



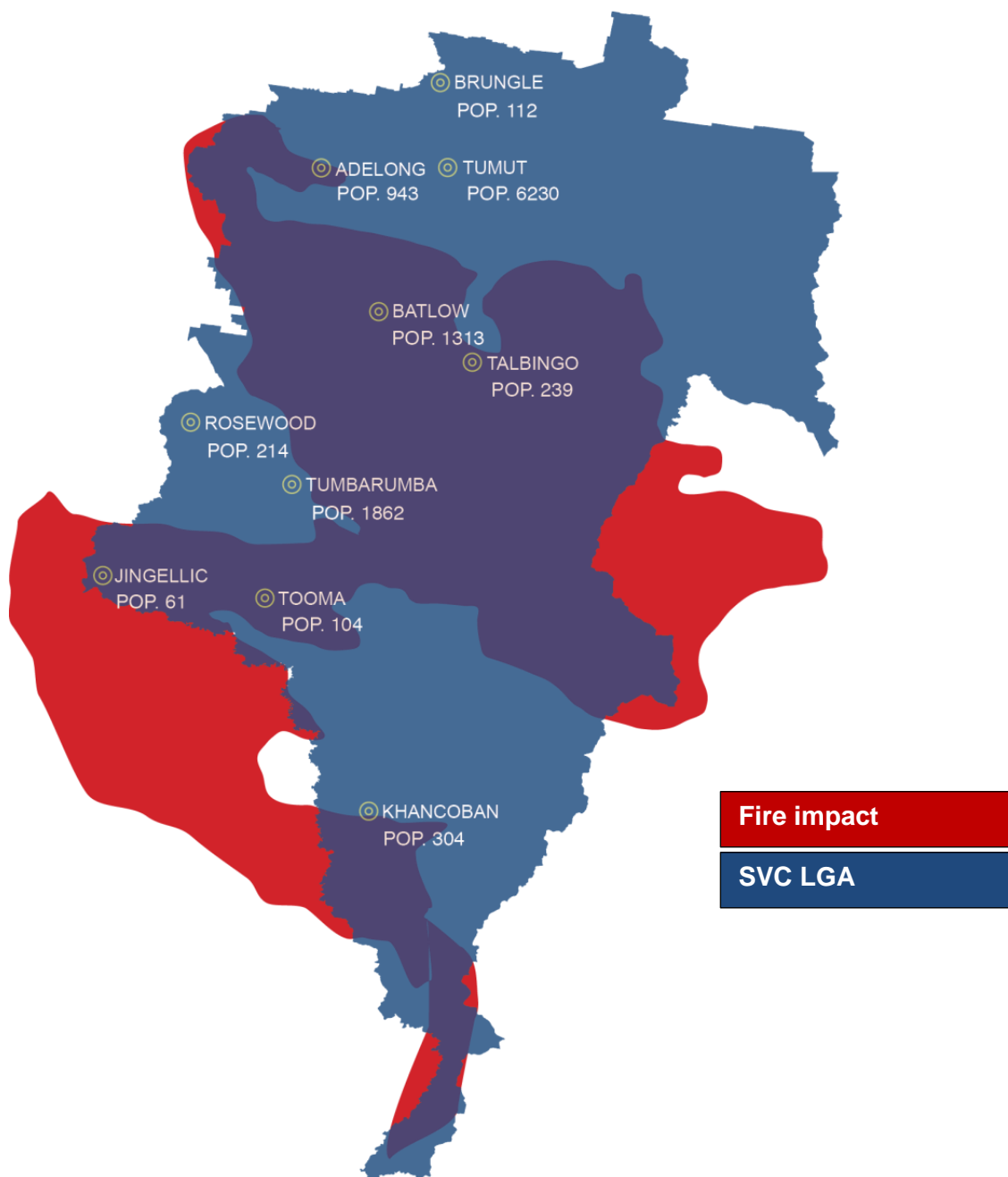
**RESPONSE TO ISSUES PAPER
ROYAL COMMISSION
INTO NATURAL DISASTER ARRANGEMENTS**

18 June 2020

Introduction

Snowy Valleys Council is located on the South West Slopes of the Riverina in NSW and was heavily impacted from fire during the summer of 2019-2020.

The Dunn's Road Fire and The Green's Valley Fire joined to create one 'mega' fire. The fire burnt through 402,650ha of land over 50 days, or the equivalent of 45% of the LGA.



Snowy Valleys – Snapshot of Impact

*Resilience NSW - BIA as of March 2020

193 Houses Destroyed

49 Houses Damaged

35 Facilities Destroyed

15 Facilities Damaged

612 Outbuildings Destroyed

186 Outbuildings Damaged

749 Impacted Rural Landholders

1 Fatality

12 Injuries (three serious and nine minor)

Snowy Valleys Council welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements in response to the issues paper on *Local governments and natural disaster*.

Royal Commission Issues Paper – Local Government and Natural Disaster

Snowy Valleys Council offers the following responses to the six questions posed in the Royal Commission Issues Paper – Local Government and Natural Disaster.

Question 1

a. What information do local governments have access to and rely on in preparing natural disaster management plans, conducting risk assessments and in otherwise preparing for natural disasters?

- *STATE EMERGENCY AND RESCUE MANAGEMENT ACT 1989*
- Resilience NSW guidelines, legislation and policies for emergency management
- Information supplied through the operation of the Local Emergency Management Committee
- Mapping and other geographic information
- ABS census data and community profile information
- LEP and other strategic planning documents
- Rates and Property information
- Forecast weather data from BOM
- Other emergency services and combat agencies
- Business Continuity Plans
- Flood Studies

b. What information do local governments rely on in assessing the impact of natural disasters?

- Combat agency information – impact assessments
- Insurance company assessments
- On site assessment by field staff for council infrastructure
- Federal and State Government agency assessments
- Asset registers
- Aerial photography and mapping
- Community and individual resident feedback
- Industry groups
- Information supplied by other land managers – Forestry, Crown, Parks
- Media

c. How can the information available to, and relied on by, local governments be improved to assist their role in planning for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters?

- One centralised point – single point of truth with clarity around roles and responsibilities
- Access to other agency data through established data sharing agreements between all three levels of government with consideration given to privacy and personal information
- Stakeholders having clear and known accountability for the data that they are responsible for to avoid duplication
- Testing and validation of data in ‘desktop’ exercises for preparing for emergency
- Funding for permanent emergency management personnel in Councils
- Cross border arrangements to be better coordinated and agreed in advance- systems, liaison officers, etc
- Clear authority given to Council’s communication function to collate and distribute information relating to response through the operation of the Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) - EOC structure currently does not support a communication function
- Strengthen Local Government’s role in the EOC in relation to community information (currently limited to provision of executive support under *STATE EMERGENCY AND RESCUE MANAGEMENT ACT 1989 - SECT 32*)

d. To what extent is the information referred to in (a) and (b) shared or coordinated with other local governments and with the community?

- Poorly and to a limited extent with little coordination or agreement between major stakeholders
- Over reliance on combat agency sharing information regularly – this will be dependent on nature and severity of emergency event
- In relation to Local Government who share a state border, there is limited to no sharing of information, exacerbating the inconsistencies in emergency management between states and territories
- Inconsistency in provision of agency information – no centralised or coordinated communication function or channel

- It is not clear who is responsible to communicate information to the community outside of the combat agency messaging (including agreed channels and authority)

Question 2

a. What is the responsibility of local governments for communicating with, and educating their communities about, natural disaster risks, preparedness, response and recovery?

- Inconsistencies between the phases of emergency – Council has accountability for recovery, but no lead authority over preparedness and response (as per the *STATE EMERGENCY AND RESCUE MANAGEMENT ACT 1989*)
- There is an expectation that council will have a lead role in facilitating communication, however Council has no authority to take a lead role in this function during emergency response with the exception of impacts on council managed infrastructure – road closures
- Council's ability to communicate is restricted to what information can be obtained or is shared by other agencies
- Recovery is also targeted to the event so it is difficult for this to be communicated and educated about prior to the disaster

b. How is this put into effect?

- Standard communication channels

c. How could this communication and education be improved?

- Need for a coordinated and consistent approach with clearly defined roles and accountabilities
- Recognition of the role Local Government plays in being forward facing within the community during emergency and a trusted and known source of information

Question 3 Are local governments provided with sufficient guidance, training and standards to perform their role in relation to natural disaster mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery?

- In relation to emergency response – there is training by the state for staff supplied to the EOC for executive support, however training is offered irregularly so often new staff called to the EOC have to learn on the job
- No training support for recovery or preparedness
- Under *STATE EMERGENCY AND RESCUE MANAGEMENT ACT 1989*– Local Government's role is limited to the provision of executive support to the EOC and participation in the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) as a stakeholder
- Council's aren't resourced for permanent emergency/recovery management/coordination

Question 4 How can local governments ensure accountability for, and compliance with, land-use planning or hazard management obligations designed to mitigate and increase resilience to natural hazard risks?

- This is impossible for land for which we have no jurisdiction such as National Parks State Water and Forests etc. Of the 8960 square kilometres that comprise the Snowy Valleys LGA, 5898 square kilometres, or 66% is unrateable. This unrateable area includes national parks, state forests and reserves, of which a large portion is forested and prone to bushfire.
- Enforcing compliance is difficult due to council resourcing.

Question 5

a. What is the responsibility of local governments for evacuation, evacuation centres and safe places?

- Council is able to provide a Council owned facility upon request. No other responsibility.
- Council can provide assistance to Welfare Services on request.

b. How could these arrangements, including with respect to coordination between local governments, be improved?

- MOU developed at State level between a responsible agency or group such as Red Cross to coordinate and establish evacuation centres.

Question 6

a. What is the responsibility of local governments for assisting the community with relief and recovery from natural disasters?

- Council's role is defined in the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act and the State Emergency Management Plan as provider of executive support. Council has no legislated authority to enact recovery works however has a community responsibility.
- Limited constitutional recognition and resourcing of LG to assist the community with relief and recovery mean that Council's can only act at the behest of the State and are reliant on State Government funding support for these functions .

b. How do local governments coordinate relief and recovery assistance with other local governments, Australian, state and territory governments, charities and community groups?

- Through the recovery committee arrangements which include representation from community groups, Government agencies and industry
- Funding and resourcing for implementation delivery of the recovery committee arrangements is adhoc and limited

c. How could these arrangements be improved?

- A consistent approach between all states and territories to emergency preparedness, response and recovery including funding and support arrangements
- Dedicated access to funding for recovery that can be turned around quickly
- Funding to develop a relief and recovery plan for Councils that is consistent in format/methodology across the nation
- Constitutional recognition for Local Government

Conclusion

Snowy Valleys Council's response emphasises that Australian Government support for a consistent approach to the planning for, responding to and recovering from natural disasters including funding support will improve the efficiency and effectiveness of emergency management.

Recognition of the critical role that Local Government plays in community during times of emergency and recovery and appropriate resourcing support would improve community outcomes.