

Emergency Management (Natural Hazards)

Agreed to by the VFF Policy Council
Meeting 178
7 December 2022

Policy Statement

The Victorian Farmers Federation is a recognised organisation in the emergency management sector. As there is no government agency in fire, flood and storm management with detailed knowledge of agricultural impacts, the view of the VFF should be sought by Emergency Management Agencies.

Executive Summary

1. The VFF seeks the acknowledgement that farms are not only a place of residence but a place of business that are key to Victoria's economic well-being and to ensure all Victorians access to high quality and affordable food and fibre. Many farmers will acknowledge that the easiest asset to recover on farm is a dwelling.
2. The VFF seek Government recognition at all stages of emergency management of the impacts of natural hazard-based emergencies (fire, flood, storm) on farm assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability¹.
3. The VFF believes that:
 - a. all emergency management agencies should specifically address agriculture and farms in control, command, co-ordination, consequence, communication and community connection stages;
 - b. all risk and consequence assessments and models are based on all four aspects of property in the *State Emergency Management Priorities*, including detailed consideration of farm property and assets in relation to the priority of *protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability*;
 - c. rapid dispatch of aircraft to ignition must be maintained, including removing any requirement to seek power companies' approval to approach powerlines.
 - d. impacts on farm assets are specifically considered before undertaking any in event management action (eg control line, back burn or temporary levee) and full compensation for impacts on farm assets is facilitated.
4. The VFF seeks a commitment from Government to VFF representation in regional and state risk assessment and planning.
5. The VFF seeks a commitment from Government to establish and fund a network of Community Reference Groups to engage with community leaders on consequence and community connection. These should be facilitated at regional and township level and support agency risk assessment processes.

6. The VFF seeks the Government to commit to delivering a range of public land and safety improvements as identified in the *current VFF Emergency Management Public Land and Safety Improvements* document forming Attachment 1 to this policy.
7. The VFF seeks acknowledgement by Government in all relevant statutes that private landholders should have the right to protect their assets, including being able to request appropriate risk reduction actions on crown land.
8. The VFF seeks a fully funded risk management program to undertake management actions to minimise risk emanating from Crown Land. This should include the Crown ensuring a qualified arborist assesses the risk to life and property of any tree on crown land identified as a hazard to private property.
9. The VFF calls for a review of planning provisions relating to managing risk to ensure that they apply to undertaking actions to protect assets. Specifically, clear provisions to exempt reinstatement of fences and structures on farm (to protect animal health and welfare).

Preparedness – avoiding impacts

10. That the VFF be consulted in relation to consequence assessment (management of the effect of emergencies on individuals, the community, infrastructure and the environment) on farmland.
11. That VFF encourage farmers to prepare an emergency plan for their business that can form a land access guide for their farm to provide to local responders. The plan could include, where relevant:
 - a. The type of production and identification of priority or critical actions in relation to asset protection
 - b. key locations on farms (assets and obstacles including in and above ground farm infrastructure; dairy sheds; intensive livestock sheds; stock containment yards; machinery sheds; pump stations) including any safety issues or business continuity issues;
 - c. the nature of systems in use (e.g. dairy power type) and ensure emergency management plans minimise impacts on farm businesses.
 - d. the location of renewable energy generation, batteries, tyres and chemicals
 - e. conditions / permissions for entry and contact details.
12. That Government work with VFF to determine how to allow incident responder access to farm emergency plans, including who can access the information and under which circumstances. (privacy management).
13. That the government ensures that Incident Controllers have passed competency test on identifying farm property impacts and how these impacts can be avoided or minimised.
14. That the VFF be designated as an agency that can provide an Emergency Management Liaison Officer (EMLO) to an incident control or management centre.
15. That the Government fund the training of VFF representatives as EMLOs.
16. The State should require telecommunication and power providers to monitor their infrastructure and have emergency response plans to ensure that they maintain service to rural communities during high-risk bushfire periods, during flood warnings or during storms.

Fire

17. The Government establishes a fuel load management strategy based on the elements of the current VFF position on fuel load management and residual risk at Attachment 2.

Flood

18. Consistent with existing Water Act, public flood mitigation works should not increase impact on farms from the likelihood of floods, the depth or rate of flow of water or the length of inundation.
19. Where impacts to agriculture from flood mitigation works cannot be avoided, commercial compensation for increased risk and impacts should be provided.
20. Flood warning stations should be expanded to give greater warning to farmers to move stock.

Storm

21. That investment is made into improving meteorological information in areas with higher risk from storms to improve modelling of events and to support risk management.

Incident Response – minimising impacts

22. That in conjunction with VFF, the Government prepare training modules be prepared for all Incident Controllers on understanding agricultural impacts and risks and ensuring clear and timely messaging in accordance with the current VFF position on emergency warning and communications – Attachment 3.
23. That the VFF, as a partner agency, be given EMLO access to incident control centres and the state control centre as applicable.
24. Ensure Agriculture Victoria presence in State Control Centre / Incident Control Centre during events impacting agricultural areas.
25. Ensure agriculture industry membership on municipal and regional emergency committees.
26. Ensure that there are evacuation areas with bio secure holding facilities (such as showgrounds) where landholders may transport key breeding stock.
27. That emergency relief areas serving farming communities provide biosecure stock containment areas to provide opportunities to provide refuge for key breeding stock.

Fire

28. To improve response and reduce impact the following actions should be implemented:
 - Designate all farming land adjacent to crown land reserves greater than 10ha as 'asset protection zone' and ensure mineral earth breaks are permanently maintained within crown land.
 - Ensure all fuel reduction plans minimise impact on areas of agricultural production.
 - Amend Victoria Planning Provisions to ensure fuel breaks and safe management of vegetation along roadsides and fence lines.
 - In the planning stages land access agreements should be developed with farmers such that there is clear understanding of what disruption there may be to the farmer's property in the event of a fire necessitating control actions (e.g. containment lines).

Recovery

29. The State, working with the VFF, publish a set of rehabilitation standards for reinstating land, fencing and other assets with targeted timeframes to assist in working with private landholders.
30. That the Government develop a targeted recovery plan in accordance with the current VFF position on recovery plans in attachment 4. As farmers often lose their home and their means of earning an income, the recovery system needs to understand that the process of recovery is long and stressful. A delay in rebuilding a fence or a farm building can have a compounding impact on recovering productivity. This plan should include:

- Expedited access for local Vets, farmers and animal health staff to assist farmers to care for livestock and animals affected by fires, floods or storms.
- Increased resourcing of Access Safety Assessment Teams and arborists to reduce road reopening delays. The list should be shared for both State and municipal road reopening assessments.
- Programs to share the burden of cost in replacing boundary fencing, public and private landowners on adjoining properties should be treated equally in terms of paying for fencing under the Fencing Act 1968, particularly after the devastation of a bushfire, flood or storm event with impact on fencing from crown property.
- Where property damage occurs, including to fences, fodder and soil from emergency works full rehabilitation should be funded by the Crown with recovery teams expediting works to agreed timelines.
- Assistance in establishing stock feed depots (where required), established channels with Defence for emergency generators, access to 'banks' to store genetic material to facilitate recovery post loss of seed / breeding stock.
- Databases of companies willing to assist in fodder programs
- Rapid referral of missing / lost stock for recovery action and investigation by Victoria Police.
- Dedicated website (that remains live for an extended period of time) with resourcing information for the recovery and rebuilding phase with information about Site clearance; rebuilding advice; Agriculture advice – recovery; financial and other assistance; Links to resources and Community information.
- Dedicated 'recovery' co-ordinator – maintaining regular contact / newsletters etc. & organising community sessions with speakers. The coordinator would be responsible for delivery of targeted Streamlined approvals processes by government (where required)
- Knowledge of Department of Defence resources and deployment protocols.
- Records of key infrastructure needs and deployment of essential infrastructure such as emergency generators, mobile exchanges on wheels and cellular on wheels to minimise impacts on operations.
- Access to 'banks' to store genetic material to facilitate recovery post loss of seed / breeding stock.
- Planning permit provisions to remove the need for a planning permit for rebuilding farm structures and buildings.
- Rate relief / assistance package for primary producers.

Fire

31. The State should pay the full cost of fire control line rehabilitation and refencing where a control line was established by government agencies.
32. Fences removed by incident response should be replaced within 2 months of the event. Where fencing is critical for business continuity this must be expedited.

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

VFF Good Neighbour Policy

ⁱ State Emergency Management Priorities The State Emergency Management Priorities underpin and guide all decisions during a response to any emergency.

The priorities are:

- Protection and preservation of life and relief of suffering is paramount. This includes:
 - Safety of emergency response personnel; and
 - Safety of community members including vulnerable community members and visitors/tourists
- Issuing of community information and community warnings detailing incident information that is timely, relevant and tailored to assist community members make informed decisions about their safety
- Protection of critical infrastructure and community assets that support community resilience
- Protection of residential property as a place of primary residence
- Protection of assets supporting individual livelihoods and economic production that supports individual and community financial sustainability
- Protection of environmental and conservation assets that considers the cultural, biodiversity, and social values of the environment.

[https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2021-](https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2021-10/Victorian%20State%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%20%28SEMP%29%20-%20Interactive%20and%20functional%20PDF%20document%20-%20October%202021.PDF)

[10/Victorian%20State%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%20%28SEMP%29%20-%20Interactive%20and%20functional%20PDF%20document%20-%20October%202021.PDF](https://files.emv.vic.gov.au/2021-10/Victorian%20State%20Emergency%20Management%20Plan%20%28SEMP%29%20-%20Interactive%20and%20functional%20PDF%20document%20-%20October%202021.PDF)