

Debrief Outcomes
Significant Victorian Fires, December 2005 and January 2006
Report by Mr Ross Smith

Response by Russell Rees, Chief Officer CFA and Ewan Waller, Chief Officer – Fire and Emergency Management DSE

The significant wildfire activity of December 2005 and January 2006 resulted in the loss of a number of homes, thousands of stock, hundreds of hectares of crops and other commercial values such as timber-forests and beehives, and impacted our natural assets. We are ever mindful that for those affected, wildfire is an emotional and physical event and understand that the trauma, fear and anger of the experience will continue for months and often years after the event.

We remember with sadness, the loss of two CFA volunteers – Captain Trevor Day on Monday January 23, 2006, and a month later, Communications Officer Rebecca Helwig on Friday February 17, 2006. Tragically, the 2005-2006 fire season also saw the deaths of Zeke and Malcolm Wilson near Pomonal on Sunday January 22, 2006 to the friends, family, and communities of Trevor, Rebecca, Zeke and Malcolm, we extend our deepest sympathies.

We would like to thank the thousands of DSE and CFA personnel who contributed with great passion and professionalism to the fire effort. The efforts of our own people notwithstanding, the management of wildfire requires Government and non-government organisations to act in true partnership with each other and communities. We would like to thank all those organisations, groups and individuals who worked with us to prepare and plan for, respond to, and recover from these fires.

After the fires, and in line with good practice, CFA and DSE jointly commenced a series of operational review processes to identify where the agencies and our emergency management partners had performed well, and where improvement could be made. This included a comprehensive, coordinated series of operational debriefs, analyses, investigations of accidents and near miss incidents, and a post fire season survey.

Additionally, DSE and CFA also commissioned Ross Smith, an independent consultant with extensive experience in wildfire operations, to attend the major fire debriefs, review the information derived from other debriefs, and report on the matters of Statewide importance that arose.

We would like to take the opportunity to thank Mr Smith for his thorough and professional approach to the task and for the preparation of a clear and articulate report. We provide the following comments in relation to the report.

It is important to acknowledge the positive nature of the report. In particular, we note the significant improvements that have been recognised in interagency integration and cooperation, provision of information to the community, and the enhanced integration of response and recovery functions. We believe that these progressions in our practices can be attributed, amongst other things, to key initiatives that have been implemented since the major fires of 2002/2003. Many of these initiatives are the outworkings of the Inquiry into the

2002/2003 Victorian Bushfires, internal agency operational reviews or a mixture of both, and have built upon the already substantial efforts of both agencies prior to that date

Whilst essentially constructive in nature, the report identifies a number of areas where the agencies should focus attention to enhance their performance. Some of these issues have been identified previously, and are subject to development initiatives that are either planned, or underway. In many cases, these processes have already resulted in improvements in our practices. Importantly, the report provides additional guidance about lessons to be learned from the 2005/2006 fire season, and will be used to assist us to better target our performance improvement programs.

DSE and CFA have jointly considered the key findings identified in the Debrief Outcomes report, along with the observations from other operational review processes, and have identified five strategic themes that require priority and strategic action. Both DSE and CFA are currently progressing the Strategic Themes within the context of their agency business planning processes, and, where appropriate, with other emergency management agencies.

For each strategic theme, CFA and DSE have identified the desired outcomes and the key deliverables that could be undertaken in the short, medium and long term. The critical steps we are jointly undertaking for each theme are summarised below, and further detail can be found in Appendix 1.

1. Incident Management Refinement

The challenge for the agencies is to improve integrated Incident Management through developing people and leadership skills, agreed processes, systems, training, products and language.

To address this, the agencies will be working to improve the balance of skills and capabilities of Incident Management Teams, and enhancing the coordination between the fire agencies at the regional and state level. Additionally, supporting the early establishment of the incident structure, and refining the Incident Action Planning process will be key work parcels.

2. Integrated Emergency Planning

The agencies need to work closely with our emergency management partners to clarify roles and responsibilities and to develop and maintain the capacity to engage and integrate stakeholders involved in activities before, during and after emergency events.

In response to this, in the short term, we will be working with organisations such as Victoria Police, Department of Human Services and municipalities to develop and deliver pre-season briefing packages that define roles and responsibilities to support a shared understanding. In the longer term, more frequent exercising and joint training will be a key focus in addressing this theme.

3. Sustainability of Community Information Flows

The report recognised that DSE and CFA displayed responsive and timely community information practices during the 2005/2006 season. However, the agencies identified the need to continue to improve on our performance in disseminating information to communities. The agencies have jointly engaged an independent consultant to review and report on our capacity in this area. The report is currently being reviewed by the agencies, and actions prioritised.

In the short term, we are working to align our processes and practices and actively training and recruiting more of our people into information roles. Longer-term initiatives will provide a single multi-agency wildfire website and refine and develop and deliver training for community meeting presenters.

4. Information Technology and Information Flow

Better integration and interoperability of DSE and CFA information technology systems was identified as a key issue in the report and represents a strong development opportunity for the agencies.

We will be working to identify shared critical information requirements and developing agreed principles for information flows within and between the agencies, and to communities. Over time, we will also carry out a joint review of our incident management facilities to ensure we have the best spread and availability of control and coordination centres.

5. Communicating our Successes and Failures

Whilst not discussed in the report, the agencies identified that the consistent application of good practice across the State required more concerted support from the agencies.

Work under this theme will include gathering and distributing case studies that provide examples of desirable work practices, optimising the use of existing internal communications tools and creating new forums for the exchange of information and feedback within and between the agencies.

Each fire season presents us with the opportunity to review and learn from our performance. Our routine post-incident and post-season business processes all contribute to our learning and future development. External and independent reviews, such as the Debrief Outcomes report by Ross Smith are another valuable source of constructive feedback, observations and learning potential.

We accept the findings contained with the “Debrief Outcomes” report for the 2005/2006 season and are pleased to present the report for wider viewing.

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Appendix 1 – CFA-DSE Strategic Themes Detail

1. *Incident Management Refinement*

Issues

- The Incident Action Planning process needs to be more dynamic, streamlined and relevant;
- Creating IMT's that work effectively as a team with the technical, HR and other skills to achieve outcomes;
- Reviewing the incident structure to ensure it is enacted early, appropriate to the incident and is robust from initial attack through to possible escalation; and
- Improve the coordination between agencies at Regional and State levels.

Short to medium term deliverables:

A critical finding of the report was the need for revised incident planning protocols, procedures and tools. An essential first step is to refine the size, content, approval and distribution of the plans that define wildfire and emergency response objectives, strategies, and communications arrangements (Incident Action Plans).

The objective will be a modular plan that enables separation of pre-planning from operational information, collation of information relevant to incident management personnel, field crews and emergency coordination agencies respectively, and differentiation for initial attack when a brief and more responsive plan is paramount.

Our medium to longer term objectives are:

- Develop a joint training strategy for effective teams, including learning and development programs and exercises and activities. The focus will be on leadership, relationships, team culture, behaviours, values and feedback;
- Refine and better define our procedures for escalation to meet incident needs, staging, and establishment of divisions; and
- Strategically work towards co-location of Regional functions, and reviewing and developing formal arrangements to support Regional and State coordination.

2. *Integrated Emergency Planning*

Issues:

The need to improve the understanding of the following across relevant agencies:

- Define emergency management arrangements (including roles and structure) for response and coordination;
- Improve integration of different levels in emergency and incident management;
- Enhance the support and services available from agencies, incident management teams, and district and regional emergency coordination centres;

- Timely activation of emergency management arrangements, especially municipal and recovery elements;
- Integration of fire management planning into broader emergency management planning; and
- Agency capability required to fulfil emergency management responsibilities.

In the short to medium term, we will:

- Work with Victoria Police, State Emergency Service, Department of Human Services, Municipalities, Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner, Department of Primary Industries and other relevant organisations to develop multi-agency pre-summer briefing packages defining the role of:
 - Incident Coordination and Regional Coordination Centres;
 - Division and Municipal Emergency Response Centres; and
 - The agencies in recovery.

Our longer term objectives are:

- To work with relevant agencies to continue the development of an emergency management training package, and undertake more multi-agency training and exercising.
- Promote and support Integrated Municipal Fire Management Planning.

3. Sustainability of Community Information Flows

Issues:

- Improve the understanding and support of the need for Community Information during incidents across CFA and DSE;
- Establish sufficient human resources to meet increasing information demands during incidents;
- Develop, refine and integrate community information-flow systems across DSE and CFA;
- Respond to the rapidly increasing demand for timely (real time) and accurate information by communities in emergency events;
- Need to be capable of serving multiple information needs at one time;
- Training of information management personnel needs to increase;
- Information from various and uncontrolled sources requires better management;
- Local knowledge needs to be more systematically incorporated; and
- The flow of recovery related information needs support when required.

The short to medium term deliverables are:

- Align critical elements of CFA's and DSE's information flow systems and training;
- Recruit and train more people to work in information roles, with a particular emphasis on volunteers; and
- Conduct more joint training on our common approach to the providing information communities;

Our longer term objectives are to:

- Create a single multi agency bushfire website;
- Improve the format and protocols for community meetings; and
- Develop and conduct standard training for community meeting presenters.

4. *Information Technology and Information Flow*

Issues:

- Better define the users and requirements for services and information;
- Establish agreed processes to gather data and information and pass it on to relevant users;
- Increase the understanding of the infrastructure standards and requirements at Incident Control Centre's and other parts of command and coordination structure;
- Agree on the best location for multi-agency incident management centres;
- Building and implementing common functionality and systems that support emergency management; and
- Maintain and improve common process and systems.

The short to medium term deliverables are:

- Identify critical information requirements and produce information map;
- Define agreed principles for information flows to agencies and communities; and
- Define minimum standards required to support information flow between incident management and emergency coordination centres.

Our medium to longer term objectives are to:

- Carry out a joint review of our incident management facilities to ensure we have the best spread and availability of control and coordination centres; and
- Identify system upgrade requirements and potential solutions.

5. *Communicating our Successes and Failures*

Issues:

- Need to highlight examples of good practice and communicate widely;

- Need to align on joint messages within and between DSE and CFA;
- Provision of forums where discussion and feedback can occur around organisational positions, papers, issues etc; and
- Provide a strategy for gathering and communicating lessons learnt for wider adoption.

The short to medium term deliverables are:

- Feedback the outcomes of the 2005-2006 work-parcels, such as the revised governance documents, the Debrief Outcomes report and others, to our people by 2006/2007 fire season.
- Develop a joint 3-year internal communications strategy

Our longer term objectives are to:

- Implement the communications strategy, including:
 - Utilisation and maximisation of existing tools;
 - Development of new tools;
 - Gathering and distributing stories and case-studies; and
 - Delivery of a routine program of communication activities.