

Effective Disaster Recovery

What lessons can we learn from Australia's Black Saturday Bushfires?



What would you like to change?

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Foreword

7 February 2009 is now referred to as Black Saturday in Victoria. There were more than 40 days of fires that devastated 33 different communities and changed thousands of lives forever. For those in Melbourne on that day it felt ominous from the outset. The temperature soared to 46.4 degrees Celsius (115 degrees Fahrenheit). It was Victoria's hottest day on record.

The wind on Black Saturday peaked at 120 km per hour (75 mph) and even as you stood in the shade the heat was oppressive. Fires were travelling at more than 50 km per hour (30 mph) and jumping ahead up to 5 kilometres (3 miles).

While we talk about 'Black Saturday' the fires actually lasted for more than five weeks.

On the sixth day after the fires started PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) offered a pro bono team to support the establishment of the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA), the Authority created to lead and co-ordinate the recovery process.

The PwC Team worked with VBRRA for around four months and this paper reflects our view of the learnings over this period.

The PwC team included specialists in strategy, technology, planning and managing change. It's fair to say that for all of the staff who worked on the project, including myself, this four-month period became a life-changing event. I think this is also true for many of those who came to the Authority from different government agencies or from other parts of the private sector.

We can be thankful disasters such as Black Saturday don't come along very often. On the flip side, we don't necessarily prepare as well as we should for disasters that do strike our communities – or learn from them in the aftermath.

At PwC we felt it important to document our first-hand view of the lessons learned from the recovery process and convey our view of what to do and what not to do through the recovery period.

The recovery process in Victoria following Black Saturday can only be described as amazing. It has been a world-class recovery process and one in which so many parts of the solution were executed extremely well.

This document is provided to communities and governments around the world in the hope they will consider some of the lessons learned and use them to assist recovery in the event of disaster or, more importantly, assist in disaster recovery planning. This paper does not address any issues associated with the response of emergency services to the disaster.

For further information on the Victorian Bushfires recovery process please see the VBRRA website at www.wewillrebuild.vic.gov.au or contact your local PwC office.

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Executive summary:

A disaster like no other

The Black Saturday Bushfires – the greatest natural disaster in Australia's history. In the course of the devastation 173 Victorians lost their lives, 78 townships suffered directly, over 2,000 properties were destroyed and 430,000 hectares (1 million acres) of land was burnt. The disaster has taken an enormous psychological and physical toll on all affected communities. Rebuilding homes and local businesses, regenerating the natural environment and restoring community identity will take years.

In response to the disaster, the Victorian Government established the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) to coordinate and oversee the recovery and rebuilding program. Working in partnership with affected communities, councils, charities, businesses, and state and federal government agencies, VBRRA made significant strides in the year following the disaster. Homes were being rebuilt, businesses were returning, community gatherings were taking place, and the regeneration of the natural environment was underway. However, despite these notable achievements, it was still a long journey.

Important lessons can be learned from the VBRRA experience. The magnitude of the disaster, the range of people and organisations involved, and the scale of funds and donations under management represented an unprecedented challenge for a disaster recovery authority in this country. Our hope is that this report will provide some guidance to government authorities seeking to respond to similar natural disasters in Australia and abroad, or prepare for the future.

A FRAMEWORK FOR RECOVERY

The recovery plan used by Victoria grew out of a New Zealand model that was adapted and tailored to the changing needs and circumstances of the affected communities in the aftermath of the fires. The plan was developed with two elements at its core:

- Every action must be considered with the community at the centre.
- Every community is different.

The Authority was created with unprecedented speed, given direct access to the centre of political power and staffed with leaders who had the respect of the public as well as intimate familiarity with the workings of government.

Recognising that early decisions would have wider ramifications as the recovery progressed, the Authority applied rigour in establishing structures, processes and controls that would permit a flexible approach.

Importantly, systems had to be developed to manage the information that measured the progress of recovery in terms of reconstruction, the economy, the environment and the support of people in need. It did this by drawing together a range of technologies which enabled the tracking of donors and donations, the identification of properties, and collation and analysis of shifting collections of data.

Impact of the bushfires:

- 173 lives lost
- 430,000 hectares (1 million acres) of forest, crops and pasture burnt
- More than 2,000 properties destroyed – another 1,400 damaged
- Over 55 businesses destroyed
- Three primary schools and three children's services destroyed – with 47 primary schools damaged
- 10,000 km (6,200 miles) of fencing lost
- 11,000 farm animals killed or injured
- 70 national parks and reserves affected

Snapshot of progress:

- A\$388 million donated
- 33 Community Recovery Committees operating
- Over 250 community projects funded
- A\$15.9 million provided to Income Recovery Subsidy
- More than 3,000 properties cleared in less than five months

An integrated and highly specialised media and communications plan was essential in managing the flow of information to and from those affected and to the wider public as well as in controlling the collection and distribution of donations.

While the recovery process still continues, we can be proud of the way a complex interrelationship of management and technology has been leveraged to meet the needs of a large number of communities and individuals recovering from Australia's worst natural disaster.

This map of the state of Victoria highlights the geographical spread of the 78 townships which were impacted and the 430,000 hectares (1 million acres) of land that was destroyed by the Black Saturday Fires.

All statistics referred to throughout this document were relevant at the time of publication.

Figure 1 – Map of Victoria showing fire-affected areas



Source: VBRRA's Community Engagement Strategy

Lessons learned

In this section we have summarised the lessons learned which are contained and given context throughout the body of the report. Full detail on the rationale for each lesson is contained in each of the six sections of the report.

Establishing a disaster recovery authority

- Frequent and open communication to the executive is essential so that major decisions can be made quickly.
- Empowerment of the Authority is essential for success.
- Make the time to focus on the long-term strategy for recovery.
- Develop a set of guiding principles to shape the decisions of all involved.
- Keep the community at the centre of what you do.
- Develop a recovery framework that acts as both a planning and reporting framework.

Harnessing resources

- Put in place a structure, processes and controls that have a balance of flexibility and control.
- Make sure all parties know who makes the decisions.

Community at the centre

- Understand that those that didn't lose much may go through severe psychological challenges as well.
- Aim to shorten the period of disillusionment for members of the community, and lessen the 'depth' of the trough.
- Communication post-disaster is a major challenge and one that requires up-front planning.
- All communities are not the same. Tailor the solution to fit the individual community – don't use a one-size-fits-all approach.

Managing overwhelming generosity

- Understand the real needs of individuals and communities, but in the meantime encourage monetary donations.
- Seek donations of physical items based on community need.
- Take the time to plan the sort of information you need to collect from both the disaster zone and the providers of goods and services.
- Trust people to know what is best for them. Empowerment aids recovery.
- Establish processes to manage high profile donors.

The role of technology

- The speed with which the recovery authority can activate systems will in part impact its effectiveness.
- Agree data collection and 'source of truth' processes early.

A model for disaster recovery management

- It is important to implement project management office support early to monitor, manage and report progress of programs.

Establishing a disaster recovery authority

The Black Saturday Bushfires of 7 February 2009 presented an unprecedented challenge for government authorities in this country. The magnitude of the disaster, the range of people and organisations involved, and the scale of funds and donations under management were unparalleled in Australia's history. The State and Federal Governments together established the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority (VBRRA) on February 10. In the days and weeks that followed, a senior leadership team was assembled and a recovery framework developed to guide decision-making and planning of the recovery effort.

The Black Saturday Bushfires placed a huge strain on existing government infrastructure and organisation. Given the scale of the disaster, it was clear that existing arrangements would not be sufficient to meet the needs of recovery – an extraordinary response was required, one well outside the normal business of government.

The Authority was established under the Department of Premier and Cabinet in the Victorian Government. As a result, the Authority had the direct involvement and support of the Premier. This factor proved vital to the success of the Authority and the recovery program.

LESSON:

Frequent and open communication to the executive is essential so that major decisions can be made quickly.

A large number of private and public bodies were involved through the immediate post-disaster phase. VBRRA executed the key functions of providing information and coordinating planning. Government agencies, local councils, businesses and community groups developed plans within a framework created by VBRRA.

On the ground

Under the guidance of the Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Cabinet Committee (BRRCC) and the Premier, VBRRA developed and managed plans reflecting contributions from the following sources:

- **Intra-government:** Department Secretaries and the Inter-Agency Taskforce.
- **Community:** Local mayors and community representatives.
- **Bushfire recovery industry champions:** CEOs, who provided advice, assistance and, in many cases, donations of valuable temporary infrastructure.
- **Expert Reference Group:** A group that provided advice on specific issues impacting fire-affected communities.

The role of the Authority was defined as follows:

- Advise government, undertake activities and work with other relevant organisations to help regions, towns and individuals recover and rebuild in a way that is safe, timely, efficient, cost-effective and respectful of individual and community needs.
- Ensure that the community actively participates in the process of rebuilding and recovery and that individuals are consulted closely and provided with real choices.
- Provide up-to-date, relevant and useful information to assist with the recovery process.

On the ground

The practical challenges in the aftermath of Black Saturday were immense.

Within days it was clear that the recovery would be severely hampered by a slow clean-up process. Burnt-out trees, partially demolished houses and unsafe liquid petroleum gas (LPG) tanks presented a serious danger to people already severely traumatised.

The decision was made to undertake the clean-up at the Government's expense and proposals for assistance were sought from appropriate organisations. A contract was signed with a provider within days. This was likely the fastest tendering, letting and signing of a multimillion dollar contract in Victoria's history.

Empowering the Authority is essential in responding to a disaster such as the Black Saturday Bushfires. While regulations and guidelines are essential to the proper functioning of government, it is important to be able to cut through the red tape in extraordinary circumstances.

LESSON:

Empowerment of the Authority is essential for success.

THE IMPORTANCE OF A RECOVERY FRAMEWORK AND STRATEGY

In the immediate aftermath of the Black Saturday Bushfires the VBRR team focused on the immediate needs of affected communities. However, it was also necessary to plan for the longer-term recovery.

When making decisions, the Authority knew it had to consider the views and actions of a diverse range of individuals and organisations and align these with Government strategy and broader community needs. The Authority needed to apply a high level of discernment to determine which opinions were based on in-depth knowledge and which were not.

LESSON:

Make the time to focus on the long-term strategy for recovery.



Guiding principles

The Authority established a set of guiding principles to steer the decision-making process. There had to be a sound method in place to help answer vital questions such as: What issues are most important? How do we prioritise actions? Can we agree to the request of a person impacted by the devastation?

While the guiding principles won't help to answer all of the questions, they will lay a foundation for effective decision-making. VBRRA's guiding principles were designed to address specific issues and challenges that would confront the team on the ground.

On the ground

The guiding principles agreed following the Black Saturday Bushfires were:

1. The safety of people in the local community, including householders, volunteers and workers, will be the top level priority and will not be compromised.
2. The needs of each community impacted by the fires will be different and the recovery solutions will be tailored to the specific needs of each community.
3. Community involvement is key and will be pursued through all activities, with management at the local level empowered to deliver results.
4. Resources for recovery will be focused on areas of greatest need in each community. Provision of services and resources will be governed by the principles of fairness and equity.

Guiding principles need to be sufficiently focused but at the same time able to guide a 'user'. The speed with which the Authority had to be created did not permit the lead-time normally expected in an organisation for people to assimilate, and understand and agree what is important. The guiding principles helped to fulfil this function.

LESSON:

Develop a set of guiding principles to shape the decisions of all involved.

On the ground

Householders wanted to get back to their properties as soon as possible after the fires, but the dangers of unexploded LPG tanks and the presence of unsafe trees and buildings meant that to allow them to return without appropriate checks might have led to additional deaths or injury. By establishing safety as the primary guiding principle, all staff understood that there could be no compromise in this area.

Community

The concept of 'community' lies at the centre of each of the guiding principles that inform the recovery framework. The second and third of the guiding principles underline the need to consider every action from the viewpoint of each local community affected. Remember that every community is different.

LESSON:

Keep the community at the centre of what you do.

On the ground

Almost every building in the historic town of Marysville was destroyed and 34 lives were lost. As well as the immediate traumatic impact, there would be the longer-term impact on the livelihoods and existence of those who live and work in the town.

The impact on citizens and the required response is very different in a community with minimal property damage and no loss of life.



DEVELOPING THE DISASTER RECOVERY FRAMEWORK

In the midst of a disaster it is difficult to stop and consider the bigger picture, however one of the clearest lessons is that dedicating a team to focus on long-term planning will deliver positive results. Agreeing on a recovery framework that will guide this planning is the first step.

LESSON:
Develop a recovery framework that acts as both a planning and reporting framework.

A number of existing disaster recovery planning models were reviewed in developing the strategy for VBRRA. These included: lessons learned from Cyclone Larry; the Australian Disaster Manual (from Emergency Management Australia); the Australian Capital Territory Bushfires; and New Zealand’s Holistic Framework for Disaster Recovery. All of these sources (and others) were evaluated and the New Zealand framework was chosen as the basis for this plan as it was thought to be a comprehensive model that clearly outlined the key dimensions for recovery. Minor modifications were made to address the specific needs of the Black Saturday Bushfires.

Figure 2 – Disaster Recovery Framework



Source: New Zealand’s Holistic Framework for Disaster Recovery, Sarah Norman MSc BSc(Hons) RCN, NZ Ministry of Civil Defence & Emergency Management

Figure 2 shows the four elements of the disaster recovery framework: people, reconstruction, environment and economic. At the centre of the framework lies the local community – the prism through which every action undertaken by the Authority must be filtered.

Appendix 1 offers an expanded view of the subcomponents within each of these elements.

People

This element focuses on the overall well-being of individuals by addressing their safety, health and welfare. The planning emphasis in this area was on ensuring the right resources were in place to respond to the needs of the community in the months after the bushfires.

On the ground

The Victorian Government through the Department of Human Services (DHS) acted quickly to assign case managers to the individuals and families directly impacted by the fires. In all, 385 case managers were assigned to over 5,000 individuals to support them in their recovery. Case managers had the authority to liaise with over a dozen government agencies on behalf of those affected, cutting red tape and speeding the delivery of essential services and financial support.



Reconstruction

Reconstruction has a broad scope, including residential, commercial, rural, public buildings and utilities.

The foremost priority was to assist those who had lost their homes and belongings. In many cases individuals were not insured, which brought additional hardship to the recovery process.

In addition to residential property damage, more than 10,000 km (6,200 miles) of rural fencing was burned. Since much of the affected land contained livestock, there arose the significant challenge of keeping animals in a protected environment once the fires had passed.

Commercial properties, along with public buildings, go to the heart of the community and also provide income for many. Utility assets must be rebuilt to supply essential services and communications. Planning permissions and permits must be acquired and inspections carried out for all new constructions. These sequences of actions must be carried out methodically and rigorously, according to law but as rapidly as possible.

On the ground

VBRRRA's goal was to support residents in the reconstruction process rather than trying to dictate to them. Some residents had no insurance and nowhere to go; some were insured and wanted to get on with rebuilding.

The Authority needed to facilitate rapid mobilisation of planning and support from professionals such as builders and architects and offer guidance about building in fire-prone areas.

Some of the services the Authority offered were:

- a streamlined process for approving planning permits
- pro bono architectural services for rebuilding
- advice on rebuilding in fire-prone areas through the Building Commission
- a mobile rebuilding advisory service which travelled to each community area
- a service to register for free portable toilets and showers to use on their property while rebuilding took place.

Environment

The fire regions included precious environmental assets on both public and private land. The devastating impact of the Black Saturday Bushfires included:

- the destruction of almost 430,000 hectares (1 million acres) of forests, crops and pasture
- damage to 820 km (500 miles) of streams, rivers and creeks
- 11,000 farm animals killed or injured
- 70 national parks and reserves as well as 950 local parks affected
- 280,000 hectares (700,000 acres) of public land burnt.

On the ground

A major waste management challenge in the aftermath of the Black Saturday Bushfires was the fact that most of the affected areas were not connected to town water or sewerage. As a result, there were no toilet or water facilities available. Furthermore, the recent move to plastic water tanks meant there was no water available on property sites once the fires had passed.

Economic

The four areas of economic focus are individuals, business, infrastructure and government. The planning goal in this area is to ensure that entities in and around the fire-affected areas have sufficient support to return to normality. This must include individuals and businesses that may not have suffered a direct loss through the fires but whose subsequent economic loss may be significant.

On the ground

Donations of cash and goods for bushfire relief set new records – total cash donations exceeded A\$388 million. One of the most persistent challenges was to establish and monitor the process for allocating cash and goods to meet the needs of communities.

- approximately A\$8 million worth of high-value goods and services donated
- 3,059 people accessed the donations management system
- 50 projects funded by donors (A\$5.38 million value)
- 6,831 referral cards issued for material aid
- 25,000 material aid pallets donated.

Harnessing resources

In the aftermath of a disaster there is an immediate need for people to get things moving. An important lesson learned from the VBRRRA experience is the need for a structure that balances control with flexibility.

There are many different forces and groups of people at work in the aftermath of a disaster. The major challenge for those responsible for recovery is to prioritise actions effectively. However, not all activity is helpful. Actions taken in the early days of the recovery can have unintended consequences over the long term.

On the ground

These are some of the resourcing issues that arose in the days following Black Saturday:

- The Premier and the Cabinet had direct and necessary involvement and needed to be kept informed.
- The Federal Government appointed senior staff from the Department of Defence to assist.
- There was almost immediate need for a range of services from a range of agencies (more than 15 in total).
- Leaders from the private sector wanted to help and made very significant offers of assistance that included both workers and infrastructure.
- Local councils that had suffered the impact of the fires reacted differently: some wanted immediate assistance, others wanted minimal input and assistance.
- Donations of goods and offers of all kinds of services started flowing into emergency centres, with little in the way of quality filters or capacity to allocate.

LESSON:

Put in place a structure, processes and controls that have a balance of flexibility and control.

Effective harnessing and direction of resources will add value in the longer term. It is impossible to wait until all planning has been completed before tasks are undertaken, so it is essential to stagger the planning and begin allocating tasks that make a positive impact as early as possible.

In the course of structuring and resourcing the Authority these were the key lessons:

- **Leadership team:** Having a trusted public figure in addition to a respected senior government bureaucrat at the head of the Authority made it considerably easier to carry out external community engagement at the same time as internal planning. This model of leadership should be closely considered in all disaster planning environments.
- **Coordination and accountability:** It is important to focus and coordinate the efforts of individual agencies by ensuring there is a single point of accountability. All activities need to be integrated around achieving common goals.
- **Community and regional leadership:** Assign senior government leaders to manage communities or regions that have suffered major destruction. In Victoria, the extreme devastation in Marysville warranted the appointment of a senior individual to help with the recovery process.
- **Government engagement:** Recovery planning should include all levels of government, with resources harnessed in a coordinated fashion.

- **Public sector experience:** Ensure that those individuals driving the recovery understand the machinery of government. While there is always a need to expedite processes in the context of a disaster, it is still important that appropriate governance is in place to ensure accountability for actions and probity when assigning government funds and private donations.
- **Stakeholder management:** Understanding and managing external stakeholders is complex and time consuming and requires the development of a robust communication and media plan. The coordination and alignment of messages with those of other government agencies is also important to ensure the consistency of messages being delivered to the public.
- **Team empowerment:** Responding to a disaster requires taking extraordinary actions, many of which are outside the normal processes mandated by government regulation. Empowering the Authority to take charge is vital to making things happen; however, appropriate controls need to be implemented to ensure that integrity and honesty are maintained.

LESSON:

Make sure all parties know who makes the decisions.



Community at the centre

All actions in the disaster recovery process must be filtered through the perspective of each local community. The success of post-disaster recovery and rebuilding can be measured by the degree to which local communities are positively engaged and empowered.

UNDERSTANDING THE PSYCHOSOCIAL PHASES OF AFFECTED COMMUNITIES

Closely aligned with the tasks of relief, recovery and rebuild are the psychosocial phases which disaster-affected people, and communities as a whole, will travel through on their pathways to recovery. Figure 3 outlines the stages of recovery and the dramatic variations in emotional response. Those affected move through 'Heroic' and 'Honeymoon' phases before encountering a significant trough filled with emotions from disappointment to disillusionment. The final stage, in which obstacles are overcome and reconstruction commences, sees people begin the healing process.

While those affected by a disaster such as the Black Saturday Bushfires will recover in their own time and at their own pace, the services and support provided by the Authority can help to alleviate their suffering during the worst phases.

LESSON:

Understand that those that didn't lose much may go through severe psychological challenges as well.

Because people are in a state of distress in the recovery period and will be reliant on support services for many months, the Authority must take note of the needs of those affected at each stage by constant monitoring with appropriate support and communication methods.

On the ground

The pace of recovery has varied greatly in the aftermath of the Black Saturday Bushfires. Communities were not only affected with differing degrees of severity but also had different capabilities to respond to such a disaster. Some communities in Gippsland in eastern Victoria had experienced floods and fires in the years prior to Black Saturday. This enabled them to mobilise quickly, coordinate their response and travel on the road to recovery at an accelerated pace. Conversely, Marysville, one of the worst hit areas in terms of property destruction and loss of life, has found the recovery journey much more arduous.

LESSON:

Aim to shorten the period of disillusionment for members of the community, and lessen the 'depth' of the trough.

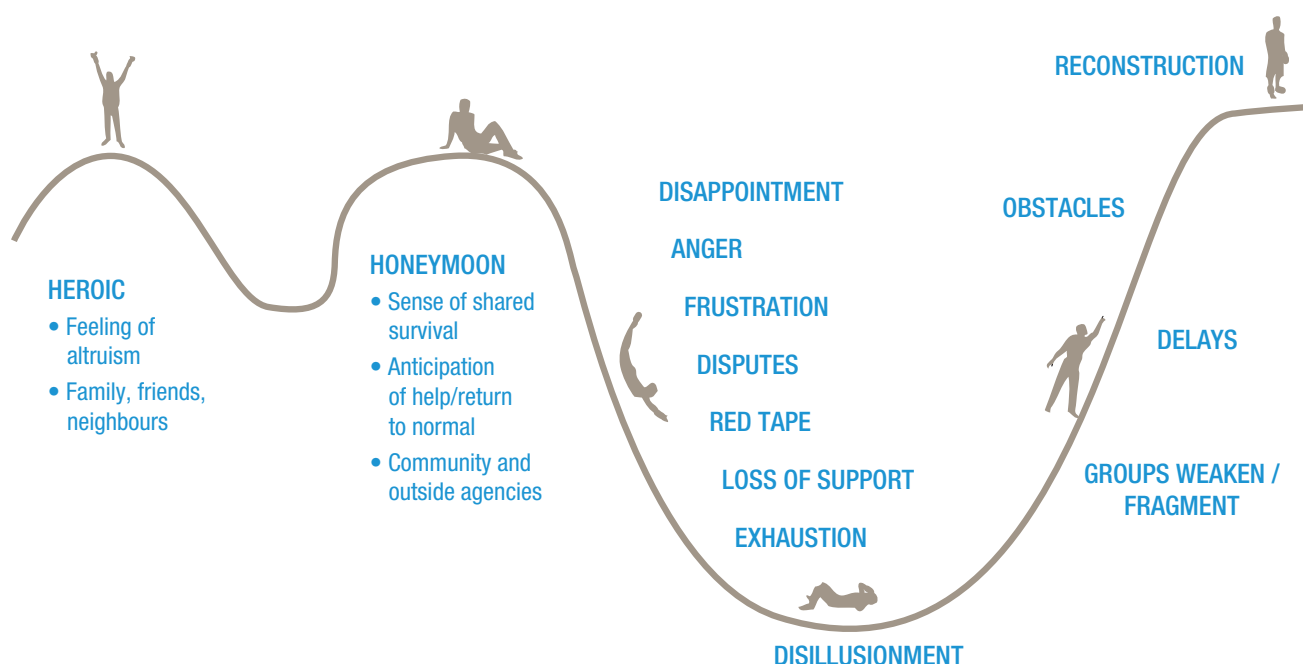


Figure 3 – Psychosocial Phases of Recovery
Source: Australian Disaster Manual – Emergency Management Australia

TAILORING COMMUNICATION TO INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

Communication is crucial post-disaster. Just as crucial is understanding that men, women and children require different communication strategies as they move through the recovery process.

It is also important to engage communities as a whole early. This can start with daily information meetings with citizens to disseminate key messages. Focused communications containing factual, practical information outlining the services being provided will further instil confidence in the process. For many people this might be the first time they have engaged directly with any level of government, so it is important to clearly outline the role that government will play.

Direct face-to-face communication, ranging from private, one-on-one discussions to town meetings, is important to build confidence in the Authority's response. The individual human contacts and broader networks developed during these meetings will prove invaluable to citizens through the different stages of their recovery.

Case managers also play an important role in supporting people through recovery. They can find themselves in a variety of roles, from social worker to general 'problem-solver'. In the context of the Authority's rapid reaction to the Black Saturday Bushfires, case managers appointed by DHS were delegated instant and far-reaching authority to act as direct intermediaries between those affected and essential support services and government agencies.

The needs of those affected and the numbers of case managers required should be assessed during recovery planning to ensure the appropriate level of resources are made available (both government and private).

On the ground

Communication with the community in the days, weeks and months following the Black Saturday Bushfires was led by the Chair of VBRRA, Christine Nixon, who visited all communities within weeks of Black Saturday. Meetings were held in community halls or centres and gave citizens the opportunity to address the Chair of the Authority directly. This proved an excellent medium for communication as well as providing a real-time 'health check' of community needs. These meetings were supplemented through other channels, including Community Service Hubs and case managers.

Just as 'early warning systems' can notify communities of impending disaster, post-disaster systems that incorporate widespread modern communication tools will help smooth recovery. Social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook as well as SMS and email will be essential parts of a comprehensive communication strategy in the aftermath of a disaster such as the Black Saturday Bushfires.

LESSON:

Communication post-disaster is a major challenge and one that requires up-front planning.

FURTHER METHODS TO FOSTER COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

There exist many opportunities for collaboration and coordination at the local level with councils, chambers of commerce and other bodies that are embedded deeply in the community fabric in 'normal times'. In times of emergency they can be a tremendous asset to the recovery process as long as they are sufficiently resourced.

On the ground

Many community-based clubs assisted throughout the fire-affected regions in the aftermath of Black Saturday. Rotary International, for example, leveraged their considerable network connections to make a significant contribution of funds to large infrastructure projects such as the Marysville Central shopping centre. As well as offering urgent financial assistance to individuals in crisis, Rotary International was also instrumental in setting up the Kinglake Ranges Business Network – an organisation to help local businesses recover and regenerate. Rotary International also made resources available for fence rebuilding across the affected regions.

LESSON:

All communities are not the same. Tailor the solution to fit the individual community – don't use a one-size-fits-all approach.

Community Service Hubs

Community Service Hubs provide an effective model for quick access to broad sets of services for disaster-affected individuals. Initially they may be temporary structures such as army tents but will then occupy portable offices or permanent buildings. The services provided by these hubs may change over time, depending on the resources available and the stage of recovery.

On the ground

In the days after the Black Saturday Bushfires 'Community Service Hubs' were established in many affected communities to provide a variety of essential services including access to case managers, basic living services, access to state and federal bodies (e.g. health and financial organisations), access to non-government organisations (NGOs), and access to 'needs coordinators' managing distribution of donated goods and services.

Identity cards

Temporary identification cards can be an excellent solution in the immediate aftermath of a disaster such as the Black Saturday Bushfires, where many survivors were left with nothing more than the clothes they stood up in. With facilitated access to such comprehensive databases as driver licensing it is possible to establish survivors' identities on site so they can register for support services immediately. Identity cards should be provided to those affected in a way that does not compound stress resulting from loss of personal items of identification.

Community Recovery Committees (CRCs)

These local committees provide valuable support to the recovery Authority by developing Community Recovery Plans in line with the overall statewide strategy. They also offer an extremely useful channel for the Authority to tap into the heart of the community. In view of this, they should be led by a person well respected in the local community with knowledge and awareness of government processes and politics. Depending on the scale of the disaster and its impact on the community, it may be necessary to appoint someone with significant government leadership experience.



Managing overwhelming generosity

The flood of donations and offers of assistance in the days and weeks following a major disaster can present significant management challenges.

DISCOVER THE REAL NEEDS OF INDIVIDUALS AND COMMUNITIES

Society responds in extraordinary ways in times of disaster. People are often far removed from the scene of the disaster and making a donation of goods or services is one of the few ways they feel they can assist. However this outpouring of generosity can create multiple management challenges.

It is important to understand that communities will seek to give to support those in need, and in many cases they will offer physical items rather than money. In some cases this is all they can offer.

It is very possible that physical donations will have a real cost associated with management and movement of the goods.

Where an appeal is made through a public broadcaster for physical items the trailing donations that follow may be long and significant. For example an appeal for blankets will possibly result in blankets being donated long after the need has passed.

One of the things that the Authority should consider for physical items is approaching targeted community groups and seeking a specific measured physical request eg. "We need 1,000 blankets could you assist with this?" The impact from a logistics perspective is made easier, and the matching of demand with supply reduces wastage.

LESSON:

Understand the real needs of individuals and communities, but in the meantime encourage monetary donations.

Survivors' needs will depend on a variety of factors including the type, scale and location of the disaster, as well as varying according to the stage individuals and communities have reached in the recovery process. In the immediate relief effort there may be a need for basic necessities such as food, water, clothing and shelter. As the recovery progresses, survivors will need such things as household goods. Consequently, an assessment of needs should occur at multiple stages throughout the relief and recovery process, supported by customised systems to capture these needs.

Until specific needs are understood, only monetary donations should be encouraged. This will allow funds to be funnelled in multiple directions to assist in a variety of relief and recovery efforts.

LESSON:

Seek donations of physical items based on community need.

On the ground

The generosity of the Australian public and international community following the Black Saturday Bushfires was unprecedented. Extraordinary quantities of goods or 'material aid' were donated through charity shops, collections undertaken by businesses or items brought directly to the disaster region. Approximately 25,000 pallets (1.5 cubic metres per pallet) of goods were received prior to any assessment of individual and community needs. Although these donations provided significant assistance, some goods were not needed.

A fund should be established to support the capture of monetary donations. Alternatively, as happened with the Black Saturday Bushfires, the service can be provided by a respected charity, in this instance the Australian Red Cross.

It is important to understand any tax restrictions on the fund, such as charity classifications. In some jurisdictions the tax classification may restrict the use of funds or dissuade some parties from donating. Some funds may contain restrictions on who can be paid – it may be the case that only individuals and not businesses can be paid. It is important to ensure that the fund is free to make payments to any entity.

DEVELOP THE RIGHT SYSTEMS AND PROCESSES

The right planning around people, systems and processes makes successful management of needs and donations more likely. Significant data management issues can be avoided through the correct capture of initial data. Systems developed in response to the disaster, or legacy systems from a prior disaster, can assist in this process. For example, a centrally managed system to capture needs can be accessed by widely distributed users to record needs as they are identified. This data can then be aggregated to provide a disaster-wide assessment of needs. However, in some situations such a system may be excessive. Where there is a significant quantity of small value or second-hand donated goods warehoused, it may be a waste of resources managing these goods in an inventory system.

LESSON:

Take the time to plan the sort of information you need to collect from both the disaster zone and the providers of goods and services.

The capture of client information and interactions can take different forms, ranging from simple spreadsheets to database systems or leveraging the functionality of a CRM system. Hosted systems can provide the required functionality without the burden of maintaining a large system. However, the facilities to maintain such a system may not be readily available and the user base may be mobile or dispersed across a large area. An effective system, therefore, must be able to service the network of stakeholders present in the recovery and reconstruction effort: individuals, case workers, local councils, businesses, not-for-profit organisations and others.

Clearly defined processes will help stakeholders capture crucial data concerning needs and donations. Mandatory data needs to be captured quickly and accurately to minimise later complications – for example, expiry dates on offers of goods and services.

Significant thought and planning needs to be invested to ensure that donations of goods and services are equitably distributed among disaster-affected individuals and communities. A policy may be required. As it is difficult to predict the needs of each disaster-affected individual, the wisest option is to put the individual in control of the decision-making process. This empowerment can be an important step in their recovery.

LESSON:

Trust people to know what is best for them. Empowerment aids recovery.

On the ground

The donation management system developed for the Black Saturday Bushfires – based on Siebel Customer Relationship Management (CRM) – enabled all donations to be matched with the needs of fire-affected individuals within a centralised system. Each fire-affected household was allocated a 1,000-point voucher linked into the system that could be redeemed against donated goods and services they required. To ensure communities facing a slower recovery still had access to more popular donations (such as gift vouchers), release of these items was staggered over time. Fire-affected households could access donations through their case manager or donation coordinators who were located throughout the fire-affected regions.



MANAGING DIFFERENT TYPES OF DONATIONS AND DONORS

The variety of donations made by individuals and organisations may require different levels of effort and expense to manage. Transport and warehousing are key management factors, particularly where a disaster attracts donations from interstate and abroad. The donation of a car, for example, conceals significant hidden costs. Registration and assessment for road worthiness may constitute an outlay that the donor may not be prepared to pay. Other costs associated with donations include disposal fees and the cost of returning borrowed goods.

Media focus on significant donations can improve the morale, and therefore recovery, of some individuals and communities. This is particularly so where the donation offers some enjoyment or reprieve for individuals, such as a holiday. There is a risk, however, that this donation may fail to materialise as promised. In such cases the adverse impact on disaster-affected individuals, who have already experienced great trauma, could be immense.

Disasters often attract contributions from prominent public figures such as leaders of industry and celebrities. They can be a positive force in harnessing public support but their contribution needs to be aligned with recovery efforts. It can be useful to assign a role to manage these 'high-end' clients, including assessing their motives and educating them on the role of government and the important process of matching donations with needs. Engaging such high profile figures early in the recovery will allow some control over their activities and the consequent media attention.

LESSON:

Establish processes to manage high profile donors.

MANAGING PRO BONO ASSISTANCE

In the early stages of disaster recovery, business should be encouraged to make monetary donations until resource requirements can be determined. However, there will be offers of pro bono assistance. For effective management of these offers, donors must be engaged and educated about the specific skills and services required in post-disaster recovery as well as being made aware of the guiding principles.

When assessing pro bono offers, consider whether donor organisations are capable of operating within the government framework, where requirements can differ significantly from private sector processes.

Resources' skills and experience need to be carefully matched against the needs of the community. Acceptance of an offer of help simply because it is made pro bono may result in a poor fit and damage to the recovery effort.

An agreement should be put in place to cover the scope of the work, period and termination of pro bono services.

On the ground

PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) donated a team pro bono to assist the Victorian Bushfire Reconstruction and Recovery Authority. Its key tasks included setting up a project management office (PMO) and related systems and processes, data management, donations management and long-term planning. Although this was a pro bono engagement, a formal engagement letter covering scope, approach, duration, resources and terms and conditions was agreed. PwC's involvement allowed the foundations to be laid while the Authority leadership focused on activities 'at the coalface'.



The role of technology

The reach and capability of current technology is astonishing and unprecedented. Technology played a vital role at all stages of the disaster recovery, but particularly in the crucial initial days.

LESSON:

The speed with which the recovery authority can activate systems will in part impact its effectiveness.

ESTABLISH OR CONSOLIDATE THE DATA COLLECTION REGIME IN ADVANCE

Collection of accurate, reliable and timely data can prove difficult in the days and weeks following a disaster. Details of property damage, loss of life, donations, and insurance claims are collected by a variety of organisations, agencies and authorities. There is often overlap in the types of data collected, making it difficult to identify one 'source of truth'.

The Disaster Recovery Framework can assist in determining the types of data most useful to affected communities, the general public, the government, the media and the Authority. Establishing a source organisation for each data type as well as a process for collecting that data will greatly enhance information sharing and analysis.

LESSON:

Agree data collection and 'source of truth' processes early.

Design of the central data collection repository requires careful consideration. The ability to effectively categorise and summarise data is a key requirement. Figure 4 demonstrates how the factors of time, location and information sources can intersect to give a constantly updating and accurate measurement of progress.

Statistics come into the central repository from agreed sources within each geographic region at an agreed frequency. This data reflects the components of the Disaster Recovery Framework (people, economics, reconstruction and environment) down to the level of detail articulated in Appendix 1. All of this information is refreshed at a frequency dictated by degrees of need for information and capability to provide it.

Using a single data repository eliminates conflicting statistics, double counting and random inputs of data, offering the most accurate basis for continuing assessment and planning.

On the ground

It proved very difficult to get accurate data on property damage by region during the Black Saturday Bushfires. Councils, government agencies and emergency authorities all kept geographical records, but regional boundary definitions differed across organisations. To help streamline data delivery in the recovery phase, an inter-departmental data committee was established to agree on the organisations responsible for collecting types of data and reporting progress to the Authority.

Figure 4 – Data collection model



LEVERAGE EXISTING SYSTEMS

While each disaster will have its unique characteristics and requirements, little may be required in terms of new applications or infrastructure that is not readily available or adaptable from existing government agencies. Pre-planning of potential technology needs and infrastructure requirements accompanied with advance implementation of agreements will allow an Authority to activate the relevant systems and infrastructure quickly when needed.

Key systems and infrastructure that can be leveraged from government agencies include:

- **Case management** – extended to cater for needs tracking, donations and donations management.
- **Geographic information systems** – numerous GIS applications exist within government to track boundary, property, infrastructure and environmental data. These systems are ideal for capturing disaster impact data and providing imagery of the impacted areas.
- **Data repositories and analytical and reporting tools** – to capture impact assessment data and provide regular analysis and reporting.
- **Website** – quickly establishing a web presence to communicate information to the public and those affected is crucial.
- **Project management tools** – for issue and risk management, status reporting and project planning and monitoring.
- **Office systems** – email, document repositories, FAQ databases, policies and procedures, budget tracking, etc.
- **Software licenses** – to support development of any custom applications.
- **Infrastructure** – to support the office systems, provide desktops and laptops, local network, internet, telecommunications, and provide linkage to externally hosted applications.

Custom applications may be needed to support specific government initiatives or grants in the disaster recovery effort. An agreement with service providers, reached in advance, is the key to rapid implementation of custom requirements. These service providers must have the capacity to deliver relevant software and hardware infrastructure quickly.



GEOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SYSTEMS (GIS) AND MOBILE TECHNOLOGY

Quick, accurate data capture and analysis can be greatly enhanced with the aid of geographic information systems (GIS) and mobile technology. GIS applications can provide multiple layers of information such as burn area, region boundaries, property boundaries and topographical data.

Linking GIS applications with PDAs (Personal Digital Assistant) and laptops offers a user-friendly, efficient way of capturing end-user data. For example, where street numbers and other address information have been eliminated by fire, those affected can 'point and click' on their property on a map using GIS technology, allowing support services to access their property via GPS (Global Positioning System) coordinates.

Mobile technology is also important to assist those affected and on-site support services, as landline telecommunications are often unavailable in the immediate aftermath of a disaster. Mobile technology allows those affected to access information and register for services, while support teams are able to record data relating to the needs of those affected and the recovery effort.

A mechanism to ensure telecommunication providers rapidly restore mobile communications, as well as the means to give access to laptops and PDAs, will greatly assist disaster recovery.

On the ground

GIS applications were leveraged to provide significant benefit to those affected during the Black Saturday Bushfires and subsequently.

- GIS technology was used to record imagery of the burn area, property destruction and to detail property and region boundaries.
- During the property cleanup program, PDAs were used to match the details of affected property addresses with the GPS coordinates of the actual property, enabling accurate direction of cleanup crews to the correct location.
- A web application was built so that those affected could identify their property on a map using pre-fire images and view status information on the progress of their property cleanup.
- Large numbers of laptops were delivered to community hubs to assist those affected in registering for services and to assist case workers or managers to arrange services.



A model for disaster recovery management

Incorporating the lessons of the Black Saturday Bushfires it is possible to define an effective model for disaster recovery management that we suggest will lead to success.

The recovery effort, developed out of the Disaster Recovery Framework (see Figure 2), is spread over three distinct phases:

- Immediate post-disaster
- Plan
- Recover

Within each phase, activities can be classified into two areas:

- **Recovery framework** – relates to the recovery of people, the environment, the economy and in terms of reconstruction – all seen through the perspective of the local community.
- **Authority operations** – covers program management, stakeholder management and communications, processes and systems.

See Appendix 2 for a practical, methodical guide to the entire process.

IMMEDIATE POST-DISASTER PHASE

The days following the disaster are a blur of frantic activity. Order among the chaos is required. Without a plan this period will be extremely difficult. The risk of bad decisions leading to poor productivity and falling community and public confidence is high. On the other hand, prudent government bodies with a ready-to-activate plan will be able to move quickly to assist those affected.

Establishing the leadership team

The creation of the Authority and the appointment of the leadership team is a crucial task in the days after the disaster. A trusted public figure at the head of the Authority will instil confidence in those affected and reassure them that support will be provided now and throughout the recovery period. A strong leader with an intimate knowledge of government can harness and direct the necessary resources to deliver relief services to those affected quickly.

Impact assessment

A rapid initial impact assessment of each affected community across each of the recovery framework dimensions – people, environment, economy, reconstruction (property damage) – will inform the recovery strategy and governance arrangements.

This impact assessment will be the source of vital information to direct the supply of essentials: food, water, shelter and safety.

Emotional support

Support for impacted communities from case managers and through community hubs is critical. As a result of stress, many will have high energy and adrenaline levels, giving them a strong urge to action. The Authority can assist by providing tasks for those affected within the community hubs. Others will simply need a shoulder to lean on.

Managing donations

The overwhelming desire of the public and business to donate money, goods and services is best managed through a fund to which people are initially encouraged to make monetary donations. Only once individual and community needs have been assessed, or arrangements with appropriate welfare organisations have been made should donations of goods or services be encouraged.

The generous response of the public and business also manifests in the form of offers of skills and resources. It is important to have a clear view of the resources, facilities, roles and skills for which outside assistance will be required and to put in place appropriate commercial arrangements, including agreements governing pro bono assistance.

Managing Authority staff

Just as those impacted manifest high energy levels as a response to stress, so will many Authority staff. Strong management backed by a clear understanding of the tasks and activities to be performed (established in the Master Recovery Plan) will help channel this energy in productive directions.

A daily 'all staff' operations meeting updates everybody on progress and recalibrates activities and priorities.

Managing stakeholders

High profile stakeholders and public figures may require special attention in order to manage expectations and the resultant media attention. A strong communications and media relations team should be established early to ensure frequent and consistent communications with those affected and the wider public.

Technology systems

Systems to support the communications team and the rest of the Authority are required immediately. Websites, office infrastructure, email addresses, phones, hotline numbers, SMS facilities, conference facilities, TV and media feeds are all examples of infrastructure and resources needed in the immediate aftermath of the disaster. Other technology systems need to be activated to support image capture, mapping, data capture, case management, donations, reporting and project management office functions.

On the ground

VBRRRA managed many competing issues following the Black Saturday Bushfires. The Authority needed to establish facilities, resources and infrastructure for its own operations. Approximately 30 staff joined VBRRRA within the first few weeks. Regular and clear communication was vital.

The daily 'all hands' meeting greatly assisted the smooth running of the Authority during the initial period. Led by the CEO and Chair, this meeting covered everything from the latest statistics to immediate issues requiring action in the community to HR and administrative issues. All the information was logged in tools provided by the project management office.

PLAN PHASE

Priority programs will emerge in the weeks after a disaster. After the Black Saturday Bushfires, the key programs were Property Cleanup, Temporary Accommodation and Donations Management. Scope and budget management are often difficult in disaster management situations, so strong project management expertise will be important.

LESSON:

It is important to implement project management office support early to monitor, manage and report progress of programs.

Community engagement

Those affected will be looking for clear guidance as well as evidence that recovery planning is underway. Following the Black Saturday Bushfires, weekly community meetings were held in multiple locations throughout Victoria to provide information and to hear people's concerns.

Creation of Community Recovery Committees involved the community in recovery planning through nominating representatives to work with the Authority and local government to identify needs and wants. The role of the Authority was to facilitate the prioritisation of needs and to manage community expectations.

Master Recovery Plan

A Master Recovery Plan should be developed to document the needs and wants of communities as well as the priority programs identified by the Authority and federal, state and local governments. The plan may include strategy, a list of funded activities, a schedule or timeline, as well as other elements. This is a complex activity that will require the establishment of subcommittees to manage each planning component before they can be integrated into the Master Recovery Plan.

For the Black Saturday Bushfires, the structure of the Master Recovery Plan was based on the Disaster Recovery Framework planning components: people, reconstruction, environment, economic. The plan identified the activities to be funded, the source from which they were to be funded (government funds; public donations fund; donations of raw materials, goods and services) and the party responsible for the activity. Management of each activity was left to the responsible party.

The earlier this planning activity is commenced, the better the expectations and efforts of communities and the recovery Authority can be aligned. Not all activities can be funded, but if the Authority and communities can agree on a set of priorities (remembering that all communities are different and that priorities will justifiably vary between widely dispersed communities) then programs can more easily be assessed against these defined community needs.

Developing a plan that meets community expectations and fits within the funding envelope is a long and complex task. Multiple drafts of the plan based on extensive stakeholder consultation will be required.

Risk management

Identify risks by using the planning components as a framework, then develop steps for mitigation, assign responsibility for mitigation actions and agree processes for ongoing risk monitoring.

Ongoing project management tasks

The Authority will continue to execute programs and carry out associated ongoing tasks such as implementing the donations management system; collecting damage and recovery data; issuing public reports on statistics, progress and plans; reporting to stakeholder groups; and holding 'all staff' meetings at reduced frequency.

On the ground

VBRRRA's resourcing and structure stabilised during the plan phase; processes, systems and infrastructure became operational and the Project Management Office provided structure and governance over key activities, projects and programs. Daily meetings, in which team leaders reported on progress as well as issues and risks that had been identified, became twice-weekly.

During this period community meetings were ramped up, Community Recovery Committees were established, and long-term recovery planning commenced in earnest.

It was also during this time that VBRRRA managed the challenges flowing from the scale of donations: storage, recording detail useful for later matching with people's identified needs, equitable distribution and delivery.

VBRRRA has established a variety of support services specific to the needs of affected communities as these needs became apparent. They include:

- Free financial planning consultations
- Reconstruction advice from architects
- Fast-tracking building approvals
- Support for businesses that supported the community, such as veterinary clinics that looked after burned animals
- Special grants
- Tourism special support

VBRRRA continues to publish three-monthly reports that document the progress of the Authority and the affected communities as they continue toward recovery.

RECOVER PHASE

Within several months, the recovery effort moves into a 'business as usual' phase. The focus during this phase is on supporting and monitoring the programs within the Master Recovery Plan while reporting progress to government, communities and the public.

The pace of recovery

The pace of recovery is an important indicator of the effectiveness of the Authority. Those affected may move quickly to rebuild private residences; alternatively, they may not start for many months, or they may not wish to rebuild at all.

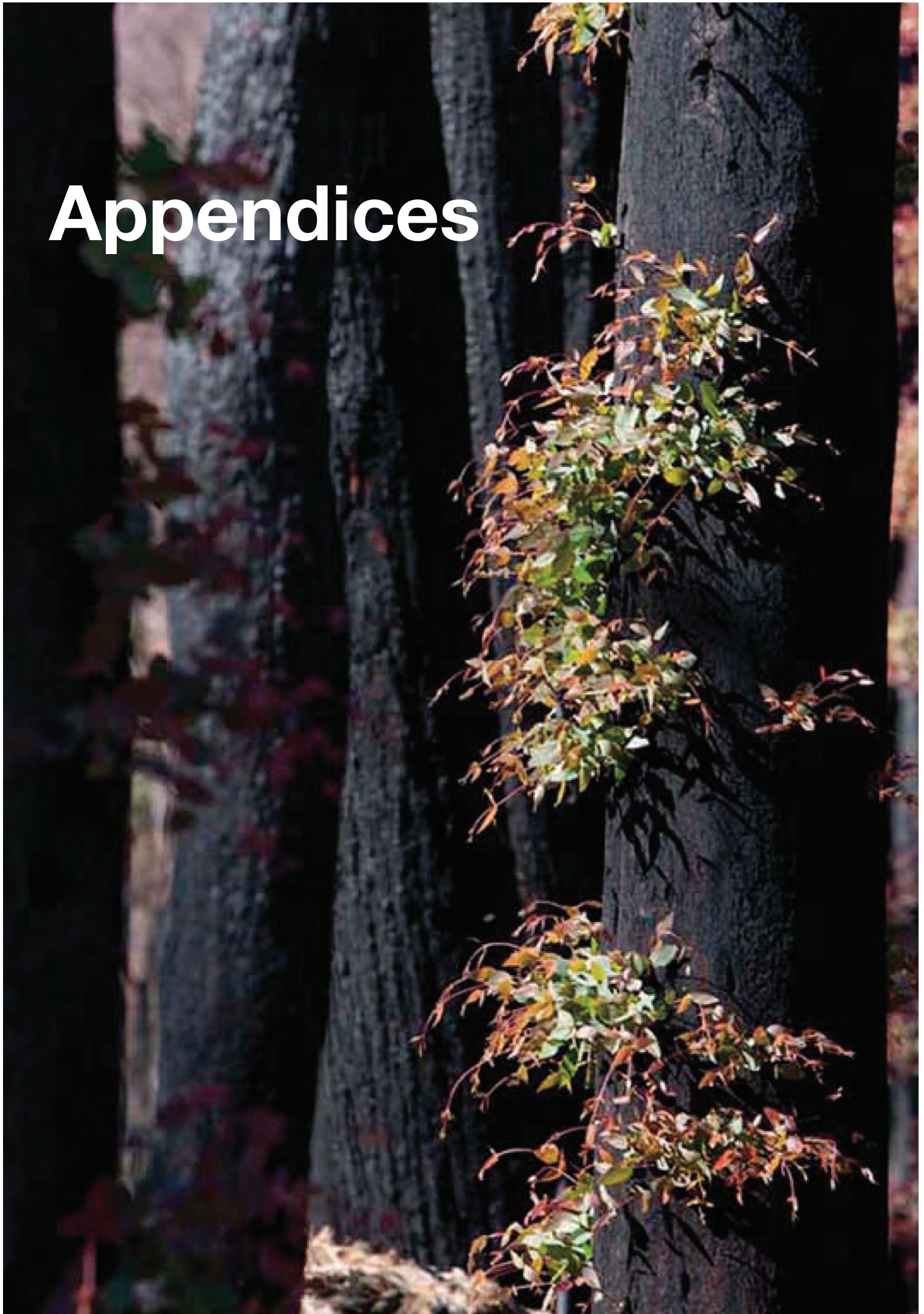
Government has a lead role to play in instilling public confidence and speeding up the recovery process. By quickly reopening or commencing reconstruction of schools, community buildings and other public infrastructure, local job generation and economic activity will result. The pace at which communities recover will often depend upon the effectiveness of government in implementing programs across the people, reconstruction, environment and economic dimensions of the disaster recovery framework.

Winding down the Authority

The final activity of the Authority is to bring to a close its own operation. This may not be as trivial as it sounds. Activities include:

- making arrangements for return of staff to their previous employer
- harvesting lessons learned and developing recommendations for the future
- packaging systems and processes for future use should they be required
- transferring ongoing functions to other parts of Government.

Appendices



Appendix 1

Disaster recovery framework – detailed



Appendix 2

A model for disaster recovery management

		Immediate post-disaster (short-term)	Plan (medium-term)	Recover (long-term)
Recovery framework	Community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact assessment Set up community shelters and contact hubs Conduct initial community meetings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish Community Recovery Committees Assign committee leaders Community meetings to provide information and understand needs for recovery and rebuild Community meetings and facilitation to identify and prioritise rebuild needs Conduct/facilitate community events (eg. entertainment, etc.) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing community recovery and planning meetings
	People	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact assessment Assign case managers Assist with emergency food, health and shelter arrangements Assist with short-term welfare support, including counselling 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Case management and welfare services Provide material aid via donations Facilitate financial support via financial support packages, insurance and donations fund Plan programs to support recovery of individuals and families 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing case management and welfare services Implement people programs as per Master Recovery Plan
	Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact assessment Remove immediate dangers (eg. trees, erosion, etc.) Assist/facilitate authorities responsible for roads, power, telecommunications, water, gas, etc. Assist with livestock and wildlife issues 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan programs for environmental recovery For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parks & wildlife Erosion control Water management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement environment programs as per Master Recovery Plan
	Economic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan economic recovery programs For example: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local business Tourism Re-skilling Agriculture and farming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement economic programs as per Master Recovery Plan
	Reconstruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Impact assessment Clean up dangerous sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement medium-term programs for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Temporary accommodation Property cleanup Confirm building regulations and any revisions Assess skills and materials available via donations Plan construction programs for community facilities, local government services, schools, infrastructure, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement reconstruction programs as per Master Recovery Plan
Authority operations	Program management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Confirm the scope, budget and powers of the Authority Confirm/refine the recovery strategy, framework for recovery and governance arrangements Activate the Authority, secure resources, secure facilities, activate pre-agreed service agreements Confirm roles and responsibilities of support agencies Confirm pro bono support resources and agreements Confirm donation fund arrangements Operationalise a PMO Daily 'all hands' operations and issues meeting Conduct an initial risk assessment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initiate, manage and monitor medium-term programs – eg. temporary accommodation, cleanup, etc. Compile a master plan of longer-term recovery programs Confirm and secure funding for recovery and rebuild programs Twice-weekly operations and issues meetings Refine risks and mitigation strategies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing monitoring and management of programs and the Master Recovery Plan Regular operations and issues meetings Ongoing risk management Harvest lessons learned Wind down the Authority upon completion
	Stakeholder management and communications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Announce leadership appointments Activate information lines and other communication channels (eg. web, radio, media, etc.) Announce financial donation process Manage high-profile stakeholders Develop stakeholder management and communication plan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate material aid and services donations process Ongoing publication of statistics, support services and processes Manage high-profile stakeholders Implement stakeholder management and communication plans 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing public reporting of progress
	Processes and systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide technology and communications support to community hubs Collect, publish and analyse impact data Operationalise technology support and core systems (eg. donations, case management, GIS, data collection and reporting, PMO, office systems, etc.) Develop/refine business processes for donations, logistics, procurement, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Capture donations of material aid and services Capture and match individual and community needs against donations Deliver material aid and services Data collection, analysis and reporting Systems support, development and maintenance Implement monitoring and reporting tools for medium- and long-term programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing donations management Ongoing data collection, analysis and reporting Ongoing systems and administrative support Decommission systems and facilities Package systems and processes for future use

Acknowledgments

This paper is the result of the experiences of the PwC team who worked with the Recovery Authority over the period February to June 2009. We consider it is important to share the lessons learned through the experience with the broader community around the world in the hope that it can add value to the recovery process of other disasters.

Throughout this paper we have referred to “the Authority” and we think it is important that we recognise the people behind the name. It is only through the dedication of the men and women who came together in the days after Black Saturday that the recovery process occurred. There are three people in particular who in our view require special mention:

Christine Nixon

Chair of VBRRA and former Chief Commissioner of Police

Christine was the face of the Authority and worked incredibly long and challenging hours in engagement with the community. In total there were 33 communities devastated by the Black Saturday Bushfires and Christine met with every one multiple times to ensure that their needs were taken into account and issues were addressed. It was her balance of sensitivity for the community and ability to engage coupled with leadership ability that resulted in real progress in recovery and delivered real outcomes for those affected in a very short period of time.

Jeff Rosewarne

Former CEO of VBRRA and COO Department of Education and Early Childhood Development

Jeff was asked by the Government to lead the bushfire recovery authority five days after Black Saturday. The fires would continue to burn for another 35 days, but Jeff started in the role and immediately began the process of building an effective team – out of nothing. Jeff had an uncanny ability to see a clear path forward through what many would see as a jumble. It was Jeff’s practical approach to “getting it done” which enabled the Authority to make it happen. Managing the input and contributions of 16 different Government Agencies and putting in place a workforce that focused on delivery and cutting through red tape made a major difference. The management of issues every morning by both Christine and Jeff with the entire team meant that everyone on the team had a clear view of what to focus on and what were the priorities.

Ben Hubbard

Current CEO Victorian Bushfire Recovery & Reconstruction Authority

Ben has led VBRRA for the last 13 months took over from Jeff in June 2009 and has achieved some amazing results through the process since then. This includes putting in place the Statewide recovery reconstruction plan, the establishment of regular engagement processes with affected communities and supporting local communities through a long period of recovery, including the matching of donor funding to community rebuilding projects. Ben continues in the role of CEO and working with both communities and three levels of government agencies to support and coordinate the recovery effort across Victoria.

We have no doubt that the recovery of Victoria is in large part attributable to the decisions the Government (both Federal and State) and the Premier took in the days immediately after Black Saturday as well as the dedication of the team to make it work.

The support provided by all levels of Government and the co-operation that existed between councils and Government Departments such as DHS was a significant factor in the positive progress.



The VBBRA team as at June 2009, led by Christine Nixon (front centre) and Jeff Rosewarne (standing on Christine's immediate left).

PwC would also like to thank the following individuals from VBBRA and the Victorian Government for making their time available to contribute their insights for this paper: Christine Nixon, Jeff Rosewarne, Ben Hubbard, Helen Silver, Adam Todhunter, Craig Lapsley, Penny Croser, Betsy Harrington and John Hanna.

We would stress that the opinions contained in this document are the opinions of PwC and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of those listed.

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GREG BARBER

Greg is an Executive Director within PwC Australia's Technology and Projects consulting practice. Greg is an IT and Program Management specialist with more than 24 years experience consulting to government and large corporate organisations throughout Australia and the Asia Pacific region. Greg led the PwC team at VBRRA which was responsible for establishing a recovery and reconstruction framework and governance structure, creating a capability to manage donation of goods and services, establishing and operating a Project Management Office, establishing an on-line property clean-up registration application, developing a data management strategy, and assisted in compiling the initial master plan for the long term recovery and reconstruction program.



MARK FULCHER

Mark is a Director within PwC Australia's Technology and Projects consulting practice. Mark has over fifteen years experience in business and IT consulting to government and the private sector in Australia, Asia and Europe. Mark created and led the initial Donations Management team within VBRRA, which won an award from the Institute of Public Administration Australia (IPAA) for Innovation in Policy Development for the Donations Management Needs-based Points System.

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