



# Campaspe Shire Council Submission: Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria

5 June 2023

## Introduction

Following wetter than average winter and spring periods, from 6 October 2022, heavy rainfall and severe thunderstorms resulted in riverine flooding across multiple river catchments in Victoria and NSW. Locally, this resulted in widespread major flooding along the Campaspe and Murray rivers which significantly impacted the townships of Rochester, Echuca, Gunbower, Torrumbarry and many other small rural communities within the Shire of Campaspe.

Some of the impacts included:

- 1 human death
- 728 animal deaths
- 2,800 properties impacted
- 58,007ha (45.80%) farm area impacted
- 1,887kms of fencing destroyed
- 32,224 tonnes of crops lost
- 27,807 tonnes of hay lost

In addition to the above, the wider economic, environmental and social impacts, and the toll on mental health and wellbeing, are incalculable and will be felt for years to come.

Rochester and district were hardest hit, with over 800 homes either damaged or uninhabitable. More than 70 per cent of residents are still not back in their home some seven months post the event. Of these, 250 households are living in caravans on their impacted properties, many are living in makeshift accommodation such as sheds, and many are living outside of the municipality.

At the time of writing, approximately 110 residents are also living at the Elmore Village. This village was established by the Victorian Government at the height of the floods and it housed 350 residents at its peak.

The village is due to close on 15 August and while Emergency Recovery Victoria is currently assisting residents to relocate into alternative accommodation, there is still some community concern and angst by those residents still residing at Elmore, about their immediate future.

From day one, Campaspe Shire Council has worked in partnership with the Victorian Government, agencies and local communities in delivering our key responsibilities of preparedness, response support and coordinating/leading relief services. And in recovery, we continue to work closely with our partners and impacted communities in navigating the short and longer-term needs, priorities and processes.

We are pleased to lodge this submission to the Victorian Parliament's Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee's Inquiry into the 2022 Flood Event in Victoria. We trust that the evidence, along with our collective insights and experiences, will positively contribute towards solutions that mitigate the frequency and severity of any future flood events.





# Responding to Terms of Reference

## 1: Causes and Contributors to the Flood Event

Traditional flooding in the Shire of Campaspe has involved singular flooding along the Campaspe catchment, the Murray Valley catchment or the Goulburn catchment. These flood events in the past have occurred independently, allowing water to drain into the Murray River with only localised and short-term effects on communities. The 2022 flood event involved all catchments flooding within a similar timeframe which resulted in the Murray system being at capacity and a backup of flood water in the Goulburn and Campaspe catchments. This caused a landscape event that lasted longer than authorities had predicted.

Campaspe Shire has a unique connection to the rivers – we see the meeting of the Goulburn and Murray rivers and connection of the Campaspe and Murray rivers further upstream, bringing with it significant beauty.

The shire is located at the heart of one of the richest and most diverse agriculture and processing regions in Victoria, and we are best known for our history, natural assets and relationships with Australia's iconic Murray River.

Across the Loddon Mallee Region (Macedon to Mildura) we have a unique flood history. Starting with flash flooding at the bottom of the region moving to sustained riverine flooding, to slow sustained expansive flooding across the upper region, resulting in much of our region dealing with all aspects of response, relief and recovery at the same time. During some events, a single municipality can be in all emergency phases at one time.

As a result of the heavy rainfall and severe thunderstorms across NSW and Victoria last October, widespread major flooding along the Campaspe and Murray rivers significantly impacted the townships of Rochester, Echuca, Gunbower, Torrumbarry and many other small rural communities within the shire.

The Campaspe River at Rochester peaked on 14 October 2022 and the Murray River peaked at Torrumbarry on 22 October 2023 and Echuca on 26 October 2022.

In Rochester, the unprecedented spill from Lake Eppalock, upstream on the Campaspe system where, on 14 October 2022, flows over all three spillways peaked at 103,000 ML/day – marking the largest flow ever recorded over the spillway. This was a major contributing factor.

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## 2: Adequacy and Effectiveness of Early Warning Systems

Campaspe Shire residents have expressed concern that they did not receive adequate warnings prior to being flooded.

Advice from the Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) didn't predict and advise the timing and potential of rainfall events, and predicted flood levels were at a level 400ml lower than what was actually attained.

While Campaspe residents were greatly affected by a flood event in 2011, new residents were unprepared for the impacts of a flood event.

Further, residents who lived through the 2011 event assumed that the 2022 event would be of similar impact and felt that they were adequately prepared. However, the impacts of

the 2022 event were wider spread and higher than in 2011, leaving those residents to underestimate the levels of flooding experienced.

In Rochester, despite door knocking of 700 homes in the lead up to the event by local CFA, SES and local Community House members, the majority of residents declined to leave due to what the prediction was and their previous experience in preparedness; the sentiment was, 'we know floods and how to prepare'.

Due to the unprecedented impact on Rochester, more than 100 swift water rescues occurred over a period of four days post the initial impact, relocating over 400 Rochester residents to both Echuca and Bendigo Emergency Relief Centres.

The VicEmergency App and website played a significant role in the confusion of the public and Council staff. Data was inaccurate and slow to be updated. Rather than a single source of truth / or access to factual information, social media became the primary source of information for residents. As is the nature of social media, rumour and misinformation can take the place of authorised information from lead agencies.

Reliability of internet and mobile reception in the lead up to an emergency is difficult in rural areas, and relying on an app and website creates challenges for residents.

Clarity on watch and act alerts, evacuation areas and other warnings is required, as residents expressed confusion in what each warning meant, treating them as advice only rather than an articulated warning to leave the area.

By contrast, warning systems around Echuca and other towns ultimately not impacted by the floods, were left up entirely too long, leading to residents being displaced unnecessarily,

businesses being unable to operate, and continued impact on tourists and visitors.

Neither Council nor residents could adequately rely on river heights reported by the BOM. They are not connected into local Catchment Management Authorities which have better local knowledge and understanding of river heights and flood plains.

Council is also concerned that the BOM has announced a 12-month delay for the roll out of early warning systems for floods due to the upgrade of Bureau-owned assets nationally and from the impacts of the floods. There are currently no timeframes for local government to understand when handover of responsibility for maintaining high-priority rain and water level gauges will occur. Councils' capacity to maintain these markers in a rate capping environment is challenging. As a sector, local government is not responsible for early warning systems, which conflicts with having to provide markers and gauges.

Warning system structures that measured levels and water velocities were washed away with the initial flow.

Warnings during the 2022 event were extremely broad and created concerns within the community that led to a response and a great deal of effort.

In particular:

- Community members within the Torrumbarry area created levees independently based on historical knowledge with a disconnection from the established Incident Control Centre (ICC).
- Many community members around Echuca went to enormous efforts sandbagging based on evacuation and warning advice that was not targeted. This led to angst within the community and resulted in enormous waste and recovery activities.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 1. Ensure that the VicEmergency app and VicEmergency website are accurate and provide timely warnings that give people the opportunity to prepare and plan.***
- 2. Ensure VicEmergency app and VicEmergency websites are adaptive and reflective of community need - addressing challenges of low literacy, language barriers, connectivity issues and are not a standalone function of engagement and decision making during a crisis.***
- 3. The introduction of a National Warning System and ongoing community engagement required. Organisations need to review and stay abreast of innovative strategies and provide appropriate consultations meeting the demand and expectations of community.***
- 4. Improve the sharing of information between agencies, role clarity and expectations, lack of agency awareness regarding the long-term impacts on community and appropriate messaging to go out with warnings.***
- 5. Improve digital connectivity across rural areas to address blackspots, including around key community hubs.***
- 6. Review/update/resource flood plans reflecting clear triggers for preparedness and response.***
- 7. Explore the way centrally-managed data is informed by local knowledge to ensure warnings are accurate and support informed decision-making.***
- 8. Review the Total Flood Warning System and councils' role in providing gauges and markers.***

### **3: Resourcing the State Emergency Service**

The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) has several critical roles in Victoria's emergency management arrangements, including leading flood planning and response. Both the agency and its volunteer units are highly valued by Campaspe Shire Council.

The efforts of the VICSES as a whole should not be understated – they provided enormous levels of support to residents and councils alike. Campaspe Shire Council is grateful for the efforts of the VICSES through this event.

However, it is apparent that the VICSES is under resourced and unable to adequately respond to a major flood event.

There are significant challenges faced by the SES, which is a volunteer organisation and ultimately responsible to a board. This structure creates a slowdown of decision-making, and limits incident controllers' ability to make decisions, particularly decisions which have a significant monetary cost.

The prolonged nature of the 2022 event meant crews and controllers were significantly fatigued and unable to provide the level of support required across the breadth of the event.

The burden on local SES crews, which struggle for members outside of events, is enormous.

Throughout the floods in Campaspe Shire, there was significant disconnection/lack of clarity of the roles and responsibilities, and communication pathway of the Divisional Command (DivCom) and the Bendigo Incident Control Centre (ICC). Command and control structures were not followed or potentially understood by the local volunteers (both SES and CFA) and other agencies, resulting in significant and timely communication gaps between the localised and ICC decision-making and challenges faced by agencies stepping outside of their span of control, making decisions without considering all information required.

Appreciating the need to manage worker fatigue through shift rotation, with the frequent turnover of ICC Incident Management Teams (IMT), there were significant challenges with change and the repetitive nature of information and often delayed decision-making, creating frustration, and contributing to the disconnect. Regrettably, local government did not have the same ability to rotate workers, and the significant number of Campaspe Shire Council officers who were personally impacted by the floods added an additional layer of complexity in terms of heightening fatigue levels and the ability to respond to other agencies in a timely manner.

There is also significant concern regarding vulnerable residents and the adequacy of planning and preparedness to support these people during large-scale events. The Vulnerable Persons Register (VPR) is one component of supporting residents, however

due to the stringent nature of eligibility criteria only a small percentage of community members are eligible. The majority of highly vulnerable residents are not supported by this system and those that are registered, the flow of information to agencies is not timely nor supported by robust person-centred planning by agencies to support residents within emergency scenarios.

The current VPR system creates a challenging scenario of complacency during disasters as agencies and communities alike hold a false sense of comfort, thinking that the system is established, embedded and well planned for supporting vulnerable people during times of stress.

Making councils responsible for holding this list but asking funded agencies to enter the information means that the lists are not complete and this creates significant gaps where the person is not in “the system” and therefore not on the VPR. More needs to be done to ensure vulnerable people are considered a priority in an emergency, and to support them if they need to be evacuated. Campaspe did not have an adequate facility to house vulnerable people through the ERC and temporary arrangements were not appropriate.

VICSES facilitates Community Emergency Risk Assessments (CERA), addressing all hazards at multi-agency Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPCs), which form the basis of planning priorities documented in Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMPs). Currently, risks are identified; however, limited resources and capacity are dedicated to mitigation planning, education and infrastructure.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 9. Resource the State Emergency Service to ensure it can sufficiently fulfill its planning and control agency role in response to major flooding, align with delegation and functions with like response agencies, establishing robust plans and processes.***
- 10. Ensure that government and emergency services systems and command and control structures support a swift and equitable response across communities.***
- 11. Review Victorian Emergency Management structures to ensure clear leadership and roles/responsibilities to adapt to all campaign style events.***
- 12. Implement targeted education and community engagement in high-risk flood areas so that residents better understand how to prepare and take appropriate response mechanisms to protect themselves and their properties from flood damage.***
- 13. Review the VPR and emergency arrangements for people on the register to see them given priority.***
- 14. Fund and legislate agencies to ensure adequate training for staff to support vulnerable people and person-centred emergency preparedness.***
- 15. Strengthen Emergency Risk Assessment processes at state, regional and community level sand resource mitigation planning and action.***

#### **4: Victorian Flood Plain Management Strategy Delivery and Effectiveness**

It is noted that the 2016 Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy aimed to:

- Provide access to better quality mapping to support emergency services response and recovery.
- Assist councils to implement water management schemes for flood mitigation infrastructure.
- Clarify the arrangements for flood warning systems, with the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) as the oversight agency and providing direction for new flood gauges to be included as part of the water monitoring partnership.
- Clarify the arrangements for the management of urban and rural flood mitigation infrastructure.
- Plan for stormwater management and reduce smaller scale flooding over the medium to longer term.
- Increase access to information to encourage flood insurance to be taken up commensurate with an individual's risk.
- Provide guidance for preparing Regional Floodplain Management Strategies based on a risk assessment framework.
- Increase land-use planning coverage for areas in the 1 per cent Annual Exceedance Probably (AEP).



Given the impact of the 2022 flood, Council does not consider that the strategy has been well implemented. The strategy's effectiveness in relation to the 2022 flood event does not consider the issues experienced in rural areas and the vast impacts flooding has on agriculture, productivity, and economic and social stability.

It does not consider:

- Remediation of breaches to rural levee banks that have the greatest impact.
- Standing water removal.
- A plan to manage hyper-saline lakes.

- Significant cultural heritage sites.
- Strategic drainage outlet locations.

Furthermore, the strategy has failed in its aim to work in partnership with communities to be better prepared for future floods and to improve sharing of high-quality flood risk information.

In addition, the North Central Regional Floodplain Management Strategy 2018-2028 and the high-level work plan requires review in consultation with local government to ensure that there is a guide for future investment priorities for the remaining five-year timeframe.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

***16. Ensure that the North Central Regional Floodplain Management Strategy 2018-2028 reflects the 2022 flood and that the high-level work plan is updated in consultation with local government to guide future investment priorities for the remaining five-year timeframe of the current plan.***

***17. Review the 2016 Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy review in collaboration with Local Government.***

## **5: Location, Funding, Maintenance and Effectiveness of Engineered Structures, Such as Floodwalls, Rural Levees and Culverts, as a Flood Mitigation Strategy**

It is abundantly clear that there is a lack of leadership and ownership when discussing mitigation efforts surrounding floods.

Floodplain management strategies should not assign responsibilities to councils to provide more engineered structures as solutions to mitigate flooding without acknowledging and addressing councils' and communities' financial constraints and addressing the liability provisions in the Water Act.

Council does not have the resources or expertise to be able to fully mitigate flood waters, and only has control over its own municipality. Flood waters do not respect municipal borders.

Council also has no control over crown land, managed by several other agencies and authorities.

More investment is required on long-term mitigation efforts to greatly reduce the need for response and recovery efforts.

Once an event has occurred, Council is required to access the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements Scheme (DRFA).

This process provides councils with reimbursement for funds spent to conduct emergency works on damaged critical infrastructure immediately, while undertaking reviews of damaged assets completing repair works over a period of time. This scheme does not currently allow for betterment of assets, requiring a like-for-like replacement. It stands to reason that if Council is required to undertake assessments of roads damaged by flooding and can see an engineering solution that could protect that asset (and others around it) that it would rebuild that asset with



that in mind. The current DRFA does not fund councils to conduct this work.

### Temporary Levees

Several kilometres of emergency sandbagging and earthen levees were constructed throughout Echuca and Torrumbarry to reduce flood impacts on the townships, with a 3km temporary levee within the Echuca township and a nearly 18km levee in Torrumbarry through to Gunbower constructed with the help and guidance of locals. Residents have little understanding of who is the control agency in an event and hold Council responsible for the construction of temporary levees to help save properties. Temporary levees then become incredibly contentious, as some residents want them retained in perpetuity, even when they cross or damage critical infrastructure. Council is at the behest of the ICC as to when temporary levees go in and where they are placed. In the absence of strong and timely leadership and decision-making from the ICC, residents will take it upon themselves to create

temporary levees, with little understanding of the potential knock-on effects of a levee.

Temporary levees placed in Campaspe created significant community angst and anger. While they were effective in some capacity, and placed with the best of intentions, they always have unintended consequences or are placed with the understanding that they will save much property at the detriment to some.

Following these critical decisions, there was an unwillingness of agencies to own these decisions. Miscommunication and finger pointing followed, creating more community angst.

Clear planning around temporary levees is needed with wide community consultation so that there is wide community acceptance and understanding on temporary levees, when they would be required and who is responsible for their placement, and ultimate repatriation of the area post event.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 18. Change the 'like-for-like' policy position with a 'build back better' policy position under the Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) so that mistakes of the past are not repeated in the future. This system should be modelled on the Queensland application of DRFA.***
- 19. Review of current Federal/State Emergency Management structures to ensure mitigation/preparedness activities reduce the need to respond/recover to complex and compounding emergency events.***
- 20. The State and/or Federal Government establish a centrally-funded or coordinated, pre-disaster mitigation assessment of infrastructure.***

## 6: Flood Event as a Whole, Including the Catchments and Floodplains of the (d) Campaspe River, (e) Goulburn River and (h) Murray River

There have been more than 16 significant floods since 1867 in Campaspe Shire, caused by overflows from the Campaspe, Murray and Goulburn rivers.

Flooding can occur on one river or be caused by a combination of all three rivers. Historically,

the worst floods are from a combination of flooded rivers rather than just one. The 2022 event saw all three rivers flood.

Campaspe Shire Council contends that changes in infrastructure development over many years, combined with an unknown

release of flows from Lake Eppalock, created unpredictable water movement across the landscape.

Following wetter than average winter and spring periods, from 6 October 2022, heavy rainfall and severe thunderstorms resulted in riverine flooding across multiple river catchments in Victoria and NSW. Locally, this resulted in widespread major flooding along the Campaspe and Murray rivers which significantly impacted the townships of Rochester, Echuca, Gunbower, Torrumbarry and many other small rural communities within the Shire of Campaspe.

The 2022 flooding event involved all catchments flooding within a similar timeframe which resulted in the Murray system being at capacity and a backup of flood water in the Goulburn and Campaspe catchments, and a landscape event that lasted longer than authorities had predicted, with results that included:

- Many smaller communities and individual properties impacted and isolated.
- Associated impacts on region-wide transport and road networks, water and sewerage services, agriculture and livestock.
- Significant economic and social disruption, including community wellbeing.
- Waste and landfill issues to deal with flood debris.
- School closure due to an inability to access the premises.
- Mental health and wellbeing issues for displaced persons and flood-affected communities.
- A need for fodder and animal health.
- Concern with mosquito numbers including potential agricultural effects.
- Significant damage to major and minor roads across the region.
- The construction of unauthorised levees across the landscape causing a significant impact to assets and infrastructure.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 21. Review the Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy.***
- 22. Implement targeted education and community engagement in high-risk flood areas so that residents better understand how to prepare and take appropriate response mechanisms.***
- 23. Update resource flood plans reflecting clear triggers for preparedness and response.***

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## **7: Flemington Raceway**

This is not relevant to Campaspe Shire Council so no comments are made.

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## 8: The Implications for Future Planning Decisions, Including:

### (a) how the Victorian planning framework can ensure climate mitigation is a consideration in future planning decisions

There is a clear distinction between recent houses constructed pursuant to the Campaspe Planning Scheme and those which have been in situ for a significant period of time.

Houses built recently have been subject to the Land Subject to Inundation Overlay and are raised at least 300mm above the designated 100-year AEP flood level as shown on the Rural Water Commission Plan No.135897.

The Land Subject to Inundation Overlay (LSIO) seeks to identify flood prone land in a riverine or coastal area affected by the 1 in 100 (1 per cent Annual Exceedance Probability) year flood or any other area determined by the floodplain management authority:

- To ensure that development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwaters, minimises flood damage, responds to the flood hazard and local drainage conditions and will not cause any significant rise in flood level or flow velocity.
- To minimise the potential flood risk to life, health and safety associated with development.
- To reflect a declaration under Division 4 of Part 10 of the Water Act, 1989.
- To protect water quality and waterways as natural resources by managing urban stormwater, protecting water supply catchment areas, and managing saline discharges to minimise the risks to the environmental quality of water and groundwater.
- To ensure that development maintains or improves river, marine, coastal and wetland health, waterway protection and floodplain health.

The Floodway Overlay (FO) seeks to identify waterways, major flood paths, drainage depressions and high hazard areas which have the greatest risk and frequency of being affected by flooding:

- To ensure that any development maintains the free passage and temporary storage of floodwater, minimises flood damage and is compatible with flood hazard, local drainage conditions and the minimisation of soil erosion, sedimentation and silting.
- To reflect any declarations under Division 4 of Part 10 of the Water Act, 1989 if a declaration has been made.
- To protect water quality and waterways as natural resources by managing urban stormwater, protecting water supply catchment areas, and managing saline discharges to minimise the risks to the environmental quality of water and groundwater.
- To ensure that development maintains or improves river and wetland health, waterway protection and flood plain health.

The implementation of the Planning Scheme relies on other authorities for information that make up the planning provisions, such as Catchment Management Authorities.

However, what is needed is for the State Government to implement a consistent state-wide planning approach to flood inundation to direct development away from flood prone areas.

The 2022 flood emergency highlighted the urgent need to reform Victoria's planning system to direct development away from flood-prone areas to protect lives, property and fragile environments. Unfortunately, the current approach to implementing flood studies through the planning scheme amendment process on a town-by-town, council-by-council basis results in inconsistent and often substandard outcomes.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 24. That the State reinstate Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs) as 'determining referral authorities' under Section 55 of the Planning and Environment Act and in all planning schemes.***
- 25. That the State implements a consistent state-wide planning approach to flood and coastal inundation, similar to the current bushfire arrangements, with the Minister for Planning made responsible for implementing best-available flood and inundation data into planning schemes. This must be supported by ongoing review, the provision of clear policy direction, and updating of overlays and planning provisions to ensure development is appropriate to current and future risk.***

**b) how corporate interests may influence decision-making at the expense of communities and climate change preparedness.**

Lake Eppalock serves as a crucial water resource for Bendigo with a fixed spillway that can only release 50 megalitres of water per day for environmental reasons. However, the current inability to regulate water levels has contributed to an incident where the lake reached its capacity, resulting in a flood event that particularly affected Rochester and surrounds.

Recent studies in hydrology and damage assessments indicate that a significant benefit could be achieved by reducing the peak flow rate by approximately 200m<sup>3</sup>/S. This reduction

would transform the current 1% Annual Exceedance Probability (AEP) flood event into a 2% AEP flood event, likely reducing the number of properties flooded above the floor from 266 to 157. Consequently, damages would decrease by around \$4 million in the 1% AEP design flood.

While acknowledging the presence of competing interests, Council believes that greater emphasis should be placed on prioritising public safety over commercial water interests.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 26. That the State thoroughly explores and establishes a balanced approach that considers both corporate interests and the insights derived from flood studies. This approach should also address the future mitigation measures required to fulfill public safety obligations. The goal is to provide the community with reassurances regarding equitable consideration of corporate, private and community interests while ensuring that public safety takes precedence in the face of extreme weather events.***



## 9: Other Related Matters

### Operation of Emergency Relief Centres

The Echuca Emergency Relief Centre (ERC) (Basketball Stadium) was opened for 35 days with approximately 340 residents presenting to the site. About 220 residents were relocated to the regional based Bendigo Emergency Relief Centre (Bendigo Showgrounds) to manage the increased numbers, emerging health crisis and limited resources within the isolated town of Echuca.

The Bendigo Emergency Relief Centre was open for 16 days, catering for residents across the region; predominantly Campaspe, Loddon and Gannawarra, with extensive services within the centre to manage the flood and evolving (mental & physical) health crisis.

Councils would normally plan to open ERCs for a maximum of seven days. Having to open and staff an ERC for such a long period of time created a significant burden on Campaspe Council and its staff.

While Council sought support from other municipalities, it was resource intensive to find,

induct and house support staff to assist at the ERCs.

Council resources were also stretched thin because a large number of other councils also experienced flooding, and requested support from other municipalities.

Consistent and regular training is required in every municipality to ensure that councils can stand up ERCs in the future and are appropriately funded to run them.

Funding is also required to ensure each municipality has appropriate venues which can be used as ERCs, including appropriate power, food preparation facilities and adequate sleeping facilities.

Given the length of time in operation, Council and its support partners struggled to ensure it could supply adequate resources and personnel. State organisations and support agencies were unpredictable with their presence and support commitments.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 27. State/Federal government support, resource and fund local government to ensure Emergency Relief Centres (ERCs) are fit for purpose and support complex community needs, including planning for escalation of requirement for regional based ERCs to support vulnerable communities.***
- 28. State/federal government fund/resource appropriate local government emergency management training that aligns to EM agency doctrine and embedding cross agency roles and responsibilities as part of annual exercising and review.***
- 29. Review traditional relief and recovery agencies roles and responsibilities ensuring they are fit for purpose and progressive to meet the needs of complex community and sustained emergency events, reducing the fatigue one agencies and volunteers.***
- 30. All tiers of government to establish preparedness planning regarding short to medium term temporary accommodation, supporting residents to be actively involved in recovery within own community.***

## **Initial Impact Assessment (IIA) Secondary Impact Assessments (SIA)**

The flow of information from control agencies (first impact assessment) has consistently been slow or non-existent, making secondary impact assessments a significantly more difficult task for Council to complete. Around 720 initial impact assessments were completed immediately after the event.

Given the breadth of the event, Council has conducted approximately 2,800 secondary impact assessments (SIAs), which, given the relative size of Campaspe Shire Council's workforce, has been a considerable task.

Once those secondary impact assessments were completed, Council then had a statutory obligation to prohibit occupation of properties which were not fit for human habitation, causing significant angst for residents already suffering from a devastating natural disaster.

Given a large number of residents had relocated from their dwelling, accessing

properties for the purpose of SIAs has been incredibly difficult and resulted in a number of SIAs not being completed, or completed without entering buildings or speaking to residents.

Campaspe is still becoming aware of properties impacted which have not yet been assessed through the SIA process.

Residents are often confused about the SIA process, and hesitant to allow Council to complete them, given the possibility that Council may have to issue notices to prohibit occupation or undertake works.

The availability of qualified staff to undertake SIAs is a significant challenge, including the availability of municipal building surveyors and environmental health officers. Appropriate and qualified crisis support officers are also difficult to source on scale.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 31. Review state/local emergency management databases to link and share relevant data across agencies, including local government Crisisworks system and EM drive portal.***
- 32. Review the current SIA processes to improve the quality and timely nature of data collection, aligning with significant time and financial commitment to quality of data collected.***
- 33. State/local governments develop an SIA process, embedding into preparedness exercising.***

## **Issues with Insurance**

Residents have experienced significant delays with the repair of their dwellings and properties. Residents are being advised that there may be a 18 – 24 month period before their properties are repaired.

Furthermore, there are significant concerns about properties being deemed "uninsurable".

This adds to the significant burden and stress associated with this flood event for residents.

**Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:**

- 34. A review of the insurance system, and its capability in a significant event.**
- 35. A cap on insurance premiums post an event, to ensure they are affordable for residents impacted by large scale events**
- 36. The Federal Government to consider being an insurer of last resort.**

## Resourcing of Councils

It is important that there is adequate resourcing and staffing of agencies to undertake their role appropriately in an emergency situation of this magnitude.

Knowledge sharing, training and system exercising is required to build capacity across the state to respond to large-scale flooding. The Local Government Liaison Officer in the ICC needs to have local knowledge, and be adequately trained to understand their role and purpose.

There also seems to be a lack of understanding by government, and indeed emergency authorities, of what councils' legislated role is in an emergency. Councils are not resourced to upscale to respond to an emergency of such magnitude or to respond to the myriad of requests.

There were issues experienced regarding the credibility of information being released to the community.

There is a need for the State Government to better understand the roles and responsibilities of all authorities, government departments, and local government in responding to emergencies. Ensuring that all are appropriately resourced to undertake this work is essential to future planning.

This requires clear messaging from the State Government on who does what in an emergency, and the role and function of each area. This ownership would lessen finger pointing and provide residents accurate and up to date information.

**Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:**

- 37. Local governments' roles and responsibilities throughout all phases of emergencies are significant and currently not supported with appropriate levels of funding, resourcing, and training to align to state and federal doctrines/planning (e.g. AIIIMS). With increasing impacts of climate change and concurrency of emergencies, the expectation on local government is increasing; however, strengthening capacity and capability is not being addressed.**

## Cross Border Challenges

As a nation we are experiencing more frequent, intense and concurrent disasters, creating significant strain on local communities

and resources. The capacity to respond to and recover from these events is becoming increasingly challenging as we continue to see

heightened risk and vulnerability across community including increased poverty, inequality, climate change, poor land management and non-risk-informed policies.

The emergency management sector nationally relies on individual and varying structures that are not equipped to manage the new 'normal' for natural disasters and emergencies, and lack a unified, coordinated approach to disaster management and risk reduction. As a sector, it is acknowledged that disasters have no boundaries, making it challenging and complex to navigate across state and territory borders. Lack of consistency in approach to disaster management and risk reduction reduces the focus on consequence management, impacting community relief and recovery.

The challenges highlighted by the October flood event have also been significant barriers for communities throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. As a border community, there is a pressing need for a consistent and coordinated approach to systems and communications, and access to equitable services. This ensures that communities are not excluded from established community networks and their day-to-day activities.

During the event, both communities and agencies faced several challenges, including:

- Differing emergency relief systems within NSW and Victoria, leading to confusion and difficulties in providing support for relief needs in the short and medium term.
- Communication / information discrepancies, such as varying water boil notices between Moama (NSW) and Echuca (Victoria).
- Differing emergency relief systems within NSW and Victoria, leading to confusion.
- Accessing cross-border relief programs.
- Navigating differing relief funding systems across state and territory.

Despite these challenges, there were some successful instances of cross-border collaboration, such as positive communication and cooperation in managing council operational responses, including waste management and sandbagging.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

***38. Federal/State government conducts a comprehensive review of emergency management processes nationally with the aim of aligning processes and reduce barriers that hinder community resilience and support all phases of emergencies.***

## **Flood Waste**

The environmental toll and creation of waste from an event of this magnitude is significant.

Waste management has been a challenge through all phases of the flood event. Significant levels of red tape and lack of structural process and clarity of lead within this

space has created a significant toll emotionally, financially, and the future impacts on climate across community and agencies alike.

The flood impacted multiple waste facilities both in terms of the significant volume of waste that was received and access to the facilities.



For instance, landfill airspace was a challenge during the event with Patho landfill not being accessible and Eaglehawk Resource Recovery Centre forced to turn away loads due to airspace running out. Access to landfill not only impacted the disposal of flood waste but also business-as-usual kerbside collections were compounded by the closure of two local organic processing facilities: Biomix and Western Composting due to flood-related access issues.

Obligations under the Environment Protection Act 2017 and requirement of section 157 (s157) exemptions added additional complications. The intent of exemptions granted were admirable; however, didn't meet the needs of the evolving waste disposal challenges.

Issues were experienced with JLG commencing operations within Rochester township four days post initial impact; however, Rochester residents had mobilised clean up from the next day. Local government was put in a challenging position managing community expectations as well as meeting legislative obligations and regulations, while managing reactive external agencies, without clear planning, processes or localised knowledge or connection.

The Mount Scobie JLG Waste facility has been established to support flood waste receipt and processing, to maximise diversion to landfill in accordance with the Circular Economy Act 2021. However, due to Federal Government funding constraints, the facility cannot be

utilised by commercial operators which is in direct contradiction to the Circular Economy Act. While commercial operators can take advantage of the free flood waste levy waiver provided by DEECA, they have little interest in paying another facility to process the waste and reduce the impact on landfill. Future planning to address this is critical to ensure we utilise and maximise the value of investment into a fit-for-purpose emergency waste site that services multiple LGAs within regional Victoria and meets our legislative obligations and regulations.

Review and future proofing sites requires a multi-government approach and to be considered a priority. Sites such as Patho landfill and Biomix (organic waste) were cut off for significant periods of time due to road access being heavily flood-impacted. Currently, roads to access these sites are managed by local government; however, to maintain and improve the road infrastructure to a future standard that will withstand flood impacts, requires significant and ongoing investment and maintenance. This is a heavy burden on local government and ratepayers to invest and maintain, and requires State Government management as the site is used from councils across the state.

Consideration needs to be made to the Circular Economy Act 2021 and the Environment Protection Act 2017, and the impact these Acts have on flood waste and the removal and disposal of flood waste.

***Based on the above, Campaspe Shire Council suggests the following points for consideration:***

- 39. All tiers of government to prioritise the development of an Emergency Event Waste Management plan that aligns with new Circular Economy Act 2021 and the Environment Protection (EP) Act 2017, meeting all local and state legislative obligations and best practice. Embedding and exercising waste management in all phases preparedness, response, relief, recovery as a multi-agency obligation.***
- 40. Include waste management into agency readiness arrangements, including pre-approved locations, equipment on standby to set up emergency transfer stations.***