide approach before an emergency event? How can they develop and share their perspectives, skills and knowledge for a stronger understanding of self-care throughout the community? How would future local government staff take up and respond to a shift in their roles in the event of another disaster that triggered a centralist control point? We think the conversations in sections 2, 3 and 4, and the more statement-oriented section 5, might serve as contributions toward highlighting the importance of some of these questions.

As one of the key themes in this work is the need for flexible 'place sensitive' approaches to recovery, some of these issues may resonate with some areas, community groups, community service organisations, and local government authorities and not with others.

Some core issues across the three groups:

- A desire for greater, rather than less local autonomy, and a requirement to define roles and responsibilities across the three areas, plus those areas not represented in the project, and to co-create and co-constitute authorising environments for issue deliberation and decision-making
- To advocate for and support state government's role as that of enabling, empowering and resourcing disaster impacted/disaster vulnerable communities, service provider agencies and local governments
- For recognition of the negative impacts of the speed of the state government driving community recovery and reconstruction, and advocate for human scale/human pace processes

- A shared desire to see system-wide investments to ensure communities are better prepared for future disasters and enabled to take responsibility for leading preparedness planning processes
- A desire to see ongoing state government investments in community development workers to facilitate disaster-vulnerable communities preparedness / community resilience planning
- A need for all to be more mindful of the negative impact of prolonged exposure to traumatised survivors in disaster communities on volunteers, front-line staff and on whole organisations
- To collaborate around investing in securing the community economy, providing training and employment opportunities and enabling socially entrepreneurial approaches to disaster community renewal

Section 6 widens the report by referring to some of the policy environment and other literature that amplifies several of the themes on the report, particularly in relation to 'place' and 'community' and the tensions in the system around these concepts.

Our point in highlighting both some *'behind the scenes'* tensions, and some explicit ones, is to provide affirmation for many of the insights offered by participants in the study, and also to draw attention to the background dynamics into which the *'community led recovery'* principle was placed. We outline some of the many and painful tensions for Emergency Services volunteers, particularly around their service to their localities, and the costs to them, and the tensions in the community fabric, that accompany these roles. We believe the tensions outlined above in reports such as the Auditor Generals (2010) mirrored what was experienced daily in the field, and reported through the conversations in this report: issues of lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, tensions between different government and non government stakeholders, frustration and clashes due to the absence of agreed upon formal decision making processes and ongoing difficulties in finding ways to collaborate effectively when working with what was admittedly thousands of traumatised community members.

Tensions for government about how to manage 'service equity', while on the other hand 'supporting the principle of devolved responsibility' are highlighted. Issues of autonomy and flexibility were raised, as were issues of unresolved tensions between centralist and regional DHS, and how these tensions were experienced by others in their many 'central' or 'local' guises. Much of the government literature talks of the need for services and agencies to be collaborative, but often there was no reference to how or where 'community' fitted in. There was a paradox in this – that the policy has community at the centre, while much of the focus, energy, resources and decision-making were focused on 'institutional' structures. 'Community' was not in frame as partners in collaborative effort.

One of the examples of related literature giving voice to themes similar to those raised by participants in this study was from the Regional Australia Institute (2013). This report highlights the key link from disaster to renewal as 'detailed, comprehensive and locally contextualised planning'. Like other voices in this report, this Institute argued that business was misunderstood and under attended to in the recovery period. Their report drew attention to the need for greater attention to local renewal and adaptation, and how local economic issues are key to this. It argues that community level knowledge, expertise and institutional capacity cannot be attended to without this detailed and contextualised local planning. Again, as with many reports, it finishes with the much talked of requirement for greater engagement with local communities.

Many reports refer to the phenomenon of the resources that might otherwise be deployed in developing a closer understanding of and providing direct structural support to community, getting stuck in the higher institutional levels. The link to the diminishment of autonomy and self-reliance at the local community level needs to be constantly highlighted.

Other tensions that diminish the local community focus are increasing self-interest and competitive relations between key players, electoral cycles, conceptually limited frameworks to reform and monitor partnership approaches, lack of agreed structures and process for dialogue and conflict management, and lack of rewards for developing place-based and community focused approaches. There are many barriers to the idea of developing shared understanding, which this report argues is a precursor to shared responsibility. The presence of multiple and conflicting forces makes the tasks associated with developing shared understandings enormous. This was exemplified in VBRRA who were required to *(in their own words)* '*be seen to act quickly, decisively and comprehensively*'. Some regarded the speed as crippling and ultimately counterproductive. For others there were developments that have strengthened community.

Reference is made to the valuable contributions to the study of 'wicked problems' in other fields – environmental management, public health, and public education in low-income neighbourhoods. Section 6 finds parallels between these domains and that of Emergency Management. Reference is made to the importance of scale, localness, local distinctiveness, and how some of these ideas fit well with ways to approach disaster preparedness particularly around communities getting better at interpreting their local landscapes in an environment change framework.

Some of what are called 'systems psychodynamics' are outlined, for their value in helping us understand how and why states of denial may be operating, how we desire protection and can abrogate our roles to others, how authorities can fear a loss of control and act coercively, and how other defense mechanisms may be operating. The report highlights the policy emphasis of 'shared responsibility' and raises the possibility that corrective action toward equipping community so they can manage to respond to 'their responsibilities', could become coercive, if the structural underpinnings of and motivations for enabling community are not attended to. This section highlights the voices from within senior ranks of Emergency Management institutions about the need for power to be shared with community, and some of it given up by authorities. The difficulty in the transference of power and resources is exacerbated by the absence in many areas of structures within which community can become more involved.

Insightful and progressive practitioners from within the CSOs have good clinical understandings of how individuals become disempowered, and work is required to further understand how this works at the community level. There were views expressed that when disempowerment occurs it always comes at a cost. Some put the view that as a society perhaps the social and economic rationalist policies that keep it going as it is currently structured, have already resulted in 'enough' disempowerment and learned helplessness such that some communities are now unwilling to 'take responsibility'. That is, that chronic disempowerment has already become 'entrenched'. This negative perspective needs to be aired and discussed.

With the above sentiments as a backdrop, this report suggests that the journey toward shared responsibility will continue to be a thorny and difficult one, and one requiring less broad 'motherhood statement' rhetoric, and more protracted cross-sectoral negotiation to achieve a pre-requisite for shared responsibility, that being shared understanding. Such discussions and reflections on the conduct of disaster preparedness and recovery planning

need to include disaster-impacted people, as well as those with formal responsibilities in the area, and those who could be contributing but who are not yet part of the sector.

There is a need to develop more informed responses to the question of how best to enable community-led community renewal processes. This report suggests new opportunities for all stakeholders, (which in community resilience is everyone), with a focus on the considerable resources of government to better support and enable local initiatives, local leadership and local responsibility-taking. Much work remains to be done to materialise and support mechanisms for local area community governance.

Section 7 is entitled Distilled Learnings.

The various perspectives shared in the report, are in this section, encapsulated as key learnings, and distilled into a set of 10 principles that underpin many of the concerns raised, and reflect much of the optimism regarding proposed *place-based and community-led* and *generalisable community resilience* future directions actions and applications in relation to emergency management and disaster preparedness and disaster recovery policies, practices and programs.

These 10 principles are presented in diagrammatic form, with the two main principles nestled in the centre, within the Yin – Yang figure:

The first is legibility – which in this emergency management context is taken to be our mechanistic *instrumental specific disaster preparedness* and immediate crisis responses. Sitting opposite legibility, and as a complement to it, is the idea of complexity – understood as an emergent property generated by complex adaptive living systems processes and as essential to the development of *highly adaptive generalisable community resilience*. As in the philosophy of the Tao, neither factors are absolute, both are required, operating in an interdependent manner. The system they comprise is not static, but constantly in flux. We argue our current systematic commitment to mechanistic *instrumental specific disaster preparedness* and crisis response is out of balance – hypertrophied – and that, as a consequence, a systemic *highly adaptive generalisable community resilience* is currently under-resourced – atrophied – and is insufficiently understood, and where it is flourishing, it does so invisibly, below the radar.

Circling the periphery of the diagram (see Figure 2, page 204) are a set of related concepts that assist consolidate *highly adaptive generalisable community resilience*. In full, these are:

1. **Embrace Spontaneous Autonomous Local Peer-to-Peer Networks** *(self-organisation)*
2. **Enshrine Place-Based and Community-Led Regeneration and Renewal** *(subsidiarity)*
3. **Ensure Shared Understanding, Shared Resourcing and Shared Responsibility** *(solidarity)*
4. **Promote Emergency Management Critical Literacy and Conscientisation** *(systemicity)*
5. **Specific Disaster Preparedness – Single Purpose Instrumental Rationality** *(legibility)*
6. **Generalisable Community Resilience – Relational Systems Dynamics** *(complexity)*
7. **Enact Collaboration, Co-Creativity, Co-Production and Collective Impact** *(commons)*
8. **Engage Deeply with Disadvantage, Diversity, Difference and Dependency** *(dignity)*
9. **Acknowledge and Transcend Structural Theft and Structural Violence** *(non-violence)*
10. **Operate Beyond Denial – in Uncertainty, Instability and Unpredictability** *(humility)*

Some detail on each of these concepts or principles is provided, and effort is made to situate these them in the Emergency Management field. A selection of experiences of participants which are seen to be relevant, partially or fully, to the concept are restated in summary form from previous chapters, brief statements on key learnings are elaborated, quotes offered up as reminders, some ideas on advocacy offered, and each principle finishes with a conclusion.

It is hoped that Section 7 could 'stand alone' and be used to prompt discussion and dialogue in a range of delegated authority, contracted agency and community-based settings.

Section 8, entitled 'concluding remarks' offers a brief account of some of our own experiences of writing this report and bringing it to a close. We note our various states of being humbled, overwhelmed, and challenged by the task – of carrying the rich stories and finally bringing them to some coherence, at least as we've come to see it. We hope readers find some coherence too, and that some will find elements of their own experience reflected back and also encounter new insights from others.

We reiterate that there were so many people in so many different roles who demonstrated enduring courage and quiet persistence, as they went about their work. We acknowledge those who still work in the field, trying hard to make a difference in so many varied aspects of this 'system'. We continue to parenthesise 'system', and note the limitations of that word as a descriptor of the amorphous field that emergency management occupies.

Reference is made to the lower than anticipated number of women's voices in the report and how this reflects the wider context of emergency management, although we suggest there is a change toward a necessary and overdue feminising of the field. We note the paucity of critical debate in this field and allude to, and comment on, the complex ways in which silence is achieved and maintained. We also draw attention to the environment of psychological, emotional and social injury, where silence, self-imposed or 'system-imposed' can and does lead to deleterious outcomes at the individual, community, organisational and societal level. Without opportunities for healing these rifts that we both create and are created around us, there will continue to be a diminishment, rather than an enhancement of what our policies are seeking to create – resilient individuals, organisations and communities.

There are multiple challenges: increasing polarities (in wealth distribution, and its inherent vulnerability creation), increasing financial system volatility, increasing environmental and climate threats, less easily accessible energy reserves, human services struggling to survive with decreased resources, or less well distributed resources, and the increasing isolation, fragmentation and underemployment and unemployment experienced in communities.

If we are to have more disasters and crises, pressures on emergency management, against a backdrop of weakened community fabric, will be immense. We reiterate that there is scope for rebalancing the yin and yang by replenishing the non-instrumental adaptive half of the whole – the adaptable, fluid, dynamic woven through relationality. We hope we have drawn out the importance of connectedness and relationality, even if in large part we have done so by attending to the ubiquitous pressures that undermine and disrespect relationality.

At times the weight of comment in this report has highlighted the consequences associated with the dominance of the 'instrumental' side of the Yin - Yang figure – the side that does have to focus on the more rationale way of operating – and the associated weight of resources which this component of the whole 'holds': all of the expensive equipment, the highly technical communication systems, the high end collaboration of the heads of services and efforts to ensure some degree of collaboration for anticipated *events*. We have argued for the creative adaptation of systems already operating within emergency services, such as

incident debriefing, and scenario planning, toward a deeper more human systemic inquiry, developing new *muscles* for different strategies.

Different strategies include ones we can use to strengthen our abilities to engage in shared dialogue, create safe spaces, and sharpen and deepen appropriate methods of inquiry which bring together the requisite variety of voices needed to make sense of the complexities and to bring with the voices, the desire to participate and work together for the changes we all need to live safely together and for our descendants to also live safely and productively.

With community level contributions either being actively withdrawn or stretched to breaking point – exhaustion and world-weariness are endemic - communities now require a renaissance, with new and considerable investments so that they can re-fashion and reinvent, reflect and reappraise and re-encounter and re-connect, all the while fostering the relationships and mutual understandings, skills and resources and energy and motivations needed to weave and craft *generalisable community resilience*. Our Emergency Services managers, staff and volunteers have highly important roles to play in the rejuvenation of our communities, but this is a much wider task requiring partnerships and alliances across every facet of community and public life. Emergency Management's concept of interoperability provides a bridge between the Yang of Specific Disaster Preparedness and the Yin of Generalised Community Resilience.

Section 1: Report Background

Introduction

This report records a portion of the work carried out by CatholicCare, in the Melbourne Archdiocese, which set up a Bushfire Community Recovery Service (BCRS) with some of the funds donated by the Catholic community, at home and abroad. The project described in this report was carried out as part of CatholicCare's BCRS.

The geographic area in this study includes what is now known as the Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex, so named after two earlier fires, the Kilmore East fire and the Murrindindi Mill fire, merged following the wind change on the evening of 7 February.

The lead CatholicCare BCRS project worker was Daryl Taylor, employed by CatholicCare as a part-time Community Development worker. The project used an action research approach to facilitate conversations with three key parties from within this Kinglake mega-firestorm complex, being Local Government Authorities, Community Recovery Committees and Community Service Organisations. The raw data was collected between March and December 2011. The purpose of the conversations was to capture a snapshot of the recovery process at the two and a half year mark: what were the experiences of these key parties, with a particular emphasis drawing out their understanding of how the interests of 'community' had been served up to that point. It was hoped that this would be a contribution to the field in general, as well as to widen CatholicCare's thinking on community development ideas within a recovery environment.

The report is set out in seven sections. Section 1, this section, provides information about the context of the fires, an outline of the project, and some material on the limitations of the study. Sections 2-4 outline the data that arose in the conversations with the three sectors. Section 5 summarises our observations of key issues and points to suggestions made by the report authors as well as ones made by participants. Section 6 engages key policy documents and reports to highlight state and federal government and academic research assessments of place and community in emergency management. Section 7 details key shared learnings and distills a set of new practice principles for wider consideration.

Our Context[1]

The weather predictions for Saturday 7 February, 2009 were what would now be called catastrophic. Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, described the anticipated conditions as

> *the worst day ever in the history of our state.*

[1] A number of sources were used to compile 'Our Context'. Data is taken from A Day Like No Other: Black Saturday on the Kinglake Ranges by David Johns, Worst of Days: Inside the Black Saturday Firestorm by Karen Kissane, Inferno: the Day Victoria Burned by Roger Frankland and also Firestorm: Black Saturday's Tragedy compiled by parents at the Glenvale School in Lilydale. This book cites the work of Dr Kevin Tolhurst, at pp 14-15. Dr Tolhurst presented to a workshop in Kinglake and conducted a Kinglake Ranges-wide tour convened by KANDO on 8th November 2011, at which some of the facts presented below were provided. Other sources include newspaper articles, radio and television news reports and websites, the Bureau of Meteorology website and government press releases.

Country Fire Authority (CFA) Chief Officer, Russell Rees, concluded

> *We are in uncharted territory.*

The Black Saturday bushfires of February 7, 2009 ignited and spread on a day when the temperature in Victoria reached 48.8 degrees Celsius (120F) and north-westerly winds were over 100km/h (62mph)[2]. A late afternoon wind change brought with it a cool change, bringing with it lower temperatures, but gale-force south-westerly winds in excess of 120km/h (75mph). The change in wind direction caused the long eastern flanks of the bushfires to in turn become new fire fronts that burned with speed towards towns that had earlier escaped the flames. The bushfires resulted in Australia's highest ever loss of life from a bushfire - 173 people died and 414 were injured. 120 of the deaths on Black Saturday were attributed to the Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex[3].

The bushfires destroyed 2,030 houses, damaging thousands more. The death toll from Black Saturday was almost double that from Australia's previous worst bushfire Ash Wednesday in 1983. The fires affected 78 townships and displaced an estimated 7,562 people[4].

Fallen or clashing power lines are said to have ignited the worst of the fires. Also implicated, as an underlying condition, was an extended el nino drought that had persisted for more than twelve years, as well as a domestic 50-year warming trend linked to human-induced climate change. Insufficient fuel reduction burning was also thought to have contributed.

The drought severely compromised Victoria's extensive Mountain Ash forests. Late spring rains generated fresh new growth that was then seared by two months of little or no rain and then the unrelenting fortnight-long record heat wave. From 28–30 January, Melbourne broke records by sweltering through three consecutive days above 43 °C (109 °F), with the temperature peaking at 45.1 °C (113.2 °F) on 30 January, the third hottest day in the city's history. A fortnight of high temperatures (31, 37, 42, 44, 43, 40, 36, 31, 31, 35, 35, 38) culminated in the highest recorded temperature in Victoria since records began in 1859 – 48.8 degrees C (humidity 4%) on Saturday 7 February 2009 – Black Saturday[5].

The intense heat wave was caused by a slow moving high-pressure system that settled over the Tasman Sea. This high-pressure system combined with an intense tropical low located off the north-west Australian coast and a monsoon trough over northern Australia produced an ideal set of conditions for hot tropical air to be directed down over south-eastern Australia.

On Saturday 7 February a day of Total Fire Ban was declared for the entire state of Victoria and Fire-fighters from the Country Fire Authority (CFA) and Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) were deployed across the state in anticipation of the extreme conditions.

Hamish Townsend (2009) reports that as the day progressed, all-time record temperatures were being reached.

> *Melbourne hit 46.4 °C (115.5°F), the hottest temperature ever recorded in an Australian capital city. The McArthur Forest Fire Danger Index reached unprecedented levels, ranging from 120 to over 200. This was*

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[2] Bureau of Meteorology National Climate Centre Report – The Exceptional January-February 2009 Heatwave in South-Eastern Australia.
[3] Victoria Police, Press Conference: Bushfires Death Toll Revised to 173, Release date: Mon 30 March 2009 http://www.police.vic.gov.au/content.asp?Document_ID=20350
[4] 'Victorian Bushfires' Parliament of New South Wales. New South Wales Government. 13 March 2009.
[5] Text for the paragraphs above is taken from Firestorm – Black Saturday's Tragedy Publisher Glenvale School 2009, p 17.

significantly higher than the extreme fire weather conditions experienced on Black Friday in 1939 and Ash Wednesday in 1983.[6]

David Karoly (2009) reported that

Record low values of relative humidity were set in Melbourne and other sites in Victoria on 7 February, with values as low as 5% in the late afternoon. Melbourne had 35 days with no measurable rain up to 7 February, the second longest period ever with no rain, and the period up to 8 February, with a total of only 2.2 mm was the driest start to the year for Melbourne in more than 150 years.[7].

By midday wind speeds were reaching their peak and by 12:30pm a 2 km section of power lines owned by SP AusNet in Kilmore East was felled due to the high winds, sparking a fire in open grasslands that adjoined pine plantations, igniting a bushfire that would become the largest and most intense firestorm ever experienced in Australia's post-European history[8]

The Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex was named after two earlier fires, the Kilmore East fire and the Murrindindi Mill fire, merged following the wind change on the evening of 7 February. The complex was the largest of the many fires burning on Black Saturday, ultimately destroying over 330,000 ha (820,000 acres). It was also the most destructive, with over 1,800 houses destroyed and 159 lives lost in the wider region[9].

As stated previously, a late cool change around 5:30pm, brought strong south-westerly winds. The wind change turned the initial long and narrow fire band into a wide fire-front that moved in a northeast direction through the Kinglake National Park and to the towns of Humevale, Kinglake West, Pheasant Creek, Hazeldene, Flowerdale, Strathewen, Christmas Hills, St. Andrews, Kinglake, Castella, Toolangi, Steele's Creek and Chum Creek. This area was to be the worst impacted in the state with a total of 120 deaths and more than 1,200 homes destroyed[10].

The Murrindindi Mill fire started at 2:55 pm and burned southeast across the Black Range, parallel to the Kilmore fire, towards Narbethong where it destroyed 95 per cent of the town's houses. When the southerly change struck, it then swept towards the town of Marysville. At about 5:00pm power was lost to the town. Around 5:30pm, the wind died away, however, minutes later it returned from a different direction, bringing the fire up the valley with it. 34 fatalities were confirmed in the Marysville area, with all but 14 of over 400 buildings destroyed. Other localities severely affected included Buxton and Taggerty[11].

Dr Kevin Tolhurst was quoted in Firestorm: Black Saturday's Tragedy (2009) as suggesting that the Black Saturday mega-firestorm complex was unique in at least three ways:

- *The speed of ignition*
- *The intensity of the flames*
- *The spread of fire in pulses (p.17)*

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6 Townsend, Hamish (7 February 2009). 'City swelters, records tumble in heat'. *Fairfax Media* (Melbourne: The Age).
7 Karoly, David (16 February 2009).'Bushfires and extreme heat in southeast Australia'. Real Climate.
8 Medlibrary – Open Source Encyclopedia - February 7 Victorian bushfires
9 'Reports of major casualties at Kinglake'. Geelong Advertiser. 8 February 2009.
10 'Kilmore fires cause grave concern'. Geelong Advertiser. 8 February 2009
11 Cowan, Jane (8 February 2009).'Wiped out: Town destroyed by killer fires'. Australian Broadcasting Corporation

He went on to explain that mega-firestorms produce their own energy, creating a self-sustaining fire system (the more fuel the mega-firestorm consumes, the more fuel it can consume) producing exploding fireballs, spiraling fire tornados, leaping flares, and its own weather - lightning, rain and snow.

The mega-firestorm propelled embers up to 35 km with the wind and 15 km against the wind, all the time generating new fires. The fire plume produced a sucking effect drawing more air into its base. This vacuum action pulled in thousands of surrounding spot fires.

The Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex smoke plume was over 5,200 km high forming white pyrocumulus clouds 8,500 km above earth[12].

Our Region

The importance of the Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex (confluence of fires) is related to its unprecedented scale and ferocity and the fact that it crossed so many major administrative and governance boundaries[13].

The importance of the place related to its geography, topology and climate. A network of national parks and state forests surrounded the townships and settlements most significantly impacted by the firestorm. Settled valleys and foothills rise up steep 70-degree forested escarpments to the 35km long settled ridge.

Socio-economically there is diversity with greater proportions of retirement age home-owning couples in the metropolitan urban fringe settlements and greater proportions of entry-level first home-buying young families in the adjacent rural peri-urban settlements.

There are a significant number of people who have sought sanctuary in the hills - single parent families, people fleeing family violence and people with a history of mental illness or drug and alcohol abuse.

Historically there has been high property turnover and continuous *'new residents.'* Conditions that impact on families settling permanently include inclement weather (snow falls, frosts and long periods completely in cloud in the higher altitude areas), absence of serviceable public transport and the corresponding super-commuter car dependency that leads to movements away from residences toward a central area for employment. Some families can travel up to 2,500km per week to access employment, education, services and shopping. These factors can lead to time poverty, high family stress and high vulnerability to economic downturn[14].

While the landscapes include green pastures, rural aesthetics, pristine waterways and stunning vistas, many of the settlements are linear, with no obvious town centre. 'Ad hoc' unplanned development and 'opportunistic' sub-divisions have characterised 'land use planning'. For some the sub-rural and sub-urban can easily become a '*no man's land',* for others it is paradise.

For those requiring assistance this region can be a challenge as fragmented, outreach or absent services is all too often the norm. Other core services and physical infrastructure

[12]Franklin, 2010, Inferno: the Day Victoria Burned. p.17
[13] Some of the text for this section is taken from The Central Ranges LLEN Environmental Scan, 2008.
[14] We discuss later the impacts of these factors on community safety and community resilience

taken for granted in rural townships and urban and regional centres can be either inadequate or absent.

Low educational attainment, socio-economic disadvantage, leaky local economies, vulnerable social institutions, remote Local Government Authorities, small local leadership base, community disengagement and social isolation are all evident in the most disadvantaged peri-urban communities.

Older generations can be capable, resourceful, self-reliant as well as conservative, parochial and inward looking. Stoicism can make them vulnerable as they age and their health deteriorates and their social support networks become sparse. 'Ageing in place' can be a challenge in peri-urban areas.

Living on the urban-peri-urban fringe brings an exacting consciousness of boundaries and what they encompass and allow one access to. Five Local Governments of differing capacities span the Kilmore-Kinglake mega-firestorm complex area. State government metropolitan – rural boundaries also bisect the fire-impacted area. Many communities straddle the state rural-metropolitan boundary, local government authority boundaries, and the boundaries of several other key state departments (eg DOH, DHS, RDV) as well as boundaries associated with Commonwealth services such as Centrelink, and other key services. It was not uncommon for people living in a rural shire to spend at least their weekdays in a metropolitan area.

It was apparent early on, and to some extent widely known already, that there were significant differences in capacity and capability to contribute to community recovery, reconstruction, renewal and regeneration across the metropolitan – rural boundaries:

- Metropolitan based LGAs had more capacity and capability and were closer to impacted urban-fringe/peri-urban areas than their distant rural counterparts
- Metropolitan based CSOs had more capacity and capability and were closer to impacted urban-fringe/peri-urban areas than their distant rural counterparts
- Metropolitan based outer suburban communities had more capacity and capability and were closer to impacted areas than their more remote non-impacted rural counterparts

The smaller settlements and districts in the metropolitan municipalities, in particular Humevale, Strathewen, St. Andrews North, Steele's Creek and Chum Creek, were significantly impacted, with disproportionately larger numbers of lives lost and infrastructure destroyed. The larger townships in the rural municipality of Murrindindi, Kinglake West-Pheasant Creek, Flowerdale, Kinglake and Marysville, experienced larger absolute numbers of lives lost and larger absolute amounts of infrastructure destroyed.

It is of course the case that under normal circumstances these communities share much in common, including shared histories of gold diggings, forestry, fishing and farming.

Place-based identities are typically created more by shared social infrastructure than by administrative boundaries created by various levels of government and other key organisations. Such social infrastructure includes small hall social events, shared school communities and sporting teams, arts networks and musical and theatre groups, Landcare, environmental and emergency services volunteers and informal meetings at communal places such as St Andrews Market, or other local shopping centres. Many lifelong friendships and deep social connections have flourished among the communities that traverse the metropolitan-rural divide. They all effectively share one terrain, the Great Dividing Range

and the associated river flats, foothills, escarpments, ridges and forested ecosystems of the Kinglake National Park and State Forests.

CatholicCare's independence

CatholicCare Bushfire Recovery Service was new to this region. Its presence was characterised in particular by the fact that it was one of the community service organisations with independent funding, due to the Archbishops Charitable Fund Bushfire Appeal. Beyond Black Saturday[15] documents a range of activities made possible through this Fund. While these funds were spent across the other fire affected areas in Victoria, this project and report pertain only to its work (and only one aspect of its work) in the Melbourne Archdiocese, a geographic area that most closely matched the Kinglake mega fire complex area. Some other community services operated from a donation base from their own organisations. Some were a mix of funding types – government and independent sources. There were also examples of services going out on a limb and offering a community response from their own staff funded under other programs.

CatholicCare had (or gave itself) a broad remit to work in and across all of the fire-impacted communities, and had senior management support to offer from within its service, both the more traditional aspects of service such as counselling, as well as to include a community development orientation. It also was able to work responsively to community need, and emphasised an outreach component of its service. This cluster of service attributes were unusual, with the usual model of service delivery, at least that sanctioned by the State, consisted of Department of Human Services bushfire recovery service delivery contracts operating within specific catchments, and with a dominant emphasis on individual level not community level service.

CatholicCare had recognised the opportunity its broader remit provided in terms of the opportunity to generate a systemic view, and to explore how to relate programmatic interventions to systemic dynamics and determinants. This was a good fit given the commitment by the CatholicCare Board, its CEO, and Bushfire Community Service Manager to establishing and resourcing a community development-oriented approach to Bushfire Recovery. This meant CatholicCare was well-placed to facilitate cross-sectoral, cross-jurisdictional and cross-community dialogue on disaster reconstruction and recovery issues and aspirations[16].

Our Project

Broad aims

This participatory action research inquiry project was produced with a view to fostering understanding of different parties experiences across different practice domains and perspectives. Our view was that this understanding would be a necessary precondition for

[15] http://www.cam.org.au/Portals/0/2013/Documents_PDF_WORD/Beyond-Black-Saturday-report.pdf
[16] Further documentation on the aspirations of CatholicCare's service, and some accounts of what it was able to deliver, are contained in published material noted in the bibliography, particularly Webber & Jones, 2011, 2013, Jones &Webber, 2012, 2013, and Ward, n.d.

increased cooperation, coordination and collaboration across disaster recovery issues and tasks by facilitating mutual engagement and practical conversations across difference[17].

This participatory action research based inquiry process was undertaken two and half years in to the disaster recovery period that followed the 2009 Black Saturday Bushfires.

We believed that creating opportunities for dialogue would provide opportunities to hear each other's experiences, so as to learn from each other, and in doing so, to gain new insights into different perspectives, assumptions, observations, experiences, motivations, connections and relationships. We thought this would assist us to become more aware of our blind-spots and to assist us with our sense making of this huge event, its aftermath, its impacts, and our roles in it.

We anticipated generating data from the conversations that would inform CatholicCare's (and potentially other providers and other sectors) subsequent strategies regarding longer term disaster response and recovery interventions.

Research approach

The project conducted participatory action research across 5 Local Government Authorities, 12 Community Service Providers and 10 Community Recovery Committees, inquiring into:

- What were some of the functions carried out by participants and their agencies or organisational auspice, particularly focused on 'community level' approaches?
- How did participants perceive their roles and tasks in the light of their experience up to that point?
- What were some of the unmet needs and gaps, and unrealised aspirations and opportunities?
- Where do the real opportunities to make the 'difference that makes a difference' lie?
- Where can the best investments in community capacity, capability and leadership in this field lie?
- How were shared decision-making mechanisms and authorising environments experienced?
- What of these experiences can be reported back on, highlighted for others, and considered for their usefulness to the BCRS, and to the tasks of identifying community renewal needs, issues, opportunities and synergies.

Another data source we have drawn on in the report, is the written material participants forwarded during the course of the project (period ending November 2011) in relation to their work. Sometimes these sources were tabled during a workshop, such as being made available to the project during or after a presentation to other participants in a workshop. In other circumstances, material was provided to the project worker to form the basis of case studies. We have not been able to finalise this work. Some organisations didn't send material where others did. We have cited some references to this material within the report, but have decided not to list these initiatives in an Appendix as we had initially planned as the accounts are incomplete and only partial in their coverage of participants' efforts.

[17] Like many in the recovery environment, our aspirations did not match our capacity in this broadest sense, at least at the time of the study, although we know that several of those who participated reported informally to us that they learnt a lot by coming together with others.

Other activities within the research period included a two day workshop with international guests, Meg Wheatley and Angela Blanchard, convened by Daryl Taylor on August 30 and 31, 2011 at Borderlands Melbourne[18]. The organisational partners for this event included Green Cross Australia, Berry St, Women's Health Goulburn North East, Victorian Council of Churches – Emergency Services Ministry, Borderlands Cooperative, Kildonan Uniting Care, Women's Health in the North, and Australian Red Cross. 82 people participated across the two days. The outcomes of this work are not documented in this report.

Also Meg Wheatley and Angela Blanchard attended a 'Kinglake Ranges Workshop Conversation', entitled '*Wisdom of the Fire: From 'Us' and 'Them' to our 'Shared We*'. This was held on September 1, 2011. There is a brief reference to this workshop in this report.

The primary method was facilitated shared conversations conducted in a group setting. Participants engaged with this project of their own free will (to our knowledge). The approach was to value the conversation, thereby honouring what is widely thought of a narrative approach. Others in this field (see Borrell, 2011; Lollar, 2011) have used this narrative framework for its capacity to contribute to the task of making sense of catastrophic events. It is also said to facilitate possibilities of healing and transformation. We discuss this possibility further in Section 5.

The project was inclusive in its approach, inviting wide participation, across the three groups of LGA, CSO and CRC participants. The aspiration was to hold what is referred to as 'braided conversations', where the responses of different parties can be woven together to allow for further emergence of meaning making between parties[19].

We were unable to bring the three groups together, to further discussion on the key issues that arose in each group. This would have made for a more balanced report, as individuals and groups would have had the opportunity to reflect on their initial conversations, and benefited hopefully from the time between the first and second conversation in relation to both their own thoughts, and also those of other individuals and groups whose issues , feelings, reactions, efforts, may not have been known or understood. In the 'disclaimers' section below, we comment on the losses of data quality due to not managing to finalise the work as planned with these more integrated, or 'braided', conversations.

A further element of the approach that was not achieved, was that of 'co-writing' the results with the study participants, or those who wanted to be involved. It was planned that we would, with the assistance of Borderlands Cooperative, establish a web-based medium for co-writing and co-editing the final workshop reports. While a desirable democratic approach to knowledge gathering and processing, it exceeded our time and capability toward the end of the project period.

There was variation in how each conversation unfolded across the three groups, as did the degree of presence of CatholicCare and Daryl Taylor. Jacques Boulet from Borderlands facilitated the CSO workshop, with Daryl Taylor and Helen Goodman participating in the small group conversations, but in the main acting as note takers. Janet Cribbes assisted Daryl Taylor in the facilitation of the Local Government workshop, following an opening address by Father Joe Caddy, CatholicCare CEO. Daryl undertook the conversations with local government staff that occurred outside the workshop, both prior to and after the workshop.

[18] http://www.margaretwheatley.com/; http://angelablanchard.com/

[19] The phrase 'braided conversation' has been first used to our knowledge by Wadsworth and Epstein, in their ground breaking work that sought to find and develop approaches that would increase understanding between users of mental health services, and their carers. There are several publications in relation to this work. A summary is provided in the 2001 Victorian Health Promotion Foundation report, entitled The Essential U&I. See Wadsworth & Epstein, 2001.

Daryl Taylor played the main role as conversation facilitator in the CRC conversations, with Helen Goodman acting as note taker.

CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service staff co-hosted all conversations:

- Janet Cribbes, Manager, BCRS (June 2009 to 2012, with the exception of April to August 2011)
- Helen Goodman, Acting Manager, BCRS, April to August 2011
- Daryl Taylor, Community Development Worker, BCRS (November 2010 – part-time, two days per week, for a one year period)

Each conversation gathering was held at a neutral setting and conducted across a full day, except for the Community Recovery Committee conversations, which were conducted across three separate half-day gatherings.

The conversations gatherings were fully catered. There was a participatory conversation agenda created, distributed as a draft and confirmed prior to each gathering. While the agendas for two of the conversations are held on the Appendices (see Appendix 1), the setting up process was one of negotiating with each group how they wished to proceed and the key issues they wished to discuss.

In this report, in the interests of protecting privacy, the opinions or quotes of individual participants have not been identified. However at times general reference has been made to a particular initiative or fact about a geographic area or an organisation, particularly where there are additional complementary sources of data for those references that are already in the public domain.

We next set out further detail in relation to the three groups whose conversations informed the project.

Local Government Authorities (LGAs)

The LGA workshop was held on Friday 18th March 2011, at the Whittlesea Council Offices of Edge Youth Services in Westfield Plenty Valley in Mill Park.

Fourteen individuals were present at the workshop. They included staff from the following LGAs: Shire of Mitchell, Shire of Murrindindi, City of Whittlesea, Shire of Nillumbik and Shire of Yarra Ranges. The Municipal Association of Victoria also sent new staff members from their then new Royal Commission Recommendations implementation team. Additional conversations were held with officers interested in the project, but unable to attend the workshop. In one Shire four LGA staff were consulted prior to the workshop; in another Shire there was a conversation with the CEO who could not attend the workshop. In another Shire, two separate conversations were held with two senior Emergency Management staff. With the 14 present at the workshop, and 7 additional interviews, the project reports views from 21 people from this sector.

Additional less formal conversations were held in the ordinary course of the work, such as in setting up the workshops, and in providing drafts of the work that were returned to workshop participants.

Content from both the individual and group interviews, and the comments of the MAV staff are included in the themes outlined in Section 2.

The workshop focus was to provide a venue for a conversation about the various LGA recovery experiences up to that point, to discuss some of the difficult issues, and look at what can be learned. It included discussion about what officers were proud of as well as what they found most meaningful. Participants were invited to share any innovative practices they had developed in their response to the Black Saturday fires. The workshop conversations provided opportunities for particular LGA focused comment, and in some cases led to more explicit sharing of information around particular initiatives Local Government had taken in response to their post-fires experience.

Each Council also provided specific agenda items.

CatholicCare staff assisted with note-taking at the workshop, and some other participants also took notes. Notes taken by CatholicCare staff were returned to participants for review. Agreement was reached that in the main, although there were key differences between the Local Government areas, their responses and experiences, issues would be collated in the general case: that is, not attributing comments to particular Councils. However attributions would be made where particular Local Governments had provided specific detail on innovative practices.

Community Service Organisations (CSOs)

On the 29th July 2011, a number of representatives of community service providers non government agencies, met at the Whittlesea Council Offices of Edge Youth Services, in Westfield Plenty Valley in Mill Park. Invitations had been extended widely.

17 individuals were present, as well as a visiting UK Churchill Fellow, who was invited to sit in on the day. In addition, Jacques Boulet from Borderlands Cooperative was engaged as the facilitator. These individuals were from 9 Community Services Organisations. These included Kildonan UnitingCare, CatholicCare, Nillumbik Community Health Service, Eastern Access Community Health, Community On Ground Assistance (COGA), Victorian Council of Churches – Emergencies Ministry, Morrison House (and the Association of Neighbourhood Houses and Learning Centres - ANHLC), Yarra Valley Practitioner's Project, Whittlesea Community Care, and FamilyCare.

While those assembled had a role within a particular organisation or program, it may not have been their only identification with the bushfire recovery work. Four participants were also residents of the directly impacted areas, and at least one other had close family in the impacted area while living off the mountain himself. Those who were residents were also employed directly by a community service organisation, or were in projects funded by VBAF or another philanthropic organisation, but auspiced by a CSO. An example of the latter (while the word 'auspice' does not adequately describe the relationship) is the Community On Ground Assistance project that at that time was housed under the service arm of CatholicCare.

There was a good spread of participants that included Executive and Senior Managers, Counselors, Housing Workers, Case Managers, Welfare Workers, On Ground Assistance Workers, Chaplains and Community Development Workers. Again, all service provider organisations contributed agenda items to the participatory agenda development process and follow up with those who had expressed interest, but were unable to attend was undertaken. The final agenda is included in the appendices.

The session ran from approximately 10am to 4pm. Not all participants could stay the full day, and there were a number of apologies. Helen Goodman, Acting Manager of CatholicCare,

and Daryl Taylor, Project Worker, CatholicCare, took major responsibility for taking notes, and participated in the discussion where possible and appropriate.

A key purpose was to inform CatholicCare's thinking about its own future role in recovery. Another purpose was to take the opportunity to provide a space for others to share their experiences and share some collective meaning making. Innovations across agencies were shared. Participants provided short presentations from their own program areas. It was expected that in so doing, those present would become more familiar with each others roles and perspectives. Participants were able to explore common themes in the experiences of working in disaster recovery roles.

Note taking of key issues raised was shared in the small groups and collated after the event. Notes were returned to participants for review.

Community Recovery Committees (CRCs)

The Community Recovery Committee conversations were all held between August and October 2011. Fourteen Chairpersons and/or Committee Members from Community Recovery Committees from the following townships and communities participated in the conversations:

Whittlesea, St. Andrews, Kinglake Ranges, Flowerdale, Melba, Mitchell, Marysville, Strathewen, Strath Creek, and Toolangi-Castella. Only one CRC from the region, Yarra Ranges, was not present for the conversations.

Elected Chairpersons were well represented, and more often than not they were accompanied by at least one other community recovery committee member. As well as significant time spent living and interacting in the disaster impacted areas, the community recovery committee members who attended also had an enormous variety of professional, vocational, voluntary and life experience. This variety of professional and life experience included international consultants, former mayors, former secondary school principals, film-makers, ministers of religion, small business owners, farmers, CFA Captains, SES Control Officers, logistics managers, business development professionals, trade unionists, festival directors and senior bureaucrats.

Section 4 of this report provides a range of perspectives from some Community Recovery Committee members, both Chairs and members, from areas impacted by the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Individual participants are not identified, although at times general reference will be made to a particular initiative or geographic area, particularly where there are sources of data for those references that are in the public domain.

Daryl Taylor hosted the conversations, with Helen Goodman, (then Acting Manager of CatholicCare Bushfire Community Service) assisting with note taking.

Summary numbers

In all, 18 individuals were involved in the Community Services Organisations workshop, 12 CRC members participated in face to face conversations, with two further CRC members participating through follow up phone interviews, and 12 Local Government officers, and 2 Municipal Association of Victoria officers, participated in the local government workshop,

with 7 additional follow up conversations with senior staff unable to be present at the workshops.

In total, 53 individuals provided comments. These form the basis of the summaries offered in Sections 2, 3 and 4. This data is supplemented where it was available, by the written work presented by participants during and after the workshops.

Report Uses

Our record of the conversations is available in three separate sections (2, 3 and 4) contained in the complete report.

- Our Conversations - Context, Approach and Disclaimer (Section 1)
- Our Conversations with Local Government Authorities (Section 2)
- Our Conversations with Community Service Providers (Section 3)
- Our Conversations with Community Recovery Committees (Section 4)
- Summary observations and suggestions from the above 3 groups (Section 5)
- Common themes through a community lens, and discussion (Section 6)
- Distilled Learnings (Section 7)
- Concluding Remarks (Section 8)
- Our Appendices and References.

The report has some content that is repetitive. However we have done this as we think some readers may only read sections that they feel pertain more to their interests. Some methods and approaches are repeated for example in each of the sections.

We think that despite the obvious limitations (which we discuss below), the content of this report is valuable for the insights it provides the reader of some of the respective and shared struggles and successes, politics and uncertainties, and issues and opportunities associated with being a senior leader or manager or professional employee or elected committee member of

- a Local Government Authority
- a Community Service Provider Organisation or
- a Community Recovery Committee

faced with the daunting task of making a difference in the aftermath of a major disaster.

The report may be of value to a reader at a policy development and policy change level, given the participants' experiences with and critical reflection on the emergency management system as it was then constituted, and their roles within it. It may be of value at the community preparedness and practical response level, regardless of whether the next disaster experienced or next recovery process initiated is 'locally managed' under the current regulations and protocols, where the Local Government Authority is the key institution involved, or one which is a Tier 3 disaster – of the magnitude of the February 2009 fires, in which the state government assumes management responsibilities. We think that there is plenty in this report for the interested community service provider: there are several topics in which community service organisations (using inclusive inquiry processes) could reexamine their roles and capacities to contribute to Emergency Management

planning and also on which they could offer conceptual and practice leadership in certain areas. We think interested readers will find much they can contribute to, at all levels.

Readers will need to take into account the fact that to the local government sector, the introduction of a State governing authority was a new entity. Roles that had historically been held by local government were 'taken over' by the State. The Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV) now makes it explicit that the State will be the managing authority for a Tier 3 disaster[20]. However it is unknown to us how much this reality has been planned for or 're-imagined' in every day Emergency Management planning. Some of the content of this report may be valuable to a reader regardless of whether the next disaster they experience is small and 'locally managed' under the current regulations, where the Local Government Authority is the key institution involved.

Report Scope

For some readers, we will not have gone far enough; for others we will have gone too far. There were some challenges for us in writing up what was often 'dark' data. There are all manner of pressures (internal and externally imposed) on expression, when one deals with 'dark data'. While there were many creative responses to the crisis posed by the 2009 fires, we have focused on that which was on balance central to the majority of workshop and interview participants - the challenges and the politics, the darker or more difficult side of the recovery experience[21].

For some, the type of change required to bring about 'transformation' would stop nothing short of changing the basis of our political and economic systems, for the repercussions it brings to the unsustainable way we are living, the ever expanding gaps between societal groups in terms of income, education, influence and other resources including general well being, and the inherent increase in societal risk if we ignore the above trends. Some see that many large organisations and institutions have themselves reached a point of dysfunction, giving rise to the 'walk out, walk on' phenomenon that Wheatley and Frieze (2011) talk about in the book of the same name. Wheatley and Frieze (2011) provide encouragement to citizens who find that certain organisational beliefs and frameworks are so limiting and antithetical to their interests that there is little likelihood that their communities can partner with formal institutions, confident that their values and choices will be respected and prioritised, leading to the notion and practice of 'stop trying here and start somewhere else'.

Considerations of siloes in government and other sectors, divisions in communities, differences in beliefs and motivations, are important ones for Emergency Management and Disaster Recovery practitioners to consider. Divisions created by disconnected systems, disparate and incommensurate beliefs, increasing distances between advantage and

[20] http://www.justice.vic.gov.au/emanuals/emmv/default.htm

[21] We also believe change is more likely to emanate from those places where pressure or dissatisfaction are apparent, another reason to give weight to what others may see as negative and therefore unproductive accounts of experience. Stacey, a complexity theorist, talks of change emerging from 'shadow side' of organisations or events. Appendix 2 holds two graphics: one is called 'Certainty and Agreement', depicting a framework used by Stacey, in which he points to 'where people are most comfortable' and also 'where real life takes place'. In our view, much of the raw data in this report gives accounts of 'where real life takes place'. The second is named 'Decision Making in Organisations'. Stacey's work (and those from a field known as systems psychodynamics) hold strongly to the idea that if experiential learning can be grasped and understood, it can lead us in fruitful directions. Stacey's (1996) work on emergence, self-organisation, non-linear systems, and network feedback within complexity theory provide fruitful pointers to managing in the chaotic environments post-disaster.

disadvantage, and cynicism and apathy with respect to certain dominating organising systems, make for increasingly large holes in community safety initiatives.

While we recognise those ideas, gaps, beliefs, practices are real, we do not start from the position that 'total system transformation' is the only way of making progress. This is not to say that 'total transformation' may not be necessary, given the likely mismatch between the different time scales predicted for climate havoc and ecosystem degeneration, and the sorts of time scales that historically accompany incremental systemic, organisational and institutional change. It's just that making recommendations for transformational change was not our starting point in this piece of work. Our discussion recognises that socio-political change is required in order to respond adequately to climate disruption and also to usher in the overdue paradigm shift said to be required (with which we agree) in Emergency Management.

We also recognise the ongoing societal, economic and political barriers to achieving these orders of change, including behaviours many of us continue to implicitly endorse in the way we choose to live.

To our way of thinking, if the paradigm shift said to be required, actually occurred, the transformation that would accompany such as shift would result in the community as a resourced, enabled and respected initiator and partner (with locally oriented community governance and decision-making leadership) in a place-based, multi-stakeholder, solidarity and common good-oriented community development approach to key aspects of Emergency Management.

We start from the view however therefore that 'incremental change' is what the system will allow, and that it is already in evidence, at least in some of its parts.

Our Disclaimers

The reflections and opinions of participants in all three groups can never represent the diversity of situations, activities and experience that emerged in the aftermath of the mega-firestorm. Participants however through their own commitment to their endeavour and through their many and varied networks, showed an active engagement in seeking to develop an emerging sense of the whole. This report is an attempt to draw together the threads of three quite specific conversations held at a particular moment in time – two and half years into the community recovery-renewal-reconstruction-regeneration process.

Despite the breadth of participants in number and organisational and CRC spread, there were clearly large sectors whose views were not sought as part of this inquiry. Absent voices included members of government, in particular, those working in VBRRA and DHS. Other major gaps include the voices of those in Emergency Services, both paid and volunteer.

We are mindful that the original work plan for the project included bringing participants back together again after the initial workshops/interviews with the three separate groups. We had hoped to do this, (or at least to convene a group of representatives) to reflect together on the observations of each individual group, and look for and expand on common as well as different threads. The time lapse between the initial and follow up discussions

would have allowed for new thoughts to emerge[22]. We were not able to bring parties together. Had we been able to bridge this methodological gap, we may have been able to be firmer in some of our final observations.

As could be expected, considerable further work has been carried out by all sectors on some of the key issues or concerns that were raised[23]. This report cannot highlight or track these developments. To do that is a separate piece of work. We reiterate here, that this report is a snap shot in time, and now 'time past', and despite the delay in finalising the report, the report writers have not in the main, documented work on matters that lie outside of the period of this project, which is focused between April and September 2011.

We have no doubt that some participants may not feel now as they did then about some of the issues they had very strong views about. Some opinions will have changed. Time permits greater reflection or introduces new evidence or brings forward change. Despite this, our *general* sense (having said we have not explored specific changes since 2011) is that the extent of change of the magnitude required to lessen the likelihood of some of the conflict and dissatisfaction (and at time sheer distress) pictured in this report, has not occurred. We return to this opinion in Section 5. This may reflect where we situate ourselves as a society, in this second decade of the 21st century, in terms of a range of matters, but most particularly, our economies in which decreasing labour costs is a key driver, for the impact of this in communities, and in the related questions of government and community relations. Economic policies in one part of our social system are weakening community, while at the same time, in another part of our system, Emergency Management policies are increasingly seeking to rely on community strengths.

Another necessary drawback in presenting the data has been the requirement to maintain the anonymity of participants. In adhering to this there is some significant loss of specificity of local context, culture and issues. However we hope that despite losing some contextual richness, we have been able to adequately weave together the generalisable experiences and reflections of our front-line and back of house participants, operating within and across multiple sectors and levels. We hope readers who were participants in our conversations will recognise their quotes and experience some familiarity with events as they were in 2011.

Indeed the main motivation for those who participated in the discussions appeared to us to be, to develop ideas together and contribute to future learning.

We have taken a leap with the data from the first three sections, to construct Section 5. We did this by closely examining Sections 2-4, taking what we think was the intent or learning behind many of these comments. We acknowledge that here it is our appraisal of the likely intent, with no capacity to check this out with those who provided the data from which these comments in Section 5 are derived. However we believe these statements made in Section 5 (learnings, suggestions, ideas) may be useful for others in these 3 areas of LGAs, CRCs and CSOs, as well as those in policy making positions as topics for debate, who might value the 'on groundedness' of the comments.

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[22] Several scholars note the importance of follow up questions, both within the interview process and in follow up discussions with the same individual or group, in a data gathering process. Rubin (2012) notes that follow up questions permit you to fill in the steps of a process and politely challenge the perspective of your interviewees. One purpose of this kind of question is to explore unanticipated paths suggested by the interviewees; a second goal is to elicit detail, depth, and nuanced understanding. Follow up questions provide an opportunity to test and improve your ideas of what is going on and thereby increase the credibility of your findings.

[23] For example, Local Governments have done considerable work on the future delivery of material relief, and other cross regional initiatives; changes have been introduced into the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria; Australian Red Cross has developed further approaches to and tools for the management of spontaneous volunteering; Yarra Ranges Neighbourhood House network have moved on from their (unpublished) 'Peeling the Onion' report to further community preparedness initiatives. These are only a few of the many changes that we cannot possibly canvass.

Because of the focus of the three sets of conversations in this project was more particularly around the idea of community, including opportunities for community development, lost opportunities to engage with community, and difficulties of engaging with community, there was little or no recognition in the conversations of the many examples of services and programs that did good work at the individual and household level. Several reports have been published, which outline some of the work at the household level, including the study of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service (2011) and the report of the Department of Health into the psychosocial response to the bushfires (2010)[24]. This work was not the focus of conversations, except perhaps by default, given the critique offered by several participants on what they saw as an overemphasis on the 'individual focus' of services at the expense, as some saw it, of taking a broader community wide focus.

One final comment on the data as presented. The CRC conversations were largely held with men. There were only two women among these 14 participants. We know that women will report some similar and some different issues and concerns than men, and we acknowledge this imbalance in perspectives offered.

[24] http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Evaluation-of-the-Psychosocial-Response-to-the-Victorian-Bushfires-Final-Report---December-2010-(PDF--1-41mb).
DHS VBCMS studies: http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/644782/2-Evaluation-of-the-Victorian-Bushfire-Case-Management-Service.pdf

Section 2: Local Government Authorities Recovery Conversations

Introduction

This section of the report provides a range of perspectives from Local Government officers who were brought together in March 2011, from areas impacted by the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Key aspects of the workshop outline and methods were set out in 'Our Approach' in Section 1. To briefly summarise here, the LGA workshop was held on Friday 18th March 2011, at a premises owned by the Whittlesea Council in Mill Park. Five Councils/Shires were represented, including Mitchell, Murrindindi, Whittlesea, Nillumbik, and Yarra Ranges. Two members of staff from the Municipal Association of Victoria were also present. In addition, 7 follow up conversations were held with senior managers who could not attend the workshop. CatholicCare staff assisted with the note taking. Notes were returned to participants for review.

At the time of the workshops, emotions were running quite high particularly in relation to intergovernmental relations. A decision was taken in conjunction with the participants, that no attributions of specific comments would be sourced to individual councils or shires or their officers. This has of course meant that there are some losses in pointing to the critical differences in key aspects of organisational and community context and culture. Some peculiarities of place are not as pronounced in this report as they might otherwise have been. Where references are made to specific places or organisations it is where there is a pre-existing public understanding of the circumstances, situations or issues commented on. For instance, it is a matter of public record that less populated rural shires have lower rates bases (PriceWaterhouseCoopers, 2010), leading to fewer available resources for Emergency Management program planning and implementation. In the main, however, a closer analysis in this report of the material pointing to differences in Local Government contexts has not been possible. We are not disturbed by this, as readers from different regions will need to reference whether the issues raised here are likely to be relevant in their areas.

What emerged through our conversations is that despite diversity in the fire impact, scale of operations, priorities, resources, capability and culture, many universal themes and issues were discussed.

The Unprecedented Impact of Black Saturday

The impact of the fires.

The impact of the fires at multiple levels within their host organisations was strongly voiced by many local government officers, both senior managers, and staff. Impact was mediated by many factors.

What was universally agreed on was that the size of the disaster was unanticipated, and was very different to what had been planned for, captured in the comment, 'you can only plan for what you can envision'.

Local Government officers talked of the trauma they had experienced, either directly or vicariously.

> *Many of our Officers were directly impacted by the fires, some losing homes, friends and loved ones. Others have been indirectly impacted through their ongoing work with impacted and bereaved families and communities.*

In one LGA, 14 staff members lost their homes. In addition, some staff lived considerable distance from their work, which exacerbated their stress when work hours and pressures were extreme.

The experience was also protracted.

> *We had staff on high alert for over 2 weeks. We experienced the absolute relief of seeing people still alive.*

Another noted that

> *Fires burnt in our shire for over a month and townships were at continuing high risk.*

Others spoke of the protracted nature of staff involvement.

> *We've had people in communities and staff working impossibly hard. Six months without having a night off is unsustainable.*

One LGA began a discussion about remembrance, about its organisational memory of Black Saturday. This evolved into a series of one to one interviews where staff members were able to speak openly, sometimes for the first time about their experiences, struggles and feelings.

> *Our interviews with staff uncovered stress, trauma, grief and loss. We were able to clarify that many of our people had been significantly affected personally and some in their role as an employee. We established that whole teams were carrying unresolved issues, important things that we just didn't have the time or the processes to address.*

Officers spoke about how unforgettable 'the raw emotions of the community' was. For some the pressure was enormous (and dangerously easy to personalise):

> *We agonise over how many have fallen and not gotten up because of something we didn't do.*

Several other pressures to which staff members were exposed are discussed in other aspects of the report. These included staff being moved to areas of work they were unfamiliar with, and being the 'meat' in the sandwich between layers of government and the community. It also needs to be said plainly, that the workload issues were 'just immense'. It is hard to account for the many and varied ways in which Local Government officers expressed this. Common sentiments were that key new roles were needed and additional staff and managers were required as the workforce expanded beyond that which existed at the time of the fires.

> *When everyone moved out of their ordinary jobs, it left a huge backlog of unfinished work that we are still to get back to.*

One officer provided a good overall summary.

The disaster has had a profound effect on individuals and the organisation as a whole. Our officers have all been profoundly affected by the experience.

Many felt others in the community and other organisations lacked an understanding of what they had gone through. Some talked of the resilience they had found in themselves and others in the process.

The sheer 'volume' of stories generated was itself overwhelming: 'there are so many stories to be told; there have been so many issues'. This report bears witness to some of those issues.

Precarious State-Local Government Relationships

Preamble

There was a great deal of discussion in the workshop and in interviews, about the importance of trust and relationships, particularly how trust plays out in the relationships that Local Governments have with their State and Federal Government counterparts. The principles to guide Local and State Government relationships were outlined in an agreement and signed off on, on 14/5/2008[25]. The idealism housed in the agreement crumbled under the weight of the circumstances brought about by the 2009 fires.

Some saw that recovery as a practice was not 'properly constituted' in the first place and therefore open to being disregarded. Others saw that there was recovery infrastructure in place but that it was unable to be resourced properly. Some were not sure the answers would be found with government, and wanted the limitations and the responsibilities of Local Governments to be recognised and codified clearly. However the strongest comments on this matter of precarious State Government – Local Government relations, pertained to the experience of working with the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA). While it was not always clear that arms of State government were under consideration in the comments made by officers, we think it is reasonable to focus on VBRRA, as it was the entity most often cited in the conversations, and it was the body designed to coordinate and implement the State's response.

> Part 6.1: Victorian State Local Government Agreement, 2008: Relations between State and Local Government should be conducted in a spirit of mutual respect with an emphasis on improving communication and cooperation.

We set out comments under several headings here, including the experience of disrespect, the left field 'surprise' of dealing with VBRRA, the experience of prior rules and roles being overturned and disregarded, the difficulty in establishing lines of authority, the inadequate resourcing of the recovery roles Local Government had to take up, the politicization of the recovery space, the role of the media, the experience of 'bearing the brunt' of the miscommunications, and being the 'meat in the sandwich'. Specific comment is provided on particular State Government approaches that compounded the

[25] https://docs.google.com/viewer?a=v&q=cache:EgYnLrmj8-YJ:www.mav.asn.au/policy-services/finance/cost-shifting-government-agreements/Related%2520documents%2520%2520cost%2520shifting1/Victorian%2520state%2520and%2520local%2520government%2520agreement.docx+local+government+role+in+relation+to+state+government&hl=en&gl=au&pid=bl&srcid=ADGEESi0ZqvTfKY4D8aDJVX9mDlRRxO2rgnQmXypxxn1xo9-sU9GBAJKOAHKfQic0DSEXIn4VDaj9LSYab80OwZDEEiwFDpls_Ek6MsKs2SU8CBwPpFc5a_nN_hl1X-XKFd2Rfac3JpW&sig=AHIEtbRst3AXSpSKm7ztlhbmFm89xn9iPA. Accessed 25th September 2012: An Agreement establishing principles to guide State Local Government Relations on Local Government matters. Signed 14th May 2008 by the Minister for Local Government on behalf of the Victorian Government and the President of the MAV on behalf of Victorian Councils. This is referred to as the 'Intergovernmental Agreement Establishing Principles Guiding Inter-Government Relations on Local Government Matters (IGA) by entering into the Victorian State-Local Government Agreement (VSLGA).

difficulties for Local Government, including what was referred to as a 'one size fits all' approach; an overemphasis on the built environment; the setting of unworkable time lines for project delivery; and in particular incommensurate approaches to 'community development'.

We address these themes in turn.

> What really happened was that VBRRA circumvented Local Government and their legislated responsibility, authority, and key role in disaster recovery.
> Workshop participant

The unifying experience of disrespect

A particular theme that emerged from many comments from Local Government officers was their experience of being recipients of 'disrespect' – or this is how they spoke about it and seemed to 'feel' it. While sections below provide accounts of the circumstances and conditions that appeared to trigger these feelings, we provide a summary of the voiced experience itself, as a 'stand alone' issue, given its strength as a theme in the conversations.

Words frequently used were that as Local Government officers they were 'disregarded'; that State Government (in particular) needed to 'understand' the authority vested in Local Government, including their roles and responsibilities; that the maturing capacity of Local Government be given 'greater recognition'; that Local Government was the recipient of being 'told' what to do and not listened to. Some experienced the result of these dynamics as having been 'compromised'. One saw the lack of acknowledgement of Local Government particularly by State Government 'was bordering on disdain'.

For some the disrespect was experienced in specific ways. One was the failure to recognise specific strengths of Local Government. One such strength that was overlooked was the greater capacity of Local Government compared to other levels of government, for closer relations with community. This was seen as having been brought about through solid community engagement and community development work and trust between senior staff and community leaders. Particular examples were given of how communities are best enabled when real local place-based experts – local governments and established community leaders, can be brought into play. Emergencies were seen to make this local quality 'fragile, easily forgotten, and can be undermined'.

One reason offered as to how these qualities are easily forgotten, is perhaps that they were not understood in the first place. Some officers reported that in their opinion, State Government employees knew very little about the role and capacity of LGAs.

A 'down stream' impact of the disregard was that in the minds of some communities and other organisations, Local Government was not competent. 'The lasting legacy for us is a series of broken relationships, requiring significant healing'.

Officers individually found they had located some resilience in themselves, and some reported that at the organisational level, groups found energy for 'push back' and resistance. For some the tensions were seen as creative, allowing for 'real development opportunities'. Other parts of this report highlight some of the opportunities brought about through the harshness of the experience. Some detail is provided on the emergence of new structures, practices, and long term change management initiatives.

VBRRA – an 'unexpected' entity: disturbance in lines of authority

Some officers appeared to be genuinely intrigued with the emergence of VBRRA - 'where did it come from? What was the trigger for its creation?' There was a general view that 'nobody saw it coming'.

What was obvious to local government officers was the creation of a 'responsibility vacuum' as a direct corollary of the state government not following established disaster response and recovery plans and protocols. Concerns were expressed that Local Government was not able to be heard when clearly reiterating and advocating for their roles, responsibilities, capacity and authority.

Several Local Government participants talked specifically of the intervention of VBRRA as creating great uncertainty and consternation. It was seen as usurping long-held and well-established practices and roles that had been developed by the sector. Some had undertaken extensive work based on policy, protocols and practices that reinforced Local Government's established leadership role in disaster recovery. Local Government, particularly in some of the fire-impacted regions, had established considerable maturity, innovation, capacity and capability for dealing with disasters.

> *Under the new regime, our existing recovery plans and protocols could not be followed and couldn't be engaged or resourced.....VBRRA ignored Council's strategic planning, decades of work and relationship building with local communities, small businesses and our service provider agency partners.*

VBRRA was, in one participant's words, 'an enormous frustration'. Some officers saw VBRRA as actually undermining Local Government reputation and authority. Local Government staff conveyed that

> *VBRRA repeatedly advised – don't worry about Council. They don't know what they're doing.*

These sorts of attitudes and behaviours were said to have created confusion among agencies and communities and added to the chaos or recovery.

Several participants talked about the difficulty of acting in the new environment.

On any given issue, seeking out and then establishing, with the necessary clarity, just who had decision making roles and responsibilities, and why, was experienced as an enormous challenge.

> It was also clear that the bushfires and their aftermath had shocked Victorians and the rest of the nation and that people needed assurance that the massive recovery task would be tackled quickly, decisively and comprehensively.
> VBRRA Legacy Report, June 2011.

Some felt they had lost their mandate as Local Governments, leading to being in an

> *invidious position, wedged between recognised authority and disaffected community.*

Another officer expressed feeling 'alienated from above and alienated from below'. Some expressed the feeling that they had been 'used' in this grey context of unclear lines of authority.

In the eyes of some, the cost of these changes in responsibilities and difficulties in working with VBRRA in the new environment, is that it will take years for Local Government Officers to regain trust with

> The Federal and State governments established the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority on 10th February. It was established as an administrative office of the Department of Premier and Cabinet., reporting directly to the Premier…Its key task was to coordinate the rebuilding program. It closed in June 2011. It was replaced by the Fire Recovery Unit.
> VBRRA Legacy Report Summary

community leaders, caused in part through the difficulties Council Officers faced.

> *working in a new environment with changed expectations and diminished powers.*

One officer, while perhaps not distinguishing role differences between VBRRA and the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF), noted the Council had experienced considerable difficulty getting detailed information from the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund about fund allocation, which acted as an impediment on Council's efforts to strategically target its recovery effort.

In the words of another officer,

> *The reality underlying assumptions of joined up government is fragmentation, turf wars and chaos.*

One size fits all?

Some felt that the 'broad brush approach' VBRRA implemented, was indeed too broad. One participant saw that it 'painted over the top of our local diversity'. The 'one size fits all approach' was seen to 'fit no-one'.

There were a few particular and closely related manifestations of the 'one size fits all' approach. One was workshop theme was about the failure to recognise the diversity in the Local Governments themselves as organisations, and the other was around the diversity in socio demographic variables within and between Local Government areas, in particular the understanding of socio-economic and educational disadvantage. Firstly to the variance across Local Governments:

> *It's chalk and cheese. Rural councils have so few resources compared to city councils. There are huge differences in capacity, networks, and commitment to community development between councils.*

Other words used to describe differences included differences in cultures, professionalism, scales and living conditions. Some identified certain LGAs as having distinct financial, political and cultural constraints, and some as lacking the basic management systems that were 'standard issue in larger organisations'. Several officers felt that the state government was seriously ignorant of or neglected these differences. The geographic disparateness of some LGAs, and the remoteness at times of Council offices from key communities, made for additional engagement, operational and implementation challenges. And just as council areas are not homogenous, neither are communities.

> *We're not homogenous communities. The state government has to understand the different scales, cultures and conditions across the state, appreciate the strengths and the vulnerabilities, and work better with locally-based service providers and Councils.*

Some participants referred to this one size fits all as a 'cookie cutter approach'.

One area of diversity of particular concern, and that generally went unrecognised, was the diversity of 'disadvantage' across the LGAs. Several officers were very in tune with the notion that 'disaster reinforces disadvantage', and that there were particular challenges about engaging 'hard to reach' citizens from economically deprived districts and regions and especially the peri-urban and remote areas –

Our high SEIFA Index disadvantaged communities continue to be a considerable challenge[26].

For those in the SEIFA disadvantage areas, their 'pre-disaster' lives were characterised by disadvantage, insecurity and vulnerability to crisis. For these households, the notion of 'planning' in recovery was a foreign one, having been (socially) disenfranchised for a long time.

DOH functions were formerly part of DHS, which split into two separate departments on 12 August 2009

Sometimes diversity was expressed as above, as diversity in levels of disadvantage. At other times it was expressed as 'diversity' in a 'practice', or an approach at the Local Government level. One such variation pertained to the considerable differences in commitment to community development between interface and rural – remote Councils.

Some saw that the bushfires exposed these practice and approach differences quite starkly.

The bushfires reinforced how far we are behind Metro Councils in securing an ongoing organisational commitment to community development as a legitimate practice.

Again, these differences were seen to play their own role in how VBRRA and Local Government were able to relate.

In the eyes of some, the 'leanness' of resources in some areas has also been the source of creativity. Many Local Government officers saw diversity as a strength – and the source of opportunities 'for good local community input, implementation and monitoring'.

Other State Government presence in recovery

Department of Human Services Recovery Coordination

LGA officers made some positive comments about DHS staff 'on the ground'. One officer put it like this:

DHS is the most outstanding example of helpful staff being undermined by bureaucratic process at cross-purposes with the needs of the community.

The workshop notes do not elaborate on what particular cross-purposes were being referred to here. There was considerable comment about the mismatch of state determined DHS metropolitan-rural regional boundaries and regional offices with the LGA boundaries and LGA desires to work collaboratively across Local Government areas affected by the fires. The 'fire footprint' boundary cut across the DHS boundaries, with, in the words of one senior manager, 'Hume Region meeting in Benalla on matters involving Mitchell and Murrindindi'. The other rural shires in Hume (DHS) region, such as Alpine and Indigo, had much less in common with the fire-affected communities in the south of Murrindindi and Mitchell than did the adjoining metropolitan-based fire affected LGAs.

[26] http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/censushome.nsf/home/seifa?opendocument&navpos=260

> The Department of Human Services (DHS) was coordinating personal support, financial assistance and emergency accommodation. However, the circumstances demanded additional urgent and extraordinary measures to coordinate and drive the longer term rebuilding effort. In particular, the extent of the impact of the fires – both in the intensity of destruction in many communities and the geographic spread of damage across the State – meant that a dedicated coordinating authority was considered essential, as existing agencies would be fully committed in delivering their own relief and recovery services.
>
> VBRRA submission to the Bushfires Royal Commission, p 6.

Some saw less involvement of regional DHS than they had felt they were promised. Others were adamant that the more rural DHS region of Hume was having less to do with the metropolitan regions of North and West DHS than was desirable or required according to Local Governments understanding.[27]

Specifically some Local Government officers saw that in future recovery efforts they would like to see better management of service withdrawal and more explicit formal decision-making structures between state and local government and the contracted service provider agencies.

Some had positive things to say about the DHS funded deployment of CDOs within the Shire/Council areas.

Our shire's response centred on the employment of DHS funded bushfire CDOs to work across emergency management, environmental recovery, psychosocial recovery, financial management and administrative support including grant writing and acquittals and in supporting engineers and planners progress built infrastructure projects.[28]

Need for greater recognition of others roles in recovery

There was also some concern expressed that

> *other state government departments weren't more fully deployed in disaster recovery or engaged in disaster recovery evaluation processes.*

For example, the Department of Planning and Community Development and all their community planning, infrastructure and community development resources and knowledge were seen by some as not sufficiently engaged in disaster recovery and community renewal.

> Just who was accountable and for what was not thought through by VBRRA.
> Workshop participant

Also for some, the work of the Department of Sustainability and Environment was not given the same profile or status as that of other departments. In the eyes of some participants, the existence of VBRRA or the different perceptions of 'who' constituted VBRRA, and how it operated, led to this diminution of the roles of others.

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[27] DHS regional boundaries have now changed, DHS now has 4 Administrative Areas (North, South, East and West) and 17 Local Areas. http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0008/701945/presentation-gill-callister-human-services-partnership-implementation-committee-6-03-2012.pdf

[28] This quote also points to the possible tension of CDO's roles needed to assist the formal authority with its tasks, which, understandably, may or may not be aligned with community priorities.

Arguments over Resourcing, Authority and the Media

Resources required for Emergency Response

Inadequate resourcing was another major theme in relation to the pressures on local governments that fuelled relationship tensions with VBRRA.

> *It has never been clearer that our ability to conduct disaster response and recovery comes down to resourcing.*

This strong statement by one participant provides a focus for the comments made in this section about the resource requirement if Local Government is to be a strong presence in Emergency Management, which is itself a broad field of disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Participants highlighted the large work load imposed both on local government and on community members by the need to manage the millions of dollars that came in following the fires. One participant found the financial monitoring, administration, reporting and acquittals 'ludicrous'.

> *We were not prepared for this. We had to fund a new position just to manage all the recovery funds. There was too much grossly inappropriate nit-picking over amounts of grant money as small as $3,000.*

The 'nit picking' and basic lack of trust was also seen by some to delay the progress of projects. Officers described the relief offered by those situations where resources came through private donor funds, thus reducing the need for detailed reporting and monitoring.

Some officers held the view that VBRRA's expectations of community members were way too high.

> *There was far too much stress created for our disaster survivors. We were acutely aware of the stresses and strains on community members. They were being put under extreme pressure and duress.*

Another perspective was that due to the pressure to achieve rapid visible outcomes, lack of appropriate time lines, and inadequate community engagement, some community members have remained disengaged. One officer saw that

> *New divisions have emerged within communities between those who could and couldn't participate in the limited Community Recovery Plan consultation. The ridiculous timelines for all processes were oriented to VBRRA reports and state government press releases. They were driving the so-called 'community led' recovery.*

For some

> *There was a paucity of staff in VBRRA with Community Development qualifications and real 'on the ground, in the community' experience.*

Some officers made comparisons with funding formulas in other areas of Council work, such as the availability of recurrent funding for aged care and infrastructure. By comparison Emergency Management is poorly funded, with short term positions, or positions held by officers with additional, or even higher priority responsibilities outside of Emergency Management. Some said they were in disbelief when they learned that the Shires of Murrindindi and Mitchell did not form part of the Bushfire Royal Commission outcomes of the recommendation to fund 48 Local Government areas with

additional resources around bushfire preparedness[29]. In addition to needing additional resources, some officers interpreted this as having their rich experience overlooked, experience that was seen as potentially valuable to and able to be utilised by other Local Government areas.

There were gaps in the provision of additional human and technical resources for data collection and management of disaster impact. Some officers believed they had learnt that the State could not be relied on to share data and that local systems were required.

Several officers emphasised that often it is not the ideas that are lacking in terms of how to proceed toward strengthening community capability but actual lack of resources. Lack of resources in general were seen as inhibiting the process of giving full effect to the community partnership and leadership roles, policies and theoretically implementable programs.

> *We have so many community and partnership leadership roles and responsibilities, yet, unfortunately, we lack the necessary resources to give full effect to our policies and implement our programs .... It is important that enough resources are made available for Councils to undertake disaster prevention, preparedness and disaster response and recovery planning.*

Political pressures between different levels of government.

Another source of fragility for Local Government as the deliverer of State policy at the local level, at times of disasters, is the inherently political context of the disaster itself. Many commented on the ever-present driver of short-term political pressures, gains and influences that can be exercised in disasters and emergencies.

Government Departments were sometimes experienced as *telling* not *listening*. Some saw these dynamics as part of the 'nature' of State Government

> *It's (State Government's) way ... to come in and take over … to be in control.*

Many comments made by participants drew attention to this tussle over control as a dominant experience. Among repeatedly used images affirming a picture of compromising and conflictual relationships were 'the meat in the sandwich', 'holding the baby', and being 'between a rock and a hard place'.

Yet for some there was also a sense of it not being clear '*who* had authority...'

One participant used a colourful image in likening VBRRA to an epicormic growth ....

> *… very much a short term fix and completely unsustainable[30].*

Another saw VBRRA as creating a culture of

> *Cheap wins …. quick and dirty pragmatic political wins.*

For some these 'good process' circumventions were seen as producing enduring repercussions. Some participants resented the use of 'community development' terminology by VBRRA.

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[29] http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/assets/vbrc-final-report-recommendations.pdf
http://www.abc.net.au/news/2009-08-18/list-victorian-towns-most-at-risk-this-fire-season/1395268

[30] Epicormic shoots arise from buds which lie dormant beneath the bark of certain species of trees. These shoots will appear under certain conditions, one of which is when fire removes some or all of the limbs of a tree. The image of epicormic growth was a common one used to signify renewal on many bushfire websites and other media images. However the appearance of epicormic growth doesn't always signify the tree will survive (Tropical Savannas CRC and Bushfire CRC, 2010)

Its (VBRRAs) so called community engagement work was not community engagement and it was not community development. It was all about expending the VBAF/Red Cross donations as soon as possible.

For another officer,

If recovery is not clearly constituted it becomes political and media-driven. Summary comment from LGA workshop participants following presentations from each LGA.

What happened in recovery has compromised so much. Our Councillors trusted our Officers and Managers. Our communities trusted our Officers and Managers. The relationships were well structured and mature. There was a fundamental disregard for community and history.

Officers felt responsibility was too often unfairly attributed to them by their community for issues outside their control, such as when Local Government officers had to bear the brunt of anger about the new (state government) bushfire re-building regulations.

One officer reported sentiments that could be interpreted as feeling 'being used'.

Local governments were framed as the conduit for state government, but we quickly became the meat in the sandwich. What really happened was VBRRA circumvented Local Governments and their legislated responsibility, authority and key role in disaster recovery

Another officer talked of local government being 'wedged out' – 'alienated from above and from below'.

As in most of the conversations during this project, some participants were able or willing to look beyond the presenting source of the distress they were experiencing, and question the source of the systemic pressures. Some saw that these pressures were not one directional – only toward Local Government, with the State as 'oppressor'.

When you talk to the State they say the Commonwealth always does the same thing … 'power over' politics – that bullying is sanctioned all the way to the top – and that this is very much the norm in Australian politics.

Some questioned how realistic it is to be aiming for the development of respectful relationships 'in good faith', in this sort of culture.

Those who stand to benefit the most can and will exploit power and conflict.

There were several conversations about the immediacy of the Government's 'we will rebuild' mantra, and how there was little time to think this through. From this perspective, in the minds of some workshop participants, VBRRA itself was left with difficult and unachievable roles and tasks to perform in unrealistic timelines.

Some participants believed there was not enough thinking through of the differences in the two tasks of Recovery and Reconstruction. These needed to be more clearly separated conceptually, with the skill sets and approaches being fundamentally different.

> *Recovery is all about psycho-social approaches and is the domain of soft skills 'people people' with relational and emotional skills and expertise. Reconstruction is a technical enterprise and focused on hard skills physical expertise.*

For some

> *There was too much emphasis on physical rebuilding and not (enough on) relationship rebuilding and community rebuilding.*

The media in recovery

Closely related to the conversations about resources, diversity in capacity in Local Governments, and the use of power, were the conversations about the media.

Local Government saw themselves as less able to influence the media than State Government. Across Local Governments, there was significant variation in capacity to contribute information, shape opinion and be heard. Some participants saw it was important to function strongly here. Most Councils had insufficient resources and networks to cut through on the many important issues that attracted unprecedented state and national interest.

> *There are those in the media who seek out and exaggerate conflict, portraying and perpetuating simple either/or dynamics, and not sufficiently grasping complexity.*

Rebuilding is a time consuming activity and the imperative to quickly and efficiently rebuild towns has to be balanced with the need to carefully plan post-disaster reconstruction and involve communities in all decision making. Achieving the balance between timely and quality outcomes has been an ongoing challenge for VBRRA, and a divergence between public expectations for rebuilding and the practical realities of construction has at times been evident.
VBRRA submission to the Royal Commission, Scn 149, p 29.

Deleterious impacts of these processes were not confined to government officers seeking to carry out their role. The 'binary' and at times misleading reporting also impacted on the community. One of the explicit negative influences of poorly informed or misinformed media stories was that these reports sometimes undermined structures and led to loss of faith in leadership. Some noted that Local Government was often left to 'mop up'. Some talked of learning that

> *the importance of being savvy, proactively anticipating, and managing community perceptions. The media and politicians will always want to spin stories ... We need to address our capacity, ability and willingness to use and handle the media.*

When there is no clarity about roles and authority, recovery becomes highly politicised and adversarial.
Summary comment from LGA workshop participants following presentations from each LGA

While some saw the need to step up to a stronger role in managing media, for others, taking up such a new role would service as a 'persistent unwanted distraction'. However the bottom line of those comments recorded in the research notes, was that

ultimately we know that politics and media are more powerful than partnerships and planning.

For some this appeared to be inevitable. For others it seemed to lead to the conclusion that it was imperative for Local Government to 'step up' and manage this space better in the future.

The conundrum of Community Recovery Committees (CRCs)

This next discussion highlights the centrality to these Local Government workshop participants, of the inception, development and growth of CRCs, as part of the new landscape they had to traverse[31]. Not surprisingly, some of the themes already discussed - the political nature of decision-making, the obfuscation of lines of authority, particular pressures around time lines, are repeated here and find particular expression.

These comments were a mixture. They

- highlighted the value of the community voice
- showed empathy for the situation CRCs were placed in
- noted disbelief at the expectations placed on CRCs
- denoted consternation at the repercussions of the shift in power relations between government, 'the community' and LGAs due to their creation
- pointed to anger at the inevitable consequences of misplaced policy and practice
- recognised the importance of the learning that flowed from the difficulties.

Some of these sentiments will be substantiated below.

Differences in stances toward the CRCs

Some officers talked of a 'we' – a togetherness of 'the community and Council', in relation to the demands of the State, and in particular VBRRA. This was reflected in comments such as 'We, Council and community, were forced to come up with a plan in a very short time'. LGA officers and CRC members were both struggling with the state-government imposed planning process and timelines – reflected in the threat:

If you don't get your plan in by August 2009, you won't get any bushfire recovery funds.

Some Local Government officers talked of their responsibilities toward the CRCs – and how delicate the balance was.

We set up and resourced the Community Recovery Committee. It was an incredible balancing act requiring lots of patience and understanding as the state government pressured affected communities to fast-track recovery and rebuilding.

Some Local Government officers spoke of initiating a process for nomination of members for the CRC, to which 'VBRRA stepped in and said no', and that the 'community would be doing this'.

Officers were not all at one with their employers about how Councils responded to the CRCs. Some spoke of how they had assisted in setting up a CRC (type) body, using a slightly different model, with

[31] Greg Ireton's unpublished work on the history of CRCs in disasters in Victoria, shows that CRCs are not new, as would previous versions of the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria.

representation from various affected communities, as well as from local organisations. One CRC structure was not recognised by the Shire Council and Senior Management, a source of ongoing friction and conflict.

Some spoke of a sense of 'role displacement' in having to accommodate the advent of the CRCs, best summed up in the comment:

> *As a Shire we have really struggled with our relationship with the CRC.*

For some their experience with CRCs was very positive; several participants were very clear in the high regard they held for the certain CRCs and their members.

> *The community recovery committees are the best tool or structure we've ever had for community engagement and for taking action in partnership with communities. We have had excellent leaders who liaise and connect, never pretending to know everything, being humble.*

From *experience* to *meaning making* – issues of authority

Many LGA officers were thoughtful in their comments about the 'reasons' for the struggle with CRCs - why was the experience of accommodating and working with CRCs so problematic. One participant likened the changed dynamics, with the changed partners, to a dance – referring to how

> *We all had to learn how to do the 'CRC-VBRRA-Shire-VBAF' dance.*

One key element in discussing the dynamic was the underlying change in 'lines of authority'. Who could speak to whom, publicly or covertly, was different, and implications for decision-making were experienced as profound, and unprecedented. One officer used the phrase 'surreal'.

> *VBRRA created a surreal reality .. who community members got to speak with when lines of authority are obscured was unprecedented and created an opportunistic and divisive politics and an unreasonable level of expectations about future norms.*

Local Government staff talked of community members having private conversations with cabinet ministers and heads of government departments. CRCs were seen as having a lot of power, with 'sign off' roles for projects.

> *All of a sudden, power and influence were available where previously they had not been available to community groups.*

The burden of shortened planning time lines

Some officers were empathic in their accounts of how the time lines imposed by VBRRA were not only impacting on them, but in some ways more seriously on CRC members. One participant talked of

> *the 'ethical and conscientious' approach taken by their CRC to respond to the crisis and carry out their community representative role.*

One officer spoke of the CRC as being a 'good steward of resources'. However this officer also stated that these qualities alone were not enough – good qualities were the pathway to the disillusionment that characterised the CRC. Comments were made about how exhausted the CRC members became. Many officers agreed with the comment that

> *What was expected from CRC members was unreasonable, and incompatible with managing their own personal recovery, supporting their families and rebuilding their homes.*

Another participant compared a more usual 12-18 month process in which a Council might develop a community plan, (with opportunities over successive budgets to implement it), with the VBRRA-imposed community recovery planning process where

> *Time lines were limited, guidelines were unclear and we were working with a community who were best described as traumatised and dispersed fire-impacted residents.*

For some participants there was little wonder that some CRCs were disillusioned. There was a sense that both LGA officers and CRC members had become caught in a complex dynamic where they were both seeking to manage in what was referred to as the 'shifting goalposts' of community recovery. The image of the tight timelines and shifting goal posts was counterpointed by another image provided by a participant who described Local Government as usually

> *deliberate and conservative ... Our slow considered processes are so we can take real steps together. Quick and dirty is political, not about impacts that can be sustained.*

Local planning and state priorities

Some officers perceived the CRCs as getting caught 'in the web of' the State Government's agenda. Accounts were provided of where CRCs wanted particular outcomes like 'fire access tracks', but 'government policy meant that they got a community hall'.

> *Some (CRCs) wanted fences and simple practical projects – these went right down to the bottom of the list.*

Another example cited of unmet community expectations or desire was in relation to wildlife preservation.

LGA officers said they shared with CRC members some of the frustration that promises were not always matched with resources. Some LGA officers also felt this set them all up to fail, local government officers, community members and CRCs alike, in that

> *State government had raised community expectations, which we as an LGA could not guarantee*

Some LGA officers did not believe that some of these matters were brought about as 'unintended consequences', but rather that the strategies were intentional, and intentionally divisive.

> *There was a lot of divide and conquer/wedge politics going on. VBRRA's 'working together' tag lines were empty.*

For others the seeds of some of their concerns about the CRCs lay in the 'squeakiest wheel' phenomenon. Some CRCs were seen as being comprised of politically capable people who could get the ear of people of influence, but who themselves were not representative. One variable in this dynamic was seen to be the style of the CRC Chair. Given the State Government often went to the CRC Chair

Information flow was dependent on the willingness of the CRC Chair to share information.

Some officers, while seeing the problems, voiced their awareness that these matters are not easy to resolve.

How do you manage processes so the loudest people don't dominate?

Others agreed with the conclusion that the

VBRRA processes had failed to achieve truly representative community participation in the development of the community recovery plan.

A reasonable aspiration? Or wishful thinking?
A true measure of community recovery will be when communities are ready to operate at normal support levels, consistent with Victorian and Australian emergency management policy. To achieve that end CRC members, with VBRRA assistance, will need to increase their capabilities so that they can participate in the development of longer-term strategies for the sustainability of their communities. VBRRA submission to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission, Scn 203, p 39.

The need to pick up the pieces

By the time of the LGA workshop in March 2011, VBRRA was progressing to its planned closure in June 2011. For many this reinforced how the 'community and Council need each other', and that now 'the pieces had to be picked up.'

Some officers shared their concerns for the future of CRCs.

How long can community members who have stepped up to leadership positions keep going?

At the time of these discussions some CRCs were seen as not having a 'specific project, or a direction or a focus'. Some officers felt that the CRCs could and should have been offered more assistance with their transition. A few comments were made specifically about how difficult it was for some CRC members who had played roles with considerable power and influence attached, when this influence was diminishing. One officer questioned

This concern was set against the parallel comment that 'Council is the constant'.

One officer talked of being 'duty bound' to continue to support the CRC, but the way ahead was not clear. For some,

We still have many questions about the role of Community Recovery Committees and the ability of affected communities to manage their own resources.

One participant expressed the pleasure of learning that

Communities can engage at a high level-dialogue rather than the traditional adversarial/snipe and run.

Another officer noted that

We are keen to celebrate their (CRCs) achievements, and ask where to from here.

For another,

Our communities are dynamic and I hope they will move on.

Renewing the commitment - task, relationship and role clarity

The urgency of role clarity.

For some participants, questions remained.

> *Is it all going to be all just up for grabs again [in a future disaster scenario]?.*

Another statement about the State 'taking over' was that

> *We now need to know unequivocally, under just what circumstances this can be done.*

One officer talked of being

> *Tired of being vulnerable to the whim of State Governments and the major parties.*

One council officer reported that their Council had written at length to the Premier about the lack of clarity of government roles in the recovery period. Another talked of the need to redevelop 'mutually respectful relationships', hinting at the two-way element to respect.

Some officers voiced the need for bridge building across all levels of government, across government departments, and between disciplines. There was acknowledgement that there were no immediate answers, and many different aspects to consider, particularly the relevance of scale – both of communities and the extent of the disaster impact, on the projected length of a recovery process in relation to scale and impact, and what issues these raised for transition from 'bushfire' services and responses and the capacity of mainstream services.

Some participants put forward ideas about ways to reduce the chasm that had formed, and remained in some instances, between Local Government and State Government. For some

> *the cost of response and recovery uncertainty led to unnecessary duplication and wasted resources.*

Some talked of the need for 'role negotiation'.

While the discussion on breakdown of trust was expressed by many, some were also keen to emphasise that where good relationships existed with State Government, regional office bureaucrats and elected politicians, these were critical for local government decision makers.

> *Where pre-existing relationships were protected and developed, progress could be fast tracked.*

Some turned their minds to the possible means through which role clarity could be gained. Several commented on the importance of Senior Leadership – having a supportive CEO and Council – 'having hierarchy, structures and the key decision makers behind you'. Local government officers emphasised that

> *Coordination and leadership of disaster preparedness and recovery partnerships is among our most critical strategic work.*

In addition to leadership, was the need to have the right people in the right jobs. Some saw it as critical that senior Council staff had substantial local government and management experience in running community recovery.

In addition to leadership, some referred to other aspects of the hard work.

> *The respective roles of state and local government needed to be defined, documented and followed, including a commitment relating to how all levels of government will support local government in emergency management and disaster recovery situations.*

The requirement for role and responsibility clarity wasn't just at the governmental and intra-governmental levels. There was a strong feel among many Local Government officers that Councils *and the resident communities in their areas,* are well placed to respond to disaster recovery *if* there is a strong history of enduring community engagement and community development work, and established trust between senior staff and community leaders.

> *The priority should always be utilising and enhancing existing local networks first.*

Local Government officers talked to the fact that often community members, who are typically the first responders in a disaster, found it impossible to hold on to any authority – that their first responder role is often overridden.

> *They have the local knowledge and will be there for the long haul.*

Against these ideas of the necessity to recognise the role of community members, is what some saw as a different reality. Some asked: will community members actually engage with longer-term (less crisis focused) community preparedness work. One officer noted that

> *We now have a more educated community that takes less personal responsibility, yet has much higher expectations of Council. Look at how it responds and makes demands.*

How to manage these differing expectations at all levels of community and government is a huge and complex question and task.

Some hinted at a possible upside of the absence of adequate role understanding and structure.

> *This led to incredible experimentation ... 'Let's Just Do It!'*

Some saw the community embrace these challenges. Whatever the strengths and difficulties were at the local government level, there seemed agreement that partnerships were the only way forward.

> *We've learnt the importance of building strong and defensible relationships and agreements with adjoining local governments, state government departments, peak bodies and service provider agencies, prior to disasters.*

The notion of establishing larger and more strategic networks and collaborations was seen as self-evident – disaster recovery (and its associated tasks of preparedness and mitigation) is just too big.

> *Work on this scale is too big for any one officer, or team … too big for any one department or organisation. We need to work together better, to collaborate.*

Local Government officers also talked about the need for considerable role clarity in the services on which community and government rely in the non-government (human services) sector. Some spoke of the NGO sector as needing to demonstrate more clarity as to what they can provide and commit to, and over what period of time. In some instances it was recognised that this was not always possible. In

some instances agencies were seen to be seeking opportunistic funding, with the implication that their 'local' commitment may be a secondary consideration. One participant summarised this concern:

> *What is the real capacity, role, and remit of each agency and are they in for the short term or the long term?*

Increasing role clarity - barriers and opportunities

One participant perceived some of the role and authority problems as being inbuilt within some of the disaster 'infrastructure' that crossed government boundaries. One example cited was the National Disaster Funding arrangements; these were seen to

> *Create a licence for dominance and the swamping of local government.*

A further barrier seen as problematic was more of a conceptual one – that there are differing paradigms, differing approaches to disaster, across government, across different disciplines and professional groups, and across different local areas.

> *We need to negotiate a workable balance between extremes – between centralisation and professionalism, command and control, and decentralisation, place management, community development and re-localisation.*

Another officer saw the differences in frameworks in these terms [32].

> *Local Government workers are technical, bureaucratic and policy-oriented workers, and not social and emotional people-oriented workers. So focusing above the line (on hard skills) and under the line (on soft skills) is very important. (As officers) we tend to think above the line and under the line usually gets forgotten ....*

In the view of this officer, since the disaster,

> *The hard and soft skills now rate as of equal importance.*

Another barrier that could be redressed, was the lack of valuing of Local Government. One officer saw that in framing its strengths, Local Government could emphasise that it acted as a tool of State Government, delivering policy on behalf of the State, and that

> *Local government has unparalleled on-ground community planning, community development and service delivery capacity and capability.*

This person took the view that it's actually State Government's role to *enable* Local Government Authorities.

Some alluded to the barriers to gaining clarity in developing clearer pictures of what 'could be' in terms of partnership development. One officer saw that there was a failure to seek out what pre-existing partnerships and alliances actually existed prior to the disaster, and to use this knowledge in the disaster response. One officer put the importance of these pre-existing relationships as follows:

[32] Here a workshop participant was talking to a conceptual diagram taken from Meg Wheatley's work, which he had drawn on the whiteboard during the workshop. The diagram highlighted historical technical-rational professional knowledge skill alongside the more contemporary social-relational knowledge skill sets

We advise using pre-existing peacetime arrangements and relationships whenever and wherever possible.

Generally it was felt that more thinking and discussion was required by management and those in leadership positions, about implementation of priority actions in community recovery. Some indicated that the environment for these conversations will always be risky.

Planning for recovery arrangements will always be difficult, partly because emergencies are unpredictable and partly because politics are unpredictable.

Another endemic problem for planning around roles and responsibilities pertained to the unfortunate 'fact' that when it comes to dominant elements of the media,

Perception is more important than reality….[and that] politics and media are more powerful that our partnerships and planning.

Several saw that there were missed opportunities for strategic and cooperative approaches to the provision of sustainable material relief. This topic of material relief also touched on concerns about local livelihoods and how these can be sustained in the context of a recovery process. Questions were raised about the critical need to highlight opportunities for sustainable development in recovery processes.

Some emphasised the need for more community involvement and education as strategies to increase understanding of the complexities of Emergency Management.

Our communities didn't know about our Emergency Management Plan or the context of local, state and federal (government) relations.

Others emphasised that

Organisational and community development initiatives now have a better profile in the organisation as a consequence of our work. This is what happens when programs get ramped up from part time piecemeal projects to full time workers. This is important for legitimacy.

One reflective officer contributed this suggestion:

We need to develop a more curious approach to what informs our own and others views and practices.

Most participants enthusiastically endorsed the following sentiment

There are many new opportunities for new ways of working, new relationships and new partnerships.

These were seen as possible at many levels – across communities, across government, across LGA boundaries with other Local Governments.

These relationships need to be developed and documented, MOU's need to be drawn up, and the various planning tools and frameworks at many levels need to be linked up.

Community development practice and principles

Differing views on what constitutes community engagement?
VBRRA's approach to community engagement – having a central team and regionally-based Community Engagement Coordinators actively support community groups as they develop and implement plans for recovery – has constituted the most comprehensive and sustained community-led recovery process undertaken in Australia. VBRRA will continue to work with CRCs and local councils over the coming months to refine and deliver the community priorities identified in the CRPs. To date, more than 300 out of 1,000 ideas and projects from these plans have confirmed funding.

VBRRA submission to the Bushfires Royal Commission, Scn 202, p 39.

The closeness with which some Local Governments felt they worked with their communities was apparent. Some saw no dividing line between 'Local Government' and 'community':

We are community-based. We are community-oriented and community-driven. We are the critical community building partnership brokers.

A senior officer spoke highly of their staff in their immediate and subsequent responses to the disaster

… not just as workers, as real participants in the community recovery process. 300 of our staff were involved in our response to the disaster. They have strong relationships and real bonds with the community.

community development principles were reaffirmed as critical, especially placing a key emphasis on Local Government Executive and agencies working collaboratively and purposefully with community members, particularly community leaders. Opportunities existed to make the most of what some saw as a revitalisation of community groups.

> *We've now got an active Progress Association and a lot of new community champions and community leaders.*

In some instances the Community Development Officers (CDOs) were regarded as particularly important for the assistance they were able to give to other Council officers facing challenging community engagement tasks.

> *Community Development Officer support for Council's engineers and infrastructure department was intensive, as these staff members were not used to doing consultation or working collaboratively with the community.*

Another example of building bridges between the involved parties was that of the Nillumbik Social and Health Alliance, where there was a focus on creating a regular meeting place and decision making mechanism between community members, Council and professionals from service provider agencies.

> *It provided us with a forum to facilitate advocacy and lobbying and to support mutual learning.*

Local Government officers in this workshop reported learning a lot about community dynamics and networks through the experience gained during recovery work (as did other participants in sections 3 and 4 following).

One local government officer talked about the reliance on tried and true Community Development principles.

> *Community development is now a much greater focus and priority. Our CD Officers are taking on much bigger roles working directly with our communities and working across our whole organisation. Our Community Development team have been our Change Managers.*

Some participants used language that suggested a considerable shift in approach – with phrases like

> *We've come to realise just how much we rely on community. We've done well … relying on the community to understand what needed to be done, and what still needs to be done.*

Building and supporting community also extended to the need for support for community organisations such as the SES and the CFA at the local level.

> *We need to keep these (local emergency services organisations) going as part of our culture.*

Particular needs of more isolated and traditionally under-resourced communities posed their own demands. One officer made reference to the fact that members of small communities are now asking for Community Development assistance, suggesting an increase in the awareness of the value of Community Development.

> *Our community realise there is still an enormous amount of work to be done. They have been advocating for Community Development workers.*

Officers were cognizant of the importance of providing opportunities to enable informed community leadership. They were also aware that conferences and workshops marketed at professional employees in organisations with professional development budgets were not accessible to or designed with community participation as a consideration. There was a lot of state and commonwealth government talk about and *on behalf of* community, but very little *with* community.

> *I attended an Australian Institute of Emergency Management conference on community engagement and resilience … we need to provide these opportunities to community leaders too. Discussion took place on the importance to be more mindful of the 'flow' of community and not to always engage with community 'on our timetable … to our rhythm'.*

There were also some concerns about the methods of engagement. Some expressed a sense of 'ennui' about that they saw as

> *State government imposed formats … red dots and World Cafes. These processes don't allow for the really important dialogue across hierarchies and across difference and across power.*

However 'deep dialogue'[33] was also recognised as a 'scary place'. One Local Government had engaged IAP2[34] to 'teach community engagement and community planning through the organisation', but there was tentativeness about engaging in processes for developing new relationships.

> *Our Community Development staff and our CRC are just now able to build 'light footprint' relationships with key shire officers to support and enable participatory processes.*

The key role of community development in building local resilience is clear, as is the challenge of finding funding to pay for ongoing community development workers.... We have to continually come back to the fact that we have finite resources. Workshop participant

As the above comment indicates, there are many challenges to face when a change in orientation to the 'community' is required. In the mind of one officer,

> *We've now got to make the quantum leap with our community from being part of superficial Community Recovery Planning for VBRRA back to the real deal.*

Images of 'scary places', 'light footprints', and quantum leaps[35], convey some aspects of the 'affective' milieu in which community development works[36]. While the workshop space was not one in which these important aspects of the work could be further elicited, the conversations frequently referred to 'affective' learning. Participants expressed the stress, anxiety, and exhilaration in the work in different ways. One participant noted how 'communities themselves have been very challenging'. Another officer referred to the need to 'take the plunge with the community', to build confidence in brokering long-term relationships. This person felt 'not as scared to delve into the community now'. In our view, these words are not just 'turns of phrase'. This work is challenging indeed.

However resources to carry out community development work were not plentiful. The winding up of the DHS funded Community Development Officer positions occurred, in the words of one participant, 'at the time we needed them more than ever'.

The key role of community development in building local resilience is clear, as is the challenge of finding funding to pay for ongoing community development workers.

The primary community development need was seen as

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[33]One (and perhaps the earliest) published claim to the creation of the term 'deep dialogue', its use, why it is required, and how it has been used, is that by Leonard Swidler. Swidler is a Professor of Catholic Thought and Interreligious Dialogue, at Temple University, Philadelphia. Very briefly, Deep-Dialogue can be described as a '*conversation between individual persons—and at times through them, two or more communities or groups—with differing views, the primary purpose of which is for each participant to learn from the other so that s/he can change and grow—and thereby the respective groups or communities as well*.' Local applications of the use of the phrase 'Deep Dialogue' has been made by Wadsworth and Epstein, 1996, in projects seeking closer communication between consumers and staff in mental health settings.

[34] International Association for Public Participation: http://www.iap2.org.au/..'IAP2 is an international member association that seeks to promote and improve the practice of public participation or community engagement, incorporating individuals, governments, institutions and other entities that affect the public interest throughout the world'.

[35] Interestingly, as Jim Loy points out, a quantum leap is in fact not the image usually conveyed in the lay public use of the term. Loy has this to say on its real meaning: 'Some people think that a quantum leap is a particularly large leap. This is incorrect. In fact, in quantum physics, where the expression came from, a quantum leap is usually a very tiny leap indeed, often smaller than the diameter of the nucleus of an atom. So what is a quantum leap? A quantum leap is a leap from A to B, without passing through any of the points between A and B.' This difference in meaning with how the word is used colloquially provides an interesting paradox warranting further consideration. What conditions would need to exist in order to make the move from A-B, not with the scary connotations of 'leap'? . http://www.jimloy.com/physics/quantum.htm

[36] By affective we mean the manner in which we deal with things emotionally, '*such as feelings, values, appreciation, enthusiasms, motivations, and attitudes*'. See the work of Harold Bloom for the critical importance of this domain as a significant 'learning' domain in education. Understanding this domain is critical in any endeavour, and particularly so in areas where the actors are working in threatening situations. http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html#affective. See recent work by Daniel Kahnemann (2011) and his elucidation of the critical role of the emotions particularly in relation to decision making, using insights provided through the work of the neuroscientist, Antonio Damasio (Kahneman, p.139).

the re-engagement and maturing of relationships and re-building of trust.

Reference was made to the ongoing work Council and consultants are doing on re-establishing the necessary formal structures for ongoing engagement of and with our community.

Local Government, Disaster Preparedness and Emergency Management

Integrating disaster preparedness and emergency management

Several officers emphasised the importance of achieving clarity in relation to Council's own internal partnerships across its own departments, and in relation to its own communities, with other Local Government Authorities, and with other service provider agencies.

Many Local Government officers were convinced that the Black Saturday disaster played a key role in pointing to the investment and work that was still required to improve preparedness for large scale disasters.

> *We need to build preparedness and resilience systematically and simultaneously across all departments and in all of our communities.*

Some reported very specific and critical initiatives they had undertaken.

> *For our part, a defensible model will have the most impact if it is unambiguously linked to Council business planning processes, but we need well-defined commitments from other levels of government detailing their support for local governments in emergency management and disaster recovery situations.*

Several officers too talked of the importance of the Council Plan, the Community Plan and Council Policy and Strategy frameworks in affirming and legitimising Local Government roles. Many saw the need to work hard at cross-referencing Emergency Management and Disaster Recovery Plans with other Council processes and plans, and to recognise that there is danger in ignoring this. It was emphasised that

> *Our work needs to progress towards 'normal business' increasing its adaptive capacity and accommodating unpredictability, uncertainty and insecurity.*

One suggestion received widespread agreement:

> *There is a need to integrate Emergency Management into all position descriptions.*

Alongside this is the tough task of assessing levels of competence required in undertaking delegated authority in an emergency. Opportunities have arisen through the crisis for new organisational relationships internally, which were seen at this point as demonstrations of increased capacity. One example given is the existence in some areas of

> *holistic cross-functional groups looking at risk from occupational health and safety, community development, infrastructure maintenance and business continuity perspectives.*

Others saw the need for such cross-disciplinary team development but less evidence of it actually occurring in the Councils as yet. Others talked about internal 'back up systems', in partnership with local business, other government departments and community organisations.

An example of the need for heightened awareness and cross-departmental response was the work undertaken at one Council on staff needs.

> *We decided at a managers meeting that staff health needed to go beyond the programs on offer through our Human Resources team. Responsibility and accountability for staff wellbeing needed to be owned by everyone … Managers got together with key staff and we created a Staff Health and Wellbeing Plan. This plan would have roles for staff across all departments and would be carried by Organisational Development.*

Some Local Governments have developed tighter guidelines for deployment of staff, including attention to rostering. One organisation imposed a six-month limit on the deployment to front line work.

> *This was to guard against getting completely absorbed or even lost in the role.*

One officer was less enamoured with the emphasis on 'strategic planning' as a way forward.

> *Sometimes we need to forget about all our strategic plans – developing and maintaining good knowledge management and communication systems, grant management systems etc. and just get out there and find out what people are doing and what they really need.*

This sentiment resonated with another officer's comment, when speaking of Local Government restructuring:

> *In many ways this is the wrong end to focus on – our structure is completely irrelevant to most people in the community. One can't determine everything … We know we need the communities input. If it doesn't make sense to community … it doesn't matter how many times we re-structure.*

Some noted the specific need for planning to be place-based at the locality – neighbourhood or district – level. The Community Plan in particular acts as the tool for strategic place-based policy and planning. Every effort needs to be made to strengthen local area planning, to 're-endorse it', and 'recommit' to it, and then see that it is firmly built into community recovery. One Local Government officer noted:

> *I'm determined to lead place-based processes to arrive at community priorities and not just seeing communities as the convenient locality for tethering government programs.*

Another officer talked in terms of the importance of tentacles being rooted in community, rather than pulling people and communities 'into the Council vortex'. Local Government officers saw they had a key part to play in whatever was going to be required to honour the 'place-based' ideas fully. One saw the need for Local Government to engage in much more bridge building.

> *We need to become stewards of workable approaches to small-scale place making.*

Accounts of specific environmental damage being particularly place-based highlighted a need to focus on the importance of the nuances of place-making. The resources required to actually engender place-based initiatives were too often seen as lacking.

> *Since the fires we've had lots of erosion and then flooding. Our engineers have been involved in a lot of remediation and preventative works. Place Management is going to become increasingly important.*

Some Council officers noted that the experience of the fires demonstrated that there was not extensive community interest in, understanding of, or commitment to, the Community Plan.

> *A major priority for us now has to be supporting our community to understand, engage with and develop ownership of their Council and Community Plan.*

For some the key question that remained was

> *How do we plan in partnership with our communities, seeing them as a natural disaster response and recovery resource?*

Many saw the need for balance in the dynamics:

> *Community ownership of community planning or preparedness planning or like processes is only part of the picture. There is a demonstrable need for real buy-in and policy and strategy leadership by Council, including senior management, the CEO, elected Councillors, and also supported by state government.*

Working across local and regional boundaries with neighbouring councils.

Some of the larger LGAs have been able to release staff to lead and work across regional emergency management coordination and partnership projects across multiple local government authorities. Protocols are emerging from this work. The technical term 'interoperability' was being used as a lever for some of this thinking.

Some participants provided evidence of real pleasure and excitement at the work they have been doing across the region.

> *Working so closely with other municipalities has been terrific. It has been great for me to realise just how much I've learnt from our fire recovery experience and how much value we can add to other Council's disaster preparedness planning.*

Another project has looked at cross regional coordination of emergency relief.

> *It has been a long and drawn out process but it will be of enormous benefit in the event of another Black Saturday.*

Those working at this regional collaboration believe it will form a key component of a defensible model of local government-led disaster recovery.

> *Collaboration and in particular interoperability on this scale will enable us to draw on staff from across the region should we ever find we again need the intensive support required in the event of a major disaster.*

Officers made reference to the informal BUDDY system that emerged through the disasters with large Councils supporting small rural Councils.

> *This has been brilliant and left an enormous positive legacy.*

Some officers expressed considerable pride in these individual Council-to-Council and sector-wide informal and formal relationships and assistance packages.

> *The generous help afforded by the sector is a credit to Victoria's local governments and the people who work in them.*

And specifically, some were looking to develop ideas of 'service hubs' in more remote areas.

The limits to local government

Reflections of the overall effort and impact on Local Government produced some strong statements about the nature and extent of the dialogue required, to bring about increased understanding and then transformation, and also the actual 'limits' of Local Government.

Regarding the nature of the dialogue, one officer in particular did not underestimate the challenge, which was seen, for Local Government at least, in terms of

> *a requirement for honesty and transparency and realising some hard truths … we just can't do everything.*

Part of the hard truth in the mind of another officer was the issue of what 'taking responsibility' really means. To this person, it requires 'shifts everywhere'. While 'everywhere' was not specifically elaborated on, the thread of this conversation was about the need for shifts at all levels – and across all domains – across community as well as government and other institutions. Such shifts were discussed as being about 'the transfer or the appropriation of power' and seen as 'of necessity, transformational rather than incremental.' Support for that reading is implied in the insight offered in the following comment by one officer:

> *Council currently plays into the paradigm of being the provider.*

While not clear from the research notes, one likely interpretation of this statement is that this 'provider' role is one that requires 'shifting'; perhaps in order to allow for more 'mutual sharing' or, to use a current term, 'co-creation' with community and others in this huge task of increasing community capability. Some participants wished to emphasise the impossibility of (and perhaps inappropriateness of) Local Government being expected to be, and attempting to be, all things to all people.

One officer pointed to the *conundrum* of the place of Local Government.

> *There are real limits on its ability to act independently and also advocate successfully for lasting change.*

Another officer referred to others perception of LGAs:

> *Local Government is as an undervalued sector, which is at the same time expected to do the impossible, pick up any slack and be all things to everybody, particularly when help is needed regardless of capacity or resource constraints.*

This person may have been suggesting that at a time of disaster, there is even *less* likelihood of some objective analysis of what is really possible.

This comes back to some of the comments above about the need to share responsibility and about what exactly is required, legally and institutionally, to invoke, enact, establish, resource and sustain responsibility – across all sectors.

There was strong agreement among workshop participants that legitimated authority to take and exercise responsibility has been insufficiently articulated and constituted at all levels.

Fostering Organisational and Community Resilience

Particular challenges - structural disadvantage, dependency and resilience

Officers particularly from community service departments emphasised social and environmental justice themes, and how some community members are more vulnerable than others.

> *We know disaster reinforces disadvantage. Engaging our 'hard to reach' citizens from economically deprived districts and disadvantaged regions is very difficult.*

Distance, remoteness and isolation added a particular dimension. While engagement of 'hard to reach' citizens was experienced by some as a problem, another perspective on the presence of vulnerable residents has been that they have been exposed in the process of the disaster.

> *Our communities have not been protected, they've been laid bare, left exposed to all comers – drug issues, mental health issues, private issues – have all been ...exposed.*

While this was not elaborated on, others referred to this sense of 'overexposure' of disaster survivors, of them becoming public property, with its associated loss of privacy.

While being mindful of the risks of highlighting disadvantage, there was discussion in the workshop as to how disadvantage can be identified. Some struggled with the perception that providing assistance may contribute to a state of 'dependency' in community members, a view one often hears. Some wished to challenge this.

> *How much real dependency is out there? We just don't know. We don't have the data … Do we just believe everyone's story? … How do we differentiate between opportunism and real need? How do we differentiate between the unscrupulous and the wider community good?*

These were difficult questions. Some pointed to the possible adverse outcome that 'long term community dependency' could threaten 'community resiliency'.

> *Our community development workers realised early we had to move away from everything being free.*

One officer reported that when the floods occurred a year after the fires, citizens were asking

> *Where do I go to get my blue form?*

Some saw that this state was not desirable and not something communities themselves wanted.

> *No one really wants to be dependent. This is much more complicated than anyone realised.*

One interesting observation was the possible double edge of the availability of resources and their distribution.

> *Simultaneously we have had degrees of dependency created through grants and gifts and degrees of autonomy granted through greater local decision-making power.*

Some reported having established many new initiatives.

> *We have established many new disaster recovery initiatives relating to both organisational and community resilience. (We are) building organisation resilience as a strong adaptive and authoritative organisation.*

In one Council, a new Resilience Department was established. In another a People and Place team was formed. In a third, considerable effort was focused on establishing a defensible local government-led emergency management and disaster recovery policy framework.

For some there was both a challenge and an opportunity to build resilience within the context of perpetual vulnerability and unpredictability. Contributing to the evidence-based case for concerted action on climate change was one such identified opportunity. Another was the need to explore how cooperation can diminish risk. Another as noted above, was to develop the capacity to be frank about limitations and develop mechanisms to establish clarity on what can be expected from citizens and communities. This applies particularly to Local Government to seek to be open and clear about interventions and the likelihood of their efficacy[37].

Many acknowledged that resilience represented yet another new buzzword and a new challenge, which their staff and their organisations were still coming to terms with. Workshop conversations brought this struggle to light.

> *What are resilient communities? This is not really obvious yet … it's still very messy and in transition.*

Others talked of using the phrase resilience as a given, and used it as prompt:

> *We are asking questions like … how are our relationships and partnerships related to our long-term resilience?*

Reference was again made to the difference in resource levels between Councils. One officer noted:

> Victoria's rural communities have been hit by a decade of drought and have faced several major natural disasters, including the 2009 bushfires, the 2010 locust plague and the 2010 and 2011 floods. These disasters have affected the resilience of both the communities and local government.
> [MAV submission to the 2011-2012 Commonwealth Budget January 2001. Introduction].

[37] These aspirations, while worthy, are complex. The work of Kahneman (2011) has highlighted for us the real difficulty for individuals and organisations to hold the capacity to foresee poor outcomes in organisation plans and decide to cease planned or poorly implemented interventions (see pp 249-254)

We are under constant pressure and scrutiny to just provide the basics.

Officers from rural Councils appeared to accept that their window of opportunity for innovation and successfully engaging new ideas was significantly smaller, given the expectation that they provide so many basic services with so few resources. Some noted that reflecting on resilience was a bit academic, or a luxury, given the inordinate amount of additional work generated by the bushfires.

Another officer noted:

> *It's not just as simple for us as … what is resilience? We first have to find the time and resources to reflect on, embed and sustain all of what we've learned from the fires.*

Others saw the desirability of actually doing the hard work to develop a stronger understanding of the determinants of resilience, including how partnerships and relationships build resilience.

Additional work is required on identifying the measurable and tangible policy outcomes and 'practical win wins' from the work of 'building organisational, community, neighbourhood and household resilience'.

Several participants believed that while the experience of recovery and reconstruction has been trying on all levels, many positive new initiatives and structures have grown out of the unprecedented conditions. Several reported growth in the size of their operations and considerable organisational change.

> *As an organisation we had little previous experience in major projects. These kind of developments were not part of our world, so we had to develop whole new skill sets and systems and ways of working.*

For some opportunities were created in 'linking local staff with metropolitan providers, new technology, skills and project management processes.'

> *The assistance we received was invested in building organisational capacity across all departments. The scale of the work involved for staff was enormous. We saw our annual budget double and then double again.*

Opportunities were created that meant resources could be invested where they hadn't existed before. Particular areas of growth noted were in youth services and the environment and emergency management. For rural Councils, the sheer scale of infrastructure rebuilding was beyond the capacity of their existing resources.

> *We've made more purchases in the past two years than in all of the previous years I have worked here.*

One officer noted that prior to the fires and the distribution of monies, their organisation didn't previously need the kind of tendering and procurement systems and programs that larger local governments had. Building and Engineering Departments were seen as having been stretched to the limits.

> *We've had so many new assets to build, then bring on to our systems, establish maintenance schedules, set up financial and accounting systems and ongoing maintenance budgets.*

Despite the enormity of the tasks, the unchartered territory Local Government was sent into, and the short time lines in which to respond, one officer spoke clearly about the strengthening that has occurred.

> *The new learnings and systems are making us more robust and capable as an organisation. We're not trying to create something new. We're just maturing, developing the sophistication of our core functions and systems so we can better deal with complexity.*

Compliance with the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission

Officers and managers noted that in some ways the Royal Commission's recommendations have reinforced organisational preparedness and responsibility, but that one consequence is that

> *The prioritising of strategies and tasks to be completed associated with implementing all of the Royal Commission's Recommendations for local governments has led to a culture of compliance, with an associated array of new organisational systems requirements.*

For some this may not lead to better outcomes.

> *All of the new compliance paperwork won't necessarily translate into safer, more capable and resilient communities.*

The conversations with workshop participants had as an underlying theme, the tension inherent in local government aspirations of becoming an adaptive flexible learning organisation and state government requirements to meet the ever more complicated compliance regimes associated with practicing in a defensive litigious risk culture.

Some saw that this sort of compliance oriented organisational environment needed to be resisted.

> *We need to break out of the reactive and risk-averse mindset and the stuck mode, and move into more enabling practices.*

One officer thought that rigidity and fear that was identifiable in some organisational cultures was in part a consequence of the prevailing 'risk' culture.

Naming the Learning - Sharing the Disaster Recovery Experience

For some, the considerable learning that had taken place was vividly and enjoyably expressed. For others, this was less so.

One officer gave a strong account of learning in quite specific terms.

> *We were able to take the floods in our stride - $5million dollars worth of flood recovery / reconstruction funds. There is nothing like experience as a teacher and driver of new systems to build in new learning. The easy bit is building the protocols. The hard bit is the implementation … making it stick.*

Some were dissatisfied with what they saw as a restricted approach to review and evaluation. Local government officers talked about State Government engaging in only internal reviews, which they believed was a response to the prevailing culture of risk aversion and emphasis on the importance of 'public relations'. Those holding views of this nature believed that such review processes intentionally excluded broader stakeholder feedback and key learning, and that this bred cynicism. Some felt that the State Government bushfire recovery review processes in particular have not been open and transparent. The question was asked:

> *Where are all the state government learnings from response, relief, recovery and reconstruction processes?*

Several in the LGA workshop felt that the experiences and perspectives of disaster-impacted communities and local government authorities in particular were largely ignored and both were excluded from contributing meaningful input to formal state government review processes.

Participants were aware that VBRRA had carried out some 'legacy work' but a senior local LGA manager saw this as

> *A carefully stage-managed process using largely internal staff, state government-friendly consultants and only operating from an appreciative inquiry and public relations rather a real warts and all lessons learnt standpoint.*

Some saw the DHS recovery process as similarly based on internal stakeholder and departmental feedback only[38].

There was some consensus that there was an unprecedented opportunity for an all-stakeholder participatory recovery review, evaluation and shared learning process. There was however from those with an interest in this, little confidence such a process would ever eventuate.

There was common feeling among Local Government staff members about the importance of sharing experiences and innovations.

> *We have a responsibility to our sector. We want to assist with wider community and organisational preparedness.*

Some saw the opportunity created by the unprecedented conditions as being unique, and could be the catalyst for overdue and lasting change. Some officers had ideas about the importance of what they termed 'wife swaps' – by which they meant role swap exercises – where State Government employees spend some time each year on the ground in LGAs and community organisations, so there is much greater insight into Local Government and Community Organisations' roles and responsibilities, pressures and priorities, capacities and capabilities.

Some saw a lead role for the MAV and the VLGA across the sector in resource advocacy and critical questioning.

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[38] There was no mention in the conversations in this project of the evaluation of the Victorian Bushfire Case Management Service (VBCMS) and the Department of Health study into its Psychosocial Services response, both of which were carried out by external providers. However while data was collected in relation to both these reports in the period prior to the conversations that comprise this report, the publications of the evaluations post-dated these conversations. DOH study: http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/Evaluation-of-the-Psychosocial-Response-to-the-Victorian-Bushfires-Final-Report---December-2010-(PDF--1-41mb).
DHS VBCMS studies: http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/644782/2-Evaluation-of-the-Victorian-Bushfire-Case-Management-Service.pdf

How do we secure the developmental resources needed to establish new roles and ways of working, sustain core relationships and enable new partnerships?

Workshop participants described having spent considerable creativity and effort in developing new partnerships that included a regional emergency relief and material aid model, new cross regional emergency management exercises, and new emergency management and community resilience positions and position descriptions. Several participants believed that there was considerable useful learning for others in different sectors and across all levels of government. Some have carried out detailed work into better understanding how to interact with the National Disaster Relief Fund, particularly around staffing. Several Councils had reviewed emergency procedures and infrastructure including communications, IT connectivity, precinct planning and external lighting. In some instances full time Relief and Recovery Planning Coordinators have been appointed. Participants would have liked to see greater emphasis on strengthening the local government emergency management and community resilience research base to contribute to and develop applications of their learning together to share with the sector.

Throughout the comments made during workshops and follow up interviews, officers talked in specific terms about learnings particularly in relation to future unanticipated events. Toward the end of the workshop, participants generated their list of learnings in the following summary:

A VBRRA aspiration:
However, VBRRA does believe that it has successfully supported individuals, households and communities to meet their immediate and ongoing needs in the short and medium-terms, which will help facilitate their long term recovery in the years to come. In this sense, two thirds of the overall recovery program can be said to be complete or well-underway. Much of the longer-term assistance that may be required, such as psychosocial support, is able to be delivered through normal service delivery platforms, reducing the need for a coordinating agency beyond 2010. VBRRA report to the Bushfires Royal Commission, March 2010, Scn 208, pp 39-40.

- To be diligent in ensuring better comprehensive planning for emergencies
- To plan for a wider impact than just your immediate community
- Not to rely on State Government to play a coordinating role
- To understand the National Disaster Recovery Fund criteria
- To gather your own data; not relying on other agencies or government
- To reiterate the centrality of communication (meetings, bulletins etc.), internal and external
- To work alongside and engage the community on their recovery
- To emphasise a shared understanding of the psychological impacts of disasters and ensure health and well being, including the management of staff welfare and their suitability for tasks
- To use existing community networks, clubs, supports and not to reinvent structures
- To reinforce the Importance of establishing a community hub and associated services
- To be visible
- To build on the opportunities and partnerships created (don't lose sight of the opportunities created, they are transferable into everyday practice)
- To ensure MOUs are in place and sound understanding is established with agencies of what everyone brings to the table

LGA officers felt firmly about a particular piece of advice they wanted to pass on to Government.

Our advice to VBRRA and the State government is Slow Down! Community recovery can't be mandated. It needs to be allowed to happen at a human scale and at a human pace.

Some Council officers were aware of an Action Learning Circle model of community engagement developed and successfully deployed by the Queensland State Government after Cyclone Larry.

Other Officers were familiar with a particular process used in Greensberg Kansas involving a protracted period of whole of community dialogue following a devastating tornado. There was a genuine desire to know more about these processes.

Other aspects of learning have been recorded elsewhere in this report.

We note the comment made by one officer

Greater credence is now being given to the social and emotional people-oriented workers. The hard and soft skills now rate as of equal importance.

The overwhelming importance of developing mutually respectful relationships and re-instating trust between state government and Local Government Authorities. Summary statement of one of the 'learnings' from the LGA workshop participants

One person talked of a major win as being the 'joy of working together'. This person questioned how this opportunity and experience (a most meaningful and productive experience) might be built into everyday ongoing practices.

Our relationships have changed. I hope our behaviours and approaches will continue to reflect this.

This joy and new learning was not a universal experience. For another officer it was

Business as usual….[Life] just keeps rolling on. We have been very busy, but there has been no reflection, no learning and no change.

The Long Haul

For some what was reported in the state government's 'glossy reports' is a far cry from the ongoing reality of the process of recovery. 'The reality is really challenging'. Some saw the ongoing damage to people and systems, including the anger, people becoming 'stuck', and 'highly emotionally charged environments', alongside more exciting aspects such as the new leadership emerging. Whatever the experience, perceptions, and memories, participants felt it was imperative that the breadth of these experiences are not diminished.

The ongoing task for Local Government held real concerns.

There are precedent problems with the new infrastructure and as a consequence a new set of expectations that cannot be sustained … We have to take on projects that were ill-informed, ill-conceived and ill-managed and that we, as Council, are now ultimately accountable for.

The costs of this management needs to be absorbed into core business and budgets in future years. For the bigger Councils this was more manageable than for smaller less well resourced Shires.

> *Kinglake and Marysville were the worst affected, but with the smaller Councils like Murrindindi ..... They don't have the capacity. Without resources small Council's can't mount a successful recovery.*

Community fragmentation pre-fires was seen to have worsened in some areas. Added to this, officers talked of the issue of community complacency. Reference was made to CFA community fire awareness meetings that in 2010 might have attracted 100 people, but that now those same meetings may only attract 10.

Several argued that a 'long haul' perspective is needed.

> *Recovery is a long process and people and community's own experiences shape their response. We need to be very flexible and adaptive.*

Participants provided reports of community members coming forward now for assistance for the first time. Included in other ongoing issues are environmental, including roadsides, erosion, dead and hazardous trees, as well as psychological and overall community well being.

> *Post disaster recovery is a longitudinal thing. Closing the books is not the way to go. Community recovery will need ongoing commitment and resources from us.*

Various studies have indicated that the financial performance of local government in Victoria is strong. However, these studies have also consistently identified a cohort of councils that have a much greater susceptibility to financial distress. These councils are typically geographically large, often with multiple and dispersed population centres; have small and often declining populations; and have extensive infrastructure portfolios, particularly relative to their population size.
MAV Submission to the 2011-2012 Commonwealth Budget January 2011, p. 3.

Section 3: Community Service Organisations Recovery Conversations

Introduction

This section of the report provides a range of perspectives from Community Service Organisations who were involved in providing services to communities following the 2009 Victorian bushfires.

Key aspects of the one day workshop outline and methods were set out in 'Our Approach' in Section 1. In summary, the CSO workshop was convened on 29th July 2011 at a premises owned by the Whittlesea Council in Mill Park. 17 individuals were present, from 9 Community Service Organisations. Four participants held dual roles of both workers and also members of fire impacted communities. The aims were to assist CatholicCare's thinking about recovery, to provide a forum for sharing information and perspectives, and to increase knowledge of one another's understanding of roles, responsibilities and perspectives.

The workshop structure included presentations by each agency, with the following general themes emerging from those presentations:

- Authorisation
- Engagement
- Collaboration
- Competition
- Orientation
- Challenges
- Volunteers
- Preparedness
- Support
- Dependency

After lunch, the large group broke into three small groups, during which each group prioritised the above themes, and discussed these further. These ideas were further elaborated during a final plenary session of the day.

As in all three sections (Sections 2, 3 and 4) there are many contextual factors and conditions that were often obliquely referred to, which can be seen as 'pre-existing' or 'pre-determining' factors or characteristics of the canvas upon which the disaster event and aftermath played out. We start with an overview of these background contextual factors referred to by CSO participants during the workshop.

The Context of Vertical Contracting with State Government

Workshop participants quickly identified the complexity of their shared context.

> *Nothing is simple, everything has a context and is connected, complex or complicated.*

In particular they reflected on the recent history of changing relationships with state and local governments. They spoke of new money from the State Government Department of Human Services and the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund. There was no doubt this brought new opportunities for their organisations and staff as well as new challenges and practice limitations. A key limitation some named was relinquishing control over the type of service to be delivered. One participant put it like this:

> *When you take on a tender or contract from government, you become an arm of the government, you are doing their bidding.*

With clearly delineated practice parameters and enormous political pressure for 'runs on the board', agencies found that their scope to adequately explore the on the ground dynamics was compromised. Output-based funding and success measures made it challenging to report on exactly what they experienced, and saw unfolding, in bushfire-impacted communities.

> *Agency staff and managers experience tension and discomfort advocating for directions or on issues that are challenging to authority and government. Our efforts at advocacy are too often compromised by pre-existing contractual relationships.*

For some the solution to these dilemmas was to secure independent funding that enabled staff to be more exploratory, creative and strategic in their responses to emerging issues.

> *My organisation managed to fund our bushfire programs to the tune of $100K. We cobbled together resources from our other programs and we just made it work. It was agency-designed and agency-organised.*

The staff member continued to outline the agency's rationale for this decision:

> *Vertical reporting on service delivery output statistics is not program evaluation. Contracted services end up reporting only on inputs and outputs, not on processes and outcomes, and not on learning and innovation.*

Relevant aspects of the LGA context

Workshop participants also talked about the importance of 'pre-disaster' intra and inter organisational cultures and climates. There was a view expressed by some that if 'genuine good will and collaborative spirit' existed before the disaster, it was more likely to be able to continue, thus offering a number of benefits, a key one being the opportunity for workers to work more harmoniously.

There was also discussion about the changed nature of local government. It was commonly understood that while amalgamation of local governments provided some cost savings there were new costs associated with larger catchment areas to service often with fewer resources.

One participant put it like this:

We don't have local governments any more, we have regional governments.

It was suggested that some areas do not identify with the 'main seat of local government' and feel under-represented and mis-represented. Reference was made for example to the perception that Murrindindi Shire had been under-resourced, under-performing and 'Alexandra-centric'. Another perception was that Mitchell had been focused on the demands of new peri-urban housing estate development at the cost of investing resources in community development. Metropolitan-based local governments, in contrast, were seen as having significantly greater resources at their disposal and a long-term and relatively well-resourced engagement with regional and local emergency management planning.

In some local governments, there were sheer facts of large distances to travel, distances that inhibited community access. These factors were seen as contributing to a decreased likelihood of developing nuanced cultural understandings across the larger Shires[39].

> *We have a major local democratic deficit since the amalgamation of Councils in Victoria in the 1990s. There are now large areas and huge distances to travel to access government services. Many local governments are now too physically and culturally remote from their constituents.*

The Imperative of Authorising Environments

What is an authorising environment

A theme workshop participants repeatedly returned to throughout the day was the impossibility of satisfactory decision-making under conditions of great uncertainty. So began our exploration of just what constituted enabling and authorising environments.

We have adopted the phrase 'authorising environment' as an umbrella term under which to discuss the many and varied ways in which participants talked of 'authority'. We have taken Mark Moore's broad meaning of authorisation[40] , a mechanism enabling a range of processes that can lead to the taking of authority. Such processes and places may involve a range of 'formal' sources of authority, (government, laws, regulations, regulatory environment and climate etc.) as well as 'informal' sources (the wider set of influences, including business or civil society interests, the media, community and political leaders with responsibilities in certain areas).

One participant had his own definition of what an authorising environment was for him:

> *The right people in the right positions with defined decision making capacity and playing an active role is essential, particularly during the chaos that ensues after a major disaster.*

Here we have collated some general themes and observations brought up by participants, which could broadly be thought of as relevant to considerations of working within an 'authorising environment' in a recovery or post-disaster context.

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[39] We refer in the last section to the propensity for an 'us and them' ('community' versus 'other', or 'agency' versus 'other') dynamic to develop. Distance between the key stakeholders clearly risks exacerbating this tendency.
[40] See Moore, M: 1995, 2000

Participants used a range of descriptors when speaking of their experience of the 'authorising environment' or lack thereof, including 'battering', 'exciting', 'confounding', and 'disempowering'.

> *At the heart of each community were community members having a voice and with this some authority. Communities embraced the ideas of self-authorisation and self-determination – taking up and declaring authority and responsibility.*

There was general interest in talking together about how community members and community leaders stepped up and in to leadership roles in unprecedented experiences.

> *We've seen many examples of the authority of someone just taking the lead role.*

Experiences of the use of authority

Many examples were provided of uses of authority where authority was seen as 'foisted on' the individual, agency or community. The weight of examples provided were around the impact of authority on community members or community groups, although the lines of 'agency staff member' and 'community member' were blurred in this workshop. As already noted, some participants worked both as CSO sector workers, as well as contributing as volunteer residents of their disaster-impacted communities.

Participants referred to the challenges for communities under the VBRRA 'community led recovery' policy, particularly in relation to issues of authority between VBRRA and LGAs.

> *VBRRA went to CRCs, not to Councils. Each recovery committee went back to their communities and fed information in. However they weren't supported with resources or administration. Yet they were expected to collect information for Government driven-planning processes. They did a lot of work and weren't paid. Questions as to where all the promised money and resources for their support went were raised regularly. There was a sense CRC members became volunteers for VBRRA.*

Another participant expressed these relations in this way:

> *VBRRA was seen as touting the CRCs as the conduit for the coordination of donations, for service delivery, and also for partnership facilitation.*

Some participants spoke of their direct experience with, or their perceptions of the threat to authority, felt by LGAs, in relation to the emergence of CRCs and the interventions of VBRRA.

One tangible difficulty that was talked of by participants as publicly known and understood, was the experience many CRCs had in accessing even the most basic (operational and administrative) resources required to exercise the tasks of a 'community-led recovery' initiative. VBRRA made significant demands of CRCs but were seen as failing to make good on promises to ensure the requisite capacity to meet these demands was provided. This was seen to lead to elected community volunteers working greater than full time hours to meet their many and varied CRC responsibilities.

Authorisation currently criss-crosses multiple policy areas and different ways of working with community. Unless communities are aware of the authority structures, and the players, they cannot choose how and where to best invest their time, energy and resources in participation.

Another complicated aspect of authorisation was the question of 'representation'. The authority base of Kinglake Ranges CRC was discussed, and was considered problematic particularly given the number of different communities it was expected to officially represent.

One participant's contribution on 'Experts' vis a vis community based First Responders:
IMMEDIATE: first responders.
MODERATE: experts, who may disconnect and disenfranchise the First Responders
LONG TERM: first responders and other locals left to stay the course.

Unlike most CRCs that represented small constituencies, more often than not less than 500 people and in some instances as small as 50 people, the Kinglake Ranges CRC was tasked with representing 4,500 people (at least a third of whom were dispersed due to loss of their homes) across a very large geographic area. Issues of scale were seen to impact on and complicate questions of 'authority' and effectiveness. Issues of differing and conflicting role expectations and a system-wide inability to clarify and constitute disaster recovery roles and responsibilities contributed to tension and dissatisfaction.

Acceptance of and clarity about responsibility, authority and decision making at an impacted community level and at all levels of government is absolutely critical.

One participant provided a vivid example of a first responder experience during the (then) recent Victorian floods. This citizen had been engaged from the outset with key activities in relation to a community-based recovery response. This person was 'summarily relieved' from his role by an LGA officer, who arrived after the community-based response was firmly in place, and stated he was formally authorised under the local emergency management plan to carry out these tasks. The first responder was offended by his displacement. In telling the story, the participant regarded this as a loss of community-based knowledge and networks and the locally sensitive systems that had been community-generated. Such use of authority were discussed as consistent with many Black Saturday experiences and were considered harmful to community culture, initiative, and community-based processes.

Workshop participants provided accounts of community members creatively finding and maintaining a voice and in doing so, engaging in some form of 'self-authorising'. Where this happened, and when it was seen as legitimate by other 'authorities', it was embraced and valued. The challenge of continuing to self-justify and creatively self-authorise, in the context of established power relations and changing power dynamics was also touched on in this workshop. It is elaborated on further in the CRC discussions in Section 4.

Without legitimacy, authorisation will be ripped away and will go to the next level up.

Some CSO participants saw that part of their role was to seek to ensure that the legitimate voices, language, and priorities of communities are heard. Questions were raised as to how, if this was a legitimate CSO interest, to best enact this role. This led to further questions about

the process by which community members become authorised. Questions and comments indicating these concerns included

How are community members authorised ... was this [through] the CRC?

Participants saw as endemic, a climate of uncertainty and confusion and increasing suspicion and anxiety with regard to authorisation, responsibility and resources.

While there was discussion on the difficulties for state and local government to 'see' community, some pointed to the limit on the degree to which Government can [and should be expected to] understand local community culture and community dynamics when enacting their role and authority, or their perception of their role and authority.

While there were accounts of situations where government expended effort to try and understand what was happening at the community level in order to act with or within a community, in some instances this expended effort was seen as being 'not for the right reasons', or more directly, for 'their own interests'. One of the government motives thought to be operating was 'self-protection'. This idea was captured in the comment that

If government services need you, they let you in.

Another more pointed quote from a participant was that in her view,

Government 'uses consultation like a skunk uses smell'.

Agencies experience of self-authorisation

Just as communities could and did 'self-authorise', so too could agencies.

One example provided was of a group of service providers in the Marysville area who mutually agreed to come together each week in a collaborative manner. This group was known as RP7. While they had no 'official' authority, they explicitly developed norms of trust and respect and understanding of each other's roles. They developed a milieu in which it was also expected that service providers would come to these meetings and talk about their service offer to an area. This process allowed others to comment, question, add value and provide advice. The group worked as an orientation, mutual support, debriefing and planning structure for the participants[41].

One community service organisation whose presence in the recovery area was funded by contributions from church membership, and not from government, discussed their experience of a much greater degree of freedom in defining how they went about their work. This freedom of response was contrasted with the experiences of community service organisations whose work was directly contracted by the state government Department of Human Services.

Situational complexity in the Emergency authorising environment

[41] Email correspondence (2/9/12) between Ray Siegersma, Hub Captain, Marysville, and with one of the authors of this report: the following were perceived as key attributes of the meeting space:

- That the meetings were kept informal, with no notes or minutes kept
- The convenor kept the meeting structure informal, and encouraged all new agencies and staff to attend the meeting before they went into the field. The most numbers attending were 26. Breakfast was considered the best time to meet
- All participants were reminded there was plenty to do and reinforced and supported where appropriate in their role
- Opportunities were available for workers to share stress as well as success
- Local residents were not included, unless they were in a formal paid role.

The multiple levels of government involvement in Emergency Management made for enormous complexity around understanding 'authority'. Participants referred to the mix of policy and practice areas that intersect when thinking about and working in an Emergency and post-emergency environment. Those in authorised positions are guided by a range of different 'instruments' such as legislation, regulations, guidelines or policy. 'Domains' of responsibilities vary, overlap and intersect, and typically include direct Emergency Services responses, through to domains of public and environmental health, safety, housing, welfare, mental health, local and regional planning, economic development, social recovery and ecological restoration.

There was a consensus among participants that it was a major task in itself for community service workers, managers, and volunteers to both understand themselves, as well as to assist community members learn about and understand the various authority structures and dynamics at play in Emergency Management.

Some participants regarded this understanding as a prerequisite to meaningful community and agency involvement in community safety, that it was a 'necessary' (if not sufficient)[42] step in developing more collaborative authorising environments. That is, in order to collaborate, it was seen that parties needed to know who each other is, and something of each others' roles, responsibilities and tasks[43]. Such understanding could better equip people with

> *'Tools' for, [and] approaches to ...negotiation and authorisation*

A VBAF funded community-based project with close links to a CSO provided an example of their efforts to negotiate an authorised outcome on a particular community matter. The matter pertained to developing a joint approach with key partners, to an unexpected donation of monies into the community to assist with a particular (and specified) community need. The particular need was firewood, and the project members who had the skills and equipment to respond to this need, convened a meeting of key stakeholders. Organisers sought to make the meeting process as transparent as possible. Parties were informed of each other's desires and intentions, a meeting was held to discuss the issues was attended by relevant (organisational) parties, and decisions were reached as to a way forward. One of the agency workers who was acting as if she was authorised to proceed with the actions decided on at the meeting, found, on return to her workplace, that she was, in fact, not authorised to make decisions on behalf of her organisation on this particular issue. She discovered this when her manager sought to revisit and revise, the decisions made at the meeting. This was despite considerable effort having been expended by the meeting organisers to get this more senior manager to the meeting in the first place, including scheduling the meeting time at the time he put forward as the most convenient to him.

The Community Timber Mill Project (Kinglake Ranges) similarly struggled to lever its potential through collaboration. Key problematic issues impinged on progress, including project constitution, governance and management and the lack of effective, legitimated decision-making authority, role clarification, conflict resolution and restorative justice processes.

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[42] The ideas around the relatedness of 'necessary' and 'sufficient' may be useful for further thinking in this field. http://philosophy.hku.hk/think/meaning/nsc.php

[43] The UK Churchill Fellow present gave some examples of the work that has been done in the UK since the London bombings, particularly around establishing a framework for command and control of major incidents and disasters, with differentiation of role at strategic, tactical and operational levels. These approaches are focused on the 'front end' particularly of an emergency. However this body of work may hold some useful thinking about the role definitions and impact in recovery work. Christine Owen's work looks at interoperability in disaster response, but again is focused at the 'front end' of emergency response. http://www.bushfirecrc.com/managed/resource/2010_poster_christine_owen.pdf. However this may be able to be adapted to address the critical importance of finding processes and proper authority to negotiate role questions.

The above stories highlighted a number of complexities of seeking to work collaboratively across agency and community boundaries.

How does 'authorisation in collaboration' actually work?

Issues of how individual agency staff members and organisational and community representatives can be authorised, or know when they are not, are all complex issues. Participants noted that in some cases a worker or community member may not know whether they are authorised or not, until they are 'de-authorised'. Self-authorisation, being proactive and willing to partner has its attendant risks if the worker doesn't receive formal confirmation or permission to play what can be seen as 'boundary rider' roles[44].

Continuing this theme, participants discussed the importance of knowing *how* decisions are made. Some participants queried *how* priorities were actually established in the post-fire environment. For some the priorities were misplaced. For others the question of what, when, how, where and why to prioritise was a huge, and at times, imponderable task.

> *How do you decide an order of priority for rebuilding a community, in terms of business, homes, the environment and people?*

Questions were raised as to how these various decision-making domains relate to each other, and to the community as a whole.

As in the other conversations in this project (with CRCs and LGAs) CSO workshop participants spent some time discussing the mechanisms used by Government to 'invite' comment on funding requests for particular projects. These mechanisms, which could be seen as illuminating perspectives on the way 'authorising environments' or 'authorising moments' were actually working on the ground, or at a particular juncture, were seen by some to have a deleterious impact on the quality of the decisions reached. Too often funding applications structures and frameworks reduced the picture of complexity at the community level. Some felt there was a lot of effort put in by the 'bureaucracy' to have manageable templates with overly simplistic questions that then in turn 'dumbed down' the complexity of the conditions and experiences on the ground and diminished opportunities for developing greater understanding of determinants, dynamics and trajectories of the issues at hand, and hence for developing more targeted or nuanced responses. The drive to simplify is captured in this participants comment:

> *The neatness required in contracts and reports is a long way from the messiness on the ground.*

Some participants were of the belief that one of the underlying drivers and problems in recovery was that it was legitimate to 'just do it' or 'just get it done'. Some present wanted a stronger emphasis in recovery on 'getting it done in a safe and sustainable way'. Others spoke not only of 'actions' but also of thinking – what environments can be created in emergencies immediate aftermath that allowed groups to evaluate and deliberate – to be able to 'think'.

While participants talked of the emerging policy trend toward democratisation in Emergency Management planning (citing the 'community led recovery' rhetoric), some felt it remains to be seen how the *means* for implementation will become evident. Participants talked about the need for wider recognition, from agency workers as well as others, of the importance of

[44] The literature on boundary riders or boundary spanners (Farmer & Kilpatrick, 2009; Rugkasa et al, 2007) as it might apply to Emergency Management would be a fruitful avenue of exploration.

acknowledging that the community has a lot of pre-existing practical skills and local cultural knowledge to bring to the table. One person saw the community as having a low profile

> *Operating under the radar, but deliberately so.*

This 'under the radar but deliberate' bypassing formal channels image is interesting – and a challenge, if the image has salience, for authorities to 'access' and interact with.

There was some comment in this group as well about the importance of an adequate understanding of Privacy laws.

> *To know what the legal situation is in terms of privacy laws would be good for the future. There was widespread misunderstanding of Privacy laws after Black Saturday.*

Necessity for a clear authorising environment

While the issues considered under the umbrella of 'authorising environment' were broad and diverse, what was clear was that there was general consensus on the importance of the idea.

This is neatly summarised by one participant:

> *Unless you have a clear authorising environment it is very difficult to act effectively.*

Participants also argued that the authorising environment needs to be as close as possible to the level at which the impact is most pronounced[45].

CSOs_focus on staff well being

Introduction

Interestingly, this theme of worker well-being generated the greatest volume of text when the initial process of eliciting themes for the workshop conversations was carried out. The topic was also particularly rich in the diversity of perspectives – given the dual roles some participants held – being both members of agency staff, and also members of the fire impacted communities.

There was general acceptance that the post-disaster work was difficult, complex, challenging, often new, exhausting, constant, complicated, as well as, for many, essentially rewarding.

> *We refused to recruit straight away, taking time to get the right staff. We were adamant we need the best person for this position.*

However the theme of the hazards was predominant.

[45] This ideal of the authorizing environment being closest to where the decision impact is most pronounced, is known in the literature as the principle of 'subsidiarity'. We return to this idea later in the report. 'This principle suggests that 'higher levels' of governance should not attempt to 'deliver' programs in such instances where 'lower' (or, better, 'local') levels of governance or local capacity can do so. The higher levels should thus 'subside' from intervention but they should 'subsidise' it (given their greater capacity to raise the funds and their social justice obligation to redistribute wealth and resources)' (Boulet, personal communication).

Workers would arrive full of energy and full of heartfelt empathy. For some the time before their first meltdown was two and a half weeks!

One agency person was particularly explicit in her views:

The data is clear – everyone is having some level of vicarious trauma.

Participants talked about issues of worker well-being from different angles. Reported below are the main issues that were thought to be of key relevance - the key threats to well-being, as well as some of the practices, procedures, and work cultures that made for a supportive work environment. Some of these more enabling or supportive environments were located within agencies, and some between agencies. Some conversations focused on the personal responsibility of the worker, and were located in the wider societal context such as the threat of the media. We discuss some of these threads next.

Healthy organisational and personal characteristics

We will first report on the key characteristics within the organisational domain that were seen by participants as enabling supportive environments. Several conversations highlighted the importance of certain characteristics of organisational structure. Participants highlighted the importance of good working relationships, trust, vulnerability and clear lines of authority.

People were practising at the edge of their competence. Some were really going down, but no one wanted to report this. No one wanted to get sacked.

Organisational policies were seen as critical. One key one was supervision policy – that supervision, in the minds of some, was not negotiable – it was essential. There was a lot of discussion about this, and participants shared their experience with the way they addressed this issue within their agencies.

Workers needed to trust that if they said they were having trouble coping, they didn't feel they needed to watch their back.

Some managers refrained from using the word 'supervision', after experience that for some, the concept itself had negative connotations and seemed to be operating as a barrier to accessing support among some workers. While one agency moved more toward the use of the phrase 'professional development', it continued its firm approach toward the necessity for this, however it was labeled. In the course of its work the agency stance of staff support was made more explicit, to the extent that prospective and current staff were advised that 'being supported' and being able to 'receive support' was a necessary part of their work.

For us it came down to if you are not willing to take the support you are not allowed to do the work. We have a duty of care to not allow you to work in the space. We didn't want heroes and we didn't want burnt out staff members on sick leave.

Managers spoke of the importance of reaffirming to staff that they don't have to be in situations where they are compromised, and that they can say 'no'.

Sound supervision practices (or whatever name was used to describe these resources and processes) were seen as part of a positive supportive organisational culture, and several agencies tried various models of internal and external staff. One agency developed a

professional development program that had attendances of 40 to 50 people at some stages, from more than a dozen agencies. There were reports of and observations of strong networks of mutually supportive relationships being built. One participant noted that for him, the most supportive environments are those 'when you can feel with others'.

> *The important role of general camaraderie cannot be under-estimated. Also you can't underestimate the importance of looking after yourself. If you don't look after yourself you will burn out. Support processes can be intense and also intensely valuable.*

Another agency reported experimenting with what fitted best with the staff's needs and developed some creative interventions around the idea of reflective practice. Creative methods were employed - making DVD's, allowing space for rituals to develop, ways to celebrate, workshopping, collective sharing, team dinners, building co-supervision competence. Participants reported that over time there have been deeper conversations about the experience, for example, around dimensions of the spiritual experience of recovery work.

> *Celebration and rituals have become really important. People have been transformed by their experience.*

There was some consensus that organisations that fostered the creation of a range of opportunities for collegial support were maximising the opportunity for their staff to find a healthy work environment. Some of the conversations on this broad issue of staff support held the notion of 'duty of care' as a guiding principle that agencies should adhere to.

A related issue to a supportive organisational environment, or perhaps seen as a means through which support can be offered, along with supervision, was the policy and practice issue of staff training. This was regarded as very variable, with some agencies attending more thoroughly to preparing their staff for the work than others. Agencies were regarded as responsible for ensuring that the right staff ended up in recovery roles. One example was given of a young new graduate who was ill-prepared for the role. One participant who was also a community member queried:

> *How could an agency contemplate doing this to us – and to the worker?*

One trap participants discussed was that the pressure to 'act' sometimes translates into poor decisions, such as not taking the time required to get the right staff.

> *It is easy to feel the pressure to cut corners, but this is best resisted.*

The idea of role modeling was raised as another means through which productive post-disaster work could be emulated. One example provided of this was the desirability of modeling balanced home and work life boundaries, such as not emailing on work related topics on weekends.

An important matter that emerged but was not explored, was the view that

> *Service workers continually under-estimate their value and find it difficult to advocate for themselves or their services.*

This is an interesting observation by one person, about their perceptions of the culture and psychology of community service and caring work; the extent of and possible reasons for this sentiment warrant further examination.

Participants noted that workers did not seem to know much about each other's roles and that this led to misunderstandings. Although it is not clear whether this comment was made about intra-organisational or inter-organisational lack of knowledge, given the extraordinary number of new staff brought on board for disaster recovery roles both are likely to be the case. There was not time to explore how this might be better addressed.

Individual self-awareness and self-care

The conversations were not all focused on what agencies were responsible for. The individual's responsibility for his or her own self-care was also highlighted. Staff had to come to the working environment with some internal capacities as well. As one participant worded it:

> *If a person needs [too much] support they are better off not on the ground. They should be in the hanger.*

One participant was clear in his view that

> *One key quality of importance in this work was the need to learn to live with discomfort.*

A closely related idea to living with discomfort is living with uncertainty.

Participants discussed some of the dilemmas that could be seen as being in the 'shared space' of individual and organisational responsibilities. While the workshop could not tease out this important issue and its many dimensions, it was raised as an important concern. The dilemma as discussed pertained to the need to create an organisational environment in which workers could express their concerns, while recognising the reality of the barriers for some staff in doing just that. One barrier to voicing concern that was brought forward in discussion, was that

> *Some staff experienced anxiety around how any expression of need for support would be regarded.*

Would staff have to worry if they reported any concerns about how they were coping?

> *Some people were really going down … but no one wanted to report this.*

Interestingly, and conversely, some reported that it was also difficult to voice that one was actually enjoying the work. Some workshop participants talked about the benefits of being able to recognise or 'own' that the work could actually be empowering and enjoyable. One participant said that

> *It took me a year to be able to publicly state I actually enjoyed the work.*

While workshop time did not allow an exploration of these issues, it is none the less an interesting observation[46].

The workshop conversation also touched on the potential for transformation through the work. This was seen as having implications for both individuals and organisations, which could not be teased out within the workshop, but their importance was reflected in the passing comments about resettlement issues for staff who have experienced and been deeply affected by the work. This transformative impact was put as follows by one participant:

[46] Teasing out potential barriers to this form of expression would be valuable.

When you've been to Paris, you are just not going back to work on the farm.

Most participants affirmed the notion of rigorous attention to self-care:

> *Self-care must not be underestimated; it was confronting to expose yourself to the need for support, and that while it can be intense, it is also be intensely valuable.*

Perhaps this quote best summarises the interconnectedness of the issue of organisational responsibilities to provide supportive and enabling environments, and in particular supervision, and the personal responsibility of the worker to be open to the potentially confronting reality of this experience. This is indeed a complex interconnected unfolding dynamic requiring constant attention.

There was an awareness in some conversations that there was a 'dark side' to post-disaster work, particularly with the risk of what was referred to as a 'contraction of one's identity'.

One participant summarised this as follows:

> *Citizens have had a profound experience. It's important to realise that there is risk in this experience as well. You have to be careful that the event doesn't become you. It is important that the experience enriches you, but doesn't become who you are.*

Some saw this risk being manifested in the idea of becoming a 'disaster chaser'. Other 'types' of responses were noted:

> *There were those that cast themselves as heroes, as well as those who projected an image of 'being selfless'.*

These response or identity self-ascription 'types' were seen as having negative consequences for the person taking up either persona, for the service offered, and for the employing agency.

While not using the phrase, some participants appeared to be talking of the power of 'parallel process' – where workers were in danger of reflecting the crisis and arousal of people they were working with[47]. Some staff were seen as reflecting (or 're living') community emotion.

> *There is a danger of reflecting the crisis and arousal of the people you are working with. You need to make a place to relax and have a reflexive space. Everyone felt they wanted to help. Many ended up reflecting the community, they got too hyped up and hyper-vigilant.*

It was postulated that other dynamics such as guilt were operating in some staff – leading people to 'not stop'. The phenomena of some roles being seen as more important than others was operating, with the outcome that certain categories of staff became invisible. Office based administration staff, in particular, were mentioned in relation to this observation.

[47] While a complex concept in some respects, put simply here, the reference is to the phenomenon of behavior in one part of a human interactional system being reflected in another part of the system. So what might be occurring at a community level, for example, may be replicated in the behavior of the supporting agencies. The phenomena is well accepted; rather than looking for 'causes' of this phenomenon, it can be more helpful to seek to understand how it can be worked with. Supervision offers one such process for the containment, where within the confines of a supervisory relationship, influences of the work on the worker can be explored and means identified to understand its influences. One workshop participant noted that in his opinion, 'In the beginning. services mirrored the community processes: staff, services and community members were all very chaotic'. The 'mirroring' concept is akin to the idea of 'parallel process'.

Pervasive contextual and systemic influences

While agency and worker responsibilities for self-care and support were seen as critical, there was recognition that wider influences that were uncontrollable were at play. One example of wider influences, was the difficulty of getting respite from the work, even if one had good organisational support and was at least cognisant of the need to attend to. The constancy of the media coverage brought its own dynamic. As one participant commented,

> *Everywhere you looked there was something about the fire. There was nowhere to hide so you could go back refreshed.*

A further stressor particularly for those workers who were also residents in their own impacted communities, was their constant exposure to community dynamics, from which it was difficult to get relief. Some felt

> *We needed to be available to community, to agencies and to government.*

One participant likened his experience as a community member and a community service worker as being

> *Comparable with the role of an elder in an indigenous community. You need to be constantly available to community and government.*

Another contextual pressure that was highlighted in the conversations was what was referred to as the 'rush rush culture'. It became a task in itself, to take time, to provide safe spaces,

> *To be present for the one person you are with right now.*

One participant talked of what staff can offer to community, citing the beautiful image from a TS Eliot poem:

> *'Be the still point of the turning world'* [48].

> Workers who are based in the community and live in the community literally never leave the workplace.
> Workshop participant: resident, and CSO worker

Another characteristic of the post-disaster climate that was pervasive was uncertainty around program funding. This was seen to add a particular flavour to the experience of stress – given its close connection to the inability to plan ahead with staff and community.

Inter organisational networks and alliances

Some organisations developed networks for support that aimed to work across organisations. One of these, the RP7, (mentioned earlier in this section) provides an example of a group of agencies 'authorising themselves' to collaborate. Outcomes of the collaboration were seen to be the facilitation of communication, the sharing of information, the development of mutual strategies and the creation of an environment of support. Time did not allow for the elaboration of this important topic.

[48] From Burnt Norton, the first of T S Eliot's Four Quartets, 1936.

Bridging Silos in Emergency Management

There was reference in the conversations to the different images that were seen to constitute the different parts of the Emergency Management continuum. For some, these images conveyed some reality of the differences within the segments of Emergency Management. One image was in gender terms: some saw the immediate disaster response period as more demonstrably male in its characteristics, and the recovery process is more akin to a feminine archetype.

> *The response is all about uniforms, the relief is all about welfare and the recovery is all about therapists, so there are different professionals with different mindsets leading different stages.*

Reference was made to the state's presence in recovery led by Department of Human Services. For some Human Services was by nature 'risk averse' and also predominantly had an inclination in practice to 'do *to*' rather than 'do *with*'. While there was an understanding that global perceptions of these representations pose limitations in understanding the detail, they were regarded as relevant overall in understanding broad cultures and their potential impact on how the work gets carried out.

Again, as in the other LGA and CRC conversations, there was a sense that the Emergency Management framework itself did not give enough weight to the reality of 'community' as first responders in a disaster, perhaps given the 'top heaviness' and responsibilities outlined for the formal authorities.

> *We need to have something in a disaster plan that authorises communities to have a say in the direction of their own community's recovery and renewal. It would need to go back to preparedness planning. We'd need to know the proper channels to make it happen.*

One participant commented that

> *It is communities who will be leading the process when the shit hits the fan.*

Continuing the idea of the importance of preparedness, some participants expressed concern about the lost learnings from the disaster for their relevance to future disaster preparedness. One participant summed up this view in this way:

> *It is like the Raiders of the Lost Ark – the covenant goes in the box, and the box ends up in storage.*

Issues of preparedness were made more complex in those areas where community vulnerability is increased when community members live in one place and work in another.

> *For those areas with little available local employment, such as the Kinglake Ranges, one cost of working off the mountain was to diminish the capacity of households to get to know one another.*

Participants talked of how

> *The siloed approach of some program areas that, if seen more broadly, could make more significant contributions to the development of community.*

One example given was that of 'terrorism preparedness' – where program funds, if directed to investing in strong communities, would provide an overlap with issues such as disaster preparedness, where both (natural disaster preparedness and terrorism preparedness) are dependent on the strength of local coherence at the community level.

It was regarded now as 'common knowledge', or an accepted notion, that

> *The less community coherence, the greater the vulnerability to disaster.*

The issue of knowing, or coming to understand about how communities are constituted, as one way of thinking about disaster preparedness, was understood to be a complex idea in itself. Participants talked about processes that were important in developing a picture of how to understand a makeup of a particular local area. Important processes were 'communication', 'dialogue', 'action research' and 'generating, collecting and responding to local data'. In some areas of the fire-affected communities, some of these processes of developing understandings of local resources and capacities were underway, and in some cases quite advanced, but sometimes buried or overlooked, when the disaster struck. [49]

One participant questioned the degree to which there were 'community voices' in development of Emergency Management Plans at the Local Government level. Most participants were just not sure of what processes existed for community involvement in the development of emergency plans, or if there were opportunities but they were not taken up by communities. There was general recognition by many present that *they* did not know the content, broadly or specifically, of Emergency Management plans. There was general agreement that

> *We all need to examine what's in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan.*

It was generally felt too that there was a similarly limited understanding from ordinary community members of Municipal Emergency Management Planning issues and processes. Without this understanding, it was felt that it was hard to argue for more community members to be authorised to have more of a say.

> *We need to know the proper channels to make it happen.*

Some Emergency Management processes were seen as not open, and also as limited to the input of paid professionals. One participant put the view that community members are rarely, if ever, invited to join MEMP committees.

Some participants believed it likely that the majority of committee members at the Municipal and Emergency Services planning level were of the 'command and control' orientation. Some saw exceptions to this bald statement. One participant felt that

> *Maybe communities want it this way,*

by which we think was meant – maybe it is more convenient for community members to have *others* act in these roles at this level.

There are clearly hidden (and not so hidden) assumptions in these views. One assumption is that communities are happy for the authorities to take care of planning processes regarding

[49] We cite one example of this phenomena below - an example from the report 'Peeling the Onion', a report of the Yarra Ranges Neighbourhood House Network.

Emergency Management. These are contested views, and require much work and 'working through'. Whatever the most influential factors are in the paucity of community involvement in the planning processes for Emergency Management, it remains a key task to find ways to connect and re-engage community members directly with disaster prevention and preparedness and emergency response and recovery.

Whatever the 'reality' (acknowledging there will be different realities in different regions and local areas) there was some agreement that recovery was itself disconnected from the wider disaster recovery policy and strategy review and development.

> *Currently it is so messy and ad hoc.*

Community Services in a Community Development Framework

Workshop participants expressed a range of views, skills, sentiments, beliefs, learnings, about 'community development' as a relevant concept in the recovery period.

Some saw community development as embodied in 'good community generated work'. This was in keeping with others who saw it as 'community led and community oriented'. Participants highlighted what they saw to be some of the requisite skills and orientations to be more 'community developmentally focused': including 'listening carefully', 'sensing the culture and ways communities do things', and the ability to hold onto this learning and these approaches in advocating and championing community development work with communities.

> *Government efforts at discerning community dynamics and undertaking community engagement were inadequate.*

Another necessary capability was seen as the need to 'be comfortable with the uncomfortable'.

> *In community development we have to be okay with uncertainty and experiencing greater contingency – semi-permeable membranes and looser boundaries.*

Discomfort was seen as inevitably present when boundaries in work roles are not clear, such as is often the case in community development. Participants noted that boundaries have to remain permeable in order for emergent issues and structures to grow. Among some of the main sources of discomfort include the notion that some of community development is about changing the way we think about things. Sometimes it is about challenging the status quo, about changing perceptions – perceptions of class, race, power, order and disorder. There were limits to the practice of community development in certain settings when a challenge to authority was required in order to achieve something at the community level. One participant expressed this limitation like this:

> *Community development can fold like a pack of cards in the face of certain power structures.*

For some there were lessons to be learnt for community development in domestic settings, from International Development, where some programs have approached their role as

Working with a whole community … not with an individual or household only.

You don't adopt a child, you work with the whole village[50]*.*

The conversations on the topic of community development also touched on engaging with the paradox thrown up particularly in recovery work, that

A key requirement of CD workers and other recovery workers is to carefully attend to one's personal, professional and community boundaries, while also working in such a way as to reflect the idea that the thrust of CD is to practice in a more holistic way.

This requires the ability to face a variety of contingencies at any one time, contingencies that together may not cohere. The instability of a lot of the recovery work was seen by participants to point to the need for good worker support, agency approaches to which were discussed above. This was challenging for some agencies to provide, and for some workers to 'receive': that is, to acknowledge their need for support.

A further challenge to the practice of community development is that it is a practice that requires time: time to understand issues, to identify key people involved, to acknowledge history, to honour and develop relationships. Yet the need for time was at odds with what one participant described as the 'rush rush' culture of recovery. In this environment, the focus was seen to too easily gravitate to immediate action, to defining problems and to finding immediate solutions, without reflecting on what dynamics were really at play, what was underpinning these dynamics and what interventions and resolutions, if any, were appropriate and sustainable.

We could spend time writing funding submissions or co-create grant application documents. This would be much better than 'here is our template – fill it out – just tick the boxes'. The neatness required in contracts and reports is a long way from the messiness on the ground.

The quest for bureaucratic efficiency is incommensurate with developmental processes. Effectiveness and quality is not easily achieved if efficiency and quantity are the measures.

As a process too, community development was seen to require considerable skill in being involved with and supporting community without taking over.

External bodies can capture the community and divert local people from local priorities to the priorities of other organisations and agencies.

It was also noted that:

Community members can also capture community engagement process and exclude other community input.

As a consequence

[50] This latter thought comes from the much cited idea that it takes a village to raise a child.

Community engagement needs to be a measured, deliberate and open process.

One participant referred to this interaction as a 'two way street'. Another referred to this skill or judgement call in this way:

A lot of skill is required of workers to get that balance right – when to back off and when to come in.

Another underlying challenge to maximising the opportunities for community development was identified in

The strong level of fear and mistrust of communities and community development by politicians and bureaucrats.

Conversely

Community Development is a practice that only flourishes where a lot of trust exists.

Another barrier to community development flourishing, is that funded agencies can find it difficult to engage in advocacy on issues that are challenging to authority and government, particularly where they have pre-existing contractual relationships with government. Some expressed the view that in recovery work,

Good advocacy [within a Community Development approach] had to both channel anger and to take responsibility for producing real data.

It was also noted that community development as a practice needed to be cognizant of, and use, available formal decision making structures, mechanisms and instruments. One participant saw that

The promise for community development to be able to contribute to building more resilient and self-reliant communities was talked about but often not achieved in practice.

References were made to the many tensions between the practices that underpin community development and those that inform case management and counselling. In the former, the task is to keep people connected with one another. One version of delivering the latter was to confine and individualise information. However most participants did not see these divisions in such black and white terms. Some toyed with the notion of needing to think on different levels when it came to the 'individual' voice and the 'community' voice, and how critical it is to keep aware of those two levels. For example, strategies used to consult individuals are different to those used to 'consulting community'. The traps here were expressed with humour in the comment that

Just because your gums are flapping it doesn't mean you talk for anyone else.

Another trap for agencies was that

In capturing the input and resources of community in their agency priorities, they risk diverting local people away from their own local priorities.

Community members too can engage in this sort of 'capturing' and diverting the energy away from where most other community members want it to be. There were comments too about the risk of overlooking the capacity of community to work things out for themselves.

There was quite a bit of discussion around what could be termed 'listening carefully' – and that this was a critically important but also a challenging task – for both agency staff and community members. It was noted that

> *There was an important role for NGOs in capturing and holding the space for participatory and deliberative processes, and also being an intermediary between government and communities.*

One perspective on the role of agencies was

> *To help the community find their voice so they can identify their needs and aspirations.*

CSOs were seen by some as having the capacity to 'sense, recognise and feedback community capacity' at different stages of recovery. This would need to be a dynamic process and could guide service delivery.

> *Community dialogue processes are important as is action research and generating and collecting and responding to local data.*

One example given of a successful community development process and structure, was that of Community Dining in Kinglake. It grew quickly from having numbers of around 50 attending, through to 100 people a night five nights per week. While providing a nourishing 'low cost' meal it was 'much more than that'. Among the benefits cited were 'quality contact', a chance to share information, opportunities for some residents to receive advice from others on pathways of referral for issues they were grappling with, mutual support, creating new networks. It added to a sense at a community level that 'others knew what you were going through'. This common knowledge and understanding was regarded as really important in helping people bear the loads they were carrying. One participant described Community Dining as:

> *A place to share a meal and help one another heal.*

In a previous section of this report, a workshop participant was quoted as saying how important it was to be able to continue to 'think' in the 'rush rush' of the recovery space.

> *Another challenge is the need for arriving at solutions and immediate action versus the importance of thoroughly working issues through, learning about the relationships and history and arriving at holistic strategies in partnership with local communities.*

One of the identifiable thinking traps was that of the often pervasive presence of 'binary thinking' – that states of mind or matters of fact were 'either/or'.

One example given was that some assumed 'either' that an individual /group/or community was either 'independent', with the capacity to look after itself … or … was in danger of becoming 'too dependent'. This binary thinking was seen by some to have a negative impact on a range of decisions in the recovery environment, and had a particular influence on community

development. The idea of 'dependence' and how various workshop participants thought about its relevance to their thinking and their work is further discussed below.

Agency Competition and Agency Collaboration

Antecedents for competition and collaboration

While these two themes were discussed at times separately in the group and subgroups of the workshop, they are documented here together, as they can be seen as two sides of the same coin, or at least, as closely influencing each other.

> *Cooperation and collaboration are not sexy. They don't rate media coverage. To some extent it needs a low profile to be successful.*

While 'collaboration' between workers, agencies and communities was generally seen as a 'necessary good' in the recovery environment, there were many challenges to achieving collaborative working environments.

> *The perception and assumption of competition is a major issue – if your orientation is towards partnership and cooperation you can be very quickly blown out of water.*

Participants identified some of the 'contextual necessities', or perhaps antecedents, required to facilitate a collaborative mindset and collaborative practice.

> *Collaborative intent is not enough. Practical project work is not enough. Collaboration can't be just based in relationships. Collaboration needs relationships, and shared understandings, and shared commitments.*

Several requisite antecedent factors to enable collaboration were seen as overlapping or closely related to each other, and included time, energy, good faith, knowledge, a sense of accountability, some sense of history, and a strong orientation to the importance of relationships as the context and vehicles for carrying out good work.

Time

One participant contributed poetical insights into the importance of time.

> *It's the time we waste with people that makes us friends. Saint-Exupery [paraphrase[51]]*

Another example cited was the task of working on grant applications together:

> *We need to be given enough time to be able to ask: can we do this together?*

[51] A paraphrasing by a participant, of the excerpt from St Exupery's Little Prince, which reads: 'It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important'.

One participant noted:

> *It takes time and energy to connect, let alone collaborate.*

An important factor was funding timelines.

> *The short turnaround process for applying for the $16 million in the VBAF Medium Term Fund is reinforcing competition.*

Relationships.

Some saw relationships as core to the idea of collaboration. The importance of relational understandings was given in an example around referral practices. It was noted that

> *Practitioners would not refer to someone they didn't know.*

Relationships at the organisational level were also seen as critical.

> *Collaboration conversations need to happen at the right levels, both with the practical on the ground workers and also with the key organisational decision-makers.*

'System' practices and tools and their influence on collaboration

Participants shared views about some of the 'system' issues that reduced collaboration.

> *The history of regional competition for contracts will always have an influence.*

> If communication isn't there before, it won't happen because your house has burnt down.
> Workshop participant.

Some were more simple but important issues such as the need to have information about what other agencies did. This was seen to be lacking in some areas.

> *If you didn't know what an agency was doing, this impacted negatively on chances of collaboration and partnerships.*

Some organisations just had very different approaches to and methods of organising. This too impacted on collaboration.

> *The differing approaches and methods of organisations were not always compatible.*

> Cooperation is not sexy. It doesn't rate media coverage. It needs a low profile to some extent
> Workshop participant

Partly linked to the above discussion on 'authorising environments' is the question of the freedom or otherwise to 'act together'.

> *The power of authorisation can have a huge impact on collaboration.*

There was a tendency to over-formalise relationships. This led to a diminution of collaboration.

Not everything needs to be formalised. Being free and flexible can be great because you can take action.

In the early days of collaboration, verbal agreements as the mechanism of collaboration were adequate, but there will come a time where there is a need to formalise relationships and agreements. Timing was a critical skill here.

A competitive environment was seen to engender the necessity for certain 'ways of being'. One 'way of being' was the necessity to have an 'organisational persona' that gave off an aura of 'needing to be seen as knowing what you're doing'.

A Liberal Government took over from the Brumby Labor Government in November 2010

This 'stance' was seen to preclude a more questioning approach, which in itself also worked against collaboration with others, and indeed precluded more 'developmental' work. One workshop participant commented:

There are other dynamic internal and external expectations that lead to competition. Our organisational identity – the look, feel, culture, perception – the expectation that you will be in this recovery space, occupy the space, be high profile in the space.

Unless community are aware of the authority structures, they cannot choose how and where to best invest their time, energy and resources in participation. Workshop participant

Another systemic issue reducing collaboration, was the infrastructure of data bases. Some agencies spent considerable time entering data of their work into DHS data systems, but were then left with no access to this hard earned data and not even a record of what was entered.

It becomes the State Government data [and] State Governments don't give data back.

Some argued for the need for more accessible localised data. Others saw this 'ask' as being too big, too complicated, too constrained by legislation. A few participants had some insight into the machinations of the new state government[52], and noted that

At this time there was little trust particularly between the new state government and the bureaucracy.

Some participants were critical of the type of data they needed to report on to government, as well as the already cited imbalance in not getting data back they had submitted. Some saw lost opportunities in the existence and maintenance of those data systems that only required output clinical encounter or welfare intervention statistics and did not seek to capture any information on conditions, determinants, dynamics, processes, learnings, innovations and outcomes.

Participants suggested that

[52] The ALP in Victoria lost the State election on the 27th November 2010, to the Liberal/National Coalition.

> *The process itself of making applications for grants in the period following the fires was one where the possibility of agency co-creation was structured out, given the competitive inter agency environment.*
>
> *Even where there had been a pre-fires orientation toward partnership and cooperation, these principles were hard to maintain in a competitive environment.*

One agency that had provided considerable resources to recovery work had been able to exercise a considerable degree of freedom due to the source of its money being community donations, not government grants or contracts.

One senior agency worker felt that

> *There needs to be greater tolerance of and respect for non-government funded services. When agencies do demonstrate ability in particular areas of work when they are not government funded, they can be exposed to criticism, and being marginalised.*

Unfunded agencies or programs were extremely vulnerable politically with their legitimacy being called into question by state government officials.

> *They are really pissed off – they snipe at me – claiming you're not valid, your approach is not valid, your measurements are not valid.*

One of the restricting aspects of being a recipient of government funding, is that

> *The agreements can lead you into a position of being expected to act as if you are an arm of government.*

Where agencies could cobble together resources from a range of different areas, often this creativity had dividends, being empowering for agencies and their staff, alongside the satisfaction of delivering valuable services and innovative programs.

Participants raised the practice of 'agency poaching' as a threat to collaboration – where the better workers are poached by other agencies. This was seen by some as just the way of life in a competitive environment.

> *Workers move around. Agencies poach good workers. This is what happens to workers, services, programs, grants and funding in a competitive environment*

Structures for collaboration

Participants shared information with each other about some of the ways they had sought to communicate, cooperate, coordinate and collaborate. One fire-affected area had a regular meeting of managers of agencies that would meet weekly. By the time of this CSO workshop this had ended and had been replaced by a 'network' meeting, which was made up of a mix of managers and workers. Similar developments had happened in various settings. In Kinglake there had been a Combined Agencies Meeting chaired initially by the Shire and then four months later by the DHS Hub Captain, and a Kinglake Ranges Psychosocial meeting chaired by

what was then known as Mitchell Community Health[53]. At around the time of the workshop, plans were afoot to develop a Kinglake Ranges Community and Services Collaborative meeting that for the first time would be open to citizens and community leaders. Whittlesea had meetings with community representatives, and had community development workers who worked more closely with CRCs and who worked toward mobilising agency staff. Yarra Ranges held meetings of managers of local agencies. Reference has already been made in this report to the RP7 meeting of agency staff in the Marysville area.

One of the outstanding examples of agency and community collaboration was considered by some present to be the Nillumbik Social and Health Alliance.

Participants talked about how the alliance nurtured greater collaboration between agencies and community groups.

Since this workshop in July 2010, considerable changes have occurred in the Kinglake Ranges area in relation to agency community collaboration at least in relation to meetings.

> *It would be helpful if agencies made their services better known to community members, and also invite community members to sit in on agency meetings. There would also be possible roles for community members to be employed as networkers in future disasters.*

The Temporary Villages had residents sit on the Stakeholders meetings to good effect. Some workshop participants had been in these meetings and could testify that community members' input to the meetings was very useful and helped 'ground' the decision-making.

Innovating and Adapting our Service Delivery Models

Increasing community development orientation

Some salient sentiments in relation to thoughts about service delivery are contained above in the theme on Community Development. Reference has already been made to the tensions between the practice philosophy behind community development and case management and counselling, where one is required to withhold information and the other requires connectedness between people.

Several participants saw that agencies should see community development as a frame for or part of their 'service offer'. Some saw a risk in ignoring the historical issues experienced by citizens, by concentrating only on the most recent trauma. This was seen to further disempower the service user, and therefore also further entrench disadvantage.

> *Community development is challenging and uncomfortable because it forces us to re-consider and debunk our perceptions – what do we hold dear and why – issues of class and race and order and process and place.*

Several participants noted that the 'good community processes' that were critical to community progress, could be strengthened by agency advocacy, support and input. There was

[53] Now known as Nexus Primary Health http://www.nexusprimaryhealth.org.au/

strong consensus that communicating skillfully and purposefully with communities was hard work.

> *It is challenging to be open and responsive to different views, especially when tensions are high and people are stressed.*

There were reminders of successful service delivery within community development models.

> *There was a time when Community Health had a guiding '80/20' rule for its workers – that 80% of time was to be given to direct service and 20% was to be invested in community development.*

Workshop participant comments suggested there was support for a return to this sort of work structuring practice (that is, a mandating of community development within a public health model).

In-house clinical model or out-reach social models

Some participants were critical of what they perceived to be inappropriate emphases in some types of services. For example, some voiced the concern for example that it was their view that Cognitive Behavioural Therapy was over-emphasised as a methodology for ATAPS[54] workers.

A few participants emphasised that in their view agencies could have done better in making clear what their service offer was.

> *Information enables choice.*

The provision of genuine choice beyond 'one size fits all' was seen as central to good practice.

Participants spoke of the value of certain types of service, particularly those that met residents in their own patch.

> *You have to take good community processes to the community rather than relying on people to turn up to meetings (or clinics).*

> *It's not the bricks and mortar that matters – it's the hearts and minds – it's relationships.*

> *Our service is about being slow, taking your time, providing safe spaces and really focusing in on and really being present for one person you are with right now, listening to and working with one person at a time.*

Some were able to speak from experience of delivering a VBAF funded program called 'Community On Ground Assistance' (COGA) where residents could ask for assistance for something tangible, such as removal of a tree. Often the request was only the tip of the iceberg, but the context of the program allowed other needs to become known in a more oblique and at times 'acceptable' way, or more 'gentle' way for the resident. Many of these residents who were able to request a COGA service had not come forward for other services. Some felt they had 'had their share', and were self-selecting out of available services. Other service agencies

[54] ATAPS Access to Allied Psychological Services. https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-boimhc-ataps.Reifels (2013) made reference in a PhD completion seminar to some of the strengths and limitations of service delivery models following the 2009 fires on capacity building approaches.

present at the workshop were focusing on outreach as a particular modality, and were reporting some success at reaching 'harder to reach' residents. It was noted that some communities may be more predisposed to outreach based approaches than others.

> *The characteristics of specific communities affected by the disaster that may lend themselves more to outreach-based approaches.*

There was general concern about the length of time services were provided for in the post-disaster environment.

> *Therapy is funding driven. When the funding finishes, then weaning them off begins, decreasing contact, and all of the issues are still with the community*

There was concern raised across the group that there was dissonance between

> *the understanding from the literature, which is that people will be experiencing and presenting with symptoms of post traumatic stress disorder for at least 7 years, and the fact that several services were required to wind up after 2 or 3 years*[55].

Some of the therapists present felt what they saw as premature service closure, compromised their authenticity.

While we could not explore what the participants meant by this, one possible construction could be that there is a negative impact on one's sense of self, if one's practices and professional beliefs are compromised by a policy or expedient view that threatens or undermines those beliefs or practices, such as in this case, the duration and termination of service provision[56].

Community member workshop participants noted that with the influx of services into areas that historically were underserviced, that

> *We now know what we never had.*

One of the many impacts of this community experience, has been the need for agency workers to find a way to respond to community demand.

Dependency

There was considerable discussion in the workshop about the word dependency, including the varying ways of both thinking about it and how the word is used in the post-disaster domain. It was regarded as a 'loaded term'. Some spoke of it as a word that suffers from 'extreme' use.

> *It (dependency) is a word that seemed to induce binary thinking — that one can be 'too dependent' and 'too independent'.*

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[55] Jo Best, the Churchill Fellow present at the CSO workshop, mentioned in the workshop and in her Churchill Fellowship Report, that this theme of the difficulty for communities of services ending too soon was a recurrent issue across several of the international community disaster sites she had visited to date, during her Churchill Fellowship period.

[56] The work of Gary Hough provides an account of the practices of social workers in child protection developing ways to 'work around' the system and its attributes, some of which they believed were compromising families and professional practice (cited in Green, 2007).

The latter 'state' could cause difficulties in that it can prevent people from asking for help. One participant noted that

> *The word dependence was used as if it was a toxic disease.*

Some felt that dependence was spoken about as something to be feared. One story from Kinglake was that a minority group of Kinglake residents put the view that the ongoing presence of the Army would 'create dependency'. It was the understanding by some that this view about the risk of dependency was linked to the decision of the timing of the Army's departure, which was earlier than some expected and wanted. Those participants who recalled this time and this decision, had vivid, raw and resentful memories of what they saw as a minority but powerful community voice impacting negatively on community well being.

The use of the word dependence in negative connotations, was seen by some to be unwarranted – given that in fact we are all dependent to some degree and particularly at different times. One participant commented that if one takes this view, then

> *Our shared goal is to acknowledge and own our interdependence.*

Some explored the idea of there being a strong link between 'dependence' and 'control' – that if control is taken away from people that this will lead to dependence, and with this, passivity, impotence, frustration and anger.

> The problematic assumption that an individual, group, or community is either 'independent and has the capacity to look after itself' OR is in danger of becoming 'too dependent" usually has very poor implications for appropriate funding and long-term recovery.
> Workshop participant perspective

Dependence as a descriptor was used in relation to both organisations and to individuals. In relation to organisations, one observation was that as citizens we can legitimately *be dependent on*, or *depend on*, certain 'taken for granted' services, such as police, public transport etc. In relation to 'individuals' and dependency, some saw the existence of 'dependent' people as being in some ways a 'given' – that there was something about their make up that was more like a 'constant state', and that there will always be people who seek to attach themselves to organisations or particular individuals.

Some saw these issues in structural term, as in states of human existence that are brought about through structural disadvantage, such as through multigenerational poverty, giving rise to the need for 'dependent relationships' such as for basic items like food.

Another viewpoint was that

> *For some people, becoming dependent was a time-limited, but necessary state of being, that is, for some, for a period of time, it is a functional response.*
>
> *Our fears about dependency are unwarranted. Most people are not interested in being dependent on others any longer than they need to.*

There was also genuine concern for those who had always been considered self-reliant.

> *The idea of dependency can be unhelpful. At one end you can be so independent you can't ask for help. Stoic individuals are of concern because they may not be aware of needing assistance.*

There was feeling that these issues are underexplored in recovery thinking and practice, and that they are really important issues to understand - how dependency manifests itself, how it is experienced and lived with, how expectations it gives rise to can be managed, and how boundaries can be constructed within which the different manifestations of dependency can be understood and appropriately responded to.

This was a deep discussion, and one that demonstrated the complexity of and variability in ideas of our human condition. One participant rephrased the discussion toward the desirability of seeking to

> *Create a caring holding space, surrounded by 'time' for this to develop. In this space, community can experience and receive some validation for its losses.*

A final contributor highlighted the importance of rituals and events.

> *Celebration and rituals have become really important. People have been transformed by their experience. For some it's been a spiritual experience.*

The Opportunities and Risks associated with Volunteers

'Volunteering' was a key aspect of the disaster response, and there was general consensus that a lot has been learnt about volunteering.

There was some criticism directed at 'one-off event' opportunistic volunteering

> *Some corporate volunteering is really all about the volunteers and their organisation. We have 80 of us and we have 3 hours and it has to be on this day and produce a great photo.*

There were several accounts of concerns that highlighted the need for coordination of volunteers, and the need for more integration of volunteer management issues into local Emergency Management Plans.

> *The coordination of volunteer labour is essential. Volunteers need training, appropriate support, appropriate skills and appropriate placement and management.*

There was a key role for agencies here in assisting in the management of volunteers, and as part of that, to advise the community when community members required assistance in dealing with volunteers.

> *Communities and agencies need a strict governing body for volunteers. It really needs to be enshrined before a disaster and as preparation for a disaster.*

Some community members had to take stances against unwanted volunteer input. Two cases were cited where the police had to get involved due to what were referred to as 'predatory volunteers'. One religious organisation had as its mantra, 'we don't say no' in responding to expressed need. For some people this led to too many unmanaged and unmet expectations.

Issues of the complexity and misunderstandings pertaining to Privacy legislation were raised but not explored in relation to managing volunteering.

Participants agreed that.

> *It is important that there be some registration of volunteers by some group with authority.*

It was further suggested that

> *Volunteers need to be attached to an agency*

This idea links with the issue of the dilemmas when there is no apparent 'authorising environment'.

> *How can you stop someone coming into an area?*
>
> *Who has the authorisation to stop an agency setting up in an area if they are not wanted?*

In the absence of authorised entities and formal decision-making structures there was some sympathy expressed for fire-impacted communities being left to deal with such issues.

> *Community members shouldn't have to be driving people and organisations out who have the wrong motivations and should never have gotten through basic checks in the first place*[57].

Fostering Greater Awareness of the Local Economy

Several participants noted the significant gaps in support to the business community after Black Saturday.

> *While we all acknowledge the value of volunteers, it is important that they don't replace local people or have a negative impact on the local economy.*

One figure cited was that about 300 home-based and small businesses have been lost or subsequently closed down across the Kinglake Ranges.

> *We have to come up with strategies to reinvigorate the household economy and the community economy.*

Opportunities were identified, without time to explore.

> *Key local businesses could not function without support. Real socially entrepreneurial opportunities were missed. This could have been handled very differently.*

[57] Red Cross has done considerable work since the 2009 fires on spontaneous volunteering. http://www.redcross.org.au/files/ES0-Research_report.pdf

There was also acknowledgement that more local people could have been engaged in gainful employment throughout the disaster recovery and community renewal process.

> *Wherever possible, employ local people. Have the systems in place to keep it squeaky clean. Counter the local mythology of how did you get the job?*

> *There are a lot of people now retraining because they can no longer go back to the work they had previously done.*

There were particular challenges around tax laws and small business grants that compounded difficulties for local small business, especially those who were operating in the informal economy, accessing VBAF monies and other available grants.

In some areas, this was made more complex by local factors. For example, Kinglake is one community that has had quite a significant barter-based social economy, which was, as a result of its informality, invisible to government authorities.

> *Kinglake had a strong black economy. It's hard to acknowledge. How do you use donated or state government funds to support an informal economy? The black economy is a way to get things done and needs met. It's how poor people survive.*

Given that a strong black economy is often linked with communities with low incomes and high formal unemployment, such communities can be further disadvantaged and alienated as a result of sitting outside the 'formal' system of validated resource distribution and support.

> *Financial literacy is low among disadvantaged in the community.*

Low level financial literacy among low income people further compounds their difficulties in managing what recovery resources, grants and insurance payouts may be available.

> *If community development and development of the local economy were an appropriate and ongoing focus for collaborative work, preparedness issues would be largely addressed.*

There were several stories of issues that arose over the immediate response of residents managing distribution of food and other resources. For some carrying out these tasks, they became a strong feature of their identity and commitment to the community as they saw it. Some of these groups found it difficult to manage the criticism of what they were offering that arose from local businesses.

> *In one area local shopkeepers banded together to protest about the distribution of free food and clothing.*

For community members and outside agencies managing material aid distribution, they saw it as their right to continue and wanted to maintain control over these tasks and processes.

Such conflicts need to be anticipated, prevented or resolved.

VBRRA reports provide considerable insight into some of the particular dilemmas and challenges on the distribution of material resources.[58]

Community Services Sector Preparedness

There was a shared acknowledgement that the community services sector was inadequately prepared when disaster struck on Black Saturday.

> *We've learned that the provision of basic needs is not enough - food, shelter, water and sewerage – survivors also need meaning, agency, care and love.*

It was widely recognised that long term responses need a solid foundation and they need to be integrated into effected communities to ensure transition into something that is sustainable.

Workshop participants identified the need for a much greater emphasis on community strengthening

> *Ongoing and sustained investment in community is needed. It sits there in programs as methods. But investment over time in sustainable communities is not made. ...We need to emphasise community development is an ongoing investment and sustained effort.*

Others made the direct connection between stronger communities and disaster preparedness

> *Disaster and crises preparedness needs to be community development driven and funded.*

In positing potential new roles for CSOs, community appraisal and community advocacy emerged as a recurring theme

> *It is important that we listen carefully, sense the culture and ways of doing things of a community, and take this forward advocating and championing a different way of working.*

The role of honest broker and intermediary was also floated

> *NGOs role in sensing, recognizing and feeding back community capacity at different stages of recovery and using this dynamic status assessment to guide service delivery.*

In addition to advocacy, also mentioned was the role of interpreter and influencer

> *How do we as CSOs ensure the legitimate voices and the language and priorities of communities are heard and influence the professionals and bureaucratic structures?*

[58] VBRRA's Donations Management System was recognised as an exemplar case study. http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/featured/innovation/case-study-donations-management-system/22-html/98-dms-html

The advocate, the mediator, the interpreter, the influencer, the partnership broker, the social entrepreneur, the capacity builder, these were some of the many roles put forward as extensions of, or alternatives to, the more traditional contracted clinical service and welfare provider roles.

Inevitably, advocacy requires strength, leadership and courage.

> *A challenge with advocacy is to be able to channel anger and not just cry wolf.*
>
> *Advocacy is an opportunity, an opportunity that brings with it a responsibility to be brave.*

Also prerequisites for organisational developmental and structural change are support and acceptance, validity and authority and resources, encased in new revenue streams.

Section 4: Community Recovery Committees Recovery Conversations

Introduction

This section of the report provides a range of perspectives from members of Community Recovery Committees, set up after the 2009 fires.

Key aspects of the approach to these conversations were set out in 'Research Project Approach' in Section 1. In summary, 14 CRC members took part in conversations between August and October 2011. They were held in various locations, typically in or close to the geographic area that the CRC members represented. Participants were from the following CRCs:

Whittlesea, St. Andrews, Kinglake Ranges, Flowerdale, Melba, Mitchell, Marysville, Strathewen, Strath Creek, and Toolangi-Castella.

Only one CRC from the region, Yarra Ranges, was not present for the conversations.

Individual participants are not identified, although at times general reference will be made to a particular initiative or geographic area, particularly where there are other publicly available sources of data for those references.

Some CRC participants were concerned as to whether there would be any identifiable differences in the feedback they provided through these conversations, and the feedback that some of them had already given to Government through the CRC meetings that VBRRA convened – two in all, which gave rise to the report: 'CRC Lessons Learned: Advice to Communities'[59] and 'CRC Lessons Learned: Advice to Governments[60]'. We do feel that while there is some overlap, there are also differences. This document we think is more of a 'reflexive discussion piece', whereas the CRC Lessons Learned document has more of an instructive tone. One example of such language includes the following statement: 'People across all spheres of government need training in community development principles.' While we would whole-heartedly agree with the 'statement', this report in the main (with the exception of the tone of section 5), is not of this type. This report documents a moment captured during what was for many, an unprecedentedly frantic and fraught time. It is a more reflective piece – derived from recorded and compiled conversations and presented or submitted documents, and written hopefully to be used to generate further conversations aimed to enrich thinking on and contribute to disaster preparedness, response and recovery and community renewal and regeneration.

Community Recovery Committees have been in use in post-disaster environments for a considerable period at least since Ash Wednesday, (see Hill et al, 1988 CDO Handbook) and in other guises in the period before, including the 1939 Victorian fires[61]. They form part of the landscape in Commonwealth and State policy.

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[59] http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Lessons_Learned_by_Community_Recovery_Committees_of_the_2009_Victorian_Bushfires_v1.0.pdf

[60] 1309325366-2009_bushfires_crc_lessons_learned_advice_for_government_may_2011_v1.1 (1).pdf

[61] Reference has already been made to the unpublished work of Greg Ireton in this area

Part 4 of the current Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV) holds the State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan [62]. The formal system in which plans are outlined is called the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMPlan). This plan is required to detail 'local arrangements and providers for a range of issues, including 'establishment and management of Community Recovery Committees' (EMMV, Emergency Relief and Recovery Management Planning, pp: 4-15).

How the CRCs were set up, or set themselves up, after the 2009 fires, is itself worthy of considerable research. Glimpses of the variety and specificity of set up and implementation processes and challenges are presented below through the accounts of the community leaders who participated in them. There exists one detailed account of how a small community set up its own community leadership and governance structure. (For the formation of the Strathewen Community Renewal Association – see Leadbeater, 2012).

As in all three sections (2, 3, and 4) there are many contextual factors and conditions that were often obliquely referred to, which can be seen as 'pre-existing' or 'pre-determining' factors or characteristics of the canvas upon which the disaster event and aftermath played out. We start with an overview of contextual factors of particular relevance to CSOs.

Nothing Happens in a Vacuum – the Primacy of Context

Introduction

CRC participants raised several issues in conversations that can be best outlined under the heading of 'context'. The following is one definition of 'context', as a noun: '

> *the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea, and in terms of which it can be fully understood'*[63].

Reaching a '*full* understanding' of any issue is an ambitious claim – we would modify the definition as we are using it, to say that the prior or prevalent conditions and dynamics set out below were seen by participants to contribute to at least a *partial* understanding of the issues they faced in forming and working in CRCs.

A key feature of the National Disaster Resilience Framework[64] is its emphasis on 'context'. Yet as will be seen in the comments in this section, attempts to inquire into and adequately differentiate between communities were problematic. Many CRC participants regarded the state as being unable to respond to each diverse locality and specific community's needs and circumstances. Conversations touched on pre-existing community–agency–government relationships, community structures, politics, cultures and access to resources, how a community is constituted, and how these all have a role to play in informing how a disaster is responded to. CRC members believed that many of these pre-existing constitutive factors were not given adequate consideration by those in authority.

Attending to difference was further compounded by the sheer scale of the disaster and the significant and subtle variations in impact, across diverse landscapes and communities.

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[62] This high level plan states: '*As the closest level of government to the affected community, municipal councils will take a lead in ensuring the local provision of emergency relief.*'
[63] http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/context
[64]. http://www.em.gov.au/Documents/NationalDisasterResilienceFramework-EndorsedatMCPEM-EM20Nov2009.pdf

Geographic, social and economic variation

Some of the diversity in different areas is highlighted in the comments from the CRC discussions cited below.

> *We're a dormitory area too, but compared with others we are a bit further out – we have to be more independent.*

> *St Andrew's doesn't want business or tourism – there have been efforts to stimulate business – they are there for relaxation. The market is the biggest tourist attraction. Up to 5,000 visitors each Saturday. No one from our town is on our market committee.*

> *A lot of people value their isolation and independence.*

> *Kinglake Ranges had at least 4000 people spread across 4 communities and 60 plus community groups. This is a difficult space and scale. It was difficult before the fires. If you have a community with inbuilt hierarchy and divisions you will always have issues.*

Infrastructure

The variation in elements of community infrastructure has implications for pre and post-disaster for community responsiveness and capacity. Some CRC participants felt some of these differences were not adequately understood or appreciated.

> *Communications … Radio, TV and Telephone Black-spots continue to be major issues for many of our fire-impacted and fire-vulnerable communities.*

> *Been kicking and screaming and there is still No AM FM radio – doesn't work; no mobile coverage, no TV. It's like living down a mine-shaft. Satellite TV is the only thing that works here. We set up a UHF to watch each other's backs. Two bay stations. We set up protocols.*

> *In Kinglake we don't own our own infrastructure. Key buildings and strategic blocks of land are owned by absent landlords, more interested in profit than in community.*

> *Farming, timber and fishing kept places like Kinglake and Marysville going for decades. Timber, fishing and farming … there have been dramatic shift in these industries.*

> *It was a small community – we didn't have lots of people lobbing in from town every weekend. This can be interfering.*

The impact of boundaries

Participants noted that the absence of strong regional links in the current structure of government.

There was an authority vacuum across boundaries. No one had any idea. They just can't do it; they can't change the way they think and act.

There was a mismatch between government's administrative boundaries and the boundaries of 'natural local communities'.

This mismatch, in the mind of one participant,

Confines the thinking and limits the imagination of State and Local Government employees.

Another participant saw these limitations as having a particular impact at the middle management level.

Middle management across jurisdictions was paralysed … they couldn't operate.

Natural environments span boundaries, as forest fires are particularly adept at demonstrating.

The fire should have known better.

What can we do about this going forward? Where a forest extends across five local government boundaries and metropolitan and across rural state government boundaries – this is very messy.

Pre-existing community capability and relations

Opportunities for citizen engagement is a key factor in the formation of community capability. As one participant noted in relation to the need for pre-disaster community preparedness:

Good democratic representation is essential – be engaged, critical and creative citizens.

Make sure you and your community leaders know and are well networked and connected to all of the key decision-makers long before any disaster happens.

Again, it is not clear from the comments whether these are made with the benefit of hindsight, but they do point to the critical importance of pre-existing community connectedness, capacity and capability.

Culture of communities

When government was sometimes seen as acting as if communities were homogenous, this contributed significantly to the difficulty for government to recognise potential and to see how local cultures actually worked. One of the flow on effects was that community 'character' risked being overlooked. One CRC participant emphasised the importance of understanding the particular histories and characteristics of outer suburban and peri-urban communities.

A lot of peri-urban communities have a strong independent streak. They have always looked after each other. They have built their own infrastructure, the schools and halls.

Not attending to these cultural differences became sources of considerable tension in some CRC-government relations.

Sometimes specific local knowledge was critical to understanding particular communities.

> *Our local schools operate as critical community hubs and meeting places. In country towns and rural districts the local school is the community.*
>
> *In many smaller communities the only structures are the CFA and the primary school.*

It is not difficult to see the repercussions of missing these important differences.

For another participant, particular aspects of geography were critical in understanding community and local culture.

> *Because of the road networks … and where we are … and how people travel … we'll always be a regional hub.*

Experiences of governance and leadership

Who the key decision makers are is not a clear cut question, as noted in the following participant comment:

> *Councils are a revolving body. The fixed structure is the officers. The real leaders in the bureaucracy are the managers and directors; they're the significant decision makers.*

While the above quote is only one 'pre-fire' perspective, whether salient or not, it does point to one of the myriad of ways in which patterns of relations between government and its citizens, in this instance, Local Government, can vary, from locality to locality, from culture to culture, as do the roles of its elected Councillors and its salaried staff.

Several of the rurally based fire-impacted CRC communities in these conversations, saw themselves as poorly represented and poorly administered at the local government level pre-fires

> *February 2009 saw us fighting to get good democratic representation. Previously we were disengaged, disgruntled and apathetic.*

For some, the influence of disruptions in community relations with local government, disruptions that existed at the time of the fires, went back to the 1990s when Local Government 'reforms' took place. For some workshop participants, this had left legacies of loss of or diminution of, trust, local identity, connectedness and community.

> *Local communities don't trust their Local Government Authority. There has been a democratic deficit at the local community level since the local government amalgamations in the 1990s.*

Some participants made frequent comment on the

> *Differing capacity, capability and community-orientation of Local Governments*

Some participants had considerable pre-fire experience working with elected politicians and Councillors and in large bureaucracies, much of which had been frustrating. For some of these participants, the disaster had the potential of allowing space to explore new ways of working together and renewing optimism for a 'new deal' in government–community relations. Within this group of project participants, this optimism was not sustained.

Another perception of pre-existing political reality focused on the nexus between the bureaucracy and the government.

> *When political decisions are required, the bureaucracy will rally around the government.*

It is possible that for those who held these views, when these events happened (such as the government and the bureaucracy closing ranks) and they impacted negatively on a community issue or perspective, that 'at least' it may not have been a total surprise.

It is also possible that these views, put forward as pre-disaster expectations and political realities, may also have been views formed as 'post hoc' rationalizations, a mental process of attempting to come to grips with some harsh experiences and realities since February 2009.

Perceptions of emergency services

Some CRC participants drew attention to what they saw as particular cultural environments in the emergency services themselves, and made brief references to how these cultures often impacted negatively on community development approaches.

> *There is a real need to transcend and transform command and control operations and engage collaborative models.*

Another participant made closer reference to the varying utility of command and control at different phases after a disaster.

> *Command and control may be appropriate for some aspects of the response phase, but not for relief and not for recovery. Different leadership and management styles are needed for the different phases.*

Another participant added that they saw the need for a 'facilitation' mode in the recovery period.

Public service environment

Some conceived of differences between government and community as value differences.

> *In private enterprise we encourage and reward creativity. The collision of values becomes prominent. Our community saw our public services hiding behind procedures.*

Some also demonstrated a capacity for empathy with the public servants sandwiched between communities and the bureaucracy.

> *The culture of public servants is one of following the rules, of making sure you don't get your backside kicked. That's the norm. We have to recognise this.*

CRC participants explored reasons for the narrow and in their minds often inappropriate perspectives influencing working relations between community and government. Some of the dynamics between community and government were seen to be fed by frustrations that had their origins in the larger system. As one participant commented,

> *Every government department and agency had their insurers telling them what decisions they can and can't make, what they can and can't do, worrying the whole time about liability issues.*

> [Communities] don't become catatonic over concerns about liability and occupational health and safety when key decisions need to be made
> CRC member

Communities were on the other end of these complex processes, trying to negotiate them on a daily basis.

Some CRC participants identified that interpretations of privacy laws and OH&S legislation were significant barriers to community involvement.

> *Privacy laws and occupational health and safety legislation were among the biggest barriers to communities generating and sharing information and taking direct action.*

CRC participants provided some colourful accounts of how they did not always succumb to the pressure of these barriers. Some seemed less understanding and more fatigued by the battles caused by different and at times, from the government side, more 'cautious' interpretations.

> *I am very tired of bureaucrats who interpret policy rather than shape policy.*

Some participants saw as a nexus between 'public relations' and 'decision making'. Some CRC members arrived at a viewpoint about decision-making processes they termed 'pragmatic fatalism'. The public relations machinery accompanying some political processes was seen as very powerful, and some participants pointed to the burden (and perhaps unlikelihood in the minds of some) of seeking to influence such 'machines'.

While there was a feeling of 'fatalism' in some of the perspectives expressed, it would be wrong to conclude this was pervasive, or that it led to apathy and non-responsiveness. It was clear listening to many participants that they held and enacted genuine and strongly expressed intentions to make the best of the situations they were confronted with, alongside, and on behalf of, their community.

Community Responsiveness

The coercive state

With the above accounts pointing to some of the pre-existing 'blind spots' and barriers to consideration of the reality of community life, it is not surprising that some accounts of what communities actually did, and how they felt they were regarded at times from 'outside', suggested considerable tension, and sometimes resulted in negative outcomes.

> *The pre-existing agreed upon Disaster Recovery model was parked. Local government were disempowered, as were the non-government organisations.*

The initial bushfire response was driven by the state government … very strongly. To drive from the top down you have to push people and force communities into certain places to get certain outcomes.

The *blind spot* - governments cannot *see* community

While several CRC participants regretted the difficulty they had had in attaining 'standing' with government, some did see that this was also linked to a more general problem not just a disaster environment (although clearly it intensifies in that environment).

The general problem identified was that

Government doesn't know how to identify 'community'

Government will always do what they think is needed, rather than what the community know is needed.

This was seen by some as an across the board failure:

All levels of government struggle to see, understand and work with local community networks, community culture and community dynamics.

One participant saw that

State government bureaucrats and local government officers don't look for and can't see community processes, informal networks and self-organisation.

Another commented

The weakness in the system as it stands is that local knowledge is not recognised acknowledged or harnessed quickly. (The) whole aspect of losing local knowledge is a tragedy.

Another saw that government makes the invalid assumption that 'people can't self-organise', and when it was seen that they could, there was a 'sense of disbelief'.

Government was sometimes seen as failing to see people's 'latent resources and capabilities'.

They need to understand there are many highly skilled people and strong networks there

Unless they're plugged in to local networks and channels they will not be quick enough.

Another participant noted that not only were community 'not seen', they were actually 'canned'. One of the losses in not seeing community for its strengths was that community's commitment to 'ongoing passionate engagement' was bound to be misunderstood. Some saw this lead to inevitable conflict in the post-disaster political environment. In the words of one participant,

The main weakness in the system as it stands is that local knowledge is not recognised, acknowledged or harnessed.

Relationships and stories are more useful than following a list. This worked for us under these circumstances. Leave it up to them – they always forget about local knowledge and human behaviour.

Some indicated that one of the barriers to seeing community may have resulted from the 'overvaluing' of 'professional knowledge' and 'institutional knowledge'.

Some in paid positions assumed professional knowledge trumped, rather than complemented, local knowledge.

One Local Government Manager turned up one night at a community meeting in a three-piece suit and tie to tell us that they've done a Council Officer review of how the fire was managed. It's all fixed now. He spent 40 minutes telling us about this. Everyone sat there for 40 minutes. He got seriously barrelled.

Communities are typically the first responders

In a disaster, 'being quick enough', particularly in the immediate response phase, is critical. The idea of community members usually being the first responders, is referred to elsewhere in this report. This is raised in Section 3 CSO perspectives and is increasingly recognised in the literature.

Communities are profoundly innovative when put to the test … when put under pressure.

Across the whole of the first two weeks – the relief effort was totally driven by our local community. We were the first responders. We were here on the ground and we just got on with it. It was overwhelming. In first week, 2800 fire survivors were registered in that room there. We couldn't get state authorities to understand our requests for some resources to assist us with all of the tasks required.

Some would turn up at 8:00am, government would turn up at 9:00am, media at 10:00am and celebrities between 11:00am and midday. We had to develop strategies on how to manage the hysteria that came with the celebrities. We wanted to use them to help our cause while protecting people. It was a circus. It was hard to see how the celebrities were helping. We didn't need them and couldn't see the point. The Australian Cricket Team arrived, then the North Melbourne Football Club just jumped off a bus.

We had all the resources, there were no shortage of volunteers; people were turning up in the thousands wanting to volunteer. It was just a matter of harnessing all of the good will.

We created a clear separation to ensure there was a way to deal with the media circus and ensure the key jobs could be done without unnecessary distraction.

We banned the press and others from coming to Flowerdale. Our Emergency Relief Committee formed on Saturday night after the fires.

Participants saw that communities had considerable strengths.

> *Communities are 'can do' oriented, and don't become catatonic over concerns about liability and occupational health and safety when key decisions need to be made.*

> *Let's get our community groups together … no government, no agencies. We had twenty turn up. How would we coordinate this relief effort? We were running it like this before Local Government even knew what was happening.*

> *There are within communities incredible people with latent resources and capabilities*

Participants gave vivid descriptions of how some of their responsiveness was overturned by those in formal roles. One recurring thorny issue pertained to collecting and managing community level data.

> *Someone recorded names in an exercise book. Because she wasn't in an agency, it was disregarded. 20 hours of work. We put together a register of contacts – if you want water, ring this number; if you want fencing ring that number. From then on we harvested knowledge. Got three pages or so in a simple table. Brought it here to show it. Can't publish that. Have you asked everyone? Both Local Government people came to me - said we can't publish it. So as a community member I was busy doing this at midnight.*

There was comment about what we heard to be a need for a new way of thinking about risk, particularly in the early phases of community response.

> *What we need is an automatic defence. A reasonable decision under the circumstances, of making decisions in their own and wider best interests. Not a matter of avoiding liability.*

The following comments on community capability particularly as early responders, demonstrate untapped latent talent that comes to the fore in emergencies and times of great need.

> *You only have to ask and someone knows someone who can do that or get this.*

> *We operated systemically and were protective and supportive of each other, working together and beyond self-interest.*

> *Some of things we saw after the fires like the Tavern and the Singing Gardens became nodes. Private facilities were opened up. People took food to these two hubs … one feeding Emergency Services and one feeding the community.*

The critical role played by regional hubs

> *We had to do a lot of advocacy in the early months to get all of the authorities at state and federal level to understand the role Whittlesea played – inside the problem but not inside the chaos.*

We were still arguing that Regional centres like Whittlesea are playing a vital role. There were too many arguments and too much conflict. Arguments where you just couldn't see the point.

Community creativity, self-organisation, and responsibility

The critical nature of how you engage tactically was highlighted by one workshop participant.

Where and how you begin will impact profoundly on where you end up.

There was a sense of disbelief – people can't spontaneously self-organise. They need to understand there are highly skilled people and strong networks there.

We want ideas people are willing to take responsibility for. You will be in a position where you drive that project - see it through and then once it's complete – dissolve subcommittee – no obligation to go on with it.

For some, the tensions were present at the outset as one participant noted:

There were significant and ongoing challenges to the autonomy of the local community from the very first day.

There was a refreshing straightforwardness in the reframe of one CRC member from a severely impacted community:

Being wiped off the map is a blessing in terms of our recovery. We've got a clean slate and we can have a completely new beginning.

We were completely cut off that meant we didn't have any Council interference. We just got on and did it before anyone from Council arrived.

There was a sense of relief and freedom about 'not knowing' and therefore learning that came through strongly in some of the CRC accounts.

Communities literally make it up as they go along, but with a keen eye always on adapting to the continually unfolding social, political and economic dynamics.

It is important to learn as much as you can from other disasters. We learnt how hard survivors of Ash Wednesday tried to get governments to incorporate their on the ground practical and experiential learning in policy and strategy. The community-generated learning couldn't be housed anywhere and was effectively lost to subsequent disaster vulnerable communities.

Conversely, some saw government stuck in a bind of not being able to be seen to 'not know'. Some saw government as being impressed by 'professional knowing' and were typically not able to be involved in 'shared learning'.

Despite unprecedented circumstances government officials and service providers too often became prisoners of professional knowing rather than participants in shared learning.

Sometimes government inability to respond was seen as crippling.

> *We could come up with a sound demonstration of need. What we heard was you cannot change policy because of an event. They have to sit within their own guidelines. Who is there to help community? We have sat here as fire affected areas – as soon as we say – I would like there to be a change – we get grief.*

Some significantly impacted communities had to make some difficult assessments and decisions at the outset. One participant commented on the opportunity to generate a community-led process in the power vacuum that was emerging

> *We saw VBRRA as just 2 people. We saw our Local Government in crisis. Council had nothing to offer except to undermine us. We knew we had to get our act together fast.*

Interestingly, and again somewhat empathetically, one participant commented on the dilemma for community oriented government actors.

> *Disaster recovery can become very difficult for government and agency staff who align themselves with the community.*

Community perspectives on *Command and Control* decision making

From the perspectives of some CRC members, their experience of (non community based) decision makers was often a negative one. When intervening,

> *State and local governments [were] riding roughshod over our work and taking over our processes.*

This sentiment affirms the existence of pre-existing formal and informal local processes and relationships (prior to the fires) that were forgotten, ignored, overlooked or not acknowledged in the fires' aftermath. The 'riding roughshod' concern was not limited to 'community' being the only recipients of this way of acting. CRC participants were aware of some of these dynamics operating between the State and Local Government. Similarly, communities were aware of the 'intra' organisational impacts of decision differences within their local governments.

> *Our Shire had the Mayor and CEO at loggerheads – Council were seriously divided.*

Concerns were also raised about State Government representatives dealing directly with community representatives, bypassing and blindsiding local government officials all together.

Participants spoke of the mechanism to reduce the need for command and control.

> *If you have community buy in and take ownership then command and control becomes a waste of time. More about how can I help rather than telling local people what they can and can't do.*

Such comments express grievances about government actions and processes imposed on communities in response to the fires. Some also reflect the internal divisions within communities and the impact of these on processes of decision making.

> *We get fireman syndrome – it is a reactionary model. As is policing. This is the norm. They require decisiveness. Too often decisions are wrong. When things change, as they are now, we need to come more proactive. What are the tools and skills and capacities that need to be fed in to assist that?*

> *Straight after fires – communities came together pretty well – then decisions started to split community – even though decisions were made with the best of intentions. There was not enough attention to the implications of decisions.*

Mention was made of the flow on effect of 'command and control' decision making.

> *Decisions bring consequences. We have had so many decisions made on our behalf. There have been a lot of unintended consequences.*

Community control, self-determination, and authorising environments

At the community level, the aftermath of the bushfires brought much upheaval, many challenges and considerable insights. CRC participants made general comments affirming the importance of community connectedness, community resources, and community self- determination, including the opportunities to be involved in 'big decisions'. Some raised questions that for them appeared to remain unanswered, in their own minds. There was consensus on the importance of local knowledge, while recognising that to harness this the communities needed to be 'better equipped and resourced'. It wasn't only the desire for local knowledge to be recognised.

> *Communities want to create and organise their own events, projects and planning processes in their own time and in a manner consistent with their history culture and social processes.*

There was a desire expressed for people to be self-determining, yet in reality this didn't happen.

> *As community members we're all equally disempowered. How could we get better buy in and ownership of decisions?*

As one person noted, it was important to be selective about 'which issues' to focus on:

> *The only way to empower is to give communities real choices on big issues.*

For one participant:

> *We were determined to maintain the level of cohesiveness within our communities after the disaster had passed.*

Closely connected with the idea of self-determination is that of leadership, on which several participants commented. Some comments pertained to the movement in leadership – the leaders before may not be the same ones as after the event. For some the emphasis was on

'structures' for leadership and governance, and for others on processes, and differences between management and leadership.

> *Another problem is leadership. Those who were leaders may not be after the event.*

> *None of us had been involved in community leadership – nor had the others. But they came with other experience. We had a government solicitor, an ex principal, and a woman who had spent her life working with government grants.*

> *In the aftermath of major disasters we need to promote and endorse community leadership*

Some put forward in conversation, the different considerations around structures for leadership.

> *We've discovered that there is a real need for local township and district leadership structures.*

> *The way in which the community leadership group is constituted is critical.*

> *How and why you choose the structure you choose should not be taken lightly. The process is very important in terms of building trust in and with your community.*

One participant highlighted the following critical issue:

> *A key role for leadership was to raise fundamental questions around legitimacy and authority.*

The question was raised as to whether legitimacy and authority are 'bestowed on you'. Some reflected on the different skill sets of leadership and management. One person noted that

> *You can be powerful without having authority.*

There was some discussion about the processes that might have been desirable to have in place, or conversely, provided accounts of what happened in the absence of agreed processes to both make decisions and to harness conflict productively. Participants talked of having the experience too frequently of no one being authorised (or feeling they were authorised) to make decisions on key issues.

> *There were too many meetings where we had circular conversations. No one had the capacity or authority to make decisions. This was very frustrating and a waste of precious time.*

One participant summed it up as follows:

> *There is no clear authorising environment in the aftermath of a disaster. It's a mess of power and egos. A mess of engaging direct partnerships with those who are used to operating at a distance from you and from a position of 'power over' you.*

Enabling environments - space, time, resources and autonomy

Implicitly, and sometimes explicitly, CRC representatives talked about the sorts of environments community members need to do their work. Sometimes they did not find these environments. One was space.

> *Communities needed some time and some private space … time to establish their post-fires identity and their own strategies.*

Having state and local government representatives insisting on being allowed to attend every meeting made community-driven structure, process and relationship establishment impossible for some communities.

Time frames were also critical:

> *Recovery time frames are not consistent with a well-informed recovery.*

The relationship between community effort and supportive enabling environments was highlights.

> *Community self-organisation and leadership benefits from supportive and empowering agencies and government departments – this was rarely the case.*

Negotiating power relations

Some played a skillful game in negotiating the power differences, when seeking to influence government. One participant expressed it like this.

> *You have to be careful you don't get too far in front of government. Sometimes we got too far ahead of them and had to put the brakes on. You can't continually embarrass the government and expect to continue to get their support. We had to play the game.*
>
> *We were constantly warned by bureaucrats 'don't get too far ahead of the bus!'*

Perhaps providing an example of possible tensions between the 'community', the 'bureaucracy' and the political arm of government, another participant gave an interesting example:

> *Having created CRCs they had an identity of their own. CRCs could talk with politicians. We got half a million dollars for the school in two weeks. Too far out of reach...It's unthinkable for community members to go to Spring Street.*

Participants gave examples of creative community initiatives where they had to 'pull back' and wait for government to 'catch up'.

> *We proposed a local integrated planning office – we got strong push back on that.*
>
> *We developed a website - built it back.org We put it out there. Two weeks after the website was launched we heard that a Bushfire Advisory Service was to be established in Kinglake and Marysville. We tracked the website – we were*

getting hits from around the world. There was not enough information around[65].

Dissension and fracture lines

While not necessarily speaking of their own CRC environments, but often speaking at the general community level, some participants noted the intense conflict that was sometimes a feature of the post-disaster environment.

> *There were too many arguments and too much conflict.*

Fracture lines occurred (or in some cases were pre-existing) in different ways.

One participant talked of

> *The psychological, political and physical divides. Some impacted directly, some not directly.*

Another participant singled out a few key players for comment:

> *Disasters provide an unprecedented opportunity for local cowboys and political animals to override or subvert good collaborative processes.*

Some of the divides were inherent in pre-existing community structure.

> *If you have a community with inbuilt hierarchy – you will always have issues.*

One participant spoke of

> *The influence 'multi-generational families, land ownership and privilege' had on democratic local participation.*

Disasters provide an unprecedented opportunity for local cowboys and political animals to override or subvert good collaborative processes.
(CRC participant)

Similarly, another participant reflected

> *It's a well-known fact that people did come together initially. People were flung together by circumstances.*
>
> *Then you started to get this … my family has been here for four generations … I have an inherit right to take control and run this town.*

Small business losses and community economy development

The question of small business activity after the disaster was raised. There was a recognition of the need to emphasise the local area as the site for economic development, and also the need to think differently about how to attract small business. The importance of home businesses in many of the fire impacted areas was also emphasised.

[65] Reference here was to the Rebuilding Advisory Service

How to attract small business, think differently; more globalised thinking.

In St Andrews there are a lot of home businesses. Mine is in the financial area. Some other businesses are in the arts. We underestimate the vitality of the local area. In our own area the locals are shocking payers.

Another challenge in recovery is home-based businesses. Without a home there is no business. We have no idea how many home-based businesses we had.

For some there were questions as to whether a local economy *can* be developed.

In Kinglake our resilience will swing on whether we develop a local economy or not.

The Tsunami of Agency and Government Help

VBRRA (Victorian Bushfire Rebuilding and Recovery Authority)

Participants voiced both positive and negative responses to the creation of VBRRA. And within these responses, both positive and negative responses from the same participant, reflecting the complex reality of recovery experiences and organisational responses.

One participant voiced a clear and unambiguous statement:

Without VBRRA we would not have had a voice. While VBRRA existed, community recovery committees had a voice that could be heard beyond local government.

For another, VBRRA not only fast-tracked or neutralised otherwise problematic political issues, but they also

Generated a whole new suite of power-based relationships, and so a whole new disaster recovery politics.

Relationships, processes and projects were strained in some areas.

State Government's driven rush toward completion was a major issue

and seen as a key contributor to these strains.

Some felt a slower pace would have produced greater benefits and less duplication and waste. The time limited tenure of VBRRA was seen as one of the driving forces of this pace. One observation put forward was that

VBRRA's short tenure meant it was not pre-disposed toward the long term, and so became proficient at achieving short-term gains, too often at the expense of long-term problems.

Some participants expressed a mixture of incredulity and empathy for the role VBRRA had to take up.

> *VBRRA stepped into the space between communities and their Councils. This is a very difficult thing to do. All of the pre-existing trust and relationships were put at risk.*

The perception of some was that VBRRA was not its own master. Some saw that

> *VBRRA's role was to be the body administering the recovery timetable set by a state government facing a forthcoming election.*

Trust was an enduring theme through many of these conversations.

> *Trust was broken very early on with VBRRA. They were our ally but they kept screwing us as well.*

VBRRA was seen as unreliable in terms of keeping promises.

> *VBRRA made too many promises they did not keep – we'll get you administration, we'll get you resources.*

This resource issue for CRCs was a constant, and is commented on further below.

Lost trust was difficult to regain.

> *The government, and VBRRA, were making promises that would never be fulfilled. So distrust set in. Then you can't build relationships with community. The government didn't think through these implications. The local community now have to manage that legacy.*

State government-centred decision-making and VBRRA's short timelines continued to impact on processes of community engagement and empowerment

> *VBRRA didn't know how to empower. (The) only way to empower is to give people information and informed choices.*

> *VBRRA has meant 10 years of community development being undone.*

> Without VBRRA we would not have had a voice. While VBRRA existed, community recovery committees had a voice that could be heard beyond local government. CRC participant

The influx of donations and new resources

There was a sense that the response to the enormity of the disaster, while at one level helping communities understand at that time that they were in the minds of many people all over Australia, it also overwhelmed the capacity of the many local communities to come together and deliberate about best ways forward.

As one participant put it,

> *A tsunami of agency and government help came rolling toward our people– this can be very distracting and very intimidating.*
>
> *Everything is so fraught with so many departments and agencies, so many players*

There were a few comments noting dissatisfaction with some outreach services, and the need to retell stories to different people.

> *Red Cross visited us 3 times – every time different people. They were asking – how did you go – tell us your story - people started to jack up with needing to repeatedly tell their stories.*

Some case managers were seen as out of their depth.

For others, the inflexibility of agency practices was frustrating.

> *It has taken us 2.5 years to be invited in by agencies*

From one participant's point of view, youth work hours in their CRC area were problematic.

> *Try and get an NGO to get to work with Youth after hours. They only come in during office hours, school hours. There isn't a young person within 50 kilometres of this place during the day. They're all off at school.*[66]

Agencies negotiating entry and exit was lacking in the minds of some.

> *Some coming in at different stages. Come in to take over – they have no entry plan – don't know what happened here. Not having a briefing .. don't have an entry strategy .. never have an exit strategy. Don't know about others.*

Lack of negotiation on entry was seen to lead to lost opportunities.

> *Everyone is well intended – working on a certain set of assumptions that are pre-existing – didn't allow for them to engage with local community to get a full briefing on community leadership.*

Some agencies or services were seen as having ulterior motives at worst, and at best, clumsy approaches.

> *There were many businesses and corporations who were set to make a lot of money exploiting conditions that emerged as a consequence of the fires.*
>
> *I am sick and tired of hearing people using disasters to build profile for other endeavours. This has happened with politicians, workers, businesses and individuals in communities.*

[66] No attempt is made in this section of the report to counter some bald statements that were made, with countervailing examples. Had the project extended to its second phase of bringing the 3 groups together, many statements in this report could have been responded to, and where necessary, qualified.

The management of donations

Funds

Participants talked of what might be called unintended consequences of what one participant called 'public generosity'. In discussing this generosity, the conversations moved between the monies donated that were subsequently dispersed through the Victorian Bushfire Appeal Fund (VBAF) and those donations that resulted in large amounts of tangible products dispensed as 'relief', or talked of as 'material aid'.

The critiques focused on different aspects of donations. For some, there was a conundrum associated with the *amount* of money that needed to be managed, and the time frames in which it had to be distributed.

> *To get money out is not consistent with the best outcome for community. Money doesn't ipso facto equal recovery. Money and money for recovery is at the root of lots of problems.*

> *In the first few rounds of VBAF money being doled out – many projects were funded that should not have been funded. There was a race to expend the funds. Enormous pressure to come up with plans. We were bulldozed into plans long before our communities were ready to make systemic choices.*

> *Government time frames were not conducive to community recovery. What is medium term? 5 to 10 years might be medium term – people affected by the disaster will have intergenerational issues.*

> *The amount of philanthropy that is thrown at you should not happen.*

One of the consequences of the size of the pool of money that VBAF was required to administer and dispense, was the extent of the effort and machinery needed to dispense the funds. In the eyes of some,

> *The fund expenditure became more important than community recovery.*

Some participants were very aware of the barriers to decision making as to how the funds were able to be expended, including the legal restriction placed on the dispensing of monies from VBAF, to certain groups.

> *Business people's inability to access income and finance after the disaster was a major impediment to recovery and rebuilding*

Comment has already been made about the existence of informal community economies. These could not be recognised in the distribution of VBAF monies.

For some participants, the problem was more to do with the time frame of the expenditure. In the eyes of one participant,

> *The available resources were often incredibly poorly deployed. There was too much donated money distributed too early. To affect a well-structured recovery, investments have to be over a longer period than 18 months to 2 years.*

Many workshop participants expressed the view that the donation system has left a legacy of distrust.

> *Donations at that scale will probably never happen again.*

> *There is now a mistrust of the major government held and administered relief funds. People are looking for a more direct way of donating and the certainty their gift or investment is going to make a real difference.*

Some participants said they had lobbied for a review of the criteria for grants, and full disclosure of the expenditure of the donated funds..

> *How do you honour and respect Australians who gave all that money. There needs to be an independent review of the expenditure of the Bushfire fund.*

This was thought to be partly in response to what they saw as a mounting concern among community members about the targeting, impact and some of the unintended consequences of this program, including the disinclination of some members of the public to donate in this way.

> *People are looking for a more direct way of donating and the certainty that their gift or investment is going to make a real difference.*

One participant felt VBAF monies could have been apportioned on a community by community basis.

> *Instead of drip feeding, if you tell them how much there is for each community, you can do better planning prioritising. Much of the money that came into communities could have been better spent and invested. Where money sits should not be with Government. Their number one priority is to get re-elected.*

One particularly strong criticism was directed at

> *Local governments independently applying for VBAF Community Recovery Grants for projects without engaging bushfire-impacted communities.*

> *Local Government trying to grab VBAF money … its fundamentally wrong.*

Material goods

A related topic to the management of cash donations, is that of material aid, with participants mirroring the worldwide concerns about issues of large scale material aid post-disasters. There were multiple, and as with many reports of the participant conversations in this report, sometimes conflicting responses to this by community members. One strong theme was the community workload required to respond to the donations.

> *All these donated goods were a distraction that took too many good people out of service.*

For others it was the content of the donated goods.

> *Donors gave what they thought you wanted not what you needed.*

Some had reached the conclusion that

As much as possible disaster impacted communities shouldn't do relief.

Management of relief was also seen to distract attention from matters such as establishing social and economic structures, which were seen by some as infinitely more important than devoting time to sorting through mountains of second hand donated goods .

> *Ultimately our resilience will swing on whether we develop a local economy or not.*

The scope of funding efforts – possibilities and limitations

Some CRC members expressed dissatisfaction about what one participant called the 'State government driven rush to completion'. This person believed more attention could have been given to the extension of the life of temporary structures, decided on within a planned approach. The remoteness of decision making was also discussed.

> *All the key decisions on replacement infrastructure were made remotely using demographic and GPS mapping data. Water supply, power supply there were many options other than just replacement of what was there. These decisions and the decision-making process need to be run and made from our town.*

Some CRC participants were also critical (as were some LGA participants) of what they saw as lack of sustainable planning.

> *We have funding for project construction, but where is the funding for maintenance over a 10, 20, even 100 year cycle? This has never been considered, let alone thought through.*

Planning processes themselves worried many.

> *We had a generations worth, maybe even two generations worth of development in 2.5 years. Some nepotism, some conflict … now we need to get people working with each other again.*

The perpetuation of structural disadvantage

While participants made general comments about the particular needs of some more marginalised community members, it was homeless tenants in particular that was raised as an issue of community concern. Tenants were seen as representing parts of society for whom there is particular structural disadvantage. Relevant to this issue was the understanding that landlords were included in the groups in small businesses who were seen to not fare well in the distribution of resources.

> *The plight of landlords and therefore renters was little talked about. To build back a three bedroom place is most of a half a million dollars .... they can't afford to rebuild, and if they did the resulting rents would be unaffordable.*

> *People had bought a mill house or an old miners cottage, a small country place, a cheap weekender or holiday house. As part of the investment; somewhere to go. To build back in fire zone is going to cost upwards of $500,000. Where do you get the rest. I can't rebuild.*

People with informal renting arrangements got nothing. They were too frightened to tell anybody. There is lots of unapproved housing around St. Andrews and Kinglake.

It was the view of one participant in the CRC conversations that

There are 120 flame zones in the State. The majority would be in lower socio-demographic areas.

Was there anything about the age of landlords? In Kinglake the average age of landlords was over 65. For almost all of them rebuilding was not an option.

Community Recovery Committees set up and experiences

Polarity of experience

There was a breadth of reaction and comment on the experience of being a participant in a CRC. Some reported positive experiences of participation in a CRC, seeing that it enabled them to make a significant contribution and utilise their skills, knowledge and networks. A decided downside however was also discussed and this extended to matters of recognition, empowerment, compensation and remuneration. The emotional polarities associated with the experience are reflected in the following two quotes:

Participating in Community Recovery is the most rewarding work I've done.

Being on the Community Recovery Committee has been the most thankless job and the most intense job I've ever had to do.

Introduction, formation and constitution of CRCs

Some spoke of the CRCs as an imposition. For some communities, they saw themselves as well connected with each other before the fires.

We were operating very well until the CRCs came in. We were told 'you will be a CRC: this is what will happen. If you continue to do it your way – you won't get any funding..... We had a gun to our head.

There is a significance difference between all CRCs. Government wanted to put us all in the one bucket.

Different perspectives: two voices
Participating in Community Recovery is the most rewarding work I've done.
Being on the Community Recovery Committee has been the most thankless job and the most intense job I've ever had to do.

Other accounts differed in relation to the freedom for communities to work with government on a more tailored approach. For some there was room for creating their own structure. Some

groups found a capacity for early collective action, and formed according to their own intentions and wishes.

> *We established an association – discussions with the CEO of Council and CDOs – we are going to do this and want recognition. Appropriate for community to run this. Not sure this was understood fully at Local Government level. Took a while to establish association and incorporate. Had 33 people on constitution drawing committee. It was ours and we were making this happen and we would run our own decision-making and would be our own advocates to government.*
>
> *That decision and time taken to get a constitution – what that did was generate a huge amount of trust. Anyone who wanted to be on it could be on it. Went around and around. Went back to whole community – well attended.*

Others too noted that there were community groups constituted who did not become CRCs[67].

> *Communities have been very creative in how they chose to structure and constitute their community recovery committees.*

One participant reflected that with hindsight, there was some regret that opportunities to 'self-mobilise' were not taken up.

> *Before that the opportunity was there – we didn't put the time in to make the connections to work together as one. We could have achieved so much more.*

One of the many benefits of communities having their own structure, was that it brought the capacity to hold and manage their own funds. Establishing local community trusts or foundations meant some control over resources. For those who took this route, the independence and choice this created was described as being well worth the initial investment of time and energy. One community member elaborated:

> *Money – we received a big donation – a few hundred thousand. Parked it with Bendigo Bank. Money will flow and we need a structure - we set up a Trust Fund and started to park donations into the Trust Fund. Gave us a huge advantage. Able to demonstrate to VBRRA - we had a structure that was handling large amounts of money. We were able to manage our own accounts. Our measure of independence increased because we were financial. Good support from Shire in accepting our existence and independence. Then CD people got progressively better. Eventually we had shire people who understood it was appropriate for community to lead their own recovery.*
>
> *We are an Association - there are some who don't belong. Not many. We are the majority – but there are things Council should do that we shouldn't be used for e.g. – Council to tar a road to a pavilion. Wanted our permission to tar the road. There is a normal Council process – we didn't want to become a de facto Council for our area. We wanted a say, but not in a position of making*

[67] We have already made reference to the work of Greg Ireton, DHS, Victoria, on the history of CRCs. He has identified several community bodies that did not formally call themselves CRCs.

decisions on all of these things that Council would normally make decisions about.

For another participant,

If we knew what we know now we would have set up a Foundation right away in order to receive and hold donated funds.

The ability of the community structure to organise, including to collect and share information, was critical.

Because people joined the association they gave us their contact details – we have an SMS system – we still do that – several times a week. We produced a newsletter.

We were able to contact those people – as well as those who weren't members but forwarded their details. We run a website - all minutes and decisions and we know that that is looked at because people comment. Engagement has dropped off – but when significant things happen people do come out of the woodwork.

It was important to get each of the surviving Community Organisations meeting with one another – this association needs to grow out of what existed – not out of ring-ins. This came to pass. The notion of legitimacy was really fundamental.

Another enabler was seen to be the use of a legitimate external process for CRC elections.

Our election was run through Council as a secret ballot/100 people were there. We used AEC guidelines. Having good solid rules of governance. Discussion – where all the monies are going; audited trails for accounting makes a lot of people's concerns go away.

The above accounts of the different processes used to establish or recognise some community decision making structures provide the context for the wider question as to what room there was for negotiation between government and communities in the face of the disaster in relation to their representative structure. One participant noted that 'the same processes were applied regardless of the size of the community'. Yet how the 'processes' were carved out or received or renegotiated differed across communities, as the above accounts show, differed.

Hurdles encountered in set up and implementation

The range in population sizes of communities was from a pre fire population of greater than 4000 residents in one area, to a community of less than 100 in another.

Scale is such a crucial issue. We need better ways of working with communities where there are large numbers of effected citizens.

Because of our scale our priorities are different from others. We didn't have a community place to meet. There used to be a hall – we lost all our core infrastructure under the government cuts in the 1990's; telephones and all our

other public utilities were removed – centralised. So we put in a community hall and it's opening Saturday. Locals providing work in kind and expertise in community allowed that to happen and happen fast.

One of the problems is getting the right people onto the groups.

We called ourselves Renewal – enabled us to focus on the longer-term stuff – we barely got into relief. Relief puts you in a particular head-space – government, NGOs and others should organise relief so that locals can get on to look forward to other things.

Some participants felt that they would have liked to have more contact with other CRCs, but felt manipulated, believing they were 'kept apart' from one another by 'government agencies'.

I feel government agencies were very successful in their efforts to keep us apart.

Another challenge faced by CRCs was their perception that for some Councillors and some government staff, the participatory nature of the local CRC structure posed a threat to existing power bases.

Several saw the disaster recovery space as endemically a site of competition and conflict – within communities, between communities and between various government and agency bodies, and with political representatives.

This generated considerable frustration. It was seen as taxing on everyone, but particularly on CRC members, and was seen to require considerable patience and negotiating skills. Some participants were critical of politicians who at times did not seem to give enough attention to the need for detail or follow through on some of their statements of support.

Politicians should say encouraging things but not go out and build false expectations among community members.

Strategic alliances

CRC members provided strong examples of responsive and community led actions, leading at times to genuine and successful collaboration and trust with the formal system.

The use of Darley as a meeting place by fire-impacted communities was a great example of working collaboratively across common issues and supporting each other on community-specific issues. The Shire CEO and Recovery Director were invited as were VBRRA staff and State and Federal bureaucrats. The meetings were always driven by the agendas of community recovery committees. We'd meet from 10:00am and get our platform and strategy sorted out together and then we'd invite them in to have lunch and discuss and progress issues with them until 3 or 4. It was all very civilised and it meant that issues got sorted and relationships built. It's been going every month since early 2009.

We made our biggest inroads focusing in on schools. We tried to get the Regional Managers in Education involved. We were meeting once a week. We'll talk to the Principal and get their view. We went in for a half hour chat.

Got ¾ of senior staff in and had a 2.5 hour conversation. Stunned with what they were prepared to share with us – we had no idea what a significant job the teachers were doing to make the school a safe place, supporting families. This school lost 27 students and staff. We couldn't believe it. We need to get help for the school. We pulled together a discussion on this issue with people from the Education sector in the district – we had 45 people turn up. We had principals from most schools, and welfare staff. The only person who said he would be there and didn't turn up was the Head of Region[68].

When you feel you have someone from other agencies that you can work with that makes life so much easier. We were lucky there – if you feel they trust you then you can come at them with something else. Once we had built the right relationship and were managing in a particular way – things become possible.

Some saw reporting to a Local Government as a major turning point in the recovery process.

CRCs were forced to report to Local Government and treated by Local Government as a subcommittee. If you are going to be a subgroup of Council there's really not much point.

Another perspective was seeing a CRC as attending to issues n a 'transitional' framework.

Our role is to do ourselves out of business. If an agency can pick up what we've started we let it go and move onto the next thing or find another gap to fill.

Amidst the variation in how CRCs were constituted, there were also changes to their governance along the way, leading to some loss of independence, and with that, the diminution of community led recovery.

A major turning point in the recovery process was when our CRCs were then forced to become a subcommittee of Local Government.

Some CRCs forged strong links with other disaster communities. They were motivated to

Learn as much as they could from other national and international disasters and in particular from disaster resilient communities.

The challenges of communication

Some participants regarded their communication with their communities as a critical issue, and an issue that was sometimes difficult to demonstrate satisfactory achievement in.

One of our biggest problems and challenges is communication. Communication has been an ongoing issue throughout the recovery. We've gone to great lengths to publish on-line, in community newspapers, on noticeboards and via text messaging.

However there was a finite limit of how much could be achieved through these measures. There was a feeling from some participants that

[68] Name removed

Community members have to take responsibility for their own understanding of what goes on.

CRCs were not the only ones vying for the attention of community members. There were competitors for their attention. Many bodies, organisations, and others made efforts, often not collaboratively with each other, to consult communities. These efforts were sometimes seen as burdensome.

People have certainly had enough of meetings. Every time a new process begins or another project is flagged, or another agency enters the community, more meetings.

All community recovery committees explored the application of information and communication technology to community recovery processes. Reported in this section already were accounts of community members providing contact details to their CRCs, and CRCs using this information from SMSs, and forwarding newsletters.

Other examples of innovative use of communications by communities were discussed. One CRC won an international award conferred in New York for their post-bushfires website[69].

The relentless CRC workload

It is not surprising, although regrettable, that there was such a toll on many community members who became members of CRCs. This personal toll on volunteer representatives was described as

An interminable, exhausting recovery process exacted on community members.

This kind of description was common from the conversations with CRC representatives.

Some described the workload as being in the range of equivalent full time work; for others, more like 80 - 100 hours a week.

People would have no idea [about the] amount of work involved.

Some referred to the lack of monetary value placed on the quality of the work itself (as well as on the hours spent doing it).

Whenever CRC members have to report to government or an agency on an issue or a program, we are passing on information for free that reflects hundreds of hours of collaborative work.

This lack of acknowledgement extended to the amount of work governments generated for CRCs without fully considering either the resources or the competencies necessary to complete the task, or the amount of time people in temporary accommodation and living in recovering communities, might have at their disposal.

Eventually we realised we'd been co-opted, we'd become volunteers for VBRRA.

The preponderance of meetings was a particular and burdensome aspect of the CRC work.

[69] On 28th October 2009, the Flowerdale Community was awarded a Groundswell award by Forrester Research for 'Best use of Social Media for Social Impact'. http://helpflowerdalenow.blogspot.com.au/2009/11/flowerdale-wins-international-award-for.html

> *People have certainly had enough of meetings. Every time a new process begins or another project is flagged, or another agency enters the community, more meetings.*

The interminable meetings were seen by some to rarely offer genuine decision-making opportunities. Instead endless circular conversations were described with no one present having the authority to take action, an endless process of polite, ineffectual information sharing and information gathering exchanges.

> *The bushfire recovery highlights just how dependent government structures and professional bureaucrats are on communities and on community members contributing as volunteers.*

For some there was some (understandable) resentment of those in salaried positions.

> *As locals we get sucked dry in community recovery. We're expected to volunteer all our time, effort, good will and knowledge, so that the others (outsiders) can get paid ... How is it that community work came to be constituted thus? How do you reward the knowledge and the skill and the time and the petrol?*

How it would be otherwise constituted was not clear cut.

The question of remuneration

Discussions about compensation and remuneration were fraught, and exposed many tensions associated with the status of full time volunteer community members. There was some concern that remuneration, (not that this was on offer) could change relationships.

> *Can you remunerate acknowledged community leaders without changing community perceptions (of them) and without changing community dynamics?*

While such statements were not further expanded on in the conversation, one reading of the meaning could be that this particular participant thought the change in community relationships could be too big a price to pay if community leaders in these roles were monetarily rewarded. Others saw that remuneration should be considered, as long as it was done in an open and transparent way.

One participant saw particular roles in which community members could be employed:

> *What if local people were employed as knowledge bridges between local and professional - a real opportunity to have a community economic model. Take us on, utilise our knowledge. Never been an offer of remuneration. The locals do get sucked dry.*

Further comments by CRC participants demonstrated the critical importance of this issue from a community perspective:

Costs me money to be here; costs me in petrol, costs me in phone bills, costs me in lost income. Cost an enormous amount – you do it for the community but eventually enough is enough. No more. Can you do such and such?

Ethics are so important – and this is just patently unfair – we all wore our own costs – being involved in recovery has cost us thousands of dollars.

There comes a point most people say fuck this! My life is on hold! These people live in a society too. Giving them some money delays collapse point. It's extremely irritating that we're not being acknowledged.

What rates do you strike and where do you stop? Yes we would like some acknowledgement – our community does … but not Shire or VBRRA … not the cocktail parties and the badge presentation ceremonies and state government photo opportunities? Spare me. You only ever go because it's the right thing to do.

The need for administrative support

The importance of recognition and resourcing pertained at the community 'group' as well.

Administration support for local groups. Local Government should be acting in the administration support role. Place administrators. Community enablers. Someone to send notification out, to turn up and take and distribute notes.

There was a strong view among many that Local government should be providing administration support for local groups, community development workers, community administrators. If overseen by local committees, such enabling roles could provide the glue that holds things together.

The connection between resourcing and sustainability is a key issue in this next important comment:

They can stay motivated if someone can be there to help share the load.

Community Recovery Committee achievements

There were some CRC representatives who offered advice to governments about shifting the way they manage operations and support and enable disaster-impacted communities.

To be successful, CRCs have to work well across different sectors and with a host of different partners and authorities.

There were many strengths of the CRCs, and it is not surprising that they did not sing their own praises in their conversations for this project. Nor did they have access to the resources to produce their own accounts, unlike the formal bodies involved in recovery. It would be a worthwhile project to further elicit and document CRC achievements.

Recovery committee succession - ongoing community structures

Succession planning was fraught for some.

> *We are going back to being the subcommittee of the Community House. (the way we were before we had the gun to our head). It will be another 2 or 3 years before projects will be completed. Our shire just doesn't have the capacity to do the work.*

> *Our Association has a year to run. There will have to be succession planning. A lot can be handed back to community groups. We are still managing VBRRA funds – we can do that. Sense that it should disappear. If jobs left to do – designed to disappear.*

There was a sense in the next comment about the potential loss of opportunity in the CRCs dissolving.

> *What we have now is the community groups. This could influence significance change in the whole process of governance. With the CRCs we have leadership groups in all these communities that have built a relationship with the government of the day and get a place at the table on key issues. These structures could reduce the distance between the government and the community.*

Several talked of the importance of some ongoing structure or presence:

> *Government have only been in the recovery space for 26 years – before that the community always did it*[70]*. Now communities will have to take on more responsibility again. What sorts of structures would be conducive to that?*

Several participants commented on the importance of conferring appropriate status on and recognition of local communities in the aftermath of a major disaster, beyond that which is normally afforded them under peacetime conditions.

> *In the aftermath of major disasters we need to promote and endorse community leadership.*

While some were clear that Community Development could and should play a role in developing local community based structures, some expressed dissatisfaction with the Community Development resources that were available.

> *I don't want to talk about CDOs. Community Development was not done well.*

Another participant saw this question as a matter of resources, where there was a lack of internal skills in this field, and also a lack of resources with which to attract ongoing and quality staff.

> *Why can't we build a model as a support structure for community? How can we support you to do what you need to do in your locality?*

[70] Again, a contested view of history, although it is important in our view to not allow the extent of community involvement and participation to get overlooked in a social and political climate where claims can be overstated by those with the resources to make their case publicly. We have already noted the absence of documentation of community responses in emergencies.

Emergency Learning, Current and Future Challenges

> *So many situations are to do with issues that are relevant to a 'normal distribution.' This becomes really skewed in an emergency. Only if everything is normal, will the standard approach work. Everything was not normal.*
>
> *Will there be a right response in the disaster? No. But can we assist? Yes.*

The status quo or new beginnings

For one participant, it was inevitable that the disaster would only affirm the paths that the community has already laid down.

> *The way it's tracking now, the end legacy will only be a reflection of what you had before. If you were strong before you'll be stronger, if you were weak before, you'll be weaker.*

More work is required to develop approaches to explore many of the claims made in this report. However the above claim of the strong and converse, requires particular and urgent attention.

Many of the CRC members who participated in workshops and interviews had obviously been profoundly moved and changed by their extraordinary experiences in disaster response and throughout recovery. It was apparent that there was a deep importance attached to leaving a strategic long-term legacy and advocating for and participating in policy and practice change processes.

Some participants were very clear on how community ownership could be better created.

> *There should be a process where local people work through their own charter – with their own values and principles. These processes are critical because they build trust. This is how it will operate. We need a charter of transparency and accountability.*

Recovery reviews – current and future

> *No one is learning the lessons, no one has the responsibility or the authority to incorporate the learning from the impacted communities.*

There was considerable dissatisfaction with what were seen as the review processes to date, in particular the perception that community voice was absent from the reviews[71].

> *It's such a mish-mash no one knows how to organise it. Departments undertake internal reviews, agencies do program reviews – neither have any access to or input from community. No one gets the whole picture.*
>
> *What we always wanted to see was a comprehensive recovery review. We need a systemic rather than ad hoc approach to disaster recovery.*

[71] We have noted on a few other occasions in this report, that at the time of these conversations, the evaluations that had been done, in particular DOH Pychosocial Response (2010) review and DHS VBCMS (2011), may not have been finished, or may not have been known to participants. It is also likely that if they were known about, residents contribution to the VBCMS evaluation would not constitute '*community*' consultation, but rather '*individual resident*' consultation.

We have a new Fire Services Commissioner. We now need a Disaster Recovery Commissioner with wide powers to review recovery programs and frame new policy.

Some saw that

Without such a senior (recovery review) role, things won't change.

There was a preference for a multi stakeholder approach to review.

Evaluations of government's disaster performance were based on internal staff reviews only. There was no access or input from community. This is fundamentally flawed. If you don't get all the stakeholders in the room, all the real hard-won lessons are lost[72].

Dealing with multiple emergencies

Several participants made the link between a natural disaster and the possibility of other threats to community life, such as economic contraction or financial collapse. Many talked of vulnerability to climate change becoming an issue that communities are now broaching.

It is clear that the enormity of these fires was related to climate change. Our first challenge now is limiting climate change to 2 degrees. Sooner or later we need to have discussion about safety and the local environment with the community, but they are not yet ready. It's too politicised.

We're seeing the importance of investing in adaptation initiatives given the climate emergency…and in place based approaches and new initiatives given the climate emergency.

You need to acknowledge you are part of the ecology, not as something separate. We need to control our negative influence on the environment.

The experience of surviving the bushfires and participating in the recovery reinforced for community leaders the importance of being proactive about local preparedness. Comment has already been made from many different angles, about the importance of community leaders and decision makers being networked before disaster strikes[73].

Make sure you and your community leaders know and are well networked and connected to all of the key decision-makers long before any disaster happens.

[72] This comment does not take into account the initiative VBRRA made to bring CRC representatives together that resulted in the document 'CRC Lessons Learned Advice to Government' and 'CRC Lessons Learned Advice to Communities'. [These have been mentioned already in this report]. Participants in the VBRRA's effort in relation to CRC Lessons Learned noted that it had a focus not on participatory policy development but rather on providing advice to the recently flood affected communities. It was the CRC representatives who continuously reinforced the importance of providing advice to governments, a thrust that was said to surprise VBRRA staff. It is also noteworthy that this process involved only one group of stakeholders, where the quote rightly refers to getting all the stakeholders around the table.

[73] There is plenty of evidence about the importance of 'ordinary' community members being connected with each other as a factor in disaster preparedness; the emphasis in these comments is particularly about 'community level decision making', not 'individual/household level'.

Several CRC members reported being more acutely aware now of the importance of investing time and resources in building healthy, functioning communities as a disaster preparedness priority. Perceiving the Emergency Management model as a reactive one, they realised that

> *Community members could be more active in supporting the Emergency Services to be proactive in thinking about prevention and about building community resilience.*

Some were more aware than others of the more proactive community education and community building work that is carried out by some in the Emergency Services. There was a strong desire to contribute more to thinking about preparedness.

> *We are constantly asking: what can we feed from our crises and disasters experience and learning, into household and community preparedness?*

> *Our challenge now is how do you make your local communities robust when faced with unprecedented challenging scenarios.*

One community leader commented on the challenges of preparedness when there was so much more fluidity in the housing market and much less commitment to *place* than there had been in previous generations.

> *With changing demographics will it happen? Will we be better armed? What can we do as a legacy for all people in our communities?*

Some believed that economic crashes will highlight the need for placed based, accessible and viable local economies.

Sustainable support structures for future emergencies

The likelihood of an increase in climate induced emergencies made the topic of insurance salient for participants. Some talked passionately about national disaster insurance.

> *We need to work towards the idea of national (disaster) insurance. It needs to be worked into Federal Disaster and Emergency Management policy.*

Social insurance was clearly identified as a critical element of community and national preparedness.

> *There will be more disasters. There needs to be a permanent pool of money.*

Donor fatigue was cited as one reason alone to pursue more robust disaster insurance measures.

> *Only $12 million was made available to assist after the Victorian floods. This was never going to be enough.*

Some of those interviewed mentioned their participation in the establishment of a national disaster communities peak body organisation: a Disaster Resilient Communities National Body

> *We're in the process of getting up a National Disaster Communities network and organisation led by people who have been through disasters and are*

independent of government. Elements of the network are to include mutual support, education, preparedness, policy change advocacy and research roles.

[It is not to be] part of the formal bureaucracy … but to sit beside it.

Township Protection Planning[74] – a mechanism for 'shared responsibility'?[75]

For CRC participants, Township Protection Plans were of interest. They were seen as a much needed tool that could be employed to more deeply engage community members in not only thinking and action on fire prevention and preparedness, but also more broadly on creating the conditions for community and landscape resiliency.

Initially with the CFA's Township Protection Plan we got 'We've done a plan for you.' Now we're just starting to see them shift. Normally they just tell you what to do. They brief you … but now there is a shift.

For some Township Protection Plans

Represent an opportunity for us to build new structures to negotiate with emergency services and government authorities.

Participants interested in these perspectives were seeing Township Protection Plans as 'mediums', or 'mechanisms' for potential action.

Currently there is no mechanism that enables a town to go forward. No way to state 'this is what is particular about our place, our people'. A community-owned TPP could provide us with a structure we can defend and from which we can argue for our unique characteristics with local and state government and emergency services.

It was clear from CRC participant discussion about government proposals for 'neighbourhood safer places,' that community members had their own ideas and were keen to see governments find ways to resource and support diverse local community safety initiatives.

We don't want a Neighbourhood Safer Place, we want a Defendable Space. We want an enclosure; we know you won't be safe out in the open. We will make it defendable. Fire won't hit it. Government won't like it due to risk liability issues. Government don't want to encourage us, but they know it will happen.

And the need for resourcing communities was again raised:

If government are to push back responsibility to communities then they need to appropriately resource and support communities.

[74] Township Protection Planning is a phrase no longer in use. We have no direct knowledge of how 'Community Information Guides' are developed. However given the standardization of their formats, it is likely to be a less community inclusive process than Township Protection Planning could have been.
[75] The idea of examining 'mechanisms for sharing responsibility', as written about by McLennan and Handmer (2011) is discussed in Section 6.

Other 'protective' mechanisms and processes?

Participants from smaller settlements believed they were 'likely to be left high and dry again'. They were concerned that any local planning that incorporated or depended on state government services and interventions was planning to fail.

> *If it happens again … if it's a big fire … we now know we are on our own. We've learnt that it's up to us. What is our plan? How will we organise ourselves?*
>
> *We'll negotiate with the CFA. If we want to do stuff it's our stuff. We know we won't be able to rely on other agencies. We've been told 'we can't do that' by CFA. But we will. It will be our plan. Our community will have faith in it because we'll develop it together.*
>
> *Don't underestimate a community with passion. Immediately after fire has gone through it is likely people will be trapped. Can't get any help. They figure they are on their own. A mob from Hurstbridge roll up with chainsaws. Another bloke arrives with a grader.*
>
> *Could you train people in operations in a fire ground? Would this be acceptable? The authorities are blinkered. They don't want to know. They are not used to working with anarchists.*
>
> *Is it too ambitious to communicate our preparatory work? We know this will happen again. We know other small communities will not be warned*

Some were thinking very specifically about the minute details of preparedness at the community level.

> *We need an inventory of who has what around the area. Who keeps it up to date? Records of where all the inflammable materials are housed . Who has what equipment to call on? We don't even know who is first aid trained. Our community fire plan should contain all that. Who'll be responsible?….*

There was insight into the protracted nature of 'being prepared' and that it needed constant practice, as evidenced by the following comment.

> *We know we'll need to do it over and over again to maintain momentum. We know priorities shift, stuff will get lost. We need to keep it updated and relevant.*

Another participant added:

> *Evacuations and drills, we need to run them. Those who practice and prepare are the ones more likely to survive disasters.*
>
> *They won't have an understanding of what is and isn't safe until you go through a full-scale drill with them.*

You need to do it over and over and over again. All that planning will get lost if it's not practiced and kept up to date. It must be relevant.

If you work on the 26th floor you take it for granted that you do evacuations, but if you live in a fire-vulnerable community, no one even bothers to ask.

CRC members enthusiastically shared their many ideas for new community initiatives, some of which were already being developed and implemented.

We need to trial new initiatives. What we seriously want to do, we want to do a full evacuation process … get everybody out … put on beer and hot dogs at the local hall. We want to know what will happen if everyone tries to leave at the same time. We need to learn like this.

Several saw the potential for comprehensive community and neighbourhood development strategies and practices in the fire preparedness work.

Each street has a leader or street captain – communication on code red days is not broadcast – it's neighbourhood specific. Yes I'm going. No I'm staying. On front fence post: home – red, gone – green. Let CFA know if you are here or not.

This can be reinforced with social media: Are you home? Yes or No. Instantly you have a list of whether they are or are not at home. Like the idea of using things that are proprietary – Facebook, twitter – out there anyway. Can you use that tool to locate down to your community?

The Bend of Islands community near Kangaroo Ground has established their own Co-op and the Co-op runs their own CFA.

With changing demographics will it happen? Will we be better armed? Increasing communication and awareness. What could we do as a legacy for all people in our communities – a clear source of accurate and timely information?

Long time community leaders were keen to point out the importance of new residents becoming orientated to their new environments, topographies, cultures and climates.

Our challenge is how do you make your local communities robust when faced with the many challenging scenarios we didn't face in previous centuries?

One of the inevitable consequences of new people coming into an area and not bothering to learn the history and heritage of region is they don't understand what is critical, what are the risks and vulnerabilities. They don't understand the fire ecology. In 10-15 years time, who's to say what your next-door neighbour will know.

There was agreement that some of the strategies will need to be 'out of the box.'

We're investigating virtual environments, gaming, and scenarios using PlayStation and X-Box, to get people to understand the many dilemmas, to

practice and experiment and create realistic experiences and scenarios, so they understand their behaviour under times of stress.

Unprecedented conditions and unknown unknowns present communities with new challenges.

How can you prepare for what you can't imagine? We did some planning, but for a scale of disaster that was exceeded. We now know to plan for big, for wildcards.

Community leaders were clear about needing to pay much more attention to the wider risk landscape, to wider climate cycles and the prevailing weather patterns.

An important learning for some was the reality of the limitations of the emergency services in certain circumstances.

If it's a big fire … St Andrews, Warrandyte … this is where response, relief and recovery resources will go. If happens again … if it's a big fire … we know we are on our own. We've learnt it's up to us. What is our plan for us? How will we organise ourselves? If Council or the CFA will help, well good, if not we need to be ready and able to look after one another.

How can you prepare for what you can't imagine? We did plenty of planning, but for a scale of disaster that was exceeded.

Unresolved issues

There were important unresolved issues where community representatives thought they could still make an impact using local community development approaches.

One participant noted of that

One of the characterising features of 'unresolved issues' is that they don't fit neatly into policy pigeon-holes.

One discussion centred on issues of ongoing [then] current problems with Certificates of Occupancy.

Why haven't we got a team out there sorting out Certificates of Occupancy? We could do this, people with smiles on their faces. A crack team to get people over the line.

Getting Certificates of Occupancy continues to be an issue. The insurance companies don't do the proactive stuff to help individuals.

The re-building rate to lock up is only 17.6%. Is there a role around accurate stories of community recovery out there? We think we have to get political.

One participant asked himself

What would a proactive State Government look like?

Another responded

> *They'd have systems already in place to fast-track buybacks in highly fire-vulnerable areas. They'd have rules in place surrounding fire access tracks.*

Redeveloping small businesses, attracting new businesses and stimulating the local economy were the major areas of focus for community leaders in the larger settlements.

> *The laws as they stand make it almost impossible to take a strategic approach to stimulating your local economic recovery.*

Other issues included the need for review of the Privacy legislation.

Section 5 LGA, CSO and CRC Observations and suggestions

> *Changing and clarifying the way responsibility is shared, either generally or for specific conditions, therefore means altering the institutions (e.g. laws, regulations, workplace cultures or social expectations) that prescribe the obligations of the various parties engaged in collective action (McLennan and Handmer, 2012, p.9).*
>
> *Communities have predominantly been seen as targets of agency-led campaigns rather than co-implementers or goal-setters (McLennan and Handmer, 2012).*

Introduction

The above two quotes herald the need for change in institutional arrangements in the Emergency Management sector. Do communities engage with the structures that are 'offered to them' after a disaster, such as the prescribed policy that 'Community Recovery Committees' will be set up after a disaster, as set out in the EMMV, or can they pre-empt that these structures may not make enough room for the roles they wish to take up? Do agencies take up the roles they are offered, or can they use their considerable creativity and strengths and shape their services to more of a community wide approach? How would future local government staff take up and respond to a shift in their roles in the event of another disaster that triggered a centralist control point? We think the conversations in the previous sections (2, 3 and 4) might serve to throw some light on these questions.

In this section we highlight suggested 'positive attitudes', changes or actions that participants either directly commented on, or that we think were implied in their comments. Clearly we have taken some license here with these interpretations. In some cases the ideas represented one person's views, in others, they represented more widely held views. In some instances, the changes were expressed explicitly. In others, we have taken comments and turned what to our way of thinking was implicit, into an explicit view or statement. In the interests of promoting diverse views, we include all views, directly or implicitly expressed, and expressed by a few and also those expressed by many. As one of the key themes in this work is the need for flexible and 'place sensitive' approaches to recovery, some issues may be resonant for some areas, community groups, community service organisations, and local government authorities and not for others. This section is set out in three parts: first some core threads in the conversations with each of the groups, then add a very distilled summary of some common issues across the groups, then finally offering a lengthy account of more detailed comments and perspectives that we have interpreted from the three group conversations. Firstly, core threads in each conversation.

Part 1: Summary of core issues across the 3 conversations

What follows is a distillation of some higher order priorities as reported by the three groups of participants. The longer version of more details ideas is contained in Part 3.

LGA officer priorities

An acknowledgement of, and appropriate levels of resourcing of, Local Government strategic disaster preparedness work and our status as the level of government closest to people and communities and the leader/coordinator of disaster recovery

Recognition of the pervasiveness of a culture of intergovernmental bullying, and an associated ongoing disempowerment of local government; this needs to stop and in its place a set guidelines needs to be co-produced with local governments clearly outlining and committing to our ongoing roles and responsibilities

A desire for more autonomy in setting the direction of community and organisation disaster preparedness as several of the Royal Commission recommendations are contributing to a culture of compliance instead of responsiveness, adaptability and innovation

An acknowledgement of the impact of major disasters and trauma on staff and local government as an organisation, and to have in place strategies to prevent organisational trauma and shock

A need for local government to advocate for ongoing funding for ongoing Community Development positions in local government to support the building of flourishing, dynamic, resilient and creative disaster-ready communities

A desire to see our state government move beyond incremental, instrumental or centralizing changes and take the big leap of faith and invest in transformational shifts in power to local governments and communities

CSO worker priorities

A need for CSOs to develop independent sources of income and become less dependent on government funding in order to be able to deliver more nuanced, responsive place-based programs and services

A need to situate our community services delivery programs within a wider place-based community development framework

A need to extend our practice to include wider social roles such as community process facilitation, conflict resolution, reflective sense/meaning making, alliance building and community engagement

A need to participate in and support the shared process of proactively constituting defensible authorizing environments with disaster vulnerable communities

A need to build our capacity to support local economies, small business development and support, social entrepreneurialism and community economy development

A need to develop and refine our disaster recovery community worker wellbeing and safety policies, procedures and practices and contribute our knowledge and expertise across other domains

CRC member priorities

Emergency management plans are too abstract, lacking local detail and engagement; we need to advocate for resources to support the development of nested household, neighbourhood and community preparedness plans and safety and evacuation drills

A need to establish community-based legal entities capable of constituting authorizing environments and foster participatory and deliberative processes that enable local community decision-making autonomy

A need to collectively prepare for multiple disasters – ecological, economic, social, energy – by taking a ‘whole community’ approach to building/maintaining generalizable community resilience

A need to consider disaster preparedness as a community, public or social good or a shared ‘common’, rather as a private individual or family responsibility

A need to repeatedly advocate that shared responsibility is a good idea, but to enact it will require sharing understanding, sharing commitments, sharing resources and sharing power

A need to call for genuine place-based and community-led disaster preparedness and responses and for professionals and institutions (and their disciplines, targets and programs) to embrace place-based and community development informed knowledge

A need to reinforce that preparedness for major disasters goes beyond the immediate response phase and into what communities increasingly refer to as renewal and regeneration (rather than recovery – which, rightly or wrongly, has been associated with welfare, learned helplessness and dependency)

Part 2: Some priority areas common to all three groups

A desire for greater, rather than less local autonomy and a requirement to define roles and responsibilities across the three areas, plus those areas not represented in the project, and to co-create authorising environments for deliberation and decision-making
To support our state government's role as that of enabling, empowering and resourcing disaster impacted/disaster vulnerable communities, service provider agencies and local governments
For recognition of the negative impacts of the speed of the state government driving community recovery and reconstruction, and advocate for human scale/human pace processes
A shared desire to see system-wide investments to ensure communities are better prepared for future disasters and enabled to take responsibility for leading preparedness planning processes
A desire to see ongoing state government investments in community development workers to facilitate disaster-vulnerable communities preparedness / community resilience planning
A need for all to be more mindful of the negative impact of prolonged exposure to traumatised survivors in disaster communities on volunteers, front-line staff and on whole organisations
To collaborate around investing in securing the community economy, providing training and employment opportunities and enabling socially entrepreneurial approaches to disaster community renewal

Part 3: Detailed observations and suggestions from the three conversations

Observations and suggestions - Local Government Authorities

Preamble:

As we have said a number of times, the diversity between LGAs, and variation in responses between officers in the one LGA, means that not all statements below will reflect the views of all the LGAs and their participant officers in this project. We have accommodated that by making summary statements that 'may' be relevant to some readers, in some LGAs, in some future disaster. As in the other summaries of observations and suggestions, we had in our minds here, that the comments serve as a 'voice' of local government officers, making observations to other officers in a Local Government, pointing to areas of possible shared interest in thinking into the future about Emergency Management concerns. We say 'officers' plural, as some of the comments contradict each other, or at least offer different emphases; diversity in perspective is a requisite in this sort of summary process. The ideas may be of more use to new officers, though we think more experienced

officers might find some of the statements useful for their own reflection on the relevance of statements made to their current work and circumstances.

Wider context

- Appreciating that disaster recovery as currently constituted receives less focus in the Emergency Services spectrum (with attendant fewer resources) than disaster response
- Predicting that unlike other areas of local government responsibility such as home based aged care and road maintenance where recurrent funding is provided and guaranteed, emergency management is likely to continue to be either poorly funded, or funded in a series of un-integrated projects across communities, and that many who hold Emergency Management positions will have other 'non Emergency Management' roles as their primary roles
- Understanding the political, social, emotional context of disasters, which can lead to decision making that could effectively override pre existing planning, relationship building, and efforts toward shared responsibility at all levels
- Expecting that other significant state and federal government departments with roles in post-disaster work may not be as involved as they might like in shared decision-making and partnership initiatives in disaster recovery and reconstruction planning, implementation and evaluation processes
- Helping staff see the wider context of the culture of bullying at all levels of government, and in other sectors, including community
- Expecting and being open to the efforts of helpful staff from various government bodies and being mindful of, whilst not having to accept or like, the structural barriers they experience in their work
- Being alert to the impact on collaborative work of responding to Federal, State and Local Government determined boundaries across the neighbouring settlements and districts impacted by the same fires
- Expecting unprecedented pressure on state government to achieve highly visible 'bricks and mortar' project outcomes in unworkably short timelines, and that this will impact negatively on many involved, including disaster survivors and community leaders; duress thus experienced may increase community and agency vulnerability, and also lead to a disengagement from government led processes
- Re-emphasising the constant need for definition and documentation of respective roles of state and local government, including a commitment relating to how all levels of government will support local government in emergency management and disaster recovery situations
- Acknowledging that there are differing conceptual frameworks and paradigms, and differing approaches to disaster across the disaster continuum, across government, across different disciplines and professional groups, and across different local areas; working toward a clearer articulation of the balances required between centralist and local decision making and implementation
- Reinforcing that it is often the significant 'upstream' higher level structures, processes, laws, regulations, policies, programs and attitudes that impede integrated 'whole of community' strategies on the ground; opportunities could be sought to highlight the need for dialogue at this level, informed by the views of key parties at the 'whole of community' level

- Acknowledging that institutional rigidity and fear, is in part, a consequence of the prevailing globally felt defensive, litigious 'risk' culture; be alert to how this plays out to work against adaptable flexible learning at all levels, and contest this where possible

The importance of relationships

- Working continuously toward shared understanding about the importance of relationships and trust and how trust plays out in relationships between local governments and their state and federal government counterparts

- Celebrating the fact where Council – community relations and relationships have changed for the better, and working to ensure that staff and community behaviours and approaches will continue to reflect this

Should State level authority be required in a disaster

- Pre-empting that if a new State level authority is required in a future large scale disaster, it may bring with it a responsibility hiatus that may lead to confusion and uncertainty over roles, responsibilities and relationships; these dynamics may impact personally and also in work on the ground with communities, and agencies

LGA structures, processes, proximity to community, and disaster tasks and concerns

- Anticipating a lack of recognition of the authority of Local Government in the Emergency Management space, and its maturing capacity, capabilities and place-based planning expertise, as well as its closer relationships with communities that have been brought about through solid ongoing community engagement, community planning and community development work facilitated by trusted council brokers

- Working to make explicit to others, why your organisation has developed and is structured the way it is and how this relates to and responds to the places and communities you encompass, know and serve

- Illuminating your unique place based identity by highlighting the social, educational, economic, infrastructure, cultural and ecological diversity within and between communities and your nearby region, to better equip you to negotiate for a diversified response to authorities targeted to the specifics of your community

- Acknowledging as structural, the significant differences between metropolitan-based suburban–rural interface local government authorities and the more rurally based local government authorities

- Highlighting the challenge posed by geographic disparateness and remoteness on communication with and engagement of isolated communities

- Assisting state government officials appreciate and work with the different cultures and conditions, scales and specialities, and strengths and vulnerabilities

- Highlighting the likelihood of increased administrative burden for Local Government in the management of projects initiated with external resources such as donated monies, as well as the need to know the restrictive criteria where they exist, on the use of public monies, and the psychological burden of being left to 'own' these limitations while communicating them to community

- Expecting that tensions in the administrative system will play out in the implementation of projects, and generate a range of responses including defensiveness on the part of shire officers

- Looking for opportunities to garner resources and financial donations through private donor sources for the opportunity they provide to creatively respond to particular local needs in a timely and effective manner

- Expecting that particular effort will be required to generate data collection management and analysis skills and capability, and that these capabilities are unlikely to form part of project funding

- Reinforcing that coordination and leadership of disaster preparedness and recovery partnerships is among council's most critical strategic work, and its officers have substantial local government and management experience in organising and overseeing community recovery

- Noting that for some the absence of formally constituted arrangements and certainty regarding response authority, recovery leadership and strategic planning oversight may have an upside including opportunities to experiment and learn 'on the go'

- Remembering that planning for recovery arrangements will always be difficult, partly because emergencies are unpredictable and partly because politics are unpredictable, while also recognising that the partnerships and alliances in place before a disaster may be your greatest strengths in responding to the disaster

- Being mindful of the opportunities to reframe matters of material relief post-disaster with sustainable development, particularly in relation to the local economy

- Celebrating where relevant, the increase in organisational profile of organisational development (OD) and community development (CD) as a consequence of Local Government disaster recovery work

- Valuing the important role local government can play in detailing many of the challenges a change in orientation to the 'community' brings, and the time and energy required to initiate even 'light footprint' first steps towards shared ownership of genuinely participatory processes, and building (or rebuilding where it has been damaged) trust and capability for long term engagement and development

- Asserting that sometimes local government can over focus on its structure, its strategic plans, on developing and maintaining good knowledge management and communication systems, grant management systems, at the expense of finding out what community members are experiencing and what they really want and need

- Specifying the need for planning to be place-based and operationalised at the locality, neighbourhood, district and estate level and emphasising that the community plan strengthen, re-endorse and recommit to strategic place-based policy and local area planning and participatory projects

- Accounting for environmental damage such as dead and hazardous trees, denuded roadsides, erosion and flooding as psychological wellbeing issues in addition to their other considerations, and support shire engineers involvement in collaborative place management remediation and preventative works

- While appreciating that the production and reinforcement of vulnerability is complex, inquiring systematically into the actions and interventions that create and reinforce unwanted dependency and vulnerability and the actions and interventions that create and reinforce autonomy and resiliency; then being active in assisting building the evidence base about the efficacy of the interventions that reinforce autonomy and resiliency

- Acknowledging the many positive new initiatives, structures and capacities that have grown out of the unprecedented post-disaster conditions

Staff well-being

- Planning for the possibility that staff will be directly impacted in a major disaster, losing loved ones, friends, homes and properties
- Expecting staff will experience trauma (including vicarious trauma), vulnerability, uncertainty, frustration, anger, anguish, resilience, creativity and joy
- Appreciating that other staff will be significantly impacted indirectly through their work with bereaved and homeless families and traumatised communities
- Readying staff for the distinct possibility of being in a state of protracted high alert for up to a month as dangerous weather conditions and uncontrolled fires continue to threaten settlements
- Ensuring staff are sufficiently ready for redeployment to new and novel roles and assisting them prepare for the enormous backlog of 'business as usual' tasks that will accrue while they are engaged in disaster response and recovery work
- Developing where they don't exist, guidelines for the deployment of staff in post-disaster recovery, including attention to rostering and strictly adhered to limitations on deployment in front line community based work to guard against vicarious trauma and exhaustion
- Factoring in the possibility of intense engagement with some staff working impossibly hard for at least six months after a major disaster and prepare to manage the threat of burn out and exhaustion associated with such engagement
- Ensuring the provision of organisational permission and encouragement for the development of safe spaces and the allocation of time, together with the provision of skilled facilitators, for staff to debrief and reflect individually and together on their experiences, situations and struggles, the impacts of and stressors associated with the work they are engaged in, and their feelings and their learnings
- Bracing your staff, organisation and sector for the social, emotional, and political fall out by having their authority as they see it, called into question in the event of major disaster, and having to contend with wedge politics that further complicate and confuse post-disaster situations, confounding communities and agencies in their attempts to make progress on the ground
- Expecting that in some circumstances, staff experiences will be ones of coercion from all sides, of dealing with feelings of compromise, and being the focus of hostility from community around changes in the wider system that they have to implement but that they may not have devised themselves
- Anticipating that some Local Government officers may experience disrespect and disregard in their roles, and accompanying loss of status, sometimes triggered by intergovernmental relations 'above' them
- Expecting some staff will see conflict and consequences as unintended and others will see them as purposefully divisive strategies; encourage discussion of these often polarised views, while seeking ways to bridge the polarity

- Expecting that Local Government given its place between higher governments and the community, can be seriously compromised in these dynamics, with personal costs to staff, as well as costs to their community work, such as a diminution of trust

- Anticipating that constantly shifting goal posts will be a major stressor for council officers and CRC members, as will dispute over issues prioritised by community, and community resourcing as prioritised under government policy

- Including in all disaster planning an appreciation of the potential for organisational trauma, and what can be achieved proactively to prevent, mitigate and adequately address this level of organisational shock

- Anticipating that those outside your organisation will have great difficulty in understanding the gravity, complexity and immensity of what you and your colleagues have gone through

- Expecting that healing (formal and informal) may be required to rebuild relationships

- Asserting that staff health concerns can be widened to go beyond the traditional programs on offer through human resources teams, and new initiatives, such as the shared creation of staff health and wellbeing plans, be give consideration to and when developed, embedded as a high order organisational development priority

- Acknowledging that one of the stressors in the work is implementing the recommendations of others, for example the Victorian Bushfire Royal Commission, some of whose recommendations have led to a culture of compliance, and its associated array of new organisational systems requirements that will not necessarily translate into safer, more capable and resilient communities.

Regional integration

- Releasing staff to lead and work with neighbouring LGAs across regional emergency management coordination and 'interoperability' projects that reinforce local government-led disaster recovery and enable Councils to draw on staff from across their region when and if intensive support is required in the event of a major disaster

Disadvantage

- Acknowledging the likely trend in disaster decision making toward reinforcing disadvantage

- Appreciating that among the poorest and most socially isolated households, the notion, let alone the practice, of planning, is a foreign one

- Advocating for social justice and social inclusion as a consequence of experiencing first hand how disaster reinforces disadvantage and isolation

- Highlighting ways in which the most vulnerable members of community have not been adequately shielded during the recovery, talking of the negative implications of this, and working toward approaches to lessen this exposure

Community Development

- Acknowledging that the enabling environments for Community Development and Organisational Development, (such as culture, resources etc.) will be stronger in the better resourced councils and these differences will impact on community development aspirations, practices and connectedness to community initiatives

- Anticipating that one of the ways in which communities will create divisions (or have them created for them) will arise from the groupings at a community level between those who

could and those who couldn't participate in the time limited community recovery plan consultation processes

- Acknowledging that the knowledge, skills and values of community development, in theory and in practice, are not prevalent in policy and practice at senior government levels
- Reiterating that in some cases in relation to strengthening communities, it is not the ideas, knowledge, experience, skills and the will that are lacking, it's the resource shortfalls that inhibit giving full effect to Local Governments community partnership and leadership roles, policies and programs
- Imparting how community development officers played critical organisational development and coaching roles to other council officers facing challenging community engagement tasks
- Promoting the degree to which community development is now a much greater focus and priority of Councils and communities and the degree to which community development workers have come to be acknowledged as change makers, facilitators and enablers
- Identifying that new requests for community development assistance from small communities reflects an increase in the awareness of the value of community development
- Embracing the realisation that genuine community development work is of necessity always open and as such will be surprising, stressful, challenging and exhilarating
- Providing opportunities to enable and foster informed community leadership through access to conferences, training and development opportunities that are too often cost-prohibitive for community members, excluding community participation, highlighting the 'structuring out' of community perspectives, and seeking opportunities to change this
- Describing the sense of cynicism experienced by community members where an overuse of superficial (and at times manipulatively targeted) community engagement processes that have lessened the likelihood of mutual generation of community involved and where appropriate, community owned processes and outcomes

Working with CRCs

- Anticipating considerable variation among local governments and within communities in regard to views as to how CRCs are established, recognised, resourced, and worked with
- Expecting that working with CRCs will mean walking a fine line, maintaining a precarious, delicate and dynamic balance and requiring a lot of patience and understanding
- Expecting that there will be conflict on some issues between Council and CRCs, including struggles for legitimacy and certainty over function and authority
- Being open to holding CRC members and their committee structure in high regard, acknowledging that place-based community engagement and community-council partnership action can be well served by such structures
- Being aware of the risk of prolonged and profound confusion regarding changes in 'lines of authority', in who can speak with whom, publicly or covertly, and in the implications of this confusion for decision-making and process and project management
- Appreciating that CRCs may accrue power and influence, with 'oversight' and 'sign off' roles for community projects and unprecedented access to senior ministers and department heads

- Being sensitive to the fact that the onerous process and project timelines imposed on communities through their CRCs when a State authority is involved, will have a disproportionately high impact on ethical and conscientious disaster-impacted CRC members, determined to operate as 'good steward of resources' but vulnerable to exhaustion and disillusionment

- Understanding the likelihood that CRC members' roles may conflict with their own personal and household recovery

- Being willing to question the representative nature of the CRC, and guard against the 'squeakiest wheel' phenomenon

- Appreciating that the CRC chair is likely to be in a position of influence with government and others, and information flows to the CRC and wider community will depend on the chair's willingness to share information

- Anticipating different responses in CRC membership as they engage in a shift in their roles including reactions of loss, and of relief, and recognise a role for Council in celebrating CRC achievements

- Initiating the important and perhaps vexed conversation about the longevity of unpaid and under-resourced disaster impacted community members in leadership positions

- Acknowledging that some council's still have many unresolved questions about the role of CRCs and the ability of affected communities to manage their own resources

- Appreciating that some council's experienced high quality participation and pleasurable learning partnerships with CRCs, particularly in relation to the quality of high level strategic dialogue

Collaborations

- Expecting and actively promoting a context for re-establishing mutually respectful relationships and bridge building across all across all levels of government, between disciplines, agencies and all key parties including community

- Stating clearly that councils and the resident communities in their areas, are well placed to respond to disaster recovery *if* there is a strong history of enduring community engagement and community development work and established trust between senior staff and community leaders, and that the priority should always be utilising and enhancing existing local networks first

- Realising recovery from major disasters is too big for any one 'body', one team, one department or organisation, highlighting the need to build and nourish larger or more strategic networks and collaborations will in turn, integrate recovery into Emergency Management overall

- Encouraging Local Government managers to seek role clarity and detail from the non-government (community services) sector, on whom community and local government rely, and provide opportunities for review of these commitments on a regular basis; this may reduce the likelihood that some agencies will opportunistically take up funding without longer term commitments to communities

- Advocating for a review of National Disaster Funding arrangements and where necessary, seek to mitigate any negative impact they may have, or have the potential for, at the local government level

- Embracing where possible the new opportunities for 'joined up' ways of working, for new relationships and new partnerships and new alliances, for formal agreements and memoranda of understanding to be drawn up, and for the development of new planning tools and frameworks and collaboration platforms at many levels

- Acknowledging and validating the rich place-based community dynamics and cultural learning that can be fostered and engaged with through collaborative structures and mechanisms

The limitations of framing

- Acknowledging that constant effort is required to articulate the nature of the psycho social emotional tasks in recovery and their particular application to how work at all levels gets done, and seeking ways to formally integrate these with the more recognisable technical skills in the 'concreteness' of recovery; recognising too the limitations of the language available to us to articulate these domains, when we know there are those who straddle both well in a balanced way

Media

- Recognise the power of the media and the individual decisions required in each council area as to whether resources are expended to be involved in the media in a proactive way

- Understanding that local governments have insufficient media and public relations resources and networks to cut through, shape opinion and be heard on the many important issues that attract unprecedented state and national interest and as a consequence local governments will be less able to influence the media than state government

- Recognising that misleading reporting will also impact on the community as poorly informed or misinformed media stories can undermine structures and relationships and lead to a loss of faith in leadership, leaving local government to 'mop up' messes

- Highlighting to the media and the public, that over exposure of disaster survivors and the attendant loss of privacy this brings, can be debilitating

Interacting with community dynamics

- Expecting, enjoying, and benefitting from the close relationships with impacted communities and their leaders, in developing disaster responses

- Affirming the importance of communities telling their stories of community group emergence, revitalisation and innovation that grew out of disaster recovery, and offering assistance to these task where possible

Community awareness regarding Emergency Management

- Acknowledging the reality that many community members and others including CSOs just did not know about emergency management plans or the wider context of local, state and federal government mandated disaster response and recovery cooperation agreements

- Acknowledging that the experience of the fires demonstrated that in some areas, there was not extensive community interest in, understanding of, or commitment to Council and community plans, and that local government resources to address this will be required

- Appreciating that while most citizens are responsive during or after a crisis, that for many community members, disaster preparedness is not a high priority; tensions will result from different degrees of personal responsibility taken by community members and their differential expectations of council staff

Insights for preparedness – mainstreaming Emergency Management

- Articulating how February 09 fires shows the significant investments and work still to be done to improve preparedness for large-scale disasters
- Reinforcing the need to integrate emergency management into all position descriptions, policy, Local Government plans, strategic frameworks, and business planning processes
- Progressing 'normal business' towards increasing its adaptive capacity and accommodating unpredictability, uncertainty and insecurity
- Reinforcing the need for emergency management and disaster recovery policy and strategy buy-in by senior management, the CEO and elected Councillors

Recovery review and learnings – barriers, opportunities, advocacy and limits

- Noting that during and in the aftermath of a major disaster, organisational and individual reasons will be offered as to the reduced likelihood of some objective analysis of what is really required and possible; challenge this where you can, and search for people who can help with methods – e.g. action learning
- Contributing to the call for more formalised service and program planning, delivery and evaluation, using, or where they don't exist, advocating for, more shared decision-making structures between state and local government and contracted service provider agencies at all stages of involvement of post-disaster work, including phasing down
- Advocating for commitments to service and program delivery timeframes and resources commensurate with evidence-based understandings of the recovery requirements of individuals, families and communities impacted by major disasters
- Knowing that narrow recovery review processes, particularly those organisations or programs who hold 'internal only' reviews can breed cynicism, in excluding broader stakeholder feedback and learning
- Celebrating the success and the learning that emerged after the February 09 fires, from the informal buddy system that paired small disaster-impaired LGAs with larger unaffected LGAs
- Finding ways of sharing your Local Government perspectives and understandings brought about by certain initiatives, and how they create diversions of interests, resources, and good will from genuine community capacity building
- Appreciating that the unique opportunity created by the unprecedented conditions associated with Black Saturday could be the catalyst for overdue and lasting change, while recognising the likelihood that a widely based recovery review is unlikely
- Promoting the notion that LGAs have a responsibility particularly to the sector, to inquire into and share the knowledge, experiences and innovations derived from experience with a major (or even minor) disaster and that there is enthusiasm for finding opportunities for disseminating this learning, with support from MAV and LGVA
- Celebrating the 'joy of working together' and explore how this most meaningful opportunity and productive experience might be able to be built into everyday ongoing practices
- Acknowledging that not all staff and organisations will have had positive experiences and that disasters can create oppressive work environments, as relentless workloads can obviate against any systemic reflection, learning and change

- Requesting advocacy campaign leadership support from the MAV and the VLGA in order to secure the developmental resources needed to establish new emergency management and community resilience roles, ways of working and partnerships

- Articulating that there are still reports of community members coming forward for assistance for the first time

- Reinforcing at every occasion that a 'long haul' perspective is needed, as recovery is a long process and people and community's own experiences shape their responses requiring LGAs to bring awareness, empathy, flexibility and adaptive capacity to each issue and encounter

- Restating that Councils and communities realise there is still an enormous amount of community recovery and community resilience work to be done and that this work will not progress without funded community development positions

- Finding the personal and organisational courage to be frank and transparent about hard truths, especially the realisation that local governments physically can't do everything, and that there are real limits on LGAs ability to act independently toward the level of change required of a 'paradigm shift' in Emergency Management

- Appreciating that 'shared responsibility' for Emergency Management requires systemic shifts of the sort that are transformative in terms of shifts in power, and are required at all levels and across all domains, across community as well as government and other institutions; look also for, and value, incremental shifts

- Questioning phrases such as 'shared responsibility' by contributing to a dialogue about its meaning at multiple levels, by asking what legally, institutionally, formally, informally, is required to invoke, enact, join with relevant others, and establish and sustain cultures of responsibility sharing across all sectors.

Observations and suggestions - Community Service Organisations

Introduction

We have set out the ideas arising in the CSO discussions in following broad areas:

- The importance of prior knowledge of community
- Chaotic and challenging environments – management and practice implications
- Agency autonomy and interrelatedness
- Agency focus
- community development as a special practice approach
- Volunteer activity
- 'Emergency Management' - the need to understand its dimensions

Again, as with the all sections of this section of the report, we have adopted an approach for this section, which intends that the comments below be read as if it was a group of CSO staff talking to another group of CSO staff, as to some things they might like to consider in planning for their involvement in disaster work.

The importance of prior knowledge of community

- Acknowledging that the information and experience an agency has through its work of knowing certain things about different parts of community are valuable assets in a disaster
- Finding ways to share your community knowledge using processes that strengthen community capacity to respond
- Developing locally sensitive means of finding out more about a community if the agency doesn't have that prior knowledge, using sensitive but effective community engagement processes such as: action learning circles, participatory action research, deliberative democratic processes, rapid rural appraisal, and local data including narratives
- Expecting that community will often be first responders in relation to immediate relief and recovery matters, respecting that, and offering support as required
- Noting that local government amalgamations haven't provided universal benefits to all communities, and the losses of human and community scale and associated deep local knowledge and relationships, bring new costs
- Being prepared for difference in local government capacities, in terms of policy development, staffing resources, community engagement strategies and processes, and emergency management resources
- Always noting the importance of historical experiences and contextual issues, i.e., not just focusing on the most recent trauma, when assessing and working with disaster-impacted clients, families and communities
- Appreciating that some home and community based businesses may fall below the radar of understood local business profiles, and while they often play a role in generating social capital as well, they can be invisible otherwise and hence their losses in a disaster can be overlooked

Chaotic and challenging environments – management and practice implications

- Acknowledging that nothing is simple, that everything has a context and is connected and that contexts can be complicated, complex and / or chaotic
- Anticipating that post-disaster environments will pose many challenges for service delivery staff and program managers and that the work will be difficult, complex, confronting, challenging, perplexing, exhausting, constant, complicated, novel and rewarding
- Having the presence of mind to commit to slow, deep engagement, when everything around you seems urgent; take your time, provide or access a safe place to work from, and really focus in on the person right in front of you, be present for them, listening to and working well with one person at a time
- Acknowledging the importance of casual and non direct means of relating, to the development of longer term trusting and therapeutic relations
- Acknowledging that prior or redrawn contractual relationships with government may lessen an agency's ability to explore community dynamics at the level required, and to advocate on systemic and structural gaps in service responses
- Being creative in using what contractual flexibility can be found, in responding to community need
- Finding ways to access independent streams of income so that more locally relevant, responsive broad based support can be offered at the community level
- Acknowledging that the way some reporting frameworks are structured screen out critical information about broad community needs, and seeking ways to mitigate this
- Recognising the strengths community service organisations bring with their often advanced and well practiced strategies for staff support, and sharing this knowledge with community members where such partnerships can be developed
- Being prepared for the importance of early acts/decisions/responses post-disaster, as these often frame future capacity in terms of community safety and community economic development
- Being ready to share knowledge and resources with community and to advocate along with communities for the resources, time, budgets and training needed by community recovery-renewal leadership groups to enact a community-led disaster recovery
- Finding creative ways of working with community cynicism, particularly around the often experienced community response to consultation efforts that leave little time or offer few resources for engaged participation
- Taking up opportunities, and where they don't exist, creating them, to increase interagency communication and collaboration in order to share information and understanding, provide mutual support, conduct debriefing and professional development and plan and deliver a coordinated offering to disaster survivors
- Given the inherently competitive nature of the service system, develop attitudes and practices that increase interagency trust, and support those managers, staff, and volunteers who are gifted at being proactive at the agency boundary, who build networks, form alliances and broker partnerships

- Acknowledging there will always be conflict over power and priorities (people, homes, businesses, safety, public infrastructure, community development and the environment) in a disaster's aftermath; contribute to the development of systems that address conflict resolution

- Giving due consideration to the mix of staffing strategies that recognise the need for experience, for staff who can engage in self-care, for management structures that are supportive and responsive, and utilise a mix of staff development practices

- Recognising the risks for staff who are at the edge of their competence when working on complex issues in chaotic environments and where there is a likelihood of impacting their feelings of self-worth, and risking burnout

- Ensuring the organisational culture is enabling and supportive, with clear lines of authority, explicit and facilitative grievance and conflict resolution mechanisms, encouragement of the right to feel safe and say no where needed, as well as encouragement for staff to take responsibility to work on their own self-understanding, work/life balance, and self-care

- Reinforcing that cooperation and collaboration needs strong relationships, shared understandings and shared commitments; and that these factors are dependent on the allocation of sufficient time, energy and resources, the development of mutual trust, good faith, accountability, and an orientation to the importance of relationships as the context and vehicle for carrying out the work cooperatively and collaboratively

- Recognising that it is these strong relationships with other workers within one's own agency and in other agencies that are the vehicle often for the work to be carried out cooperatively and collaboratively

- Noting that collaboration is underpinned by effective relationships at all levels of the organisation, from the board level to the front line worker

- Recognising the prevalence of the negative impact on inter-agency programming, of the competitive service environment, and the means through which this competition is brought about (including grant timelines and selection criteria)

- Being cognisant of the costs (being overlooked, or ridiculed) if you take a stance against the prevailing pressures that you feel decrease your capacity for community responsiveness and inter agency collaboration

- Understanding that a key task for staff will be to make meaning of their experiences, and finding ways to facilitate this

- Cultivating awareness of the 'dark side' of post-disaster work, in particular, the potential for the contraction of one's identity, of 'becoming' the disaster, or becoming a disaster chaser, or over-identification with heroic or selfless roles, of becoming afflicted by the randomness and anomie associated with survivor guilt, of reflecting the crisis and level of arousal and hyper-vigilance of the impacted people staff are working with, and the risks of re-living and reinforcing community emotion

- Remembering that clerical and administrative staff may also be impacted by their work in disaster-impacted communities and that they should be offered the same supports and supervision opportunities as their professional peers

- Considering situating agency service delivery and program development within the context of a community development practice framework and advocating to funding providers for

recognition of this development in funding agreements, to ensure resources are available for ongoing community development processes

- Acknowledging that for many government and agency workers and managers community development can be confronting and disruptive, given its premise that barriers to the way systems can work against communities require challenge

- Being aware of the dynamic of 'co-option' – that well meaning agencies can capture and co-opt the community, thereby diverting local community priorities; the converse can occur also, where communities capture certain community engagement processes, prescribed by the formal system, limiting other community input, ownership and participation

- Being open to examining the impact on community capability of the tensions in centralist systems and locally based systems, particularly in terms of community leadership, and also the tensions between the collectivist oriented practices of community development on the one hand, and the interventions that are focused at the individual level on the other, particularly those where the professional orientation at the individual level may discourage autonomy

- Designing service programming that gives weight to the importance of clear information on available services

- Designing services that provide choice and place a high value on 'place based' services in safe community settings or in home settings, so as to reflect community diversity and the range of presenting needs

Agency autonomy and interrelatedness

- Being mindful that while unfunded agencies and unfunded programs are often able to be innovative and offer sensitive responsiveness, they can also be vulnerable politically as their legitimacy, validity, veracity and effectiveness can be called into question in regional and central authority structures

- Being mindful that a change of government may bring with it likely negative impacts on stable collaborative relationships; there can be a diminution of communication and trust, and an increasing sense of uncertainty among service providers on the ground regarding strategic directions, ongoing funding and program continuity

- Walking a balanced line between the degree of formality in establishing and maintaining relationships, where in terms of making agreements, verbal agreements are likely to be adequate for a period, but these will need further articulation as time goes on; being mindful of a tendency to over formalise these agreements that can result in diminished freedom and flexibility.

- Noting that the external service and political environment can encourage an organisational persona of 'professional knowing' that serves as a defence against 'not knowing', and can impact on open questioning and developing learning processes within and between agencies, communities and government

- Making the case for the importance of data, methods of data collection, processes for the appropriate sharing of data; accessing and making 'local', the already existing demographic and population health data, community indicators and service delivery statistics, so as to develop (or have available in the event of a disaster) richer pictures of the (impacted) population's context, conditions, culture, health status, socio-economic dynamics and wellbeing/resilience determinants

- Arguing for the development of this more system-wide level data, to inform strategic information and direction setting, and noting that the current weight of data collection is in the mode of basic clinical encounter and other service provision data that, while important for some types of review where it dominates, excludes the generation of the wider picture, which is essential for assessing desired outcomes at the community level

- Noting that several imperatives will require service closure, and that sometimes in these processes rationales are used (for example that needs have been addressed) that contradict the international disaster recovery evidence base regarding long-term impact of individual and collective trauma and loss and the need for ongoing support, services, programs, infrastructure and community development

- Preparing staff for the possibility that some will feel compromised in their relationships with citizens and communities (and themselves) when arguments used for service closures clash with their professional knowledge and ethical understandings

- Expecting that the impact of service delivery withdrawals are likely to be felt most acutely in communities, districts and settlement where there has been a history of remote service providers, difficulties in accessing regional service systems, long standing under servicing, or no direct service delivery availability

- Using service providers more nuanced understanding of the complex psychodynamics around the understanding of and use of the term 'dependency' by community, agency staff, bureaucrats and politicians, encourage public discussion of these nuances, using contextual knowledge of communities, with a view to discouraging the word becoming a loaded term, a political tool, and a means for inducing binary thinking; more sophisticated dialogue on this may decrease the sway its uncritical use has over key service delivery and support provision decisions

- Believing that increasing effort in this hard conceptual work (dimensions of dependency) can lead to enhanced understandings of dependence, which in turn can lead to further appreciation of the ideas of interdependence and independence. One such benefit is a possible increase in understandings of the connection between the threat of dependence and exaggerated stoicism. Such insights may contribute to how vulnerability of certain people is increased, including barriers for them in asking for assistance

- Recognising that there are links between issues of local control and autonomy and those of 'dependency', and that the provision of opportunities for autonomous decision making may be more likely to create the conditions that foster a healthy interdependency at the individual, household, community, organisational and government level

Agency focus

- Acknowledging the burden for many in disaster impacted communities in managing insurance matters, handling large sums of money, managing builders and buildings, and generally working their way through the maze of additional steps toward recovery will necessitate particular and targeted support

- Recognising that there may be opportunities for social agencies to increase their focus on the needs of small businesses by enhancing skills in local economy literacy, general financial literacy, small business management, social enterprise skills, budgeting and investment advice, advocacy for job related training, and supporting local employment in disaster response work

- Embracing other new and broader roles including community appraisal, community mapping and visioning, community issue advocacy, community leadership legitimation, general

capacity and capability building, conflict resolution, community healing and restorative justice, negotiation and mediation, systems navigation, interpretation and process influencing, alliance building and partnership brokerage

- Acknowledging that changes to agency direction and service mix often require organisational development and structural change, requiring leadership from senior management and board members and the commensurate investment or redeployment of resources and / or the creation of new revenue streams

Community development as a special practice approach

- Reaffirming that without the educational, institutional, and structural support including adequate resourcing, community development as a discipline, and a practice, is vulnerable and can be too easily marginalised

- Acknowledging that community development practice may mean working on the cultivation of patience and the ability to sit with paradox and contingencies and issues and proposed directions that may not, in the first instance at least, cohere

- Appreciating that community development practice requires time, time to develop a thorough understanding of the issues and opportunities, to identify the key people involved, to acknowledge history and culture, to honour and develop relationships, and that this may be at odds with the prevailing 'just do it' 'rush' 'short term-oriented' culture of community recovery

- Knowing that community development can be challenging and uncomfortable, given often the requirement to 'change frames' of the way we perceive things; we are required to review issues of race, class, gender, identity and so forth

- Understanding that community development practice methods that necessitate open participation may not gel with quantitative measurement and other measures of efficiency used in formal, particularly government, institutions

- Appreciating the important roles community service organisations can play, including creating and holding spaces (particularly ones embedded in place based spaces) for genuinely participatory and deliberative processes and operating as facilitators and intermediaries between communities and government

- Using agency skills, or developing them where they may not exist, to facilitate community dialogue, as well as supporting participatory action research that can generate community owned and validated data

- Developing methods for community participation in agency priority setting and processes, to the desired end of co-designed and co-produced programming

- Knowing that fostering, supporting, creating and enabling caring holding spaces, rituals and events that endure and provide opportunities for shared validation of people's experience and loss will be a significant and vital contribution

- Reminding yourself that the wider community, and community engagement and community development strategies, processes and projects in particular, can act as a pathway or doorway to more traditional clinical services for many citizens

- Reiterating that stepping into genuine long term community development, community partnership and community advocacy roles is a significant opportunity requiring considerable courage and an ongoing commitment

Volunteer activity

- Appreciating the overwhelming generosity and good intentions of volunteers, while being cognisant of the need for protocols for volunteer engagement, registration, coordination and management to be given specific consideration and detailed treatment within local Council Emergency Management Plans
- Acknowledging there are key roles for agencies and community organisations in administering and governing new emergency volunteers and new welfare groups
- Noting that such coordinated oversight and management should ideally apply to the engagement of all church-based, civic and corporate organisation volunteers
- Acknowledging that while these circumstances may be rare, community members have reported unethical behaviour by predatory volunteers, which have resulted in police intervention; other matters to be mindful of are being aware of the risk of disillusionment that unmet promises can cause
- Acknowledging that pre planned structures and procedures for appraising new welfare groups coming in to disaster-impacted communities are important, including mechanisms where required to remove unwanted activity; where these don't exist, or community is not supported in these dilemmas, an unwanted burden can fall on disaster impacted individuals or community groups
- Recognising that welfare agency and community volunteer activities is sometimes seen as impacting negatively on local small business and community economy; more sophisticated means for understanding these dynamics, assessing them, and intervening where necessary, are required

'Emergency Management' – the need to understand its dimensions

- Developing early, if the agency is not so equipped, a good working knowledge of the current formal Emergency Management arrangements (organisations, policies, procedures) that are in place, as one strategy of understanding what formal authority exists; this understanding may be a prerequisite for further effective involvement
- Carrying out an early analytical exercise as to where decisions are being taken, and where authority vacuums exist at times of heightened uncertainty, and where roles are most likely to come into conflict with each other
- Coming to terms with the frustration and tension of decision-making under initial conditions of great uncertainty and chaos, the pervasiveness of conflicting role expectations, and difficulty in clarifying and constituting disaster recovery roles and responsibilities
- Where possible to advocate for and contribute to the establishment of clearly understood and supported common authorising environments, deliberative processes and participatory decision-making mechanisms
- Contributing to the creation of and ongoing support of locally based means/frameworks/structures/processes that facilitate dialogue between key parties in the recovery space

- Recognise, as others in senior government and other roles have done publicly[76], that support for governance arrangements closer to the ground will threaten established institutional arrangements and may be met with resistance
- Developing robust intra and interagency capacities to monitor the fast moving environment, and being particularly mindful of the ever present instances where voluntary community labour is coopted for institutional purposes, which may not be in keeping with community goals
- Expecting that there will be enormous political, media and community pressure to be seen to just get things done and that this will likely overshadow curiosity about what exactly is unfolding and systemic thinking about what might be the best responses or interventions
- Planning for uncertainty regarding paid positions, services and program funding, the instability this may bring, and the impact on forward planning
- Looking for opportunities to identify, and where appropriate strengthen opportunities to link with pre-existing service system and community development networks such as primary care partnerships and alliances, local government public health planning committees, local government emergency management committees, police community safety committees, primary and secondary school cluster networks, early childhood and preschool provider networks, aged care networks and senior citizens clubs, disability and carer support groups and place-based community development networks and community leadership programs
- Increasing agency sophistication in identifying and making meaning from the very different ways of knowing, doing and interacting that parties bring to the recovery space
- Developing the capacity with and between agencies to identify and respond to experiential learning, as the key mode of learning in a fast moving recovery environment
- Developing ways to feed this learning back to government, particularly where there can be a focus on whole of community

[76] Examples are provided in Section 6

Observations and suggestions - Community Recovery Committees

Introduction

Community members who were participants in the CRC conversations in this project, made several observations around actions or approaches community representatives did, or can, or might consider taking in thinking about future preparedness for disaster, and actions and approaches that can be taken in the event of a disaster. In some cases the ideas set out below represented one person's views, in others, they represented more widely held views. In some instances, the changes were expressed explicitly. In others, we have taken what we think are implicit views on changes and made them explicit. In the interests of promoting diverse views, we include all views, directly or implicitly expressed, and expressed by a few and also those expressed by many. Readers may find some comments or ideas more useful than others. Some issues have already been named in Section 4, and there will therefore be repetition in summary form below in some cases. As in the approach used in 'Observations and Suggestions' from the other 2 groups, the 'voice' here is that of a 'community person talking with another community person'.

Local community building

- Engaging in activities, adopting views and approaches that strengthen pre-existing relationships and commitments to community disaster preparedness and resilience with your community services organisations, local government authority, emergency services organisations, core infrastructure and services provider and state government regional office
- Joining in where it exists, and where it doesn't, initiating greater local citizen and community group engagement and practical project partnerships with local emergency services organisations such as the CFA, SES, Ambulance Victoria and Victoria Police
- Finding out what your local emergency management plans comprise, who the key stakeholders are who developed these, and look for opportunities to contribute. Where these planning processes including meeting environments are not 'community friendly', or culturally appropriate, seek to change these
- Initiating and participating in shared planning and preparedness forums and collaborative alliances
- Participating in the creation of comprehensive household, neighbourhood and community fire plans that respond to a variety of conditions
- Participating in comprehensive community evacuation exercises, disaster preparedness workshops and fire safety drills, as well as facilitating the emergence of novel ways to approach preparedness, including through the use of games
- Assuming many new residents will have no experience living in bushfire prone areas, and advocate for fire safety education in new residents kits and online and face to face educative resources
- Collaboratively establish community profiles and community narratives that reinforce local identity and enhance participation and social connectedness
- Developing platforms clearly stating community strengths and disadvantage, and articulating aspirations and future visions and directions
- Cooperatively establishing local community groups and organisations willingness to promote local autonomy, self-authorisation, self-organisation and direct action

- Forming community organisations that are legal entities and have decision-making autonomy, to enable appropriate governance structures that could coordinate community reconstruction-recovery-renewal-resilience outcomes, hold funds, generate income, enable discretionary local investment, thus allowing for negotiation with formal authorities, decreasing dependency on distant decision makers, and increasing the likelihood of locally tailored community led and informed decisions

- Instigating new 'left field' partnerships with organisations that bring skills and knowledge essential to infrastructure betterment and community regeneration

- Designing and participating in community leadership development programs and provide supported opportunities for citizens to step into leadership roles

- Clarifying the understanding that citizens and communities will typically be the first responders during and after disasters and reinforce the self-determination, capacity, capability and responsibility of local people, groups and organisations

- Developing defensible positions regarding your community's expectations of disaster response, recovery, reconstruction and renewal plans and processes

- Demonstrating solidarity around your community preparedness and response objectives and priorities as difficult conversations with government will ensue, as will centralised, attempts to impose order

Widen understandings of formal organisations and systems

- Advocating for clearer delineations of authority and responsibilities by agencies and government departments across state and local government boundaries

- Highlighting where the divisions between government and administrative boundaries and natural local communities and broader social networks exist, and where these might impact on emergency planning processes; making yourself available for conversations and negotiations about what mutual adjustments to Emergency Management planning processes are necessary

- Initiating annual forums for strategic collaboration with community service agencies, health and welfare provider organisations and government departments

- Negotiating for broader community engagement with planning processes such as 'Township Protection'

- Highlighting the necessity to secure and strengthen the community economy as part of natural disaster preparedness

- Engaging in collective action to encourage broader community involvement in and ultimately ownership of Neighbourhood Safer Places and extend this concept to Neighbourhood Defensible Spaces, potentially incorporating all of the requirements for actively sheltering safely

- Joining community advocacy campaign for a National Disaster Insurance Scheme

Knowledge building

- Fostering shared understanding of wider risk landscapes, risk climate patterns, and extreme weather events to better inform the relative degree of risk faced in any given year and an overall understanding of seasonal climate patterns

- Anticipating multiple disasters/crises across ecological, economic and energy domains, e.g. climate disruption and natural disasters, economic contraction and financial collapse, fuel price inflation and interruptions to supply

Supporting the strengthening of Local Government

- Advocating for rural local government authorities to be sufficiently resourced to ensure they can comply with all of their statutory responsibilities

In the event of a disaster: Allowing for and expecting, community initiated responses

- Always expecting and encouraging local people and groups to step up and self-organise after a disaster

- Co-creating where it does not exist, a community-endorsed self-authorising environment and attendant deliberation and decision-making processes to enable longer term strategic community renewal and regeneration

- Reinforce with the insight now gained through experience, that the critical decisions a community makes or that are made 'on behalf of community', in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, will very likely frame and set the tone for the long period of disaster recovery

- Seeking the institution of a few basic first order principles to inform disaster decision-making, e.g. acting in the common or public good rather than responding to the many pervasive and strong systemic pulls; the avoidance of the threat of legal liability is one example of many such pulls that guide the actions particularly of government

The case for humility, empathy, and openness to others

- Being humble, knowing that a major disaster will significantly disrupt your community's prevailing conditions and dynamics, and encouraging community members that their most important attribute will be an openness to learning

- While recognising that good people in formal roles operate under extreme conditions, including short political time frames and an often unconstructive but powerful media, develop good relations with those in formal roles whose values and principles align with your own

- Contacting disaster-impacted communities and disaster survivors, as their on-ground practical experiential learning and advice will be valuable; be open to assistance from those in (organisational) support roles whose trust you can gain

- Forming closer relationships with adjoining communities and consolidating these into strategic partnerships in order to increase advocacy leverage on shared issues and to decrease the likelihood of being wedged by government and others

Be ready to show resistance; and being proactive

- Practising resistance, as authorities will be driven to institute critical decisions that might already have been made in the various Manuals and Plans that exist, or might be made on the run by professional outsiders, often with little if any contextual local knowledge

- Detailing what, to your community, are the fundamental requirements for a community-led response-reconstruction-recovery-renewal and being prepared to argue for and support this

- Arguing for the autonomy of your community renewal-resilience organisation

- Defending your shared right to community self-determination based on nuanced understandings of local history, culture and preferred engagement processes
- Resisting government and organisational requests to attend your initial group establishment and response priorities meetings, as this private time and space is critical to developing your organisations understanding, relationships, structures and setting your objectives
- Lobbying government to ensure community-led recovery receives the resources required for its implementation e.g. a decision making governance structure, office and meeting space, administration stipends to cover transport and communication costs, and give consideration to requesting and negotiating wages for committee/ leadership group members
- Building in a 'temporary' disaster community renewal-resilience organisation succession process, including engagement with community service organisations willing and able to take on responsibility for overseeing ongoing projects and continuing to advocate on unresolved issues

Being aware of the importance of data sets

- Compiling a comprehensive database including address and contact details for those community members willing to participate, as engagement with community members will be critical to your entities legitimacy, and networks will be imperative for communication and consultation purposes

Recognising the latent or manifest power and influence and also special needs within groups

- Bringing together surviving community groups and organisations to exchange information and participate in shared planning and actions
- Focusing on the long-term renewal-resilience of your community and, where possible, try to avoid getting caught up in relief; having the welfare orientation associated with relief can become incompatible with developmental objectives
- Recognising the importance of welfare relief for many in the community and find ways to support the efforts of those who deliver it
- Be mindful of business interests in relation to the provision of material relief, and find ways to monitor for any unintended consequences of such relief
- Anticipating a significant increase in those requiring public income support, and people living below the poverty line throughout the disaster recovery and reconstruction period

Be prepared for the long haul

- Understanding that initial reconstruction-recovery-renewal-resilience processes will take at least 5 years to complete (and that the impacts of disaster will be felt long after this period); ensure there are opportunities for committee/leadership group member rotation as member 'burn out' will be an ongoing risk

Expect heightened emotion, conflict and hardship

- Anticipating heightened emotions, passionate engagement and robust arguments within your community and with every other player operating in the space
- Consider finding resources that would be accepted by different stakeholders, to assist with conflict resolution

- Understanding that any unresolved political issues and divisions within your community are likely to be exacerbated during the disaster aftermath

Being open to likely unanticipated role demands, and threats, of community practice

- Understanding involvement in a community reconstruction-recovery-renewal-resilience leadership group/committee will be both fascinating and rewarding and thankless and exhausting
- Being open to the fact that some extraordinary planned and unanticipated outcomes will be achieved through your community recovery-renewal-resilience organisations and groups
- Being aware that at least some resilience-renewal leadership group/committee members have in the past worked up to 100 hours per week for the best part of at least the first two years; consider these demands in the light of your own health and self- care
- Understanding the expectation that in some cases community members attend and participate in public meetings where no conclusions are reached, no decisions made and no actions taken
- Coming to terms with the reality that the community recovery-reconstruction-renewal-resilience process will always take longer than initially anticipated
- Expecting citizens will experience many challenges rebuilding lost infrastructure, given the volume of building, changes to bushfire attack level building standards legislation and regulation, changes to planning and bushfire management overlays and the significant increases in the cost of compliance
- Understanding that advocacy and assistance will be required to achieve certificate of occupancy, as many households will struggle to meet all of the criteria and to afford additional works to satisfy building regulations
- Advocating for individual cases in response to new building and development restrictions, in particular bushfire management overlays and flame zones
- Realising the possible threat, depending on the scale of the disaster, that the overwhelming majority of new jobs associated with disaster recovery and reconstruction may go to those from outside your community

Being aware of the importance of scale

- Selecting wisely the scale of the community you want your resilience-renewal leadership group/committee to advocate for and represent, knowing that smaller scale place-based groups are better able to serve local populations

Channels of communication

- Establishing multi-media communication systems and local social networks to optimise the dissemination of local information, ideas, messages and stories
- Mapping with clarity all access, egress and transit routes and community and regional hubs, from which planning, resources, and services can be provided
- Fostering closer ties with local, regional and state media outlets to ensure coverage of local perspectives on disaster vulnerability, resilience, preparedness and response

- Building community media capability and publish community information and narratives through multiple channels - online, social media, newspapers, newsletters, mail, radio, noticeboards, messaging and word of mouth

Recognising gaps between aspirations and possible realities

- Expecting to operate in an environment where at best authority is ambiguous, at worst absent
- Expecting your local emergency services crews to be deployed elsewhere in the event of a major disaster
- Understanding that Federal and State government (and in some instances Local Government) will struggle to see, understand, acknowledge and partner with community; establish your own community sense-making tools to track and report on community conditions and dynamics, and be collaborative where opportunities exist around generating meaningful data
- Outlining the case for the centrality of place-based cultural, social, economic and environmental local knowledge and be diligent in advocating for its importance alongside, professional and institutional knowledge systems; expect knowledge systems to collide, and be ready with conflict management processes to assist with working through differences; recognise that current systems are heavily weighted against 'place based' processes and structures
- Expecting 'push back' when you are proposing integrated, preventative or holistic place-based or region-wide whole of population projects to government departments
- Recognising that place-centred approaches, such as place-shaping, place-management and place-making may be antithetical to the issue specific and target population group focus of many government programs and agency professionals
- Proactively setting the agenda, as government, despite the existence of community oriented policies, and the progressive orientation of some of its officers, will continue to work in the silos or 'pillars' of recovery projects, in which holistic roles, approaches and visions are constrained
- Foreseeing that home-based and shop-front small businesses that survive the disaster will be vulnerable to competition from new government and welfare services and may be required to persevere with inadequate external support and investment
- Acknowledging it will be very difficult to negotiate compensation and assistance for either rental tenants or landlords given the prevailing assumptions of private home ownership
- Expecting that it may be unlikely that government and welfare agencies will recognise the critical sustenance role for individuals and families played by the unrecorded and unreported economy, the informal cash economy, the non-monetary barter and gift economy, and the illicit economy
- Expecting that your resilience-renewal leadership group/committee will be faced with threats of co-option from authorities and agencies
- Actively negotiating with organisations for enabling institutional responses that support community leadership from all participants, authorities and agencies

Arguing for review

- Advocating for a comprehensive Bushfire Recovery Review that is stakeholder-inclusive, deliberative and oriented towards policy and practice changes
- Advocating for a Disaster Recovery Commissioner with wide powers to review program and investments and frame and implement policies and practices
- Advocating for legislative changes so that there are not barriers to the distribution of any public monies to the rebuilding of whole communities
- Requesting a critical review of State and Commonwealth Privacy legislation that was seen to operate often as a defence against action or collaboration, impacting negatively on recovery
- Contributing to the development of a Disaster Resilient Communities national and state peak bodies that will lobby for policy changes, encourage community-based research, assist with community preparedness, and sharing innovative community-led disaster recovery-reconstruction-renewal practices for adoption or adaptation through community-to-community networks

Section 6: Wider system tensions

Introduction

In this section we move beyond the reporting of the three groups of participants, and through the use of wider literature, including policy documents and research and other studies, to show the resonance of the themes in these conversations, with those from other parts of the Emergency Management system, as well as with other areas of scholarship.

The first section is entitled 'absent voices'. These significant voices were not part of our study design[77]. They have been drawn from secondary published sources that address themes relevant to this report. The 'absent voices' amplify the case for closer attention to locality as the necessary missing piece in policy and practice in Emergency Management. They affirm the structural tensions in different parts of the emergency management system. It's not that these tensions are unexpected, or necessarily 'abnormal' – to the contrary. It's that they occlude what we are trying to see more clearly: the place of 'community' in Emergency Management.

Two particular groups referred to in 'absent voices' are Emergency Services volunteers, and State Government policy makers and administrators, and those reporting to them, such as the Auditor General, as to their perceptions of the scope, roles and tasks undertaken in recovery.

Absent voices

Emergency Service volunteers

Regarding the Emergency Services, and in particular those operating at a volunteer level, we can only say we have immense regard for those who turn out regularly, and in events such as the 2009 bushfires risk their lives for their communities, and who will continue to do so.

It is not our place here to revisit the forensic analysis of the decision making in relation to community level (located in particular geographic locations away from the central command centre) aspects of the 2009 fires, in particular, in relation to warnings. There are several accounts of these matters already available in the public domain[78].

We understand that CFA staff and volunteers were advised not to speak publicly about Black Saturday or its direct aftermath. The direct experiences of CFA brigade volunteers and SES volunteers have been difficult to elicit in any public accounts, although known to us to a limited extent through local contacts. However, we can make some of our own deductions from public accounts of the disaster response in general: accounts that talked of extreme tensions between the 'centralist' command centre, and more local incident command centres that were closer to the fires; jurisdictional battles between those command centres; the reports of urging by some volunteers for warnings to be issued, when they as volunteers were not formally authorised to do so; the paucity of key resources such as computers, printers and faxes in local centres; disagreements over the threat of triggering community 'flight' when it was known how close the fires were to certain communities (see Manne, 2009). To think of 'community members' holding these tensions, being part of the

[77] We recognise that looking for perspectives in other reports is not ideal, as these voices will have already been filtered by others for different purposes.
[78] Various sections of the VBRC reports (2009), Manne (2009), Franklin (2010)

'organisational milieu' that was so severely criticised at the VBRC, being actors in the chaos that ensued, unable in their eyes to protect their communities, and even more so themselves and their own families and homes, and then being asked not to talk about these issues publicly, can only be considered as a breeding ground for harmful personal, family and community effects and impacts.

To this mix is added the social/cultural milieu in which emergency service volunteering is often portrayed, and experienced. Weiss, Zara, and Parkinson (2013) have provided a very good overview of the literature of elements of this milieu in their work entitled Men, Masculinity, Disaster: A Literature Review. They refer to the strong associations with heroism, typically masculine, traits fueled by the media (citing Ainsworth et al, 2013); and the militarised culture (citing Tyler and Fairbrother, 2013b). They cite Desmond (2008) who makes important points about the myths surrounding fire fighting, myths that make invisible the reality of their lives, myths that in Desmond's eyes, can have a dehumanising effect. The heightened senses of masculinity proved to be an occupational hazard for emergency services volunteers seeking treatment or counseling in the aftermath of Black Saturday. Described in the literature as double jeopardy (Kahn, 2003)[79], the masculine ideal is impossible to meet, but nonetheless attainment is expected, by males themselves, and by the social institutions they frequent.

Women's Health Goulburn North East staff (see Zara and Parkinson, 2013) picked up some of these threads in their interviews with CFA and SES volunteers cited in their report entitled: 'Men on Black Saturday: Risks and Opportunities for Change'. The accounts offered by the men highlight central dilemmas for volunteering in the Emergency Services, and highlight some of the gaps between 'ordinary community members' and those who volunteer in these roles. Some point to the no-win scenarios where fire fighters were damned if you do, damned if you don't. Male volunteers particularly talked of the difficulties of admitting 'weakness' such as PTSD or depression or anxiety. Volunteer fire fighters reported fearing their futures could be limited by perceptions that they hadn't coped, and reported they had to 'suck it up and act like a man' (p.38)[80]. Approaches to coping such as substance abuse and social isolation were deleterious to their personal health and too often exacerbated the problems they sought to remedy. The first hand descriptions reinforced the extent of suffering, and the sheer incommensurability[81] of the threat of the firestorm and the resources volunteer firefighters had at their disposal.

> *At other times, the men's own lives were at risk, and fearing death, their actions were halted by urgent calls to say goodbye to loved ones (p 7).*
>
> *Recriminations led to anger and violence. Blame was leveled at the DSE, with allegations of insufficient fuel reduction burning contributing to the intensity of the fires. The CFA was criticised for not being in 'everyone's backyard' (p.37).*
>
> *Criticism was leveled at individual members of the CFA, for example, for prioritising their own family's safety and leaving early, or protecting their own property (p 37).*
>
> *I've had some stand-up, not arguments but discussions where people were angry. 'These fire brigade people ... They just sat in the oval'. I said, 'Look, they're not superheroes, they just happen to be wearing orange overalls, doesn't make them any different. They're just as scared as you.' Ironically, other men were criticised for putting their own families at risk if they did go on the fire trucks. Decisions*

[79] Kahn (2010) cites Addis & Mahalik, 2003, p. 59.
[80] See p. 46, Zara & Parkinson, 2013, for interviewees accounts of other organisational barriers experienced by some when counselling was offered
[81] Having no common basis, measure, or standard of comparison;

had to be made about fighting the fire on the home front or with the CFA. Recriminations from these decisions persist even four years later.

With SES events we're always in control of the situation, but with what happened to me I wasn't in control. And that was probably the hardest thing I've had to deal with – that I had no control over what was happening to me (p 31).

Where does the above material 'belong', in this report on a community lens on emergency management and community safety? The 'response' phase *as a phase* has a 'practical' beginning and end, i.e., is more specifically time limited, and the key actors are those from the Emergency Services[82]. But when one places these roles of 'local volunteer' into a community context, the impact of these community members (emergency services volunteers) making a commitment to serve in this way, rightfully belongs as a key consideration when picturing a place-based, community-centred picture at the heart of emergency management.

Sewell's (2013) work is important – she is both an emergency services volunteer (Victorian) and like many volunteers, is involved in several ways in local community and community safety issues. In her 2013 study of resilient emergency services groups, she describes the strong motivation of emergency service volunteers to protect their 'home' areas, and that this relates to their sense of identity (p 16). She continues:

Engaging with community does have direct and beneficial flow on effects that support our resilience as groups from accessing sources of social capital, the mitigation of risk through education, access to much needed donations and the emotional value of having our efforts appreciated by community members (p. 22).

Sewell elaborates from her findings, on the detrimental impact where community relations are strained.

Community groups who engaged well with emergency services were a vital source of resilience for some of the above-mentioned reasons but those community groups who did not engage well were a direct source of distress on the group and a detriment to groups' desire and willingness to engage. In turn, fuelling us v them mentalities that felt isolated, unappreciated and unsupported. This is of particular concern for groups who live, work and volunteer in those areas as this sense of being undervalued helped to isolate members from their own sources of social connectivity ..... Finding acceptable boundaries around what the community can reasonably expect from emergency service groups would help to give guidance to community groups and emergency service groups, and help to give a more balanced influence on the effects communities can have on us (p. 25).

It is clear from insights such as Sewell offers here, how central emergency services well being and relationships are at the local level, for both the sheer importance of volunteer well being as a stand alone matter, as well as its relatedness to *community* well being from a community safety point of view. How past experiences endure at a community level, what can and can't be talked about at this level, while these may remain submerged concerns, they are nonetheless critical ones when thinking of identifying and strengthening community capacity, using a community wide, place based lens. We think that talking of Emergency Services volunteers like this also gives weight to the glimpses offered particularly in Section 4 from CRC members, of the importance of community members being aware

[82] Here we do not have time to refer to the literature on the significant community (not emergency services) roles in the response phase.

of Emergency Services and what is being done on their behalf, and suggesting a greater involvement of ordinary community members with these services.

Other government services

The Auditor General (2010) in his review of the recovery work carried out by the Department of Human Services, noted some of the tensions that arose in post-bushfire debriefs and multi agency focus groups conducted for the purposes of his review. One reported tension was that

> *future recovery planning at state and regional levels needs to consider ways of providing service equity while also supporting the recovery principle of devolved responsibility (emphasis added p.25)*

Another tension noted by the Auditor General (2010) was the

> *many barriers to fostering shared ownership of recovery with partner agencies.*

One of the tensions was in the area of planning. It was noted that that the Emergency Management Branch developed the State Emergency Recovery Operational Plans, designed to provide practical guidance on applying the arrangements. The Auditor General points out that practical guidance was not provided, and that the regional plans lacked detail about roles and responsibilities of regional stakeholders. The Auditor General noted that even where partner agencies formed part of regional plans (which he noted were seen to *'belong'* to the Department), that partner agencies only had access to the regional plans *'by request'*.

It is interesting to note that the focus of the Auditor General's critique was on central office, its regions and *'partner agencies'*. '*Community*' as an entity was not talked of in this report, except for the endorsement of the language of '*community driven*'. The tasks of engaging *'community'* in these Emergency Recovery Operational Plans was again not *'in frame'*. If there was disengagement between regional and central offices (our experience would mirror the comments of the Auditor General in this regard), it stands to reason that these disconnects would flow into relations with partner agencies closer to the fire footprint (particularly given the contractual relations between central office and community service agencies that we have spoken of in this report) and would also flow ('down') into impacts at the community level.

The Auditor General notes the new additions to the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria, the *'tier 3 emergency'* event triggering a ***State*** level authority and oversight (compared with or instead of the regional and local government level). This explicit new inclusion in EMMV is seen as a means to prevent the disconnects that are now taken now for granted as having happened in the 2009 fires between the various levels of state government authority. We have no insight as to how the EMMV changes recorded in the Manual, are expected to prevent such disconnects, or whether planning is occurring at the local level in relation to preventing these disconnects.

The report notes the unpreparedness for the size of the (2009) event, and noted that

> *regions were not prepared to work with a central authority, i.e., VBRRA, in a state-level event. There were tensions between regions wanting local autonomy and flexibility, and the need to provide statewide equity in service delivery.*

The Auditor notes that those Local Government Authorities with less recovery experience appreciated more centralised authority, but those with more experience, experienced disempowerment and disbelief that the centralist approach would meet local need (p.25). The Victorian Floods Review Interim Report (2011) also noted the variation in Local Government capacity particularly for large scale and protracted events (p. 20-21). The Green Paper (Toward a More

Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria[83]) talks of the mismatch between responsibilities placed on Local Government and their capacity and also what their communities expect, and recommended a review of the staffing model for municipal council emergency management functions.

The Auditor General (2010) also noted that *'lessons learned'* from events were not routinely engaged in by the Department, and that this hampered improvement (p.9).

In a future catastrophic event, such as Black Saturday, if this brought into existence another VBRRA, how the State authorities would deal with the role and responsibility tensions at the State level, while seeking to also enact 'community led' principles, remains an open question. Post the February 2009 fires, it is easy to see the multiplicity of conflicting tensions raised by participants in this project, as barriers to achieving a 'community led' focus.

Regional Australia Institute in their report (2013) on the central role of the local economy in the long term (post-disaster) community recovery, described the role of business as misunderstood and under attended to after disasters. They focus their recommendations on the need to give *greater attention to local renewal and adaptation* to the post-disaster environment, a *greater understanding of* the *local economic issues* that increase population displacement, a *greater engagement of local communities* leveraging knowledge, expertise and community-level institutional capacity. This report holds that these issues cannot be attended to in the absence of *'more detailed, comprehensive and locally contextualised planning'* (Regional Australia Institute, p.2; emphasis added).

There are some clear statements in the Bushfire Royal Commission Implementation Monitor's Report (BRCIMR) of a more general nature, about a dynamic in the 'system'. Chapter 4 of the BRCIM report states:

> *There was a prevailing sense that local communities had been disempowered by the State within the emergency management framework (p.225)[84].*

VBRRA's own documentation also provides some insight from a government perspective.

Looking at their account of the means through which the community was consulted during the recovery period after the 2009 fires, being the development of Community Recovery Plans, one can see a clash or mismatch in policy (which was to be open to, if not accepting the leadership of community input) and practice (the reality of the state government drivers and time frames within which community were expected to respond).

A key mechanism for communities to be involved was through the VBRRA devised 'guide to completing your Community Recovery Plan' in May 2009 [85] This document noted:

> *While various governments and agencies are of course able to develop such a plan for their areas ... it is important that communities themselves have an opportunity to discuss, consider and put forward their thoughts and plans for recovery.*

Further into the plan the following question is put to the community group filling out their area's plan:

> *When do we need to submit our plan? ... Soon! We need communities to submit a Community Recovery Plan by the end of June 2009. For some of you this is*

[83] http://www.dpc.vic.gov.au/index.php/featured/reforming-victorias-crisis-and-emergency-management-framework/green-paper-introduction
[84] http://www.bushfiresmonitor.vic.gov.au/resources/92862206-8eee-481c-b877-11f1fdc6062e/bushfiresroyalcommissionchapter4.pdf
[85] Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority. Community Recovery Plans. A guide to completing your Community Recovery Plan. May 2009

achievable and for others, this will be difficult in the circumstances. It is important that you at least submit a first version of your plan by this time – we will of course come back to you for more detail as you progress.

It is hardly any wonder that CRCs and LGAs reported the stresses of these procedural dilemmas in the terms they did in Sections 2 and 4[86]. In the document entitled Community Engagement. Lessons Learnt from VBRRAs Approach: March 2011, reference is made to the position VBRRA adopted as community advocate, but that suffered the (now) obvious barriers to developing this relationship and role, due to

limited resources both within VBRRA and across government that VBRRA could draw on to develop and implement its strategy (p. 26).

and the fact that its community engagement coordinators weren't on the ground until 6 months after the fires, which

created difficulties in gaining the trust of the community.

Reference is also made in the report to the absence of staff with community development practice experience or a place based focus that created a

sense of disconnection and mistrust of VBRRA amongst the community (p.26).

One could say – at the very least, through the mobilising of CRCs, that VBRRA acknowledged and supported constituting the community in this way. Such a (community) structure doesn't formally exist in other phases of Emergency Management policy. This is not to suggest that 'new structures' are always what is needed. Other fire impacted regions and local government authorities have used pre-existing structures as avenues for community input and decision-making, such as the resilience committee set up by Alpine Shire in response to the drought and that was still in existence when the 2009 bushfires occurred[8788].

Our point in highlighting both *'behind the scenes'* tensions, and explicit ones, is to provide affirmation for many of the insights offered by participants in our study, and also to draw attention to the background dynamics into which the *'community led recovery'* principle was placed. We believe the tensions outlined above in reports such as the Auditor Generals (2010) mirrored what was experienced daily in the field, and reported through the conversations in this report: issues of lack of clarity of roles and responsibilities, tensions between different government and non government stakeholders, frustration and clashes due to the absence of agreed upon formal decision making processes and ongoing difficulties in finding ways to collaborate effectively when working with what was admittedly thousands of traumatised community members.

In our view, all these formal institutional factors and the relational and power dynamics, as well as the community dynamics, need to be named, inquired into, explored, responded to, understood; they are all important aspects of the recovery context (and the wider Emergency Management

[86] Clarke (2009) refers to 'fantasy documents' – meaning contingency plans that 'rest on unrealistic, over-optimistic assumptions'
[87] Whittlesea 'Futures Now' was functioning for a considerable period before the fire. It is our understanding that there were similar influences in the background to the Nillumbik Bushfire Social Health and Community Alliance, an area that had a strong history of Primary Care Partnerships and other relationships across different agencies and community groups. These relationships preceded, and may have formed the basis for the development of the Nillumbik Bushfire Social Health and Community Alliance.
88 Reference was made in the CRC conversations in Section 4, to meetings at Darley, between CRC members and senior government officials. This was one example of how disasters provide platforms for non-traditional relations and new partnerships. The Darley Group, a global thoroughbred horse breeding operation with a base in Seymour made a substantial contribution to the recovery process by providing a monthly venue for community recovery committees particularly from Murrindindi Shire (Flowerdale, Kinglake Ranges and Marysville Triangle) to meet and progress advocacy, strategy and projects with senior staff from VBRRA, DHS, RDV and Local Government. The meetings (catered for the Darley group) ensured that the community recovery committees advocated together on shared and specific issues and were able to negotiate strategic infrastructure, program and project outcomes for their communities. These meetings ran for approximately 18 months.

environment) that need greater amplification and transparency. Without the ability of those in formal roles to share aspects of these realities in which they work, opportunities will be lost for gaining mutual trust and respect, and for all parties to '*mutually adjust'* their key tasks. Without this mutual trust, respect and adjustment, realistic plans and programs cannot be devised, and appropriate roles and relationships for those involved, including community members, cannot be clearly articulated and resourced in any fair way. [8990]

Next, we look at the policy context of 'community led recovery' and ask: is the community really centre stage? What follows is a brief overview, and points to some of the different meanings attached to the idea of 'community-led recovery'.

The policy and research context - Community-led recovery

We will only briefly here set out aspects of the policy and research context in which *'community'*, and the locality or *'place'* in which people live, are considered to have, at least in writing, a core focus and role in thinking about resilience and hazards.

Natural hazards, by nature, define themselves in 'place' terms. Individuals, families, groups, communities, businesses, services, including government and non-government, inhabit and interact in those places.

'Community' is central in Commonwealth policy. This is clearly stated in the high level Council of Australian Government's strategic document The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (NSDR, COAG 2011), developed by the National Emergency Management Committee and adopted by COAG on 13 February 2011[91]. The NSDR holds that

> *disaster resilience is a shared responsibility for individuals, households, businesses and communities, as well as for governments.*

The Commonwealth, through the Attorney General's Department, has developed a framework for community engagement in relation to multi hazard events (Commonwealth of Australia, 2013).

Of the eight National Principles of Disaster Recovery, two are *'being community focused'* and *'using community led approaches'*.

In the document, the National Principles of Disaster Recovery, the following is stated:

> *Coordination of recovery from emergencies is complex, as it needs to be community-driven and cover immediate relief, early recovery and long-term recovery. A holistic recovery should meet the challenges in the social, built, natural and economic environments. This requires coordination of all levels of*

[89] Goode et al (2011) in their review of recent Government disaster inquiries, with a focus on identifying common themes to assist in the identification of potential strategies for enhancing resilience, found the theme of 'community communication and empowerment' to focus at the individual level, with little attention to structural community mechanisms for collaborative relations with emergency management systems. They concluded that 'more attention needs to be given to ways of enabling communities to be empowered, rather than investing in further government led initiatives (see 3.2.4 of the report). Where Goode et al did talk about 'supporting local action', the references they found in their search through recent inquiries, were in relation to highlighting the importance of the recruitment and support of volunteers in relation to bushfire response. Goode et al note that the lack of guidance in the reports in relation to *local disaster planning* 'implies that this is not seen as a critical need more broadly' (p.38-39).

[90] The work of Pava (1986) on 'mutual adjustment' within the context of a socio technical (ST) systems approach to devising work tasks and roles is instructive.

[91] http://www.em.gov.au/Publications/Program%20publications/Pages/NationalStrategyforDisasterResilience.aspx]

government, affected communities, the private sector, and non-profit organisations' (emphasis added)[92].

Community is central in the State level policies. Emergency management government policy now explicitly uses the phrase *'shared responsibility'*: in this notion, *'community'* is a *'key stakeholder'* with whom responsibility (for community safety) is shared. 'Community' is central to the OFSC (2013) (Victorian) Bushfire Safety Policy Framework[93].

Part 4 of the State Emergency Relief and Recovery Plan, in its introduction, in relation to *'affected community involvement'*, says the following:

Ownership and direction by affected communities is pivotal in:

- *the development of relief and recovery plans*
- *identifying and establishing strategies to assist the most vulnerable, and*
- *designing, implementing and evaluating recovery activities*

We note the advice offered by Hawe (2009) to the Victorian State Government in the aftermath of the Black Saturday firestorm – to involve community in all aspects of decision making[94]. We note Norris et al (2008) on the critical components in building collective resilience:

To build collective resilience, communities must reduce risk and resource inequities, engage local people in mitigation, create organisational linkages, boost and protect social supports, and plan for not having a plan, which requires flexibility, decision making skills, and trusted sources of information that function in the face of unknowns (p.27).

While not stating as the policy does that community has a *central* role, the VBRC (Teague, McLeod and Pascoe, 2010) more conservatively note that

individuals and communities also play an important part in contributing to community safety during bushfires, but they need support from the State and from municipal councils (Vol. 2, p. 352)

With the plethora of above policy references across different national and state documents, one might expect to see more tangible and operationalised examples of government public- community partnerships, of policy co-development, co-design, co-implementation and co-evaluation around 'placed based', 'community led' and 'community central' ideas.

In the White Paper on Victorian Emergency Management Reform (2012), we note the current and impending changes in Emergency Management structural arrangements in Victoria, include the setting up of Emergency Management Victoria, the State Crisis and Resilience Council, and its three standing subcommittees: risk and resilience, capability and response, and recovery. While again, community is 'centre stage'[95], there is little in the White Paper that addresses the fundamental change required in order to really 'resource' and 'engage' communities that in our terms means a full engagement in the structural terms of principles such as subsidiarity – with its underpinning of devolved local ownership and decision making autonomy on agreed matters, and solidarity – with its underpinnings of a commitment to working together, mutually and collaboratively, to promote the

[92] citing the Community and Disability Services Ministers' Advisory Council, National Principles of Disaster Recovery, Australian Government, 2008, p.36.
[93] Eg: 'Government and agencies participate in and support community-driven initiatives to undertake their own bushfire preparation, planning and response' (excerpt: Figure 1, p.9)
[94] See Hawe, 2009, p. 133
[95] One of three principles is community: 'Community: Emergency management founded on community participation, resilience and shared responsibility'

common good and the full flourishing of each and every person and community[96]. There are no doubt glimpses of issues of where the 'rubber hits the road' on local Emergency Management matters in the 93 submissions received for the Green Paper that preceded the White Paper[97].

What we have historically seen has been the consumption of available resources at the government and authority policy, committee, administrative and wider structural level[98], at the expense of the local community level.

References are made to the idea of subsidiarity by those inside government as well as those arguing from within the community and from a community development perspective. In an account of the RMIT/Bushfire CRC 'Shared Responsibility Project', a participant in one of the seminars in the project asks the question of whether subsidiarity is a consideration when thinking about Emergency Management policy. Mark Duckworth, Executive Director, Citizenship and Resilience in the Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPC) in Victoria, replied:

> *Localism/subsidiarity is central to the whole thing. [It] underpins much of what is in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience and subsidiarity was discussed in depth during the drafting[99].*

The idea of *'subsidiarity'* as a principle has been cited as a guiding idea for place stewardship based and community development based governance mechanisms. The subsidiarity principle states that

> *the higher levels of government should only perform functions that cannot be effectively and efficiently undertaken by lower levels of government [or community governance]....[it] might involve a [constitutional] provision ... that, unless amended by a referendum, decision making and administration should be delegated to the most local practical level* (Lowell, 2006, p. 5) [100].

While heartening to hear it endorsed by a senior public servant, as we have noted in this report, there are few, if any, tangible incarnations of its core ideas[101].

One attempt at operationalising of the idea of 'community led' processes at least in recovery could be seen as the presence of Community Recovery Committees (CRCs). CRCs form part of the EMMV regardless of the *'tier level'* of the disaster. If CRCs are the mechanism in the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV) for the recovery phase of emergency management, the critiques, of their establishment and implementation, offered in this report, point to the gaps between *the policy rhetoric* and *the lived reality* of its application. CRCs are also considered (in

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[96] One wonders how many individuals and organisations are familiar with the legislation that was introduced into the Victorian Parliament in September 2013, and that is expected to be progressively implemented by September 2014, legislation that includes the establishment of Emergency Management Victoria 'as the overarching body for the coordination of all aspects of emergency management including preparedness, response, relief and recovery' (Fire Recovery Unit, 2014, p 7)

[97] Of the 93 submissions, 10 were confidential, raising questions of what we might learn to understand what sorts of issues were not able to be raised more publicly.

[98] The White Paper (2012) notes that the Floods Review identified more than 40 emergency management committees, subcommittees and working groups established at state level. The review noted this has resulted in a 'complex configuration of working groups and committees intended to assure the readiness and appropriateness of the State's emergency management arrangements.'(Cited on p.15 of the White Paper; from the Final Report of the Review of the 2010-11 Flood Warnings and Response, 2011, p.118)

[99] See Sharing Responsibility, Final Report: http://www.bushfirecrc.com/sites/default/files/sharingresponsibilityfinal_report.pdf p.157.

[100] Goodman, Boulet and Healy (2007) discuss subsidiarity further in "Community responses to bushfires: the role and nature of systems of primary sociality', published in New Community Quarterly.

[101] It has also been strongly endorsed by Wilkins, (2010) in his role as Secretary, Attorney General's Department, in his 2009 address to the AFAC/Bushfire CRC 2009 conference, where he states that '*It is a key principle in discussions about federalism that decision making should be devolved to the most local level possible; or, conversely, decision making should only be centralised where it is necessary to do so. This is known as the Principle of Subsidiarity*' p. 4.

EMMV terms at least) *'temporary'* structures, brought into being and sent out of existence according to government policy.

But we note – CRCs as described in EMMV, are considered to be relevant to the recovery phase of a disaster. *What of other phases?* All participants, and the state and national policy, see the phases as interconnected, and that concrete attention to *'community'* needs to be embedded in community and community–government partnership processes. The paradigm shift required on the part of governments is one from the individualistic contract state to the community-enabling partnership state. While this is the policy environment, there is ample reference to the challenges for a reorienting government and to the difficulties of partnering with community.

Community presence in Emergency Management

From our current state of knowledge and experience, we can broadly say:

- In the main, ordinary community members are not visible in the formal systems of emergency management
- The representatives of those systems that seek to develop integrated responses, such as the Integrated Fire Management Planning Framework, are typically only the members of the formal systems
- That even where those formal systems exist in the recovery phase, again it is typically only the institutional and professional players who are engaged, rather than local community members or local place-based structures. (See Appendix 4 as an example of services and organisations who provided advice on the development of the Relief Handbook for use in disasters[102])
- We acknowledge there is some conjecture as to whether it is that community members don't take up the offer of involvement, or whether the formal systems are uninviting, or whether the lack of community presence is a reflection of the relative infancy of emergency services *'community engagement'* policy and practices[103]
- It is our view that the transformative change required to really engage with, empower, and constitute community in a structural sense, and in a way that enables genuine shared understanding and shared decision making responsibility and ensures the availability of the requisite resources to ensure this is the case, cannot be detected on the radar of either emergency services or broader state government strategic thinking

We use the device of the responses of those on Community Recovery Committees to serve as an illumination of what areas will need to be addressed to meaningfully give weight to the policy of *'shared responsibility'* in this recovery phase and across the emergency spectrum.

Why is it that there is not much more than a blank canvas when the 'how' of community involvement in some form of shared governance is concerned? Is it that the theory of the benefits of 'shared ownership of recovery with partner agencies' is not clear? Is it that the theory is understood and agreed with, but the practice is undefined? Is it not this but that there are no or inadequate resources to develop the practices?[104] Is it that the key parties who hold relationships (across

[102] Page 3 of the new 'on line' version of the Emergency Relief Handbook, Victoria, 2013, lists those who have assisted the Government and the Red Cross in compiling the handbook (see Appendix 6). It is not clear to the reader, the degree to which the 'community' was involved in this work

[103] One of the authors has verbal advice that there is early CFA advice and documentation highlighting the importance of community engagement - making the use of the phrase 'relative infancy' perhaps questionable

[104] This was the view of some of the Local Government Officers, who stated they had the knowledge and skills to do community engagement but lack the resources to do so. While we have no figures on this it seems to us that there has been a diminution of 'community engagement' and 'community development' resources in lead organisations such as the CFA and DEPI. Both were

government, CSOs and community) are willing, but keep changing? Are the positions that hold responsibilities for these practices 'frozen' for long periods in times of government cuts? Is, as suggested in some reports mentioned earlier, the magnitude of the challenge of sharing and / or relinquishing power too great for centralised state government? Or is it all (or none) of the above?

Our experience from both inside and outside of government, is that public servants are not free to talk about these matters, making the issues unavailable for public comment.

From our experience, there are whole communities who don't know that decisions have already been made in statewide plans about the roles of agencies. It became clearer to us while undertaking this work, how skilled some workers and organisations are in developing their public relations and public profile in relation to their presence, practices and procedures, (for mixed reasons), and that this sort of orientation can obfuscate ideas and approaches that would actually support and foster community engagement, community development, community empowerment, community ownership and community autonomy [105].

> 'Unless community are aware of the authority structures, they cannot choose how and where to best invest their time, energy and resources in participation.'
>
> Workshop participant

We made reference above to the formal bodies that contributed to the Emergency Relief Handbook (see Appendix 4). In the 2009 recovery environments, some of the most bitter and lingering disputes between the *'authorities'*, *'agencies'* and *'community members'* were around the question of who were the rightful persons or organisations, and what were the desirable processes, for the delivery of relief to the community. How does *'community'* access these discussions, or *'know'* the decisions (such as might have been made or framed in the Relief Handbook) that are already in place by the time of a disaster? It may be that in compiling the handbook these questions may have been addressed. We have no information on this at the time of finalising this report, nor are we in a position to inquire into these questions. We can only go on what we read and know - which is that, looking at the list of who was thanked, *'community'* is not structured to have a voice; it cannot be invited to meetings, or use the entity of its own structure, given that it has none, to refine its views and engage in dialogue on options. We also note in the CRC discussions a strong view was expressed that communities can get too tied down if they get involved in relief. However, there will be communities who disagree with this and want to be involved in this way.

The key theme in our report, is that there is no agreed *'structure'* through which the voice (and aspirations) of a community and communities can be elicited and formally *'constituted'* in a post-disaster environment, and thus heard and worked with. The structure that was given the role of representing the community, the Community Recovery Committees, were, in the main, newly formed, not adequately resourced, conferred '*advisory*' status only, and again, in the main, were of a short term *'temporary'* nature. In his 'Sharing Responsibility' presentation to the 'Regenerating … People, Place, Prosperity, Preparedness' symposium held in Kinglake, ANU Law Associate Professor Michael Eburn clearly articulated who can and who can't 'take responsibility' from a strictly legal perspective in relation to Australian Law[106]:

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national leaders, in different ways, and at different times, in aspects of the 'centrality of community' debate in Emergency Management.

[105] One key dynamic underlying what appears as embellishment of self-interest and tightening of organisational boundaries include the system pressures around competitive relations between funded services However this is only one such pressure. Others are referred to throughout this report, and include the short term political cycles, the conceptually limited frameworks in which organisations 'show' their achievements, and the lack of rewards for collaboration.

[106] Eburn, M, *On Legal Precedents for Sharing Responsibility* presentation to Regenerating... People, Place, Prosperity, Preparedness, Kinglake, 5 May, 2013

> *Responsibility is always individual. Who can share responsibility? Only those with legal standing: Natural persons (you and I); Corporations; Governments; but* ***NOT*** *'communities'.*

He went on to quote Cain (2002) in reinforcing that the law cannot recognise abstract entities.

> *Group responsibility is 'collective' in the sense that it falls on the group as an abstract entity [but] … there can be no such thing as collective responsibility as there can be no abstract entities (p 171).*

There are several critically important considerations here. How can local communities be constituted, and what status does this confer on them? What are the best local community governance structures and processes that can then serve their needs and aspirations? These matters need to be considered in great detail, in the context of an appraisal of what community structures already exist that could be strengthened and built up for the *'surge capacity*' required post-disaster, and then to be reshaped into an ongoing presence and structure, that can formally engage in and be active in providing *'community leadership'* across an integrated emergency management spectrum.

Organisational and societal dynamics - flux, discomfort and threat

High turnover in human systems

During the period of the research that underpins this report, the structures supporting Emergency Management in the government systems were in various states of change:

- the closure of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority, with some responsibilities being moved to the Fire Recovery Unit, within the Department of Regional Development
- changes of government at both State and Federal level
- the separation of one government department into two in August 2009, when DOH and DHS became two separate organisations
- a major government department (DHS - who holds responsibility in state wide plans for recovery) was undergoing another restructure since its separation from DOH
- new state level arrangements are being put into place in Emergency Management during 2014
- a decision from the Abbott Government is yet to be made as to whether a Referendum will be held to change the Constitution to formally recognise Local Government, removing insecurity in relation to financial grants from the Commonwealth to Local Government
- an environment described in the Victorian Green Paper: the need to 'do more with less'.
- the increasing influence of national security and terrorism response frameworks on Emergency Management, adding another set of forces that can act to diminish community resilience and autonomy
- a new section in the Emergency Management Manual of Victoria (EMMV), which was inserted after the period of this project, August to December 2011, determining that in the

event of a disaster of the proportions of the February 2009 fires, there will be a State level intervention with an accompanying 'authority'[107].

What does the flux outlined above mean for the likelihood of transformative change in Emergency Management? It could be that the flux is disabling for the thought, energy and action required to fuel the momentum for change[108]. It could be the opposite. There is enough serious and 'pop' literature on this question – that the best creativity, and with it, momentum for change, is when there's some sort of breach, disruption, or discomfort.

Recently in Victoria we had have new legislative arrangements to be put in place to create Emergency Management Victoria, and the statutory roles of an Emergency Management Commissioner and an Inspector-General for Emergency Management. What democratising opportunities these changes might bring is unknown.

Human Systems and their (our) psychodynamics

We do know that the barriers to facing threat are deeply human and profoundly strong. The human condition errs on the side of wanting to deny or recoil or turn away from the threat of catastrophic change in our own lives, or in the lives of those we love, in our lifetime. We coexist with our own states of denial, our desire to outsource our responsibility, our inclination to avoid the challenges of naming, identifying, speaking about and questioning the functions of power, and our role in the benefits that power brings. It is easier on one's cognitive functioning to see the immediate benefit of the 'machinery and technology' aspects of keeping safe in an emergency than developing the social and governance infrastructure required to democratise decision making in disasters. Some see that what seems more likely, is an intensification of the momentum towards centralisation and command and control, augmented by big data and geospatial surveillance and communications technologies.[109]

Interestingly,

> *the data revolution is marked by terms such as interoperability, integration, automation and systems engineering*[110]

terms which are already in common use in Emergency Management.

One could make the case that the vulnerability much talked about in relation to *community* vulnerability lies more in the machinery of government and their vertically contracted service systems than in any community level dynamics. In referring to the machinery of government, we use

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[107] Some of the data, particularly that in Section 2 of this report, pertains directly to the experiences and impacts of the unexpected State Government involvement in roles historically held by Local Government.

[108] Quick provides accounts of what he calls Managed Adaptive Decline (MAD). He notes that crisis situations can usher in degenerative processes or vicious cycles for the organisations so involved. According to Quick (2009), organisations in early stages of MAD-ness find themselves '*adapting to declining conditions in a well-managed and seemingly effective way with no way of tracking, let alone intervening in the unfolding or unravelling contextual dynamics and emerging changing conditions'.* He argues that 'managed adaptive decline' occurs when people and organisations hang on to the past, trying to force redundant systems to reproduce past successes in an environment with little chance of that continuing to happen successfully. Quoted from a public presentation on the Resilient Futures Framework by Larry Quick at the Victorian Resilient Leadership Forum in March, 2009.

[109] Big data is the term for a collection of data sets so large and complex that it becomes difficult to process using on-hand database management tools or traditional data processing applications. Big data potentially will be of great assistance with emergency management and national security planning and real time decision making but is also regarded by some as tools that in the hands of corporations and population surveillance and security organisations, and hence contributing to lessening democratic processes and decreasing transparency. Rodgers (2011) cites Templeton and Bergin's critical comments on the different intents and interests behind national security strategies as compared to community resilience approaches. National security culture is seen as having more of a 'need to know' one, where resilience culture is a 'need to share' – the sharing is required because the community is expected to be fully engaged in understanding what our actual state of preparedness is, and that they are being asked to be better prepared.

[110] "This quote from Tim Thwaites article in CSIRO's *resourceful* magazine and attributed to Dr Kate Campbell, Microsoft researcher and Massachusetts Institute of Technology visiting professor, represents the industry *'jargon du jour'* http://www.csiro.au/Portals/Publications/Magazines/resourceful/Issue-4/4-Data-Revolution.aspx

the word government to include other 'governing systems' including the service systems in emergency services, and the associated institutes, key service providers, national and state committees, working parties, efforts to bring parties together such as the Integrated Fire Management Planning. Within this machinery of government, while all centrally critical work, there appears to leave little focus, energy and resources at the level of *locality* for an exploration of the threads of connectedness within and across sectors of the sort that constitute community safety[111].

Some of the emerging 'disaster related' literature is also bringing forward perspectives on the very fluid and stressful interactions at the boundaries between community and 'authorities' following disasters. Rebecca Solnit (2010), in writing about the extraordinary communities that arise in the aftermath of disasters, introduces the idea of 'elite panic', and insightfully, suggests a relationship between authorities who fear losing control and the imposition of coercive measures:

> *the fear held by authorities of the potential for chaos and destruction; an undermining of the power of authorities (whom she calls 'elites'); fear that the situation is out of control, leading to repressive measures that themselves become secondary disasters (p.21)*[112].

Naomi Klein (2007) coined the term *'disaster capitalism'*. She points to a related vulnerability for traumatised communities faced with disaster, where she argues:

> *traumatised communities can give up what they would otherwise fiercely protect, when they are in a collective state of shock, disorientation and regression. This frame of mind can be exploited when 'top down' initiatives display an aversion (for example) to hiring local people whose interest in reconstruction and recovery roles might be one of community healing and empowerment, rather than seeing it as just a job (p. 412),*

These insights are extremely useful to us. The idea that one of the drivers of coercion is fear, is valuable. It pushes our attention to the roles authorities do play, and begs the question of the degree to which they can share some of that authority. The above ideas of fear for authorities leading them to coercive behaviour, and traumatised communities 'giving up' their authority, makes the whole field of disaster management the scene for a further 'perfect storm'.

Reason's (1990) work on what he calls the Swiss Cheese Model (see Figure 1 below), while the model is typically used to assist thinking at the 'front' end of accidents or disasters, aspects of his thinking can be usefully applied throughout the longer period of recovery after a major disaster or traumatic event.

[111] In saying this we do not overlook the efforts of citizens such as Emergency Service volunteers who work hard both in their response roles and also often in community education and community support. We have been present during informal discussions among some immersed in the Emergency Management field, that one of the negative impacts on overall community safety of the narrow focus of the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission has been its heavy administrative response requirements. The community sector would benefit from further elaboration of these claims by those closer to this knowledge and experience.
[112] See Solnit, 2010, p.21 for further elaboration of these ideas

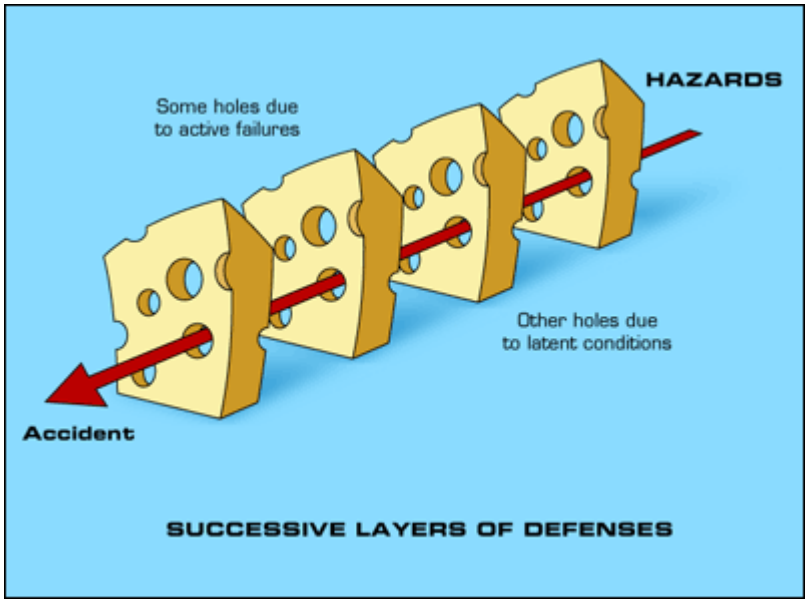

Figure 1 Swiss Cheese Model, following Reason[113]

The Swiss Cheese model highlights the layers between an event and an outcome, and proposes that each layer, where a layer is a human system, has its own inherent flaws, which are represented as holes in the cheese. It is when those holes are aligned that increases the chances of a poor outcome. Reason refers to this as a *'trajectory of accident opportunity'*.

While here we refer only to two psychodynamic system flaws – one being that authorities fearing they will lose control (and society and the media expecting them to be ahead of what's happening before it happens) and the other a community suffering trauma, and in this state giving up more authority than they might otherwise. Add in the layers of local government, and those of non-government organisations into the trajectory, with their own strengths and flaws, and the passage of disaster recovery is further compounded. One aspect of this work that is particularly valuable is that it highlights *human systems*, not *individual flaws*.

Wildman takes these ideas further, using concepts of 'labour', 'roles', and the state, when he notes that disasters ought to be seen equally as the property of the survivors (as well as authorities). He uses the term *'structural theft'* – a term used to refer to situations where roles are taken up by professionals from outside a community – roles that local people would have once played for themselves, with the associated critiques of *'over-professionalisation'* (see Wildman, 2002, p. 571-581).

Walker and Westley (2011) draw attention to the speed of disaster recovery processes, *'short term quick fix interventions'*, (p.2) that fail to surface the long term vulnerabilities, giving rise to a *'peripheral blindness'*.

> *The improvisation and experimentation that can occur in disasters provide opportunities for transformative learning, if they can be allowed to flourish, and similarly, can, if squashed, become barriers to resilience (p. 4).*

Wadsworth (2010) has defined a 'Human Inquiry for Living Systems' to help address persistent systemic sticking points in human systems. While these sticking points have many origins, some are rooted in the psychodynamic makeup of systems, in particular, defences against exploration. These

[113] Model picture taken from http://patientsafetyed.duhs.duke.edu/module_e/swiss_cheese.html. Reason (1990) sets out this model further.

are relevant considerations in all human systems, and particularly relevant for Emergency Management:

> *First the 'systemic' tendency to block or defend against raising any regular questions about 'how things are' and continue, often rather automatically, to risk an unexamined 'tyranny of performativity' or making only trivial or superficial adjustments rather than tackling deeper issues implicated in a 'bigger picture'.*
>
> *Second, the 'systemic' tendency to block or gate keep against trialing innovative ideas in new practice – even when well-grounded in empirical evidence and human experience – whether in the name of conserving a 'hard won' status quo ('we've always done it like this before', 'it worked up till now', 'the powers that be won't agree') or in the name of skeptical science ('we will need more research', 'we can't be sure this intervention will have the effect expected', 'there is a risk associated with the new')(p.8)*

While we can identify 'blockers' or defences against innovation, it is another issue as to how to push through such defences. Several senior people in Emergency Management have identified some of the defences. Letting go of defences is painful.

Altering the balance of power, essential for community empowerment, will require changes of magnitude, both at the attitudinal level as well as at the level of resourcing. A related risk is that some communities, operating out of denial or fear, may prefer to continue to buy into the fantasy of universal protection by a resource strong, technically capable, emergency service sector. Many members of the Emergency Management sector are, to their detriment at times, driven by this 'heroic' desire to protect others (as noted in the literature already referred to by Weiss, Zara and Parkinson, 2013). These heroic drives are strong drives, and as we see in many public demonstrations of gratitude to the Emergency Management sector, are and should be, highly valued, but in a more balanced way – one that is not to the detriment of the individual 'hero' and ultimately not to the detriment of the community, in that the heroism will seldom 'save' lives in a large scale disaster. The desires by some to be the protector, and by others to be the protected, make fathoming and re-negotiating 'shared responsibility' a very difficult undertaking.

The BRCIM report names the painful change that will be required in the formal institutional system, where it notes, in relation to the need for local place-based developments and structures, that

> *this will be a major challenge for government and emergency management agencies, requiring them to relinquish long established practices of absolute control of many aspects of emergency management and in devolving some of this control to local communities*[114].

The painful changes required will necessitate collaboration between all stakeholders. As will gaining a closer understanding with all stakeholders, as to how the system actively disempowers citizens and communities (as the Bushfire Royal Commission Implementation Monitor's report has already drawn attention to). Where resources flow one-way toward institutions, and where there is little in the way of community perspective taken into account in the ensuing decisions, no community participation through an equalising relationship, and no stream of resources directed to community, this is most likely to result in disempowerment. Underlying disempowerment[115], runs a sea of dynamics. Whatever the mechanisms of disempowerment are, and whenever they are enacted, what we do

[114] http://www.bushfiresmonitor.vic.gov.au/resources/92862206-8eee-481c-b877-11f1fdc6062e/bushfiresroyalcommissionchapter4.pdf

[115] Unpacking what this term really means in Emergency Management is an overdue task. However here we must slide over this conceptual complexity

know is that the symptoms are well recognised: apathy and cynicism, anger and rage, envy (look what they've got and I haven't got) and shame (this is what I expected I could do for my community and I failed), powerlessness (what's the point) and impotency ... and so on. Interventions that strengthen professional responses can also paradoxically weaken community resourcefulness and social fabric.

The ways in which divisions (or *'splits'*, as described in the systems psychodynamic literature) come about in disasters, or are brought to light further in disasters, particularly at the community level, is a topic Gordon (2004) has well described. It is our view that not enough attention has been paid to how *organisations* contribute to these splits, which often become described and perpetuated as 'us and them' dynamics. Professor of Political Science and Anthropology at Yale, James Scott, provides an interesting perspective on the process as he sees it, of how groups can develop a resistant and defiant identity. One pathway is taken when the State chooses to stigmatise particular identities or communities. This idea requires further exploration in the Emergency Management field, in relation to the increasing risk of divisions between parties who in theory are working toward 'shared responsibility'. Scott (1998) makes the observation.

> *The big mistake in this pattern of failure is projecting your subjective lack of comprehension onto the object you are looking at, as 'irrationality'. We make this mistake because we are tempted by a desire for legibility.*

We would like to see a lot more attention given to the processes that result in extreme thinking, binary, black and white reasoning, and often vitriolic and premature judgements. These tendencies are exacerbated in an environment where many parties are exposed to trauma.

Another related contribution from the disability field highlights reasons we fail to allow ordinary people to expose themselves to what Deegan (1996) calls the *'dignity of risk'*[116]. In disability politics, it is a concept that refers to the right of individuals to development, rather than stasis, or worse deterioration, the right to choose to take risks, and to hence to be exposed to learning, when engaging in life experiences. Parsons[117] notes the critical importance of *'dignity of risk'* and its emphasis on personal choice and self-determination. He draws on the work of Deegan (1996):

> *Self determination, or taking responsibility for one's own recovery, is the core component of recovery. Part of that responsibility involves the self- management of wellness ... autonomy in one's life choices, and the willingness to take informed and planned risks in order to grow.*

While this concept would need to be reformulated at the *'community'* rather than the individual level (risks a *community* can take for itself), we note the parallels between the mental health domain and the emergency services domain, where Parsons (2009) asks what stops their (mental health) system from allowing people to exercise the *'dignity of risk'*. Many of his points resonate with the concerns in this report, particularly when he notes that one of the biggest barriers for staff in mental health settings, in facilitating *'dignity of risk'*, is *'fear'*: fear of the unknown, fear of the legal ramifications, fear of failure, fear of exposure.

> *Mental health service providers worry if a consumer takes a risk and fails, that it implies they are doing a bad job*[118].

[116] See presentation by Parsons, 2009. http://www.openforum.com.au/content/dignity-risk-right-self-governance-people-mental-illness. According to Parsons, Perske first introduced this term to their field in 1973.
[117] http://www.openforum.com.au/content/dignity-risk-right-self-governance-people-mental-illness
[118] See Parsons, 2009, online presentation

Risk averse professionals can end up inadvertently intervening in the lives of people and communities in such a way that they become sheltered or protected from making mistakes, and hence learning, potentially leading to stasis or worse deterioration, rather than development and growth, i.e., to greater vulnerability rather than greater resilience.

Inattention to ideas of social capital can also erode resilience. Proponents of the importance of the idea of 'social capital'[119] are also cognisant of what is sometimes referred to as its 'dark side'. What of those who are not well connected, in either bridging, linking or bonding approaches to social capital. These ways of thinking about social capital lead to approaches in every day life in particular about matters of equity and social justice. While it is critically important to consider ways of communicating with people who are less connected, ways of getting information to them, reaching out to them, identifying who knows about 'them', it is also important for those with emergency management knowledge and expertise to be highlighting to other sectors, what the impacts are on their role in emergency management when people they are tasked to 'influence', do not have the resources to respond. We are thinking here of those in homes which are highly flammable, without resources to retrofit; those whose mental health is such that they are hard to reach with 'emergency management' preventive or response measures. This is where general social policies which facilitate societal inequities and are then central to community safety, rub up against the 'mission' of 'community safety'. A more inequitable society is a society that on many counts is inherently more 'unsafe'.

Many of the participants in this report [place based and community led] argued strongly for the importance of general civic infrastructure – opportunities for dialogue, structures and processes for a myriad forms of social engagement. These processes are critical for general civic life, as well as for disaster preparedness and response. Opportunities to see the close connections between these two broad areas of 'general civic life' and disaster awareness and response should be encouraged at every turn. These are the really hard questions and issues – how one sees the relationship between these silos of 'education', 'health', 'aged care', and so on. Perhaps it will be 'climate change' which will be the 'tipping point' in terms of the need to reassess our way of life and what we accept in terms of difference and inequity. Allocating resources in siloes goes against the grain of understanding social connectedness on the ground. While we applaud the Roundtable effort, we are at odds with the ideas of finding less complex indicators for targeting and planning activities. We have seen so often, using the 'legibility' idea framed by James Scott, simpler indicators, while making it easier to 'follow', 'enact' and 'evaluate', can assist us to turn our attention away from the richer, deeper realities which hold more explanatory power in helping us understand what is really in need of attention. This touches too on another matter we have raised in this report, which is the pressure to not speak about some of the paradoxes inherent in the issues that concern us.

Other systemic barriers [120] described by Parsons (2009) include

> *methods of operating [that] should be reviewed to determine whether they service the organisation's goals as opposed to the consumers.*

Parsons also refers to *'time'* as a standard rationale invoked as a reason for professionals for taking over which then operates to exclude the perspectives and input of others.

> *It is simply quicker and easier for decisions to be made for ... consumers than it is for their service providers to collaborate and plan with them.*

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[119] See the important work entitled Relationships matter: the application of social capital to disaster resilience. http://www.redcross.org.au/files/12-011_RED_Roundtable_Report_v3-F-web.pdf. National Disaster Resilience Roundtable report, 20 September 2012, Melbourne Australia.

[120] We would include the risk of legal ramifications as a system barrier, and point to the impact of the threat of a Royal Commission that some of those involved in Emergency Management will informally speak about, in terms of its impact in their work

There are strong resonances between these arguments as to why and how professionals *'take over'*, and the domain of Emergency Management.

Culture clashes

In the Queensland report 'Getting Back on Your Feet - Community Development and Natural Disasters', Connor et al (2013) identified a *'clash of two cultures'* in the interviews they recorded with community development workers placed in emergency management teams.

> *[Disaster management] have a very un-community friendly, rigid approach to their life and their outlook. They see community development as meaning that 'they get the key messages we're trying to tell them, they've got nothing important to say.' Now in some sectors of government that's changing but generally speaking in the disaster management offices it's not. It's still very much a technical response and the most important thing is that 'the community understands this message.' So I still think they just operate in a different mindset and that's a constraint (p.49)*

Community Development Workers described the many tensions experienced in their roles, particularly vis a vis the perceptions that CDO workers believed *'blue shirts'* had of them:

> *Just the impenetrability of the whole disaster management arrangements … and I seriously don't think that any value was placed on the roles and what we could achieve by the blue shirts. They don't know people. Pretty early on I realised the clear rationale for having community development workers working in this space with community was because the disaster management blue shirts don't necessarily engage community very well. They're good at saving lives, they good at following procedures, they're good at doing all that stuff while it's operationalised but in the general daily run of the mill they don't know how to change their language to embrace community so they can become partners. They're very top down and we've made a conscious decision to be bottom up in terms of the role of the CD [worker].*

Another Community Development worker described the hierarchical environment of emergency management as a major barrier to engagement with communities.

> *The fire service really did have no concept of community development. It was a military organisation. So, to get these guys that have been out on the fire ground for years, they've risen up the ranks and then [for us] to say to them, 'Well now we're going to talk to the community and we're going to have some field visits' … well it was just treated with total suspicion.*

A number of the stakeholders commented that community development often sits outside other Council business and that

> *Community development workers are sometimes considered to be 'airy fairy people' or the 'warm and fuzzy people that sort of talk about stuff but don't do a lot' (p. 43).*

The University of Queensland researchers concluded that

> *Our analysis revealed that many Community Development workers found the challenge of navigating multifaceted relationships with community, Councils, service providers, disaster management personnel and LGAQ [LGA State Peak Body and community development program funder] placed a heavy demand on the role (p.42).*

Connor et al (2013) quote Toomey who considers the roles of both community development practitioners and organisations as products of

> *multiple and often conflicting forces that include the goals of the intervening institution, the needs of the community, the vested interests of state and local governments and business groups, as well as the personal aspirations of the individual practitioner (p.50).*

Connor et al (2013) quote Hoggett et al on the dilemmas confronting community development practice:

> *Although community development workers share similar dilemmas to other colleagues in the public sector they also confront the dilemma of being employed by the state, as the authoritative voice and being in the paradoxical position of challenging but also representing 'the authorities' while also being seen as someone who works to enable others to take up their own authority (p. 50-51).*

Wicked problems - learning from other sectors

'Wicked problems' are now a relatively widely understood phenomenon. While it has been applied to many areas, its first use was in planning, in an article in 1973 (see Rittell and Webber, 1973, 41 years ago). Their words below hold as well today as they did then. They describe wicked problems as

> *policy problems [that] cannot be definitively described. Moreover, in a pluralistic society there is nothing like the undisputable public good; there is no objective definition of equity; policies that respond to social problems cannot be meaningfully correct or false; and it makes no sense to talk about 'optimal solutions' to social problems unless severe qualifications are imposed first. Even worse, there are no 'solutions' in the sense of definitive and objective answers (p. 155).*

While it is tempting for those within a sector to imagine that others outside that sector *'don't understand the key issues'*, there is much to draw on from other sectors (as well as no doubt of developments and initiatives not widely known within the Emergency Management sector[121]). One strong Australian contribution to a grounded application of an approach to a wicked problem is the work of Brown et al (2010), working in a contemporary environment of environmental systems, using transdisciplinary frameworks. They reiterate that wicked problems have many causes and involve multiple interests, evading simple definition, because all those interests would have a separate definition of the situation/problem. They argue that resolving wicked problems requires

[121] Kania and Kramer, 2011, talk of 'adaptive problems' that have some similar properties to 'wicked problems'; in their research and practice, they describe an adaptive problem as complex, the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change. Reforming public education, restoring wetland environments, and improving community health are all adaptive problems. In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution. The parallels to Emergency Management are clear.

new ways of thinking about the presenting issues and this thinking needs to be based on collective social decision-making[122].

We note in Appendix 3, brief reference to the work of particular scholars and practitioners that could inform domains such as Emergency Management, where the *'problem'* is regarded as *'wicked'*. Reference is made to the work of Brown (2010) (in environmental management), of Tricket et al (2011) (in public health) and that of Kania and Kramer (2011) (in education and poverty): these domains are all ones where wicked problems dominate. The paradigm shift required to bring about meaningful community involvement in Emergency Management, can also be seen as a wicked problem. Tierney (2012) puts it like this:

> *Complex social problems, such as those associated with the environment, climate change, hazards, and disasters, do not fit neatly within the purview of individual organisations and institutions. Governance through networks of collaborating and diverse entities provides a means of addressing these problems because networks are flexible, adaptable, and capable of mobilising diverse resources (p.343).*

Several reports on Emergency Management since Black Saturday (and several before) point to the sector as facing the need for large scale social change and requiring broad cross sector collaboration, yet the dominant activities (as in most complex sectors) remain disconnected, under-conceptualised, and focused on the isolated interventions across a range of program areas and geographic locations.

Given the above, the multiple sources of knowledge and perspectives, wicked problems necessitate approaches that require interventions that are co-designed. The problems need to be co-defined problems and approaches to them co-produced. In Emergency Management, with the community at the core in most policy ideals, this requires community-level interventions, cross-sectoral partnerships, and opportunities to undertake multi-faceted *'safe fail social experimentation'*, bringing forth the co-creativity possible in well-designed and supported approaches. While we theoretically and in practice believe these ideas provide the only way forward, given the *'wickedness'* of the issues requiring interventions, we are also aware of the barriers to their implementation, and to the immense pressure to work on the single-focus *'fail safe engineering solution'*. However we think this pressure should be resisted, as it overlooks the nature of wicked problems, and hence overlooks key parties to an issue.

Emergency Management thinking, planning and actions need to be re-conceptualised in their particularity, not only *'brick by brick'*, as the 2009 post-fires rebuilding mantra suggested, but *'community by community'*. This approach requires the long haul, with the same cautions as voices in our report claim: that trust is vital to this work, and that this takes years to build.

It is of interest that the Deloitte Access Economics Report (2013) recommended that the 'development of resilient and safer communities must be brought together to the centre of government as a separate, but connected, policy issue relative to emergency management' (p 51). While it is not entirely clear in the report in what ways the authors see the issues of resilient communities as being 'separate but connected' to emergency management, at least there is the thought that resilient communities should be at the centre of government. While the Deloitte report is vitally important and contains strong directions forward in relation particular to prevention and mitigation of disasters, the weight of its work is around the important matters of more 'concrete'

[122] There are various approaches to unpacking complex domains, and interested readers can explore the utility of any of those referred to in this report to their setting, and inform others of any useful frameworks they have used to address an understanding of the parameters of complex problems. David Snowden's (2007) work is particularly apt for Emergency Management as its task to integrate with 'place' in meaningful ways. He calls his model Cynefin, which is an old Welsh word, that translates into English as 'context', 'habitat' or 'place' and conveys that we all inhabit multiple nested contexts: cosmological, cultural, tribal, religious, and geographic, and simple, complicated, complex and chaotic. It is a leadership and decision making model used to develop more finessed understandings of complexity., across differing contexts, situations and systems.

infrastructure. Examples include the recommendation to increase the height of the Warrangamba Dam wall by 23 metres, reducing average flood costs by about 73% (p 43), intervening in vegetation management (a 5m clearance) around preexisting homes, reducing risks by 30%, with a projected reduction in disaster costs by $603m in the period up to 2050. These are all critical and necessary parts of the complex systems which need to be thought of holistically, as are the connections they make in arguing that long term annual consolidated funding for disaster resilience and the positive impacts this could have on future budget outlays. They argue strongly for a series of predisaster investments across the country with a view to reductions in economic costs and significant relief on long term pressures on government budgets (p. 54), and emphasise how this would then reduce trauma and loss of life.

Defining boundaries

Reason's (1990) work(see Figure 2) has typically been applied to complex high risk situations that are time critical (aviation, firefighting, acute medical interventions), and where to a large degree, the 'human systems' that interact with each other are at least known, if not well coordinated or using ideal communication methods in their interaction. In Emergency Management, with its complexity of domains, across prevention, preparedness, response and recovery, there is plenty of work to do to even define the parameters of the systems involved. What is the 'system' in which one is seeking to intervene, or to interact with, to support, to strengthen? As a series of connected elements, it is in its infancy as a system. We might even question, as we do below, if it is a system[123]. Not only is the *'formal system'* still working on itself as to what it *'is'*, the *'systems'* with which it seeks to engage are themselves sometimes cohesive and robust, and sometimes fractured or dispersed, particularly on the urban fringes, where so many super-commuters live in high fire risk environments.

Neither of the report collators can lay claim to a broad understanding of the formal Emergency Management *'system'*. Our glimpses suggest that the *'system'* is immensely complicated (perhaps overly so), with more features of a *'closed system'* than an open one, with many unconnected, non-complementary elements. There is a foreboding sense that, at least to the uninitiated, the *'system'*, as a result of its curious mix of different and unreconciled and unresolved ways of knowing, deciding, doing and interacting, may be in perpetual existential crisis, and not operating as a *'system'* at all, where this is understood as 'an entity that maintains its existence through the *mutual interaction of its parts*'[124].

Appendix 4 briefly describes some of the properties of systems, including that of boundaries. Using the work of Ison et al, from ICRA (International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture), a system has components, and those components form the whole. The properties of the whole arise from the relationships between component parts. When properties of the system don't relate to each other, they refer to the existence of a 'heap'. This may be a better descriptor of parts of what we are trying to refer to within an emergency management system, if we are taking the PPRR spectrum as the fuller outline of the system.

One can see that there is innovation happening within elements of the Emergency Management continuum. Angela Blanchard's re-conceptualising of the various phases of recovery is a good

[123] We are not up to date with developments in projects such as the Integrated Fire Management Planning Framework (http://www.ifmp.vic.gov.au/images/stories/ifmp_framework.pdf) as to its 'reach', and whether and how issues to do with 'community participation' are developed and enacted. 'Critical to the success of IFMP will be building and maintaining relationships across government, the private sector and the broader community. Participation, support and cooperative decision making by all these sectors working in collaboration to develop fire prevention, suppression and recovery strategies for all types of fire risk, *and meeting the needs of local communities are all essential to the success of IFMP*' (excerpt IFMP framework document; emphasis added)

[124] See Gene Bellinger's website on systems thinking: http://www.systems-thinking.org/: Bellinger acknowledges Bertalanffy, as the source of this quotation on what a 'system' is.

example; but recovery is only one element of the PPRR phases[125] and it is what happens between the elements or phases that contribute to the makeup of emergent system.

Economies, scale, landscapes and community

Immediately after Black Saturday it was clear that the more rural Shires with the lower the rate base[126], had fewer resources for planning and cross boundary work, were more likely to have directly impacted staff and be experiencing vulnerability with damaged infrastructure and other significant resource impacts. While some local governments were provided with additional time limited financial resources, they not only lacked money, but they sometimes also lacked additional pre-disaster resources often taken for granted in better resourced Shires. Such resources include fundamental community development experience with community oriented pre-disaster processes such as participatory and community planning, as embodied in municipal public health plans[127], and other planning processes that grow from *'mechanisms'* and *'structures'*, from people meeting in groups, building long term trusting relationships through consulting one another[128]. To take real account of such diversity requires extensive engagement across a range of program areas and a more appreciative lens. Such differences, and disadvantages, were too often invisible to and hidden from the outside (central) eye. While there were particular funding arrangements made with shires such as Murrindindi, on a time-limited basis, after the fires, other parameters of difference remained under-explored and under-interpreted[129]. It seemed that opportunistic decisions were made to take power from well resourced local governments on the spurious basis that they were similar in the extent of fire impact and in their resource bases as shires such as Murrindindi. This was far from the case.

Nested within the breadth of local government boundaries are smaller communities that are in various states of cohesion or separateness for a variety of reasons. Worldwide trends are felt at the local level. There has been an impoverishment of household and community economies and a diminution of the traditional local means of production and exchange, with associated untoward impacts on small business and employment and the inevitable socio demographic changes that ensue. The RMIT/IPSOS report (2013) commissioned by the Office of the Fire Services Commissioner further elaborates on the reasons for what they call reduced (community) capacity (in relation to disaster resilience) in some areas[130]. These local changes can be seen in the prevailing political economy of globalization, and its underlying drivers and pervasive impacts. The political philosophies[131] driving these changes impact at various levels of public sector and civil society life, in insidious ways. Pam Stavropoulos (2009) talks of the relentless drive of such political and social policies, to

> *privatise, individualise and depoliticise issues and realms that are collective and shared (p.241).*

So as our local communities fragment and become more vulnerable, our personal expressions of vulnerability are less likely to find a shared collective voice as *'the personal is political'* morphs into

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[125] Angela Blanchard, in her discussion with members of the Kinglake community at a workshop in Kinglake on September 1, 2011, offered the following segmentation of the recovery phase alone: survival, sanctuary, upheaval, limbo, resignation/acceptance, new beginning, recovery.
[126] PriceWaterhouseCoopers (2006)
[127] See Environments for Health - Promoting Health and Wellbeing through Built, Social, Economic and Natural Environments http://docs.health.vic.gov.au/docs/doc/56C6198C77BA8E77CA2578F00009D8DB/$FILE/MPHWB%20Fwork.pdf
[128] Whittlesea 'Futures Now' was functioning for a considerable period before the fire. It is our understanding that there were similar influences in the background to the Nillumbik Bushfire Social Health and Community Alliance, an area that had a strong history of Primary Care Partnerships and other relationships across different agencies and community groups.
[129] It is interesting to note among the resources at the Conflict Research Consortium, University of Colorado, the strategies/processes/attitudes required to elicit multiple stakeholder viewpoints in transformative approaches to conflict. http://www.colorado.edu/conflict/transform/.
[130] See p.iii of the RMIT/IPSOS report, 2013, for further elaboration of the reasons for what they call reduced (community) capacity in some areas.
[131] Described broadly by some as neoliberalism; by others as 'economic rationalism'.

'the personal is clinical' and then *'the personal as consumable'* without individual or collective self-reliance and in thrall to and in need of perpetual external production[132].

Yet we see in disasters extraordinary community responses, and responses from government and agencies that seem to us to indicate something more than a disaster specific phenomena, or desire. We think it reflects how most people really want to live – to connect meaningfully with each other, to share our lived experiences, to have roles that are valued and understood, to be allowed to be altruistic and to care for one another, to work together for the greater good, to be part of something bigger. While this intensity inevitably wanes to some extent, the memory of the experience remains. Our project has highlighted some of the structural, procedural, attitudinal, and resource barriers that impeded the flourishing of these desires.

If a place-based and community-led orientation were to the primary frame in public policy, this would enable a focus to be critically attuned to difference and disadvantage at the community level scale. In the recent review of CSOs (referred to as the Shergold Report), Jesuit Social Services, in talking about the structural nature of social disadvantage, noted that

> *… based on our understanding that such deeply entrenched disadvantage has a locational nature, the on the ground services that reflect this consolidated approach should be organised around defined geographic areas. Furthermore, it is our view that these areas need to be small enough to enable the intimacy of relationship and the depth of communication required between the relevant services and community members in order to work in such a consolidated fashion (p 42).*

Another important perspective on locality links the social and ecological dimensions when thinking about community, and with it, community preparedness for disaster. ANU ecological historian Tom Griffiths (2012) argues that taking this deeper and broader perspective necessitates a more collaborative participatory action research and holistic inter-disciplinary local inquiry as foundations for knowing like a community and for acting 'locally':

> *We need more research that is deeply local, ecologically sensitive and historically informed – and that is undertaken in collaboration with the communities that live with the threat of bushfire and firestorms. All the political pressure surrounding tragedies like Black Saturday push politicians, fire managers and Royal Commissioners towards 'national' responses. Yet Black Saturday – like Ash Wednesday and Black Friday – was a fire that was characteristic not of Victoria, but of a particular region of Victoria. To understand it fully, and to prepare for its certain recurrence, we need to come to terms with the local distinctiveness of fire (p 180).*

Griffiths (2012) argues it is *locality* – and in particular *local distinctiveness* –

> *expressed in the physical, geographical, biological, cultural and historical specificity of particular places – that should be the cohering focus of research (p.181).*

He further adds:

> *Local fire history is also vital to active community memory, commemoration, education and participation. Whereas national [or state]*

[132] One thinks here of the risk of the communications/IT aspect of emergency responses superceding the relational, and becoming goods requiring production.

> *institutional solutions can foster passivity in the face of a generalised fire threat, a keen awareness of local ecological and historical distinctiveness can encourage the inhabitants of fire-prone areas to be more actively engaged with managing and surviving their particular environment (p.181).*

Griffiths (2012) reinforces the importance of citizens participating in generating knowledge and understanding about their local environment, of learning the specifics of local fire behaviour and the particularity of place-based knowledge and social and ecological history:

> *Fire is ruled by weather, ecology, topography and culture, not by jurisdictional boundaries. Yet issues of risk management, bureaucratic response, political responsibility and even charitable benevolence are jurisdictional in application and come to dominate discussion and policy formation. Fire research needs to work against the grain of this institutional fabric and political momentum. It has to liberate and empower local knowledge and experience where it exists – and create it where it doesn't (p.181).*

Environmental Social Worker Katrin Oliver (2012) found that cultivating a deep relationship with nature and a love of place (soliphilia) has a profound impact on people's ability to overcome, in some instances, debilitating experiences of loss of place (solastalgia) and assist in the restoration of a sense of self and feeling of wellbeing after Black Saturday. Oliver initiated a community writing project called 'Restoring Sense of Place' to enable people to explore their feelings and thoughts of home, community, belonging and identity and how these intersect with nature. Her nature-based approach to disaster recovery work is based in the belief that a strong sense of place is essential to a strong sense of self.

A collective orientation

Key insights of post-disaster research pertain to the long-standing benefits where mutual aid and community building can emerge. Local governance structures (what Walker and Westley call *'adaptive governance and co-management'*, pp. 3-4) at the local community level are critical to supporting and shaping these positive developments.

Boyle et al (2010) introduce the idea of policy and services *co-production*, describing it as the

> *'delivering public services in an equal and reciprocal relationship between professionals, people using services, their families and their neighbors.'*

They go on to describe

> *Where activities are co-produced … both services and neighbourhoods become far more effective agents of change. Co-production is central to the process of growing the core economy – the household, the family, the neighbourhood and the community. It goes well beyond the idea of 'citizen engagement' or 'service user involvement' to foster the principle of equal partnership. It offers to transform the dynamic between the public and public service workers, putting an end to 'them' and 'us'. Instead, people pool and make available different types of knowledge and skills, based on lived experience and professional learning and are referred to as co-production (p. 9).*

If there were to be more partnerships between community, agencies and government, and there were shared understandings about the strengths and gaps in community life, it would be possible to consider the 'bouncing forward' idea put forward by Manyena in his doctoral thesis work. There are opportunities to engage in what Manyena (2009) refers to as 'bouncing forward'[133], of taking a renewed stand for the impacts of disadvantage which weaken the 'common good'. Taking a 'renewed stand' at the time of a disaster would require cross sectoral collaboration.

Closely related to these ideas is the idea of *collective impact*[134]. One source for these key ideas is Kania and Kramer, (2011), who argue for how collective impact thinking and action can bring about structural change. Domains in which collective impact thinking and action are required are characterised by adaptive problems[135]. These are by nature complex, the answer is not known, and even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change. Reforming public education, restoring wetland environments, improving community health and disaster preparedness are all adaptive problems. In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution[136].

Caniglia and Trotman (2011) conclude that a stronger focus on existing community structures and on long term investments was critical to emergency preparedness and disaster recovery.

> *While crisis responses are commendable, long term, strong and effective (community) governance groups that are already engaged in the implementation of various solutions to community issues is the best foundation for stronger recovery where bottom-up efforts and top-down support come together to achieve effective and sustainable results.*

The work of Volunteering Queensland (2011)[137] is useful to raise here, for its work on '*Adaptive Leadership*' as described in their 'Step Up' Resilience Leadership project resource.

'Adaptive Leadership' is defined as

> *A long term approach that requires leaders to continually observe, interpret and intervene in a situation; by doing so and through building trustful relationships with stakeholders, adaptive leaders can instigate long term solutions through sustained changes in people's behavioural, attitudinal and practical habits (p.21)*

and go on to state that

> *The heart of Adaptive Leadership is challenging current systems and behaviours that are not effective and facilitating the creation of new solutions and ways of working through collaboration and partnership (p.21).*

It is at the local level where the local community members currently play key community roles, where the local knowledge resides and can be brought forward for crises preparedness and response. It is at this level that the aspiration for community involvement can also be examined.

However even when community organisations 'step up', it doesn't mean that their contribution will be recognised in the heat of the moment. One of the participants of this project referred us to an unpublished report entitled 'Peeling the Onion', a post-fires report compiled for the Yarra Ranges

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[133] "Resilience-oriented capacity building processes comprises specific approaches, strategies and methodologies to transform the ability of individuals or groups, including the most vulnerable individuals groups, so they can perform functions to 'bounce forward' or 'move on' following a disaster event." See http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/661/1/manyena.siambabala_phd.pdf

[134] While there are several sources for the current writing and thinking about 'collective impact', one key one is the Stanford Social Innovation Review http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact/

[135] Some similarity in thinking here with ideas of wicked problems.

[136] http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

[137] Volunteering Queensland, Step Up - The Resilience Leadership Project Workbook, Part 1, 2011

Neighbourhood House Network. This provides an account of how certain community based groups who had done significant strategic partnership work to have themselves included in the formal planning processes for emergencies, were overlooked in the early phases of the response and recovery of the 2009 fires. The report also speaks clearly about not only why community level knowledge and experience is essential to all aspects of the Emergency Management spectrum, but also how complex it can be to elicit.

> *However, the dispersed, independent nature of community knowledge can be problematic for and invisible to government departments who need to document and plan actions for future situations. Being organised at a community level assists the integration of changing community priorities. Collectively community members hold a combined sense of community of place, built on generations of commitment of belonging, history, family and friendship, as well as a concern for the present and future. Without this knowledge the best intentions and programs can result in missed opportunities for all involved (p.5)* [138].

In this report we are emphasising the local level due to its centrality in policy, and its underdevelopment in tangible approaches, programs, support and structural visibility[139].

A non-idealistic examination is required of the reality of available resources and strengths at a community level. A place-based lens can identify gaps or areas that require strengthening and the investments and interventions required to achieve this. Such a focus will itself require a generous and open process for dialogue between agencies who have a presence in the area – either on a visiting basis or within the geographic area itself – and communities themselves. It would also be a focus for input from further flung authorities and agencies – government and non-government – with statutory or contractual responsibilities and accountabilities in a geographic region.

Deliberative Democracy

Despite our differences as authors and participants in this field, we hold a similar starting point – there was insufficient attention paid to creating spaces and processes to share, pool, and make sense and meaning from the many perspectives on the recovery experience. We also hold, as do many of the participants in this project that there were not spaces or processes that allowed for shared decision making around resources. For this reason we turn now to the important idea of deliberative democracy, as a possible resource for future consideration.

The Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI) hosted a forum for disaster practitioners and researchers as part of the process that led to the publication of a review entitled 'Deliberative Democracy in Disaster Recovery: Reframing Community Engagement for Sustainable Outcomes' (Millen, 2011).

Deliberative processes are seen as involving the consideration and weighing up of information and the development of multiple alternatives, assisting stakeholders to understand the perspectives of others using dialogue, and an approach to imagining futures in ways that were broader than infrastructure solutions only.

The three essential elements required for any deliberative process to succeed as a democratic activity are seen as

- Influence: the process should have the ability to influence policy and decision-making.

[138] Peeling the Onion, an internal report compiled by Dr Helen Sheil, in 2009, for the Yarra Ranges Neighbourhood House Network.
[139] We acknowledge that there are important initiatives at the State and Regional level to develop adaptive leadership, as there are organisations such as the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal (FRRR), and various leadership bodies, such as the Williamson Leadership Program and the Fairley Leadership Program.

- Inclusion: the process should be representative of the population and inclusive of diverse viewpoints and values, providing equal opportunity for all to participate.

- Deliberation: the process should provide open dialogue, access to information, respect, space to understand and reframe issues, and movement toward consensus.' (Millen, 2011, p 4, citing Carson & Hartz-Karp, 2005).

The review concluded that deliberative methods provide an effective mechanism for strengthening communities through engagement in decision-making. As such inclusion of communities is central in recovery, and also, although conceptualised differently, in preparedness, deliberative methods could be a central mechanism to develop the policy of community led recovery.

We think the published work on the respective deeply democratic and participatory action learning circle processes used after the Greensburg Tornedo in 2007 and after Cyclone Larry in 2006 warrant further investigation for a closer analysis of their applicability, the resources required, the shared commitments needed, the skills to 'hold the space', and the structural changes required to host and house the dialogue, with a view to assessing if these approaches can be adapted and adopted by local communities, depending on the type and scale of disaster, and the characteristics of affected communities[140].

Recent democratic innovations such as participatory budgeting[141] and liquid democracy[142] and peer-to-peer (P2P) strategies[143] could also be investigated for their applicability both to post-disaster scenarios and, importantly, as a tools to inform community governance and community based disaster–crisis and recovery–renewal preparatory processes/practices.[144]

Slowing the pace at a time of crisis

At the time of a crisis, the pressure to act quickly is enormous. As noted in the VBRRA legacy report,

> *People needed assurance that the massive recovery task would be tackled quickly, decisively, and comprehensively*[145]

For government to act *'quickly, decisively and comprehensively'* is inconsistent with a policy environment of enabling *'bottom-up'* power-with *'place based and community led'* recovery and consistent with perpetuating *'top-down'* power-over *'authority led'* recovery'.

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[140] The community participation process used after the Greensburg Kansas tornedo that occurred on 4th May 2007, appears to have produced remarkable results. There is also widespread comment on the leadership of the Cyclone Larry recovery experience, where 'circles of learning' were used to 'help public servants service their community' (Bun, 2012). Purposeful shared dialogues is said to have assisted in developing visions of the future across various otherwise often 'siloed' interest groups. We could learn more from these processes, and their applicability in a future Victorian situation

[141] See the website of the International Association of Public Participation (IAP2) for awards won by Waverly Council, NSW, for its consultation that led to community support for the largest ever rate increase approved by their state government. (http://www.iap2.org.au/awards/2011-core-values-awards/new-south-wales-regional-winner-2011) See also Sophia Parker from Demos, http://www.demos.co.uk/ highlighting the change in the quality of discussion, going from shrill tones to more adult dialogue, when people can become more involved in decisions such as is offered in participatory budgeting; people can see how tradeoffs are essential, and a correlation can develop between the sense that people can influence decisions, and factors such as trust and satisfaction. http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ylr5ZAbJF5M for a UK example. http://oursay.org/hepburn-council-plan

[142] By which is broadly meant the bringing of new forms of participation to the political scene. It involves participants integrating representational and direct democratic participation using features of social internetworking See http://www.coe.int/en/web/world-forum-democracy/lab1_

[143] see the Peer to Peer Foundation website - http://p2pfoundation.net/

[144] Deloitte (2013) argue for a policy focus on prevention in relation to building Australia's resilience to natural disasters (p 10), long term annual consolidated funding for pre disaster resilience, and the prioritisation of pre-disaster investment activities that deliver a positive net impact on future budget outlays. Their cost benefit analyses suggest that by 2050, through employing the recommendations of the report, that the future cost of natural disaster relief and recovery could be reduced by 50%. Through all its work, the need for coordination and collaboration is repetitively stated. These processes if implemented could be usefully taken through a deliberative democracy process

[145] VBRRA Legacy Report, June 2011

Should the *'quickly and decisively'* tempo be slowed, and this would require support from all sectors: the community, the media, CSOs, the Commonwealth, given that response is a State matter in the first instance, this would change the focus of government and agency service to one of *'enabling'* and *'supporting'*; a shift from one of *'what can be offered and will be offered'*, to one of *'seeing what can be created together and how can it be done.'*

This would indicate an open, adaptive and responsive system – an invitation to exploring possibility, informed by the realities of the particular place and community of impact or potential impact.

So while a *'community led'* and *'place based' lens* is increasingly used in reviewing various sectors there remains an absence of place based *'subsidiarity'* oriented structures that could provide a basis for community to organise itself. This reinforces the importance of honing and operationalising our definitional understandings of the ideas and concepts we use in thinking about 'place based' concepts, community organizing, community ownership and community leadership[146].

Calls for developing local area governance:

The lack of an ongoing structure in which to *'house'* the policy of *'place based and community led'*, is perhaps one of the key reasons the whole field of Emergency Management is seen to be needing a paradigm shift, in order to further develop the field within an overall coherent framework (McEntire et al, 2002). In the absence of such structures, community members will remain outside the formal system, and remain *'targets'* for change, not *'partners'* in change.

The closest formal authority that could develop and support local authorising structures is Local Government, with its proximal ties to community. Local Government, like communities, is also an entity seeking empowerment. As currently constituted there is too much uncertainty regarding the roles and reach of Local Government in relation to all of its program areas. Remedying the absence of any recognition or status afforded to local government in the Commonwealth Constitution is considered a strategic priority. Local Government regards constitutional recognition as a necessary first step towards gaining the requisite authority to perform its many roles. As currently constituted Local Government is perpetually vulnerable to externally generated change. While it is the ideal site for the development and nourishment of the *'mechanisms'* and *'structures'* that would allow the growth of the means through which *'subsidiarity'* and *'solidarity'* could ultimately prosper, it is not constituted in such a way that enables it to be assured of being able to deliver on this. It needs to be able to defend its formal roles and policy development and planning processes, roles and processes that were, in the eyes of participants in this project, over-ridden by *'higher'* authorities operating *'top down'*[147].

There are more 'sector specific' structures that could be explored for their contribution to wider community strengthening and consideration as channels for community voice in emergency planning. We are thinking here of Primary Care Partnerships, Medicare Locals, various community

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[146] We note that Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) was represented on the State Social, Health and Community Recovery Planning Sub Committee. See their VBRC submission.
http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Submissions/SubmissionDocuments/SUBM-002-033-0222_R.pdf
http://vcoss.org.au/blog/vital-to-include-community-groups-in-emergency-planning/ It would presumably depend on the resources at VCOSS's disposal as to the degree to which they could take a 'representative' role for their members, and on the degree to which these members could interact with their constituent community members on the key issues being raised and argued.

[147] This report has made reference to some of the innovative *'bottom up'* developments in the post-fires phase. Some of these developments will endure, others will or have faded. Some of the initiatives have included Kinglake Ranges engagement of the Australian Electoral Commission to oversee a community initiated formal ballot after the firestorm to elect its community representative group; Flowerdale's creative use of social media in its 'Help Flowerdale Now' initiative, reducing the negative effects of its dispersed nature; Whittlesea volunteers logistics work in establishing and managing a multi-campus Regional Hub for bushfire impacted citizens; Strathewen's Community Renewal Association's deliberate, participatory model and the unique and effective structures developed (Leadbeater, 2001; 2012); the Nillumbik Bushfire Social and Health Alliance group, a group of formal and informal programs and agencies, and community members, coming together to mutually explore key activities and concerns in the post-fire period; the establishment of 'Community Foundations' to hold, invest and distribute funds has been another successful post-disaster community initiative

consultative bodies in education and law enforcement, bodies like the Victorian Farmers Federation (whose members played significant roles to our knowledge in the post-fire environment, and perhaps in the earlier stages of Emergency Management planning), Landcare groups, Community Foundations, Business Networks, Progress Associations, and so on. These 'pre-existing' groups, structures and services, where they do have a strong community orientation and sometimes exemplify 'community inclusive' practices, need to be seen as part of the landscape of resilience, albeit currently formally *'outside'* the emergency services field of vision. These groups can be invisible or be *'disappeared'* just as 'community' can be 'overlooked'.

Some of the past structures that sought to provide community engagement in health, such as District Health Councils, and the *'mechanisms'* and *'structures'* from the days of the Australian Assistance Plan in the 1970s are worthy of review, for their participatory approaches to how to set up structures to engage and empower local communities. These ideas may not find favour among the political ideology of the major parties in 2014, but they were steeped in strong socially democratic participatory ideals and if revisited would find favour among community development advocates.

The Green Paper (2011) noted that a key finding of the Interim Report of the Victorian Floods Review is that communities expect to play an active role in deciding how to deal with emergencies and in working with emergency management agencies to achieve this. The report concludes that much work is still required to build resilience across Victoria. If the Flood Review Interim Report is correct, that communities expect to play an active role in deciding how to deal with emergencies (we think on the whole they do), there remains the question of how these *'bottom up'* expectations (which if *'expectations'* they could also be called *'social norms'*) marry with the formal *'top down'* structures that are authorised to plan, and act, in relation to emergencies [148].

Our project explored views of three 'sectors' – two well established (CSOs and LGAs) and one temporary (CRCs). Outside of these sectors lie 'ordinary' community members, and it is these people who constitute 'community' in the everyday sense. If government and service providers recast some of their programs to community, by taking a *'place based'* and *'community led'* approach, an empowering approach, a capability building approach, whether this be through policies and practices in education, in youth services, in health, in any area of civic life, this will positively impact on community safety, disaster preparedness and community resilience.

The more capable the community, the more socially connected the community, the safer the community, the more generalisably resilient, creative and adaptive the community.

The converse is true – interventions that override communities weaken connections and subsequently weaken safety and resilience. Jacques Boulet (pers. correspondence) talks of the importance of seeing communities as *'relational'* entities rather than as abstract configurations referred to almost synonymously as *'social groups without any concrete embodiment'*. Anyone involved in the post-fire environment saw collective strengths and capabilities communities showed in the aftermath of the fires. To Boulet, these

> *highlight both the 'incipient' strengths and actual strengths held usually invisibly, by communities. The tangible 'we will rebuild' mantra overlaid these less visible connections and the yearning for their reconnections at the relational and community level.*

[148] McLennan and Handmer (2012) say of social norms: 'However, institutions guiding collective action can also be informal. Social norms and expectations, cultural values, and social relationships of reciprocity are all examples of informal institutions that are not written down nor formally authorised but that none-the-less influence the way people work together: often in powerful and significant ways (p.8)'

The emphasis in recovery services on the individual level of service further suppressed the wider community connectedness, or desire for this. Boulet continues: '

> *The (re-)development of community and its maintenance as a 'functioning' and place-based 'system' requires careful and on-going attention and the 'along-side-ness' of skilled workers.*

While there were some excellent examples of this *'along-side-ness'* that some workers and agencies were able to offer communities, there were also many accounts of these practices being less in evidence yet wanted by and requested by communities – for support to them, on their terms, not under contractual relations that were out of keeping with their natural pace and preferences[149].

The language of 'local' and 'shared responsibility between government and community' and such phrases are not only being used in Emergency Management circles. We hope the recently released Shergold[150] report on the community services sector will impact on the Emergency Management field, as its findings are directly relevant to issues in Emergency Management with its emphasis on the need to increase a place based focus in offering services. Shergold (2013) recommends that 'local area governance be improved'.

> *New models of local area governance (which provide for the participation of local government authorities and service organisations) should be established. This will enhance the development and delivery of services that better meet the needs of individuals, families and communities at the local and regional levels. (p.43)*

Any new approach that increases a place-based focus, and calls for greater knowledge of local areas, and emphasises the need for collaborative effort such as this will require, is worthy of attention. Jesuit Social Services in their submission to the Shergold inquiry noted that

> *it is our view that [areas] need to be small enough to enable the intimacy of relationship and the depth of communication required between the relevant services and community members in order to work in such a consolidated fashion*

It is possible that there may have to be many calls from different sectors, loudly and forcefully, in order to gain attention for the need for new models of governance, with an emphasis on appropriate size and human scale, with the assumptions underlying the need for *'intimacy of relationship'* to be realised, and with these sorts of developments, reinforcement of and reinvigoration of community development processes.

Unpacking different meanings in the Emergency Management field

Many of the conversations highlighted just how many different perspectives individuals and groups were coming from, across the LGA, CSO and CRC sectors. Just as there was little opportunity to inquire into these different perspectives in the three sector conversations (this work would have formed part of the second *'braided dialogue'* stage of our proposed action-research process), there was no opportunity to collaboratively confer as the disaster recovery period unfolded in 'real life'. Shared understanding, sense-making and shared responsibility tasks and processes are central

149 More exploration is required to inquire into how more localised community responses to say Tier 1 disasters are enacted and supported, and to explore their connectedness to the circumstances surrounding Tiers 2 and 3. It may be that the pilot projects such as the Future Ready Communities149 in the Otways, the work the Office of the Fire Services Commissioner has initiated with communities in The Dandenong Ranges, and the community-initiated local fire prevention, preparedness and disaster resilience work in Hepburn Shire, will assist in shifting the field towards greater collaboration and partnership with community members.

150 While Shergold (2013) was examining the services to the state's most vulnerable families, and we are looking at the state's most vulnerable communities in terms of natural disaster, we believe the benefits of attending to the same principles of reducing the scale and increasing the knowledge of community apply.

concerns, and finding ways to elicit and embed these in emergency management settings, pose direct challenges and suggest new practice opportunities. We suggest that calls for *'shared responsibility'* are premature in the absence of *'shared understanding'* and that real *'shared understanding'* needs to be negotiated and achieved, rather than mandated and contracted, and that negotiations could form part of community, organisational and institutional disaster preparedness planning processes.

What are the environments for the clarification of the various meanings that individuals, groups, agencies, organisations, alliances and institutions bring to the words they use? Each part of the sector will have its own phrases, jargon, programs, interventions, beliefs that require clarification. Of course the words we use are only part of how we differ, as Brown's (2008) work shows[151] (see Appendix 3 for an outline of the many different forms of knowledge we each bring to our fields of interest). To elicit, question, clarify and develop shared understanding about these different knowledges is hard work. Mutual understanding is even more critical in the pressurised environment of a disaster. Unfortunately such pressurised environments make establishing such critical processes even harder.

The issue of 'frameworks' and their differences, can be at the heart of some of the gaps between the formal services and community members. For some formal services and their staff, community members are viewed as *'targets'* for professional messages. If this framework or means of thinking about community is the dominant frame, the task for the educator is to see that community follows key messages. The subtle or not so subtle expectation is that the recipient will then comply. The visible *'behavioural'* manifestation of those invisible *'belief systems'* appears to be imploring - if only people would just *'behave'* correctly. Where this view exists, it works to preclude communicative (participatory, action-learning, co-inquiry, democratic, deliberative) approaches to addressing issues, undertaking shared disaster preparedness planning and implementing appropriate strategies and interventions in disaster response and recovery.

Of course *'behaviour'* is critical – what people do or don't do, their *'behaviour'*, in the face of a disaster can be the difference between life and death. What we are talking of here is when this (behaviour of the *'other'*) approach becomes the dominant one, it precludes other inquiry-based, self-reflexive exploratory approaches, or creates an environment in which other approaches or alternatives cannot even be *'thought about'* and hence made available for exploration.

Consider the different meanings that could be associated with *'local knowledge'*, a phrase in wide use in the Emergency Management field[152]. In their use of the phrase, the VBRC in noting its importance, recommended that a local person become part of the Incident Management processes. While this recognises the specific and important issue of *'local knowledge'*, in our view it also highlights what we might call an *'incremental'* and *'instrumental'* approach to change[153], a response in which those in decision making positions allow into their structure, one other voice[154]. While this

[151] For example, the term *'first responders'* holds a different meaning for community members than it does for emergency services. For the former, it usually means those community members *'in situ'* who respond and take action before the more formally recognised services arrive. To emergency services it will usually mean the first of the *'formal'* services on the scene. Shergold (2013) provides a perspective on this in his 'Service Sector Reform. A roadmap for community and human services reform', and takes the next step by linking ideas about the impact on collaboration when shared understandings don't exist. '*My experience with this project brought home to me just how difficult it is to collaborate. There are subtle differences of language that separate public administration from community workers. Words can have different meanings that are not immediately apparent. 'Place-based' for public servants often defines an administrative boundary for regional planning purposes; for Community Service Organisations, it conveys a sense of social community and neighbourhood*' p.44).

[152] Indian (2008) has written about this in the Community Fire Safety, Edited by Handmer and Haynes

[153] We use the word instrumental here in the marxist philosophical sense, where a form of social organisation can become a tool that is exploited by an individual or a system, for its own use. In this sense a 'token gesture' toward an 'idea' without having to really engage with the full meaning of the idea, say , of the breadth of 'local knowledge', or its other uses.

[154] There are possible resonances of this instrumental approach to the finding in the RMIT_ISPOS report 'Increasing numbers of retirees with the time and skills to volunteer represent a valuable resource for emergency management, particularly in non-response roles (such as community awareness and education)'. While this is no doubt true, and welcome, it will be a welcome

is a welcome change, and no doubt the people filling these roles who bring appropriate local knowledge can make a significant contribution, and no doubt an Incident Management structure needs to be a tightly 'command and control' model, it falls short of how others will wish to establish more fulsome ways in which *'local knowledge'* can be appreciated and embraced. The *'single voice'* approach, an outsider to the *'insider culture'*, can be a very stressful role, requiring considerable resilience. While the take up by the formal services of this inclusion of *'local knowledge'* may seem to some to be evidence of a shift in attitude – few from the community development sector would regard it as evidence of the beginnings of a paradigm shift.

Other key terms in use that require teasing out are *'transformation'* and *'paradigm shift'*. In the *'ordinary'* meanings of these words and phrases, we think these ideas (transformation and paradigm shift) have the same general thrust: that major change is required.[155,156]No doubt if unpacked between different groups, the ideas of what a paradigm shift might look like in their eyes would range from simple and easy *'baby steps'* to extremely dramatic and very difficult *'giant leaps'*.

Another key word is *'participation'*. We note the warning given by Ledwith and Springett (2010) that

> *when transformative concepts such as participation are not fully understood in practice, there is a danger they will become diluted and therefore dangerous (p 15).*[157]

All participants in the project talked of the need to know more about each others' domains –and also how little community and community service organisations knew about what the formal emergency management system was: how it was structured, who the key parties were, what plans existed, what the regional and local structures were, and what were the mechanisms for participation. These comments were often made with some humility – that it took a disaster to open their eyes to this lack of understanding. Other differences include the conjecture that community is not present to play significant roles in self-determination / self-governance and community safety / emergency management. Where this assumption exists it needs to be made explicit [158], so key parties can take this not as a given, but as something to explore, both as a *'frame of reference'*, a perspective, and as a reality on the ground. This exploration would need to be broadly enough based using appropriate methods, to test assumptions in their particular locations. Where it is considered 'true', alternative means of Emergency Management response need to be found[159].

The importance of being open to the perspectives of others runs through a report commissioned by the OFSC[160161]. One respondent to the study, an Emergency Management official, noted how rural

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change when there are other roles that can be pointed to for such volunteers, including ones where the community is less the 'target' for change, but the one that is 'leading planning and decision making around bushfire safety', as envisioned on page 11 of the Bushfire Safety Policy Framework. http://fire-com-live-wp.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2013-Bushfire-Safety-Policy-Framework.pdf

[155] http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/paradigm-shift?q=paradigm+shift. The Oxford dictionary refers to 'marked change' in relation to transformation, and 'fundamental change' in relation to paradigm shift.

[156] Guba (1990) uses the term paradigm (and we adopt this broad approach) in its most common generic sense – 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in communication with a descriptive inquiry' (p.17)

[157] Ledwith and Springett (2010) note the warnings by Cooke and Kathari, 2001, who name participation as the 'new tyranny', where they outline the use of buzz words and their negative impact on transformation (cited in Ledwith and Springett, p 15)

[158] We have noted above using the voice of a LGA officer, who questioned (as so many in roles where a key aim is to increase community understanding of threat) whether community does want to be involved in Emergency Management processes. We note that that this issue of desire of community for involvement in crisis management is contested also by others; Boin and Hart (2010) note that 'politicians and citizens display a low tolerance for even minor disturbances, but at the same time *they show little interest in efforts to improve crisis management* '(p.258) (emphasis added).

[159] The RMIT and IPSOS report appear to have formed the conclusion for some peri urban environments, where fire risk has increased due to geographic location, but the population is not familiar with landscape risks. They note this population is increasing. See reports on OFSC website, particularly Report 1: Agriculture, public land, private land uses.

[160] http://fire-com-live-wp.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/Publication-External-Report-1-Agriculture-public-land.pdf

[161] There is another aspect of being open, and that is the more common meaning of open and 'transparent'. It is very hard to get information about resource allocation. Those outside government experience a degree of bureaucratic obfuscation and lack of transparency when it comes to strategic decision-making processes regarding the deployment of resources and investments. In

and regional communities are often very innovative when it comes to developing and implementing initiatives to meet their unique local needs.

> *What the sector needs to be better at is bubbling up the good ideas from the local level and sharing that innovation and change (p.15)*

The report noted that emergency managers are often reluctant to relinquish responsibility to communities. This then has a tendency to discourage individual initiative and community self-sufficiency [162] as well as the gradual acquiring of states of learned helplessness [163] and the subsequent generation of social malaise.

One of the biggest issues begging for discussion, is that of authorisation.

There was frequent use of words to do with 'authority', 'authorisation' and decision-making vacuums, by participants from each of the three sectors engaged in this project. What does this mean, and why is it important? Richard Collins (2006), drawing on ideas from Mark Moore, from Harvard University, refers to authorisation in this way:

> *Authorisation is achieved through both representative and participative democracy. It, normatively, legitimises the core assumptions and aims, mechanisms of delivery and methods of measurement of a service. Citizens, normatively, are a key part of the authorising environment and must be engaged in the public value process: a process that may involve refining citizens' preferences through education, providing citizens with information, fostering mechanisms for transparent collaborative decision making and leadership that shapes, rather than just reacts to, citizens' preferences (p.25).*

The means, concepts, practices and approaches that give weight to the concepts of *'place-based'*, *'community led'* and *'shared responsibility'*, need to be reaffirmed, where they already exist in Emergency Management. Where they don't, they can be borrowed from other fields and reshaped to this domain, given oxygen by the formal system, and debated locally for their resonance with community values. How can these means, concepts, practices and approaches be deliberatively developed by all parties in order to avoid the *'new tyranny'* that they could become if not properly, fairly, and democratically constituted? We think some of the contributions in this report talk directly to the *'tyranny of distant policy'*. Centrally determined policies can and often do struggle to grasp or attend to the detail of their meaning and application to practice in places and localities.

Unexplored meanings sitting between disempowerment and coercion

We have cited the Bushfire Royal Commission Implementation Monitor Report (BRCIMR) (2012) report in which it is stated that there is a sense in which the community has become disempowered by the Emergency Management system. There is a risk in our view, that the formal system, could become, ironically, coercive (again) under the guise of redressing this disempowerment. The BRCIMR report talks of the

> *pressing need to build communities that are more resilient as a major defensive strategy against natural disasters*

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what areas are community members involved in decisions about the deployment of resources? It may be that the public sector is already so under-resourced that the very idea of sharing resources with disaster-vulnerable communities is a bridge too far.

[162] See pp 15-16 of the OFSC commissioned RMIT_ISPOS report.

[163] See the pioneering experimental work of renowned U.S. psychologist Martin Seligman that first demonstrated the generation of states of learned helplessness (Peterson, Maier, and Seligman, 1993).

and that a

> *great deal of work needs to be done at the local level to equip communities and individuals to meet these obligations for shared responsibility (emphases added).*

We don't wish to minimise or diminish in any way the concern or the anxiety that authorities are acting under in seeking to address these pressing needs. New strategies and investments are needed. But in the hands of a formal system seeking to make and direct changes, the targeted focus *could* be narrowed down to the changes required by *'individuals and communities'* (only). Goode et al (2012) noted in their review of the UK literature in relation to enhancing community resilience.

> *The UK literature review identified two unresolved gaps in our knowledge that, from our review of the five recent disaster reports in Australia, would have some commonality here: namely – how do we get the community to behave appropriately? And, how to we motivate and sustain interest in community resilience activity before, during and after an emergency? (p.56; emphasis added).*

It is a short step (or a slippery slope) from this position to what is sometimes the very next question – *whose responsibility is it to see that communities behave appropriately?* This can lead to very real pressures on authorities to invest only in those actions that can most clearly demonstrate that they, as an institution or an authority, have used that authority to fulfill the requirements placed on them (and for which they are 'responsible'). It is then only another short step to see how the formal system responses can become weighted toward those activities that can be *'demonstrated*' and *'measured'*. While in the context of the 'risk environment' these '*incremental'* and *'instrumental'* shifts in emphasis are understandable, they can and do lead to weighting the service response toward strategies that can become coercive at worst, and that lack a partnership approach at best.

This reading would suggest that one of the reasons the system reinforces what it's already doing is that the alternative is a threat - it's power and control would be compromised if it sought to resource the voices of those other than itself. In the terms of this report, this dynamic would be a barrier to the resourcing of communities, particularly at the local level. Whether this is a conscious or unconscious strategy, its consequences are palpable: it removes the opportunity for community members to identify, explore and take up roles that would strengthen networks at the locality level. While we might argue that the community would likely respond differently if it were better resourced, what this would look like remains a moot point, as it would need to be well-resourced to experience how it would or could use its influence for positive change.

How to move the Emergency Management field's conception of the role of community from being the passive centrepiece (target) in a professionally constructed diagram, to being an active dynamic interactive agent of change in a co-constituted relationship, will need a lot of work.

Section 7: Distilled Learnings

There are many dilemmas inherent in trying to resolve questions of how, when, where and why to introduce and sustain place-based and community-led disaster recovery.

What emerged from our cross-sectoral conversations were calls for significant change in the way emergency management and disaster recovery are conceived of, constituted and implemented.

Local autonomy as an ideal was implicit in the 'community-led recovery' rhetoric deployed by the state government, but was not made explicit through the oft promised, but never delivered provision of adequate and timely resources, infrastructure and authorisation to support:

- the establishment of subsidiary community governance and decision-making structures
- the enablement of local-regional cross-agency and cross-sectoral alliances and partnerships
- the creation of collaborative action learning processes and local authorising environments

We believe significant attention is required to move toward a shared commitment to structural and systemic transformation in emergency management, predicated on an orientation to both policy and practice that explores, affirms, prioritises and enacts new community-based models.

Distilled next practice principles we believe require exploration and development in practice are:

1. **Embrace Spontaneous Autonomous Local Peer-to-Peer Networks** *(self-organisation)*
2. **Enshrine Place-Based and Community-Led Regeneration and Renewal** *(subsidiarity)*
3. **Ensure Shared Understanding, Shared Resourcing and Shared Responsibility** *(solidarity)*
4. **Promote Emergency Management Critical Literacy and Conscientisation** *(systemicity)*
5. **Specific Disaster Preparedness – Single Purpose Instrumental Rationality** *(legibility)*
6. **Generalisable Community Resilience – Relational Systems Dynamics** *(complexity)*
7. **Enact Collaboration, Co-Creativity, Co-Production and Collective Impact** *(commons)*
8. **Engage Deeply with Disadvantage, Diversity, Difference and Dependency** *(dignity)*
9. **Acknowledge and Transcend Structural Theft and Structural Violence** *(non-violence)*
10. **Operate Beyond Denial – in Uncertainty, Instability and Unpredictability** *(humility)*

We briefly expand on each of the distilled next practice principles (above) in the section that follows, contributing an initial sense of our shared process learnings. We have also included in this section, a selection from the many pertinent specific advocacy and systemic reform suggestions that came out of our domain-specific 'disaster recovery' conversations.

What became apparent from our process of hosting cross-sectoral conversations (and what has also independently arisen, and been confirmed, in and among, many other disaster-impacted communities[164]) is the overwhelming importance of maturing a social movement-oriented (complex adaptive living systems dynamics) model of disaster recovery.

[164] See accounts in Rebecca Solnit's A Paradise Built in Hell – the Extraordinary Communities that Arise in Disaster, and in Anouk Ride and Dianne Bretherton's Community Resilience in Natural Disasters

The figure below depicts our initial framing of *place-based and community-led* distilled learnings from our Black Saturday community recovery review cross-sectoral conversations.

Figure 2 Components for maturing a social movement-oriented (complex adaptive living systems dynamics) model of disaster preparedness and disaster recovery

1. Self-organisation

Principle:

Embrace the Emergence of Spontaneous and Autonomous Local Peer-to-Peer Networks

Detail:

Self-organisation is a process where an overall order or coordination arises out of the local interactions between the components of an initially disordered or uncoordinated system. This process is spontaneous and emergent, generated by complex adaptive living systems dynamics, i.e., it is not directed or controlled by an agent above or below or inside or outside the system. In human social settings self-organisation is triggered by very local interactions such as a range of local probes or prototypes – participatory action learning and safe fail experimentation –that become amplified by positive feedback and propagated via sharing. Social movements arise as amplified strategies and synergies are recognised. When resonance occurs, momentum gathers. The pattern of productive organisation that emerges is surprisingly robust and adaptive and profoundly decentralised and distributed. Self-organising social movement dynamics can be completely invisible to outsiders and often arise as a surprise to central authorities.[165]

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- setting up autonomous bodies that both enable community decision-making and protect self-organising initiatives, allows for the development of stronger relationships, mutual understanding and trust, and the requisite exchanges to achieve systemic understanding
- relationships, trust and mutuality underpin 'autonomous peer-to-peer networked processes' and 'shared understanding, shared resourcing and shared responsibility'
- self-organisation arises out of the myriad conversations and actions of communities openly and creatively collaborating and is consolidated by establishing initiatives such as: action learning circles, participatory action research, deliberative democracy, liquid democracy and sense-making to track community conditions and dynamics, and collaborate on generating meaningful, strategic 'whole community' data and narratives
- unimpeded community governance bodies demonstrate self-organising and evolutionary dynamics that with protection and enablement mature into a self-authorising, development-oriented, inclusive form, that is, more often than not, and of necessity, open to all community group leaders, and in time also to government, business and service provider representatives
- locally authorised bodies that encapsulated human scale (the centrality of community, at a small enough scale to be meaningful to local citizens), and human pace (a sufficiently long period of developmental-maturational latency / identity consolidation) prior to engaging with and building in (rather than being overwhelmed by) key decision makers – government, agency and business – through practical project work and experimentation, trial and error and trial and success, were the exception, rather than the rule
- deliberation can then be undertaken with local and state government to negotiate and then establish what the limits of subsidiarity and autonomous decision-making will be

Learning:

Always expect local people to step up, self-organise and generate direct action after a major disaster

Expect authorities and the media to unwittingly undermine community self-organisation dynamics

[165] Adapted from among others Kenny & Gardner, 1988

Quotes:

> *Coordination (oversight) and leadership of disaster preparedness and recovery partnerships is among our (Local Government) most critical strategic work.*
>
> *Community self-organisation and spontaneous leadership benefits from supportive and empowering agencies and government departments – this was rarely the case.*

Advocacy:

Advocate for sufficient time and space and autonomy to be afforded communities to enable regrouping, consolidation and coherence and for complex adaptive social dynamics to emerge

Advocate for and encourage curiosity and learning on the part of state and local government, emergency management authorities and community service provider organisations

Advocate for rapid 'on the ground' appraisals or appreciative inquiry to be undertaken alongside locals in order that external bodies can see what has emerged without their intervention

Advocate for media not to exert undue pressure on government to fix the unfixable – there are no silver bullet solutions – highlight deliberative community processes and shared outcomes generated

Advocate for community strengths and assets mapping, appreciative inquiry, community conditions, dynamics mapping, futures scanning, scenario planning and action learning as means to foster a shared ability to think – act – observe – reflect adaptively, and mature self-organising capacity

Conclusion:

A central, recurring and perhaps universal theme is the profound innovations and creative leadership that spontaneously emerges within communities in the aftermath of disasters.

Self-organisation capability may be apparent among communities during disaster prevention and preparedness efforts, but these, in the main, latent strengths are likely to be invisible or indiscernible to most until a triggering event brings them forth and sets them in motion.

The media by seeking controversy, exaggerating stereotypes and demanding rapid action and governments by imposing order, legibility and acting prematurely, undermine emergent dynamics.

Community members and local agencies can, and do, invite partnership and practice resistance, as external authorities make critical decisions with and without local knowledge, input or approval.

Documenting community dynamics, increasing interconnectedness and overcoming social isolation, appraising strengths and undertaking scenario planning exercises will likely enhance community preparedness and increase the likelihood that self-organising dynamics emerge and mature.

Clarifying roles and responsibilities across all domains will increase awareness of each parties strengths and gaps and allow communities to understand and plan for what they see as needed.

Fostering mutual self-help and collective self-reliance and increasing community autonomy, decision-making processes and collective self-authorisation will likely enhance post-disaster self-organisation.

2. Subsidiarity

Principle:

Enshrine Place-Based and Community-Led Regeneration and Renewal

Detail:

Subsidiarity is an organising principle that insists matters ought to be handled by the smallest, lowest or least centralised competent authority. Political decisions should be taken on at a local level whenever possible, rather than taken up by a central authority. A central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks that cannot be performed effectively and efficiently at a more immediate or local level. This tenet holds that nothing should be done by a larger and more complex organisation that can be done as well by a smaller and simpler one. In disaster preparedness and community resilience, subsidiarity should include active leadership roles for Local Government Authorities and community-based leadership structures.[166]

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- the many disputes that arose as a result of uncertainty regarding power, responsibility, delegated authority and autonomy were major impediments to effective recovery action
- in the absence of validated local decision-making autonomy, the inevitable dominance of state government representatives deploying 'power over' and 'wedge politics' strategies prevailed
- 'one size fits all' imposed 'top down' rational professional 'command and control' emergency services models don't work everywhere, and for the most part, don't work well anywhere
- communities and community service organisations are unaware how emergency management plans are developed, who participates, how can they be accessed and the status of local, state and federal government mandated disaster response and recovery cooperation agreements
- state and local government emergency management professional plans are too abstract, lack local distinctiveness, community ownership and the requisite resources to support nested household, neighbourhood and community preparedness plans and fire safety drills
- illuminating local distinctiveness and complex adaptive community dynamics by highlighting the educational, economic, social, infrastructure, cultural and ecological diversity within and between communities and across regions, better equips communities to negotiate nuanced responses from authorities, responses that are particular to place and culture

Learning:

Subsidiarity requires a willingness to enable and empower, to decentralise and redistribute power.

Power inequality is fundamental, action to democratise preparedness and recovery is long overdue.

Quotes:

> *There is no clear authorising environment in the aftermath of a disaster. It's a mess of power and egos. A mess of engaging direct partnerships with those who are used to operating at a distance from you and from a position of 'power over' you.*

> *There was an authority vacuum across boundaries. No one had any idea. They just can't do it; they can't change the way they think and act. There was a mismatch between government's administrative boundaries and the boundaries of 'natural local communities'.*

[166] text on subsidiarity informed by Lowell (2006, p.5) and Catholic Social Justice Principles documents

Advocacy:

Advocate for and contribute to the establishment of clearly understood and supported common authorising environments, deliberative processes and participatory decision-making mechanisms

Advocate long-term for Local Government recognition as an independent tier of government and adequately resourced to carry out its place-based local and regional coordination-leadership role as the first tier of government, the level of government closest to and most trusted by the people

Advocate for the maintenance and extension of Local Government's emergency management and disaster recovery coordination role and the resources commensurate with these functions

Advocate for Community Services Organisations government contracts to reflect service and program co-design and delivery to catchments and whole communities, not targeted populations

Advocate for Community Service Organisations with independent income streams so that they can operate more independently rather than being bound by state government directives

Advocate for communities of affinity-association instead of being hamstrung by Federal, State and Local Government determined boundaries across neighbouring settlements and districts

Conclusion:

Issues of place-based community leadership require much more than just being included in press releases or policy statements. How can disaster vulnerable local communities engage in disaster preparedness and response and recovery planning when there are no validated and legitimated authorising environments or community governance structures to support local decision-making?

By supporting and enabling the development of localised authorising environments at or below postcode scale, government, emergency services and community service organisations would set in train the necessary conditions for the development of 'community owned' participatory and deliberative local leadership processes for both disaster preparedness and community resilience.

Consistent with the distinctiveness of local communities, necessary conditions to enable local authorizing environments would inevitably vary, but would likely include the establishment of ongoing community governance legal entities that can hold funds, generate income, enable discretionary local investment, formally negotiate with agencies and authorities, establish conflict resolution and restorative justice capacity and capability, and progressively decrease dependency on external decision makers. They could focus on: improving the rates of household, neighbourhood and community disaster preparedness plans and evacuation drills, deriving a set of community and emergency management process agreements and shared expectations in partnership with authorities, and participating in the coordination of community recovery, regeneration and renewal in the aftermath of a disaster.

For subsidiarity to take hold, Local Governments need to be empowered and legitimated as the first tier of government, recognised in the Constitution and have access to resources commensurate with the requirements of their holistic local place-based planning and policy leadership roles.

For subsidiarity to flourish, Community Services Organisations need to reimagine service and program design within a place-based community development framework bringing new resources to the development of generalisable community resilience and specific disaster preparedness.

3. Solidarity

Principle:

Ensure Shared Understanding, Shared Resourcing, Shared Power and Shared Responsibility

Detail:

Standing and working together as one, the experience of alongsidedness, the unity or agreement of feeling or action based on shared interests, objectives, standards, and sympathies, especially among individuals with a common interest; mutual self help and collective self-reliance within a group. Solidarity refers to the ties in a society that bind people together as one. Being in solidarity involves activity oriented towards other people and does not result from the expectation of reward, but rather from instinctive feelings of generosity and solidarity.[167] Where a shared space of affinity, or risk exists, where working together is either natural or necessary, attention is paid to the means of reaching shared understanding regarding the issues at hand and the opportunities ahead, as well as to the resources required to nurture this understanding and commitment to each other and each party.

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- citizens and communities responding from a sense of self-interest and shared interest (mutuality) will more than likely be the first responders during and after mega-disasters
- in addition to local citizens, emergency services and community services staff members and volunteers, who are local citizens, will also step into community first responder roles
- developing defensible positions regarding your community's expectations of disaster preparedness, response, recovery, reconstruction and renewal will be of value both when your community faces a serious threat and when negotiating priorities with power
- solidarity around community preparedness and response objectives and priorities is vital as difficult conversations will ensue as centralised authorities attempt to impose order
- in order to increase likelihood of co-advocacy and co-leverage on shared issues and to decrease the likelihood of being wedged by government and others it is important to form relationships with adjoining communities that mature into strategic partnerships
- local government and community service agencies can both reinforce and undermine the self-determination, capacity, capability and coherence of local community groups and organisations, and can be at their best when adopting a stance of humble alongsideness
- despite some enmity, there was considerable empathy for state government officers as restructures, changes of government and associated political pressures interrupted the continuity of strategic partnerships and compromised policies, services and programs
- genuine enjoyment, mutual benefit and respect grow out of close relationships between agency staff and impacted community leaders who co-develop local renewal projects

Learning:

Shared responsibility demands shared understanding and shared commitments, resources and power

Community Development investments are required for resilient, creative disaster-ready communities

Quotes:

> *There is a lot to celebrate where Council – community relationships have changed for the better.*
>
> *It's the time we waste with people that makes us friends.*

[167] Colin Ward's work on autonomy and solidarity has been influential – see Bibliography

Advocacy:

Advocate for disaster vulnerable communities participation in the shared process of proactively constituting defensible authorising environments

Advocate for improved treatment of emergency service community members whose solidarity with one another and with their communities leads to demanding roles and compromising situations

Advocate for establishing closer ties with local, regional and state media outlets to ensure greater coverage of local perspectives on disaster vulnerability, resilience, preparedness and response

Advocate for community media, published information and narratives through multiple channels - on-line, social media, newspapers, newsletters, mail, radio, noticeboards, messaging, word of mouth

Advocate for curiosity about and the interrogation of new phrases such as 'shared responsibility' particularly in regard to what they might mean operationally 'on the ground' for locally communities

Advocate for detailed investigation of what exactly is required – legally, institutionally, formally and informally – to invoke, enact, establish and sustain cultures of responsibility sharing across all sectors

Advocate for and seek out opportunities to garner resources and financial donations through private sources so as to creatively respond to local disaster-impacted community needs in a timely manner

Advocate for and encourage communities to tell their own stories of how their recovery groups evolved, about revitalisation and about the social innovations that grew out of disaster recovery

Advocate for and celebrate the camaraderie and learning from post-disaster informal buddy system that paired small rural disaster-impaired LGAs with larger regional and metropolitan unaffected LGAs

Advocate for and recognise the work of peak bodies such as VCOSS and MAV along with their member organisations, where initiatives were informed by attention to local community needs and aspirations.

Advocate for finding ways of sharing Local Government perspectives and understandings on post-disaster conditions and the new roles and initiatives that emerged, with the sector as a whole

Advocate for Community Service Organisations to secure small parcels of discretionary funds that can be made available for local investment in strategic capacity in the aftermath of disasters

Conclusion:

Beyond subsidiarity-oriented authorising structures, there was an appreciation that multi-level networked governance and collaborative decision-making mechanisms are necessary, not just during disaster prevention and mitigation and disaster response and recovery, but in order to inform and enact specific disaster preparedness and foster generalisable community resilience.

These Community Resilience or Preparedness Coalitions or broader alliances would need to collaborate horizontally with neighbouring postcodes where there is a shared threat such as a National Park, State Forest, escarpment, river system or other landscape scale risk features.

Local government can detail many of the challenges and opportunities a change in orientation to the 'community' brings, and the time and energy required to initiate even 'light footprint' first steps towards shared ownership of decision-making power and genuinely participatory processes

4. Systemicity

Principle:

Promote Emergency Management Critical Literacy and Citizen Conscientisation

Detail:

Systemicity, in this instance, refers to the degree of interfacing, dynamic connectedness and effectiveness – the capacity to behave as a system, i.e., to produce complex, adaptive, dynamic, emergent behaviours as characterised and exhibited by systems, or interoperable systems-of-systems[168]. This is contrasted with the behaviours and effectiveness, or absence thereof, characterised and exhibited within, and by, systems of sub-systems or non-integrated non-interoperable non-systems.[169] By conscientisation, we invoke the practices of Friere[170] and his followers, who refer to critical adult learning processes as the basis for development of 'critical consciousness'. Friere's liberation work focused on developing systemic contextual literacy and the relationship of this to issues of oppression and suffrage: without literacy, one can't participate.

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- the frustration and tension of decision-making under conditions of uncertainty and chaos, the all-pervasive nature of conflicting role expectations, and difficulty in clarifying and constituting disaster recovery roles and responsibilities, impedes proactive local action
- there continues to be a widespread lack of understanding in the community and among professionals and bureaucrats as to what constitutes the Emergency Management system
- the competitive service environment stemming from distant vertical contracting diminishes most agencies ability to explore local dynamics and contribute to community development
- many Royal Commission recommendations are contributing to inward looking organisational cultures of closure and compliance instead of responsiveness, adaptability and innovation
- narrow recovery services review processes, particularly 'internal only' appreciative review processes breed cynicism by excluding broader stakeholder feedback and learning
- the opportunity created by the unprecedented conditions associated with Black Saturday could have been the catalyst for long overdue and lasting change to how disaster recovery is constituted, recognising, the likelihood of a wide ranging recovery review is highly unlikely
- differing conceptual frameworks and paradigms, and differing approaches to disaster across the disaster continuum, across government, across different disciplines, across different professional groups and across different local areas obviate against integration
- 'shared responsibility' for Emergency Management requires systemic shifts of the sort that are transformative in terms of power relations, and are required at all levels and across all domains, across community as well as government and other institutions

[168] Cavallo's work talks of a system of systems. See her valuable article in Australian Journal of Emergency Management, Volume 29, Issue 3, 2014.
[169] Wadsworth uses this term extensively in her text book Building in Research and Evaluation – Human Inquiry for Living Systems published in 2012.
[170] Brazilian educator, activist, and theorist Paulo Freire in his 1970 work Pedagogy of the Oppressed.

Learning:

Recovery planning is difficult because emergencies, communities and politics are unpredictable.

Expect to operate in an environment where, at best, authority is ambiguous, at worst, it is absent.

Quotes:

> *State and local governments were riding roughshod over our work … and processes.*
>
> *VBRRA … generated a whole new suite of power-based relationships, and so a whole new disaster recovery politics.*

Advocacy:

Advocate for and respect that the coordination and leadership of disaster preparedness and recovery partnerships is among council's most critical and trusted strategic undertakings

Advocate for community interest in, understanding of, contribution and commitment to Council Emergency Management Plans, and that local government resources to address this will be required

Advocate that Community Service Organisation staff develop a detailed working knowledge of Emergency Management arrangements and commit to contributing to their further development

Advocate for systemic investments to ensure communities are better prepared for future crises and enabled to take responsibility for disaster preparedness and resilience planning and implementation

Advocate for state and federal disaster donations policy and legislative changes to remove any impediments to the distribution of public donor funds to the rebuilding of *whole* communities

Advocate for a critical, systemic review of state and federal privacy legislation, as 'privacy' too often operated as a defense against collaborative action, impacting negatively on community recovery

Advocate for action on negotiating compensation and financial assistance for both rental tenants and landlords, particularly given our prevailing assumptions of private home ownership as the norm

Advocate for service and program delivery timeframes and resources commensurate with evidence - based understandings of recovery requirements of impacted individuals, families and communities

Advocate for clear commitments as to how all levels of government will support and resource local government in its critical disaster preparedness, emergency management and disaster recovery roles

Conclusion:

The absence of systemicity is a major issue for the Emergency Management field.

Greater curiosity about, interest in and a healthy critique of Emergent Management systems and practices from a community-led and place-based perspective needs to be fostered.

Care is needed at all levels to give critical inquiry and feedback a chance to flourish as this is crucial to long term transformation.

Understand that those who work from a position of belief in the importance of trust and identify its violations require respect and support when providing feedback to authorities and communities.

Hard work is required at the conceptual and practical level to reinforce that preparedness for major disasters goes beyond the immediate response phase into what communities prefer to call regeneration and renewal. Recovery, rightly or wrongly, is associated with learned helplessness and dependency.

Political imperatives require service and program closure. Rationales are used that contradict international disaster recovery evidence regarding the long-term impact of individual and collective trauma and loss and the need for ongoing support, services and programs

Pre-empt that if a new State level authority is required in a future large-scale disaster, it may bring a considerable responsibility hiatus leading to uncertainty over key roles and relationships.

Call for independent dispute resolution and restorative processes after disasters to re-establish shared understanding, trust and mutually respectful relationships and bridge building across all levels of government, between disciplines, agencies and all key parties, including communities.

5. Legibility

Principle:

Specific Disaster Preparedness – Singular Purpose Mechanistic Rationality

Detail:

A reality that serves many purposes presents itself as illegible to a vision informed by a singular purpose. Any elements that are non-functional with respect to the singular purpose tend to confuse, and are therefore eliminated during the attempt to *rationalise.* The deep failure in thinking lies in the mistaken assumption that thriving, successful and functional realities must necessarily be legible, or at least more legible to the all-seeing aerial view of the statist eye in the sky than to the local, embedded, ear to the ground. This imposed simplification, in service of legibility to the state's eye, makes the rich reality brittle, and failure follows. The imagined improvements are not realised. The big mistake in this pattern of failure is projecting one's subjective lack of comprehension onto the object one is looking at labeling it *irrationality.* We make this mistake when we are tempted by a desire for *legibility.*[171]

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- there will be enormous political, media and community pressure to be seen to just 'get things done' and that this will likely overshadow curiosity about what exactly is unfolding and systemic thinking about what might be the most strategic responses or interventions
- how community decisions are made or failing that, how decisions are made 'on behalf of community', in a disaster's aftermath, will frame and set the tone for the long recovery
- campaigns for governance arrangements closer to the ground will threaten established institutional arrangements and vested interests and will likely meet significant resistance
- the knowledge, skills and values implicit in community development, in theory and in practice, are not prevalent in policies and programs at senior state government levels
- community development processes that necessitate open participation may not gel with risk management and quantitative efficiency measures used by government institutions
- local government is required to focus on structure, strategic plans, maintaining knowledge management and communication systems and grant management systems, at the expense of finding out what communities are experiencing and what they really want and need
- the cynicism voiced by communities exposed to superficial, manipulative engagement processes decreases the likelihood of mutually generated, community-owned outcomes
- a leap of faith is required to orient policies and resources away from centralised command and control and towards place-based and community-led developmental approaches – significant investments would transform both communities and emergency management

Learning:

Professional and specialist priorities can preclude a view of 'community' and holistic approaches

Expect heightened emotions, passionate engagement and robust arguments with all stakeholders

[171] adapted from operational critique by James Scott for whom 'statist' implies the concentration of controls by the state (meaning government).

Quotes:

> *A tsunami of agency and government help came rolling toward our people – this can be very distracting and very intimidating.*

> *Everything is so fraught … so many departments and agencies, so many players. There was an authority vacuum across boundaries. No one really had any idea.*

Advocacy:

Advocate for the collection of information on the 'messy' anomalies that don't fit well with the bureaucratic requirement for tidy templated 'tick the box' plans and 'fill in the blanks' documents that require 'populating'

Advocate for, partner with and nourish those who hold more of the confounding contextual dynamics material that is too rich, too nuanced and too fluid for 'plans' and public processes

Advocate for preemption of the requirement of government to need 'order' in its reporting and contribute to the generation of more useful contextualised content which could inform progress and include more local responses to progress

Advocate for the development of safe spaces for dialogue, including the eliciting of difference, and where necessary 'buy in' support from those independent from community dynamics to hold these spaces particularly on difficult topics

Advocate for detail on the escalating costs of centralist administrative and management systems, and develop ways to examine and quantify some of the monetary and non-monetary costs which a move away from community based development accrues

Conclusion:

One of the stated arguments for the State to develop an 'even-handed' approach to community recovery was that the State was required to treat people equally.

This proved a vacuous argument, but was one that appeared to be informed by Scott's insight that government and other institutions can seek to engender 'legible' policies and practices.

Many organisations are caught up in the requirements that are essentially for 'legible' linear accounts of practices and interventions.

Such requirements pose inestimable burdens for practitioners and take time, resources and good will away from the intent of many funded programs, thereby further reducing the likelihood of sustainable ongoing connections and contributions to people and place.

6. Complexity

Principle:

Generalisable Community Resilience – Relational Systems Dynamics

Detail:

The quality or state of not being simple: complex systems involves large numbers of interacting elements, the interactions are nonlinear, with minor changes producing disproportionately major consequences. The system is dynamic, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts, and solutions can't be imposed; rather, they arise from the circumstances.[172] This is frequently referred to as *emergence.* The system has a history, and the past is integrated with the present; the elements evolve with one another and with the environment; and evolution is irreversible. Though a complex system may, in retrospect, appear to be ordered and predictable, hindsight does not lead to foresight because the external conditions and systems constantly change. Unlike in ordered systems, where the system constrains the agents, or chaotic systems, where there are no constraints, in a complex system the agents and the system constrain one another, especially over time. This means that we cannot forecast or predict what will happen.

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- we need to collectively prepare for concurrent crises – economic, energy, social, ecological – by taking a 'whole community' approach to fostering generalisable community resilience
- institutional rigidity and fear, is in part, a consequence of our prevailing global defensive, litigious 'risk' culture which obviates against dynamic and adaptable learning at all levels
- 'business as usual' approaches are redundant and need to progress towards increasing adaptive capacity that better accommodate unpredictability, uncertainty and insecurity
- traditional arrangements have seen state emergency management funds flow to specific preparedness professional-dominated authorities, agencies, services and programs, while only a trickle is ever made available to community-development-oriented (place-based and community-led) generalisable community resilience projects and programs
- our systems are heavily weighted against 'place-based and community-led' processes and our structures 'push back' when communities propose integrated, prevention-oriented and holistic place-based or region-wide 'whole community' projects to government departments
- place-shaping, place-management and place-making appear antithetical to the issue-specific and target-population focus of government programs and agency professionals
- communities must set the agenda, as government, despite enabling policy statements and progressive officers, continue to work in administrative silos or 'pillars', in which holistic roles, approaches, visions and community projects are, at best, constrained
- it is advisable to build capacity with, and between, agencies to identify and respond to experiential learning, as the key mode of learning in fast moving recovery environments
- community development officers played critical coaching and organisational development roles with professional office staff facing challenging community engagement dilemmas
- collaboration is underpinned by effective relationships and organisational culture at all levels of organisation, from board level through management and among front line staff

[172] Detail above adapted from a series of readings including Meg Wheatley and Deborah Frieze's 'Walk Out Walk On' and Donella Meadows 'Thinking in Systems: A Primer'.

- community development work is, of necessity, always open and as such, continues to be surprising, perplexing, stressful, challenging, creative, exhilarating, meaningful, rewarding

Learning:

Government struggles to see, understand, acknowledge, work alongside and partner community

Holistic 'joined up' longer-term projects are, more often than not, anathema in recovery

Quotes:

> *There was a mismatch between government's administrative boundaries and the boundaries of 'natural local communities'.*
>
> *All levels of government struggle to see, understand and work with local community networks, community culture and community dynamics.*

Advocacy:

Advocate for the centrality of place-based cultural, social, economic and environmental local community-based knowledge, alongside professional and institutional knowledge

Advocate for integrating rational, instrumental and technological (so called 'hard') approaches to change with relational, emotional and social (so called 'soft') approaches to change

Advocate for complex adaptive living systems dynamics understandings and practical literacy

Advocate for integrated community and organisational strategies and projects that seek to synergistically satisfy (produce win-win-win outcomes) simultaneous policy needs and aspirations

Advocate for well-resourced ongoing community development programs, resources and paid staff

Advocate for community facilitation processes likely to catalyse Social Movement dynamics

Advocate for immersive collaborative projects to generate Generalised Community Resilience

Advocate for investment of time, enthusiasm and resources in cross-sectoral partnerships, alliances and coalitions

Conclusion:

Black Saturday highlighted the significant broad-based and 'joined up' partnership investments, brokerage and facilitation work required to enhance community preparedness for mega-disasters.

It is important to examine the impact on community autonomy and capability of tensions in centralist and localist systems, particularly in terms of community and professional leadership, and the tensions between collectivist-oriented practices of community development on the one hand, and professional interventions focused at the individual and household level on the other.

Complex Adaptive Systems and Generalised Community Resilience approaches to disaster preparedness and recovery are suggestive of a diffusion and transformation of power dynamics, away from authoritative *power over* towards agentic co-creative and collaborative *power with*.

7. Commons–public goods

Principle:

Enact Co-Production, Co-Creativity, Collaboration and Collective Impact

Detail:

The **commons** is the cultural and natural resources accessible to all members of a society, including our air, water, and a habitable earth. These resources are held in common, not owned privately. Caring for the commons is an act of individual stewardship (long-term care for a given resource for the benefit of oneself and for others including other species and the resource itself) and collective trusteeship.[173] It is the very essence of being 'whole', the fundamental basis of inter-disciplinarity. It is one of the few ways we have to acknowledge our debt to our past generations, and to embody our link to our future generations. It shows we believe in ourselves as an enduring civilisation, not just an economy. A **public good** is a good that is both non-excludable and non-rivalrous, i.e., individuals cannot be effectively excluded from use and where use by one individual does not reduce availability to others. Public goods include, among many others, knowledge development, national security and disaster management systems. Public goods that are available everywhere are sometimes referred to as global public goods.

Experience:

For the most part, our conversation participants were in agreement that:

- first order principles should inform disaster decision-making, e.g. acting in the public good rather than defensively reacting to political threats such as perceived legal liability risks
- breaking with tradition and moving into long term community development, partnership and co-production roles is a significant opportunity requiring courage and commitment
- it is not the ideas, experience, skills or desire that are lacking, it's resourcing shortfalls that inhibit Local Governments' community partnership and community leadership roles
- embracing broader roles such community appraisal, community mapping and visioning, community profiling, issue advocacy, negotiation and mediation, conflict resolution and restorative justice all require officer time and resources
- argue against the overwhelming majority of decisions and jobs associated with post-disaster recovery and reconstruction being captured by those outside impacted communities
- reframe material relief in terms of sustainable development and generalisable community resilience, mindful of negative impact on the vitality and flourishing of the local economy
- the informal and formal partnerships, alliances and coalitions latent, or actively in place before a disaster, may be a community's greatest assets in responding to a major disaster
- always optimise *win-win* synergies between place-based and community-led disaster preparedness and community resilience and other socio-ecological policy areas such as: public health, adult education, community safety and local resource management.

Learning:

Community Safety and Resilience, Public Health and Security are all Commons-Public Goods

Self-Interest is Transformed to Shared Interest, Empathy and Collective Action after a Disaster

[173] Details of commons again have arisen from multiple sources including David Bollier, Silke Helfrich, Michel Bauwens and Elinor Ostrom (see Bibliography)

Quotes:

> *We are community-based. We are community-oriented and community-driven. We are the critical community building partnership brokers.*
>
> *The primary Community Development need was the re-engagement and maturing of relationships and re-building of trust.*

Advocacy:

Advocate for household, neighbourhood and small business disaster preparedness plans and drills

Advocate for participatory or representative community-owned structures (e.g. Community Resilience or Preparedness Coalitions) operating up to, or at, postcode scale, i.e. at sub-local government scale

Advocate for Community Service Organisations to extend their practice to include social roles such as process facilitation, conflict resolution, sense making, alliance building and community engagement

Advocate for comprehensive community evacuation exercises, disaster preparedness workshops and safety drills and novel approaches to preparedness including gamification be prototyped and piloted

Advocate for democratic and deliberative techniques and strategies to be applied in Emergency Management – e.g. participatory budgeting, liquid democracy, action learning and citizen juries

Advocate for Community Service Organisations to develop independent discretionary income in order to be able to deliver more nuanced, responsive place-based and community-led programs

Conclusion:

Community and regional emergency management functions such as: prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, recovery, rebuilding, regeneration, renewal and resilience could all benefit from greater local community group and community service provider participation.

Strategies for effective decision-making and action at the broader landscape (postcode clusters) level, among at least the state's most fire-vulnerable communities, need to be considered

Where communities and organisations cannot organise to develop a landscape scale mechanism, other means of seeking input need to be considered by those making decisions on their behalf.

The relationships and trust formed through cross-sectoral associations form the basis of alliances that provide the foundation for generalisable community resilience, regeneration and renewal

Emergency management can emulate and borrow from well-established ideas and practices from other professional domains that have turned to democratic practice by pioneering the use of deliberative decision-making, power sharing and collaboration with community stakeholders

Emergency Management can easily engage support from other sectors that have been enriching communities and contributing to community safety and community resilience such as: Primary Care Partnerships, Integrated Local Area Planning and Local Learning and Employment Networks

As 'whole communities' are not on authorities or agencies 'targeted' radar, disaster-impacted delegates need to deftly negotiate with power, for enabling institution partnership responses

Governments and welfare agencies won't formally recognise the sustenance role played by the unrecorded and unreported informal cash economy and non-monetary barter and gift economy

Many home-based and shop-front small businesses that survive disasters will be vulnerable as a result of decreased customers and competition from government and welfare services

Make the case for greater availability of systemic data, including processes for appropriate data sharing and access to baseline demographic and population health data and service statistics, so as to develop rich pictures of the impacted whole population's context and prevailing conditions

Governance and decision-making models developed collaboratively rather than imposed, informed by expert knowledge as well as by local knowledge and able to responsive to the local distinctiveness and uniqueness of place-based communities are most likely to be accepted, *'owned'*, respected and *'utilised'* by disaster-vulnerable and disaster-impacted communities.

8. Dignity

Principle:

Engage Deeply with Disadvantage, Diversity, Difference and Dependency

Detail:

We are engaging with dignity in its most rudimentary form as encapsulated in the latin 'dignitas' meaning worthiness'[174] and, as such, central to engaging with diversity and arresting disadvantage.

A key driver of crisis management is the idea of the preservation of a basic human right, that of the dignity of 'life', and saving life, that all human life itself has an inherent dignity and worth[175].

We focus on the quality of life and how society 'structures' disadvantage. As noted by VCOSS[176]

> *People facing disadvantage, such as those in poverty, migrants, refugees, children, older people, people with disabilities, people who are homeless or transient, and people living in poor quality housing, are more vulnerable at all stages of a disaster – before, during, and after it strikes. These people are considered 'socially vulnerable' in the face of a disaster.*

We direct attention to the subtle structures that unintentionally and even unconsciously produce disadvantage, those attitudes and behaviours we all engage in, that can result in a loss of dignity.

We believe there is a need to contribute to redefining dependency: the contexts in which it's used, by whom, and for what purpose are important to explore, as are the underpinning beliefs, attitudes and values and the new relationships that reframings of dependency might make possible or require.

Experience:

Our conversation participants drew attention to the following:

- that the likely trend in disaster decision-making is toward reinforcing disadvantage
- there will be significant increases in those requiring public income support and people living below the poverty line during the disaster recovery-reconstruction period
- for those most disadvantaged, those forced by compromised circumstances, to live day to day, hand to mouth, the idea of long term planning was foreign, impractical and unrealistic
- Misleading reporting will impact on the community as poorly informed or misinformed media stories can undermine structures and relationships and lead to a loss of faith in leadership, leaving local government and local communities to 'mop up' messes
- staff inevitably feel compromised in their relationships with citizens and communities - and with themselves - when arguments and justifications used for service closures clash with their professional knowledge and ethical personal and professional commitments
- recovery is a drawn out, difficult process requiring a 'long haul' perspective and the cultivation and application of empathy and flexibility to each issue and every encounter
- community development can be challenging and uncomfortable, asking of us that we 'change frames' and review our stances on race, class, gender, individuality and identity

[174] http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/dignity
[175] We leave aside here those who argue a similar approach in relation to animals and the environment
[176] See Disaster and Disadvantage. Vulnerability in Emergency Management. VCOSS. 2014, p.2

- enabling environments for community and organisational development are stronger in better resourced councils - these differences impact on the community development aspirations and staff practices and therefore their connections to community initiatives
- participants views about the need for increased dialogue about 'dependency' suggest this concept is in urgent need of deconstruction and reconceptualisation to enable the dignity of the human to be respectfully observed in Emergency Management practices

Learning:

- The most vulnerable in society tend to be the most disproportionately impacted by disasters
- Dependency is an all too human response to an overwhelming situation, it is not a toxic state

Quote:

> *Our communities have not been protected, they've been laid bare, left exposed to all comers … drug issues, mental health issues, private issues … have all been exposed.*

Advocacy:

Advocate for greater prominence to be accorded to the views and experience of children and youth and to more attention and support for the actively pro-social roles played by women after disasters

Advocate for creative approaches to evolving outreach as highly visible, township-centred, clinic-based services were not always acceptable to a significant proportion of the population

Advocate for comprehensive data collection and documentation of disadvantage, which can assist greatly in systemic advocacy and concerted action in relation to addressing structural disadvantage

Advocate for advanced strategies for intensive staff support, supervision and debriefing in order to increase awareness of structural disadvantage, and assist individual staff manage their own strong feelings about the circumstances they encounter, particularly where unfairness and injustice prevails

Advocate for better staff understanding of how historical traumas resurface under extreme conditions, pointing to the importance of acquiring contextual understandings of the region they live and work.

Advocate for creative means to access the 'hard to reach' especially those who have been socially isolated, socially disengaged, socially marginalised and socially excluded for long periods of time.

Conclusion:

Constant effort is required to articulate the nature of the many psychosocial and emotional tasks involved in disaster recovery and their particular application to those facing structural disadvantage.

Social justice advocacy requires ceaseless work to advance the formal integration of relational 'soft' knowledge with the recognisable rational 'hard' technical skills in the 'concreteness' of recovery.

We need systemic inquiry into actions and interventions that create and reinforce dependency and vulnerability and actions and interventions that create and reinforce autonomy and resiliency.

A benefit of increasing understanding of dependency is making the connection between the threat of dependence and the response of exaggerated stoicism.

Those with 'lived experience' of diversity, disability and disadvantage will often know the most appropriate approaches to use with these more vulnerable groups - valuing people with this experience will bring win-win advantages to all parties and to the wider system.

Over exposure of disaster survivors through intrusive media with the attendant loss of privacy impacts on the dignity can be shaming and debilitating for those involved.

In terms of service delivery particularly in relation to marginalised groups and communities, the impact of service delivery withdrawals are likely to be felt most acutely in communities, districts and settlements where there has been a history of remote service providers, difficulties in accessing regional service systems, long standing under servicing, or no direct service delivery availability.

Service providers nuanced understanding of the complex psychodynamics around the deployment of the term ‘dependency’ can assist promote a public discussion that draws on contextual knowledge of communities and discourages the degeneration of ‘dependency’ into a loaded term, a political tool, and a means for inducing binary thinking.

9. Non-violence

Principle:

Acknowledge and Transcend Structural Theft and Structural Violence

Detail:

Structural theft[177] describes situations where roles are taken over by professionals and bureaucrats – roles that local people in communities would once have played themselves or shared among each other. Implicit in structural theft are critiques of *'over-professionalisation'* and *'over-bureaucratisation'* and the consequences, intended and unintended, including learned helplessness, systemic impotence, horizontal violence (of the mutually oppressed) and internal violence (of the chronically repressed).

Structural violence describes situations where key groups or organisations have access to more goods, resources, power, influence and opportunities than other groups or organisations. Unequal advantage is built into the social, political and economic systems that govern our communities, societies and states. Structural violence explores how political, administrative, economic and cultural structures result in a lack of human agency. This focus holds that the violence is not a direct act of any decision or action made by any one person, but is a result of inequalities in the distribution of power and resources[178].

Nonviolence is an *"abstention from violence as a matter of principle"*[179] Methods other than violence are pursued. Friere pioneered critical forms of adult education as a basis for non-violent action. The 'Occupy Movement' is similarly a means of mass non-cooperation. Such examples and many other social, political, cultural and economic interventions are alternatives to passively accepting oppression.

The above shows how deeply embedded aspects of violence are in 'system' relationships, at a macro societal and cultural level globally, and within national, state and local political arrangements, and in relations between individuals and community groups and between agencies, individuals and groups.

Experience:

Our conversation participants drew attention to the following:

- there is an enduring culture of bullying at all levels of government, and in, across and between, other sectors, including within, across and between community groups
- disasters can create oppressive work environments, as a frantic pace, relentless workloads and constant pressures obviate against systemic observation, reflection, learning and change
- there is endless conflict over power and priorities – people, homes, community development, businesses, safety, public infrastructure and environment – in aftermath of a major disaster
- community cynicism becomes rife when consultation efforts leave little time or offer few resources for engaged participation or ownership of decisions or outcomes
- well-meaning agencies can and have captured and co-opted communities on issues, diverting energy and resources away from community priorities and local effectiveness
- individuals and community groups can and have captured and co-opted government and agency engagement processes, limiting other community input and wider local ownership
- any unresolved political issues and any ongoing or repressed divisions within community are more than likely going to be exacerbated during the stressful aftermath of a disaster

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[177] drawing on Illich *(Medical Nemesis),* Friere *(Pedagogy of the Oppressed)* and Greer *(On Rage)*

[178] See Rajkumar Bobichand: http://kanglaonline.com/2012/07/understanding-violence-triangle-and-structural-violence-by-rajkumar-bobichand/. Bobichand draws on Fisher et al (2000), Galtung (1969) and Burton (1990)

[179] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nonviolence

- procedures for appraising welfare groups entering disaster-impacted communities are imperative, including enforceable mechanisms to cease unwanted activities and to exit unwanted groups
- unfunded agencies and unfunded programs are often able to be innovative offering sensitive, effective interventions – they are vulnerable politically, as their legitimacy, validity, veracity and evidence-base are called into question by staff in regional and central authority structures
- many aspects of the recovery effort will not form part of project funding, but are important, including data access, generation, collection, management and analysis – knowledge is power
- staff face major stressors if they are not prepared for the huge backlog of their 'business as usual' tasks which accrue while they are engaged in disaster response and recovery work
- welfare agency and community volunteer activities were sometimes seen as impacting negatively on small business and the community economy – a more critical and nuanced discussion and understanding of the deleterious impacts of charity and welfare is required
- urgent attention is required in future scenarios to the risk of burnout among community recovery committee and informal community leadership group members, after disasters
- an important and perhaps vexed conversation is needed about the longevity of unpaid and under-resourced disaster-impacted community members continuing in leadership positions
- considerable variation exists on the merits and value of the central recovery authority VBRRA and on the tactics and strategies deployed when the authority liaised with Councils and CRCs
- many thought VBRRA operated to play disaster-impacted communities off against one another and to place wedges between disaster-impacted Councils and disaster-impacted communities
- VBRRA was thought of as an authority without any authority – conveniently outside, reporting to the Premier's office, but still sufficiently separated to take the heat off the government
- VBRRA brought additional professional resources and access to decision-makers which were of assistance to CRCs in making progress on vexed 'wicked problem' and 'large scale' projects and via extensive liaison with the media kept recovery progress reporting in the public realm
- considerable variation exists among local governments, and within communities, regarding views as to how well CRCs were established, recognised, resourced and worked with
- there was conflict on many issues between local governments and CRCs, including struggles for fundamental legitimacy and certainty over functions, roles, authority and accountability
- where CRCs had *'advisory status'* only, this reinforced the chasm between the government rhetoric of empowerment and community leadership of recovery and the community reality of few, if any, real decision-making opportunities and broken promises regarding resourcing
- there were differential experiences with CRCs some of whom accrued power and influence, with 'oversight' and 'sign off' roles on many recovery projects. Some CRC chairpersons and members had unprecedented access to senior ministers and department heads, which many others experienced as unfair or harmful to their interests
- onerous process and project timelines imposed on CRCs by state authorities *(timelines which community members were certain bureaucracy couldn't work to)* had a disproportionately high impact on ethical and conscientious CRC members, determined to operate as 'good steward of community resources' but profoundly vulnerable to exhaustion and disillusionment
- some CRC members worked up to 80 hours per week over the course of the first two years and such demands impacted on their health and ability to derive income to support families, potentially compromising their own medium and long-term recovery
- conferences, training and development opportunities are cost-prohibitive for volunteers, reinforcing the 'structuring out' of community participation and community voices

Learning:

Professional and political operatives hold a privileged status and exert great power over communities

Being a member of the CRC was considered the most rewarding and least well-rewarded experience

Quotes:

> *VBRRA was just like a piñata … if you hit it hard enough a few goodies might spill out*

> *When you talk to the State they say the Commonwealth always does the same thing … 'power over' politics … that bullying is sanctioned all the way to the top.*

Advocacy:

Advocate to ensure community-led recovery receives the resources required for community-led recovery implementation e.g. a decision-making governance structure, office and meeting space, administration stipends to cover transport and communication costs, and give consideration to requesting and negotiating wages equivalents for committee and leadership group members

Advocate for agreed upon disaster recovery decision-making guidelines and definitions, co-produced with local governments, and clearly outlining and committing to ongoing roles and responsibilities

Advocate for appropriate resourcing for Local Government strategic disaster preparedness work and its status as the level of government closest to people and communities (including recognition as an independent tier of government) and leader, coordinator and overseer of disaster recovery initiatives

Advocate for the availability of professional resources, services and processes for both community and local government to progress strategic negotiation, conflict resolution and restorative justice

Advocate for partner and enabling state policies, practices, programs and investments that support and enable greater levels of local government and community capacity, capability and autonomy

Conclusion:

Many individuals and agencies including different levels of government experienced social, emotional, and political fallout by having their authority, as they saw it, called into question in the event of the disaster, and contending with wedge politics that further complicated and confused post-disaster situations, confounding communities and agencies in their attempts to make progress on the ground.

The 'short termism' political, social and emotional context of disasters led to decision-making which effectively overrode pre-existing planning and established relationships – experiences that diminish the likelihood of genuine participation in planning for future shared responsibility at all levels.

Constitutional reform and recognition is an absolute necessity for Local Governments to procure the resources and defensible autonomy required to act decisively in Emergency Management and Disaster Recovery, as well as across its many other planning and service delivery responsibilities.

There was unprecedented pressure on state government officers to achieve highly visible 'bricks and mortar' project outcomes to unworkably short timelines, and this impacted negatively on many involved at all levels, including local government officers, disaster survivors and community leaders.

There is a strong relationship between citizen disempowerment and learned helplessness: citizen disempowerment and learned helplessness increase in tandem with the centralisation of authority and the professionalisation of roles.

The political and administrative requirement to 'wind down' recovery processes in 2011 with projects still needing at least 5 years to complete, and 'wind up' by 2015, were both premature and unrealistic.

The financial costs on Local Government of ongoing management of the infrastructure built after the bushfires remains outside the scope of this study, but is known to be immense, and draws down on general revenue in ways which were anticipated by Local Government, but not heeded by others.

There are ideally opportunities for healing at all levels, given the frequency with which staff and community members experienced coercion from all sides, with associated feelings of compromise; some were the focus of hostility from community on issues which they were tasked to intervene in and implement, but had not devised. The disrespect and disregard Local Government officers experienced in their roles, and accompanying loss of status, triggered by intergovernmental relations 'above' them still reverberates today.

10. Humility

Principle:

Operate Beyond Denial and into Uncertainty, Instability and Unpredictability

Detail:

As a noun, one dictionary defines humility as a 'Lack of vanity or self-importance'[180] and qualifies the state thus, as 'a disposition to be patient and long suffering'. Another dictionary notes humility can be seen as 'having a clear perspective and respect for one's place in context"[181].

Given our discussion about the nature of complex adaptive living systems, as constituting the vehicles for change and transformation, and that by their very nature they are unpredictable, unstable and uncertain, how can one 'know'… let alone know one's place? What we are offering is a 'stance', an approach to the complexity, fluidity, entanglement and contingency of the so-called systems: what we can do as humble selves is inquire of others in ways which are respectful, seek progress without coercion, and dwell in, and become accustomed to, the reality of 'not knowing'.

Experience:

Our conversation participants drew attention to the following:

- real community recovery will always take much longer than anyone initially anticipated
- concurrent crises across ecological, economic and energy domains will impact community resilience and the viability of every element of Emergency Management's 'system of systems'
- disruptions of disaster are so powerful that prior conditions can be all but lost, requiring a reaffirmation of an openness to learning, to tolerance and to the centrality of relationships
- those involved in disasters can anticipate that those outside your community may have difficulty understanding the complexity and immensity of what you have gone through
- Council and agency staff cannot avoid being impacted directly and indirectly through their ongoing work with bereaved and homeless families and traumatised communities
- staff face risks when working at the edge of their competence on complex issues in chaotic environments – there is a likelihood of diminishing self-worth and high risk of burnout
- too often clerical and administrative staff weren't offered the same supports and supervision as their professional peers on the impact of working with disaster-impacted communities
- collaboration requires humility, and is undermined by hubris, where professionals, bureaucrats or community leaders operate from a position of *'knowing'* and not *'learning'*
- there is room to increase sophistication in identifying and making meaning from the very different ways of knowing, doing and interacting that all parties bring to recovery
- a major contribution is to foster, create and enable caring holding spaces, rituals and enduring events and opportunities for shared validation of people's experience and loss
- there can be deleterious impacts of prolonged exposure to traumatised survivors in disaster-impacted communities on volunteers, front-line staff and on whole organisations
- community and organisation-wide trauma and healing are new post-disaster considerations

Learning:

Disaster dark sides: identity contraction, disaster chasers, over-identification with heroic or selfless roles

[180] http://www.thefreedictionary.com/humility

[181] dictionary.myway.com/

Enduring positive legacies after disasters are predicated on commitment to learning rather than knowing

Quote:

> *Our service is about being slow, taking your time, providing safe spaces and really focusing in on and really being present for one person you are with right now, listening to and working with one person at a time.*

Advocacy:

Advocacy on cultivating deeper understanding of the impact of major disasters and trauma on staff and on local government as a whole and on strategies to prevent and address organisational trauma

Advocacy on state government's role as that of enabling, empowering and resourcing disaster impacted and disaster vulnerable communities, service provider agencies and local governments

Advocacy on greater understanding of wider risk landscapes, ecosystem degeneration, risk climate patterns and extreme weather events to better inform relative degree of risk faced in any given year

Advocacy on staffing mix strategies for post-disaster service providers, recognising the need for experience, for staff engaged in self-care and for supportive and responsive management structures

Conclusion:

Professional humility is a prerequisite for an approach that acknowledges where links lie between issues of locus of control, learned helplessness and learned hopelessness and those of structural impotence and 'dependency'. The provision of opportunities for autonomous decision-making, while requiring some to 'step back' and set aside their beliefs, creates the conditions that foster a healthy interdependency at the individual, household, community, organisational and government levels.

It is important to cultivate awareness of the 'dark side' of post-disaster work. Dark sides include the potential for the contraction of one's identity … of 'becoming' the disaster … or consumed by the disaster … or 'becoming' a disaster chaser … or an adrenaline junkie. Other manifestations can be an over-identification with stereotypical heroic or selfless roles associated with disasters and their aftermath. Survivor guilt can be very hard to shift, and there are risks of re-living and reinforcing community and organisational shock and pain, and of becoming disabled by vicarious trauma.

A key strategy for all involved is to have access to opportunities that assist in making meaning of the experience, the situations one finds oneself in and the actions taken or not taken. The service, administrative and political environment can encourage an organisational persona of 'professional knowing' that serves as a defense against 'not knowing', and against critical inquiry, open questioning and developing learning processes within and between agencies, communities and government.

External consultation, supervision, group work and 'critical friends' can assist in creating and maintaining the balance required in self-care. Developing cultures cognisant of community and organisational trauma, and what can be achieved to prevent, mitigate, adequately address and ultimately heal or carry well this level of trauma, is vital, but as yet, is still very much in its infancy.

Councils and communities know there is still an enormous amount of personal and community recovery and healing and personal and community and organisational resilience work to be done and that this work will probably not progress without funded community development positions.

Section 8: Concluding Remarks

We have been variously overwhelmed, humbled, and challenged by the task of carrying so many rich stories and by the related task of trying to bring a modicum of coherence to what is a long report. We have persisted, in large part, out of a profound sense of responsibility to those who made such generous contributions through their participation in our Black Saturday disaster recovery interview and workshop conversations. We have also sought to make some meaning of our own experiences. We wanted to offer up a broad enough canvas or set of images, in order that those who endured the firestorm, and its aftermath, and those who participated in disaster recovery and reconstruction efforts, might at least be able to glimpse a facet of their own reality, might discern a place or a moment where their contributions and insights fit, where their piece in this massive puzzle resides. Given the all-encompassing and multi-dimensional dynamics of the Emergency Management field, as researchers trying to comprehend its breadth, depth, logic and functioning, we have often felt as though we have been looking through a kaleidoscope. Every rotation of the lens invites yet another reflection on the infinite array of ever-emerging forms. Each new perspective brings forth another reality. We hope readers can hear elements of their own experience reflected in the voices recorded in this report. The kaleidoscope metaphor implies the impossibility of recapturing what once was, of going back, of recovering, simply by returning the lens to an earlier position. Mindful of this we have done our utmost to represent the perspectives of our disaster recovery review conversation participants accurately.

We have been heartened by the feedback we have received to date on how readers have engaged with and used the draft report housed on the CatholicCare website since June 2014.

We acknowledge the complexity of this topic and hope our efforts to grapple with the material will be of use in providing encouragement to those who continue to inquire into this outwardly structured, ordered and regimented, but inwardly complicated, chaotic and contingent domain.

While we have been open, as our participants were, to exploring some of the darker terrain and illuminating some potential blindspots associated with disaster recovery, we have also been touched by the recounting of so many extraordinarily selfless acts and sensitive anecdotes from people operating at all levels of the 'system' – planners, responders, chief executive officers, directors, captains, chaplains, chairpersons, citizens, community workers, government officers and volunteers alike – we know we have drawn on their enduring courage and quiet persistence. We want to laud the commitment shown by so many in 'the system' who continue to contribute to community safety. We continue to parenthesise 'system' in recognition of our incredulity that this amorphous, rollicking, billowing field is still referred to as a 'system'.

The disproportionately low number of women's voices in this report points to the difficulty of achieving balance in emergency management which has historically been a male dominated domain. Women's voices were 'out of frame' in leadership roles in some of the organisations and on most of the community recovery committees, where the voices represented, were also in the main, those of men. That the image of yin and yang is central to our distilled learnings section reflects this need for greater prominence to be given to the views of women throughout Emergency Management, and to a necessary feminising of the field, a process already underway.

We have, in part at least, been motivated by the lack of critical and systemic review material on the post Black Saturday recovery, grounded in the voices of those who directly participated in it. The emphasis of the (Victorian Bushfire) Royal Commission was understandably on the more immediate issues relating to the operational awareness, emergency services communications and direct disaster response to the 2009 mega-firestorm.

We think it's worth asking why is it that there is such a dearth of critical and systemic inquiry and discourse. It is not so easy anymore to critique a system when one is dependent on the self same system for one's livelihood. In more and more organisations tightly controlled work practices are in

the ascendancy, practices that reduce clients to targets, and within this milieu coercion can be required at every level – managers of workers, workers of clients – to meet externally imposed, numerically defined output measures. There has been an increased tendency to silence critical public debate and this impacts on those within the various formal institutional settings who are duly silenced. Cooption and coercion (participants in our conversations refer to it as bullying and violence) underpins and constrains much of government to government, government to agency, agency to agency, agency to community, government to community and community to community relations.

It is of interest that the Australian Association of Social Workers in January 2015, in relation to the need to 'publicly authorise' staff of the Department of Families SA to give evidence to the [Child Protection] Royal Commission, called for "a public statement giving permission and encouragement to Families SA staff to make submissions to the Commission, *with public assurance that they will not be penalised in any way for doing so*"[182][183]. Penalties for speaking out come in various guises and are apparent in most workplaces. From an agency point of view in this report, the experience of pressure to not speak out is well known and was strongly felt.

A broad based critical analysis of the governance arrangements in a State led authority such as the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority and a comparison with other authorities in other disasters, through the lens of community participation and engagement, would be valuable. We understand the State Services Authority carried out some analysis in this regard but this report has not been made public. Selections from it are held in VBRRA documentation, but not unsurprisingly, the text is carefully selected to the less critical aspects of the State Services Authority report, which itself was careful and selective in its reporting.

Other than the failure to then use 'frank and fearless' feedback for continuous improvement and as a contribution to the 'commons' and 'public goods', more insidious repercussions have been observed, where professionals, organisations (and communities) end up 'minimalising', 'marginalising', 'obscuring' or 'denying' the very existence of those matters which have not been able to be broached, with deleterious long-term consequences for individual and organisational (and community) health. Some of the participants in this study confessed to a tendency to over-personalise and internalise their experiences, leaving them vulnerable to the consequences of disproportionate self-incrimination and self-blame (as in *the internal violence of the chronically repressed*)[184]. Others we encountered projected intense emotions outward, into external domains and onto other parties, and were often severely sanctioned for so doing. We are aware of many accounts of the impact of disaster recovery on staff wellbeing in organisations have been researched and compiled, but never published – perhaps due to individual sensitivities, perhaps the workload required – but we think these silences and gaps have more to do with a deep and perhaps unconscious denial and the discomfort of the many and varied residual, unexplainable feelings engendered in the effort to share often very difficult existential experiences. These broader ideas of traumatised whole teams, traumatised whole organisations and traumatised whole communities emerged late in the study and as such we have not been in a position to explore these notions in any great depth in this report. The many anecdotes of people and organisations simmering and struggling with these slow burn, but potentially injurious and toxic issues of unacknowledged, unaddressed and unresolved stigma, self-blame and shame and the conflicted relationships (as in *the horizontal violence of the mutually oppressed*) related to emotional instability, loss of trust and loss of face, suggest a field ripe for further exploration.

Our concern here is also for those with ongoing roles in community safety who are experiencing their work as increasingly limited in scope, being undertaken with diminishing resources, and with

[182] http://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/6975
[183] See also Hamilton and Maddison, 2007.
[184] See Greer, 2010

the burden of 'responsibility' being pushed around from pillar to post – a source of silent worry and palpable, if not always articulated, concern by emergency services volunteers and engaged community members.

The argument for 'generalisable community resilience' effort (cf those efforts which are put in place at the time a disaster strikes, and in its wake) and to be working directly with structural disadvantage generally in the community, is clearly outside the historic ambit of the 'Emergency Services'. Hence the need for links, dialogue and shared understandings, meaning making and actions across the 'system of systems' as set out in Figure 3, p.235.

Community development practice (when undertaken with humility) may mean working on the cultivation of patience and the ability to sit with paradox and contingencies and issues and proposed directions that may not, in the first instance at least, cohere. This requires time - time to develop a thorough understanding of the issues and opportunities, to identify the key people involved, to acknowledge history and culture, to honour and develop relationships. This is at odds with both 'the need for speed' imperative in disaster response and the prevailing 'just do it', 'short termism-oriented' culture of community recovery.

One of the aspects of the 'overwhelm', in drawing this report to a close, was how widespread and disparate the 'system bits' that underpin community resilience actually are. Ironically perhaps, Emergency Management, which is seen by many as the least theoretically developed domain, given the paucity in conceptualising the connections among its parts (historically at least, understood as Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery), could in fact be the domain (or kaleidoscope) through which community safety is widened from the 'natural hazard' to that of a less binary, more integrated ideas of 'societal risk'. The downside of elevated conceptualisations is that grounded concerns such as community safety and human security are everyday and everywhere overwhelmed by the ever-present prime-time focus on the national security state and its attendant issues of ubiquitous security and border protection. We move even further beyond our original brief, when we touch on the notion of 'species risk' – as explored by a few of our conversation participants – and as exemplified in the wider definition of resilience enunciated by the Stockholm Resilience Centre[185] as a 'safe operating space for humanity'. When climate disruption and ecosystem degeneration were raised by participants, it was in the context of concerns over 'existential risks' and extinction threats.

One factor that emerged from our work has been the desperate need to advance the way we all inquire – plan and act and observe and reflect – systemically, the way we together approach, undertake and evolve inter-disciplinary and trans-disciplinary work, the way we synergistically contribute at and across multiple physical scales, temporal horizons and levels of organisation, giving due credence and respect, resources and authority to each nested whole, networked web and nuanced niche in the process. Inherent in systemic engagement is the too often unacknowledged 'presence' of values, emotions and attitudes that reflect the dignity and sincerity of genuine human effort. Necessary too is the seizing of opportunities to come together to heal – to break down, overcome or transcend barriers to more integrated and effective understandings and practices, whether these be attitudinal, professional, organisational, societal, political, economic or cultural. Rifts can be exaggerated by the assumptions and prejudices we carry about one another, which while not verified or validated, are nevertheless used as defenses or rationales to help us simplify the terrain of our life and make our work more 'legible'. In so doing, we shield ourselves, and one another, from the depths of emotions, and the vulnerabilities, that at heart, are the essence of openly expressive, flourishing, vital communities.

That communities are seen as less capable, more fragmented and under-resourced is a sign of our times. Large hierarchical organisations – be they government bureaucracies, multi-national corporations or international NGOs – continue to garner greater shares of peoples time, energy and

[185] www.stockholmresilience.org

resources, all at the expense of the contributions they might otherwise have been able to make to the health and vitality of their local communities. This scenario of socio-ecologically impoverished and increasingly vulnerable dormitory-style settlements does not bode well, if more frequent disasters and crises are, as expected, that which befalls us in the near term.

There is scope for involving more people who can help us inquire into the 'systems' which impact on our lives and help us contribute to the strengthening of those systems, not in ways that polarize, but rather that catalyse, a shared sense that human security and community safety are public goods or 'commons' that we all contribute to everyday through our actions and encounters. How can we mesh the 'rationality' required to determine the requisite players and appropriate parts needed in emergency management systems with the 'relationality' required to creatively enact and sustain a dynamic evolving adaptive system? Could it be that adopting complex adaptive systems dynamics approaches might be less deleterious to the dignity of the people involved and less undermining of the relationships among and between those working in organisational and community-based emergency management and disaster recovery structures.

The Emergency Services sector has a longstanding tradition of 'incident debriefing' – not in the individual psychological-emotional or collective sociological-relational sense but in the operational instrumental-rational sense. There is definitely experience here which can be built upon, a potential for deeper collaborative inquiry which can take in more than the critical reflection required on operational performances around particular incidents and situations. Emergency Services also have a tradition of 'scenario planning' – the posing of a hypothetical threat and the enactment of a full operational response, with the drill evaluated as a case study.

There are kernels within these processes that can be opened up. Gradually more and different voices can be added to what has been mainly a scientific and technical conversation, voices from the humanities and social sciences for example, in order to develop fuller stories and richer pictures of likely anticipated future issues, as well as new approaches to pre-emptive problem solving and disaster prevention and mitigation. If greater integration can be achieved across the sector as a whole, then there will be an increased likelihood of bringing forth the strengths of the parties involved, to be able to imagine, verbalise, share perspectives, think and feel, and begin the journey towards shared understanding and shared responsibility. Like any behavior or attitudinal change process, these are not easy changes to make, not easy 'muscles' to develop.

The idea of human dignity underpins a more open and respectful approach to human contribution. There will be conflict in dealing with difference, but we must learn ways to manage this respectfully. Every human has worthiness. Hick's work (2011) talks of risks of disregarding this basic aspect of our humanity, in our interactions with each other, which are particularly at risk in times of heightened emotion surrounding disaster.

Conflict was endemic in the disaster recovery space, at all levels, and exemplified in this report.

> *The desire for dignity is universal and powerful. By choosing dignity as a way of life, we open the way to greater peace within ourselves and to a safer and more humane world for all… dignity is a motivating force behind all human interaction - in families, in communities, in the business world, and in relationships at the international level. When dignity is violated, the response is likely to involve aggression, even violence, hatred, and vengeance. On the other hand, when people treat one another with dignity, they become more connected and are able to create more meaningful relationships…*

The idea of 'agency' as written about by scholars such as Giddens, 1984, is about people making a difference, about exercising some form of power. It is the capabilities people have of doing things. There is a strong element of human dignity in this idea – it is like a human 'essence', not a 'nice add

on'. If we combine human agency, human inquiry and human relationality, which we have discussed as central in the interconnectedness and inter-dependence of our communities and living systems, we can see the beating heart and essence of the emergence of resilience[186].

The underpinning of the policy of 'community led' recovery if treated as a 'right' as well as a responsibility entails transferring commensurate power to communities. This will necessitate a conflictual resilience building process. How to engage in this while recognising the dignity of persons and using constructive frameworks to explore issues of difference will be a major requirement for the future. The production and reinforcement of vulnerability, and its associated counterparts of structural inequality and structural violence, is an emotionally charged area of debate and extremely complex to navigate conceptually, and in practice.

To generate meaningful rich and robust pictures and accounts of events and their aftermath, a multitude of voices needs to be heard. To then take the next step and hear what of these issues have their roots in matters which can be impacted in a disaster preparedness sense, takes even stronger 'muscles' – muscles formed by being exercised by practice in sharing dialogue, in creating safe spaces, in accessing fair, reliable methods of inquiry, and a sense of there being a place in which to develop ideas and responses. There is no place too small of scale to develop more coherent inquiring systems, and no place too large, as in inquiring at the national level.

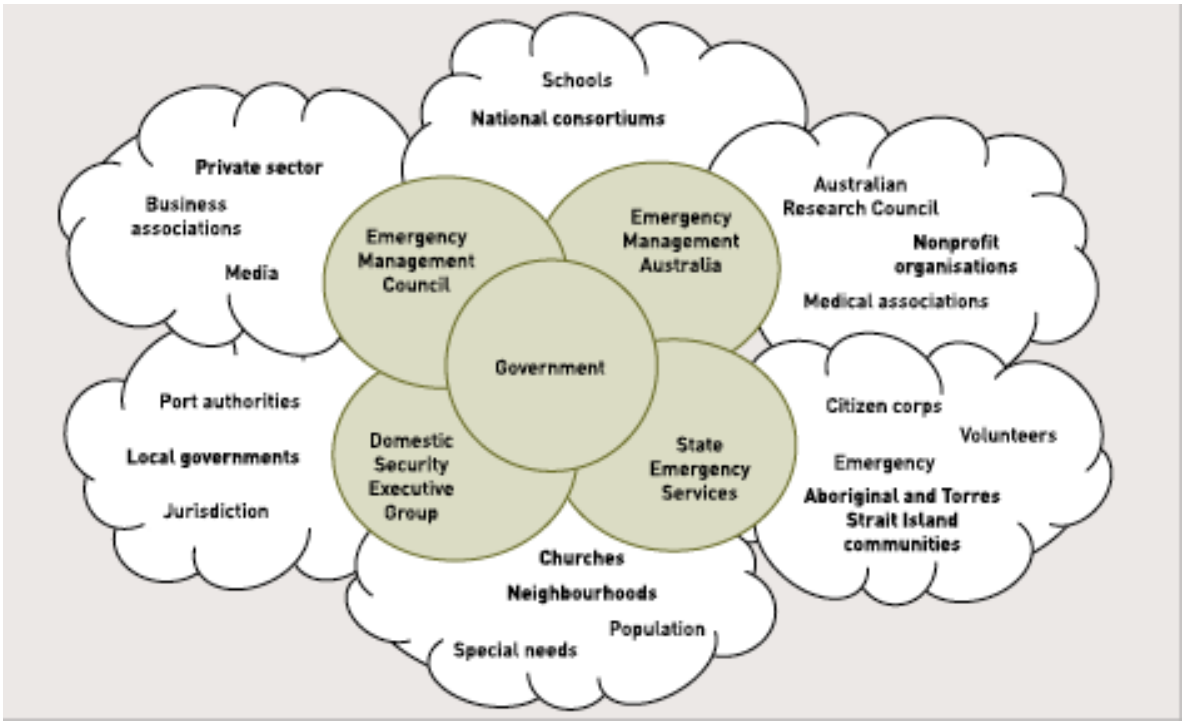
We have argued for greater balance between 'instrumental specific disaster preparedness', and 'highly adaptive generalisable community resilience'. Here we are informed by the work of Salt and Walker (2010) and Cavallo and Ireland (2013). The systemic cultivation of generalisable community resilience, we believe, perhaps counter-intuitively, affords a significant opportunity for new progress to be made on specific disaster preparedness. It is much easier to bolt specific disaster preparedness on to a pre-existing generalisably resilient community, than it is to get any real 'buy in' for disaster preparedness action in a community with little pre-existing integrative capacity.

The map below suggests the complexity and complicatedness of a highly fluid environment in which many different individuals, communities, businesses, agencies and levels of government play multiple, interweaving roles, some interoperable, some independent, some enabling, some disabling. This map is taken from Cavallo (2014)[187] and points to only some of the many related fields that are interdependent, in ecological contextual terms, with Emergency Management.

[186] The thesis by Manyena, further explores these ideas in depth. Manyena, Bernard (2009) Disaster resilience in development and humanitarian interventions. Doctoral thesis, Northumbria University. This version was downloaded from Northumbria Research Link: http://nrl.northumbria.ac.uk/661/

[187] https://ajem.infoservices.com.au/items/AJEM-29-03-10#sthash.92fkf9bH.dpuf

Figure 3: Map of Generic Emergency Management Systems



The relationships between all these fields are dense and diffuse, reciprocal and dynamic.

Meg Wheatley[188] (2012) characterises our 21st Century confluence of challenges as a world:

- of intensifying emotions and positions moving to extremes, where anger has become rage, opponents have becomes enemies, dislike has become hatred, sorrow has become despair
- closing shut, where individuals, groups, ethnicities and governments fortify their positions behind impermeable boundaries
- where critical thinking scarcely exists, where there is no distinction between facts and opinions
- that discredits science as mere opinion, yet still wants science to give us health, long life, security, and a way out of all our problems
- where information no longer makes a difference, where we hear only what we want to hear, always confirmed never contradicted
- desperate for certainty and safety, choosing coercion and violence as the means to achieve this
- solving its crises by brinkmanship and last-minute deals, no matter how important or disastrous the consequences may be
- of the Tower of Babel, with everybody shouting and nobody listening
- growing more meaningless as lives are taken over by values of consumption, greed and self-interest
- of people who had been effective and constructive now feeling powerless and exhausted
- whose growth, garbage and disregard will not be tolerated by the planet much longer

We concur with Wheatley's assessment above and also that of Margareta Wahlström, Special Representative of the Secretary-General for Disaster Risk Reduction, in her preface to the 2014 United Nations Office for Disaster Risk Reduction (UNISDR) report:

[188] drawn from Meg Wheatley's 2011 book So Far From Home

> *In many parts of our increasingly globalised world, processes such as badly planned and managed urban development, environmental degradation, poverty and inequality and weak governance, are driving levels of disaster risk to new heights.*

It is now widely accepted that throughout this century we will be forced to manage larger scale problems with fewer available resources, in a context of systemic degeneration dynamics as referred to by Wahlstrom and Wheatley above. Having to do more with less across all sectors makes generalisable community resilience approaches more attractive as a result of their focus on what Manfred Max Neef[189] calls *synergistic satisfiers* by which he means utilising strategies that ensure the mutual concurrent satisfaction of multiple fundamental human and social needs.

There can be no clearer statements than those above to support the argument that an adaptive generalisable community resilience approach in Emergency Management is warranted. The increasing likelihood of concurrent and entangled social, economic, energy and climate related crises and disasters may eventually tip the balance away from instrumental specific disaster preparedness and towards generalisable community resilience. Thus our articulation of an ethically informed, social movement oriented, socio-ecological model of generalised community resilience.

While the policy and practice environment is trending toward *all hazards* approaches, there exists an even wider risk environment of *societal, civilisational, species and existential risks*.

The stakes are high. We argue ways forward will require greater weight accorded to practices associated with complexity, and especially relationality, and its associations with tolerance of uncertainty, the dignity (worthiness) of humans, humility, and a recognition of, and engagement with, the deleterious effects of the many forms of visible and invisible violence identified herein.

We are in agreement with those who argue our trajectory of economic growth and fossil fuel dependence is unsustainable. Profound economic uncertainty (including the prospect of economic depression or collapse), insufficient available energy (including the likelihood of cascading energy descent) and a deteriorating environment (including the possibility of severe climate disruption) need to be built into our community-based and institutional risk and preparedness scenarios, as any one of these factors, or combination thereof, will dramatically impact on the response capacity and capability of our energy and finance dependent emergency management 'systems'.

If we allow the potential of complex adaptive community initiatives to remain under-developed and under-resourced this will further entrench our shared vulnerability. Growing our communities capacity for dynamic adaptability across the range of hazards already being experienced, as well as in response to those on the horizon – yet clearly in view – must be a shared priority.

We know it is a source of concern to volunteer fire fighters that they may not be able to cope with decreasing resources and increasing threats. These people are part of an already overstretched community fabric. Generalisable resilience is about marshaling latent resources and relationships and what then emerges when they are woven together with commitment and purpose. Resilience needs to be woven through our community fabric if we are to enable adaptation to future threats.

Disasters test our resilience and our relationships, as the Black Saturday mega-firestorm surely did for the many community recovery committee members, community service organisation workers and local government authority officers we spoke with. Despite, and because of this, we need to reinvest in and celebrate the *small* but *many* spontaneously arising contributions – the daily weaving and re-weaving of shared relationships, shared understandings, shared actions and shared responsibilities – which lie largely hidden from view *below the radar* within our place-based communities, within our myriad

[189] as introduced by Manfred Max Neef in Human Scale Development (1991)

everyday encounters, within our informal social networks, within our exchanges in local economies and local institutions and within our community groups and local organisations.

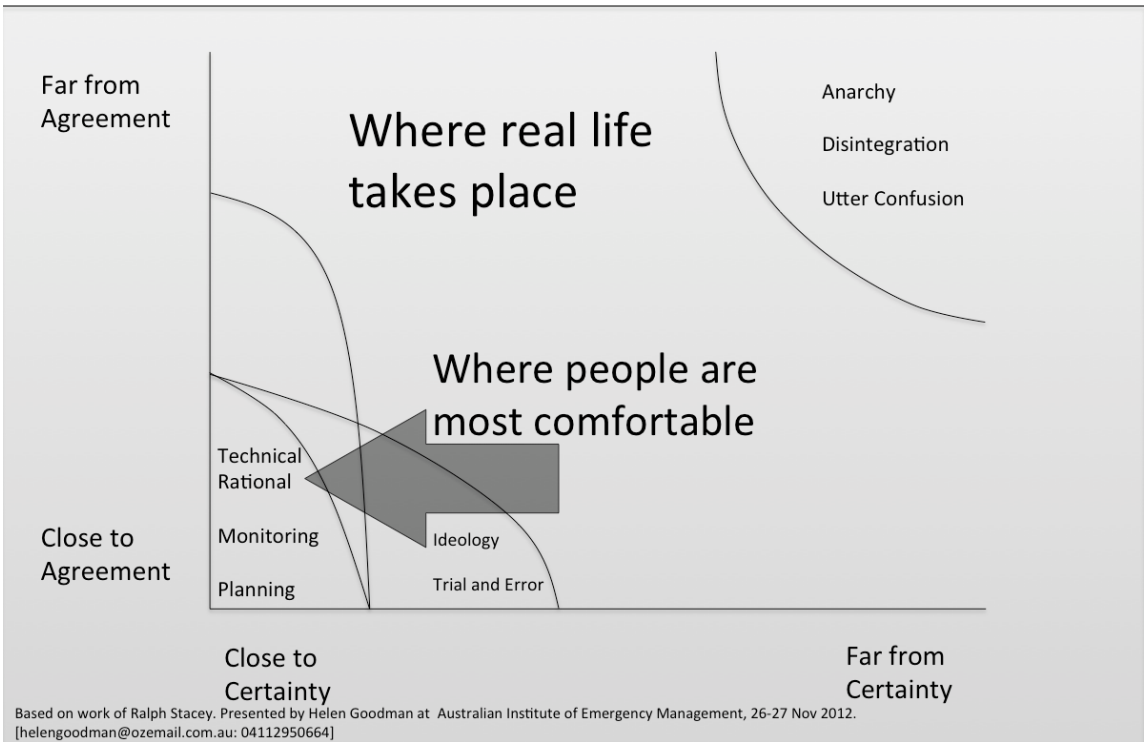
With community level contributions either being actively withdrawn or stretched to breaking point – exhaustion and world-weariness are endemic - communities now require a renaissance, with new and considerable investments so that they can re-fashion and reinvent, reflect and reappraise and re-encounter and re-connect, all the while fostering the relationships and mutual understandings, skills and resources and energy and motivations needed to weave and craft *generalisable community resilience*. Emergency Services managers, staff and volunteers have important roles to play in the rejuvenation of our communities, but this is a much wider task requiring partnerships and alliances across every facet of community and public life.

We believe that the now well-honed notion of interoperability – especially given its centrality to the evolution of immediate response coordination in Victoria – is overdue for application to all other phases of the spectrum that comprises the broad view of Emergency Management. Interoperability also has sister concepts in community development: collaboration and collective impact. Although the two systems have very different means for achieving their respective outcomes, interoperability and collective impact define a bridge between these different, but complementary ways of working.

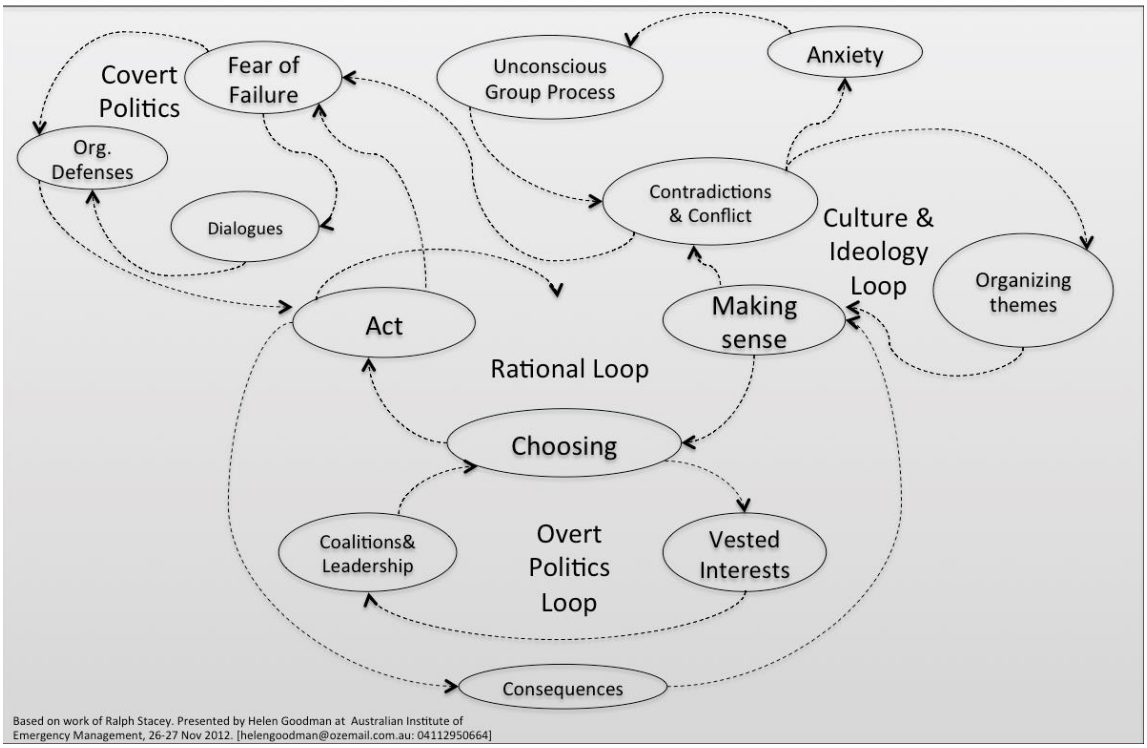
We look forward to continuing involvement in rich exchanges – of being involved more and more often in the talking together and working together, across difference, and toward shared outcomes.

Appendix 1: Stacey – Organisation Dynamics

CERTAINTY AND AGREEMENT



DECISION MAKING IN ORGANISATIONS



Appendix 2: Workshop Inquiry Questions

Local Government Workshop Final Agenda

TWO YEARS IN – Local Government Authorities Review Bushfire Recovery

A full day participatory workshop to evaluate and report on the effectiveness of the Victorian Bushfires Response, Recovery and Reconstruction processes, two years in

Friday 18 March 2011 – Edge Youth Services at Westfield Plenty Valley Shopping Centre, Shop MM1, 415 McDonalds Rd, Mill Park (near the National Bank – enter from the outside)

9:00am **Welcome, Purpose and Overview of Day -** *Father Joe Caddy, CEO, CENTACARE*

9:15am **The Impact of Bushfire Response, Recovery and Reconstruction on Shire Officers and Managers -** *Personal and Team Stories of Challenges and Change*

10:30am **Morning Tea – 20 minutes**

10:50am **LGA Presentations x 5 - Bushfire Response, Recovery and Reconstruction**
Organisational and Community Continuity and Changes, Issues and Innovations
City of Whittlesea – 15 minutes
Shire of Nillumbik – 15 minutes
Shire of Yarra Ranges – 15 minutes
Shire of Murrindindi – 15 minutes
Shire of Mitchell – 15 minutes

12:20pm **Lunch – 40 minutes +** (**reconvene to review** afternoon Agenda - **10 minutes**)

1:10pm **Concurrent Sessions 1 - Leadership Roles** - small mixed groups - 30 minutes
A – *coordinating welfare and community services - and the exit of these services*
B – *community development - rhetoric and reality of community-led recovery*
C – *local economies and small business - dependency and entrepreneurialism*
D – *new built infrastructure - project management and asset maintenance*
E – *natural environment and ecosystems - the costs of maintaining safety*

Concurrent Sessions Report Back – 10 minutes

Concurrent Sessions 2 - Partnership Roles - small mixed groups - 30 minutes
A - *working with other Local Gov't Authorities and across boundaries*
B - *working with the Royal Commission, VBRRA, VBAF & State Government*
C - *working with the Commonwealth Government*
D - *working with Big Business and Corporations*
E - *working with Non-Government Organisations and Civil Society*

Concurrent Sessions Report Back – 10 minutes

2:30pm **Afternoon Tea – 20 minutes +** (**reconvene to reduce** questions - **10 minutes**)

3:00pm **Officer–Generated Discussion Questions**

What has it been like working with the Royal Commission, VBRRA, VBAF & State Government?

What has it been like working with Big Business, Corporations, NGOs and Civil Society?

How well have you worked across boundaries with other Local Government Authorities?

How have you coordinated welfare and community services - and the exit of these services?

How difficult was it determining who was leading, partnering on or delivering projects?

How have you supported local economies, small businesses and social entrepreneurialism?

How did will you oversee new building project management and new asset maintenance?

Has the bushfires affected the way you will manage environmental assets and ecosystems?

What have you learnt about community safety, vulnerability, preparedness and resilience?

What changes have you made to your LGA planning, programs, policy and procedures?

What community recovery community engagement processes will you mainstream?

How have you provided, supported and enabled community development processes?

What was the rhetoric and the reality of community-led recovery in your municipality?

How have you managed community expectations and resourced community-led projects?

How will you maintain a culture of disaster preparedness and resilience in the community?

How have you mitigated against 'dependency' relationships that can arise after disasters?

How will your shire deal with the long term costs when the external funding ceases?

What issues do you foresee/are still challenged by? What's not resolved/resolvable?

What new issues, themes, learnings and opportunities emerged for you today?

What legacies and recommendations do you want to share with other LGAs?

4:00pm Co-writing / contributing to **'Two Years In - LGAs & Bushfire Recovery'**

4:15pm **Close**

NGO/CSO Workshop Final Agenda

TWO and a HALF YEARS IN

Non-Government Organisations & Service Provider Agencies Review
Psycho-Social & Community Development Bushfire Relief & Recovery

Friday 29 July 2011

A participatory workshop to generate discussion on community bushfire recovery services and the strengths and challenges of adopting community development approaches.

Facilitator – Dr Jacques Boulet

Co-Founder and Head of **OASES** Graduate School for Integrative and Transformative Studies
Co-founder of **Borderlands Cooperative** and Editor of **New Community Quarterly**
Life-Member of **ALARA** – the Action Learning and Action Research Association and
SPIRAL – **S**ystemic **P**articipatory **I**ntegrative **R**esearch & **A**ction **L**earning
Former **RMIT** Associate Prof and Head School of Social Work

Venue – Edge Youth Services at Westfield Plenty Valley Shop MM1, 415 McDonalds Rd, Mill Park (west end – enter next to National Bank)

9:00 am **Welcome –** *Helen Goodman, Acting Manager, CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Services Team*
Brief Background on Community Development Policy – *Daryl Taylor, CatholicCare*
Introductions - including personal - emotional impacts of Bushfire Experience

9:30 am **Community Development & Service Provision History & Definitions –** *Jacques Boulet, Borderlands Co-operative*

10:30 am **Morning Tea** – 30 minutes

11:00 am **NGO Presentations –** *Agency Bushfire Relief & Recovery Experiences & Innovations*

ANHLC – '**Peeling the Onion**'
EACH – '**Peri-Urban Outreach**'
VCC – '**The Emergency Ministries Program**'
COGA – '**Community On Ground Assistance**'
Kildonan – '**The Peer Support Program**'
NCHS – '**Experiences of Disaster Aftermath**'
FamilyCare – '**Counselling Case Management & community development**'

12:15 pm **Lunch** – 45 minutes *(reconvene to review / refine afternoon Agenda - 15 minutes)*

1:15 pm **NGO Community Recovery Themes for discussion** (ideas forwarded by NGO and service provider participants by email or phone in preparation for this workshop)

CRC RECOVERY REVIEW - Draft Agenda for Review

TWO and a HALF YEARS IN

10:00am to 2:00pm - Wednesday 24 August 2011 - Kinglake Library

1. **A DRAFT AGENDA FOR REVIEW & REDEVELOPMENT**
2. **Discussion to be drawn from responses to the following possible topics**

   Self-Organisation – community-generated 'bottom up' initiatives

   Community Development and Leadership – resources & support

   Community Recovery Committees – process & outcomes overview

   Rebuilding, Recovery, Renewal – progress made – work to be done

3. **Disaster recovery themes for consideration**

   Bridging Leaders

   Embracing Uncertainty

   Navigating the Journey

   From "Us & Them" to a "Shared We"

   Leaving a Legacy
4. **Possible themes for further discussions**

   GENDER - ***men and women in crisis and recovery***

   FAMILIES - ***families and relationships in crisis and recovery***

   ECONOMY - ***small businesses in crisis and recovery***

   GROUPS - ***community groups in crisis and recovery***

   CFA / POLICE - ***emergency services in crisis and recovery***

   SCHOOLS - ***children, youth, and education in recovery***

   SERVICE PROVIDERS - ***welfare services in crisis and recovery***

   REBUILDING - ***infrastructure in crisis and recovery***

   CULTURE – ***the arts and cultural heritage in crisis and recovery***

   ENVIRONMENT - ***ecosystems in crisis and recovery***

   LOCAL GOVT – ***response and role played by Local Government***

   VBRRA - ***response and role played by VBRRA***

   STATE - ***response and role played by State Government***

   FEDERAL - ***response and role played by Commonwealth***

   CORPORATES - ***response and role played by Big Business***

   NGOs ***- response and role played by Civil Society***

Appendix 3: Frameworks for Engaging with Wicked Problems

Brown et al (2010)

Brown et al (2010) working in a contemporary environment (their focus is environmental systems, using transdisciplinary frameworks) outline that wicked problems have many causes and involve multiple interests, evading simple definition, because all those interests would have a separate definition of the situation/problem. They argue that resolving wicked problems requires new ways of thinking about the presenting issues and this thinking needs to be based on collective social decision-making.

Brown et al (2010) offer the following framework for highlighting that each of the multiple interests has its own knowledge construction.

- Individual knowledge - based on personal, lived experience
- Local knowledge - based on shared community conditions
- Experts - contribute with the particular knowledge set from their training
- Strategic knowledge - the organisational agenda
- Holistic knowledge - gives focus and vision (p 70).

Brown (2011) [190] in a presentation to an ANU Human Ecology forum, concludes that resolving wicked problems such as poverty, obesity, trauma, climate change and disasters calls for transformational change, as these problems have:

- Multiple causes
- Multiple interests
- No single definition
- Need for social change
- Solutions with unknown consequences
- No final solution

Tricket et al (2011)

Tricket et al (2011), working in the Public Health sector, provide some useful approaches to intervening in complex systems and wicked problems, and have some utility for Emergency Management. They outline an emerging ecological/living systems paradigm of practice, a practice they see as essential for an emerging ecological/living systems paradigm. Such a paradigm of practice has the following properties:

- A focus on the goal of increasing community capacity and capability through interventions directed at specific community dynamics and community issues identified through local culturally appropriate community-engaged and community-led processes
- adopting an ecological and systemic perspective that assesses the influence of multiple levels of community ecology on the issue at hand and on community resources and capacities, research and development partners, community tensions, and the relationship between the intervention teams, organisations, and the community

190 Slide 5 of Brown, V., *The Lizard's Tale: Is There a Need for a Transformative Science?* ANU Human Ecology Forum Presentation, 2011.

- a focus on the empowering role of community collaboration throughout the community-level intervention process
- and an emphasis on the permeating role of local culture and local history as both a resource for and an influence on the community-level intervention, implementation and evaluation processes (p.4).

The intended outcome of the paradigm shift Tricket et al (2011) are advocating, is the recognition that it is the multiple-layered and systemic intervention programs that can influence whole contexts and communities, and individuals.

Ticket et al (2011) identify that underlying this shift are several specific issues:

1. questions about the external validity of knowledge produced under highly controlled conditions when it is generalised to socio-culturally diverse communities

2. the distance between knowledge development and knowledge use

3. an overreliance on individual-level or single-issue interventions that fail to address the contextual, community and organisational conditions in which people and collectives live, grow, work, and play

4. concerns about program sustainability, intervention impacts, and the state of community infrastructure after externally funded community interventions end

5. the ethical challenges and opportunities involved in working with whole communities and varied cultural groups (pp.1-2)

Kania and Kramer: Collective Impact Strategists[191]:

The collective impact strategists point to specific structural organisational changes they see as required to materialise the goals of collective impact. The changes they see required are in the following domains:

- a common agenda
- shared measurement systems
- mutually reinforcing activities
- continuous communication
- a backbone support organisation

[191] http://www.ssireview.org/articles/entry/collective_impact

Appendix 4: Properties of Systems

This key idea of '*mutual interaction'* is held within the approach used by the International Centre for development oriented Research in Agriculture (ICRA) who describe a system as

- *An arrangement of physical components related in such a way that they act as a whole.*
- *Where the properties of the whole arise from the relationships between the component parts; and*
- *Something that has a purpose, or is of interest to someone*[192]*.*

The notion of the properties of the whole *'arising'* from the relationships between the component parts, is a key idea. On this criteria alone, one could not call the domain of 'Emergency Management' a *'system'*. By way of example, ICRA refer to the properties of a prison, where, if key elements are removed, (eg walls and warders) then it will no longer be a prison. That is, the *'system'* collapses. In relation to a system having a purpose, ICRA note the differing interpretations of purpose by different stakeholders within a prison system. But this purpose can be interpreted somewhat differently by different people: to some it may be a way of keeping criminals off the streets, to others a way of punishing them, and to yet others a way of rehabilitating them. All these interpretations are similar, yet sufficiently different to imply different ways of managing a prison system.

Hawkins, Ison and Lightfoot (all contributors to the ICRA web materials) point to the important question in systems thinking about boundaries. In relation to the prison system, they pose the following questions – are the following part of the *'system'*: the vans that bring the prisoners to the prison, the cells at the police station, the courts and judges? Where you put the boundaries *'depend on, but also determine'* factors that you then deem relevant to your consideration. In the context of this report, too often the '*community'* lies out of scope when Emergency Management system boundaries are being drawn, except where communities are regarded as targets.

Feedback is also a central consideration in systems thinking and action – where systems are in operation, change in one part will cause change in another. Again, issues of *'feedback'*, review, evaluation, were considered difficult to do, or to give, in the post-disaster environment. And to whom would one give such reviews and feedback? The governing *'system'* (VBRRA) was dissolved in 2011.

But when the properties don't relate to each other at all, ICRA refer to a *'heap'* – a mass of unrelated bits. ICRA cite the work of the systems writer Russell Ackoff, who in his opening speech, in fact the opening sentence of the speech to the 3rd International Conference on Systems Thinking in Management, a conference entitled 'Transforming the Systems Movement', stated: '*The situation the world is in is a mess*'. Ackoff wrote of the idea of *'mess'* in his systems work. We think of this term as similar to the way ICRA and other system thinkers speak of a '*heap*'. It may be that emergency management in reality operates more like a *'heap'* that a *'system'*. The many elements of the Prevention, Preparedness, Response and Recovery (PPRR) spectrum are frequently inarticulated, lack definition, have boundaries that cannot be drawn, often do not work together, and at times are frankly hostile to each other.

[192] http://www.icra-edu.org/objects/anglolearn/Systems_Thinking-Key_Concepts1.pdf

Appendix 5: 'Talking Together' Community Conversations

Meg Wheatley: 12 Principles & Associated Questions

1. People Support What They Create
Q. Are we engaging all those who have a stake in the issue/s?

2. People Act Most Responsibly When They Care
Q. Are we working on issues that people truly care about? How do we know they care?

3. Conversations Are The Way Humans Have Always Thought Together
Q. When and how do we use conversation to established shared meaning?
Q. Where do such conversations naturally occur / emerge in our community?

4. To Change The Conversation, Change Who Is In The Conversation
Q. Are we stuck in this conversation? Do our conversations go round and round lead nowhere? What new people can we invite into the conversation?

5. Expect Leadership To Come From ANYWHERE
Q. When and how often have we been surprised about who stepped forward as an informal leader?

6. Focusing On What's Working Gives Us Energy and Creativity
Q. When have you been most energised by your own work? (Ask What's Possible, Not What's Wrong!)

7. The Wisdom Resides Within Us
Q. Do we first look inside our community expecting to find the answers there?

8. Everything Is Going To Fail In The Middle
Q. How do we react to times of failure when we see our progress suddenly disappear? Do we blame, deny or gather to learn?

9. Learning Is The Way We Change, Grow And Become Resilient
Q. How often do we take the time to learn from our experiences? Can we view our work as experiments that teach us how to succeed?

10. Meaningful Work Is A Powerful Human Motivator
Q. How often do we talk about and remember the deeper purpose that called us to our work?

11. We Humans Can Handle Anything As Long As We Are TOGETHER
Q. Are we paying attention to our relationships? Are we supporting each other? Are we ignoring each other? How often do we gossip, judge or scapegoat?

12. Generosity, Forgiveness And Love Are The Most Important Elements Of Community
Q. If people were observing you (in Your Community) what would they see?

Appendix 6: Emergency Relief Handbook: Acknowledgements

The Department of Human Services acknowledges the contribution of Red Cross in coordinating the review and update of the Emergency relief handbook: a planning guide 2013.

The Department of Human Services and Red Cross would like to thank the State Emergency Relief Planning Subcommittee, the local government reference group and the following organisations for their input and feedback.

Ambulance Victoria, Australian Business Register, Australian Centre for Posttraumatic Mental Health, Australian Psychological Society, Bendigo Community Health Services, City of Ballarat, City of Greater Bendigo, City of Melbourne, City of Whittlesea, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, Department of Environment and Primary Industries, Department of Health, Department of Human Services, Department of Transport, Department of Treasury and Finance, East Gippsland Shire Council, Emergency Management Network Solutions, Environmental Health Professionals Australia, Fire Services Commissioner Victoria, Foodbank Victoria, Glenelg Shire Council, Mansfield Shire Council, Maribyrnong City Council, Metropolitan Fire Brigade, Mind Australia, Mitchell Shire Council, Moira Shire Council, Municipal Association of Victoria, Nillumbik Shire Council, Red Cross, Save the Children Australia, The Salvation Army, Victoria Police, Victoria State Emergency Service, Victorian Council of Churches, Yarra Ranges Shire Council, Yarriambiack Shire Council.

The Department of Human Services and Red Cross understand that the development of the handbook is an evolving process that strives to reflect, and be informed by, emergency relief practice. To continue this process it is important to receive feedback to measure and evaluate how useful this resource is. We encourage you to provide your feedback by calling Red Cross at 1800 232 969.

Appendix 7: About the Authors

Daryl Taylor

Until February 2009, Daryl had been working from his home office in Kinglake as an organisational and community development consultant, specialising in action research and program evaluation.

Daryl, his partner Lucy, and their daughter Maggie, had their home and offices destroyed on Black Saturday. The three streets in their immediate neighbourhhood were among the most devastated in the firestorm. Daryl cites his experience of being involved with friends and colleagues in the many self-organising and community-led projects that emerged in the fire's aftermath, as transformative.

His previous work experience included positions as a Registered Nurse in community health and community mental health and in trauma and emergency; and as Community Development Officer with the Shire of Nillumbik, Public Health Planning Team Leader and Senior Health Promotion Officer with the City of Whittlesea and as Community Capacity Building Projects Officer with the Shire of Yarra Ranges. He has also worked as a Lecturer and Tutor in The Social and Environmental Determinants of Health, Health Sociology, Social and Community Planning and Community Cultural Leadership at La Trobe University, RMIT University and the University of Melbourne.

Daryl's public health and social planning, participatory action research, and organisational and community development project work has been formally acknowledged with 11 state and national innovation and best practice awards and commendations. His practice features in the Victorian Health Promotion Foundation's Local Government Good Practice Resource 'Leading the Way'.

He was employed part-time (two days per week) by CatholicCare as a Community Development Worker in November 2010, for a 12 month period during which time the participants in this project were engaged and recruited, the action-research method designed, the participatory processes facilitated and the data collected and collated, and analysis begun. He is now back working as a project worker through his consultancy firm, Adaptive Dynamics. Daryl is grateful to Helen Goodman and Janet Cribbes for the opportunity to revisit and complete this piece of work.

Helen Goodman

Helen's career spans three and a half decades of varied professional experience across multiple roles, including as a social worker engaged in casework, groupwork, community work, policy analysis, planning, research and evaluation, and management, and in administrative review as a member of the Social Security Appeals Tribunal (SSAT). In more recent years she has complemented her strong practice focus with an involvement in research and evaluation, contributing to the development of knowledge regarding services / policies / programs that enhance family life, community strength, organisational effectiveness and public policy. On completion of her PhD, Helen spent three years as a Research Fellow at RMIT's School of Global Studies, Social Science and Planning during which time she was engaged as a Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) researcher in the evaluation of community safety programs. In this time she researched fire impacted communities in both South Australia and Victoria.

After the (2009) bushfires Helen took up a senior role in community recovery, firstly managing a Community Services Hub in the Kinglake Ranges for the Department of Human Services, and subsequently as Acting Manager of the CatholicCare Bushfire Community Recovery Service. She regards this period as a privilege – to hold these roles in the midst of the Kinglake Ranges and its communities.

Helen remains vitally interested in many aspects of emergency management, and particularly likes to keep a grounded perspective – where the rubber of program ideals meets the road of implementation. Helen is grateful to Janet Cribbes for the opportunity to assist with bringing this project to completion, and is glad to have participated in this joint effort with Janet, and Daryl Taylor.

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