

29 June 2023

John Harkin
Assistant Director
Resilience and Recovery
Department of Premier and Cabinet

Via email: recovery@dpac.tas.gov.au

Dear John,

State Special Emergency Management Plan – Recovery (Recovery Plan)

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a submission on the State Special Emergency Management Plan – Recovery (Recovery Plan) review.

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 the LGAT for that specific issue.

If you have any further questions in relation to this submission please contact Rebecca Stevenson, Senior Policy Advisor, on (03) 6146 3740 or bec.stevenson@lgat.tas.gov.au.

Yours sincerely,



Dion Lester
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

LGAT Submission: Review of State Recovery Plan

General

Tasmania has well established recovery arrangements through the *Emergency Management Act 2006*, the Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements (2019) and through the State Special Plan for Recovery. Within Tasmania's recovery arrangements, regional or affected area committees play a key role in informing governments on how the disaster has affected communities and providing information on local needs for support.

Local government's historical role and experience in recovery, combined with its networks and local area knowledge, make it a crucial partner in recovery. It is not a secondary stakeholder. Response and recovery arrangements must also be sufficiently agile to rapidly adapt to any unfolding emergency.

Many councils have supported their communities through natural disaster such as bushfires, severe weather events, floods and pandemics, then from restoration through to reconstruction and recovery. A significant amount of recovery planning also occurs at the local level, through municipal recovery coordinators and committees, particularly in relation to social recovery. It is critical to recognise that these key partnerships are best placed to inform initial recovery efforts with local knowledge and networks, with the fundamental principle of recovery being local community led.

To realise the opportunities that exist at a local level, flexible service delivery and funding models are often required for effective results. State Government services directed at addressing local demand are more likely to be successful if they work in close partnership with local government. They must bring a long-term focus and allow for responses tailored to the specific local requirements.

Based on experience from past events, there were concerns that the State Government withdraws too early from long-term recovery before the community has fully recovered. This has left councils with the ongoing responsibility to support communities.

Often the costs associated with recovery efforts are dispersed over time and inevitably fall to local government. Where the role of recovery coordinator exists within a council, this function for most councils is an adjunct to a person's primary role.

Recovery Governance

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 all levels of government. Building capacity and capability from the ground up at the local government level is key to developing an effective response and recovery arrangements.

Historically, there has been a lack of communication and leadership from State Government. This has resulted in a lack of, or break down of, established relationships and understanding of the roles of each agency involved in the recovery process. An example was the announcement of locations of emergency information/evacuation centres during an event by a response agency before consultation with the council on the availability and/or suitability of the venue.

Regular, planned, consistent and sustained communication is needed between state and local government. The establishment of Resilience and Recovery Tasmania and the recruitment of a team of staff is welcome, which has seen the communication and engagement increase. Our sector recognises there will be ongoing, regular mechanisms for engagement with the new team. It is imperative to recognise that work within emergency management and recovery is heavily reliant on relationships, with the need to nurture this and acknowledge their value.

Local government needs to have a clear understanding of the support the State Government will provide in the recovery phase. The re-establishment of Regional Recovery Committees provides recovery coordinators with the opportunity to develop relationships with each other, State Government staff and agencies. This means that when activated during an emergency, existing connections are known and can be called upon to assist and support. These relationships are crucial and must be formed and supported before emergency events.

Regional Recovery Committees established as sub-committees of the Regional Emergency Management Committees provides recovery with a recognised place within the emergency management governance framework. The committees need to be a conduit to develop a strong understanding of roles, responsibilities and capacity across all levels of government in recovery - focusing on the short, medium and long term. Whilst consistency is a key element to establishing the three committees, adjustments to complement the existing committees in each area should be considered to limit any duplication.

The committees need to have a focus on preparedness, response, and recovery. These elements are intertwined, and understanding of local government's role needs to be across these areas. There is a strong understanding in the preparedness and response, with an increase needed in recovery. This is an area where State Government leadership is very much needed and guidance as to what is expected for community led recovery in the future.

The committees need to provide opportunities to establish 'lessons learnt' and develop understanding and relationships across the domain areas of social, economic, infrastructure and environment. Membership of the regional recovery committees should include a range of representation to support the establishment of relationships prior to an emergency, a key to a positive recovery outcome. This membership should include council recovery coordinators and State Government. At a state level it is important that whole of sector view is provided, so we would strongly recommend that LGAT have a seat on the Statewide Recovery Committee. The committees need to closely consider what local-led recovery should look like, and then undertake planning and deliver training to ensure this is able to be delivered. Consideration also needs to be given to the four dimensions of recovery: social, infrastructure, environmental and economic recovery. Further work is needed to build the capability of councils to support recovery planning across these, noting that many councils are constrained in their core recovery function.

Consideration should also be given to the role of the Municipal Emergency Management Committee (MEMC) and any Municipal Recovery Committee during the response phase of an emergency. Response and recovery will generally overlap in significant emergencies. This means that liaison between the municipal recovery committee and emergency management during response is critical, and it should occur earlier than it typically does. Historically, recovery communication does not occur across agencies until all response activity is finished.

Event Specific Governance

The scalable governance framework in the State Recovery Plan should allow local government involvement at all levels. Councils have strong knowledge of their communities and are able to provide the best outcomes for locally led community recovery at any event level. Recognition of the resourcing limitations is important when considering recovery, as not all councils have dedicated recovery staff, and support may be required from the State Government for large scale events.

Alternatively for a Level one event where recovery continues over a number of days, support from other councils may be required for staff rostered positions. Smaller councils are likely to have less availability of skilled and/or trained staff with expertise to

lead recovery locally. This may result in recovery efforts being ad-hoc, reactive and compromised by conflicting requirements of an officer's substantive role.

A clear understanding of the recovery resources, both human and physical, of councils would identify the potential capacity within councils and regions.

Councils and communities have a key role in recovery from all emergencies and slow onset events. It is important to engage with community representatives and groups during the preparation, response, and recovery phases. In most cases, councils already have these relationships established and are trusted by their local communities. State Government support for community-led recovery would ensure that this work can be done effectively.

The establishment of Affected Area Recovery Committees (AARCs) or other similar types such as Flood Recovery Advisory Committees (FRAG) should be undertaken in consultation, as recovery is a shared responsibility. Past events have highlighted AARCs can work very well when they allow for community led input and self-determination. Recovery is best achieved when affected communities are involved, therefore it is important the membership of the committee should be reflective of the local community. This helps to ensure community-led recovery continues and the needs of the local area are understood.

Community leaders are not necessarily the people with the loudest voices. However, they are people who represent, and advocate approaches, the majority of the community need or identify with. Councils are best placed to identify key local representatives and should be provided an avenue to nominate local representative members. Recovery committees should also have a focus and representation across all four dimensions of recovery. To be effective, membership of recovery committees should be reflective of both strategic and operational needs.

At times when established in the past, membership has focused on local government elected members, regional and state representation, and not adequately considered all four dimensions of recovery or operational aspects of recovery.

Membership should include council recovery staff as well as elected members and be representative of the local community. Consideration should be given to the impact on the resources required for medium to long-term recovery. Impacts on the operational arrangements of councils should be considered with funding to support the replacement of emergency management and recovery staff. In addition, substantive roles should be made available, supported by a defined local government interoperability agreement.

Functional responsibilities

The structure of coordinating cross domain agencies, responsibility and support needs to be clear, well defined and well communicated. It needs to be clear who is leading at each level and their responsibility. This is imperative when recovery funding arrangements are being considered.

The ability to achieve the functional responsibilities, for some councils, will be dependent upon funding and resource, as there is often limited resource capacity in local councils.

Ongoing training and regular exercises should be undertaken to build relationships and reinforce responsibilities. Training and exercises should focus on all four dimensions of recovery, including a particular focus on the three dimensions outside social recovery.

Guidance on the resources available from each agency needs to be clearly articulated to support recovery.

A range of resource documents should be made available to all councils and agencies for learning and review. These should provide guidance; lessons learnt and capture the experiences from recovery activities.

There are many past recovery activities that have worked well. For example, the work of the City of Hobart who received recovery funding following the 2018 extreme weather event to deliver five recovery projects.

These projects included activities such as:

- hosting disaster ready and communicating in recovery workshops.
- a public art installation.
- storytelling through photos and voice.
- community resilience mapping.
- a children's engagement project.

In recognition of these Resilient Hobart projects, the City of Hobart was awarded the State and the National Resilient Australia Award for Local Government in 2020.

It is noted that from a response and recovery perspective, there were significant learnings from the Hobart's organisational response that were identified. A range of actions have been undertaken to ensure that these lessons learnt were responded to, and appropriate changes made in future planning.

Conclusion

Local government is central to recovery and must be a key active supported partner in the delivery of recovery activities and programs. It is vital that local knowledge is recognised and drawn upon during the recovery phase, as local people know what is needed and what priorities are important to their community.

The establishment of Resilience and Recovery Tasmania (RRT) is a welcome addition by the local government sector. It is fundamental the relationships between RRT, agencies and councils are established and nurtured to ensure there is no adverse effect or delayed recovery outcomes for the community.

Recovery is increasing in importance as a function of both state and local government and demands a higher level of resourcing and training. The Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements (Recommendation 11.1) seeks state and territory governments to take responsibility for capability and capacity in local government in preparing for, responding to, and recovering from natural disasters. This recommendation is supported by local government. The current Future of Local Government Review may bring shifts in the geographical areas, as well as resourcing within councils. The outcomes from the Future of Local Government Review will require further, direct consideration.