

31 March 2022

Trevor Manning
Senior Constable
Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management
Via email: strategy.support@dpfem.tas.gov.au

Dear Trevor

Targeted Review of the *Emergency Management Act 2006*

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the Targeted Review of the *Emergency Management Act 2006* (the Review). This submission has been prepared by the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) and has been developed based on direct feedback from local government and previous engagement on these matters.

LGAT is incorporated under the *Local Government Act 1993* and is the representative body and advocate for local government in Tasmania. Where a council has made a direct submission to this process, any omission of specific comments made by that council in this submission should not be viewed as lack of support by LGAT for that specific issue.

The unprecedented events of the COVID-19 emergency have demonstrated the need for a targeted review of the *Emergency Management Act 2006* (the Act). During the COVID-19 emergency, local government provided an essential link between the State Government and Tasmanian communities, and councils continue to support community response and recovery efforts. LGAT welcomes the review as this is an opportunity to clarify strategic roles, responsibilities and arrangements between local and State Government to meet the needs of future emergencies.

Based on previous consultation and feedback with local government, LGAT has identified the following key issues in capability, recovery and coordination, which have been reaffirmed through direct feedback on this review.

Deputy Municipal Coordinators

Several councils have raised concerns that the Act places too stringent restrictions on the appointments of Deputy Municipal Coordinators. Under the current provisions, councils may only appoint one Deputy Municipal Coordinator. An amendment to the Act to

enable the appointment of additional deputy coordinators would provide several benefits, including:

- Sustainable coverage during long-term emergencies with the increased ability to manage fatigue.
- Further capacity to share the load where multiple events (e.g., flood, fire, pandemic outbreak) overlap and require additional support.
- Increased council knowledge and capacity in emergency management.

Recovery Arrangements

It is well recognised that recovery is best led at the local level and councils are well placed to deliver locally led recovery. This issue was also raised in the Audit Office's report *COVID-19 – Pandemic response and mobilisation*¹. Local government overwhelmingly supports locally led recovery and are supportive of the role that it has played in supporting this process and working with the State Government.

The recovery arrangements put in place during the COVID-19 emergency were significantly different from the Act and the Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements (TEMA). The move away from the agreed arrangements caused confusion and concern. The key impacts were that:

- Local government had no oversight of the local services being delivered to their communities, even though they were often the first contact point for many in the community seeking support and information.
- Recovery arrangements were not passed down to local government who may have had the capacity to assist their local communities further.

As for other emergencies, the Regional Recovery Committees should have been involved in recovery operations and provided with information around state level recovery planning. This would have supported a coordinated recovery effort between local and State Government.

If the Act is to be amended to allow greater flexibility in how recovery is delivered it is essential that there is transparency around decision-making and communication with all stakeholders to support the best possible recovery for Tasmanian communities.

LGAT in the State Control Centre

At the LGAT 2020 December General Meeting a resolution was made calling on the State Government to formalise local government's role in the State Control Centre (SCC).

¹ *Report of the Auditor-General No.10 of 2021: COVID-19 – Pandemic response and mobilisation*, 23 March 2021, available at: <https://www.audit.tas.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2021-No-10-Report.pdf>.

Embedding local government, through an LGAT representative, in the SCC would serve as a point of contact to liaise between State and local government during significant state-wide emergencies. The importance of embedding LGAT into the SCC is based on the value councils received in having LGAT, not only represent but also deliver, a critical role during the pandemic. The Secretary of the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management, in his letter to LGAT of 8 April 2021, agreed and supported this embedding in the TEMA. The Review is an opportune time to reflect local government's critical role in the SCC by reflecting this in the Act.

In addition, councils made the following comments around improvements and optimisations in the SCC and communications during emergencies:

- At times there was confusion about information channels, particularly as different groups and bodies (e.g., LGAT, Public Information Unit, Regional Emergency Coordination Control Centres) were disseminating information. This mostly came from the perspective of duplication of information, or marginal variation on messaging and timeliness. This was particularly noticed in smaller councils, where officers wearing 'multiple hats' with a range of commitments.
- Information specific to local government would be better advised through LGAT with regional or local emergency management issues being advanced through the relevant Regional Emergency Coordination Control Centres.
- It would be beneficial to have a communication plan that outlined the key timing of announcements to all levels of government and other key stakeholders. Coordinating a communications response, and the distribution of information through appropriate channels at the right time, would help councils pre-plan and prioritise their response during changing circumstances. This was particularly apparent during the pandemic as restrictions were changed in response to risk. It is acknowledged that this level of detail may sit within the TEMA or other instrument outside of this Review.
- There is not equal access to digital connectivity in Tasmanian communities, which means many people do not have equitable access to digital information and in-time reporting. Considering the needs of these communities is essential for future communication efforts during an emergency. For example, providing information in hard copy so that it can be distributed manually.

Additional Comments

We note that while this is a targeted Review, one council made comments that the State Government should lead a significant review of the state's future recovery arrangements, citing the need for this after the recent experiences with the East Coast flooding event. In approaching a review, the council suggested that the State Government should first consider the principles underlying recovery, as each emergency

has its own challenges that impacts how response and recovery arrangements are managed during an emergency. Basing the response and recovery solely on the last emergency does not necessarily provide good lessons or build capability. Response and recovery arrangements must also be sufficiently agile to rapidly adapt to an unfolding emergency.

The coordination of recovery arrangements at the local, state, and federal level needs to be reviewed with attention on agreed roles and responsibilities, as has been recently demonstrated by the significant flooding events in Queensland and New South Wales. It is essential that all three levels of government are coordinated, effective and timely in delivering recovery with the community. With changing conditions imposed by climate change, the frequency of natural disasters and the potential for future pandemics, will continue to challenge government. Building capacity and capability from the ground up at the local government level is key to developing effective response and recovery arrangements.

Our key recommendations are that:

- Tasmania needs to look to the future on how it manages local response and recovery and how this intersects with state and national support. The models based on past events will become less useful for our communities into the future.
- The delivery of timely and consistent information cannot be understated. It is essential for all levels of government to be coordinated in delivering clear messaging during emergencies.

Please contact Georgia Palmer at georgia.palmer@lgat.tas.gov.au or 6146 3740 if you have any questions or would like further information.

Yours sincerely



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