

Omeo Region Community Conversations Report

Omeo Region Community Recovery Association
and
East Gippsland Shire Council

December 2023

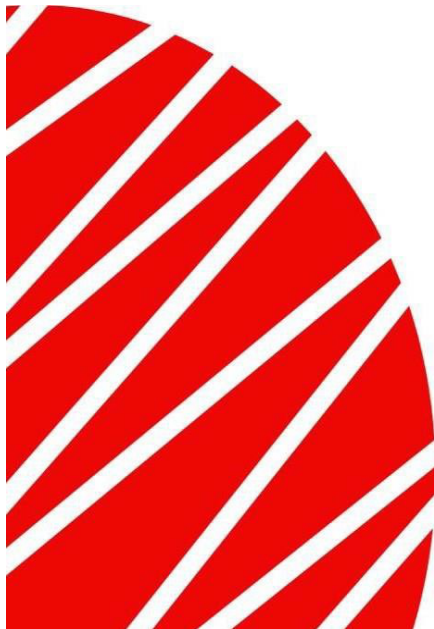


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Acknowledgments

This Report acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters on which it has been developed. We pay our respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

The Report wishes to acknowledge the commitment to the collaborative process undertaken in the sessions by both community members and emergency management agencies. The willingness to share and discuss issues of community expectation and agency capacity show how the ideas of collective decision making and shared knowledge have matured in the Omeo Region, where emergency events are too often endured.

The Report also acknowledges the exceptional work of the ORCRA committee members, led by Jane Rowe, and their Project Officer Helenka King, and the East Gippsland Shire Council's Bushfire Recovery Coordination Team, Emergency Management Team and the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (MEMPC).

Finally, to Gail Cummings for her facilitation and work consulting with agencies and communities that set the community conversations on their collaborative path.





Executive Summary

The Community Conversation sessions were a result of work undertaken by the Omeo Region Community Recovery Association (ORCRA) which was set up by the then Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), after the devastating bushfire emergencies, called Black Summer, in 2019/2020.

The active engagement with ORCRA by the East Gippsland Shire Council, later provided an opportunity to both survey the communities of the Omeo Region and to develop a format for agencies to respond to a set of expectations that communities had expressed, through the survey, of emergency management agencies, in the event of a new emergency.

It was obvious from the survey results, and how they were collated as a set of expectations, that communities wanted to ensure that their local knowledge and resources were key informants and supports for the operations of emergency management agencies prior to, during and after emergency events. Strengthening communities through agency processes that were premised on community participatory practices, meant more collaborative investigation into community reliance on vulnerable key services, such as power and telecommunications. This process also recognised the opportunity for local community services such as neighbourhood houses, bush nurses and community groups to play a major role in the strengthening of their community, through projects and programs aimed at resilience building.

The agencies that participated in the sessions were all open to discussion on their responses to the collected community expectations. Although at times critical of agency operations in emergencies there was a strong sense of collaboration, of a common purpose between communities and agencies. A summary of the key outcomes, based on ORCRA's 7 key priority areas, and drawn from the five Community Conversations sessions, indicates that there is still further development of the alliance between communities and agencies needed.

However, the openness of agencies to a more participatory process is significant progress for communities, as is the acknowledgment of the value of existing community based, organisational strength. The collective understanding of responsibility will continue to be discussed and refined as this participatory system matures, and with the identification of both shared and individual responsibility, supported by the development of a new participatory communications structure, there is every reason for the community conversations to continue to help define the future of these collaborative emergency processes.



The contributions of the Community Conversations sessions towards the ORCRA priorities are summarised here.

Alternative Power Sources

The possible solutions for rural communities include establishing solar and microgrid systems that provide power other than through the main power grid. AusNet is also engaged in improved forecasting that provides greater understanding of weather impacts on the power grid, and improvements to the outage notification process using SMS messaging will allow communities to know when power is restored after emergencies.

EGSC discussed issues relating to supply of generators during emergencies. These are designed to support halls and other facilities where communities can receive support and access to power and telecommunications, especially the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) communications equipment.

Reliable Telecommunications

The issues surrounding access to telecommunications during emergencies has been an ongoing and critical problem for both agencies and communities. The service agencies, Telstra and the NBN Co. provided information on service planning especially on the issues that involve the completion of the optic fibre loop through the Omeo region, maintenance of power to telecommunication towers and the rollout of the STAND program.

Telstra were also able to provide a solution to the ongoing issue of community refuelling telecommunication tower generators during emergencies, through a training program for local residents.

Consistent Road Access

Road access is critical to the safety of communities and agencies. Evacuation and access to homes and farming properties are dependent on consistent road access or where alternative routes must be used, that they, and any changes, are well communicated, timely and across well-defined media platforms.

The issues relating to road access were many and varied. The closing and opening of roads causes considerable problems, especially the location of the Traffic Management Points.

Bushfire Fuel Management

The ORCRA community survey highlighted the expectation that there will be greater collaboration between agencies and communities on the timing and location of planned burns. DEECA and CFA are actively providing opportunities for the community to use their local knowledge and experience to assist in planning fuel reduction burns, through the Joint Fire Management Plan (JFMP). DEECA are also keen to invite local CFA members to their planned burns to build relationships with local CFA crews.



Mental Health

The effects of disasters on individuals' mental health and wellbeing are well documented and the reason why there is a more developed network of support agencies, who provide post event psycho-social services into affected communities.

The importance of good mental and social wellbeing is reflected in the level of resilience that individuals and communities demonstrate as they emerge from an emergency situation. Although resilience is a broad term with a number of different interpretations it is still important to observe and support the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt socially, economically and mentally to their post event circumstances.

The Community Conversation sessions did not focus on these issues specifically, but there were expectations of emergency agencies that were interlinked with the effects of those agency actions on community wellbeing.

Regional Resilience Plan

The establishment of the *Disaster Resilience Plan for Communities of the Omeo Region*, developed through community consultation by ORCRA, is an important step towards understanding the strengths and vulnerabilities of the communities that make up the Omeo Region. The Community Conversations sessions discussed a number of important expectations across a range of issues that feed directly into this balance of strengths and vulnerabilities. These were discussed as follows. The details are within the body of the Report.

- Agency Priorities
- Communications
- Community Support Needs
- Donated Goods
- Emergency Planning for Individuals and Households
- Heritage Site Protection
- Local Resources and Knowledge

Access To Grant Funding

Grant funding was identified as an enabler of community preparedness and resilience. Although few comments were made concerning specific grant availability, much of the funding discussion was focussed on ensuring community needs are met during emergencies (e.g. food purchasing and storage, water, access to health service support) and for the provision of infrastructure upgrades at locations designed to support communities during emergencies. Investment by agencies was discussed in relation to specific energy and telecommunications projects that are designed to "harden" the supply systems.



Reporting to the East Gippsland Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee

Following presentation to both ORCRA and EGSC, this Report is to be presented to the Chairperson of the East Gippsland Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (EGMEMPC), to further the committees knowledge of the experiences and expectations from communities on the operations of emergency service agencies.

The Report strongly advocates for a best practice, participatory alliance between communities and agencies in order for future, locally based community emergency plans to become more integrated into the operations and structures of emergency management.

The information attached at Appendix A is an important part of the Community Conversations outcomes and provides a record for the committee of all agency responses across the five place based sessions. These have been reviewed by the agencies for accuracy and approved for publication within this Report. They indicate the detail of the commitment to the community by emergency management agencies and can be used as both an action and evaluation tool in the ongoing alliance and planning activities between communities and agencies.



Introduction

The development of the Community Conversations program was initially enabled through a partnership between the Omeo Region Community Recovery Association (ORCRA) and Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV), following the severe impacts of the 2019/2020 bushfires. The ORCRA Committee undertook a process for establishing both a record of community expectations during emergency situations and how those expectations could be clarified and discussed with the agencies responsible for emergency management.

ORCRA presented the *Disaster Resilience Plan for Communities of the Omeo Region* to East Gippsland Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee (EGMEMPC) on Thursday 8th September 2022. ORCRA's ongoing project was to have EGMEMPC agency members review a series of place based community expectations, developed through community surveys, and investigate achievable timelines for action. These were given the name "Community Conversations". ORCRA was the only Community Recovery Committee that had approached EGMEMPC with their Disaster Resilience Plan, as a proactive approach to community emergency management planning, in line with the State Framework and the Victorian Preparedness Framework - All Emergencies, All Communities.

The Community Conversations project, delivered by both ORCRA and the East Gippsland Shire Council (EGSC) in 2023, held sessions within the communities of Benambra, Omeo, Swifts Creek, Ensay and Tambo Crossing, the results of which have provided the substance of this Report.

The Report firstly, provides an outline of the methods used in the facilitated sessions, to indicate the style of the program and how collective and individual voices were recorded and acknowledged.

Secondly, there is an indication of the number of people who engaged in the sessions, the agencies involved and the agenda settings that framed the conversations.

Thirdly, there is a section devoted to the discussion outcomes and the commitments made by agencies and communities. This section indicates the extent to which the expectations were resolved or where further work would take place. A detailed appendix (A) provides a full record of those expectations and how they were addressed.

Finally, there are a set of conclusions drawn to indicate the success of the project and the potential for a process of continuous improvement to be instigated, where community conversations become a more established and productive alliance within emergency management practices.



Methods Used In The Facilitated Sessions

Although this Report does not attempt to assess the process by which ORCRA established and recorded the listings of place based expectations, it is worth noting that the process, using consultation tools designed to engage with the small rural communities of the Omeo Region, successfully captured survey data that was reflective of the communities interests in the outcomes of local emergency management systems. The engagement of agencies in responding to these expectations at community meetings, was the focus of the Community Conversations project. The overall shape of the processes put in place by ORCRA and its partners, BRV and EGSC, is indicative of a qualitative framework for social change and engagement called, Community Based Participatory Research (CBPR).

As a participatory process, ORCRA and its partners have addressed some of the key actions of CBPR, as the Community Conversations project:-

- recognizes community as a unit of identity.
- builds on strengths and resources within the community.
- facilitates collaborative, equitable partnerships in all phases and involves an empowering and power-sharing process.
- promotes co-learning and capacity building among all partners.
- integrates and achieves a balance between research and action for the mutual benefit of all partners.
- disseminates findings and knowledge gained to all partners and involves all partners in the dissemination process.
- requires a long-term process and commitment to sustainability.

This last area of sustainability will be addressed in the Report's conclusions, and is key to the process of delivering positive changes to the lives of people within each community of the Omeo Region.

Community Conversations were facilitated, community-based discussions between community members and representatives of the agencies responsible for emergency response, especially those who are activated at the commencement of bushfire events.

The sessions delivered by ORCRA and EGSC are listed below. Some changes were required to ensure agencies were available, especially during a period of fires, then floods in September/October 2023.

Session	Date	Time	Location	Attendance
Benambra	12/9/2023	10am-2pm	Benambra Recreation Reserve	43
Omeo	26/9/2023	10am-2pm	Omeo Recreation Reserve	24
Swifts Creek	24/10/2023	10am-2pm	Swifts Creek Hall	15
Ensay	1/11/2023	9am-12pm	Ensay CFA	25
Tambo Crossing	1/11/2023	1pm-4pm	Tambo Crossing Community Venue	17





Session Details

Each session was run along similar lines despite the change in facilitator for the last three sessions. Both facilitators regarded the sessions as an opportunity for the community to hear its expectations addressed and an opportunity for further questions, and for agencies to present their responses in a place based approach, i.e. within the community itself.

The agenda is discussed in more detail below but it was important that both community members and agencies had an opportunity to be physically together as an authentic process, respectful of all parties involved. This level of respect ensured that agencies felt able to engage in both formal presentation of their responses to the documented expectations, to be able to field questions of clarification and where possible, to enlist other agencies present to provide a more detailed answer to community questions.

The community was also given opportunity to respond to agency presentations as well as to pose new questions and seek further detail from the agencies. Their contributions were the evidence of the community based participatory process discussed above, giving community members the agency to engage on equal footing with emergency management representatives and the session facilitators. Although at one session there were issues expressed that indicated the lack of resolution of agency actions during the emergency of the 2019/20 bushfires, the sessions were not designed as avenues or substitutes for specific debriefing of past events. It was agreed by facilitators that a level of debriefing was always possible, and to ensure that there was support for this, social wellbeing professionals from Catholic Care and the Royal Flying Doctor Service, attended all sessions.



Community and Agency Engagement and Agenda Settings

The Community Conversations project engaged community members across the Omeo region. The engagement was based upon the program of activities and information provided by ORCRA over the period following the 2019/2020 bushfires. The establishment of the organisation within the community has enabled an ongoing dialogue focussed on developing more community input into key decision making processes, previously focussed on the emergency management agencies, who have the statutory authority and responsibility for acting on behalf of the Victorian Government and the community.

Within a range of post emergency reports¹, increasing community consultation and information has become identified with greater success in managing emergencies, including the value of the local knowledge of the community. Agencies have been expected to provide greater accountability and transparency to communities and the Community Conversations sessions reflected this. Agencies were more than open to discussion with communities on the key issues of fuel management, road closures, communications, maintaining critical infrastructure such as power and telecommunications, and operational decisions.

The individual, place based sessions were well attended by community members, especially the sessions at Benambra and Ensay, all keen to hear agency responses to their specific community expectations and to have the opportunity to raise questions to clarify responses or to raise other community issues related to emergency events. The questions were well addressed by agency representatives although there were also questions that were critical of the lack of consistency in acceptance of local knowledge, as a key informant in emergency situational operations and criticism of specific actions during taken by agencies during the 2019/2020 bushfires. Agencies recognised that there were issues with the limitations to their resource capacity during such a catastrophic event and the increasing engagement of staff from areas who had no familiarity with the Omeo Region and its communities. These discussions typified unresolved issues between community members and agencies that resulted from the 2019/2020 bushfires and the disputed rhetoric of community informed decision making.

The agencies attending the sessions were all committed to participation and to address the expectations as provided to them. Where required they also undertook to take specific actions and where further information was needed, committed to follow-up with the ORCRA/EGSC representatives and community members.

¹

- Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (2020)
- Implementation Monitoring Of 'Review Of 10 Years Of Reform In Victoria's Emergency Management Sector' And 'Inquiry Into The 2019-20 Victorian Fire Season – Phase 1' - Progress Report – 2022 (2023)



As discussed, the sessions at Swifts Creek, Ensay and Tambo Crossing were rescheduled due to two short, but intensive, emergency events that reduced the availability of agency attendees and it was considered that ensuring maximum attendance by agencies was a key element for the success of the sessions. The table below indicates a very high level of engagement from key agencies involved in emergency preparedness, response and maintenance of core power and telecommunications infrastructure.

Agency	Benambra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
ORCRA	•	•	•	•	•
DEECA	•	•	•	•	•
CFA	•	•	•	•	•
EGSC	•	•	•	•	•
SES	•	•	•	•	•
VicPol	•	•	•	•	•
Telstra		•			
NBN	•	•	•	•	•
AusNet	•	•	•	•	•
Catholic Care	•	•	•	•	•
RFDS	•	•	•	•	•
Ambulance ² Victoria			•		

Setting the Agenda

The setting of agendas is a powerful tool in designing a participatory process. The agenda for the Community Conversations was set by ORCRA and the EGSC and demonstrates that the primary task for the sessions was the opportunity for communities to hear agencies respond to the listed expectations from their community, both specific and general, as some responses were common across all communities in the Omeo Region.

² Ambulance Victoria were invited after the first two sessions had been completed.



The introductions to each session by the facilitator and by ORCRA committee members and staff were designed to set out the process by which the expectations were gathered and documented, and that agencies were assisted in understanding those expectations by ORCRA and the project facilitators. The sessions also provided an opportunity to reinforce the important participation of communities as local knowledge holders in this process. This reinforced the framing of the relationship between agencies and communities as collaborative and one that respected the knowledge and experience base of both.

In order to reinforce this sense of shared responsibilities, the facilitators framed their introductions to suggest that both communities and agencies were working towards a common purpose, that is broadly, the safety and protection of people, property and the environment. This approach was designed to reduce the perception that agencies and communities were in an unequal power relationship, that although they had different roles, they shared the common purpose.

The agenda did have specific opportunities at the end of a number of agency presentations, for the community in attendance to ask questions or to clarify certain issues, but in general the questioning became more a dialogue between agency representatives and communities. This dialogue was at times, contentious and challenging as communities raised issues that were important to their safety, their livelihoods, their decision making and their need for effective communications during emergencies. Agencies also reminded communities of the need for effective household fire planning and the level of responsibility they had in ensuring their own safety and protection of their own property.

The opportunity for the agenda to facilitate this dialogue was important for both agency representatives and community members to feel they were able to express themselves and to do so safely and in a supportive environment. Although there were some issues that became personalised the facilitators provided a level of mediation, suggesting that some issues were systemic and that the sessions enabled a process that contributed to a continuously improving relationship between agencies and communities and better outcomes for the emergency management system, more broadly.



Community Conversation Outcomes and Commitments

The documentation of the discussions for the entire Community Conversations sessions was provided by staff of the EGSC and was collated and analysed by the project facilitators in collaboration with ORCRA and EGSC staff.

All documentation was loaded into NVivo qualitative analysis software to provide fine grained analysis that was able to be themed and cross referenced. The theming was then related to the ORCRA, 7 key priority areas for the Omeo region's recovery planning.

These key priority areas are as follows.

- Alternative Power Sources
- Reliable Telecommunications
- Consistent Road Access
- Bushfire Fuel Management
- Mental Health
- Regional Resilience Plan
- Access To Grant Funding

The following discusses the information provided within the Community Conversation sessions with the aid of quotations from both community and agency participants.

Alternative Power Sources

Discussion across all sessions on the power grid and its alternatives was led by AusNet representatives who explained the issues surrounding management of energy supplies in times of emergency, especially major bushfire events.

"AusNet focuses on reliability (everyday connectivity) and resilience (emergency response)... This includes Network renewals – looking at alternative ways to giving remote communities power rather than a single wire."- Omeo Session

The possible solutions for rural communities include establishing solar and microgrid systems that provide power other than through the main power grid. AusNet is also engaged in improved forecasting that provides greater understanding of weather impacts on the power grid, and improvements to the outage notification process using SMS messaging will allow communities to know when power is restored after emergencies.

The local power grid also has the technology to ensure rapid disconnection if a power line is damaged or may fall, potentially creating fires. Improving vegetation clearing is ongoing and AusNet will look at the power poles between Ensay and Tambo Crossing where community members have identified timber poles in poor repair.



"Q.-why haven't AusNet (20yrs) replaced the wooden poles. They are the issue and in difficult spots to get to. No one can get to them in the bush" Community Member, Ensay Session

During emergencies AusNet is also able to provide low voltage generators in specific spots within towns to maintain power supply in the central area.

"AusNet-We do have a generator support now, managed by AusNet EM team where communities can be put on generator connection and then transitioned over to electricity when its fixed." -Swifts Creek Session

AusNet is also looking at ways to provide local technical support to communities during emergencies (e.g. stationing locked service vehicles in areas where there is an emergency and flying in technicians as required)

EGSC discussed issues relating to supply of generators during emergencies. These are designed to support halls and other facilities where communities can receive support and access to power and telecommunications, especially the Strengthening Telecommunications Against Natural Disasters (STAND) communications equipment.

"EGSC-Council funding for generators – 1st round did remote areas. Round 2 – 10 more generators for allocation with one allocated for Benambra. We need to identify the best area to place this. 7 have been donated to communities. Its hopeful they're rolled out before Christmas. The next 10 will be after Christmas."- Benambra Session

Reliable Telecommunications

The issues surrounding access to telecommunications during emergencies has been an ongoing and critical problem for both agencies and communities. The service agencies, Telstra and the NBN Co. provided information on service planning especially on the issues that involve the maintenance of power to telecommunication towers and the rollout of the STAND program.

"EGSC- STAND systems have been applied at 55 sites. This allows ICC to talk via teams, enables the person managing the meeting at the assembly area will need to forward to community email addresses to those who have satellite internet. The public info person who would set up a face to face meeting will set up the teams meeting for on the STAND. E.g. live feed from Bairnsdale to Benambra.

Training for the STAND at the neighbourhood house. We urge community members to come for the training."-Benambra Session

Telecommunications service will include optic fibre upgrade to complete the loop of cable by connecting the Tambo Crossing to Ensay section. The two way operability that the



completed loop will provide will ensure more sustainable service. Other information from Telstra included the following.

"Telstra- Telstra is building a new mobile base station in Omeo. If goes to plan it will operate early November 2023, bringing more capacity to town. It was acknowledged there are currently black spots in town. Small base stations are in place in Anglers Rest and Bundar Valley and Swifts Creek and Tambo Crossing." - Omeo Session

Telstra were also able to provide a solution to the ongoing issue of refuelling telecommunication tower generators during emergencies.

"Telstra-The sites rely on power and they all now have backup generators which can be started remotely. Telstra would like to train some community members to help with refuelling and start up when needed in emergencies." -Omeo Session

Consistent Road Access

Road access is critical to the safety of communities and agencies. Evacuation and access to homes and farming properties are dependent on consistent road access or where alternative routes must be used, that they, and any changes, are well communicated, timely and across well-defined media platforms.

The issues relating to road access were many and varied. The closing and opening of roads causes considerable problems, especially the location of the Traffic Management Points.

"VicPol-Road block level made at police IC and ICC; the more info we get the better decisions are made. Vic Roads have to inspect all roads to be able to reopen them. Local – we need to remind people there's several roads into / out of town." - Omeo Session

"Q. – once the roads are closed its hard to get them open. Victoria Police A. – I agree, it takes a while for roads to be assessed and reopened if appropriate. Bairnsdale station will be the ones to call with your local knowledge on roads to open / if the roads have already been cleared for residents and fires have already been through. -Tambo Crossing Session

"VicPol-Traffic Management Points (TMP)/Road closures are established during emergency incidents to protect the safety of road users by regulating the flow of traffic into an area where an incident is occurring or had the potential to occur. In addition to ensuring the safety of the public and emergency service personnel, TMPs allow emergency service personnel priority access to combat or respond to an emergency." - Benambra Session



Some communities also identified key alternative routes for emergency evacuation and how they are maintained. DEECA staff were keen to assess any identified roads/tracks to improve access for agencies and communities. Funding is always an issue given the 5500 klms of roads and tracks that DEECA manage in East Gippsland. Identifying key evacuation tracks is part of the prioritisation for allocating resources.

"Community Member: the bottom of Mt Battery Track has been washed out since the 2020 fires, needs a good look by you guys, if there's a fire I'd be hesitant to go to the Cobungra river. It's the rain we've had in 3 years. It's just one road that we know fires will come from that direction. It would be worth taking a look at the bottom site. A.-DEECA: I'll commit to that now that we will get someone out next week to look at that. I'll sent someone out for an assess." - Omeo Session

"Q – The fire history in Tambo Crossing, why isn't there more done on fall back lines and roads cleared. They've (fires) all started in the Dargo area and come over. The 5 mile spur rd. and engineers. Why don't they get cleaned for coming from that area.

A -DEECA.– it is a strategic road; we do put funding into clearing/maintain it. Maybe not as you'd like. There has been recovery work done" Tambo Crossing Session.

Bushfire Fuel Management

The ORCRA community survey highlighted the expectation that there will be greater collaboration between agencies and communities on the timing and location of planned burns. DEECA and CFA are actively providing opportunities for the community to use their local knowledge and experience to assist in fuel reduction burns, through the Joint Fire Management Plan (JFMP). DEECA are also keen to invite local CFA members to their planned burns to build relationships with local CFA crews.

"Expectation: DEECA supports input into small scale fuel reduction burn nominations for JFMP".

"DEECA: With the help of ORCRA and community meetings a fair bit of work has happened with burning around the community. The process there is you can nominate, there are a lot of restrictions we adhere to. You might nominate it this year, and go through approvals for the burns, there is a consultation period.

Community Role: Nominate desired areas for consideration in JFMP." -Omeo Session

"Expectation: Request CFA volunteers to attend a couple of planned burns a year.

DEECA: ...Share that learning experience, fully support CFA coming to our burns and asking about our burns and sharing knowledge with everyone." -Omeo Session



Mental Health

The effects of disasters on individuals' mental health and wellbeing are well documented and the reason why there is a more developed network of support agencies who provide post event psycho-social services into affected communities. The importance of good mental and social wellbeing is reflected in the level of resilience that individuals and communities demonstrate as they emerge from an emergency situation. Although resilience is a broad term with a number of different interpretations it is still important to observe and support the capacity of individuals and communities to adapt socially, economically and mentally to their post event circumstances. The Community Conversation sessions did not focus on these issues specifically, but there were expectations of emergency agencies that were interlinked with the effects of those agency actions on community wellbeing.

"RFDS-Mental Health services are advertised locally, there is money increasing positions through GPHN, they're short term. RFDS (Royal Flying Doctor Service) – mental health is engrained trauma and needs to be addressed –refer it to subcommittee to MEMPC.... MEMPC sub-committee is looking at this; more info needed for community to be aware of how to manage stress; possibly get Red Cross session run (Mental Health first aid)".- Omeo Session

"Catholic Care- mentioned mental health impact immediately during and after fires being separated from loved ones is really traumatic-changes create different ability to understand or process. might be a gradual process, for others it could be triggered by the power going off. Then we get fight or flight. Problem making, decision making ability changes. Whether it's behavioural or written down. Information needs to come in different formats."- Swifts Creek Session

"Catholic Care-Communication during EM; so much information, including on social media. It's about keeping it simple, psychologically people processing information is difficult. Maybe someone in a uniform once per day goes to a venue to share information. Face to face is valuable and helps people to feel reassured."- Benambra Session

Regional Resilience Plan

The establishment of the *Disaster Resilience Plan for Communities of the Omeo Region*, developed through community consultation by ORCRA, is an important step towards understanding the strengths and vulnerabilities of the communities that make up the Omeo Region. The Community Conversations sessions discussed a number of important expectations across a range of issues that feed directly into this balance of strengths and vulnerabilities.

Agency Priorities

Agencies explained that they operate under specific departmental/organisational guidelines which require them to undertake resource prioritisation and to ensure safety of those acting

in a response capacity. There are also departmental priorities that determine the actions taken by agencies in preparation for potential emergencies. These are often a result of the lessons learnt from previous experiences with disasters. For example, new technologies, reinforcement of key bushfire planning for individuals and households and more community participation across response and recovery phases.

"DEECA- absolutely some value in having a list of local machinery that is available for use in an event. We will commit to update community on developments on maintaining forest network in light of changes to industry. Liaise with local contractors about set rate (CFA and DEECA); ensure locals get on panel as quickly as possible".-Benambra Session

"AusNet-Where the country is heavily forested. Extreme fire danger/storm and there's a fault on the line would cause a shutdown.... It's a European system and first time it's been installed around the world on the network scale.. It's about to launch.

"CFA- There has been a change to fire danger ratings system 6 to 4 definitions. This indicates how easy the fires are to control. As public you need to understand what this means. Create and develop your own plan"- Ensay Session

Communications

Communications are always a key issue in evaluating how emergency management relationships between communities and agencies are experienced. There are also agency communications and networking with agencies outside the region. It is clear that the complexity and longevity of an emergency creates more diverse communications, both official and informal, especially with the increasing use of social media and SMS messaging to provide updated information to communities.

"DEECA-Local people have the local contacts. Have systems in place, ICC has a planning room and an operations room, have communication links (numbers and names) available to those working. Public information officers from DEECA need to know where to find these. The best way to get information in the system is by making links on the ground. The sector commander is linked with key contacts to make a plan and feed back into the system."

"DEECA- It comes down to resources and people available to do this...ICCs are obliged to share new information which can be lengthy. People don't want to leave their property so there is still the dilemma that one person gets the information but how does it get shared with those who don't leave. -Benambra Session

"EGSC-STAND – talking to agencies and communities to have teams meetings to have daily teleconference. What we're looking at now is the ICC sets up community meeting times with communities on a daily basis. Go to the hall or Rec Reserve or use the link and



join remotely. For updates. This worked well in the Bemm River floods in 2022"-Ensay Session

"DEECA- We continue to try to improve the message out to communities. How can we do it better is something to continue to discuss. The Incident Management Team (IMT) in Swifts Creek, Bairnsdale etc will link up together so everyone hears it firsthand. Then IMT will give it to communities. Telephone trees to daily hook ups with community that can spread information through the community."-Swifts Creek Session

"EGSC- Need for the Corryong/Ovens ICC to take up the use of Teams meetings with communities. RCC has link ups with all ICCs - will emphasise importance of PIOs communicating with all affected communities across borders. Community Role: Maintain up to date community contact list – ensure ICC across border also has it."- Omeo Session

Community Support Needs

During emergencies, communities continue to need access to basic services. Those relating to power and telecommunications supply are dealt with separately in this Report, however communities need access to a number of services that are provided through EGSC and others, especially in emergency situations that last many weeks and months and may include periods of isolation due to fire behaviour and road closures. Garbage collection and disposal, access to potable water, food and other household items are key to community health and wellbeing. Agencies address these support need where they are able, although there are often issues relating to safety of staff due to the nature of the emergencies.

"EGSC - Access to water at rec reserve – there's a program to put a bore at the rec reserve. When it is finalised, it will be handed over to rec reserve management for maintenance."-

"...in windows of opportunity when risk is lower then planning to have someone go and open (transfer station). Safety of Council staff is priority. OHS risk to leaving it open and we can't have someone there managing it."- Swifts Creek Session

"EGSC- Food/water supplies – ICC, since the fires EMV established community caches (containers that are helicoptered in with food/water/bedding/diesel fuel.)They are on a 72 hour activation".-Ensay Session

Donated Goods

Donated goods have been difficult to manage across organisations and some donations are considered inappropriate, out of scale and unable to be stored. The State Government have appointed a specific agency to manage all donated goods for emergency events. The GIVIT organisation was nominated by EGSC as the appropriate coordinating agency for all future donations.



"EGSC - Council refer all donated goods and requests for donated goods to GIVIT.. GIVIT will reach out to provide collateral with key messaging to support donation management. Councils can use this to direct donations, whether physical or monetary. GIVIT is contracted with State Government and works with the state to support impacted communities. - Benambra Session

Emergency Planning for Individuals and Households

The Community Conversations provided an opportunity for agencies to reiterate the need for communities and individuals to have prepared their own emergency plans. There is an acknowledgement by agencies, such as VicPol, SES and CFA, that people may not wish to evacuate, however this does mean that people take responsibility for their own safety while they stay and defend their own property. Responsibility is key to emergency management at all levels and community members are active participants in that process, as pointed out by both CFA and VicPol, during the sessions.

There is also an individual's responsibility to inform agencies of their whereabouts during emergencies and the Red Cross have the *Register, Find, Reunite* system for this. Vulnerable people may be identified within communities and this information advised to local health service or Victoria Police station. Local phone trees have operated successfully in emergencies and are part of the community participation that can assist agencies as valuable conduits for local information.

"CFA-We can't / don't want to force anyone to leave their property. The point is, if you decide to stay on your property, you have to be prepared to bunker down and be sustainable for 3 weeks. There's a chance we won't be coming. Government agencies can only do so much to a certain point."-Omeo Session

*CFA- Fire danger period has already started, earlier than normal – weather bureau decision. El Nino – hotter dry summer. (QLD at the moment. It will come down the coast, first area of impact. *mentioned recent fires in the area. Don't be under the illusion is fairly dry. You probably know and understand. Fire danger period – no burning off without a permit. Online on the website fire permits vic.*

"EGSC-EM procedure for older people, leave early plan. – who knows where people are if they leave. A – EM meeting in Omeo first week of December, we will find out where the list is (an updated one)." -Ensay Session



Heritage Site Protection

Although not widely canvassed in the sessions, there is no certainty concerning agency responsibilities for protection of listed Heritage Sites during emergencies. There was no discussion on the protection of First Nations Heritage sites.

“SES-Control agencies historic site. Not aware of King Cassilis as a flooding site, I’ll go back and look at this.”- Swifts Creek Session

Local Resources and Knowledge

The discussion on the use and importance of local resources and knowledge was central to many of the expectations that communities expressed in the sessions of Community Conversations. Key to the obvious commitment to local knowledge and resources by agencies and the desire by communities to be more engaged in emergency responses, is the apparent contradictions expressed by some community members at the application of the concept, during emergency events. This is mainly reflective of the experiences of both agencies and communities during the Black Summer emergencies and the scale and complexity of the situation. It is important that we note agencies recognise that this process needs ongoing maintenance and refinement and that they are open to more engagement from local communities to support agency activities during emergencies. Communities also need to be confident that there are agency structures in place that can be implemented consistently to enlist local knowledge and support where needed. As a participatory process their needs to be more conversations between agencies and communities on the use of local knowledge and resources, something which is an essential element of emergency management best practice. Building on the ORCRA planning for community recovery and resilience is an important part of this participatory process and there should be opportunities for these local knowledge and resources discussions to be informed by such planning.

“DEECA: We will ensure as far as possible that there is a mix of local staff embedded in IMTs. Keep a list of key community contacts in ICC; talk to level 3 ICCs about need to use this local list and ensure it is part of handover.”-Benambra Session

*“Q. Engage early with locals to ensure local knowledge drawn upon.
DEECA: Absolutely – and if you’re in town and have some info you want us to have drop into the office.”-Omeo Session*

“DEECA. Local people have the local contacts....Public information officers from DEECA need to know where to find these. The best way to get information in the system is by making links on the ground.” Benambra Session



"DEECA Identify key contacts within comm to give to field crew on the ground who can make contact with them to get local knowledge and key info."-Ensay Session

"Q – there seems to be a difference in using local knowledge as opposed to how it is used. Contradiction."-Ensay Session

Access To Grant Funding

Grant funding was identified as an enabler of community preparedness and resilience. Although few comments were made concerning specific grant availability, much of the funding discussion was focussed on ensuring community needs are met during emergencies (e.g. food purchasing and storage, water, access to health service support) and for the provision of infrastructure upgrades at locations designed to support communities during emergencies.

Investment by agencies was discussed in relation to specific energy and telecommunications projects that are designed to "harden" the supply systems. AusNet, Telstra and NBN Co. described some of the projects they are undertaking which are substantial investments in improving rural and regional access to consistent service supplies. More localised and community based solutions are becoming a part of how power and telecommunications providers see the future for the communities of the Omeo Region. DEECA has increased its local staffing numbers and CFA and SES are committed to greater educative opportunities to support their limited volunteer base in the area.

EGSC is a focus for attracting and distributing investment and funding from government bodies and works closely with communities to support community needs. The upgrades to halls and centres is part of the EGSC commitment, as is the successful provision of the STAND system in partnership with NBN Co.

"EGSC. -Air purifiers and air filters for the hall – there are grants around to help with this. The rebuild happening behind (the hall) is an example of this. The Bush Nurses centre has a new aircon for community members to go with respiratory issues."- Swifts Creek Session

"Q.- AusNet provide dedicated High Country resource.

AusNet- Looking at alternative ways to give remote communities power rather than a single wire." -Benambra Session

"AusNet.-A local generator is a microgrid, a great way to power a small section. The decision to do this has safety questions. High kVA isn't an easy decision to make. Ausnet and distribution companies to work in the future to create 'hub' towns.

If we had funding, how much would this cost?

There's layers to build up to this; how do we use power at sensible times of the day? (sunny days) how do we choose the main buildings that need power? The community "hubs" would cost about \$8-10 million to set up a microgrid."-Benambra Session



Conclusions- The Community/Agency Alliance

The conclusions that have emerged from the program of Community Conversations are described in terms of the strength of the participatory alliance between the communities of the Omeo Region. Although this alliance is a 'work in progress' it has demonstrated some key achievements that are as much a shared history of emergencies between agencies and communities as a functional relationship that increasingly sees the value of the role of communities in emergency preparedness, response and recovery.

In support of greater community participation there are a number of community/agency tools that assist in continuing to build the community/ agency alliance, including a decade of establishing Local Incident Management Plans (LIMP's), the more recent Community Emergency Management Plans (CEMP's) and the post Black Summer formation of the Omeo Region Community Recovery Association (ORCRA) and its Omeo Region Resilience Plan. The MEMPC planning work across East Gippsland provides the opportunity for larger scale commitments to this ongoing process of agency/community alliance.

The responses supplied by agencies in the Community Conversations sessions were all well informed and targeted the general and the specific expectations of communities in the Omeo Region from small communities in Anglers Rest and Tambo Crossing to the main towns of Omeo, Benambra, Swifts Creek and Ensay. Their willingness to engage in discussion and to take on board community information, advice and at times critical observations shows a maturing relationship that is vital to ensuring this alliance is both balanced and respectful. The sessions also provided agencies with a platform to speak to the community about their operational functions and future plans, as a way of providing context that assisted in explaining the key issues of shared and individual responsibility.

Addressing the increasing demand for a greater local focus of emergency services will continue to develop and as has been acknowledged may never be a perfect system in all emergencies and at all scales. However, communities and their local support structures, health centres, neighbourhood houses and community groups will continue to push for greater transparency and a more defined and structured 'seat at the table' in the evolving participatory nature of the emergency management system.

The next step for ORCRA and the EGMEMPC, to support and embed this participatory process, is the establishment of a communications structure and plan that mobilises the intentions of both agencies and communities and follows the outcomes of this report on the Community Conversations project. Building this communications structure between agencies and communities, using identified local and agency contacts, will allow communities and agencies to draw closer together in a collaborative approach to emergencies and as a mechanism for building future dialogue and partnership.



Appendix A. Community Conversations Responses by Agency and by Session Location



	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
All Agencies	Require timely, up to date and accurate information about conditions						
	Action: all agencies and RCC agreed this needs to be done better - looking at ways of improving communication with communities e.g. daily teleconference link ups						
	Pre-season briefing re importance of evacuating early						
East Gippsland Shire Council	Prioritise permits (easy process) to allow vets, stock and fodder transport (road access)						
	Action: EGSC said VFF will inform community how it will work; VicPol stated fire risk with fodder transport made it difficult at times; and that local information was critical - better process for getting info to ICC						
	With agency collaboration, inform community of Neighbourhood Safer Place (NSP), 'refuge' centre and local procedures and information available at BNH			Council/Regional Roads Victoria keep roadsides slashed generally	Bulk purchasing arrangements through agencies, such as Landcare, e.g., encourage people to have spray units for own use on property	Food, water supplies if can't get to Bairnsdale (balance with need to support local stores)	
	Action:EGSC has a flier on the NSPs, Community Assembly Areas (CAAs) and Emergency Relief Centres (ERCs) that will be shared with community and if required further communication. Ensure supply also of audio-visual screen to BNH			Action: EGSC advised tractors about to start working - will be done by Christmas, second cut if needed. Community to keep history of slashing to help prioritise works.	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	Action: ICC, since the fires EMV established community caches (containers that are helicoptered in with food/water/bedding/diesel fuel.) They are on a 72 hour activation.	
	Rely on communication from agencies to the North						
	Action: EGSC said there was a need for the Corryong/Ovens ICC to take up the use of Teams meetings with communities. RCC has link ups with all ICCs - will emphasise importance of PIOs communicating with all affected communities across borders. Community Role: Maintain up to date community contact list – ensure ICC across border also has it.						
	Donated goods (food/water) to be offered to community and stored at BNH		Develop Cobungra LIMP with Cobungra CFA Sheds as assembly point	Council provides coordinator/place manager presence in Omeo	Access to fire preparedness training (off farm)	Access to water at Rec Reserve	Support provision of water when river stops, gets dirty and water holes are contaminated.
	Action: EGSC will work with foodbank connected agencies to bolster food stocks over the summer period. Recovery Coordinator/MEMO would be the contact in the MEOC. If ORCRA set up a communications plan as part of the resilience plan Council are happy to advise further on this structure		Action: Completed; work needed between community and EGSC to socialise meeting place and processes	Action: Recruitment completed for full time place facilitator (EGSC)	Action: any CFA programs we can help facilitate to community. CFA; we talked to Omeo about a couple of specific days. We need to investigate further. Red Cross also have programs. They have an individual program called Ready Plan, they have Ready Communities, they also have a pillow case project for primary schools. (what can be packed into a pillow case in an emergency). There are things coming up where agencies can work together like Council leadership training.		
	Require volunteer(s) (jobshare) or relief agency staff to attend BNH during an emergency event. The BNH functions as the community support centre during an emergency. It's where people go.			Prefer money or vouchers, not donated goods .	Air purifier / filters for Hall. Bush Nurse for air-purifiers/filters for those with breathing challenges	Action: Pumps for firefighting installed at Rec Reserve bore tanks.	Action: Support provision of water when river stops, gets dirty and water holes are contaminated. Support provision of water when river stops, gets dirty and water holes are contaminated. Farmers/residents can go and fill up tanks at the Ensay Recreation Reserve. Static water tank out the front of Community Centre. It's been checked and its full.

	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
	Action: EGSC - As the LIMP Assembly Area, Council can help support communities in what additional requirements are needed for volunteers. Will audit strengths you have already, where the gaps are and what is needed next to support you through that. The BNH is a Community Assembly Area not NSP (LIMP)+(BCEP)				Action: there are grants around to help with this. The rebuild happening behind (the hall) is an example of this. The Bush Nurses centre has a new aircon for community members to go with respiratory issues.	Donated hay needs to be kept somewhere safe	
	Require vermin proof distribution shed (under grant application)				Navigate privacy implications for community registers, e.g., volunteer skills, satellite phone and evacuation registers	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	
	Action: EGSC work with community on this.				Action: Red Cross Register Find Reunite has privacy settings. If people seek support from Council in relief, we always ask if we can share information with other agencies.	Hall and Rec Reserve are equipped with permanent generators	
	Local freezer vans and cool rooms				Unlock the transfer station during emergencies	Action: Stand by power – hard. We looked at having generators on hire at Coates Bairnsdale. Then we looked at remote areas that would power the whole facility. Not smaller ones. We've done this. Round one did remote areas. Ensay will get one, need to work out the placement first. We can't have 2 (at the hall and rec reserve) when other communities don't have any.	
	Action: EGSC - Ensure contact details are in LIMP				Action: During windows of opportunity when risk is lower Council planning to have someone go and open the transfer station.. Safety of Council staff is priority. OHS risk to not leaving it open if we can't have someone there managing it.		
	Reinforce importance of handover processes shift change of agency personnel and keeping the local community informed.						
	Action: Regular community meetings and the affected community contacts be part of the handovers. Introductions at the start of the briefing/meeting.						
	Documented process for communicating and managing donated goods to be put in place with support agencies (Lions, Rural Aid, Salvos, etc)						
	Action: Agencies agree (EGSC) - GIVIT now organising all donations - this will be communicated to GIVIT						



	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
	Strike teams to use Rec Reserve as basecamp (close to CFA, DEWLP accommodation)			Volunteers to help with distribution, unloading water, also identifying who has extra accommodation/beds.	Volunteers to help with distribution, unloading water, also identifying who has extra beds	Council's responsibility in the mitigation of fire risk in Ensay township.	Action: Available EGSC Information storage USBs have templates for Emergency Plans and for storing vital information including rate notices.
	Action: EGSC: This will only occur after discussion with the COM, The IMT, the IC and Council.			Action: EGSC: will use LIMP process to identify local contact for this role	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	Action: This is now with the Shire Area Supervisors. Discussion to clarify road maintenance (1 metre from white post) and slashing. Helen Shiels (EGSC Place Manager) will follow-up and report to community members.	Action: STAND we've had issues connecting the systems together and then once rejigged will run a training day for comm members to know how to set them up and use them.
	Larger (temporary) generators required and to be situated at Benambra Turn off (near Rodger Connley's house) and Benambra Hotel			Agencies to provide local emergency workers timely clearance to act (as response may not be activated locally)	Cassilis Historic site "H1940" to be protected	Prioritise food/fodder deliveries and stock transport.	Action: LIMP – assembly area is still down at the rock, decision required to have it moved up to CFA/Community Centre
	Action: EGSC: Coordinated through the IMT if approved by the IC (Refer to CFA response)			Action: Needs response from ICC/EGSC	Action: The King Cassilis mine site has significance, and we would (aim) to protect it. Not sure if there's some protection we can do ahead of time. Bound by legislation to protect from damage.	Action: VFF manage this process. They put the call out to various farmers outside of the fire area. Some of the people they get to coordinate can be difficult in prioritizing. VFF only support for 1 month after fire has impacted your property.	
				Signage and advertising to indicate that ABC Radio 720AM is the emergency radio station for this area			
				Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities			
Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action	Regular and accurate Agency information (official apps are hours behind / lack required detail)						



	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
	Action: DEECA agrees there is a need for more up to date info for community; hook ups great idea during event - need very specific instructions about who to call from which community. Action: Updates can be hours behind , a part of this is we were managing fires widespread, trying to keep information update to date can be difficult. If you can see fire, trust what you can see. Also, ICC to record audio of community briefing and remotely relay via Community Radio						
	Send teams to correct coordinates and undertake grading using a risk-based approach						
	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities						
	ICC to provide transparency into decision-making, updates regarding conditions, and when convoys are leaving/returning DEECA						
	Action: ICCs to investigate more use of daily community hook ups at critical times; VicPol reminded people to use VicPol IC as a way of getting info to ICC						
	Action: DEECA to ensure as far as possible local people in IMT and that all staff at handover fully briefed on local contacts						
	Action: DEECA: agrees there is a need for more up to date info for community; hook ups great idea during event - need very specific instructions about who to call from which community.						
	DEECA supports input into small scale fuel reduction burn nominations for Joint Fuel Management Plan	Critical to keep both Mt Battery Tk and back track to Cobungra Estate accessible for alternative access.	Support 'table-top simulation' sessions for newcomers to increase knowledge of risks.	Grade around township to prepare a fire break.	Use local fire crews, they know the tracks and the conditions.	Critical to keep Somerville Track clear for alternative access.	
	Action: DEECA encourages input to JFMP from community members	Action: DEECA: Crews being sent out to check immediately. Recognise importance of access there for community	Action: DEECA/CFA will coordinate this activity for communities as soon as possible.	Action: This is not something we do ahead of course (season) due to the grass fire risk, the risk we faced in the 2019/20 fires	Action: Use of local crews –in 19/20 fires we tried to but were stretched so far. We struggled; we acknowledge this wasn't done as well as could have been. In ORCRA convos we have tried to develop key contacts to tap into . we don't know everything. We struggle when it comes back into the private land.	Action: That is a track we will maintain but at a lower level as it is a lower priority track 5500km road network we manage (limited resources/funds) Q – Jamies place backs on to it. It's the only way we can get out when the bridge goes down. A – It is a steep track as you know, it won't be a major route ever, we don't have the funding. A flood event, it will be slippery. We slashed it 18 months ago.	
	Request CFA volunteers to attend a couple of planned burns a year.	DEECA seeks local input for Asset Protection Zones in the Joint Fuel Management Plan	Local knowledge should be drawn upon to navigate local conditions.	Local freezer vans and cool rooms.		Meals for emergency workers delivered to community facility.	
	Action: DEECA really welcomes this and it is now happening more frequently	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	Action: DEECA and other agencies in ICC will ensure this is cemented in as part of handover and shift changes	Action: We could do that to provide fire fighters and community members, more a relief / recovery area; Refer to the Shire		Action: Meals for EM workers –new CFA/community centre would be a good support location for crews	
	DEECA supports ad hoc and small scale planned burns on the spur	Water tanks trucked in from Dinner Plain	In addition to essential services, request for Heritage area "H1536" (in middle of town) to be protected	Prioritise permits (easy process) to allow stock and fodder transport (road access)		Provide better defence lines from fires coming from Dargo direction especially the Tambo Crossing Spur Rd and Engineers Rd.	
	Action: DEECA supports small burns - will communicate better through STAND systems	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	Action: further info needed from CFA and DEECA	Action: The permit system was also overwhelmed. There was an influx of people needing permits. We would expedite specific permits such as the pharmacy needing medicine. We can use our influence down the line for certain permits		Action: it is a strategic road; we do put funding into clearing/maintaining it. There has been recovery work done.	



	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
	DEECA meets with local community for ICC Planning				Large wire cages available for larger animals	Simplify food requests of surge firefighting workforce (e.g. limit to regular, vegetarian or vegan options)	
	Action: Will attend whatever is planned. Community to ensure up to date contact list				Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	
	Agencies to be engaged and provide locals with timely communications (meetings re planning and response). Engage early with locals to ensure local knowledge drawn upon by DEECA				Two points of comms for DELWP daily report – Hall and the IGA (need volunteer to relay info sheet every couple of hours)	Council's responsibility in the mitigation of fire risk in Ensay township.	
	Action: RCC will remind ICCs to use local contact lists; DEECA to ensure locals in IMT; and use of multiple methods of communication				Action: The hall is our formal assembly area, the STAND (we can live stream into this site from anywhere...) I guess this is more a newsletter style to get local information out. I think have 2 specific spots to share information in community spots. When there are changes every 2 hours, updates are expected but for fires that go for months and there's no change, the updates will be less. Don't be afraid to stick your head in the front door and volunteer to help hand out/put up fresh updates. Let public information know there are 2 sites to see new information.	Action: VicRoads manage vegetation 20-40 meters to the edge of the highway. Council are responsible for their roads. Incident perspective – high on our priority to open roads after an incident. Having escorts to get people in and out.	
						Need for emergency provisions for farmers to put down own stock if suffering	
						Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities	
Country Fire Authority	Provide CFA with back-up power and back-up communications	We appreciate support in response to fires, but never expect it	Emergency worker meals delivered to CFA Shed			Visiting Fire Trucks – in the last fire they were parked just out here. They were advised about a fire out in the bush and local and very few attended. Their response was asset protection	Total fire ban, its over too big an area. Significantly different weather patterns in different areas needs to be considered.
	Action: CFA: Will investigate VESEP funding to get a large permanent generator that would then be maintained by CFA	Action: Community members be prepared - have plan. Note: CFA shed is past three (3) gates/ cattle grids	Action: To be addressed following further consultation with agencies and communities			Action: ICC makes that decision at Swifts or Bairnsdale down to division commander looking after geographic area to make the decision. The local people should contact the division commander / ICC	Action: Fire danger period has already started, earlier than normal – weather bureau decision. El Nino – hotter dry summer. Fire danger period – no burning off without a permit. Permits can be applied for online. are online.



	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
	Require fuel drops	CFA volunteers re-familiarise with truck (e.g. water access, pumping, hose handling, etc) and run truck into Omeo to ensure all in working order					
	Action: CFA: If BNH could let ICC know this would be good	Action: CFA: Done as part of regular training, vehicles get driven over 30kms, coming in to warmer periods, this time of year is when brigades and vols refamiliarize through training, more season drills.					
Victoria Police	Respect individual preference not to leave the land or livestock						
	Action: Agencies cannot force people to leave, but if staying community members must have plan and be prepared for conditions						
	Timely, accurate and current information about access routes (websites/apps update e.g. VicRoads and EM App)/Reopening Roads						
	Action: Currently a VicTraffic upgrade underway; EGSC has also worked to improve notification systems						
	Action: There is time needed for roads to be assessed and reopened if appropriate. Bairnsdale station will be the ones to call with your local knowledge on roads to open / if the roads have already been cleared by residents and fires have already been through						
	ICC to provide transparency into decision-making, updates regarding conditions, and when convoys are leaving/returning DEECA						
	Action: ICCs to investigate more use of daily community hook ups at critical times; VicPol reminded people to use VicPol IC as a way of getting info to ICC						
	Action: Use the "what three words" app when there are no discernible cross streets.						
	Timely response to call-outs re road blockages						
	Action: Reminder to use VicPol IC as way of getting info quickly to ICC						
	Those enforcing road incident control protocols need to be properly briefed about local hazards, conditions and to allow locals through						
	Action: TMP staff are sympathetic to local community needs and there are processes in place to allow access for community members at 'Restricted Access B, Authorised Access C and Authorised Access D' with authorisation from the Incident Controller via the Victoria Police Traffic Management Manager. VicPol works closely with ICC to ensure safety. Again, local info paramount.						



	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing
Telstra	Telstra to boost mobile capacity, which drops when its crowded (e.g. Easter, snow season, times of emergency)						
	Action: Telstra has constructed a new tower in Omeo, bringing more capacity to town.						
	Action: Telstra projects ongoing for the Omeo Region to manage increased mobile usage						
	Action: Studies shows this is a very expensive and fragile option. Much better to develop self-sufficiency at a local level which is what AusNet are doing (examples needed)						
	Ensure plan for timely refuelling of generators for telecommunications tower where power outage						
	Action: Telstra has made progress with generators that can be remotely operated and is looking to work with local community/agencies to refuel and support the generators when needed during emergencies. Community Role: Work with ORCRA/Telstra to train community members						
AusNet	AusNet provide dedicated High Country resource		Create connection from Omeo to Dinner Plain to provide a power infrastructure loop AusNet?		Local technician to support refuelling generator or AusNet dedicated High Country resource. Provide generators (x3) to service station, pub and community centre	Ausnet to replace damaged and older poles between Ensay and Tambo Crossing	
	Action: AusNet are doing a lot of work in this area under their Microgrid and sustainable energy program; have presented to ORCRA and BNH recently		Action: Studies shows this is a very expensive and fragile option. Much better to develop self-sufficiency at a local level which is what AusNet are doing (examples needed). The addition of the energy systems in Omeo funded under the State funded Community Microgrids and Sustainable Energy Program. This program adds solar systems, batteries and generators to key buildings, and solar and batteries to create and energy system that can operate even when the main grid experiences an outage.		Action: We do have a generator support now, managed by AusNet EM team. Where communities can be put on generator connection and then transitioned over to electricity when its fixed. Community centre / service station – if we were to put a low voltage generator in town, potentially we can put 2 . The ones in town also picks up other spaces like the IGA, the schools	Action: Information provided by community to AusNet for checking and action. AusNet also discussed the REFCL protections on the Omeo / Tambo Crossing feeder. Designed to further limit potential for lines to be possible source of ignition. State mandated safety improvement to reduce risk of ignition source during severe fire danger. Rapid earth fault current limiter is located at Bairnsdale and reduces risk of fault on the entire line leading from Bairnsdale to Omeo/Cobungra and Benambra. More information available on AusNet website at: https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/projects-and-innovation/current-projects/rapid-earth-fault-current-limiter-and-a-factsheet at: https://www.ausnetservices.com.au/-/media/project/ausnet/corporate-website/files/about/refcl-project/ausnet-powerline-bushfire-safety-refcl-overview-fact-sheet-1.pdf	
							AusNet to slash area under and around powerlines
	Benambra	Anglers Rest	Cobungra	Omeo	Swifts Creek	Ensay	Tambo Crossing



							Action: Vegetation maintenance under powerlines is ongoing including establishment of new system for instant disconnection of power along the grid when lines are damaged stopping fires being generated from fallen lines
							Where appropriate, supply large generator to Omeo to power Tambo Crossing (reverse power direction down the line)
							Action: Energy resilience solutions – back-up generator, back-up power and communications. In several regional locations.
Victorian Farmers Federation	Need for emergency provisions for farmers to put down own stock if suffering						
	Action: Follow up needed (VFF ICC)						
State Emergency Service					Cassilis Historic site "H1940" to be protected		
					Action: SES will look into the site and its protection		
Social and Emotional Wellbeing	Coordinated mental health and wellbeing support services established (preventative steps)				Older and mobility restricted people may seek respite (and clean air) at Bush Nursing Centre	Community template of the available options (e.g. for caring for / evacuating elderly or those whose mobility is limited)	
					Where no family support at home, require laundry service, meals, support for wellbeing		
	From a psychological perspective, the communication is very important especially in an EM, processing info can be difficult. Sometimes in small communities if there is a capacity for someone once a day at a certain time whether physical or zoom, this is reassuring for people to process and ask questions. I know it's a big ask but worth it.						
	Changes create different ability to understand or process. might be a gradual process, for others it could be triggered by the power going off. Then we get fight or flight. Problem making, decision making ability changes. Whether it's behavioural or written down. Information needs to come in different formats.						
	Action: Refer wellbeing enquiries to Relief and Recovery Sub-Committee of the MEMPC						



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