



**Victorian
Farmers
Federation**

SUBMISSION

Victorian Preparedness Strategy

18 March 2022

OUR POSITION

What is the fatal flaw underpinning the current preparedness strategy?

While the preparedness strategy remains sound, it is clear the current system does not deliver the focus the Overview of the 2016 document aimed to achieve.[i]

For agriculture we are seeing an increase in the frequency and intensity of emergencies but still face an emergency management system that does not have the capability to understand the risks and consequences for agriculture.

Agriculture is often the most impacted business in the highest priorities of bushfires and floods. We were the most prepared sector for pandemic influenza and other novel viruses due to industry practices on biosecurity and zoonotic disease management. Technology risks, infrastructure emergencies, mine failure and natural hazards such as heatwaves, pest incursions, animal disease and severe storms are issues agriculture understands and prepares for.

The challenge we face is that emergency managers rarely consider agriculture in preparing for or responding to these risks.

VFF agrees that understanding risk is critical to *identifying, developing and delivering the core capabilities that are essential to building safer and more resilient communities*. For the past five years we have been submitting on gaps within the emergency management system due to a dwelling being used as an indicator for life and property. This leads to an urban bias in emergency management models and management systems which is rarely corrected through management.

Agriculture is often forgotten in the before, during and after phases of emergency. Terms of reference for IGEM investigations often compound this problem by the exclusion of consideration of impacts on emergency. Ironically, the movement to consequence, communication and community connection[ii] has been driven by a more centralised agency position that excludes farmers and farming communities. We are now further away from the emergency management structure understanding consequences on farms and how to communicate and connect with farming communities.

This bias is even reinforced in the planning system. Although often referred to as a solution, the recent DELWP document on bushfires and planning focused on existing measures that only apply to dwellings in urban zones. The objectives of planning in Victoria, at s4(1)(c) of the Planning and Environment Act state that an objective *to secure a pleasant, efficient and safe working, living and recreational environment for all Victorians and visitors to Victoria*. A farm is a working environment.

Without the ability to consider safety on farm in emergencies and the planning system there are many permit triggers to manage risk on farm and systemic blockages to being able to consider risk or safety in permit considerations.

This does not demonstrate and understanding of the *capability and capacity requirements of the whole community*. Until there is a clear voice for agriculture, all emergency management agencies and emergency management models and protocols requiring active consideration of impacts on agriculture, then the objective *to be effective, the core capabilities are interdependent, coordinated and overlay across the three critical phases* will never be achieved.

What are the solutions to ensure we are prepared for all emergencies in all land use types?

For some years the VFF has been raising concerns that the Emergency Management Act does not define property. Despite the broad meaning of property in the Macquarie dictionary, or the narrower focus in the State Emergency Management Priorities, the emergency management system still uses a dwelling and property as interchangeable terms.

A first principles approach is essential. Until all assumptions, models and norms are reviewed against consequence on all aspects of life and property and responding agencies all embed core duties and understanding for all aspects of life and property in their understanding of consequence, community and communication, a business-as-usual approach with embedded urban bias will continue to undermine the capability and capacity of the system.

Some simple actions to start the process of being able to achieve the preparedness strategy are:

- Use the 6 Cs of emergency management to assess all aspects of life and property per land use type.
- Review risk and consequence models to reflect all aspects of life and property or the key indicators per land use types.
- Ensure all emergency management agencies have a clear statutory duty in relation to considering all aspects of life and property in discharge of their duties.
- Ensure local, regional and state emergency management plans clearly articulate risks and consequence for all land use types.
- Require incident controllers to be trained on assessing risks and consequences for major agricultural commodity types in Victoria.
- Ensure mapping of agricultural land use / commodity types are available in Incident Control Centres.
- Ensure a key role for agriculture industry in reviewing appropriateness of emergency management models, plans and protocols.
- Ensure terms of reference for any review of emergencies that impact on rural / farm zoned land includes agriculture impacts in the terms of reference.

Emma Germano

President

Victorian Farmers Federation

[i]The Victorian Preparedness Goal assists the sector to understand the risks to prepare for, and *what capabilities are required to manage any potential majoremergencies.*

Global trends show that Victoria is going to experiencean increase in the frequency and intensity of emergency incidents. But what are the biggest risks facing our community?

The State Emergency Risk Assessment identified Victoria’s highest priority emergency threats to be bushfires, flood and pandemic influenza. Theseare followed by technology risks, infrastructure emergencies, mine failure, marine pollution and naturalhazards such as heatwaves, pest incursions, animal diseases, severe storms and earthquakes.

Understanding risk is critical to identifying, developingand delivering the core capabilities that are essential to buildin g safer and more resilient communities. It also assists to prioritise preparedness efforts and outline the capability and capacity requirements of the whole community.

In Victoria, we have arranged our core capabilities intothe three phases of emergency management; before, during and after.

To be effective, the core capabilities are interdependent, coordinated and overlap across thethree critical phases. [ii]
<https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/about-us/what-we-do/the-six-cs>

The Victorian Farmers Federation

Victoria's agricultural production accounts for over \$13 billion of Victoria's economy and over 25 per cent of the State's exports per annum. Victoria's farmers produce high quality food and fibre, produced to high standards of safety, with little taxpayer support, and to some of the strictest environmental and highest animal welfare controls in the world.

The Victorian Farmers Federation (VFF) represents a farming community which creates a profitable, sustainable and socially responsible agriculture sector connecting with consumers.

We have a proud history representing Victoria's farm businesses since 1979 – primarily family farms that produce the eggs, grain, fruit and vegetables, meat, and milk that help to feed Victoria's six million people, and the bigger global community, every day.

The VFF consists of commodity groups: dairy (United Dairyfarmers of Victoria), grains, horticulture (including Flowers Victoria), intensives (chicken meat, eggs and pigs), and livestock – and expert committees representing; water, land management, agricultural and veterinarian chemicals, farm business and rural development, and workplace relations.

Our purpose is to make Victorian farmer's lives better; enhancing Victoria's future.

Our mission is to ensure a community of farmers creating a profitable, sustainable and socially responsible agricultural industry connecting with all Victorians.