

Chapter Twelve

Conclusions and the future

BUSHFIRE INFORMATION

With the formal role of the Taskforce concluding at the end of September 2003 it is critical that recovery activities are progressively integrated into the normal business of the ACT Government and community. A Bushfire Recovery Executive, including senior representatives from across the ACT Government and the Chair of the Community and Expert Reference Group, will continue to maintain momentum and responsiveness on recovery issues. As part of this work, the Executive will continue to review lessons learnt during 2003, and to ensure opportunities for improvement are recognised and addressed.

Recovering from an event such as the January 2003 fires in the ACT is a complex process which involves many phases. While for some the memory of the fires is now distant, for many others (including Government), there is still much to be done. Experience from other disasters suggests that the recovery process will go on for many years, and there will be a need for ongoing rebuilding and restoration, as well as services and support for those directly affected.

PLANNING FOR THE NEXT PHASES OF THE RECOVERY

Review of the Taskforce

When the special arrangements were announced in January 2003, the Government put the Taskforce and Reference Group in place for an initial period of six months. This was in recognition that there was much to do, and understanding that after six months, there would be much better information about the next set of challenges, issues and activities.

In June 2003, the Taskforce undertook a review to identify what the key issues were for the future, and to provide advice to Government regarding the next phases. The Reference Group also undertook a similar review of its functions and future challenges.

This review identified that while there had been much progress, there was still much to do. Significant work still to occur includes:

- preparing for the next bushfire season;
- supporting affected households and communities through the next bushfire season, particularly taking into account key efforts such as the Christmas period, the one year anniversary and potential bushfire threats;

- supporting affected households and communities through inquiries and inquests;
- assisting people through the rebuilding process (by September 2003, there is still significant private rebuilding to occur);
- completing and implementing the Non Urban Study; and
- continuing the Government rebuilding and restoration program.

As a result of these activities, the Taskforce recommended to Government:

- the continuation of the Taskforce until the end of September 2003;
- the continuation of the Reference Group until the end of March 2003;
- the continuation of the ACT Recovery Centre until the end of March 2003;
- the establishment of a group of senior executives to lead the ongoing recovery process after the completion of the work of the Taskforce; and
- the continuation of the Taskforce Secretariat, with its gradual movement into the Chief Minister's Department.

This review confirmed the view that it was appropriate for the Taskforce to conclude its formal role at the end of September 2003. The Taskforce did identify that while it was important to ensure that recovery activities were progressively integrated into the normal business of ACT Government, there were risks in this approach, particularly in relation to ensuring a smooth transition and ongoing priority to the bushfire recovery task. Therefore, a significant process was introduced in handing over responsibility to the new Bushfire Recovery Executive. This is outlined below.

Establishing the Bushfire Recovery Executive

While the Taskforce was very aware of a range of activities that still needed to be completed at the end of September 2003, they also recognised the need to move through the different phases of the recovery process.

Therefore, in proposing a Government Bushfire Recovery Executive, the Taskforce believed that the timing was appropriate to consider new recovery arrangements, particularly the gradual integration of recovery activities into the normal business of Government and commencement of the process of returning some functions of the recovery process back to the mainstream public service.

Given that the members of the Taskforce would remain available to provide expertise and advice, the Government agreed to move to these new arrangements from 1 October 2003.

The Bushfire Recovery Executive was tasked from this time with responsibility for the ongoing recovery process. It is their role to ensure that recovery remains a key priority of Government and that it continues with the momentum created in the initial phases. In particular, the Bushfire Recovery Executive will ensure:

- there is continuity and a coherent recovery strategy;
- recovery from the January bushfire remains a high priority for the Government and community;

- there is a high level of responsiveness by the Government and partners in responding to recovery issues; and
- organisational arrangements are in place that are adaptable and able to respond to changing priorities throughout the ongoing recovery process.

It was an agreed position of the Taskforce, Government, and the Bushfire Recovery Executive that this change in arrangements did not signal a lessening of the priority of the recovery process. It did signal however, a new phase, where key executives throughout the ACT Public Service needed to become even more directly involved in driving the recovery process.

To ensure a smooth transition, this Executive Group was established in August 2003, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive of the Chief Minister's Department, and involving all ACT Government Departments and the Chair of the CERG.

Through September, the Executive joined with the Taskforce at their fortnightly meetings and participated in a number of briefing and planning sessions. This provided an opportunity for the Executive to gain an understanding of future challenges, have a full hand-over of issues, and commence their forward planning process.

In taking on the task of ongoing recovery, the Recovery Executive has identified key priorities in this next phase. They include:

- maintaining priority and momentum;
- maintaining a high level of confidence in the community;
- assisting individuals through specific events associated with the bushfires;
- mainstreaming services in a way that is sensitive to the needs of bushfire affected households; and
- integrating lessons into the broader ACT Government.

THE FUTURE PRIORITIES FOR ONGOING RECOVERY

The Taskforce has been very keen to ensure that the recovery process continues to have priority, and the momentum generated to date is not lost.

In moving into this next phase, the Taskforce sees that there are four key issues which are vital in the next stages of recovery. They are:

- ensure that those directly affected by the fires are adequately supported, and provided with the resources to assist them fully recover;
- do everything to encourage the rebuilding process to progress, and assist individuals working through the rebuilding process;
- ensure that residents of the ACT are able to again enjoy the recreational and public places which are important to them; and
- ensure that the Government and the whole community are prepared for the next bushfire season.

Key activities that are still on the agenda as the recovery process moves into its next phase include:

- continuing to provide direct services to those affected by the fires through the ACT Recovery Centre through the next bushfire season;
- ensuring ongoing communications to affected communities, and the whole of the ACT community, through *Community Update* and local newspaper advertisements to the end of March 2004;
- progressive clean-up and restoration of public recreational areas, particularly in non urban areas;
- the implementation of the Government's decisions in response to the Non-Urban Study;
- significant rebuilding, both of residential and public property; and
- supporting the community through potentially difficult periods, including a new bushfire season, and bushfire event, Christmas and the first year anniversary.

The Bushfire Recovery Executive has developed an action plan which will outline the key areas of activity for recovery action from October 2003 to March 2004. This is included at Appendix 10.

Additional work which will be occurring over the next period, and will have significant links to the work of bushfire recovery includes:

- implementation of the recommendations of the *Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January Bushfires*;
- completion of the Coroner's inquiry, and the associated flow-on work;
- implementation of the bushfire awareness campaign, and introduction of new emergency public communication arrangements;
- review of the Emergency Management Plan, and its associated Sub-Plans; and
- introduction of a new emergency services organisational structure.

It should also be acknowledged that this work occurs at a time where major planning exercises of the ACT Government will also be progressively completed. This includes the completion of the ACT Spatial Plan, Social Plan and Economic White Paper.

BUILDING POSITIVE LEGACIES FOR THE ACT PUBLIC SERVICE

Throughout the recovery process, the Taskforce had seen the need to identify positive legacies from this event, and position the community as even stronger than before the bushfire disaster. The flexibility created through the Taskforce Secretariat and Recovery Centre structures suggested that there were also lessons to be learnt in terms of public administration.

There was acknowledgment from those working within the special recovery arrangements that this was a different working environment to any previously experienced. Feedback from staff involved in the process suggested a very positive work environment, and resulted in a group of highly motivated, enthusiastic and skilled staff working on the project.

The Taskforce has identified a number of key management lessons that have flowed from this exercise. These have been intrinsic to the success of the process, and are the result of work of the Taskforce and other key partners.

Management Lessons: Top Ten Keys to Success

- Engage the community – the Taskforce must be part of a much wider alliance
- The 80% principle – don't wait for complete certainty or perfect analysis before taking decisions. Adjust as you go
- Teamwork – work in partnership and outsource parts of the task to organisations best placed to handle them
- Concern with outcomes – streamline processes where possible, monitor results and press for action
- Dedicated governmental machinery – ensure that the Taskforce is well advised and that its decisions lead to action
- Strong political backing – and budget to get the job done
- Sense of urgency – the mission is recovery from a disaster and 'business as usual' is not good enough
- Practicality – the emphasis is on pragmatism and results rather than elegant corporate planning
- Openness to views and criticism – an important early warning sign of emerging problems
- Seriousness of the task – remembering in particular that people's lives and their futures will be affected by how well the job is done

In September 2003, the Taskforce undertook some preliminary work with staff within the Taskforce Secretariat and Recovery Centre, which aimed to identify some of the key public administration lessons, and identify opportunities to integrate some of these into mainstream services.

This work resulted in the conclusion that there were a number of major positives in the organisational framework established by the ACT Government to guide bushfire recovery. These included:

- **Credibility and purpose:** By establishing a small, capable and cohesive Taskforce, the Government and community have benefited from a credible and purposeful vision of recovery. This credibility and purpose would have been very difficult to achieve through the normal Ministerial/ Departmental structures.
- **Project focus:** The establishment of a full-time dedicated Secretariat provided a high level of energy and focus to assist the Taskforce and the Government in responding promptly to the disaster, free of the distractions of other business that can occur in departmental structures.

- **Client focus:** This has been largely achieved through the Recovery Centre and its case management model, with a willingness to tackle issues which “cut across” a number of separate government agencies and the commercial sector. In addition, components of the Secretariat work have also operated on a similar basis, notably in relation to asbestos, insurance problems and tree concerns. Again, the normal public service structures often cannot provide the same degree of client focus because of the formal departmental arrangements.
- **Community engagement:** This has operated at a number of levels, but the best example of this engagement has been through the CERG which has provided very prompt information and feedback about “what is happening” in the community without the need for lobbying of MLAs, complaints to the media etc.
- **Timely, accurate information:** This has been achieved through regular newspaper advertisements, *Community Update*, media advisories, talkback radio, meetings, Canberra Connect etc.
- **Staff as agents of future improvement:** It is fair to say that the vast majority (and possibly all) of the Secretariat and Recovery Centre staff have not only experienced a sense of personal empowerment, but have also seen and understood the benefits of the recovery model, including its credibility, project focus, client focus, community engagement, and timely accurate information. It can be expected that as these people move out of their bushfire roles, they will be active disciples for this type of approach to future tasks, and this should benefit the overall ACT Public Service and their clients.

Analysis suggested that the response of the ACT Public Service to this disaster was a strong base to build on in relation to the further improvement of services to the community. The enthusiasm, commitment and professionalism of staff involved in the recovery effort, complemented by the lessons learnt through the process provides opportunities for the ACT Government and Public Service in the future.

The work already undertaken however, is only an aspect of the broader task, and the Taskforce is aware of the need to consider issues and potential projects in a holistic manner, taking into account whole of Government frameworks, and perspectives of a range of people involved in the recovery effort, not just those located within the special arrangements (ie, the Secretariat and the Recovery Centre).

The Taskforce believes that there are a number of projects that the Government may wish to consider to build on the lessons of the recovery process, and test the feasibility of particular approaches outside ‘extraordinary’ environments. Some opportunities which have been identified by the Taskforce include:

- Further utilisation of ‘one stop’, ‘first stop’ and integrated service provision, particularly in human service areas. The success of the ACT Recovery Centre in providing a range of diverse services within a geographical area suggests the potential of building on this model;
- Building on lessons regarding community engagement, particularly in relation to better utilising the skills, attributes and contribution of community advisory mechanisms;

- Reviewing the potential of ongoing communication methods with the community, and building on lessons in relation to consultation, information flow and feedback; and
- Integrating the lessons of team based approaches, and project management within mainstream program areas, and reviewing the lessons for whole of Government projects and approaches.

ACT COMMUNITY LEGACIES

While the January bushfires were truly a disaster, the Taskforce has been committed to ensuring that the Canberra community emerges from this a better, stronger community. This commitment has driven the pace, quality and form of the recovery plan, with the aim of a community that is well placed to respond to future challenges and opportunities.

A number of the legacies that flow from this event are tangible and easily identifiable. These include improved infrastructure, new community facilities, updated emergency management arrangements, improved recreational opportunities and a better planned non-urban area.

There are also significant intangible legacies that have been achieved through the recovery process. This includes a range of management lessons where there is potential to build even further. There has also been the opportunity to develop our understanding in a number of areas including fund-raising and volunteering. In addition, in moving through the recovery process, we have hopefully been able to build on the enormous community spirit that was demonstrated during the bushfire crisis and continue to involve the community in this process.

The Taskforce hopes that this report also serves as an ongoing legacy. It is anticipated that those in the unfortunate position of needing to respond to similar issues in the future, may be assisted through being able to access information about the process undertaken by the ACT, reflection on the way activities were implemented, and documentation of the lessons learnt through the process.

CONCLUSION

The recovery effort is not something that the Taskforce has done alone. Indeed, the work of the Taskforce is a small part of the total recovery effort. The ACT Government, agencies throughout ACT Government, formal community groups and associations, community networks, households and individuals have all contributed to success during the first phases of the recovery process.

While there are many who have significantly contributed to the recovery effort, in relation to the work of the Taskforce, it is important to acknowledge the particular support of two groups:

- the Community and Expert Reference Group has provided invaluable advice, support and input into the recovery process. They have served their community in a way that has demonstrated total commitment, professionalism and competence. At times, this has been at a time of extremely difficult personal circumstances, particularly in the case of community members; and

- The staff of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat and ACT Recovery Centre: the performance of the ACT Public Service in this task has already been analysed through this report. The effort of the Service in the aftermath of this emergency should leave the ACT community confident about the ongoing skills, commitment and professionalism of their public administration.

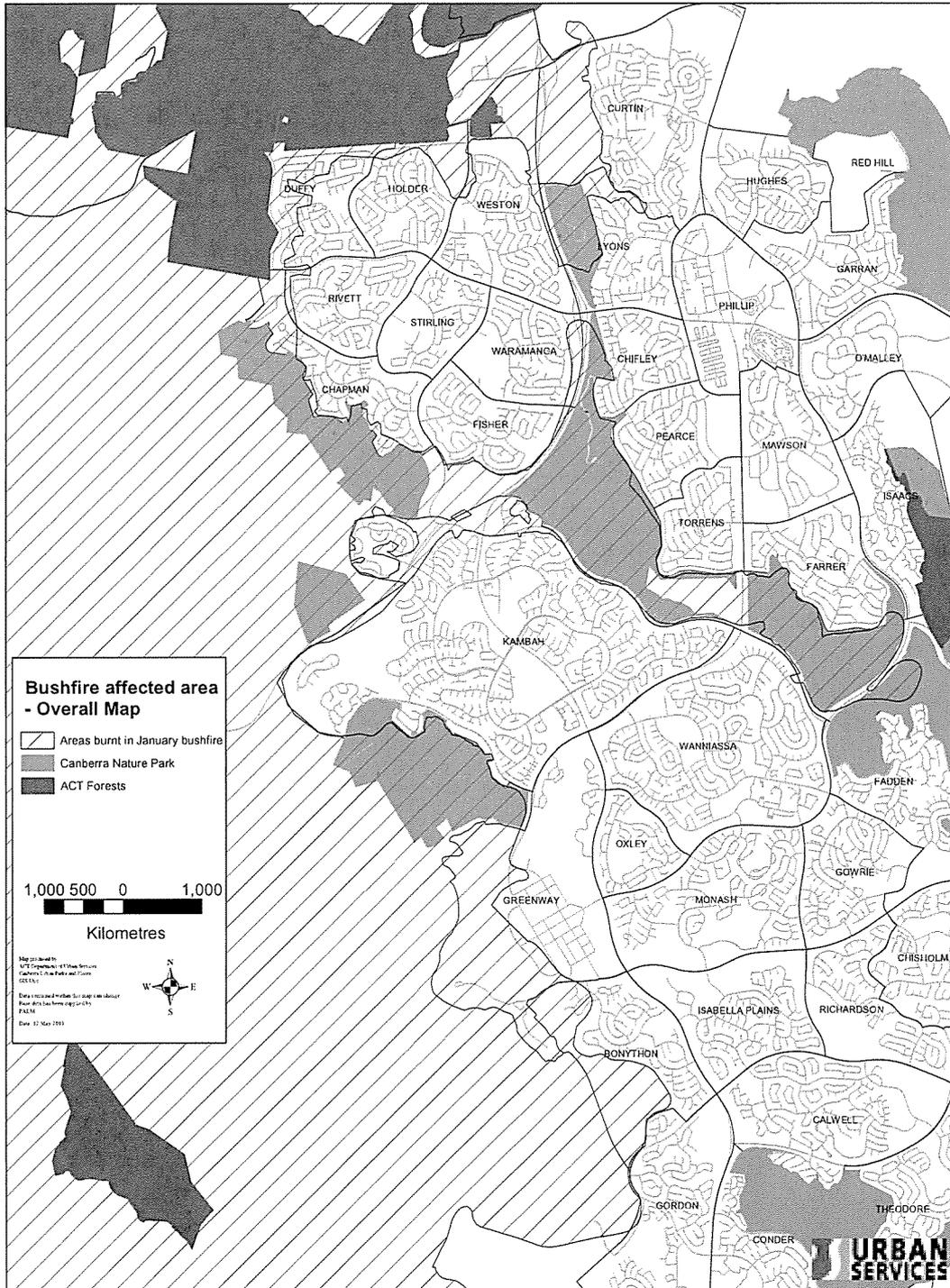
The task given to the Taskforce has not always been an easy one. In some cases there has been the need to respond to some of the less desirable aspects of our community, for example, dealing with thefts on sites being rebuilt. In some cases, we have witnessed great individual courage as we have responded to those in great need due to injury and other issues. There have been significant policy issues that the Taskforce has needed to respond to, balancing the different perspectives of those directly affected, and placing the needs of bushfire-affected communities in the broader picture of the needs of the whole community.

The Taskforce hopes that the Government and the ACT community will judge them as being successful in assisting the community through an extremely difficult time. This job has been unceasingly demanding, at times frustrating, often humbling and always a privilege.

The Taskforce would like to thank the Government and the ACT community for the opportunity to be a small part of this extremely important task, at an extraordinary time in the ACT's history. It believes that the ACT community has emerged as a stronger and better community, and thanks the community for being provided with the opportunity to be a part of the recovery effort. This experience has led members of the Taskforce to be immensely proud, humble and full of admiration for the people of the ACT.

Appendices to the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Report

Appendix 1 Maps of bushfire affected areas

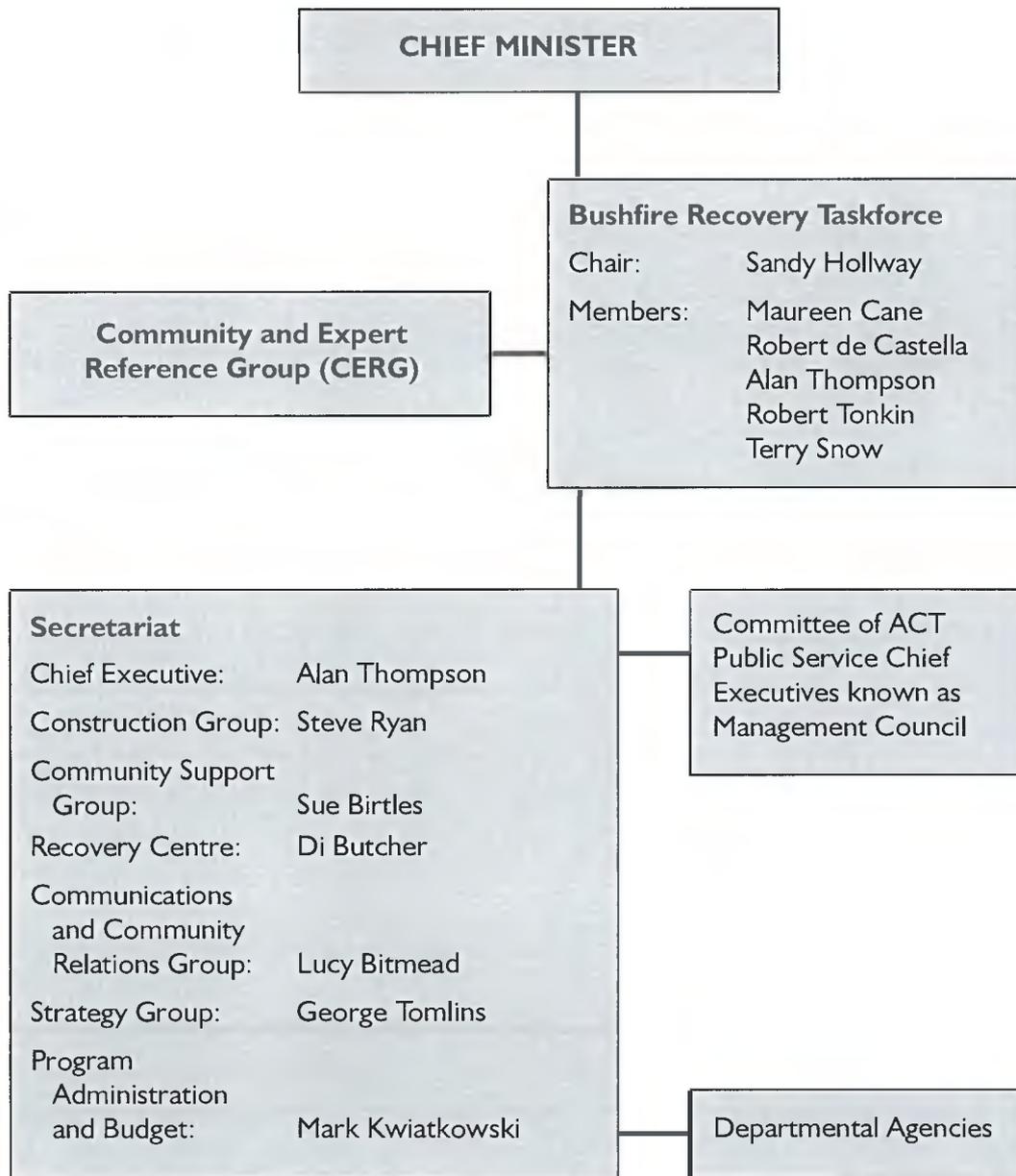




Appendix 2

Organisational arrangements for the Bushfire Recovery

(Phase I: January to September 2003)



Appendix 3

Taskforce Action Plan February 2003



SUPPORT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED BY THE FIRES

Key issues:

The very real trauma of the fires and the situation in which many people have been left needs to be recognised. The range of existing services and support available from government agencies and community groups needs to continue to be pro-actively and creatively applied, and special arrangements set up (notably case management as outlined below).

There are a range of groups which have been significantly affected by the bushfires. These groups include:

- Residents of the 500+ houses which were destroyed;
- Rural Lessees who lost properties and businesses;
- Residents whose properties were damaged or who lost possessions and equipment;
- Businesses and community organisations who lost properties and other possessions; and
- Neighbours of lost or damaged properties.

These groups have common as well as specific needs, which must be acknowledged and responded to. There is a need to recognise the individual nature of the impact felt, as well as realising a common experience being shared by many members of our community.

The most effective form of liaison with people affected by the fires, to convey information, understand emerging needs and provide assistance, will be the provision of case managers. These will be skilled people tasked with maintaining contact with and supporting an appropriate number of affected people. They can keep them abreast of decisions, the recovery progress, support available and feed concerns and issues back to the Taskforce.

There are immediate issues for people who have lost their homes such as arrangements for helping young children to get transport to their schools.

One of the highest priority issues of the recovery is medium term accommodation for people who lost their homes, while the rebuilding process proceeds. If possible, the preferred approach would be to handle the need for medium term accommodation using accommodation already existing in Canberra (rental, public housing etc), rather than special one-off arrangements (erecting temporary accommodation). However, a decision on this, which needs to be made as soon as

possible, must be informed by a more definitive scoping of needs of individuals who have lost their homes, and this analysis therefore needs to be driven ahead strongly in the next few weeks.

Considerable data on the needs and circumstances of people affected by the fires has been collected, notably through contacts at the Recovery Centre. However, it does not include all people and it is important for planning purposes to gather fresh data now that the immediate crisis has passed and people have started to look to the future. As noted above, it is especially important to have a better understanding of peoples' accommodation situation in deciding what options are best for medium term housing. It would also be useful to have data on intentions about rebuilding. Such data collection must be done sensitively and its genuine practical purpose properly explained to the people involved.

There needs to be a smooth transition from the operations of the Recovery Centre at Lyons in handling the immediate needs of people at the time of the fire crisis, to its ongoing support and information role.

On balance, it is preferable that management of the Recovery Centre now shift to the Taskforce. In particular, this will allow the Taskforce to keep close to the community and understand its needs, allow policy and program decision to be quickly implemented at a community level and allow the Taskforce and government agencies each to focus on their core business.

This is not to say that the Recovery Centre, and fire related assistance generally, will somehow be separated off from the wider work of Government. On the contrary, there will continue to be tight integration for a unified effort.

As well as individuals, businesses (especially home based small businesses) and community groups (who lost premises) have suffered from the fires. The relevant agencies of government, encouraged by the Taskforce, should provide assistance and clear points of contact for information for business about what is available.

It is also important to remember that there are also those within the ACT community who remain vulnerable due to reasons not related to the recent fire events. While recovery from the recent disaster is a priority for the ACT in coming months, the needs of others should be remembered and addressed.

The Taskforce will:

	When	Who*
Continue to support people and communities to manage their own recovery by providing a Recovery Centre, aimed at being a central point for support and referral. This will be managed directly by the Taskforce	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Through the Recovery Centre, provide staff to link people to services including financial assistance through government grants, personal and practical assistance, counselling services and outreach services to rural and urban fire affected communities and to people displaced from their community	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Through the Recovery Centre, assist individuals to access medium term accommodation	Ongoing	Community Support Group

	When	Who*
Urgently scope the need for accommodation while the rebuilding process occurs	Feb/ March 03	Community Support Group
Collect information regarding the nature of the impact of the fire of affected groups, their immediate and likely issues, to assist with planning the recovery process	Feb/ March 03	Community Support Group
Implement activities to assist those living away from their community to maintain linkages	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Through the Recovery Centre, coordinate the provision of government financial assistance with assistance from the Bushfire appeal	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Establish a network of Case Managers to provide a single point of contact for each household significantly impacted by the fires	Feb/ March 03	Community Support Group
Scope the issues faced by businesses and community organisations who have lost premises and other property in relation to their issues and needs	March 03	Community Support Group
Assess further requirements for assistance	April 03	Community Support Group

*This is a first point of contact / accountability. ACT Government line agencies also be involved

Current Status / Update

Emergency Accommodation: The urgent task of responding to the immediate crisis needs of affected families is largely complete. During the crisis, evacuation centres were established in four locations to house displaced persons.

Recovery Services: A Recovery Centre has been established to provide a single service for affected households to access information and services to assist them through this process

Financial Assistance: A range of financial assistance packages have been provided for affected households and businesses by the ACT Government.

The essential task now is to shift to ongoing, sustained support while individuals and the community work through the recovery and rebuilding.

ENSURE THE COMMUNITY IS INVOLVED IN THE PROCESS OF REBUILDING AND RECOVERY

Key issues

The recovery process is one that will involve many people in many different roles. It is vital that this process is 'owned' by the Community. The Taskforce is a way to ensure that community concerns are responded to and therefore it is important that members are accessible, informed and respond to issues raised.

The generosity of the Canberra community (and beyond), including ACT companies and individuals in offering goods and services to people affected by the fires, has been outstanding. In addition to a major effort to match these offers to needs, it must be recognised that new needs will emerge.

Some important community assets have been lost. There may be the possibility of private funding (in return for recognition) for the replacement of some of these. A comprehensive list of assets lost and the best replacement strategy (where replacement is appropriate) is needed.

The Taskforce will:

	When	Who*
Fully utilise the knowledge and expertise of the Reference Group as a fully fledged partner in planning and driving the recovery – both as a source of advice and outreach to the community	Ongoing	Taskforce Secretariat
Establish direct communication links between the community and the Taskforce through mechanisms such as email links for community members to input issues and concerns	Feb 03	Communications and Community Relations Group
Continue to meet with stakeholders, such as the ACT business community, the building industry, the insurance industry and community organisations and to work with them on issues and action	Ongoing	Construction Group and Community Support Group
Facilitate and support community events in relation to the recovery process	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Appoint dedicated Community Development Officers to assist each affected community to work with local leaders and local committees	Feb 03	Community Support Group
Work with the strong ACT community sector to direct efforts to affected communities and to link those communities back into normal service provision	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Ensure appropriate matching of donations in kind to people in need, not only those already provided by also into the future	Ongoing	Community Support Group
Scope the issue of lost community assets, and the potential of private organisations to be involved in their replacement	April 03	Strategy Group

Current Status / Update

- Taskforce Membership:* The Taskforce has been appointed and includes membership of those personally affected, involved in community services in the area and local business people affected by the bushfires
- Community and Expert Reference Group:* The Community and Expert Reference Group has been established and comprises members of the community
- Community Feedback:* A range of community networks and groups have arranged useful meetings and invited key members of the Taskforce.

The aim now is to build a community wide alliance in the ACT to achieve the recovery. This must include the Taskforce and Reference Group, Government, business, unions, community groups, media and individuals. A strong platform for this has been created by the remarkable community spirit shown through the fire crisis.

ENSURE CLEAN UP OF THE TERRITORY IN A WAY THAT IS SAFE, TIMELY, EFFICIENT, COST EFFECTIVE, AND RESPECTFUL

Key issues:

The clean up of sites affected by the fires is an important task which needs to be accomplished quickly to respond to the issues including health and safety of residents and adjoining neighbours.

There is a need to ensure that the large amount of debris is disposed of appropriately, that demolition can occur professionally, efficiently, safely and cost effectively. It needs a plan, not merely disorganised disruption on blocks, neighbourhoods and streets as could occur if the cleanup is left only to individuals to organise for themselves.

The Taskforce believes there is no higher priority than commencing a well organised cleanup. A decisive attack on this problem will be through project management (for all homeowners who wish to use the facility), established with Bovis Lend Lease.

An important task for residents of damaged properties is to salvage surviving property and mementos. However, this needs to occur in a way that responds to the safety concerns of residents, neighbours and others.

Health and safety issues (asbestos, chemicals) are important both in the management of areas devastated by the fires and in the rebuilding process. It is entirely understandable that health and safety issues will be at the forefront of people's minds. Expert assessment, accurate advice with complete transparency, and appropriate precautions are the keys. The more rapidly a well managed and safe clearance operation can commence the better, and in the meantime there must be monitoring of health issues and proactive advice about the situation and about any precautions needed.

The Taskforce will:

	When	Who*
Ensure the establishment of an appropriate disposal site	Feb 03	Construction Group and Urban Services
Ensure the provision of a professional, cost effective and efficient clean up operator	Feb 03	Construction Group and Urban Services)
Ensure monitoring of the affected areas	Feb 03	Construction Group
Ensure the establishment and enforcement of a management plan for clean up of the sites which includes appropriate health and community safety precautions	Feb 03	Construction Group
Ensure the provision of clear information in relation to health and safety concerns and ways to manage possible risks	Ongoing	Communications and Community Relations Group
Ensure a definitive statement about health matters to provide full and open advice to residents about risks and precautions	Feb 03	Communications and Community Relations Group
Establish procedures for public access to Government grants for site cleanups	Feb 03	Construction Group

Current Status / Update

Disposal Site: An interim disposal site was opened at the Belconnen Land Fill on 4/2/03, Pricing has been decided, including no fee for affected residents

Clean Up options: Bovis Lend Lease has established a special arrangement in relation to clean up of sites. ACT Government will be using this arrangement for Territory sites affected.

Safety Information: WorkCover has provided information regarding this issue. Taskforce issued information on weekend of 1-2 Feb.

The aim will be to complete the cleanup under the Bovis Lend Lease scheme in four months, with close attention to health and safety issues through this whole period.

FACILITATE REBUILDING IN A WAY THAT IS SAFE, TIMELY, STREAMLINED AND PROVIDES INDIVIDUALS WITH REAL CHOICES

Key issues:

The rebuilding process ahead of the ACT is immense, with properties affected including infrastructure, residential properties, rural properties, businesses and institutions.

The Taskforce wishes to set targets for the rebuilding as a basis for its planning and for the information of the ACT community. These will be finalised in consultation with the building industry taking into account industry capacity and the extent to which the approvals process can be streamlined.

The Taskforce wants to do all it can to help those affected to rebuild as rapidly as possible, while at the same time wanting to be sensitive to the fact that timing needs to fit with individuals' needs, wishes and capacity to reach informed decisions about the nature and form of their new homes.

There is a need to ensure that once decisions are made, the process and approval process is straightforward, streamlined and responsive.

It is important that practical information about the building system be disseminated to people who have lost their homes and their options, bearing in mind that many have never built homes before. The Taskforce will work with the building industry and government to prepare and provide such advice, including contact points for follow up enquiries. The aim is to show people a path to make well informed decisions and to clarify how they go about organising to build a home.

Streamlined approval process should ideally apply not only to rebuilding of homes lost in the fires but home building generally in the ACT. The best approach may therefore be enhanced resources and streamlining of approvals generally through the period of the rebuild, rather than a focus solely on the rebuild for the homes lost to fire.

The Taskforce must keep the building industry fully informed on decisions in relation to such matters as the building standards and approvals to apply.

The capacity of the ACT building industry to rebuild homes is strong, and is likely to be assisted by the spreading over time of the rebuilding according to the needs and wishes of homeowners themselves. Some will certainly want replacement of homes quickly whereas others may wish to take more time. The industry will be best able to cope if an early start is made on homes which involve little change from the ones lost, such as the Government housing stock. On the 'supply side', the general view within the industry is that the market demand will allow the industry itself to draw in the additional building materials and skilled trades needed. However, these capacity issues need to be watched.

The stock of accommodation may be able to be relatively quickly enhanced by bringing to completion, projects already near completion (connections of utilities to blocks of units etc), and by expediting approvals for home building already in the pipeline.

There is a need to ensure that once rebuilding commences, households can access materials and qualified trades people to undertake work, and the work is charged at a reasonable rate, and is of a high quality. There needs to be assurance that consumer protection mechanisms are in place.

It would be unrealistic to predict that there will be no increase in costs if building, given the operation of supply and demand. On the other hand, price gouging and exploitation of the present situation are unacceptable and measures need to be taken to enhance consumer protection. This could include involvement of the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), the monitoring and publication of regular surveys of building costs, the utilisation of the facilities of the building industry to receive and follow through on complaints and the involvement of the ACT Fair Trading Office.

It is also important that issues of consistency in relation to the approach taken by insurance companies are addressed, and issues around coverage regarding public liability are resolved prior to and through the rebuilding process. There is also a need to ensure that the affected households have access to objective advice regarding options in relation to insurance claims and rebuilding.

The Taskforce will:

	When	Who*
Ensure the completion of the repair of infrastructure of the Territory	Ongoing	Construction Group and Strategy Group
Continue to work closely with the building industry regarding the rebuilding process	Ongoing	Construction Group
In consultation with the building industry, set targets in relation to the rebuilding of residential properties	Feb 03	Construction Group
Ensure that planning processes are understandable and streamlined	Feb 03	Construction Group
Provide clear guidelines about the building standards that apply (ie what can be expected to be approved and what will not be)	Feb 03	Construction Group
Ensure that consumer protection issues are addressed through the involvement of the ACT authorities, the ACCC, the complaints mechanisms of the industry, and publication of trends in prices	Feb 03	Taskforce Communications and Community Relations Group
Ensure that insurance issues are addressed and there is equity in relation to approaches taken on these issues	Feb/March 03	Taskforce Strategy Group

Current Status / Update

- Infrastructure:* The majority of infrastructure has already been re-established. While there was major damage with regard to the major utilities, most residential properties now have access to full services in the areas of electricity, sewerage, gas, water and telephone connection.

- Industry Issues:* A range of issues have been identified in relation to this, including the need to ensure that there is a supply of materials and tradespeople. The Taskforce has commenced discussions with the industry on this issue

- Planning Approvals:* Planning and Land Management is currently responding to a number of approval issues and is putting in place a streamlined approval process.

- Targets:* Brochure prepared by Planning and Land Management which sets out the targets for individual building projects. Overall, a preliminary target of 18 months for 80% of properties to be rebuilt has been set.

The Taskforce believes that essentially the best things government can do to expedite the rebuilding phase are to clear the way for the people who lost homes and the building industry to get on with the job; to provide an ongoing close partnership with the industry to anticipate and resolve issues; and to set an example of speed in the rebuilding of government housing.

PROVIDE UP TO DATE, RELEVANT AND USEFUL INFORMATION TO ASSIST WITH THE RECOVERY PROCESS

Key issues:

Access to information is the right of all Canberrans during the recovery process, and the effective provision of information will enhance the community's capacity to recover. It is important to recognise that information is the basis for effective decision making for both those directly affected by the fires and those working towards the recovery of the community.

Different groups of people will need different types of information and information requirements will change during the course of the recovery. Two broad groups need information: the affected community; and those working towards recovery of the community. A wide range of individuals, groups and organisations are included in these categories, as well as the Government, Legislative Assembly and the media.

The Taskforce will need to identify what needs to be communicated, to whom and when, and to develop information gathering, processing and dissemination channels. The Communication Strategy will include a continuously updated set of questions and answers so as to ensure relevant and consistent advice to the media and the public on emerging issues.

The Taskforce will:

	When	Who
Establish communications channels to facilitate information transfer both to and from the community, and between the Taskforce, Secretariat and the Community and Expert Reference Group. Where possible, established communications channels will be utilised; for example, the Taskforce will make use of the Canberra Connect website and call centre because of the high recognition of these within the community. Ensure that formats such as frequently asked questions are used through this process	Feb 03 & Ongoing	Communications and Community Relations
Produce regular community updates, covering both specific topics of concern and broader community information.	Ongoing	Communications and Community Relations
Provide regular briefing on identified and emerging issues to the Taskforce, Secretariat, Community and Expert Reference Group, the Government and the public service	Ongoing	Communications and Community Relations
Facilitate the transfer within government and to the public of necessary technical and operational advice prepared by on working towards the recovery.	Ongoing	Communications and Community Relations

Current Status / Update

Website: The Canberra Connect channel is being utilised and adapted urgently.

Community Updates: Issue 1, which will be published mid February, addresses the broad areas of concern on risks associated with hazardous materials. Issues will be prepared regularly on a needs basis – it is expected this will be more frequent for several months and then weekly.

Use of media: Director of services bulletins to be posted at least weekly in *The Canberra Times*. To be reviewed at end February. The first of these appeared in *The Canberra Times* 1 February.

Briefings: Daily briefings to the Taskforce, Chief Minister and departmental Chief Executives to commence Monday 3 February.

The aim is an effective (not necessarily elaborate, expansive or 'slick') communications strategy which gets necessary information in a timely way to stakeholders and to the community. This is therefore to be seen as an integral operational part of the recovery effort, not public relations for its own sake or a mechanism to put 'spin' on issues. The Taskforce will contribute to wider communications strategies to reinforce community morale, spirit and pride in the ACT's response to the fires and confidence in the future.

LEARN LESSONS FROM THIS EVENT SO THE ACT COMMUNITY MOVES FORWARD POSITIVELY

Key issues:

The fire events experienced by Canberra and the region during January 2003 will impact on us for a significant period of time. It is important that we take this opportunity to learn from these events, and ensure that the ACT emerges from this disaster positively. A range of issues will need to be addressed through the recovery process and beyond. These include discussion and agreement on:

- land management practices;
- the urban perimeter;
- housing design;
- urban design and vegetation; and
- the role of Government and community responsibility in bushfire management.

The impact of the fire disaster has not, of course been on Canberra alone. Surrounding areas, facilities, homes and communities in rural ACT have also been devastated. The Taskforce has responsibilities to advise the Government on recovery in these respects as well.

Issues such as the future of pine plantations require detailed economic and environmental analysis and are in fact only part of a wider issue of the best land use future for the wider area beyond Canberra itself. There will be a range of options to consider – forestry, farming, tourism and recreation. The issue of water quality is also one that the Taskforce should be mindful of.

These matters in turn relate to decisions about whether or not to replace facilities and public housing in rural areas. The latter is an understandably sensitive issue, as is the fire impact on farmers holding leases due to expire in 2005.

Finally, while the current focus is on recovering from this disaster, we have learnt much from this situation. We have a responsibility to transfer the knowledge we have gained and assist other communities in the future who may suffer in a similar way to the ACT.

It may be appropriate that these lessons should inform changes to future emergency management planning and arrangement. These lessons should be captured and assist in the emergency response of the ACT in the future.

The Taskforce will:

	When	Who*
Liaise with people in the fire affected rural areas and provide advice to government on facility and home rebuilding issues, and others	March 03	Strategy Group
Source the best knowledge on means of planning for protection against bushfires for houses and units, commercial and industrial buildings and rural settlements	Ongoing- prelim advice- Feb	Strategy Group
Source the best knowledge on the type, density and layout of planting and landscaping for residential areas on the urban perimeter for bushfire prone areas	Ongoing	Strategy Group
Seek advice from experts in the ACT, other States and Territories and the Commonwealth on the best planning and management approaches to bushfire prevention	Ongoing	Strategy Group
Develop a method for determining which areas are susceptible to bushfire attack and may require additional protective measures either within the development or in an adjacent buffer	March 03	Strategy Group, PALM and ESB
Assess the support needed to enable urban and rural businesses to obtain best protection against bushfire attack and fast recovery after an attack	April 03	Strategy Group, BusinessACT, EnvACT
Understand the response of individuals, community groups and government agencies during and after bushfires, and drawing widely from the experience of affected people, review current advice manuals	May 03	Secretariat and relevant ACT agencies
Collaborate with States affected by current bushfires and Emergency Management Australia to gain additional information and ideas on methods of responding to bushfires	Ongoing	Secretariat
Assess the needs for restoration of the natural environment	May 03	Strategy Group with Environment ACT
Contribute to a long range study of land use in fire affected areas of the ACT	March03	Strategy Group
Assess the current provision of community facilities in the affected areas and determine whether cost effective changes are required to meet the new and changing needs		Secretariat and affected agencies
Ensure that knowledge is captured and encourage the transfer of knowledge to other affected communities in the future	Sept 03	Strategy Group
Determine when the affected areas can be incorporated into the Neighbourhood Planning programme	March 03	Strategic Group with PALM

Current status/update

Planning for bushfire protection:

NSW guide for councils, planners, fire authorities, developers and homeowners produced by the rural fire service and planning NSW is being assessed

A Web search is underway

Mapping is underway

Government and community response:

Expert briefings have been obtained from interstate experts

Contact has been made with the Emergency Management Australia and the Emergency Management Institute and a number of state governments all of whom have offered assistance

The Taskforce will assist long term issues to be addressed for a more secure future for the ACT, but it will also identify any immediate conclusions so that the rebuilding process can proceed quickly and is not held up by design and land use studies which will necessarily take longer.



Appendix 4

Extract from Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat submission to the inquiry into the operational response to the January bushfires in the ACT

Preface – Preparation of Submission

Introduction

Overview of Process, Achievements and Lessons Learnt from the Phases of the Recovery

- Pre State of the Emergency
- State of Emergency
- Recovery Transition Stage
- Formal Recovery Process commences

Attachments

Attachment A

Background information on the formal framework for the commencement of recovery action, and relevant action taken preceding and on 18 January 2003

Summaries of specific actions and issues by agency

Attachment C

Department of Education, Youth and Family Services

Attachment D

Department of Disability Housing and Community Services

Attachment E

Department of Urban Services

Attachment F

ACT Health

Attachment G

Department of Treasury

Attachment H

ACT WorkCover

Attachment I

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

PREFACE – PREPARATION OF SUBMISSION

This submission has been prepared by the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat, within the Chief Minister's Department, with assistance, and contribution from the following Territory Agencies¹:

- Department of Education, Youth & Family Services (Community Recovery Sub-Plan);
- Department of Urban Services (Infrastructure Sub-Plan);
- Department of Treasury (provision of finance, interaction with the Commonwealth);
- Department of Disability, Housing & Community Services;
- ACT Health;
- ACT Workcover; and
- ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat (transition from emergency to longer term recovery actions).

The submission essentially comprises two main parts.

The first part of the submission provides a whole of government overview of issues, actions and outcomes relevant to what, in this paper, is referred to as the completion of the emergency response. The coverage and significance of this subject area is discussed in the following pages.

The second part of the submission provides, through a series of attachments, further important background information and details including:

- background information on the formal framework for the commencement of recovery action, as provided by the ACT Emergency Plan and relevant Sub-Plans (in particular the Community Recovery Sub Plan), together with relevant details of their activation;
- the further arrangements made by Government, post the bushfires, including those relating to the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, and subsequent actions taken by the Taskforce; and
- individual agency summaries of specific issues faced, actions taken, outcomes and observations.

¹ The following agencies have also provided separate submissions to the Inquiry: Department of Justice and Community Safety, Chief Minister's Department; INTACT, Department of Treasury; Department of Urban Services; and ACT Health.

INTRODUCTION

The Terms of Reference of the subject inquiry (also known as the McLeod Inquiry) principally requires it to “*examine and report on the adequacy of the response to the bushfires by the ACT Emergency Services agencies*”. Additionally, the Inquiry is also to “*advise the Government on the ACT’s overall structure for dealing with emergency situations....., including the operation of the Emergency Management Act*”.

Relevant agencies have provided, or are currently finalising, submissions by addressing issues directly within the terms of Reference - planning and specific actions relating to preventing and combating the bushfires, both preceding and during the emergency.

This submission aims to provide the Inquiry with information on other Government action that proceeded in parallel with these efforts, specifically action taken directly, both immediately and over the medium and longer term to enable recovery – what can be called *the completion of the emergency response*.

These other actions necessarily interact (and interacted) with the primary fire fighting/suppression actions during the emergency period, and to that extent are directly relevant to the Inquiry’s defined tasks, noted above. The submission, however, also provides information relating to subsequent Government actions relating to the longer term recovery effort, and in particular actions taken to effect transition from the initial emergency period to the longer term effort.

As further discussed at Attachments A and B, the Emergency Management Plan provides for specific recovery action to commence immediately in the event of a disaster. Shortly before the ending of the State of Emergency further special arrangements for recovery were established to augment the recovery actions already underway, and to ensure that the specific community needs arising from the disaster would be met.

It is generally considered that these complementary actions were initiated and continue to be undertaken efficiently and successfully. However, as improvements are always possible, the lessons learnt have also been identified, along with suggestions and plans for addressing these issues.

OVERVIEW OF PROCESS, ACHIEVEMENTS AND LESSONS LEARNT DURING THE PHASES OF THE RECOVERY

Key Phases to the Emergency and Recovery:

Complementary 'recovery actions' were undertaken by several agencies (both individually and jointly), and these can be generally described within four broad periods or phases:

- | | |
|--|-----------------------------|
| (1) Pre State of Emergency: | to 18 January 2003 |
| (2) State of Emergency: | 18 January-28 January 2003 |
| (i) Opening of Recovery Centre: | 24 January 2003 |
| (ii) ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce established: | 24 January 2003 |
| (3) Recovery Transition stage: | 28 January-10 February 2003 |
| (i) ACT Bushfire Taskforce first meeting: | 29 January 2003 |
| (4) Formal Recovery Period commences | |
| (i) ACT Bushfire Taskforce assumes responsibility for Recovery Centre: | 10 February 2003 |

Pre State of Emergency

Prior to the emergency on 18 January 2003, there were a number of activities that ACT Government agencies had participated in to prepare for emergencies such as natural disasters. These were mainly concerned with long term planning, systems establishment and the immediate preparations to initiate the recovery process.

Planning

The major long term activity which occurred in the lead up to the emergency phase was the development of the ACT Emergency Management Plan, and its various sub plans. Perhaps the most significant of these sub-plans (in relation to the January 2003 fires) has been the Community Recovery Plan, which is the responsibility of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services and provides a framework for the recovery process. Recent recovery training (November 2002) conducted on the establishment of evacuation centres also proved invaluable during the January emergency. The activation of the sub-plan did on the whole work very well, with the Community Recovery Team able to contact people quickly to ensure that recovery facilities and plans were in place quickly. An issue that did emerge was the need to ensure that some contact lists were up to date. In a more general sense, it was clear that the preparation for an event such as a bushfire would have been assisted with a broader level of participation in the preparation of plans, and a broader knowledge of the content of the plans across the ACT Government agencies and key community groups.

Systems

In preparing for the upcoming emergency, it was essential that major systems were in place that could cope with heavy traffic.

A 1800 telephone number was established and operated at the Winchester Centre. The information provided through this telephone line was also provided through the ACT public communication system, Canberra Connect. This system proved to

be very robust and was heavily utilised through the emergency phase and staffing resources were identified quickly to answer calls made through this number. Systems in place meant that the 132281 phone number of Canberra Connect was able to be established as a national and international telephone number quickly.

In establishing specific facilities to assist with community recovery, it was essential that technical systems such as information technology infrastructure were installed quickly and this was generally achieved.

However, as the disaster grew in scope, it became obvious that the resources required to assist recovery would be more substantial than first thought. This resulted in the initial Recovery Team (responsible for setting up Evacuation Centres) being relocated from their initial facility at the Emergency Services Bureau (ESB) Headquarters to the AFP Headquarters at the Winchester Centre, with some effect on the initial recovery response.

It is clear that providers such as INTACT needed to be engaged as early as possible and the Major Technical Systemic Failure Sub-committee should be reactivated in order to revise its sub plan.

It may also be appropriate to consider whether purpose built facilities should be established for co-location of Police and Emergency Services.

Interface between recovery and combat / response teams

In the preparation phase of the recovery process, it became clear that there needed to be a very close interaction between the combat response team and the “initial recovery” team. While these activities are separate, they are not sequential and therefore need to be integrated. The location of the initial recovery team with ESB was very useful.

However, the co-location could not be continued because of space difficulties at Curtin, and the operation was transferred to the AFP Winchester Centre in Belconnen. Whilst this new location provided larger accommodation, significant information technology infrastructure was not available or difficult to access. It was also evident that it would have been very useful to involve personnel involved in combat / initial response in the recovery planning process, and have a stronger link with the recovery coordinator in response briefings.

State of Emergency

During the actual emergency, there was a need to immediately move in to a recovery phase, to ensure that the community who had been affected by the events around them were safe, had access to essential services and were able to access accurate and helpful information. A range of agencies provided services to assist this process as outlined below.

Information and services to the community

Through the emergency, the media (particularly radio) emerged to be a major source of information to the community. Other submissions are understood to discuss media issues related to fire combat. However, in relation to immediate recovery actions, the media was provided with information to assist people in accessing evacuation centres. The media were also able to assist with structuring donations from the community.

As previously mentioned, Canberra Connect proved to be a significant source of information to the community. On 18-19 January, it received over 25,000 phone calls and 50,000 website visits responding to a range of queries about the fire events and about immediate recovery actions. The Red Cross also established a service to locate displaced people on 18 January 2003.

The Community Recovery Plan had included Lifeline as part of the recovery response. They were quickly able to provide a valuable service to the community to in relation to emotional issues. The success of the early involvement of Red Cross and Lifeline suggests that it will be useful to include other community agencies in the plan.

Responding to the needs of Displaced People

A total of four evacuation centres with professional staff and a full complement of support services were established and operational within two hours on the afternoon of January 18. These centres were operational 24 hours a day scaling down as the need subsided over a seven-day period. During the first 48 hours of operation, over 5,000 people accessed the evaluation centres and the Salvation Army provided 8,000 meals.

While most people arranged their own temporary accommodation, ACT Housing (with AdraCare) was able to assist 658 families with temporary accommodation. The experience did suggest that the Community Recovery plan should be revised to be more explicit concerning roles and responsibilities.

Affected people were provided with immediate emergency financial assistance (\$75.00 per day). The issue of obtaining a large amount of cash (in small denominations) within a three hour timeframe was a significant achievement given the emergency occurred on a weekend. It may be useful to investigate alternate options, such as a voucher system, and prior arrangements with retailers to mitigate risks of theft or fraud.

During the emergency, the ACT community responded to the needs of displaced persons with donations provided to the Evacuation Centres. The sheer number of donations consumed significant resources and it would be useful to explore ways of managing large scale donations.

Injured People and Public Health Risks

The Public Health System was able to meet a high level of demand as people presented to hospitals with bushfire related injuries. We understand that information regarding this is contained in a separate submission from the Department of Health to the Inquiry.

Throughout the emergency, there was the emergence of some significant public health issues. It has been noted that the coordination with relevant agencies through this period was excellent and contributed to a high quality of information to the public.

Environmental staff worked closely with ACTEW AGL in relation to damage to the Lower Molonglo Sewerage Treatment Plan and the Chapman water reservoir. These facilities were restored by 22 January, and residents were able to resume normal use.

Responding to the needs of ACT Government services clients

Disability ACT manages over 20 group homes that were threatened during the emergency. 82 clients were evacuated on 18 January 2003 and another 38 clients on 21 January. A coordinated approach to clients who had been evacuated was taken, with a key focus on providing information and updates to families. Key learnings on reflection of the process included the need to develop a “sector emergency plan”, the development of clear emergency procedures, protocols and the usefulness of the central coordination point that was established during the emergency.

The fires heavily affected ACT Housing clients, with 80 properties destroyed and 133 properties suffering damage. ACT Housing moved to offer alternative accommodation for all clients, with 60 ACT housing tenants taking up these offers. ACT Housing has moved recently to establish a specific Recovery Team to address issues faced by tenants, and it is acknowledged that this may have been useful earlier in the process.

Immediate Infrastructure Recovery

During the emergency period there was a large number of road closures, both planned and unplanned. In addition, some 50,000 ACT residents lost their utility services (electricity, gas and water).

In response, major rectification programs were initiated. In the case of roads, this was largely managed through contracts and government service providers coordinated by Roads ACT in the Department of Urban Services. In addition, the Australian Army assisted by building a temporary crossing at the Cotter River, just upstream of the burnt out bridge.

ActewAGL also initiated a major restoration program for water, gas and electricity services, which included calling in interstate electricity crews (provided by joint venture partner AGL). It is understood that ActewAGL is providing a separate response to the McLeod Inquiry.

Recovery Transition stage

In line with the lifting of the official State of Emergency, the recovery process moved into a different phase on or around 27 January 2003. During this period, activities were focused on moving from an emergency / immediate response to medium term issues and concerns.

Public Health and Safety Concerns

In response to major community concerns (notably about asbestos), air and water quality monitoring and the coordination of the removal of hazardous materials and dead animals within affected suburbs was introduced. It was clear that it would have been useful to provide public information regarding community health concerns early in the process. There were a number of proactive responses to public health, including the provision of toilets for people salvaging property on their destroyed blocks, immediate waste arrangements put in place and substantial collection of residential green waste from at risk suburbs.

In rural areas, Environment ACT activated a major program of fence restoration to prevent stock from wandering onto roads (with consequent risk to people, vehicles and stock), and/or wandering into the forest reserves surrounding our rural lands.

Assessment of the impact of the fires on residential properties

There was a very fast response in collating information regarding damaged and destroyed properties. However, when this data was reviewed it was clear that it would have been useful to have developed criteria for damage and destroyed properties earlier, and put in place a more robust system of recording this damage.

Displaced and directly affected People

With the progressive closure of the Evacuation Centres, the Recovery Centre (established at Lyons Primary School) became the main point of contact for the community affected by the fires. The Recovery Centre was up and running within four days, and immediately thereafter over 850 households registered (this was to rise to approximately 1400 households). The Recovery Centre provided a range of services including a PALM Design Service, ACT Housing services, community services, Environment ACT, MBA building advisory service, ACTEW/AGL advice regarding utilities and Bovis Lend Lease advice regarding demolition and cleanup. The Recovery Centre was well publicised and utilised. The temporary staffing by volunteers of various organisations worked well.

In providing services through the Recovery Centre, the need to have a case management approach was recognised and implemented early. Community development activities were also provided through the Recovery Centre and linked with valuable community sector organisations. The Recovery Centre is a valuable source of information in terms of emerging issues, and it could perhaps have been useful to cement linkages with Recovery Centre and Bushfire Recovery Secretariat a few days earlier.

It was recognised that members of the community who had lost or who had sustained significant damage to their residential properties would require a high level of financial support. Financial Assistance Grants were made available in the week following the fires. The application and timely distribution of these grants was administered through the Recovery Centre.

Similarly, the Government through Business ACT sought to provide grants to businesses who had been affected by the fires, including rural lessees (who were already experiencing considerable problems because of the drought).

As many households had lost important documents, Government agencies moved to make replacement documents such as vehicle licences and house plans available at no cost. There was also the introduction of a streamlined planning process to assist people commence the rebuilding process.

With the securing of temporary accommodation by many people outside their usual communities, there was a concern about children's transport to school with the commencement of the new term. A system was put in place prior to the term commencing.

Community Response

From the commencement of the emergency, the response of the community was extraordinary – over 1000 volunteers registered through Volunteering ACT. This provided some challenges in the management of the volunteers, and the task of matching volunteers and needs emerged as significant. It would be useful to include Volunteering ACT in the Community Recovery Plan. Donations also

provided significant challenges, particularly in matching needs with offers. The early involvement of charities ensured consistency on decisions re allocation. As was implemented later, a voucher system proved to be a useful way of distributing goods

A Bushfire Appeal at arms length to Government was established to manage the process of cash donations from the Community. This appeal has raised over \$7million. The Recovery Centre was able to provide a linkage service for the application process, and the ACT Government provided an administration process which included the involvement of the Commonwealth Bank. The Government has also assisted with the provision of public information regarding the donations, application and appeal process, and it may have been useful to provide more comprehensive information regarding this earlier in the process.

Infrastructure Restoration

The restoration of infrastructure was a joint activity which was managed under the Infrastructure Recovery Sub-Plan, and involved ACT Government, ActewAGL, the National Capital Authority and telecommunications organisations. In this event, ACT Government and ACTEW AGL were the largest contributors to this activity but the telecommunications providers were also very active.

An immediate priority was to ensure appropriate traffic management, and specifically to re-open roads. ACTEW AGL will provide details of its major recovery activities including restoration of the water, electricity and gas networks to affected suburbs in a separate submission. It should be noted that ACTEW restored all damaged water, sewerage, gas and electricity services in an extremely short timeframe.

Another key activity which occurred during this time and was completed by the end of March was the replacement of all damaged streetlight lamps, poles and columns. During this time, activities to protect the ACT and regional water supply and catchment areas also occurred.

During the emergency a range of community assets were threatened and a major facility housing community organisations was evacuated. After the immediate threat, assessment of damage revealed that while there were a number of community assets which had been destroyed, this was not at the level which was feared.

In relation to rural fencing the length of damaged or destroyed fences is enormous. Consequently, although a number of contractors have been employed by Environment ACT, at the time of writing this submission a significant length remains to be repaired.

Natural assets are currently being restored. Parts of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Canberra Nature Park and parts of Namadgi National Park are now reopened to the public.

Services to ACT Government Staff involved in, or affected by Disaster

The response to the disaster by ACT Government employees, with staff being involved in combat, recovery and support roles in many different locations, showed a level of commitment and dedication above and beyond the call of duty.

With the magnitude of the disaster, it also emerged that the fire had directly affected many ACT public servants and their families. Most ACT Government agencies established welfare committees or other direct services to provide immediate

assistance to staff who had suffered property losses or significant affects from the fires. All ACT Government agencies have in place employee assistance programs that provide free counselling services for staff and their families. Information regarding this was reinforced to staff members. In addition, due to the high level of staff involvement in the emergency, a range of operational debriefing sessions were arranged, addressing various aspects of the emergency process.

Formal Recovery period commences

The Bushfire Recovery Taskforce was established on 24 January 2003 to lead and assist the recovery process. The Taskforce was comprised of a high profile and highly skilled group of community and ACT Public Service leaders dedicated to assisting the community with its recovery. It was recognised that there was a need to involve the community in this process, and the Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) was established shortly after. The Reference Group has proven to be invaluable in providing feedback and assisting the recovery. A Secretariat, led by high level staff from across ACT Government was established to coordinate the recovery implementation.

The enormity of the clean up process was recognised early. The engagement of a highly skilled project management company (Bovis Lend Lease) to coordinate this process served to make sure this clean up happened quickly, safely and in a cost effective manner. Providing residents with additional financial grants also assisted in this process, as did the establishment of a temporary landfill site close to affected areas on the side of Mt Stromlo.

One of the key elements of ensuring a well supported and effective recovery process was the provision of timely public information to the community. A weekly Community Update newsletter (circulated to some 40,000 households and individuals), and regular Canberra Times and weekly local newspaper advertisements have responded to this need. Hard copy examples of these documents are at Attachment J.

In responding to the aftermath of the disaster, decisions on land use for affected public lands emerged as an issue which needed timely resolution. Establishing a study into the use of non-urban areas ahs ensured that the community will be able to participate in the process surrounding this study, while ensuring that land use decisions are based on expert advice.

There were a number of less-anticipated issues which emerged in the early stages of the recovery process which provide useful lessons:

- Insurance: employing a dedicated advisor to liaise with members of the community and industry representatives was an effective way to respond to issues.
- Public health and safety: the level of community concern regarding this issue suggests it may have been possible to be more responsive in providing public information earlier.
- Corporate Sponsorship: like donations, the importance of identifying needs and matching offers emerged as a significant task, as was the need to respond to offers quickly.

- Memorials: it became clear that it will be very important to involve the community in memorial proposals, and the time taken to go through this process is something that needs to be community driven.
- Restoration and repair of ACT Government assets: it appears that insurance issues and procurement requirements has slowed some aspects of the process of asset cleanup. While there has been significant effort in liaising with agencies and the Insurance Authority, in addition to emergency procurement arrangements being put in place, maintaining the momentum of asset restoration for government facilities has (at times) been challenging. A significant factor has been that the ACT reinsurers have been off shore, leading to long lines of communication.
- The community (and national) focus immediately after the events of January 18 tended to be on urban residents who had lost their homes in the fires, with less focus on three further important communities of interest, all of whom suffered significant losses and trauma. These communities were:
 - those people who had not lost their homes but were living in the damage zone, frequently with a huge loss of general amenity and safety;
 - rural leaseholders, many of whom had lost their livelihood for an extended period (as well as substantial property losses); and
 - residents of the rural settlements.

Over time, the Taskforce and Recovery Centre workers have sought to ensure that these important communities of interest have been recognised and that their needs are responded to. It will be important for future events to recognise the wide range of communities of interest.

Discussion / key learnings

It is clear that the ACT Government had a recovery planning process in place that was appropriate in relation to most emergency and disaster situations. However, it must be acknowledged that the magnitude of the extent of the January 2003 bushfires was not, and could not have been, anticipated. For example, an evacuation centre had never been established in Canberra's history and yet four were established on the afternoon of 18 January. Having gone through an emergency of this scale, it is clear that improvements can be made to the Emergency Recovery plans and procedures, including broadening the input to the plans (at the planning phase) and broadening the knowledge of the plans.

Coordination across the various agencies was a major theme that worked well, but can be improved in the future. The importance of recognising the various phases of the recovery, including the initiation of recovery while the emergency was still unfolding, provides important lessons in ensuring communication between agencies with various responsibilities occurs throughout the process.

Specific and targeted responses to those directly affected by the bushfires have proven to be an extremely effective way of driving the recovery process. The Recovery Centre's case management approach is a model of service for other areas of Government responding to the recovery needs of their clients.

The potential contribution of all sectors of the community, including the private sector (particularly through industry and professional associations), the community sector (particularly charities, peak organisations and emotional health providers)

and the Government, is the most effective way of managing the recovery process. The most useful approaches through the recovery processes have been partnerships between different groups.

The vital role of communicating with the community on the recovery process continues to be highlighted as a key issue. The ongoing provision of information regarding services, assistance and issues of concern has had a high level of community support.

Conclusion

A well coordinated and professional recovery process was anticipated and planned for, and has on the whole been remarkably successful. There are many examples of extremely successful strategies that have been implemented to ensure that the recovery is speedy and sensitive to the needs of the community.

While there was a high level of planning prior to the emergency, it is fair to say that the scale of the January disaster was beyond what had been envisaged. Consequently, although the recovery response has been very successful, the experience has highlighted key learnings for the future.

It should be acknowledged that much of the success of the recovery process has been due to the professionalism, experience, flexibility and nous of those involved in its management, whether they have been part of the Government, community or public sector.

ATTACHMENT A

Formal Processes for Recovery Response/Actions Taken

The ACT Emergency Plan

The *Emergency Management Act 1999* provides the basis for all aspects of emergency management with the ACT. It provides the principal framework for emergency management arrangements and outlines arrangements relating to the primary provisions for the management of emergencies, including declaring a State of Emergency, the role of the Territory Controller, and the emergency powers of the Territory Controller. The main response document under the Act is the Emergency Plan.

The Emergency Plan establishes the ACT's emergency management structure, and provides for the Territory-wide mobilisation of all relevant agencies and resources for the conduct of emergency preparedness, response and initial recovery operations.

The Plan provides a basis for:

- emergency management;
- coordination of emergency service agencies;
- coordination of agencies, organisations and other persons; and
- coordination of Territory agencies with agencies of the Commonwealth and the States in the event of an emergency within the ACT that requires a significant and coordinated multi-agency response.

Seven sub plans support the Emergency Plan, providing specific operational direction

- Animal Disease Emergency Sub-Plan;
- Community Recovery Sub-Plan;
- Flood Management Sub-Plan;
- Hazardous Materials Sub-Plan;
- Health Emergencies Sub-Plan;
- Infrastructure Recovery Sub-Plan; and
- Major Systemic Technology Failure Sub-Plan.

At 2.45pm on 18 January 2003 the Chief Minister declared a State of Emergency, the first for the ACT. In accordance with the Emergency Management Act, the Chief Police Officer assumed the role of Territory Controller and was placed in charge of the emergency management and recovery process. A Territory Health Controller was also appointed who oversaw the provision of emergency medical services. The Territory Controller authorised the activation of the Community Recovery Sub-Plan, although the ACT Community Recovery Coordinator, based on advice (and as allowed for in the Sub-plan), had activated aspects of the Sub-plan on the previous day.

Other plans activated when the State of Emergency was declared were:

- Health Emergency Management Sub-Plan;
- Infrastructure Recovery Sub-Plan; and
- Major Systemic Technology Failure Sub-Plan.

The Community Recovery Sub-Plan

The Community Recovery Sub-Plan details the management arrangements adopted by the Emergency Recovery sub-committee and supporting agencies to coordinate community welfare services in the event of an emergency in the ACT.

The Sub-Plan:

- enables both Government and non-government organisations to provide coordinated assistance in an emergency and sets out specific roles and tasks;
- details the arrangements for the provision of welfare assistance during response to, and recovery from, emergencies in the ACT; and
- includes arrangements for relief services to people affected by emergencies during response and recovery operations.

Specifically, the Sub-plan identifies the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services as responsible for coordinating and managing recovery tasks and processes, including provision of financial/welfare assistance, and ensuring appropriate training in emergency recovery. It also outlines the Department's responsibility for managing personal support staff and administrative officers during the recovery process. These tasks are the responsibility of the Community Recovery Coordinator (an executive officer of the DEYFS).

The Sub-plan sets out a range of functional responsibilities in the event of an emergency and identifies specific government and non-government agencies that undertake these tasks. The Sub-plan identifies particular types of recovery services, such as assembly areas, emergency relief centres, community recovery information centres, and the preferred sites for these. Financial relief arrangements and some aspects of managing recovery staff are also outlined in the Sub-plan.

In the period around the declaration of the State of Emergency, a number of actions were taken under this Sub-plan. These included:

- evacuation centres being established at Phillip, Erindale, Lake Ginninderra and Narrabundah Colleges - approximately 4000 to 5000 people received services at the centres, including food, clothing, personal items, temporary accommodation and transport to accommodation;
- establishment of dedicated assistance 1800 numbers (including a Red Cross number to record registrations and provide information on people's locations and a Bushfire Information Service);
- the authorisation, under the Community Recovery Plan provisions, of an immediate financial assistance payment of \$75.00 to assist those persons affected by the fires who were in immediate need of financial support;
- counselling and support services managed under the Community Recovery Sub Plan through the Canberra Hospital; and
- arrangement for temporary accommodation, initially through the evacuation centres.

(Further details of actions taken, both leading up to and following the activation of the Sub-Plan, are discussed **Attachment C**. Pre State of Emergency preparations under the Plans are also further discussed below.)

Lessons Learnt

The Department of Education, Youth and Family Services has engaged the services of Morgan, Disney & Associates to undertake a formal review process of the operational aspects of the Sub-plan. The results of this review are expected to be available in late May 2003, and will provide important input for the rewriting of the Sub-plan later this year. However, a number of principal observations and lessons are already evident.

Given the magnitude of the bushfires, a significant number of agencies other than those represented on the Community Recovery Sub-Committee and/or identified in the Sub-plan became involved in recovery activities. It is essential that some of these be identified in the new version of the Sub-Plan.

Feedback from the review process interviews with workers/agencies involved in a range of recovery activities indicates that many were unaware of the Sub-plan's existence and/or contents. Engagement of these agencies/workers in training and planning exercises is essential in raising awareness of the Sub-plan.

Aspects such as volunteering, volunteer insurance, and donations are missing from the Sub-plan, as are communication and media. Clear and unequivocal media messages about donations and volunteering can alleviate many of the logistical problems arising from spontaneous donations and volunteer offers. It is also clear that current details on financial relief arrangements need reviewing and clarification in subsequent plans.

The appropriate management and matching of volunteers, both registered and spontaneous, has been a significant issue and Volunteering ACT's expertise and participation has alleviated many potential pitfalls.

The ACT Infrastructure Recovery Sub-Plan

The ACT Infrastructure Recovery Sub-Plan is intended to provide an effective framework for a coordinated response to and recovery from emergencies involving damage or disruption to ACT Infrastructure. It aims to ensure coordination of key stakeholders, provide a mechanism for ongoing liaison and information dissemination, ensure the mobilisation of emergency management resources and enable the Territory controller to determine priorities for recovery and restoration programs.

The Infrastructure Recovery Sub-Plan was formally activated by the Territory Controller on 20 January 2003.

The Infrastructure Recovery Sub Committee, chaired by Mr Hamish McNulty, Director Roads ACT, Department of Urban Services and involving key stakeholders met twice during the bushfire emergency to discuss key issues on 21 January and 3 February 2003). Organisations who participated in the Sub Committee included:

- Roads ACT, Department of Urban Services
- ACTEW AGL, with key responsibilities for utilities including water, gas and electricity
- Environment ACT, Department of Urban Services
- Australian Federal Police
- Canberra Urban Parks and Places, Urban Services

- ACT NoWaste, Department of Urban Services
- Telstra
- Transact
- Optus
- National Capital Authority

At the first meeting, organisations demonstrated their capacity to implement recovery plans in areas of their responsibility and that the recovery process was proceeding in a timely and efficient manner. It was agreed that the Committee would meet again if the situation changed. A number of the members of the Sub Committee also attended the daily meetings of the Emergency Management Executive and these meetings ensured the free flow of relevant information. Following the revocation of the State of Emergency the second meeting of the Sub Committee was held to address any outstanding issues and review the recovery process.

Health Emergency Management Sub-Plan

The Health Emergency Management Sub-Plan provides for command, control and coordination of medical and health resources; pre-hospital medical management for casualties; transportation of casualties; public health advice and support; psychological and counselling services (in conjunction with the Community Recovery Sub-Plan); ongoing medical and health services; and provision for people with special needs such as those in nursing homes or hostels. The Plan emphasises the need for cooperation, and stresses the close working relationship between the Ambulance Service and medical, dental and nursing personnel.

The operation of the Plan is discussed in the ACT Health's separate submission to the Inquiry. Complementary public health actions taken by ACT Health to support the recovery effort addressed in this submission are included at **Attachment F**. Issues and actions relating to hazardous materials were addressed in this public health response and are included in Attachment F.

Major Systemic Technology Failure Sub-Plan

The Major Systemic Technology Failure Sub-Plan outlines the control and coordination arrangements for responding to a major systemic technology failure affecting services such as power, telecommunications, water, sewerage, transport, food, etc.

The Major Technology Systemic Failure Sub-Plan was invoked during the Bushfire emergency, however, in the event the level of systems failure was limited and the Plan was not a major component of the recovery response. Relevant issues were effectively covered under other plans, notably the Infrastructure Recovery Plan. While the Technology Plan was not effectively tested in this instance, it has been noted (see Attachment G) that it is important that it also be reviewed and actively managed.

ACT Animal Disease Emergency Sub-Plan

The Animal Disease Emergency Sub-Plan outlines the arrangements for an effective and coordinated response to major animal disease emergencies in the ACT. It aims

to ensure the effective eradication or control of disease, which may minimise animal losses, social impacts, economic impacts and health risks to humans.

The Animal Diseases Sub Plan was not officially activated during the State of Emergency, although it was necessary to dispose of dead animals in urban and rural areas for public health and safety purposes. This activity was done in accordance with the fire response procedures contained with the Fire Action Plan, a procedural document of Parks and Conservation within Environment ACT.

These procedures were developed in consultation with Environment ACT staff and the Government Veterinarian, and further refined following the 'Operation Minotaur' foot and mouth disease simulation which occurred during 2002. While they are not specifically referred to within the Sub-Plan, the plan does give guidance to documents within Environment ACT where these procedures are contained.

PRE STATE OF EMERGENCY – PREPARATIONS UNDER THE PLANS

During 2002 a number of actions were taken in the context of the Plans to ensure operational readiness in the event of a future disaster:

- representatives of all Government agencies participated in an Emergency Management Committee (EMC) review of the Christmas 2001 bushfires;
- representatives of many Government agencies also participated in Operation Minotaur (in relation to Foot and Mouth Disease), an exercise in disaster management in anticipation of a real disaster, including identified locations of animal disposal pits; and
- Workcover reviewed the coronial findings in NSW and Victoria regarding the Ku-Ring-Gai and Linton bushfire tragedies and held discussions with the Emergency Services Bureau (ESB) regarding safety strategies for the ACT.

On 17 January 2003, the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services established a sub-committee to consider responses to possible evacuations. Membership included the Fire Brigade, Australian Federal Police, Environment ACT, Planning, Media Liaison and key recovery personnel. In addition, during this time the Community Recovery Coordinator met with Emergency Services Bureau and was briefed on the fire situation. Approximately six community recovery key personnel were activated to commence a ring-around of rural lessees in southern ACT to advise of potential threat of approaching fires. The ring-around was completed by midnight 17 January.

ATTACHMENT B

Further Arrangements Post 18 January 2003

Special Arrangements

A range of special arrangements have been put in place to assist, coordinate and manage the complex recovery process. The Administrative Arrangements Orders were revised on 23 January 2003 to give the Chief Minister formal Ministerial responsibility for the Bushfire Recovery. Individual Ministers and agencies retain responsibility for the conduct of their aspects of the bushfire recovery, with the Chief Minister's oversight responsibility providing focus, whole of government co-ordination and enhanced community involvement. Much of the implementation work is and will continue to be done by line agencies.

The **ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce** (Taskforce) was established on 24 January 2003. Chaired by Mr Sandy Hollway, and including prominent ACT residents and senior Government officials, the Taskforce was established to advise the Government, provide leadership for the recovery, and to act as a bridge between Government agencies and the community – industry, business, unions, the community sector, residents and Canberrans generally.

The Taskforce comprises:

Mr Sandy Hollway (Chair);

Mr Robert de Castella, as a representative of those people whose homes were destroyed;

Mr Terry Snow, Executive Chairman of the Canberra Airport Group, as a representative of the business community;

Ms Maureen Cane, Executive Director of Communities@Work (the recently amalgamated Tuggeranong and Weston Creek Community Services), as a representative of the community sector;

Mr Robert Tonkin, Chief Executive of the Chief Minister's Department; and

Mr Alan Thompson, as Chief Executive of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

A **Taskforce Secretariat** was established to support this group, and to provide a strong policy and program management team. Headed by Alan Thompson, seconded from his position as Chief Executive of Department of Urban Services, this small group of people drawn largely from the ACT Public Service provides the specialist skills and human resources necessary to support the Taskforce and co-ordinate and manage the wide range of recovery issues, both within the government and across the community.

Under the overall authority of the Chief Executive to the Taskforce, the Secretariat is comprised of five functional groups with the following responsibilities:

- **Construction Group** (Group Head – Mr Steven Ryan) - coordination of the cleanup of sites and infrastructure restoration (immediate and permanent). Coordination (with PALM) of the reconstruction of destroyed and damaged houses and community and business premises including streamlining of approval processes, issues of trade and building capacity and supplies, fair trading issues;

- **Community Support Group** (Group Head – Ms Sue Birtles) - coordination of ongoing support programs for households, community groups, business and rural leaseholders, and ACT Government personnel affected by the fire, including liaison with the Canberra Community Foundation regarding the allocation of appeal funds. Organisation of the provision of medium term accommodation, in consultation with ACT Housing;
- **Strategic Group** (Group Head – Mr George Tomlins) - coordination of longer term issues including urban planning, the urban / bush interface, forests, national parks, built form, vegetation, relationships with other parties (NCA, ANU) and, when available, integration of the lessons learnt into these issues;
- **Communications and Community Relations Group** (Group Head – Ms Lucy Bitmead) - public information and media relations, coordination of intra-government communications for the Taskforce secretariat, management of the formal community / business / expert consultative process through the Community and Expert Reference Group; and
- **Project Management and Budget** – (Group Head – Mr Mark Kwiatkowski) - provision of project management, budget and administrative support for the Taskforce and secretariat. Secretary to the Taskforce.

A **Community Recovery Centre** was established in Lyons on 24 January 2003 to provide a central point for providing services and information for Canberrans affected by the bushfires. The Recovery Centre was initially established and managed by the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services with assistance from other ACT Government agencies and community groups, Commonwealth Government staff provided by Centrelink and the Department of Family and Community Services, and personnel from NSW and Victoria. The responsibility for the Recovery Centre transferred to the Taskforce Secretariat on 10 February 2003, and continues to bring together a wide range of government and non-government services to maintain contact with and support individuals, notably through case managers.

The **Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG)** was established on 3 February 2003 as the key advisory body to the Taskforce, and as an essential channel of two-way communication to ensure that the recovery strategy is informed by community views and needs, and by local knowledge and expertise. The CERG brings together community groups, fire affected residents, unions, the business community and the Commonwealth. Amongst other achievements to date CERG has:

- provided direct intervention and assistance on insurance, banking and business issues;
- played an important role in the identification and monitoring of community health (including mental health) and safety issues;
- provided early warning of issues generally, and a channel for communication between the Taskforce, Government and the community in addressing community concerns for both urban and rural residents;
- worked together with community groups on a wide range of projects such as garden and environment cleanups, and the rebuilding of community assets; and

- provided direct feedback to Government so as to assist in the tailoring and streamlining of program delivery.

The members of the Community and Expert Reference Group are:

- Ms Elizabeth Whitelaw (Chair), lawyer and Immediate Past Chair of the Canberra Business Council;
- Ms Catherine Townsend, Institute of Architects;
- Ms Claire Middleton, ACT Division, Planning Institute;
- Mr Jeff Carl, Weston Creek Community Council;
- Mr Peter Malone, Unions ACT;
- Mr David Dawes, Executive Director, Master Builders Association of the ACT;
- Ms Nicola Davies, Conservation Council;
- Mr Daniel Stubbs, ACT Council of Social Services;
- Mr Chris Peters, Chief Executive, ACT Chamber of Commerce and Industry;
- Mr Richard Tindale, business sector;
- Ms Karla Ries, Duffy Primary School P&C;
- Ms Liz Tilley, Duffy resident (home destroyed);
- Ms Joanne Matthews, Kambah resident (home destroyed);
- Ms Annette Ellis MHR (Member for Canberra);
- Dr Tony Griffin, rural lessee; and
- Senator Gary Humphries (Commonwealth representative).

ATTACHMENT C

Department of Education, Youth and Family Services

Interface between response and initial recovery services¹ preceding and during the firestorm

17 January 2003 20:00hrs	Communications sub-committee established to consider potential responses to any possible evacuations that may be required. Membership included Fire Brigade, AFP, Environment ACT, Planning, Media Liaison and key recovery personnel.
17 January 2003 20:00hrs	Community recovery coordinator met with ESB and briefed on the fire situation.
17 January 2003 20:00hrs	Approx. six community recovery key personnel activated to commence ring-around of rural lease holders in southern ACT to advise of potential threat of approaching fires. Ring-around completed at midnight.
18 January 2003 08:00am	Meeting of key recovery personnel, ACT Government officials and the AFP. Decision was made to relocate recovery operations to Winchester Centre in line with establishment of the Territory Emergency Operations centre at Winchester.
18 January 2003 10:00am approx	Community recovery manager designated as operations liaison officer between the Territory Emergency Operations centre and the community recovery coordination centre. The liaison officer remained at ESB until midday Sunday 19 January before relocating to the Winchester Centre.

Outcomes

Emergency Services Bureau Headquarters (ESB) -The on-site availability of key personnel and resources (maps) from Environment ACT, to assist in locating affected properties (and status of occupancy) was invaluable.

The on-site expertise of a senior firefighter to assist recovery staff when communicating with rural lease holders who had specific questions about fire safety was invaluable.

The preparedness of recovery services to activate key personnel within one hour to assist with the ring-around was significant. The Community Recovery team maintains a list of key contacts of staff trained to respond to emergency situations.

Limited knowledge of the role of the recovery services in the event of an emergency by response agencies (and others involved, particularly media liaison) and limited understanding of the community recovery sub-plan (including the role of participating agencies) resulted in some time lost on planning processes that were already in place.

The initial co-location of recovery and response services at Emergency Services Bureau headquarters provided unique opportunities for timely and accurate flow of information, ease of meetings for key stakeholders and central point for media liaison. However, the accommodation at ESB was limited with the expanding staff

¹ In this Attachment, the term "recovery" applies to the "initial recovery" from the events of January 18 and preceded the later and longer term recovery being oversighted by the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

resources required. Limited access to essential equipment including photocopiers, faxes, phones with STD access, white boards and meeting rooms also inhibited the recovery operations based at ESB headquarters.

Interruptions to telecommunications and power at ESB headquarters inhibited the operations of the recovery team, slowing down response times and causing data to be lost on computer systems.

The transfer of operations to the Winchester Centre provided a larger space for the task, and a location near the Territory Controller. However, there were substantial early difficulties in this transfer, including loss of direct linkages with the emergency services personnel (as time was spent on travelling between ESB and the Winchester Centre with road blocks in place), lack of infrastructure at the Winchester Centre (including computers, and ACT Internet access), and restricted access in the control room where printers, photocopiers and faxes were located. Furthermore, heightened security arrangements made it difficult to bring in essential resources, and allocated rooms were not appropriate for the recovery operations.

Lessons Learnt

The value of planning for the recovery was proven through the emergency. The importance of ensuring that contact lists were held by all agencies with community recovery responsibilities was particularly evident. As the key agency with these responsibilities, the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services will ensure processes are in place so updating occurs regularly.

An early response is essential to successful recovery management. Close liaison with the relevant combating agencies is essential. Effective and regular liaison between the range of disaster management agencies at the planning and activation stage will increase the likelihood of early notification at the time of a disaster.

While response and recovery activities may be separate, they are not sequential activities and should commence and initially occur as parallel activities, hence there needs to be an integration of all services. This is particularly important where there is an overlap between response and recovery activities, such as where response and recovery agencies both require access to limited resources.

To ensure an effective interface between response and recovery, response agencies should have some involvement in the recovery planning process and recovery agencies should be familiar with response plans.

Given the very high level of dependence by response and recovery services on technology in the event of an emergency and the significant consequences of their failure, adequate arrangements need to be in place to mitigate the potential impacts.

The aim of the Major Systemic Technology Failure Sub-Plan 2000 (under auspices of the ACT Emergency Management Plan) is to reduce the risks to public safety from the impact of a major systemic technology failure event including emergency response capabilities. Paragraph 8.3.4 of the plan outlines alternate communication channels for the dissemination of information in an emergency where normal technology has failed. It is perhaps timely to review this sub-plan, in relation to the telecommunication and power capabilities of the response and recovery services.

Future planning should examine the need for more appropriate accommodation to allow for the co-location of response and recovery operations centres including the benefits of emergency power supplies, back up telecommunication systems, access to the ACT Government network and appropriate accommodation.

Lead up to and the subsequent establishment and operation of evacuation centres

18 January 2003 approx 09:00hrs	All key recovery ² managers activated. Essential personal support workers, administrative staff and participating agencies placed on high alert.
18 January 2003 approx 12:00hrs	Recovery staff and participating community organisations activated and deployed to the designated evacuation centres.
18 January 2003 approx 14:00hrs	Canberra College (aka Phillip College) was the first of four evacuation centres opened. Erindale, Lake Ginninderra colleges were opened shortly after. Narrabundah College was the fourth evacuation centre opened to cope with overflow experienced at Phillip.
18 January 2003 17:00hrs	The recovery team in partnership with the AFP established the "Bushfire Information Service", a 1800 hotline to provide information, support and advice to both ACT residents and interstate callers.
18 January 2003 23:00hrs	The Red Cross established a 1800 number for displaced persons. Displaced persons could register their whereabouts to provide information for concerned family/friends/relatives.
18 January 2003	Immediate cash assistance was provided by DEYFS, under the auspices of the Sub-Plan, to affected persons at evacuation centres.
18 January 2003	Lifeline, a participating agency under the Community Recovery Sub-Plan, extended their 24 hour telephone counselling services to assist with the bushfire crisis. In addition Lifeline provided volunteers to debrief Canberra Connect call centre staff, distributed pamphlets re trauma and provided after-hours backup for the 1800 bushfire information service hotline.
19 January 2003	Experienced recovery workers arrived from NSW to assist the ACT recovery team.
19 January 2003	Recovery Coordinator convened a meeting of the recovery committee and participating agencies to determine the needs of the community.
20 January 2003	Recovery Coordinator convened a meeting of the recovery committee and participating agencies to determine the needs of the community.
21 January 2003	Recovery Coordinator convened a meeting of the recovery committee and participating agencies to determine the needs of the community.
21 January 2003	On advice from the AFP re potential fire threat to the Belconnen region, Lake Ginninderra evacuation centre was relocated to Dickson College.

² "recovery" is used in this table to describe initial recovery, which preceded the longer term process being oversighted by the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

21 January 2003	Further updates on fire conditions necessitated the move of Dickson evacuation centre back to Lake Ginninderra college.
22 January 2003	Recovery Coordinator convened a meeting of the recovery committee and participating agencies to determine the needs of the community.
23 January 2003	Recovery Coordinator convened a meeting of the recovery committee and participating agencies to determine the needs of the community.
23 January 2003 20:00hrs	The provision of immediate financial assistance ceased.
24 January 2003	A Recovery Centre was opened to the public on the site of Lyons Primary School.
27 January 2003	All evacuation centres closed. Referrals made to the Recovery Centre.
28 January 2003	The "Bushfire Information Service" 1800 hotline number was closed.

Outcomes

All evacuation centres were up and running, with the full complement of support services (including registration, first aid, food, clothing, personal support workers and housing) within two hours. An experienced/trained manager was appointed for each centre as was the essential support staff and participating agencies.

Evacuation centres were operating twenty-four hours a day for the first seven days, and were subsequently scaled down to 8am – 8pm in response to a decline in demand from the community.

Evacuation centres registered over 5,000 affected people during the first 48 hours of operation.

The majority of people registered at the evacuation centres sought temporary accommodation with family or friends. ACT Housing, in conjunction with AdraCare, arranged 658 emergency hotel/motel placements.

The Salvation Army provided approximately 8,000 meals to affected people at evacuation centres. Food vouchers were also supplied to allow families to purchase their own requirements from supermarkets.

St Vincent De Paul provided essential clothing, bedding and personal needs to affected people at the evacuation centres.

ACT Government domestic animal service provided accommodation for pets at the evacuation centres, either on-site or relocating pets to the pound at Mugga Lane or a temporary site at the Exhibition Centre.

First Aid was provided by St John's Ambulance volunteers at all evacuation centres.

ACTION buses assisted with transporting affected people at evacuation centres.

It is estimated over 500 ACT Government staff and volunteers from a range of community organisations assisted in the recovery effort.

The question of authority to release information to the public presented a major challenge. Timing, credibility of information, information needs and communication channels were critical factors.

In accordance with the Community Recovery Plan a 1800 number was established to provide information, support and advice to Canberra residents and interstate callers. The Government then provided Canberra Connect (internet site and call centre) as the central point of information dissemination to the public. Internal systems were developed and key contacts established to ensure information was distributed through to the Canberra Connect site in a timely and consistent manner.

All releases to the media were initially channelled through ESB for dissemination. This responsibility was subsequently handed to the AFP. The recovery team established a key media contact officer (19 January) and all recovery information was filtered through this source. All information was consistent and provided to both points of contact simultaneously. The 1800 number provided a free service to the community and engaged trained professionals to provide information and assess the ability of the caller to cope with the tragedy, identifying any callers who may have had difficulty in dealing with the traumatic events.

Evacuation centres, from the onset, were inundated with individual's donating all manner of items, including mattresses, clothing, food stuff, blankets, toys and furniture. These gestures of goodwill consumed significant resources in sorting and storing the donated goods. An immediate media campaign was undertaken to provide some structure to the process.

The management of donated goods including processes for matching needs against offers of assistance was a significant task and remains so.

Lessons Learnt

To determine service, staffing, resource and general recovery requirements it is necessary to obtain an early but full assessment of the disaster and the needs of the community, including identification of the number of properties destroyed or uninhabited, the number of people affected including their circumstances (ethnicity, age, disabilities).

Evacuation centres provided people affected by the firestorm with basic human needs including accommodation, food and water. In addition, to enhance the recovery process, a range of other welfare services were provided.

Information management is a key function of community recovery management. Much of the success of the recovery process is dependent upon how well information is managed. Provision of information in community recovery not only provides the affected community with information about the availability of recovery services and plans but is also the basis for important social processes such as bonding between individuals, groups and communities.

The effective management of information following a disaster can be utilised to promote and hasten community recovery.

Establishment and ongoing operation of the Recovery Centre

21 January 2003	Preparation for the establishment of the Recovery Centre commenced.
24 January 2003 08:00 hrs	The Recovery Centre was opened to the public on the site of Lyons Primary School.
10 February 2003	Responsibility for the management and operation of the Recovery Centre transferred to the ACT Bushfire Taskforce.
10 February 2003	Responsibility for the ongoing recovery operations transferred to the ACT Bushfire Taskforce.

Outcomes

The site of the former Electoral Office at Lyons Primary School was identified as the most appropriate site for the centre for a number of reasons related to access, parking, location and the immediate availability and size.

The Recovery Centre was up and running within four days, a significant achievement considering that within this period, the space underwent refurbishment, carparking was constructed, essential telecommunications and other critical infrastructure was installed and staff identified, recruited (including staff from Centrelink and the Commonwealth Department of Family and Community Services (FACS)) and briefed.

The Recovery Centre provided a “one stop shop” to the affected community with the inclusion of a range of advisors including: ACT Housing, Centrelink, Insurance Commission, ACTEW/AGL, Master Builder’s Association, Bovis Lend Lease, Planning and Land Management, Housing Industry Association, Royal Institute of Architecture, The Salvation Army, Environment ACT, the Red Cross, and the YWCA.

Personal support workers were part of the permanent staff as was essential corporate support services. An outreach service was also in operation, providing personal support services to residents in the affected suburbs.

People were able to register at the Recovery Centre to receive ACT Government disaster relief grants, including \$5,000 to all households who lost their property, and a further \$5,000 to those who were uninsured.

In the first four days of operation the Recovery Centre had registered over 850 individuals.

A well advertised media campaign and ease of accessibility to the centre (ACTION provided a free shuttle service from the Woden bus interchange) encouraged people to visit.

Lessons Learnt

Most often people affected by disasters need concrete help such as information about available services, how to get benefits or loans, assistance with completion of applications to government agencies, health care, baby sitting, transportation, clothing and other essential items.

A Recovery Centre or “one-stop shop” enables the affected community to access a multiplicity of services with a minimum of inconvenience.

Future planning should consider the need for the ACT to establish dedicated management arrangements to plan for and co-ordinate community welfare recovery services to respond to emergencies in the ACT.

ATTACHMENT D

Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services

Impact on External Service Providers

20 & 21 January 2003	Contract managers phoned all 26 services under the Community Services Program and 24 services under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program that were potentially affected by the fires to confirm impact on service provision and properties.
22 January 2003	Belconnen Community Service, with agreement from the Department, made internal arrangements to provide counselling support to clients and their families.
4 March 2003	The Community Services team phoned all services to seek an update on any impacts due to the fire. Feedback from this exercise indicated the service most significantly impacted on to date has been Lifeline as it is part of the Community Recovery Sub-Plan; it was the first point of call for people needing to talk and their call rate thus increased significantly; it provided the 1800 Bushfire Information Line after hours, between 5pm and 9am; it increased its capacity from 3 to 5 crisis phone lines and had between 3 to 5 people on shift most of the time; it is undertaking extra training courses for phone counsellors; it provided debriefing for Canberra Connect and it was diverting gambling line resources to its general phone lines.
30 April 2003	To date, additional funding is being made available, from the Recovery Centre, for Woden Community Service and Communities @ Work to employ two additional community development workers. These workers will be located at the Recovery Centre and are to work specifically on bushfire recovery initiatives for their two geographical regions.

Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

- *No fire damage had occurred at any service although a number had lost electricity and water provision.*
- Toora reported that its transition service in the Belconnen (Heira) had been evacuated; the eight women residents were temporarily accommodated at Arcadia House on the Saturday and have since returned to the service.
- Communities @ Work domestic violence accommodation service (Weston) has seven properties. Five houses were evacuated. The residents moved in with family or friends and the houses are now tenanted again.
- Galilee education facility for young Indigenous people (Kambah) was destroyed.
- Subsequently, Galilee's offices were burgled, resulting in the further loss of equipment and records. This Department has exempted Galilee from its contractually required output reports for the July-December 2002 period. This Department has also sought, on Galilee's behalf, an exemption from

Commonwealth reporting requirements to the National Data Collection Agency required under the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program.

Community Services Program (CSP)

- The Smith Family, St Vincent de Paul Society and Salvation Army all reported that they were coping with slight increases and expected more impacts later. The Salvation Army has had a huge presence at the Community recovery centre and St Vincent de Paul Society also had a room there to provide counselling.
- The two services that were most directly impacted on by the fires are Lifeline and Volunteering ACT.
- It is also anticipated that negotiations will be undertaken with Lifeline to adjust their contract as a result of the bushfires.
- Lifeline also advised that two other organisations that they were working closely with in relation to the fires had significant impacts, Relationships Australia and the Social Work Department at Calvary Hospital.
- Volunteering ACT took a major role in co-ordinating requests to volunteer and for volunteers in relation to a wide range of activities following the fires.
- Support services such as Domestic Violence Crisis Service (DVCS) and CARE financial counselling service have been pro-active in positioning their services to be able to respond to increasing needs as they occur, for example, DVCS have planned additional outreach teams to be available should there be a need for additional outreach support in relation to domestic violence.
- All services were asked to contact the Department if their circumstances changed.

Outcomes

As previously mentioned, additional funding and re-negotiated contractual arrangements were made with several community service organisations to relieve the additional burdens created by the bushfires.

Lessons Learnt

The need to undertake more regular training for counsellors to ensure they are able to cope in such large scale crisis situations.

Responding to ACT Housing Tenants and other ACT Residents whose dwellings were destroyed or damaged in the fires

18 January 2003	A minimum of 8 ACT Housing staff attended the Evacuation and Recovery Centre in response to the emergency as part of the Emergency Disaster Planning. In conjunction with ADACARE the staff provided assistance to ACT Housing tenants, private tenants and property owners who called at the Centres for assistance because they had been affected by the fires and needed emergency accommodation.
	During the disaster, ACT Housing staff assisted by locating accommodation (ie. identifying the size accommodation needed, and phoning motel/hotels to book vacant accommodation) and, in some cases, transporting the client to the accommodation if they had no means of support.
19 January 2003	An Emergency Departmental Management meeting was held and staffing at both evacuation centres was on a roster system.
January – early February 2003	All ACT Housing tenants who stayed in Canberra after the fires, and who, registered for assistance were offered alternative government housing. Visits were made on various dates to the tenants of government properties that were damaged in the fires but were habitable to determine the extent of the damage and to ascertain what could be done to assist the residents.
	ACT Housing arranged for its Facilities Managers to also visit the properties to assess the damage and arrange for necessary repairs to be carried out as soon as possible.
30 April 2003	A total of 17 householders remain to be housed (13 ACT Housing tenants and 4 private householders).
	ACT Housing has visited tenants who were affected by the bushfires. To date, 338 visits have been conducted, 213 in the Weston Creek area and 125 in Kambah. Visits to some tenants were not as successful as was hoped and are being rescheduled.
30 April 2003	The Government is considering providing tenants whose properties were damaged with compensation for their loss of amenity.

Outcomes

An Allocations Team was established immediately after the fires to assist urban and rural clients with medium and long-term accommodation.

77 of the bushfire affected Households signed up to tenancies by close of business on 2 May 2003 (61 ACT Housing tenants and 16 private householders). A total of 201 offers of ACT Housing properties (169 to ACT Housing tenants and 32 to private householders) have been made to 96 discrete households (79 ACT Housing tenants and 17 to private householders).

A decision was made by the Department to give preference to bushfire affected homeless people ahead of others on the general ACT Housing applicant list. A Determination was signed on 24 March 2003.

Lessons Learnt

The need for ACT Housing to investigate how it may better respond to issues such as immediate contact with affected tenants, reallocation of resources, compensation for victims, alternate housing arrangements and staffing issues in situations where ACT Housing staff are also victims should another emergency like 18 January occur.

Managing Damaged or Destroyed ACT Housing Properties

Between January and April 2003	A total of 81 properties were identified as being destroyed in the fires, made up of 18 in Duffy, 8 in Kambah and 55 in rural areas. No Community Housing properties were affected.
21 January 2003	A meeting of stakeholders was held to assess the effect of the fires on the housing industry and housing generally. A suggestion arose from that meeting which was ultimately adopted by the Government, that clean up of sites be arranged with a single contractor rather than a number of contractors.
	Discussions with the Insurance Council were held to discuss their settlement processes for private and government property owners.
February 2003	In the urban areas, ACT Housing decided to replace the destroyed houses to modern standards and conforming to new building and planning policies. The Minister announced that if a house a tenant lived in before the fires is rebuilt, they will be given the first option of moving back when construction is completed.
February 2003	In the rural areas, the Government has yet to decide whether ACT Housing's fire-affected rural properties will be rebuilt because a number of impending bushfire-related inquiries, including one by the ACT Coroner, will have a major bearing on the future use of rural areas.
March 2003	A procurement plan for bushfire affected properties was approved and tenders were issued for the redesign of Tanjil Loop and the other urban rebuilds including 2 older persons' units in Duffy and 11 houses in Kambah and Duffy. An Agreement with insurers/reinsurers on the way to manage the claim for destroyed properties was made but was then changed, apparently by GAB Robins, without the knowledge of ACT Housing until early April.
April 2003	The original process regarding claims was reinstated and insurers approved the letting of a tender for the reconstruction of Pinefield Court.
	Rural demolitions are in progress at Stromlo Settlement and Uriarra.
15 April 2003	ACT Housing has recently established a new multi-disciplinary recovery team to work closely with tenants and ensure that we look more at the whole outcome for the tenant.

Outcomes

The establishment of a new multi-disciplinary recovery team to work with tenants.

All tenders for the rebuilding of the urban properties and the redesign of Tanjil Loop have now been let.

ACT Housing's insurers have agreed to the rebuilding of the two damaged Older Persons Accommodation in Pinefield Court, Duffy.

18 properties will be bought this financial year with a further 15 expected to settle early next financial year plus 22 to be bought by Christmas.

Purchases of three bedroom houses to replace the rural properties have commenced.

Lessons Learnt

ACT Housing's previous processes have turned out to be too focused on the programs and not sufficiently on the outcomes for individual tenancies.

The importance of clear, coordinated and early advice about insurance and related matters was made clear.

It is important to clarify the process for agreeing how to respond to the costs of rebuilding and repairs and for determining the claim on replacement properties to prevent delays.

Balancing the need to move quickly to respond to client need with the need to follow appropriate process.

Repairing Damaged Properties

January 2003	133 ACT Housing properties were damaged, but not destroyed, (120 in the urban areas and 13 in the rural areas). The damage to properties ranges from minor to moderately severe. ACT Housing and its insurer jointly inspected the properties.
January – February 2003	ACT Housing staff with Facilities Managers contacted the residents of damaged properties, fully inspecting them and discussing clients concerns and identifying additional maintenance work.

Outcomes

There has been significant progress on the repairs of damaged properties with about two thirds of the work (apart from fencing) now authorised to proceed and a high level of confidence from the loss assessors in Transfield's scoping.

Following the receipt of all the fencing scopes, work has commenced on ACT Housing properties, because these can be commenced without the agreement of the private neighbours. Active work to secure agreement from private neighbours is continuing. The size of the program is significant. 50% of fencing has been scoped to date.

Temporary fencing is being provided as required to secure premises for tenants concerned over security and safety.

Lessons Learnt

The need to clarify processes related to the evolution of the agreements between ACTIA, its insurers, the loss assessors, ACT Housing and its Total Facilities Managers.

Volunteering

January 2003	A number of Departmental staff volunteered at the Evacuation and Recovery Centres in the first few weeks of its operation.
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Outcomes

Staff shortages within the Department to manage core functions, especially in the Administrative area.

Some staff who volunteered were exhibiting considerable stress as a result of the interactions with people who had lost their homes and possessions as well as fatigue associated with long working hours over the week and on weekends.

Lessons Learnt

The need to more frequently counsel some staff who volunteer willingly and thereby put too much pressure on themselves to do long hours as well as normal work.

The need to implement on the spot counselling services so volunteers can debrief at the end of shifts to reduce stress and improve coping skills and the need to identify stress being suffered by the volunteers.

Disability ACT

<p>18 January 2003</p>	<p>Over 20 group homes managed by the Government service provider of Disability ACT were threatened and over 82 clients were evacuated in a timely and orderly manner to ensure that client safety and wellbeing was maximised and to minimise the effects of trauma. There were no reported injuries to clients.</p> <p>Disability ACT staff responded with immediacy to the emergency with many staff reporting for duty despite threats to their own homes. There were no reported injuries to staff.</p> <p>Two residences were destroyed and an additional residence suffered extensive fire/smoke damage.</p>
<p>19 January 2003</p>	<p>Established a coordinated centralised approach to address staff issues, concerns and enquiries, and the dissemination of information.</p> <p>Established a Disability Hotline 24 hrs a day, 7 days per week.</p>
<p>20 January 2003</p>	<p>Disability ACT senior management met and established an action plan.</p> <p>The status and location of all clients and in particular those evacuated was updated, and families advised accordingly.</p> <p>Disability ACT's response to the non-government sector included staff making contact with every funded organisation to establish their individual levels of operational service and to provide advice regarding support mechanisms over the coming weeks.</p> <p>Provided a central coordination of offers of accommodation and assistance from the community to the service delivery area.</p>
<p>21 January 2003</p>	<p>Daily conferencing with key senior management commenced.</p> <p>Senior management met with middle management of the service provider arm and developed contingency plans for the coming week.</p> <p>The status and location of all clients and in particular those evacuated was updated, and families advised accordingly.</p> <p>Emergency evacuation procedures were established and disseminated.</p> <p>Daily Emergency Briefings and Updates to staff commenced.</p> <p>All routine client activities and some respite services were cancelled throughout the state of emergency.</p> <p>16 group homes were in suburbs that were under high alert and over 38 clients were evacuated. All clients returned to their usual place of residence by late afternoon and families kept advised.</p>

<p>22 – 24 January 2003</p>	<p>Daily conference with key senior management.</p> <p>Daily Emergency Briefing and Update to staff was disseminated.</p> <p>The status and location of all clients and in particular those evacuated was updated, and families advised accordingly.</p> <p>HR staff support mechanism was established through the employee assistance program.</p> <p>Draft risk management plan developed.</p> <p>Executive Director of Disability ACT initiated a briefing for all non-government service providers and this meeting was well attended and the feedback from attendees was positive.</p> <p>Contingency planning for the coming long weekend that included emergency evacuation procedures, active weekend service arrangements, manning of evacuation centres, reporting lines reiterated and staff encouraged to be available for shifts.</p> <p>Client Guardian Forum representatives and a Regional Manager participated in a radio interview which provided the public with a positive report on how staff managed the recent emergency.</p>
<p>25/26/27 January 2003</p>	<p>Additional staff at the middle management level on active duty providing a central coordination role if needed.</p> <p>Senior management on standby.</p>
<p>28 January – March 2003</p>	<p>Daily conference with key senior management. A decision made to reduce daily briefings to staff to 3 days per week.</p> <p>Commencement of daily information briefings to Chief Minister.</p> <p>Emergency briefing and update disseminated to staff and clients.</p> <p>Routine client activities and Respite services resumed from 29 January 2003.</p> <p>Employee Assistance Program IPS representatives briefed managers on the effects of traumatic events and provided possible coping strategies.</p> <p>Brief prepared on clients who lost equipment through the bushfires.</p> <p>Emergency briefing and update disseminated to staff that included a message from both regional managers thanking them for their contribution throughout the state of emergency.</p> <p>Disability ACT initiated an independently facilitated meeting with representatives of the Community, NGO and Disability ACT to identify key learning's and begin a process of collective planning for future emergencies.</p>
<p>March 2003</p>	<p>Contact made with NGO's in regard to the impact of the fires on their services and their staff and a report provided for the Bushfire Recovery taskforce through the Chief Executive.</p>

Outcomes

Clients received utmost assistance, support and care from staff during the time of the bushfires and its aftermath.

Client safety was of utmost importance and therefore minimised risk.

No reported injuries to clients or staff.

Increase in staff morale.

Improved working relationships across the sector.

Strong working relationships with other parts of the Department and other parts and other Departments.

Better working relationship with the emergency services.

Responded in a timely manner to those clients directly affected by bushfires with replacement housing in collaboration with ACT Housing.

Affected clients are receiving assistance to access the Bushfire Recovery Centre. Improved systems in place to know where clients are and in particular the more independent clients.

Lessons Learnt

Need to establish a cross sector forum to work together on a sector emergency plan.

Needs of high support units and their specific requirements in relation to evacuation procedures.

Provide staff with clear protocols and responses to emergency procedures.

Central coordination point established worked particularly effectively and needs to be further developed.

Future planning to include recognition of timely advice from emergency services.

Establishment of Disability Hotline aided the community.

ATTACHMENT E

Department of Urban Services

The Department of Urban Services played critical roles in the response to and recovery from the January 2003 bushfires. The Department's fire fighting activities are discussed in detail in the DUS submission to the McLeod Inquiry and cover the period from 8 January until all fires were extinguished.

This submission provides a summary of the extensive recovery activities that have been taken by Urban Services to date. It should be noted that these recovery activities will continue to be a big focus of the Department over the coming months, and in many cases, over subsequent years. DUS activities have been grouped into non-firefighting activities during the state of emergency and recovery activities commenced since 18 January 2003.

DUS NON-FIREFIGHTING RESPONSE DURING THE STATE OF EMERGENCY

Fire Prevention

In addition to the professional firefighting brigades and support staff, DUS staff carried out other activities as precautionary measures during the fires. The most significant of these measures was patrolling of Nature Parks across the ACT by City Rangers, Domestic Animal Rangers, Parking Officers and Sportsground Rangers to deter potential arsonists and to look for spot fires. These patrols commenced on 17 January and continued until 26 January. Up to 30 rangers patrolled on each day during the hours of 7am to 10pm.

Support to firefighting activity

During the fire, Urban Services staff and facilities were used in important support roles. The Curtin District and Nichols District Playing Fields and Tuggeranong Enclosed Ovals were used as bases for fire fighting crews and helicopter bases. Environment ACT staff formed boat crews to patrol the dams being used by the water-bombing helicopters. Roads ACT staff attended the Winchester Police Operations Centre from the morning of 18 January and throughout the state of emergency to provide advice and liaison regarding all matters relating to Urban Services.

Community Information

Canberra Connect was an information and advice lifeline for Canberrans during the January bushfires – an event which occurred in the middle of summer holidays with many Canberra residents away. On the critical days of Saturday 18 and Sunday 19 January Canberra Connect received over 25,000 phone calls and recorded over 50,000 website visits on the specially constructed Bushfire Status website. Subsequently, the equivalent of three months of calls were received in a ten-day period by Canberra Connect, with website traffic rising 300% in the same period. Such was the demand for phone information and advice from residents, friends and relatives outside Canberra that the 13 22 81 was extended first as an Australia-wide number and then internationally. On 18/19 January 43% of calls were from outside the ACT.

Over 250 people from the Department of Urban Services were involved in phone-answering services – at the Canberra Connect call centre, the Emergency Services Bureau, Curtin and the AFP Winchester Centre.

Canberra and interstate businesses supported Canberra Connect's operations with donations of staffing and technical support, food and beverages and even massages to keep Connect's information services operating around the clock.

A subsequent Issues Management Report prepared by media monitoring and analysis firm *Rehame* showed Canberra Connect was covered and promoted as an authoritative information source in local and national media.

Support to community recovery

As part of the Community Recovery Sub-Plan, Domestic Animal Services staff evacuated dogs and cats from the community evacuation centres. This task commences as soon as the first evacuation centre was opened on the afternoon of 18 January and continued over the following days. The animals were initially looked after at the Domestic Animal Services animal shelter at Symonston. From 19 January cats were moved to more suitable accommodation at EPIC. Dogs were reunited with their owners from 19 January onwards, but many were minded for several days while their families found alternate accommodation. Many dogs who had run away during the chaos of the fires were reunited with their owners in the following days.

DUS RECOVERY ACTIVITIES AFTER 18 JANUARY

Public Safety

Commencing on 18 January, temporary traffic management for road closures and openings were instituted on a daily basis. Some rural roads remain closed due to roadside embankment instability. Roads ACT inspected the rural roads on a regular basis for damage assessments, fallen trees and soil slippages. A tree survey commenced on 28 January 2003 to identify the trees to be cut down or trimmed for safety. Tree removal commenced on 31 January 2003 for Stockdrill Drive and Coppins Crossing Road and is continuing on other rural roads.

From Sunday 19 January Environment ACT staff were involved in locating and assisting fire injured animals, and staff from many areas of the Department located and disposing of dead animals at Tidbinbilla Nature reserve and rural properties.

Environment ACT, with ACTEW developed and implemented recovery responses to protect the ACT and regional water supply including an impact assessment of urban catchments in fire affected areas which was undertaken in conjunction with Roads ACT.

In rural areas, Environment ACT activated a major program of fence restoration to prevent stock from wandering onto roads (with consequent risk to people, vehicles and stock) and/or wandering into the forest reserves surrounding our farm lands.

Support to community recovery

An initial recovery package for rural lessees was developed and announced by the Government on Tuesday 21 January. Environment ACT staff also visited all farms in the affected areas to provide assistance to those in need. These staff also assisted with responding to community inquiries at the Lyons Recovery Centre.

As mentioned above, Environment ACT has also activated a major fence reconstruction program, partly to assist with road safety and partly to restore boundaries between the various reserves and leaseholder properties. The length of damaged/destroyed fence is very large (initially estimated at some 419 km). Consequently despite employing 6 contractor teams much work remains to be completed.

Toilet facilities were arranged for the suburbs of Duffy and Chapman. Six toilets were operational by 27 January 2003 with a seventh operational by 30 January 2003.

Canberra Connect has continued to assist residents in the recovery process. Over 7500 bushfire related calls have been taken since 20 January. In the same period, over 190,000 visits and 710,000 page views have been recorded at the Emergency Services and Recovery Taskforce websites monitored by Canberra Connect.

Canberra Connect has been a key player in Canberra's Bushfire Recovery Appeal with its call centre, Internet website and shopfronts all accepting donations. Canberra Connect also coordinated the Appeal's fundraising at the Royal Canberra Show. Over \$360,000 has been received by Canberra Connect from 1780 local, national and international donors.

The Road Transport Authority (as part of DUS) arranged for the waiver of fees for fire victims for replacement driver licences, replacement vehicle registration certificates, late transfer fees, and unregistered vehicle permits. This service was carried out through Canberra Connect shopfronts and the Motor Registry. In the two weeks following the fires 780 fire victims were assisted with replacement documents and information. The Student Transport Program was extended to provide free bus tickets to students who had to move house as a result of the fires.

Arts ACT worked with the Chief Minister's Department and the community to coordinate special bushfire entertainment and benefit events being offered by community and arts organisations. A bus tour was organised for artists to visit Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve. A number of artworks have been created as a result of this tour. Arts ACT is working with the Community and Expert Reference Group of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce to commission a bushfire memorial.

Contact numbers were made available through the Canberra Connect website for information on lost and damaged rubbish bins. Except for the houses that have been destroyed, normal collection services are now operating.

Arrangements were put in place on Monday 20 January for fire damaged household items to be taken to Mugga Lane Landfill and Mitchell Resource Management Centre free of charge. Residents were advised at the same time that dead animals from the fires could be disposed free of charge at Mugga Lane. This exemption remains in place.

On Monday 20 January special hoppers were provided at five locations for the disposal of spoilt food from residents affected by power outages. These hoppers were emptied as required and remained in place until Friday 31 January.

Supporting the efforts of residents to clear their properties of fire hazards, the Mugga Lane landfill and the Mitchell Resource Management Centre experienced unprecedented numbers of vehicles delivering waste material on Tuesday 21 January. This was managed with minimal problems at Mugga Lane but at Mitchell the queues

caused traffic concerns on Flemington Road and a temporary waste storage area was opened up to cope with the additional material. This material has since been processed.

On Tuesday 21 January residents clearing vegetation in an attempt to reduce the fire risk to their properties severely overloaded the normal green waste recycling facilities at Corkhill Brothers, Mugga Lane as well as Canberra Sand and Gravel at Parkwood Road and Vicars Street Mitchell. Additional staff were provided by Corkhill Bros at Mugga Lane and by Canberra Sand and Gravel at Parkwood Road in an attempt to cope with what was essentially a three-fold increase in drop-offs. As the Mitchell site is limited in size it quickly became overloaded and no more material could be accepted. The Vicars Street site was closed and an additional temporary green waste drop-off was set up in Mitchell, on the corner of Hoskins Street and Bellenden Street. The temporary facility operated from 7.30 am to 5 pm, Tuesday 21 January and continued to operate until 21 February.

In addition to the extra material delivered by residents, there were increased instances of dumping of green waste and other waste material on the nature strips in suburbs of high fire risk. This material was collected by Urban Services and to accommodate the disposal, an area at the Belconnen landfill site was made available.

PALM commenced a recovery role on the morning of 19 January 2003. Personnel from PALM co-ordinated the efforts to identify the property damage and the nature of damage to property. A hierarchy of objectives for this identification and the work to flow from identification of the issues was put in place. A procedure for identification of the damage was recommended to other organisations. Approximately 30 staff were involved in a range of recovery activities in the early period until the end of January 2003.

Immediately after the fire PALM established the Property Assessment and Recovery Team in order to quickly assess the implications and commence the process of repairing and rebuilding. This team included representatives of the ACT building and construction industry (Master Builders Association, Housing Industry Association and Property Council) and representatives from government agencies with expertise in planning issues, demolition, and redevelopment, Building, Electrical and Plumbing Control.

By 23 January PALM had established a presence at the ACT Recovery Centre in Lyons along with other Government agencies. Initially people whose homes and properties were lost or damaged were able to talk with representatives of PALM, the building industry, and the insurance industries.

As the weeks passed the focus of the information requested changed and PALM responded by establishing a design advisory service at the Recovery Centre in association with the Royal Australian Institute of Architects. The service provides advice about house plan design and information about rebuilding processes. Copies of building plans for all affected properties were retrieved from archives and made available to lessees free of charge.

Since it commenced operations on the 17 February, initially for a four-week period, 93 formal meetings have been held with bushfire victims to advise them on their rebuilding plans (to 9 April). A further 7 have been held with the Design Advisory Service since it relocated to Planning and Land Management in Dickson on 31 March 2003.

Since 23 January PALM has had 152 clients visit PALM (in Dickson or Lyons). 33 of these clients visited PALM on two or more occasions (totalling 75 visits). This makes a total of 185 people/families who have come to see PALM, and a total of 260 visits.

The Government announced in February simpler processes for the demolition and rebuilding of homes destroyed by the recent bushfires in the ACT. Under new conditions for bushfire victims, those home-owners wishing to rebuild according to previously approved house plans are not required to lodge a development application, saving both time and money.

Where a householder wishes to rebuild a similar dwelling without adding significant building height, number of dwellings or total floor area – in other words the replacement building will have no greater impact on the streetscape or the neighbourhood amenity than the previous dwelling - the normal public consultation has been waived and the High Quality Sustainable Design pre-application process has been streamlined. Again, significantly reducing the time and complexity involved in the approval process. 16 development applications have been approved using this streamlined process and have usually been approved on the same day they were lodged.

The ACT Government has waived most fees associated with demolishing and building to people affected by the January bushfires. This includes fees relating to development applications, building levy, hydraulic fees, plan registrations, access to house plans, survey data and relevant certificates such as certificate of occupancy.

PALM has prepared and released the "Guide for Rebuilding After Bushfires". This has been widely distributed including to 1700 members of the building industry and has been very well received. PALM also developed a number of fact sheets on demolition issues and the development application and building approval process. For example, 2000 pamphlets entitled 'What neighbours need to know about living near rebuilding work after a bushfire' have been delivered in bushfire-affected suburbs.

Clean up activities

Cleanup operations on roads and verges commenced on 21 January 2003 and continued daily within the fire affected suburbs and in rural areas. An ongoing cleanup of the road reserves was required as residents constantly placing green waste on the verges. These cleanups continued until early April. The Army initially cleared the main rural roads (Tidbinbilla, Paddy's River, Cotter, Uriarra and Coppins Crossing) for local residents and emergency vehicle access.

A total of 1,731 truck loads (or 9,000m³) of debris, essentially green waste, were removed from the urban area and deposited at a temporary stockpile site on Kambah Pool Road, from where it will be mulched. A total of 785 truck loads of debris have been removed from the rural area and deposited at three temporary stockpile sites at Sunshine Crossing, Freshford Farm and Cotter Road. The sites are currently holding an estimated 4,000m³ of green waste ready for mulching and disposal.

In addition, a total of 138 truck loads of soil/mud have been removed from rural roads and drains due to soil slippages. This equates to approximately 1,400m³ of soil. Slippages are expected to continue for some time until the denuded areas are re-vegetated.

Road sweepers commenced cleaning ash and silt from the fire affected suburbs on 30 January 2003 with approximately 100 loads picked up by 1 April 2003.

The removal of fire-affected trees is ongoing and is expected to continue into May 2003. To date more than 5000 trees, including roughly 1000 verge trees, and several thousand shrubs have been removed (apart from those managed by ACT Forests). Pine trees along Cotter Road, Streeton Drive, Waragamba Ave and Eucumbene Drive have been felled, with more than 50 % of the burnt pines removed and chipped. The remainder of the fallen pine trees will be chipped late in April. Hundreds more trees which have failed to recover from the fire are currently being removed. Removal of shrub beds has commenced, and all burnt Koppers logs and the resultant ash surrounding playgrounds have been removed and the sites validated as uncontaminated. Burnt log barriers and bollards around parklands have been removed. Three playgrounds needing total replacement have been demolished and removed and the burnt machinery and equipment sheds at the Holder Works Depot were removed in March. The weed infestation which has resulted from the fire is being treated. This will be an ongoing task for the next 3 years.

As many of the houses in the fire affected areas were more than 20 years old, there is a risk that asbestos cement sheeting was used in wet areas and under eaves. Residents were advised to seek advice prior to disturbing damaged material and at a minimum to wear a protective mask and appropriate clothing. Residents were also advised that only a licensed building contractor could undertake demolition of buildings and that they should contact BEPCON or WorkCover for advice.

Appropriate procedures for the disposal of the demolition material from the fire damaged buildings and the establishment of a suitable site for the disposal of this material was progressed in consultation with BEPCON, PALM, WorkCover and Environment ACT.

As an interim measure until the Stromlo Forest site could be established, a temporary disposal site was set up at the West Belconnen Landfill. Strict site environmental and OH&S procedures were developed for the site. During disposal operations, approximately 30,000 tonnes of bushfire demolition waste was accepted at this site.

On 3 March the Stromlo Forest site was opened. This greatly increased the cleanup rate in the suburbs with an average of around 200 trucks per day accessing the site. By early April, a total of approximately 310 destroyed houses had been cleared and disposed of between both sites. The Stromlo Site is expected to remain open until 16 June. This site will then be capped with cleanfill and grassed to stabilise the filled area. Long term groundwater monitoring will be conducted to ensure that there is no impact on the surrounding environment.

This section has focussed primarily on clean-up as it applies to the immediate public "domain". In addition, since 20 January 2003, Environment ACT has embarked upon major clean-up operations to restore a wide range of facilities in and around:

- Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve
- Namadgi National Park
- Murrumbidgee River Corridor

ACT Forests has also embarked upon a major salvage logging operation and clean-up of other burnt areas and pines.

These clean-up operations are major undertakings but have not been further elaborated upon in this report, partly because of the desire for some brevity, and partly because the clean-up/recovery activity of these business units is likely to be beyond scope for the Inquiry. If however further information is required it can be assembled and submitted to the Inquiry.

The mulching of unsaleable burnt logs from ACT Forest plantations is ongoing.

A works program for the demolition, security fencing and signage and clean up of damaged facilities in nature reserves is ongoing.

Assessment

The extent of the damage to assets, both natural and built, from the January fires was unprecedented in the ACT. There has been a huge task for Urban Services to assess the extent of the damage in order to make decisions about repair, replacement and rehabilitation options, as well as deal with the complex issue of insurance. This work is ongoing, and in some areas of the Department staff have been taken off-line to concentrate solely on this task for the coming months.

Some of the assessment tasks include:

- Damage assessment for Environment ACT assets (buildings, roads, signs, bridges, picnic areas, horse paddocks etc) and attention to safety issues in reserves
- Assessment (with ACTEW) of potential threats to the water catchment, and any risks to natural resources
- Damage assessments for Roads ACT assets commenced on 20 January 2003 and are substantially complete. Pavement assessments were recently completed for the rural roads and further assessments remain for embankment instability on two rural roads
- Roads ACT and the insurance assessor inspected a representative sample of damaged assets in the urban and rural areas in late January and early February 2003
- Mapping the infestations of environmental weeds, including Blackberries, Chilean Needle Grass, African Lovegrass and Patterson's Curse
- The parkland and other urban open spaces which were burnt have all been mapped in order to manage for erosion control
- Street and parkland trees have been assessed for public safety and a second phase assessment to identify trees which failed to recover from the fire and will need to be removed
- Boundary fences of Government land have been surveyed for damage
- Initial harvest planning in ACT Forest plantations to determine a program of log salvage has been completed
- Impact assessment of fire on Aboriginal and historic heritage places in fire affected areas, including nature reserves, ACT Forest land and rural lands
- Assessment and recording of damaged heritage places in complete

Asset Replacement

The replacement of damaged and destroyed assets will in most cases take months, in many cases years, and in some instances replacement will not be viable. The following gives an indication of the asset replacement works currently in progress or completed by Urban Services.

The Army constructed a low level crossing at the Cotter soon after the bridge was destroyed on 18 January, and Roads ACT carried out subsequent improvement works including asphaltting, signage and temporary traffic lights during the period 24 January to 17 February 2003.

The street light system has been fully assessed, and all damaged lamps, poles, and columns were replaced by the end of March. Some contracts for the rectification of other damaged road-related assets have been awarded and further tenders are being prepared.

Three playgrounds were required to be completely replaced and four needed repairing. Tenders for their replacement or repair have been called and the work should be completed by the end of May.

The repair or replacement of damaged shrub beds will continue until August when replacement planting will commence.

Repairs to the major areas of damage to the playing surfaces of sportsgrounds have been carried out and some further minor work will be required in spring.

Construction of the replacement buildings at the Holder Works Depot will be completed in May.

Extensive earth firebreaks were constructed during the fire period. Remediation work of these areas is well in progress, including regrading, grassing and weed control.

Considerable areas of parkland and ancillary urban open spaces were burnt during the fires in Weston Creek, Woden and Tuggeranong during the fires. Ten hectares of the worst affected areas are to be grassed in April to prevent erosion.

As mentioned earlier, ACT Forests have been undertaking a massive recovery logging operation to salvage as much as possible of the damaged pines before they become unsaleable. New export markets are being explored for the possible sale of burnt timber. Machinery has commenced work in Uriarra to prepare 800ha for replanting in winter. The business has also re-establishing an office headquarters and attempted to reconstitute records lost in the fire.

Environment ACT has restored basic operational services to reserves following cessation of the fires, including track clearing, securing of damaged facilities and re-establishing of communications. Detailed recovery strategies to restore public access to basic facilities in reserves have been developed and implemented. Environment ACT has prepared and publicly released a detailed Bushfire Recovery Plan 2003 which addresses all aspects of the extensive recovery activities which will be required for environmental and heritage issues on public and private land over the coming months and years. The plan has been attached to the Urban Services Submission to the Inquiry and can be viewed at www.environment.act.gov.au

Lessons Learnt

Information relating to the lessons learnt by the Department of Urban Services about the immediate bushfire event can be found in the Agency Submission titled “Urban Services Submission to the Inquiry in to the January Bushfires”. An extensive chapter has been included which provides information relating to proposed improvements, and measures taken to date to address matters that were identified as requiring immediate attention.

ATTACHMENT F**ACT Health**

ACT Health has provided a separate submission to the McLeod inquiry addressing the health and medical aspects during the state of emergency.

The information provided here relates to the cooperative work undertaken with other agencies during, and immediately after the declared state of emergency, which was not included in Health's separate submission.

Chronology of Key Actions by Department of Health

14 January 2003	The fires contributed to a serious decrease in air quality and the amount of smoke in the air varied depending on weather conditions. The Chief Health Officer issued a health warning to sufferers of asthma and other chronic health conditions urging asthmatics, in particular, to continue their medication and consult their general practitioner if they had any difficulties. The Health Warning was repeated during the State of Emergency on the 21, 22, 23 and 24 January 2003.
14 January 2003	Environment ACT in conjunction with ACT Health provided information to the public on air quality.
18 January 2003	Provision of public health advice to ACTEWAGL on drinking water and sewerage management particularly when the roof of the Chapman water reservoir was destroyed during the fires. To ensure safety, residents of Chapman and Duffy were advised to boil water or use bottled water. ActewAGL provided bottled water to affected residents at no charge.
18 January 2003	Coordination with ambulance in the development of evacuation plans for residential care/acute care facilities.
18 January 2003	Due to fire damage the Lower Molonglo Sewerage Treatment Plant was not able to function. ActewAGL carried out repairs and advised Canberrans to prevent/minimise water going down drains in order to prevent sewage overflow which could contaminate waterways and damage local ecosystems.
18–22 January 2003	Environmental Health staff monitored the situation until the treatment plant was repaired and the sewage backlog was processed.
22 January 2003	Environmental health staff of the Health Protection Service liaised with ActewAGL in relation to water quality. ActewAGL undertook cleaning, refill and testing of the water reservoir and Public Health Officers conducted on site inspections.
22 January 2003	ActewAGL advised that there was no longer a need for residents to boil water.
22 January 2003	ActewAGL lifted the advice that residents should minimise water down drains.

24 January 2003	Liaised with DUS and the private contractor on the collection of spoilt food, including the inspection of collection sites.
24 January 2003	Public Health Officers carried out a joint inspection with other agencies of the Stromlo, Uriarra and Pierces Creek rural settlements. There were no major public health issues, except for asbestos and Copper Chrome Arsenic (CCA - the substance used for treating the pine logs).
8 February 2003 (also 17 & 19 February 2003)	Early assessment of environmental hazards in collaboration with Environment ACT and WorkCover.
8 February 2003	Dust masks were distributed to residents remaining in badly fire-affected areas, along with the media release about resident safety and an information sheet about dust masks. Further masks were available at no charge from the Lyons Primary School Recovery Centre or can be purchased at pharmacies and hardware stores. The dust mask information sheet was also available from this time at the Recovery Centre.
8 February 2003	Residents were advised that only BEPCON licensed builders with demolition endorsements can remove asbestos-containing rubble from the fire-affected sites.
13 February 2003 – ongoing	Public Health Advisory fact sheets were provided to Canberra Connect and placed on the ACT Health website in relation to issues such as basic hygiene, food safety, gastro-enteritis and other environmental/public health issues.
21 February 2003	Recreational swimming areas was closed to the public by Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management. ACT Health liaised with staff on this issue.
Late January through February	Chief Health Officer and Deputy Chief Health Officer attended numerous public meetings and gave extensive media advice about health issues related to the fires. Subjects included concerns about asbestos, odours, rats, etc.

Outcomes

There was excellent cooperation between the agencies concerned. The quality of the advice from other agencies that impacted on the public health was very high and often the work was undertaken at very short notice.

To facilitate the flow of information, a liaison group comprising of senior representatives from ACT Health, Environment ACT and WorkCover has been established and this group meets every second month to discuss topics common to all parties.

Habitation of fire-affected rural settlements

There was liaison between Public Health Officers and counsellors regarding concerns passed on to counsellors by residents of Uriarra settlement, such as lack of garbage disposal, dead animals and possible asbestos in the air.

There was a lot of camping in Uriarra by locals as a result of having lost their homes in the fires which presented sanitation problems.

Public Health Officers conducted visits to rural residents to ensure that there are no major residual public health issues, such as contaminated drinking water. Water analysis and other assistance was made available as necessary.

Fire-Affected Areas - Exposure to Toxic Substances (including Asbestos)

Residents remaining in fire-affected suburbs were concerned about exposure to toxic materials during high wind conditions. Advice was provided to residents in relation to precautions to be taken.

In particular, asbestos was of concern. Buildings over 20 years old are likely to have had fibro cement (AC) sheeting placed in wet areas or eaves.

Dr Dugdale and Ms Jocelyn Plovits, Commissioner of ACT Workcover, prepared advice in relation to asbestos for inclusion in the Recovery Taskforce newsletter.

Environment ACT advised residents returning to damaged properties that they should avoid disturbing any burnt material to minimise dust being generated. People visiting these sites were advised they may be exposed to dust, ash and possibly low levels of asbestos and should wear personal protective equipment such as gloves, solid shoes, protective clothing and a correctly fitted face mask or a damp cotton tea towel tied around the nose and mouth.

Liaison between Environmental Health staff, ACT WorkCover and Environment ACT is ongoing in relation to safety of fire-affected areas.

Liaison with Murrumbidgee River Corridor Management has been undertaken to prepare an emergency plan to close the river corridor in event of rain. An appropriate media release is also being prepared for this eventuality. This action is in recognition of the likely run off and bacterial loads associated with dead and decaying animals. As many animals are in remote locations, it has not been possible to collect all the carcasses.

Lessons Learnt

While Emergency Management Plans were in place, the State of Emergency demonstrated that the Health sub-plan needs refining in a number of minor ways, including contact names and numbers, identification of equipment availability and location. It is also proposed to expand the areas covered by standard operational procedures for environmental health issues. This is currently being undertaken in collaboration with the relevant agencies.

In general, the experience from the bushfires response has highlighted the need to continually ensure close liaison between ACT Health, ACT WorkCover and Environment ACT in relation to matters of common interest. Further emphasis is now being given to this with more regular inter-agency meetings occurring to discuss issues of mutual interest.

ATTACHMENT G

Department of Treasury

ACTIONS, OUTCOMES AND LEARNINGS SINCE THE BUSHFIRES

Chronology of Key Actions

18 January 2003	InTACT (which operates as a business unit of Treasury) was involved in the provision of communications and IT facilities prior to, during and after 18 January. (InTACT will make a separate submission)
19 January 2003	Worked with relevant agencies to provide financial, budgetary and insurance advice as required. Represented on interdepartmental committees responsible for implementing Government policy in relation to financial assistance for bushfire affected persons.
19 January 2003	Sought the cooperation of the Territory's banker, the Commonwealth Bank, to access \$200,000 cash
19 January 2003	\$200,000 cash made available to assist bushfire affected persons in emergency accommodation. This consisted of cash assistance of \$75 per family per day
21 January 2003	Met with officials from Department of Transport and Regional Services (DoTARS)
22 January 2003	With the agreement of Management Council, Treasury took on responsibility for dealing with the Commonwealth in relation to financial assistance including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liaising with DoTARS to understand terms and conditions of the National Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA); • Notifying the occurrence of a natural disaster; and • Putting in place guidelines to agencies in relation to the capture and isolation of costs associated with the bushfire, required for NDRA, audit and general information.
23 January 2003	Letter sent to all Chief Executives regarding Treasury's role in liaising with Commonwealth re the provision of financial assistance
24 January 2003	Notified Commonwealth of Natural Disaster.
30 January 2003	Executive Director, FABM, notified Chief Finance Officers (CFOs) of arrangements for the capture of data and costs

Outcomes

An amount of \$200,000 exceeds the amount of cash that would normally be expected to be held on premises by Government agencies. Large amounts of cash are expected to be deposited with the Territory's banker for both security reasons and to maximise return on cash.

As a result, it was necessary to seek the cooperation of the Territory's banker to access this amount of cash on a weekend. The Commonwealth Bank was extremely

cooperative in this instance, although, there were some difficulties. It was initially very difficult to contact a person on the weekend. When local bank personnel could not be contacted, a person was eventually reached by ringing the lost card number. Once this first contact was made the bank was quick to respond.

The second difficulty is that the Bank itself can have difficulty accessing large amounts of cash on weekends. It is understood that bank safes are on time locks over weekends and cannot be opened even by staff who have access to combinations. In this instance the bank was able to get the required amount of cash from the cash held in ATMs.

Moreover, handling of cash has security implications and it is difficult to control to prevent theft, fraud or false claims.

Lessons Learnt

Consideration should be given to preparing pre-numbered vouchers with control chits for recording the issuer and recipient. This would greatly increase control and reduce the risk of theft or fraud.

Prior arrangements could be made with leading retailers to provide goods or cash in return for the voucher. If agreed, such vouchers should be pre-printed and stored in a safe location to be accessed only in the event of an emergency.

Information Technology and Communications Infrastructure (InTACT) (summary only: refer separate submission).

ACT Government IT&C infrastructure is critical to a successful ACT Government response to a disaster. It is recommended that the ACT Government's IT&C systems be recognised as critical infrastructure, and designed and managed with all appropriate measures to maximise business continuity for key systems across Government.

Early engagement of Government Agencies with IT&C Provider significantly improves business continuity capability. It is recommended that all agencies with systems identified as having a role to play in emergency or disaster response, liaise with InTACT to establish and test appropriate disaster contingency plans.

Formal communications outside of Emergency Management Council should be expanded. It is recommended that the existing Liaison Officer system be extended from the current membership of Emergency Management Council to all Government Agencies with a possible role in emergency response. It is further recommended that these arrangements be flexible enough to allow non-member Agencies to be included as the need becomes apparent.

The Major Technology Systemic Failure sub-committee should be re-activated and the associated sub-plan revised. It is recommended that, given the increase in threat to key systems from cyber-attack and the need to be prepared for other natural disasters in future, the Emergency Management Council sub-committee to co-ordinate a response to systemic loss of technology-based infrastructure be reactivated.

ATTACHMENT H

ACT Workcover

Assistance and information

Pre-fire (during the previous year)	Review of coronial findings in NSW and VIC regarding Ku-ring-gai and Linton fires. Discussions with the Emergency Services Bureau (ESB) regarding safety strategies.
	Review of processes to remove horses from Government horse paddocks in the event of a bush fire. Discussions were held with Environment ACT to assist in improvements to procedures.
	Participated in Emergency Management Committee (EMC) review of bushfires the previous year. Liaison was undertaken with agencies such as ESB and Police about temporary traffic control.
	Participated in Operation Minotaur (a nationwide exercise in foot and mouth disease control). This provided the benefit of practice for a real disaster. Many Government agencies were involved in this exercise.
18 – 27 January 2003	State of emergency – Identification of problem of low level contaminated waste. Immediate liaison with the ACT Health and Environment ACT about a number of issues.
	Provided support to the Chief Health Officer regarding asbestos and other contaminated waste management practices.
	Media information provided.
	Coordinated development and promulgation of Demolition Guidelines for Contractors.
	Developed a “buddy system” for inspectors WorkCover / Environment to provide assessments and more efficiently use resources.
	Provided 1000 breathing masks and supporting documentation for distribution to householders. Prepared documentation relating to the recommendation for eye ware, long sleeved and long legged clothing, gloves and sturdy footwear in contaminated / damaged areas.
	Assessed option for contaminated waste locations.
	Assessed potential for hazards at Uriarra Crossing (expected to be similar to the hazards at Stromlo, Pierces Creek and Cotter). Joint inspection undertaken with Health, Environment and Housing.
	Establishment of testing for contaminants. This was undertaken in consultation with Robson Laboratories.
	Advice provided regarding gas infrastructure to augment advice from ActewAGL. Provision of media release regarding relighting of appliances.
	Provided information about safety of LPG containers, demolition and management of asbestos. Information was provided to Canberra Connect and the media.

	Provided full-time officer to Police Operations Centre. This enabled cross-agency liaison.
	Provided advice about management of dangerous goods including ammunition, explosives and explosives magazines, damage to petrol station. Liaison was undertaken with building owners and goods owners and Environment ACT.
	Provided pamphlets and further 1000 masks to the ACT Recovery Centre.
	Provided a full-time OHS inspector service which was based out of the Lyons Recovery Centre.
	Provided advice regarding operation of contaminated waste site at Belconnen Landfill. This involved communication with DUS, Environment ACT and NoWaste.
	Identified problems with heat affect gas cylinders and provided information to the general public regarding handling heat affected cylinders. Liaison was undertaken with gas suppliers regarding the pick up of fire affected cylinders.
	Identified problems with TTM in fire affected areas. Liaised with DUS and the Police to restrict traffic speeds in fire affected areas.
	Identified potential areas of vulnerable infrastructure. Liaised with Defence and ActewAGL to complete fire break around vulnerable infrastructure.
	Attended infrastructure recovery meetings and undertook early liaison with the Infrastructure Recovery Committee.
	Provided advice to the Police regarding events during the State of Emergency (eg. Triathlon).
27 January – 10 February 2003	Continued to provide support information to builders, demolishers and Canberra Connect.
	Liaison was undertaken with Bovis Lend Lease (BLL), BEPCON and DUS regarding planning for demolition.
From 10 February 2003	Commenced preparation of instrument to remove fees and charges under the OH&S Act, Scaffolding and Lifts Act and Dangerous Goods Act for bushfire affected people/properties.
	Participated in community meetings with ACT Health, DUS and Canberra Connect.
	Participated in rural landholder meetings with Environment ACT and DUS.
	Undertook an inspection of Stromlo contaminated waste site.
	Assisted with OH&S strategies to support all government staff.
	Provided advice to BLL and influx of building contractors regarding advice on workers compensation requirements.
	OHS inspectors based out of the BLL facility to bring them closer to the areas requiring assistance.
	Completed process to assist residents clearing and disposing of waste from partially damaged properties in consultation with Environment ACT, NoWaste and community.

	Provided assistance to develop OH&S action plan for schools in affected areas. Consultation was undertaken with Education and subsequently with ACTION and DUS on specific matters.
	Progressing the development of Building Collapse Sub-Plan in liaison with ESB, ACT Health and Environment ACT.
	Consideration being given to the need to generally educate the community about emergency strategies and what can be expected from Government – eg. Listen to radio, where evacuation centres are likely to be.
	Provided information for bushfire victims and participated in the NRMA Insurance Help Expo.

Outcomes

ACT WorkCover has two roles in relation to matters such as this bushfire disaster;

- assistance and information in relation to those elements where preventative action can be taken in relation to the safety of workers; and
- assistance with expert information and strategies in the recovery phase.

Participation as a member of the Emergency Management Committee provides invaluable insight into the planning required for emergency response and in developing the networks to manage WorkCover's roles in assisting in the response processes.

The excellent liaison with, support for and support from other agencies and entities ensured that outcomes were achievable to assist in the recovery process.

Lessons Learnt

WorkCover's role will continue over the coming years in terms of ensuring safety during demolition and during the rebuilding. This role will also address issues supporting all staff who have undertaken a considerable workload during this period.

The need for the Building Collapse Sub-Plan will be progressed as appropriate with the Emergency Management Committee. The forum for progressing the proposed Building Collapse Sub-Plan is through the Emergency Management Committee as a sub-plan to the *Emergency Management Act 1999*. This matter has been placed on the agenda for discussion at the next meeting of the Committee.

The need for community education will be progressed as appropriate with the Emergency Management Committee.

ATTACHMENT I

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

The Taskforce and associated Secretariat commenced operation in the 10 day period following the events of January 18 with the Taskforce formally announced on 24 January 2003. Membership of the Taskforce is detailed at Attachment B which also outlines the organisational groups of the Secretariat.

In very broad terms, it was agreed by the Taskforce at early meetings that its role should be fourfold:

- To set out an overall Recovery Plan for the ACT. The key document here is the Action Plan, developed in early February and included at Attachment K;
- To coordinate the recovery effort being undertaken by a wide range of ACT Government agencies;
- To directly undertake a limited range of tasks. To date these have included:
 - initiating the physical cleanup process, through Bovis Lend Lease;
 - providing information to the community through Community Updates and regular newspaper advertisements; and
 - operation of the Recovery Centre at Lyons with associated individual and community support.
- To identify emerging issues and ensure that there are prompt responses, through the Taskforce Secretariat, through the CERG or through line agencies as appropriate.

Action Plan

The Taskforce released an Action Plan on 12 February 2003. This action plan aimed to provide a work program for the Taskforce and key partners.

The key goals of the Plan were to assist the Taskforce in its work in partnership with Government and the Community to

1. support those who have been significantly impacted by the fires;
2. ensure that the community actively participates in the process of rebuilding and recovery;
3. ensure clean up of the Territory in a way that is safe, timely, efficient, cost effective and respectful;
4. facilitate rebuilding in a way that is safe, timely, streamlined and provides individuals with real choices;
5. provide up to date, relevant and useful information to assist with the recovery process; and
6. learn lessons from this event so the ACT Community moves forward positively

In each of these areas, the Plan sought to articulate key issues and concerns and outline key actions required to respond to these issues. It also outlined achievements which had already been made in these areas.

To monitor the implementation of the Action Plan, a project management tool was developed within the Secretariat. Based on a database application, it provided a mechanism to record new issues throughout the recovery process, new actions and

tasks, responsibilities and updates on progress. This is monitored, and reported on regularly, with information regarding this provided to the Taskforce at each meeting. Consequently, there is a full record of the activities and progress of the Secretariat and Taskforce from the commencement of the implementation of the Action Plan.

ACT BUSHFIRE RECOVERY TASKFORCE

Establishment Phase

From its commencement, the Taskforce met on a weekly basis and sometimes more frequently to progress recovery activities.

The Taskforce invested significant time in its initial phase in the process of obtaining briefings from key stakeholders responsible for aspects of the recovery. Early briefings which were arranged included:

- the ACT Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, the Department of Urban Services and ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services who had key responsibilities in relation to recovery;
- ACTEW AGL and Telstra, both of whom had responsibility for key aspects of infrastructure repair;
- building industry representatives regarding anticipated issues in relation to cleanup and rebuilding;
- insurance industry representatives regarding issues being faced by residents with destroyed and damaged properties; and
- Bovis Lend Lease who had developed a project management proposal to assist the clean up process.

A key activity which engaged the Taskforce in its initial phase was the development of an action plan which sought to define the aims of the Taskforce, set key targets and articulate the key actions of the Taskforce over its lifespan.

In its initial establishment phase, the Taskforce also met with the Community and Expert Reference Group which had been recently established to support the Taskforce exchange views about key issues, establish a process to ensure interaction of the two Groups and gain input into the development of the Action Plan.

In its initial meetings, the Taskforce was involved in further priority activities including:

- ensuring that the community needs were being addressed through a well resourced Recovery Centre, community development activities, appropriate levels of financial assistance and matching needs with offers and donations;
- ensuring that public information was provided to the community in a timely and useful format targeting key stakeholder groups including urban and rural residents, those who had lost houses and those who were still living in the zone of fire damage;
- facilitating a well coordinated, affordable and well managed cleanup process for destroyed blocks in suburbs;

- ensuring that physical aspects of the clean up and restoration were progressing, for both urban and rural ACT including the opening of roads, clean up of public areas, restoring rural fences, and the completion of the infrastructure restoration; and
- ensuring that aspects of the clean up which were the responsibility of ACT Government, including buildings and ACT Housing properties progressed quickly.

Second Phase of Taskforce Activities

After the development of the Action Plan, the Taskforce discussed and addressed priority issues which emerged and were identified by the Reference Group, Secretariat and other agencies. Key issues during this phase of activity included:

- assessing the needs of people affected by the bushfires, particularly those requiring temporary accommodation;
- assisting people in finalising the clean up of their blocks through better linkages between the Recovery Centre and Bovis Lend Lease;
- establishing a process to respond to the issues surrounding the future use of non urban land; and
- responding to emerging issues raised by the Community and Expert Reference Group, particularly in relation to further issues facing rural lessees, volunteer projects and the development of a memorial

Ongoing Work of the Taskforce

After its tenth meeting on 1 April 2003, the Taskforce deemed it appropriate to move to fortnightly meetings. This move signalled another shift in the Taskforce's activities, with a greater emphasis on longer term issues. From this point, the Taskforce has been considering and progressing issues including:

- responding to issues within the community, particularly recognising that mental and emotional health issues may be an issue for many people;
- providing services to ensure that people have the information and resources to commence the rebuilding process;
- monitoring the cleanup of residential properties and ensuring the completion of the cleanup process by the end of the four month deadline; and
- canvassing the community about new and emerging issues.

It should be noted that the Taskforce is also involved in progressing the Study into the Non Urban Land through their involvement in a steering committee responsible for this issue.

COMMUNICATIONS GROUP

Communication efforts

1 February 2003 onwards	Canberra Times ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce 1/2 page advertisements commenced. These have been published twice weekly since, and provide a range of information on health and safety, clearance and building, support services etc. Ads also placed in Chronicle and Valley Voice. To ensure accuracy of contact details and service availability the Communications team has regularly checked the services listed in publications. Early information needs included health advice, especially on asbestos, and issues related to fire damaged sites and clearance process.
6 February 2003	Community meeting held at Recovery centre to discuss asbestos issues.
7 February 2003	Additional ½ page CT ad on asbestos.
11 February 2003	Need for additional communications resources identified and procurement process commenced.
13 February 2003	Process formalised to monitor Canberra Connect shopfront, call centre and website inquiries.
14 February 2003	Bushfire recovery taskforce website loaded. This took over from the Bushfire Web pages on Canberra Connect site that had been established and maintained from 16 January.
14 February 2003 onwards	1st edition of weekly community newsletter "Community Update" – 40,000 copies distributed directly to Recovery Centre registrations, letterbox to affected suburbs, and distributed through clubs, schools, libraries, shopping centres. The content has included a wide range of factual reports to inform and assist in decision-making, as well as community stories related to the recovery. Later additions have included "Fact sheets" on topics such as financial assistance and rural support.
21 February 2003	Community Billboard established at Duffy Shopping Centre as part of program addressing need for variety of communication channels.
Week ending 28 February 2003	Communications team receives much needed additional resources, including expertise in disaster and recovery media management.
28 February 2003	Bushfire Recovery included in ACT Government exhibition at the Canberra Show – memorial walls for visitors to record messages, access to wide range of government services including rebuilding advice from PALM, and opportunity to email "Lucky" the koala for the children.
7 March 2003 onwards	Community Billboard appears in Canberra Times – this initiative of the Community and Expert Reference Group appears on a regular basis and matches offers of assistance with requests for help.
7 March 2003	NRMA Rebuilding Advice Expo – approx 500 attendees to expo that provided opportunity to meet with range of suppliers of goods and services relevant to rebuilding.

10 March 2003	Planning commenced for community project to “re-green” the fire-affected suburbs.
16 April 2003	Free plant issue scheme announced for residents with gardens damaged by the fire.

Lessons Learnt

The issues listed below have been progressively identified since January 18 and rapidly addressed by the Taskforce Secretariat, Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) and relevant government organisation. Nevertheless we consider it worthwhile to record these issues so as to act as a reminder to people responding to future disaster events

Train and support secretariat team by discussing how community committees operate, what to expect (including the storming, forming etc phases), how to settle in processes– recognising the CERG is a primary indicator of community needs for the Taskforce.

More information is required earlier to address perceived public health and safety concerns.

The community does not have experience in being affected by disaster, personal and community recovery, and specific tasks such as rebuilding. Information supplied needs to start from “zero base – no assumptions”.

Need to closely monitor the questions being asked through Recovery Centre, Canberra Connect channels and at the Taskforce Secretariat to:-

1. monitor issues and ensure these are being addressed; and
2. develop Question and Answers for use at all these venues, and also in printed communication such as Community Update and newspaper ads.

This monitoring can also assist in anticipation and response to emerging issues to be advised to Chief Minister’s office and Taskforce.

Note that people may not use standard communications channels – may have stopped reading the newspapers, may not listen to radio. This means messages have to be delivered in many forms, and repeated often.

Need for information on processes underway as well as results eg advising that air quality is being monitored, and no results to cause concern is more important than only advising if an issue arises.

Recognise benefits of public meetings beyond those able to attend by reporting the Q and As from these meetings via other channels.

As early as possible in response identify information needs and establish common databases across Government agencies.

Use existing community channels as much as possible, and have better connections with radio media.

Check if information flow is meeting community needs, and if physical distributions are getting to the right people.

Ensure printed material is obviously new content – the first few weeks of CT ads all looked alike, and feedback received was many people didn't pick up that each ad contained new material. This was addressed in several ways, including insert of photos.

Review information flow to ensure even coverage across issues and fire affected regions.

Ensure information is provided in timely form – challenge with print run deadlines and speed of issues in early weeks.

Community and Expert Reference Group

Progressive Set Up

<p>15 February 2003 to 27 February 2003</p>	<p>The Community Expert Reference Group (CERG) membership was announced on 3 February 2003. Its role is to provide a link between the wider community and the Taskforce and to be a key advisory body to the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.</p> <p>Membership of the Reference Group was drawn from a wide cross-section of the Canberra community. It includes representatives from the community sector; residents who have lost households and property; business and professional organisations; unions and relevant Commonwealth authorities.</p> <p>The Reference Group are currently meeting and regularly joining together to discuss issues (such as asbestos health concerns, insurance problems, business recovery and many other issues), and assist in progressing actions.</p>
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“Normal” meetings of CERG

Indicative discussion items listed below:

<p>21 February 2003 onwards</p>	<p>CERG is continuing to meet weekly and to add to its identified issues list. Taskforce Chair and CERG chair have met to discuss possible areas for improving links and input into strategic work programs</p>
<p>28 February 2003</p>	<p>Weekly discussions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the urgent need for distribution of Appeal funds for people in need. • the need for a rural forum, or forums, was raised. A forum would allow rural lessees to air their concerns and speak directly to officials about their needs. • recognition of needs of residents remaining in damaged suburbs. • more active counselling programs to address emerging problems. • options for a memorial. • the need to coordinate offers of assistance, including donations of computers and Microsoft software. • the need for ACT Housing tenants to be better informed on the broader context of processes they are involved in, such as the range of inspections necessary on damaged properties. • the need to assist charities in collection and distribution of donated goods.

7 March 2003	<p>Weekly discussions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • concern that people may become 'burnt out' from the high intensity of effort since the bushfires, including people that may be covering for someone that has been pulled out of their normal role to assist in the recovery process. The group will assist in influencing the provision of additional resources where necessary. • concern was expressed about the need to confirm the rural assistance package. Rural lessees are facing major issues related to loss of property and livelihood (including business and pasture and security of tenure). • consideration of options for an appropriate tribute to recognise the efforts of firefighters, charities and members of the community before, during and after the bushfires. • further consideration of an appropriate memorial or memorials.
14 March 2003	<p>Weekly discussions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need to offer constructive options that engage individuals and community groups who offer to help with the recovery process (ie, adoption of a park) and to develop proposals for a coordinated approach when using these resources. • the need to support those in the rural settlements, such as Pierce's Creek, who are feeling excluded and believe they are not being heard. • continued concern about the wellbeing of people directly affected by the fires and those supporting them (including public servants). Males, as a group, were identified as one group often unwilling to recognise a problem or seek help.
21 March 2003	<p>Weekly discussions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a proposed meeting with PALM to discuss the monitoring of levels of dual occupancy, planning issues and the possibility of opportunistic development in fire affected areas. • dust suppression measures during demolition and clean-up – information will be sought from Workcover on standards to be met and a note included in the Community Update. • the opportunities for the involvement of community organisations, such as the Rotary Club, in the recovery effort.

<p>28 March 2003</p>	<p>Weekly discussions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the need for clarification of areas covered by the various studies currently underway. Residents are unsure which study they need to provide input for, as they have not found the line between the urban and non-urban studies to be clear. • rural issues included the desirability for finalisation of 99 year leases and the need for assistance in the removal of debris from burnt shearing sheds. • the high desirability of Commonwealth taxation breaks for people who have lost houses (eg no GST). • mental health of residents of affected areas and all people (and children) affected by the fires is emerging as a real concern. The group has emphasised the need for specialists in mental health to be available for people at risk and for information and guidance on mental health issues to be made publicly available.
<p>4 April 2003</p>	<p>Weekly Discussions included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senator Gary Humphries has now joined the CERG as the Commonwealth representative. Senator Humphries attended his first CERG meeting on 3 April 2003. • concern that people who lost their homes are not aware of all options open to them (rebuilding, selling etc) and the pros and cons for each option. Information on this matter is to be included in the Community Update and letters/flyers to affected residents. • looking to move from a reactive and 'emergency' focus, to being proactive and considering its objectives in the next phase of the recovery process. • mental health issues, particularly for children, are an ongoing concern. Issues need to be identified and support needs to be available for people at risk. Support resources also need to be constantly monitored. <p>the perceived high cost of rebuilding has been identified as an ongoing concern. The group would like all options for additional Commonwealth assistance to be explored. Additionally, it was suggested that the receipt of additional GST revenue resulting due to the bushfires should be drawn to the Commonwealth's attention in support for further assistance.</p>

Lessons Learnt for CERG

The learnings outlined below have been progressively identified and rapidly implemented:

- CERG (or similar body) can provide an essential feedback mechanism
- Need for early resources as advisory committee established
- Desirable to ensure close links between CERG and the Taskforce
- Need to listen, check, verify, feed back, manage expectations
- Need for VERY quick response on emerging issues

COMMUNITY SUPPORT GROUP

Community support of those affected by the fires was activated on 18 January 2003 primarily through the establishment of evacuation centres, providing telephone services and general support to the community. DEYFS had carriage of community support under the auspices of the Community Recovery Sub-Plan. DEYFS established the Recovery Centre on 24 January 2003. With the establishment of the Taskforce on the same day the overall co-ordinating responsibility for community support progressively became the responsibility of the Taskforce.

On 11 February 2003 the responsibility for the management of the Recovery Centre transferred to the taskforce.

The Community Recovery Process

18 January 2003	Established four evacuation centres.
24 January 2003	Opened the Lyons Recovery Centre.
6 February 2003	Advertised for recovery team members and leaders.
11 February 2003	Transfer of management of the Recovery Centre from the Department of Employment, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS) to the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat.
17 February 2003	<p>The appointment and recruitment of recovery workers was undertaken to provide: outreach visits and personal support; counselling; practical advice about rebuilding or repairing damaged property; access to a variety of material assistance; help to make contact with other ACT Government and non-Government agencies; and assistance to community neighbourhood and street groups.</p> <p>The recovery workers are grouped into four teams (Duffy, Chapman/Kambah, Rural and Other Suburbs teams) established to provide case management and support to all households where houses were destroyed, and other households in the fire affected areas.</p>
10 March 2003	Three Community development workers, under the auspices of Woden Community Services and Communities @ Work were funded by the Taskforce to work with the bushfire affected communities to support them to design and put in place a range of projects to lessen the social and health impacts of the bushfires on communities. These workers work in partnership with the Recovery Centre to empower individuals and communities to manage their own recovery.

Outcomes

The Recovery Centre is located at 67 Launceston Street, Lyons, an annex of the Lyons Primary School.

The Recovery Centre was initially staffed by volunteers from ACT Government, staff from NSW and Victorian human services agencies, community volunteers and volunteers for Commonwealth government agencies.

The Centre was designed to provide a one-stop shop for people most severely affected by the fires. Immediate help was provided for peoples' survival needs for food, clothing, shelter and information.

Agencies and organisations providing services at the Recovery Centre from January 24 were as follows:

Disaster Relief Grants, St Vincent de Paul, Salvation Army, Red Cross, ACT Housing, PALM, Insurance Council, Adracare, Anglicare, JPs, Centrelink, YWCA. Counselling services were provided by ACT Mental Health, School Counsellors, Relationships Australia, and debriefing for staff was provided by the social work teaching staff of ACU.

The Recovery Centre provided registrations for assistance and took applications for the Disaster Relief Grants program. These applications were also processed at the Recovery Centre. The Scheme provides \$5000 to households rendered uninhabitable by the fire, and a further \$5000 for these households not insured for loss of contents.

At the time of writing, four teams of Recovery Workers (Duffy, Chapman/Kambah, Rural and Other Suburbs teams) provide case management and support to all households where houses were destroyed, and other households in the fire affected areas. Staff come from professional backgrounds in social work, psychology, mental health and housing. They have been chosen for their flexibility, skills and high motivation.

Recovery workers pay particular attention to people who are at higher risk in the recovery process; for instance, people who thought they or their loved ones were going to die, the bereaved and seriously injured, those separated in the evacuation, people who have had multiple moves since the fire, and people who have suffered prior trauma. There is also a focus on people who are frail or have a disability, are socially isolated, have low incomes, or have inadequate housing.

Anglicare and the Salvation Army provide "friendly visiting" services from the Centre.

In addition to providing services for individual households, the Recovery Centre assists the new community organisations that have emerged as a result of the fire. Recovery Workers, and community development workers from Communities @ Work and Woden community Services, assist these groups with practical support around community events, and information.

ACT Community Care and ACT Mental Health provide counsellors to the Recovery Centre for services for people who have persistent psychological symptoms as a result of the fire.

362 households registered for assistance on the first day. Over 700 applications have been received for the Disaster Relief Grants Program. In all 1400 households have registered for assistance from the Recovery Centre. Recovery Centre staff have been a useful source of information for the Recovery Taskforce on emerging community issues.

It is proposed that the Recovery Centre will close when community and responsible ACT Government agencies have the capacity to take on any remaining clients requiring service, and when people and affected communities say they no longer need a dedicated service.

Lessons Learnt

Responsibility for emergency housing and friendly visiting is not clearly set out in the Community Recovery Sub Plan. These roles were effectively played by Adracare (emergency housing) and the Salvation Army and Anglicare (friendly home visiting) in this disaster. The Community Recovery Sub Plan should be amended to reflect these roles and organisations.

The Recovery Centre case management and community development model, staffed by multi disciplinary teams, has been very effective and well received by the affected community. The model should be documented as best practice and be included in the Community Recovery Sub Plan.

Safety plans for the frail aged and people with a disability, especially those living alone, should be developed before the next bushfire season. This would significantly relieve the anxiety of these vulnerable people, many of whom were evacuated on January 18, and are still suffering from anxiety.

Housing

4 February 2003	The Bushfire Recovery Taskforce initiated a quantitative market research survey covering medium term housing needs of those displaced by the bushfires. The main objective of the study was to identify the diverse medium-term housing needs of people displaced by the bushfires so that the government could respond accordingly.
10 February 2003	Chief Minister approved the proposed survey.
11 February 2003	Bushfire Recovery Taskforce briefed on draft survey questionnaire and contract let to Market Attitude Research Services (MARS).
28 February 2003	Final detailed MARS survey report received. 403 households were interviewed. Key findings were as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Almost six in ten homeowners (and dwelling renters) who had their dwelling destroyed will return to their suburb affected by the bushfires. Based on interviews the following outcomes emerged: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • over four in ten (44%) of all bushfire affected households intend to rebuild on the same block of land; • over one in ten (13%) of all households affected intend to rent back in the same suburb or rural area of the ACT; • over two in ten (24%) are unsure but have indicated that they will likely remain in the ACT (Note: most of this group are homeowners and not normally renting their dwelling); • 10% of households will rent elsewhere in Canberra; • 1% of households are planning to move out of the ACT and rent elsewhere; • 6% of households will purchase or build elsewhere in the ACT; and • 2% of households intend to purchase or build elsewhere in Australia. 2. Around half of the dwellings currently planned to be rebuilt may be larger in size than the original dwelling. Over five in ten householders rebuilding their home feel it would be useful to obtain building advice and information.

	<p>3. Most householders currently have interim private dwelling arrangements but around one-twentieth of all affected householders may require ACT Housing interim arrangements within the next twelve months.</p> <p>4. Useful information sources to assist bushfire victims were identified, but further effort is required.</p>
5 March 2003	Meeting held between Taskforce members, Taskforce Secretariat, the building industry and PALM to discuss survey results. A media release titled ' <i>Results of Housing Survey for Residents Affected by ACT Bushfires Released</i> ' released from the Chief Minister's Office.
10 March 2003	Meeting with Land Group to discuss bushfire related affects on the private, residential land and housing market.

Outcomes and Lessons Learnt

The key outcomes and learnings for Housing are those listed at 28 February 2003 from MARS.

In assessing the results of the survey, Land Group of DUS advised that Bushfire related market activity would have minimal affect on the land availability in the ACT and that there would be sufficient private rental properties available to meet immediate housing demand.

Advice and information, including PALM requirements for rebuilding dwellings, should be provided to people planning to rebuild their homes.

ACT Housing may need to provide some housing (on an interim basis) for households who are unable to maintain their existing interim arrangements before permanent accommodation is found.

Volunteering / Donations

The following outlines the joint achievements of the Secretariat and relevant volunteer bodies:-

24 January 2003	Volunteering ACT (VACT) offered to administer all offers of volunteer assistance from individuals and groups.
25 January 2003	Storage found for overwhelming quantities of donated goods.
11 February 2003	Meetings arranged with charities assisting with distribution of donated goods and services.
25 February 2003	Audit to identify fire affected community groups commenced.
21 February 2003	Guidelines developed for distribution of major corporate donations.
28 February 2003	Audit of amendments to contractual arrangements as a result of impact of fires on contracted community agencies.
4 March 2003	Identification of impact of fires and particular needs of affected groups and matching of their needs with business, service clubs, etc. who were able to offer assistance.
7 March 2003	Community Billboard established in Canberra Times daily as a tool for matching potential donors and recipients.

13 March 2003	Levels and types of need of affected community groups determined for development of appropriate strategies to meet these needs.
18 March 2003	Fire affected people provided with an access voucher so that charities can verify their eligibility for access to donated goods and services from charities and businesses.
1 April 2003	Assisted Scouts and YMCA in a collaborative process to planning the rehabilitation of affected youth outdoor recreation facilities – Camps Sturt and Cottermouth.

Outcomes

A significant matching of the needs of fire affected people with offers of assistance has been achieved.

The organisation of meetings with charities resulted in consistent decisions on the allocation of donations, based on a set of principles and casework recommendations.

The audit to identify fire affected community groups was completed and has allowed the matching of offers with identified need.

Rigorous practices were put in place to minimise the risk of valuable goods being accessed by unscrupulous, ineligible people at the expense of eligible householders. An access voucher was developed and sent to each eligible household. The voucher was well received by all and has streamlined processes for access to goods.

Lessons Learnt

Volunteering ACT should be recognised in the Community Recovery Sub Plan as responsible for the registration and matching of volunteers.

Early media attention needs to be given to informing the public of the types of donations required to avoid the logistical problems associated with the storage, handling, sorting and distribution of large amounts of donated goods.

That attention be given to providing information to affected householders in a timely manner of offers being made by ACT Retailers to provide discounted prices on goods and services to people trying to recover from the bushfire.

CONSTRUCTION GROUP

Decision to “Project Manage” the Demolition Process

Wednesday 29 January 2003	Bovis Lend Lease (BLL), through the MBA, met with the Department of Urban Services (DUS) to table a proposal to project manage the clean up of Canberra following the bushfires. The initial proposal was that BLL would offer its project management services to all the insurers and that the ACT Government should use BLL to project manage the clean up of Government properties. DUS referred the concept to the Government for consideration.
Afternoon of Friday 31 January 2003	BLL again met with DUS. It advised that many of the insurers had or were about to pay out their insurance claims on destroyed property. The Company had therefore amended its proposal to suggest that the Government should project manage the entire clean up by providing individual lessees with a demolition service that was safe, cost effective and quick. A formal proposal with costings was tabled at the meeting.
Monday 3 February 2003	ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce met for the first time and considered the BLL proposal which was tabled and discussed. The Taskforce endorsed the proposal and it was subsequently discussed with the Chief Minister. As a result, a formal submission to the Government was prepared (including advice about costings from an independent quantity surveyor). The submission supported the BLL proposal and included a further proposal to provide residential and community lessees with a demolition grant.
Monday 10 February 2003	The Chief Minister advised that the Government had made a decision to appoint a project manager, that the project manager would be BLL and that a demolition grant of up to \$5000 would be provided to residential and community lessees, provided they were insured but were not fully covered for the actual cost of the demolition.

Outcomes

The appointment of a project manager for site clean up ensured:

- a consistent and safe work method for clean-up of each block such as using water sprays, acceptable hours of work and had proper covers on their loads etc;
- the bushfire clean up is completed systematically, and as quickly as practical to minimise the cost to individual households of clearing destroyed or uninhabitable homes; and
- a managed traffic plan to reduce the impact of the considerable plant and machinery working on each property and the large number of truck movements through residential streets, and the minimising of queuing at the landfill sites.

Lessons Learnt

The appointment of a project manager proved to be a constructive approach which allowed for the orderly and safe site clean up including close monitoring.

Waste disposal (West Belconnen & Stromlo)

Immediately after the bushfire	It was apparent that a site was needed for property demolition material. As the worst affected areas in Weston Creek were about 30 years old, there was a concern that asbestos cement sheeting (fibro) would be present in most of the burnt structures. This was tested and confirmed. Therefore waste disposal would have to be carefully controlled.
	While a site close to the bushfire areas would have been preferred, the only immediately available site was the recently closed West Belconnen tip. The tip was recommissioned and used for all potentially asbestos contaminated demolition waste from 6 Feb 2003.
	The Coppins Crossing sewerage sludge lagoons was identified as a possible site that was relatively close to Weston Creek, but the sludge in the lagoons was still smouldering as a result of the bushfires. Preparation of the site began, but it soon became apparent that the pit fires could continue for weeks or months. An alternative site in Stromlo Forest was therefore identified and assessed by all relevant Commonwealth and ACT agencies.
Friday 21 February 2003	Brief to Chief Minister seeking agreement to transfer the disposal site for demolition waste from West Belconnen to the temporary disposal site at block 447, Stromlo. The brief received approval.
Thursday 6 March 2003	West Belconnen tip was closed.
Friday 7 March 2003	Block 447, Stromlo opened and closed due to rain on Saturday 8 March 2003.
Monday 10 March 2003	West Belconnen re-opened after heavy rain made the Stromlo access road impassable, forcing the closure of Stromlo. Further work on the road rectified the problem and Stromlo re-opened.
14 March 2003	Block 447, Stromlo re-opened (see outcome below)

Outcomes

Since the Stromlo site opened it has received a peak of over 200 trucks per day, each visit saving an hour in round trip travel time (compared with West Belconnen). The Stromlo temporary landfill is only for fire damaged building rubble. Green waste and hazardous wastes are not permitted at this site, however, it can be delivered to either Mugga Lane Tip or to Corkhills at

Fyshwick. A geotechnical assessment of the Stromlo site required a subsoil cut-off drain to be established. The landfill is not lined but will be clay capped. When the site is closed, cover material will be put in place.

Lessons Learnt

The quantities of waste were greater than initially expected. Fortunately, the Stromlo site has been able to accommodate the extra volume.

Help line - “Totalcare”

Mid February	Both the Taskforce and the Community and Expert Reference Group began to receive complaints from residents still living in the bushfire affected areas. The complaints ranged from safety issues such as missing fences, to sewer smells. It was decided that a helpline was needed which could receive complaints at any time of the day and then arrange the investigation and rectification of the problem.
18 February 2003	The Taskforce engaged Totalcare Facilities Management (TCM) to undertake remedial works on an “as needs basis” as TCM already had a 24 hour a day helpline and employed a range of tradespeople who could handle most issues. Where it could not handle an issue, TCM was required to contact the appropriate ACT agency and work with it to resolve the matter. The TCM service commenced on 18 February and its availability was advertised through The Canberra Times Taskforce advertisements and Community Update newsletters.
28 April 2003	As the calls to the helpline were occasional and the upper limit of the funding allocation had been reached, TCM was advised that the services provided by the Helpline were no longer required on an ongoing basis. It was anticipated that TCM would receive occasional calls from the public as a result of either advertising, TCM has been asked to take the details of the caller and their concerns and refer them to the Construction Group. These cases will be assessed on a case-by-case basis and action implemented if necessary.

Outcomes

The community was provided with a 24 hour emergency service to rectify health and safety and public nuisance matters.

Lessons Learnt

If the time is available, work should be done on clearly defining the scope and limits of the task and the definition should then be clearly signed off by the contractor.

STRATEGY GROUP

Study into Non-Urban Bushfire-Affected areas

mid February 2003	Prepared submission to Government on a non-urban strategic development study.
19 February 2003	Government announced the Study into Non-Urban Bushfire-Affected Areas (“the Non-Urban Study”).
Early March 2003	Engaged ACT Procurement Solutions to manage procurement. Prepared budget submission
15 March 2003	Government announced Steering Committee for the Non-Urban Study.
Mid-March 2003	Liaised with Environment ACT on links between Recreation Strategy and the Non-Urban Study.
19 March 2003	Briefed professional institutions on the Non-Urban Study.
20 March 2003	Held first meeting of Steering Committee.
Late March 2003	Finalised procurement documentation for Stage 1 (Expressions of Interest). Prepared document for Taskforce and Community and Expert Reference Group showing links between studies.
27 March 2003	Consultancy Expression of Interest documentation made available on BASIS website.
1 April 2003	Convened industry briefing.
8 April 2003	Held second meeting of Steering Committee. Steering Committee undertook tour of non-urban bushfire-affected areas.
9 April 2003	Expressions of Interest for consultancy closed. Finalised procurement documentation for Stage 2 (Request For Tender).
11 April 2003	Shortlist selected. Request for tenders provided to shortlisted parties.
late April to mid May	Identifying and collecting (through the Taskforce Secretariat and ACT government agencies) information and research to support the study team.

Outcomes

Original aim was to contribute to a long range study of land use in fire affected areas of the ACT, as part of coordinating longer term issues including urban planning, the urban / bush interface, forests, national parks, etc. Timeframe as listed in Taskforce Action Plan was March 2003.

The Government announced the Study into Non-Urban Bushfire-Affected Areas (“the Non-Urban Study”) on 19 February 2003 and announced membership of the Steering Committee to oversight the study on 15 March 2003. Expressions of Interest for the consultancy have closed, and the Request for Tender has been issued.

The draft report is expected to be released in July 2003, followed by a public consultation period of approximately six weeks, after which the final report is expected to be completed in September.

The study will provide a report on the best use(s) of non-urban land for the sustainable development of the Territory. The output of this study will form an input to the ongoing development of the Spatial Plan, which in turn forms a part of the Canberra Plan.

Lessons Learnt

Learnings will best be identified and articulated when the study is further advanced or completed.

Insurance, Banking and Finance

mid February 2003	Identified public liability issues. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need to advise owners. • Need to secure blocks. • Need to negotiate bringing forward of public liability insurance to the signing of the demolition contract rather than commencement of demolition.
17 February 2003	Insurance advisor joined Taskforce Secretariat.
19 February 2003	Convened the first of a number of teleconferences with representatives from Insurance Council of Australia and key insurance companies to progress and resolve issues identified by individuals and by the Community and Expert Reference Group. Teleconferences to be held weekly, with other insurance companies to join.
Mid-late February 2003	Investigated insurers' treatment of co-insurance and under-insurance.
Mid-late February 2003	Liased with banks to progress and resolve issues identified by individuals and by the Community and Expert Reference Group. Liased with CARE Financial Counselling regarding response of finance companies to clients affected by the bushfires.
5 March 2003	Provided template to companies for provision of contact details and key information and main elements of their insurance policies. Companies agreed to ascertain number of partial claims and costs associated with partial damage.
6 March 2003	Held public forum on insurance – attended by 40 people.
March 2003	Worked with ACT Insurance Authority to arrange scheme for public liability insurance for vacant blocks.
17 April 2003	Chief Minister announced availability of public liability insurance for vacant blocks.
late April 2003	Advertised scheme in the Canberra Times and the Community Update.
28 April 2003	Arranged for public liability insurance to be purchased from Canberra Connect Shopfronts.

Outcomes

The aim as stated in the Taskforce Action Plan was to ensure that insurance issues are addressed and there is equity in relation to approaches taken on these issues. Timeframe as listed in Taskforce Action Plan was Feb-March 2003. Issues relating to banking and finance have also been addressed.

The insurance advisor has received numerous enquiries during the period 17 February to 1 May 2003, with the most significant cases reflected in the statistics below.

As at 2 May 2003, the insurance advisor had received notification of 29 cases relating to home insurance. Of the 29 issues notified, 24 have been resolved to the satisfaction of the owner. The remaining 5 issues involve ongoing negotiations between owners and their insurers.

As at 2 May 2003, the insurance advisor had received notification of 2 cases relating to contents insurance, both of which have been resolved to the satisfaction of the resident. 4 cases relating to business insurance have been raised with the insurance advisor. These matters are being negotiated between business owners/legal advisors and their insurers.

As at 2 May, the insurance advisor had received notification of 2 cases relating to banking and 1 case relating to a finance company.

Advice and assistance provided through meetings with Taskforce and Community and Expert Reference Group; information in the Canberra Times and articles in the Community Update; public forums; individual contact (in person, or via phone, email or letter); and briefings to the Government.

Lessons Learnt

Importance of having an advisor dedicated to insurance, banking and finance issues.

- Serves as a clear contact for individuals, companies, the Secretariat and other recovery-related agencies, and the Government.
- Facilitates consistency of approach on broad issues while still allowing individual issues to be progressed and resolved on a case-by-case basis as needed.

Importance of coordination and liaison role, especially through building relationship with and convening discussions with representatives of insurance companies, the loss adjuster and the Master Builders Association. Assists with efficiency, information-sharing, consistency of approach.

Importance of community education role through articles published in Community Update, the Canberra Times and public forums.

Important elements in success of service include expertise, liaison and negotiation and customer-focus.

Importance of establishing the position, role and profile as soon as possible after an emergency event i.e. immediately.

Remembrance and Commemoration including Memorials

February 2003	<p>A number of remembrance and commemoration proposals are made in the community, the media and within government.</p> <p>Secretariat held preliminary discussions regarding community input, resourcing and timing.</p> <p>Secretariat undertook preliminary research on options.</p>
24 February 2003	<p>Secretariat met with Chair of Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) to discuss concept of a national memorial.</p>
13 March 2003	<p>Briefed Chief Minister. Chief Minister wrote to the Minister for the Arts and Heritage proposing that the latter assume coordination of collection of artefacts and memorabilia for possible use in memorials and for the coordination of bushfire commemoration and memorials.</p>
Early April 2003	<p>The Minister for the Arts and Heritage agreed to assume responsibility for the coordination of bushfire commemoration and memorials.</p>
17 April 2003	<p>Minister for the Arts and Heritage met with Community and Expert Reference Group to discuss memorial ideas and develop options.</p>

Outcomes

Canberra Museum & Gallery have, where appropriate identified the location and owners of significant memorabilia.

Department of Urban Services is preparing to provide advice to community groups wishing to undertake commemorative activities in public places.

Community consultation on the notion of a memorial and its various aspects is to commence shortly.

Lessons Learnt

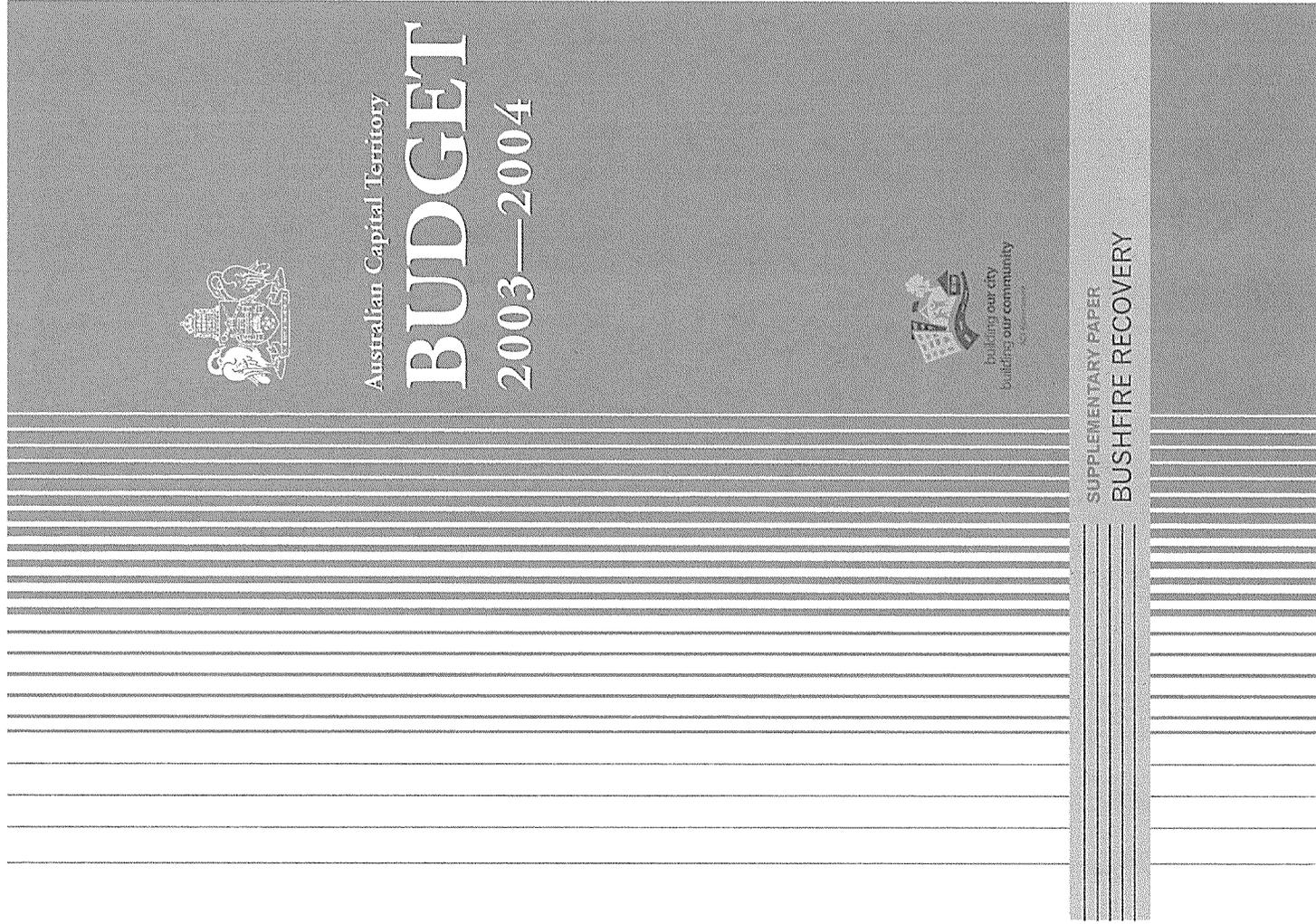
Importance of collecting artefacts as soon as possible after an emergency event i.e. before demolition and destruction of artefacts.

Importance of monitoring community feeling about, and facilitating community involvement in, commemoration.

Importance of recognising different responses to and rates of recovery from disasters, particularly in terms of timing, site and type of commemoration.



Appendix 5
ACT Budget 2003-04:
Supplementary Paper: Bushfire
Recovery



Guide to the Budget Papers

Structure and content of the 2003-2004 Budget Papers

The 2003-2004 Budget is presented in four budget papers.

PAPER N° 1

SPEECH

The Treasurer's speech to the Legislative Assembly highlights the Government's Budget strategies and key features of the Budget.

PAPER N° 2

BUDGET AT A GLANCE

A summary of the overall budgetary position together with information on the Government's expenditure in key service delivery areas. It provides cross references to other budget papers to assist readers in locating details of specific budget measures.

PAPER N° 3

BUDGET OVERVIEW

Summarises the 2003-2004 Budget and forward estimates for the general government sector, the public trading enterprise sector and the total Territory Government. Details of the projected 2003-2004 Budget results are provided, as well as background information on the development of the 2003-2004 Budget, including consultations with the community, economic conditions, and intergovernmental financial relations.

The *Appropriation Bill 2003-2004* is appended.

PAPER N° 4

BUDGET ESTIMATES

Information on each department and their respective output classes, including descriptions of functions, roles and responsibilities, together with major strategic highlights. Full accrual financial information is provided for the general government sector as well as details of the Territory's public trading enterprises.

SUPPLEMENTARY PAPER

BUSHFIRE RECOVERY

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<http://www.act.gov.au>

Telephone: Canberra 13ACT1 or 132281

Introduction

On 18 January 2003, the ACT experienced a fire disaster, unprecedented in its history, and of a scale ranking it as one of Australia's worst single day natural disasters.

The devastation tragically included the deaths of four people and many others who were injured, in some cases very badly, as well as the loss of some 500 properties, including homes, businesses, community educational facilities, rural properties, stock, ACT Government facilities and assets, equestrian and other sporting facilities as well as places and items of environmental and heritage significance, wildlife and family pets. Many other properties were damaged.

The Government and its departments and agencies, together with many thousands of people across the ACT – community, church, business, unions, and individual citizens - responded immediately to the crisis to meet the needs of those affected by the fires. Both in fighting the fires and in the immediate response to the disaster, the ACT received generous assistance from neighbouring local government areas within the ACT region, from Governments, particularly the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, and from thousands of businesses, organisations and individuals from around Australia and overseas.

It was an extraordinary response that demonstrated clearly both Canberra's depth of community spirit and the more general attitude of compassion and commitment that Australians share in a crisis.

The response of Canberrans to the January 2003 bushfires was recognised by the award of the 2003 Canberra Citizen of the Year to *"everyone who fought the bushfires of 18 January 2003, all those who supported them in their heroic efforts, and all those who offered generous assistance and counsel to their fellow citizens in a time of need"*.

The longer term recovery effort is well underway. This task involves support for affected individuals and families, and extensive rebuilding and restoration. The aim is more than a simple return to the pre-bushfire situation. The goal is to ensure a Canberra that is more secure and revitalised, and, having learnt the lessons which have come out of such a major disaster, captures and builds upon the community spirit, cohesiveness and pride which the response to the fires triggered.

This budget document naturally concentrates on Government related activities. However, the bushfire recovery is a project of the entire ACT community. It will, in the end, be the achievement of the people of the ACT.

Initial Response

SPECIAL ARRANGEMENTS

A range of special arrangements have been put in place to assist, coordinate and manage the complex recovery process. The Administrative Arrangements Orders were revised on 23 January 2003 to give the Chief Minister formal Ministerial responsibility for the Bushfire Recovery. Individual Ministers and agencies retain responsibility for the conduct of their aspects of the bushfire recovery, with the Chief Minister's oversight responsibility providing focus, whole of government co-ordination and enhanced community involvement. Much of the implementation work is and will continue to be done by line agencies.

The **ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce** (Taskforce) was established on 24 January 2003. Chaired by Mr Sandy Hollway, and including prominent ACT residents and senior Government officials, the Taskforce was established to advise the Government, provide leadership for the recovery, and to act as a bridge between Government agencies and the community – industry, business, unions, the community sector, residents and Canberrans generally.

The Taskforce comprises:

- Mr Sandy Hollway (Chair);
- Mr Rob de Castella, as a representative of those people whose homes were destroyed;
- Mr Terry Snow, Executive Chairman of the Canberra Airport Group, as a representative of the business community;
- Ms Maureen Cane, Executive Director of Communities@Work (the recently amalgamated Tuggeranong and Weston Creek Community Services), as a representative of the community sector;
- Mr Robert Tonkin, Chief Executive of the Chief Minister's Department; and
- Mr Alan Thompson, as Chief Executive of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat.

A **Taskforce Secretariat** was established to support this group, and to provide a strong policy and program management team. Headed by Alan Thompson, seconded from his position as Chief Executive of Department of Urban Services, this small group of people drawn largely from the ACT Public Service provides the specialist skills and human resources necessary to support the Taskforce and co-ordinate and manage the wide range of recovery issues, both within the government and across the community.

A **Community Recovery Centre** was established in Lyons on 24 January 2003 to provide a central point for providing services and information for Canberrans affected by the bushfires. The Centre was initially established and managed by the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services with assistance from other ACT Government agencies and community groups. Commonwealth Government staff provided by Centrelink and the Department of Family and Community Services, and personnel from NSW and Victoria. The Centre is now under the direction of the Taskforce Secretariat and continues to bring together a wide range of Government and non-Government services to maintain contact with and support individuals, notably through case managers.

The **Community and Expert Reference Group** (CEREG) was established on 3 February 2003 as the key advisory body to the Taskforce, and as an essential channel of two-way communication to ensure that the recovery strategy is informed by community views and needs, and by local knowledge and expertise. The CEREG brings together community groups, fire affected residents, unions, the business community and the Commonwealth. CEREG's involvement has been invaluable to the recovery. Amongst other achievements to date it has:

- provided direct intervention and assistance on insurance, banking and business issues;
- played an important role in the identification and monitoring of community health (including mental health) and safety issues;
- provided early warning of issues generally; and a channel for communication between the Taskforce, Government and the community in addressing community concerns for both urban and rural residents;
- worked together with community groups on a wide range of projects such as garden and environment cleanups, and the rebuilding of community assets; and
- provided direct feedback to Government so as to assist in the tailoring and streamlining of program delivery.

The members of the Community and Expert Reference Group are:

- Ms Elizabeth Whitelaw, lawyer (Chair);
- Ms Catherine Townsend, Institute of Architects;
- Ms Claire Middleton, ACT Division, Planning Institute;
- Mr Jeff Carl, Weston Creek Community Council;
- Mr Peter Malone, Unions ACT;
- Mr David Dawes, Master Builders Association;
- Ms Nicola Davies, ACT and South East Region Conservation Council;
- Mr Daniel Stubbs, ACT Council of Social Services;
- Mr Chris Peters, Chamber of Commerce;
- Mr Richard Tindale, business sector;
- Ms Karla Ries, Duffy Primary School P&C;
- Ms Liz Tilley, Duffy resident (home destroyed);
- Ms Joanne Matthews, Kambah resident (home destroyed);
- Ms Annette Ellis MHR (Member for Canberra);
- Dr Tony Griffin, rural lessee; and
- Senator Gary Humphries (Commonwealth representative).

INQUIRIES AND STUDIES

In addition to these management and consultative arrangements, a number of major inquiries and studies will contribute to the recovery.

The ACT Government has established an Inquiry into the preparation for and operational response to the January 2003 bushfires by the ACT's emergency services and other relevant agencies. This inquiry is being conducted by Mr Ron McLeod, the former Commonwealth Ombudsman. The Inquiry commenced on 3 March 2003 and will report by 30 June 2003.

The ACT Chief Coroner has established a Bushfire Inquiry to be conducted by Magistrate Doogan. Ms Doogan's Inquiry will undertake an examination of the cause, origin and circumstances of the fires which destroyed and damaged property in January 2003 and inquests into the deaths associated with those fires.

On 19 February 2003, the Chief Minister announced the conduct of a major study into the non-urban areas of the ACT affected by the bushfires. This study will consider the best uses of non-urban land for the sustainable development of the Territory, including the impacts on infrastructure, adjacent areas, and the region. The results of this study, which are expected by end September 2003, will contribute to the development of the Canberra Spatial Plan and the overall Canberra Plan. This study will be informed by the development of a new draft business plan by ACT Forests and a recreation strategy being developed by Environment ACT.

This study will be directed by a steering committee chaired by Mr Sandy Hollway and comprising the members of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, supplemented by:

- Professor Peter Cullen – Chair, Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee;
- Professor Bob Wasson – Chair, Sustainability Expert Reference Group;
- Mr Kevin Jeffery – Member, ACT Bushfire Council;
- Mr Ted Evans – Former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Treasury;
- Professor Peter Kanowski, Head of the Department of Forestry, Australian National University
- Ms Dorte Ekelund, Director Territory Planning Branch, Planning and Land Management (PALM); and
- Ms Annabelle Pegrum, Chief Executive of the National Capital Authority.

As announced by the Minister for Planning on 12 February 2003, PALM is coordinating an Urban Edge Review in response to the impact of the fires of 2003. The urban edge includes all open space lands that abut residential areas including the 'open space fingers', such as road corridors, floodways and pathways that extend into and through the metropolitan area. This Review is investigating planning, design and management of the urban edge of Canberra, including current urban edge treatments, design standards and guidelines and management approaches. It will assess bushfire risk to residential property and whether any areas should be considered for bushfire prone designation or in fact other land use and management approaches that are more appropriate. The Review will address future residential and other land use areas.

ACTION PLAN GOALS

The Taskforce's Action Plan identifies six goals for recovery, under four general themes.

Supporting People

1. support those who have been significantly impacted by the fires;

Community Involvement

2. ensure that the community actively participates in the process of rebuilding and recovery;

Clean Up and Rebuilding

3. ensure clean up of the Territory in a way that is safe, timely, efficient, cost effective and respectful of people's interests and needs;
4. facilitate rebuilding in a way that is safe, timely, streamlined and provides individuals with real choices; and

Learning Lessons and Building a Stronger Future

5. provide up to date, relevant and useful information to assist with the recovery process; and
6. learn lessons from this event so the ACT Community moves forward positively.

PROGRESS REPORT

Significant achievements so far include:

- Supporting People**
 - Approximately 5000 people were accommodated in four evacuation centres across Canberra on January 18 and 19, the first 48 hours of their operation. Evacuation centres remained open until 27 January;
 - Urgent treatment was provided for many people at Canberra's main hospitals, including for lacerations, fractures and respiratory problems, and severe burns victims were transferred to Sydney;
 - After the emergency/evacuation phase the ACT community, ACT Housing and the accommodation market met the interim housing needs of 500 households who lost their homes;
 - Utilities and infrastructure were restored to over 50,000 homes.
 - Over 1400 people have registered at the Recovery Centre at Lyons which brings together a wide range of Government and non-Government services to maintain contact with and support individuals, notably through case managers;
 - A range of Government financial grants (detailed below) have been provided to affected households and businesses;
 - The Canberra Bushfire Appeal, conducted independently of Government, has raised over \$7 million;
- Community Involvement**
 - Over 1000 volunteers registered through Volunteering ACT, with countless more assisting neighbours, friends and work colleagues directly;
 - Community groups and volunteers are assisting with the clean-up and rehabilitation of the environment;
 - Communications have been established, including through the "Community Update" newsletters to all affected areas, the regular provision of recovery information in local papers, and community meetings;
 - The community's extensive and committed effort in responding to the disaster was recognised by the Community being awarded Canberra of the Year;
- Cleanup and Rebuilding**
 - Clean-up and re-opening of most roads has involved removal of huge volumes of fallen or dangerous trees;
 - Bovis Lend Lease has been contracted by the Government to manage an efficient and safe clean-up, with the support of local businesses, unions and industry organisations;
 - Safe disposal of contaminated waste is being achieved through a landfill site at Stromlo, fully dedicated to block clearance;
 - (As at 28 April 2003) 340 blocks have been cleared;
 - Streamlined demolition and building approvals processes have been introduced;
 - A Design Advisory Service has been established for residents to provide information and guidance on home building;
 - Construction of the first replacement homes commenced in mid-March;
 - Restoration, rehabilitation and monitoring of Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and Namadgi National Park has commenced;
- Learning lessons and Building a stronger future**
 - An inquiry by Mr Ron McLeod has been established to examine and report on the preparation and adequacy of the response by ACT Emergency Services and other agencies; and
 - Reviews have been initiated to consider and advise on issues of Non-Urban Land, the Urban Edge, and Recreation to ensure we learn from our experiences and plan for our future.

Funding the Recovery: First Phase 2002/03

FUNDING TO DATE

In total, \$29.694 million is being provided in 2002-03 to deal with the immediate emergency, and to meet the initial needs of the recovery effort.

The Government's strategy has been to respond to the needs of the bushfire recovery as quickly and comprehensively as possible. The expenditure summarised below (an overview is provided at Attachment A) has been grouped against the goals of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Action Plan.

SUPPORTING PEOPLE (\$7.723M)

Emergency funding was provided to establish and operate the Evacuation and Recovery Centres and to provide emergency daily allowances (\$75 per person per day), and emergency short-term accommodation assistance.

Emergency funding also was provided to ACT Health and the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services to offset a number of emergency response costs. This included funding to meet the needs of those injured in the fires, to provide ongoing counselling and outreach services, and to meet evacuation and relocation costs and other necessary needs of residents of disability group homes who were affected by the bushfires.

As part of its general function of planning and effecting a coordinated and speedy recovery, the Taskforce and its Secretariat has been funded to develop and oversee the co-ordination and implementation of the many programs directed at supporting people, including the operations of the Recovery Centre.

The Recovery Centre provides outreach support, case management, referral to services and counselling. Over 1400 people have registered at the Recovery Centre.

A range of grants have been provided to affected households, businesses and, rural lessees, including:

- \$5,000 Assistance Package for owner-occupiers or renters to replace essential household and personal items lost in the bushfires. A further \$5,000 was provided for those who did not have household contents insurance;
- \$3,000 Disaster Relief Grant to assist businesses and rural leaseholders whose business assets were destroyed. The grant was provided to assist with business revival as a means of recovering employment and income losses resulting from the fires;
- assistance for affected rural lessees, comprising 100% of costs for cartage for feeding animals for one week after the fires and 50% of cartage cost after that, until conditions improve with changes in the weather and on a needs basis; and
- a 50% interest subsidy on loans of up to \$50,000 for affected businesses and \$130,000 for affected rural leaseholders to repair bushfire damage or capital losses.

In addition, a range of fees and charges have either been waived or deferred, including:

- waiver of land tax for the period 1 January 2003 to 31 March 2003 for rented properties that have been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable;
- waiver of stamp duty payable on the registration of a replacement motor vehicle that was destroyed, up to a maximum amount of \$750 per registration;
- waiver of the stamp duty payable on the purchase of a replacement house or block of land for an owner occupied property

that was destroyed or rendered uninhabitable, up to a maximum amount of \$7,000 for the purchase of a replacement home, or a maximum amount of \$2,800 for the purchase of a replacement parcel of land for the purpose of building a new home;

- water and sewerage charges waived for six months where homes have been destroyed;
- waiver of rates for a period of up to 6 months from 1 January 2003 for properties that have been destroyed or rendered uninhabitable; and
- charges for identity and land title documents waived, including destroyed driver's licenses, land titles, and birth, death and marriage certificates.

A Canberra Tourism and Events Corporation's (CTEC) tourism marketing campaign has been supported with additional funding of \$100,000. The awareness campaign is ensuring that Canberra's important and valued tourist facilities continue to be promoted nationally, and aims to turn around the reduction in visitors since the bushfires.

Free school bus travel has been provided to students from families who have had to relocate as a result of the bush fires.

The ACT Government donated \$100,000 to the Canberra Bushfire Appeal.

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (\$1.175M)

The Taskforce and its Secretariat are funded to achieve the greatest possible level of community involvement in the recovery effort. Amongst other activities, the Secretariat provides support to the work of the Community and Expert Reference Group, publishes and/or facilitates regular community bulletins, facilitates public forums and works with community groups.

Active community participation programs include the 'Community Engagement in Restoration of Murrumbidgee' which provides for joint Government and community planning and implementation of conservation, restoration and construction works along the Murrumbidgee River corridor and catchment.

Funding has also been made available through community grants to assist local groups in recovery related projects.

Similarly, the specific studies and planning which will guide the ACT's long term direction, such as the Study into Non Urban Bushfire Affected Areas and the Spatial Planning work, referred to earlier, are proceeding within clear and open community consultation processes.

CLEAN UP AND REBUILDING (\$14.044M)

As part of its functions, the Taskforce and its Secretariat was funded to develop and oversee the demolition and clean up process, and to assist in the subsequent planning and coordination of the rebuilding effort. Within this framework the following actions have been undertaken by various agencies:

Clean Up:

- contracting of a project manager, Bovis Lend Lease, to ensure a coordinated clean up of properties destroyed by the bushfires;
- provision, subject to certain conditions, of a demolition grant of up to \$5,000 for home owners and community organisations where insured, and meeting the full cost of a standard demolition for uninsured home owners;
- the waiving of fees for disposal of fire-damaged building material from residential and community properties, with a concessional rate for institutional and commercial properties;
- removal of dangerous trees, and the clearing of debris and other waste from roads and properties affected by the fires, to ensure public safety, including the safe re-opening of roads;

- the urgent disposal of livestock and wildlife killed by the bushfires, to protect public health;
- the removal of burnt pines in areas adjacent to Duffy and Holder, and casuarinas along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor, and the management of pine trees located on public open space across Canberra. Additionally ACT Forests is engaged in the “salvage logging” of some 500ha of burnt pine plantations to date, with an additional 600ha forecast, to achieve sale of some of the burnt timber;
- establishment of waste facilities, including a temporary site at Stromlo, to ensure the professional and safe disposal of the demolition material;
- clean up and repair of rural roads affected by landslips due to rain following the bushfires;
- replacement of approximately 1600 garbage and re-cycling bins destroyed in the bushfires; and
- funding of residual clean up, repairs and maintenance costs, not covered by insurance, for those schools affected by the bushfires.

Rebuilding:

- funding of land acquisition costs for the replacement of 55 ACT Housing rural dwellings destroyed in the bushfires;
- funding of the aerial grass seeding of burnt areas, planning for stabilising of catchment areas to protect water quality, and associated costs for aerial surveys and recovery plans;
- the supply of feed for Tidbinbilla animals;
- provision of funding to support additional weed suppression measures to protect vulnerable areas affected by the bushfires;
- provision of additional resources to PALM to implement streamlined building processes, enhanced building/structural inspection services and to review land management and urban design issues;
- the waiving of fees relating to a range of planning approval and certification requirements to replace destroyed buildings;
- commencement of the replacement of urban assets destroyed by the bushfires including: verge and shrub beds, screen plantings, dry land grass areas, semi-natural open space and sports grounds, new line marking, and replacement or painting of signs, bridge rails, bus shelters and street furniture;
- development of a Rural Assistance Recovery Program to assist rural lessees in areas such as weed suppression, soil stabilisation and replanting, including funding for Greening Australia’s ACT Rural Recovery Project;
- commencement of the restoration and rehabilitation of fire suppression trails made in combating the fires, and the restoration of existing walking trails and fire trails damaged as a result of the bushfires;
- funding of residual replacement costs, not covered by insurance, for Howard Florey Centenary House (the Health Protection Service Headquarters); and
- provision of funding for a free plant issue scheme to residents whose house and/or gardens were destroyed by the bushfires.

LEARNING LESSONS AND BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE (\$1.619M)

A number of actions, including some already noted above, are being taken by the Government, the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, its Secretariat and relevant agencies to ensure that all lessons from the bushfires are fully understood and acted upon, including putting in place essential planning for the future:

- A Study into Non Urban Bushfire Affected Areas has been funded to provide advice on the best uses of non urban land for the sustainable development of the ACT. This work, which will be informed by a new draft business plan being prepared by ACT Forests and a recreation strategy being developed by Environment ACT, will together with the Urban Edge Review, being undertaken by PALM, provide important inputs into the Canberra Spatial Plan and the overall Canberra Plan to be completed later this year; and
- A Review of Heritage Places affected by the bushfires has been funded to assess damage and required essential works, prepare location and condition reports and establish processes for their continued conservation.

Additionally, the Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January Bushfires, and the Coronial Inquest will provide further important advice to Government, strengthening this learning experience and the future response to bushfire risks and events.

In parallel with these activities, immediate work has commenced to provide essential bushfire protection measures. Funding has been provided to undertake fuel management works in the Canberra Nature Park adjoining residential areas including Aranda Bushland, Black Mountain and Mount Ainslie.

ADDITIONAL FIREFIGHTING/PROTECTION COSTS (\$5.133M)

Funding of \$5.133m was also provided in 2002-03 to cover additional unanticipated costs directly incurred in fighting the January bushfires by agencies including the Emergency Services Bureau, ACT Forests and Environment ACT.

Completing the Recovery: The Forward Strategy

LOOKING AHEAD-2003/04 AND BEYOND

Although much has been accomplished, bushfire recovery remains a key Government objective for 2003-04. The effort will be sustained until the process is completed.

The focus of initiatives to date has been on urgent needs and recovery essentials, including:

- support for people affected by the bushfires;
- restoration of essential services and infrastructure;
- ensuring public safety;
- clearance of blocks;
- establishment of machinery to drive recovery in partnership with the community;
- public information;
- forest salvage;
- addressing critical environmental needs such as protection of water catchments; and
- preparing for the major rebuilding that must be done.

Clearly, not all these tasks have been fully accomplished and they therefore remain priorities in 2003/2004. However, substantial momentum has been gained, and the next stages in the recovery process, addressed in the 2003-04 Budget, involve a three part strategy:

- (1) the consolidation of the progress to date and carrying the 2002/03 priorities through to completion;
- (2) lifting our sights to longer term issues; and
- (3) looking beyond mere "recovery" to improvements, and positive legacies for the future. The aim is not merely to replace what was lost.

The budget, therefore, provides the opportunity not only for a stocktake of what has been done in the very active period since January, and the reinforcement of these early responses, but also shaping of a coherent strategy for moving forward.

VISION FOR RECOVERY

The forward strategy proceeds from a vision of the future: a picture of what we want Canberra and the ACT to be like; what in fact will constitute a successful recovery.

It adopts the Taskforce view, stated in its Action Plan, that:

“The recovery...should not aim simply at a return to the pre-bushfire situation... the objective should be a Canberra more secure and revitalised...not just to a return to the past but to position the ACT better for the future.”

This requires:

- restoring Canberra suburbs - the quality housing, beautiful gardens, neat and green streetscapes, open and accessible public areas, recreation and community facilities, shops and businesses;
- re-establishing the surrounding rural areas, both in terms of their natural splendour and the distinctive landscape they provide for the community and visitors, and in terms of sustainable mixed uses ranging from commercial and business uses to community recreation;
- rebuilding secure and high amenity neighbourhoods for families, children and other residents, and close local communities comprising both existing residents and newcomers;
- retaining and reinforcing the strong community spirit in Canberra and the ACT, the capacity of community organisations, and the sense of pride in how the community by working together came through the crisis to build an even better ACT;
- positioning the ACT economy for the future, not only by supporting bushfire affected businesses and industry to recover, but where possible building a stronger economic base for the longer term; and
- harnessing the potential for positive legacies in fields ranging from urban design to improved emergency services.

The bushfire recovery strategy has been shaped, and budget priorities set, so as to achieve the progressive realisation of this vision.

PRIORITY PRINCIPLES

In determining priorities for budget initiatives the following principles have been applied:

- **Putting people first.** This means giving top priority to supporting the individuals affected by the fires who suffered both material damage and psychological and emotional impact. It also means giving priority to restoration of places and facilities which people need, such as recreation areas and community facilities. The clean up work will, over time, need to remove what has been burnt but the replacement and restoration will need to be deliberately sequenced, with the focus on the needs of people. Priorities would include:
 - affected suburbs, including parks and fringes;
 - the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and Cotter, including recreation points; and
 - key places in reserves such as Visitor Centres.
- **Investing now to save later.** In particular, it will make sense to devote resources at an early stage to land management to protect the environment against erosion and other problems following the bushfires, rather than neglecting this and having to correct the environmental degradation at greater expense later on. Also, funding of data collection now will provide a more sound basis for future programs to restore and protect the environment. In the replanting program a priority will be for land restoration and stabilisation (such as containment lines).
- **Doing all we can to prevent re-occurrence.** To an important extent this involves learning the lessons from the January fires, but it also includes prudent physical measures, such as open spaces or buffers on the urban fringe.
- **Taking the opportunity to replace or restore community assets in ways which are “smarter and better”.** We should not automatically fall into a habit of rebuilding or replacing exactly what was there before, whether in relation to community facilities, recreation areas or physical infrastructure. There is the opportunity to think first whether there are better approaches.
- **Providing a positive legacy for the community.** This legacy will be of two kinds - tangible improvements to the environment and the built structures of Canberra, and the intangible but nonetheless important legacy of improved management, greater community partnership and enhanced civic pride.
- **Getting the balance right between rapid response on the one hand, and not pre-empting longer term decisions on the other.** It has been an important principle of the recovery to get on with the job, recognising that there is not the luxury of time for endless analysis of data and options. Even so, important decisions which will affect the fundamental nature of Canberra for many years to come must be soundly based and thought through. Thus, for example, the Non Urban Land Use Study will examine land use options in depth and in close consultation with the community, but will also reach conclusions and recommendations on a “fast track”, with a final report in September 2003.

A COHERENT STRATEGY

The coherence of the recovery strategy, reflected in the Budget, involves:

- in each year, a set of actions which continue the progress on a broad front, reinforce one another and reflect sound priorities; and
- over the budget year and the out-years, an efficient and effective roll out of the recovery program, including a sensible phase down as the job gets done.

This is described in more detail below.

PROPOSED FUNDING FOR 2003-04 AND THE FORWARD YEARS - \$22.799M

The funding program for 2003-04 and the forward years, together with funding already provided in 2002-03, reflects the strategic approach set out above.

In summary the following new or continued measures are proposed, with the Taskforce and its Secretariat, which will continue to operate into 2003-04, again providing strategic and operational support across all areas:

SUPPORTING PEOPLE (\$3.581M)

The Recovery Centre will be funded to enable it to continue to provide the broad range of support services commenced in 2002-03. The Centre will operate until such time as the demand for its services is able to be appropriately and satisfactorily accommodated within mainstream programs.

The following support programs and/or additional resourcing will continue:

- the business assistance grant scheme;
- the interest subsidy scheme;
- additional resources for counselling services; and
- free school bus travel for students who have had to relocate (to end school year 2003).

COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT (\$1.027M)

Activities ensuring vital community participation in the recovery effort will be sustained into 2003-04. This will occur through the work of the Community and Expert Reference Group and the Taskforce and Secretariat, the continuation of regular community bulletins, media releases, facilitation of public forums and community projects.

Specific recovery projects that will involve direct community action include:

- the design and establishment of a landmark memorial which will appropriately acknowledge the 18 January bushfire disaster and those who were affected by it;
- the running of a community firefighting units trial; and
- the continuation of the community participation program in the planning and implementation of conservation, restoration and construction works along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor and catchment.

CLEAN UP AND REBUILDING (\$13.630M)

Clean up and rebuilding activities that will continue beyond 2002-03 include:

- the program for removal of burnt pines adjacent to Duffy and Holder and casuarinas along the Murrumbidgee River Corridor, and the management of pine trees located on public open space across Canberra;
- additional weed suppression funding;
- landslip repair works along rural roads;
- the closure and restoration of the Stromlo waste disposal site;
- funding for land acquisition costs for the replacement of destroyed ACT Housing rural dwellings;
- reinstatement of urban assets (including verge replanting and replacement of other road and road related infrastructure) destroyed by the bushfires;
- the Rural Assistance Recovery Program;
- restoration and rehabilitation of areas such as fire suppression trails, existing walking tracks and fire trails damaged as a result of the bushfires;
- additional resources to PALM to implement streamlined building processes and advisory assistance; and
- the free plant issue scheme.

Additionally, new funding will be provided in 2003-04 and 2004-05 to repair and replace road infrastructure damaged by the fires and in the subsequent clean up and rebuilding effort.

LEARNING LESSONS AND BUILDING A STRONGER FUTURE (\$4.561M)

Activities that will continue beyond 2002-03 include:

- the Study into Non Urban Bushfire Affected Areas;
- the McLeod 'Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January bushfires';
- the Coronial Inquest into the bushfires;
- the Review of Heritage Places affected by the bushfires; and
- fire fuel management works.

Additionally, new funding will be provided in 2003-04 to:

- undertake spatial data acquisition by Environment ACT to support recovery planning in non-urban areas;
- finalise a Recreational Strategy for natural areas of the ACT, to guide the redevelopment of recreational facilities and their management; and
- undertake vegetation and weed control on rural road verges, to improve road safety and reduce fire hazard.

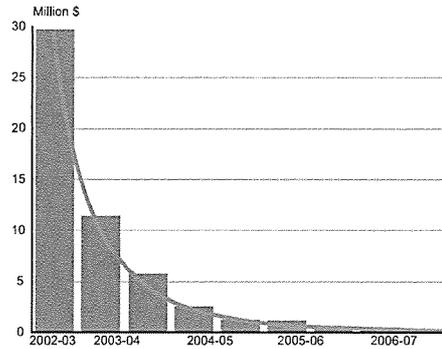
The following Maps indicate the general location of works and other activities to be undertaken as part of the physical recovery.

Note: The map "Recovery Work - Weston Creek, Woden and Tuggeranong" has been reduced for printing in this publication, therefore the 1:40,000 scale is no longer accurate.

RECOVERY EXPENDITURE PATTERN

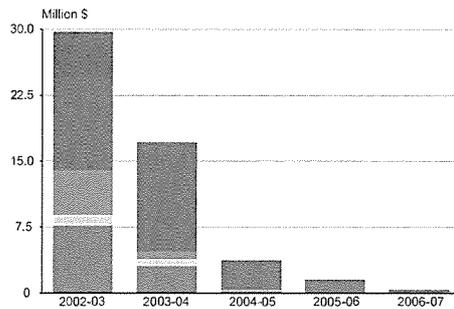
Graphs 1 and 2, at right, provide a visual insight into Bushfire Recovery funding across 2002-03, the budget year and the forward year estimates.

Graph 1 illustrates predicted spending on a 6 monthly basis, with most expenditure occurring in the first half of each year.



Graph 2 shows the expenditure pattern on a full year basis, both in total spending and by category.

- Supporting People
- ▨ Community Involvement
- Cleanup and Rebuilding - Private
- Cleanup and Rebuilding - Public
- Learning Lessons and Building a Stronger Future
- Additional Firefighting/ Protection Costs



As can be seen considerable investment has been made in 2002-03 to address critical people needs, including safety, immediately, as well as establish a coordinated and sound framework for completion of the recovery and to generate momentum for the most pressing priorities. Expenditure in later years progressively reduces in line with the declining level of remaining need.

Graph 2 also illustrates how expenditure in later years also shifts in relative terms from the initial focus on addressing individual needs, and establishing the recovery framework, to broader community and physical infrastructure restoration and improvement.

The Territory can also expect that further initiatives in future budgets will be needed following the completion of the McLeod Inquiry, the Coronial Inquest and other relevant studies, notably the Non Urban Land Use Study, currently being undertaken.

INSURANCE FUNDING REBUILDING AND REPLACEMENT ACTIVITY

In addition to recovery activities directly supported as government initiatives, over \$44m will be reinvested in rebuilding and other replacement activity from relevant insurance coverage, excluding ACT Forests. This will cover reinstating damaged and destroyed assets including:

- fire and ambulance stations;
- the Health Protection Service Headquarters (Holder);
- the Gran Cameron Community Centre (Holder);
- playgrounds;
- bridges;
- public housing;
- depots, signage, observation towers and fencing; and
- replacement of vehicles and equipment.

A further \$21m of insurance coverage will also be provided for cleanup, debris removal and reinstatement of a depot and property in ACT Forests.

NATURAL DISASTER RELIEF ARRANGEMENTS (NDRA)

In the event of a significant natural disaster, States and Territories access Commonwealth assistance under the Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements (NDRA). The NDRA provides assistance to States and Territories to alleviate the financial burden associated with the provision of natural disaster relief payments and infrastructure restoration. The NDRA ensures States and Territories are partly reimbursed for natural disaster relief costs once their expenditure exceeds a certain threshold.

The NDRA assists with eligible expenditure measures on acts of relief or restoration adopted by a State or Territory, where the level of damage and distress is a direct result of an eligible disaster (eg bushfire, earthquake, cyclone or flood). However, the NDRA also sets a number of conditions on eligible expenditure.

The Territory estimates it will receive around \$17m in reimbursement from the Commonwealth under the NDRA.

Areas where the Territory seeks to receive assistance includes costs incurred for:

- personal hardship and distress relief;
- restoration or replacement of essential public assets;
- interest subsidy grants to small businesses;
- psychological counselling; and
- other acts of relief and restoration.

In addition to the Commonwealth's NDRA assistance, as noted in the Introduction, the Commonwealth also assisted directly in meeting the immediate needs of the crisis. Personnel, equipment and information were provided both through its civilian and military agencies to assist in the firefighting effort and in assisting the staffing of the Recovery Centre.

Other Commonwealth assistance is being made available to individuals by programs operating through Commonwealth agencies such as the Department of Family and Community Services and Centrelink.

The Commonwealth, in a letter from the Chief Minister to the Prime Minister, has also been asked to consider providing further assistance to the Territory to assist the recovery, and in particular to address the longer term impacts of the disaster. Four key areas of direct assistance have been sought:

- Tourism Promotional Package;
- Forest Industry Package;
- Re-Greening the ACT; and
- Improved Emergency Communications Systems.

A response from the Prime Minister has just been received. The Commonwealth has agreed to provide \$0.5m towards the Tourism Promotional Package and \$1m towards the Forest Industry Package. A commitment has been given to working with the Territory to develop proposals relating to our other requests. Details of any final assistance relating to these matters will therefore be subject to further discussions.

Overview of Recovery Funding by Year

The following is a snapshot, year by year, of what the recovery strategy will deliver:

2002-03	Significant expenditure is occurring in 2002-03. The recovery process is proceeding on a very broad front with the emphasis on human recovery and other needs, but with appropriate attention given to the commencement of physical recovery.
2003-04	Funding is appropriately reducing in this year. Recovery activities will increasingly be returned to the mainstream of government agencies and non-government organisations. Support for people remains an important priority. 2003-04 also sees a move beyond block clearance to rebuilding of private homes, government housing and community assets. Re-greening accelerates, both in suburbs and surrounding areas. Restoration focuses on areas of special interest to the whole community including parks, the urban/rural fringe and recreational areas. In 2003-04 some legacy benefits emerge including newer and better community facilities and infrastructure. Work on the next generation of issues (notably the Non-Urban Study) is driven through to completion in close consultation with the community. This work feeds into the overall Canberra Plan.
2004-05	No further Taskforce funding is provided as its work is completed. Human resource needs have declined with the residual picked up in normal programs. Rebuilding of homes should be substantially completed. Restoration of the environment continues at a high level. However, the bulk of physical restoration is still in the areas most important to people's daily living. Additionally, by this time the Non Urban Land Study and other studies will have enabled final decisions to be made on such important land use issues as the future of forestry and, more generally, the long range sustainable pattern of land use in the ACT.
2005-06 & 2006-07	Most aspects of the recovery are virtually completed with only relatively small spending being needed to round out the work. The main exception is the implementation of findings from the Non Urban Land Study; over a number of years, but the programs will be firmly in place.

FIRE RECONSTRUCTION LEVY

In total approximately \$52.5 million is to be provided over 5 years to give effect to the recovery, with most funding (\$50.5 million) being expended in the first 3 years – 2002-03, 2003-04 and 2004-05.

As an essential and immediate response to the disaster of 18 January 2003, this program and funding is both unanticipated and substantial within the normal budget cycle.

As noted above, approximately \$17 million of the program is estimated to be recovered under the Commonwealth's Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements scheme. Additional assistance is also being sought from the Commonwealth to support recovery programs.

A two year Bushfire Recovery Levy is to be introduced to partially meet the balance of the net cost of the bushfires. A fixed rate levy based on the Average Unimproved Value (AUV) of each rateable property in the ACT will be implemented for a two year period from 2003-04. Pensioners will receive a 100% rebate on their portion of property ownership and ACT Housing properties will be exempt. Separate legislation will be developed to implement the Fire Reconstruction Levy.

This initiative aims to raise approximately \$5m net per annum for two years commencing in 2003-04. The rate charged on AUV will be recalculated annually and will depend on overall AUVs in the ACT.

Impact on the General Government Sector Budget over 2002-03 to 2006-07	\$m
Total cost of initiatives and non insurance related work*	52.5
<i>plus:</i> work funded from "self-insurance" fund**	8.6
<i>less:</i> total estimated return from NDRA	17
Total revenue from Fire Reconstruction Levy	10
Estimated Net cost of event over five years	34.1

*this excludes any reconstruction, clean-up or reinstatement in ACT Forests

**this is the insurance which the Territory provides for within its own insurance provision and is not recoverable from reinsurance.

Conclusion

The program of funding made available for the recovery is both substantial and reflective of a considered and strategic approach that seeks to improve upon the pre-bushfire situation wherever possible, providing positive legacies and a better Canberra.

Expenditure is greatest in the initial years to ensure that essential issues, and in particular people needs, are addressed early and quickly, within appropriate priority principles. Over time the emphasis moves to provide greater relative attention to community and general public assets, but without neglecting continuing people needs which are progressively absorbed within mainstream programs.

The achievement of the recovery will in the end, however, not just be a result of Government funding or programs, but will be due to the collective effort and actions of all sections of the ACT community. The strategy for the recovery contained within the Budget recognises this total approach and seeks to enhance that effort in an effective, integrated and comprehensive manner.

ATTACHMENT A

Government Expenditure on Bushfire Recovery

Category of Expenditure	2002-03 \$'000s	2003-04 \$'000s	2004-05 \$'000s	2005-06 \$'000s	2006-07 \$'000s
Supporting People					
Evacuation and Recovery Centres – DEYFS	204	0	0	0	0
Evacuation and Recovery Centres – DDHCS	40	0	0	0	0
Emergency Assistance	150	0	0	0	0
Emergency Short-term Accommodation	36	0	0	0	0
TA Financial Assistance	1000	0	0	0	0
Hospitals	389	0	0	0	0
Counselling – ACT Health	288	250	0	0	0
Counselling and Outreach Services - DDHCS	100	0	0	0	0
Destroyed Disability Group House	100	0	0	0	0
Recovery Taskforce Allocation	835	523	0	0	0
Recovery Centre	1054	2,000	0	0	0
Financial Assistance Grants – DEYFS	2245	0	0	0	0
Bushfire Business Assistance Package - Business Grants	270	30	0	0	0
Bushfire Business Assistance Package - Interest Subsidy	65	189	189	189	189
CTEC Marketing Campaign	100	0	0	0	0
School Bus Transport	22	22	0	0	0
TA Donation Bushfire Appeal	100	0	0	0	0
Supplementary Emergency & Financial Assistance	725	0	0	0	0
TOTAL – Supporting People	7723	3014	189	189	189
Community Involvement					
Recovery Taskforce Allocation	1075	442	0	0	0
Community Engagement in Restoration of Murrumbidgee	100	200	100	0	0
Bushfire Memorial	0	185	0	0	0
Community Fire Units Trial	0	100	0	0	0
TOTAL – Community Involvement	1175	927	100	0	0
Clean Up and Rebuilding – Private					
Recovery Taskforce Allocation	492	184	0	0	0
Site Clean up	3230	0	0	0	0
Waste Disposal	740	0	0	0	0
Demolition Material Disposal Facility – Site Closure	0	150	0	0	0
Replacement of Garbage and Recycling Bins	80	0	0	0	0
Reconstruction and Assessment	369	0	0	0	0
Bushfire Development Application Process	0	215	0	0	0
Rural Assistance Recovery Program	170	150	0	0	0
Free Plant Issue Scheme	25	75	100	0	0
TOTAL – Clean Up and Rebuilding – Private	5106	774	100	0	0

Category of Expenditure	2002-03 \$'000s	2003-04 \$'000s	2004-05 \$'000s	2005-06 \$'000s	2006-07 \$'000s
Clean Up and Rebuilding – Public					
Removal of Trees and Debris from Road Verges	1500	0	0	0	0
Cleanup of Burnt Trees in Duffy	300	0	0	0	0
Removal of Pines and Casuarinas	210	600	0	0	0
Landslip Rectification	300	200	0	0	0
Repairs and Maintenance	45	0	0	0	0
Replacement of Rural Housing	4400	4400	0	0	0
Aerial Grass Seeding of Burnt Areas	330	0	0	0	0
Restoration Works	998	0	0	0	0
Weed Suppression	50	250	300	300	0
Re-greening Fire Affect Areas	659	2600	1455	51	0
Fire Suppression Trails and Walking Tracks	100	700	700	600	0
Howard Florey Centenary House	46	0	0	0	0
Replacement of Gutters, Footpaths and Associated Works	0	100	400	0	0
Colter Bridge Improvement	0	100	0	0	0
	8938	8950	2855	951	0
TOTAL - Clean Up and Rebuilding	14044	9724	2955	951	0
Learning Lessons and Building a Stronger Future					
Category of Expenditure	2002-03 \$'000s	2003-04 \$'000s	2004-05 \$'000s	2005-06 \$'000s	2006-07 \$'000s
Recovery Taskforce Allocation	469	451	0	0	0
Study into Non-Urban Bushfire Affected Areas	250	250			
Bushfire Recovery Program - ACT Heritage Places	100	200	0	0	0
Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January Bushfires	400	100	0	0	0
Bushfire Coronial Inquest	150	1,500	0	0	0
Fire Fuel Management - Accelerated Works	250	500	250	250	0
Rural Road Verges and Fire Fuel Management Plan	0	150	150	150	150
Increase Bushfire Fuel Management Planning Resources	0	80	0	0	0
Spatial Data Acquisition – Interpretation of Recovery Plan	0	130	40	40	40
Completion of Recreation Recovery Strategy	0	100	30	0	0
TOTAL - Learning Lessons and Building a Stronger Future	1619	3461	470	440	190
Additional Firefighting/Protection Costs					
Category of Expenditure	2002-03 \$'000s	2003-04 \$'000s	2004-05 \$'000s	2005-06 \$'000s	2006-07 \$'000s
Immediate Response - ACT Forests	35	0	0	0	0
Immediate Response – Emergency Services	3783	0	0	0	0
Immediate Response – DUS	1315	0	0	0	0
	5133	0	0	0	0
Grand Total*	29694	17126	3714	1580	379
TOTAL COST OVER EVENT					\$52.493 m

* Total funding includes 2nd Appropriation, 3rd Appropriation, Treasurers Advance and Budget initiatives. It includes Government Payments for Outputs, Expenses on Behalf of the Territory and Capital Injections. Any offsetting insurance revenue or Commonwealth assistance is not incorporated in the table.

Appendix 6

Key milestones and activity relating to the Bushfire Recovery

Date	Milestone / Activity
18 January	Fires reach the urban fringe of Canberra, after devastating rural and natural land, destroying 488 homes and other property
20 January	Government announces financial assistance packages for bushfire affected residents who lost their homes
20 January	Bushfire Appeal announced
21 January 4 & 14 March	Relief Packages for bushfire affected rural lessees announced
22 January	Range of waivers for fees, rates, rebates announced
24 January	Recovery Centre is established to provide information, support and advice to bushfire affected residents
28 January	First meeting of the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce
29 January	\$3000 Disaster Relief Grant to assist businesses and rural leaseholders whose business assets were destroyed.
1 February	First Recovery Information advertisement placed in the Canberra Times
3 February	First meeting of the Community and Expert Reference Group
5 February	Temporary Land Fill opened
10 February	Recovery Centre operation transferred to Bushfire Recovery Taskforce
10 February	Government announces Bovis Lend Lease's project management clean up process, and financial grants to assist clean up process
10 February	Government announced inquiry into operational response into the January Bushfires (the McLeod Inquiry)
14 February	First edition of the <i>Community Update</i> Newsletter provided to the Community
18 February	Taskforce Action Plan announced
10 March	Taskforce releases results of first survey into housing intentions survey
18 March	Non Urban Study announced, including Study Team
14-17 April	Round One Appeal Funds distributed: Almost \$6.5 million was distributed in Round One, which has assisted 949 households, 69 small businesses, 30 rural families and 20 community groups
16 April	Free Plant Scheme for bushfire damaged properties announced
17 April	Public Liability Insurance Scheme for bushfire affected properties announced
28 April	Recognition Program announced
28 April	100 days after the bushfire

Date	Milestone / Activity
1 May	Small Grants Program for bushfire recovery projects announced
4 May	First of the Regreening Canberra garden days organised by Phoenix Garden Group, Anglicare, Chapman Residents Action Group and Bushfire Taskforce Secretariat
8 May	Government submissions to McLeod Inquiry released
30 May	Winter Warming Program announced
End May	1500 people registered with Recovery Centre
End May	99% of clean up complete
Mid June	Results of second housing intentions survey released
End June	First home rebuilt
End June	\$33.8 million spent by Government to respond to the immediate emergency, and to meet the initial needs of the recovery effort. \$22.8 million committed in 2003-04 to continue the recovery process
17 July	Additional rebuilding assistance announced, including financial grants to those rebuilding
4 August	McLeod Report released, and Government provides information on implementation of recommendations
12 August	First Non-Urban Study Report released
15 August	Bushfire Recovery Appeal closes, having raised more than \$9million and having assisted 1,273 households, small business, rural properties and community groups affected by the fire
5-7 September	Camp at Collaroy Plateau for 91 children from fire-affected families organised by The Salvation Army with support from the Recovery Centre
11 September	Free seminar Rebuilding our Community by consulting psychologist and expert in disaster recovery Dr Rob Gordon sponsored by Recovery Centre
13 September to 12 October	Regreening Canberra marquee at Floriade gathering donations to purchase plants for bushfire-affected gardens
22 September	Bushfire Awareness Campaign launched, involving distribution of an information kit to all postal addresses in the ACT reinforced by television, radio and newspaper advertising
25 September	Chief Minister announces the establishment of a new Bushfire Recovery Executive to guide the continuing recovery process following the completion of the Taskforce's formal term at the end of September 2003
27 September	Free Rebuilding Advice Day sponsored by the Master Builders Association, professionals from ACTPLA, and a number of commercial organisations were available to provide advice on rebuilding matters
26 October	Presentation of prizes relating to the children's literary competition <i>Bushfires and Beyond- children and young people telling their stories</i> . Around 430 competition entries were received.

Appendix 7

Summary of Bushfire Recovery funding

	2002-03 \$'000	2003-04 \$'000	2004-05 \$'000	2005-06 \$'000	2006-07 \$'000
Additional Immediate Firefighting/Protection Costs	5,133				
Supporting Fire-Affected People					
Emergency Accommodation and financial assistance	4,400				
Counselling	388	250			
Hospitals	389				
Recovery Centre	1,054	2,000			
Recovery Taskforce	835	673			
Business Assistance	335	219			
Tourism and Events Marketing Campaign	100				
School Bus Transport	22	22			
Destroyed Disability Group House	100				
Donation to Bushfire Appeal	100				
	7,723	3,164	0	0	0
Community Involvement					
Recovery Taskforce	1,075	592			
Community Engagement in Restoration of Murrumbidgee	100	200	100		
Bushfire Memorial		185			
Community Fire Units Trial		100			
	1,175	1,077	100	0	0
Clean-up and Rebuilding - Private					
Recovery Taskforce	492	284			
Site clean-up	3,230				
Waste Disposal incl closure of disposal facility, replacement household bins	820	150			
Reconstruction and Assessment	369				
Streamlined Development Application Process		215			
Bushfire Rebuilding Grant		1,200	250		
Cotter Tavern Demolition		125			
Rural Assistance Recovery Program	170	150			
Free Plant Issue Scheme	25	75	100		

	2002-03 \$'000	2003-04 \$'000	2004-05 \$'000	2005-06 \$'000	2006-07 \$'000
Clean-up and Rebuilding - Public					
Removal of Trees and Debris	2,010	600			
Replacement of Rural Housing	4,400	4,400			
Regreening/weed control/ aerial grass seeding	1,039	2,850	1,755	351	
Landslip rectification	300	200			
Replacement of gutters, footpaths, etc		100	400		
Cotter Bridge Improvement		100			
Birrigai Bushfire Recovery		150			
Fire Suppression Trails and Walking Tracks	100	700	700	600	
Restoration/Repairs and Maintenance	1,089				
	8,938	9,100	2,855	951	0
Learning Lessons and Building a Stronger Future					
Recovery Taskforce	469	451			
Non-Urban Study	250	250			
Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January Bushfires (McLeod Inquiry)	400	100			
Bushfire Coronial Inquest	150	1,500			
Additional Automatic Weather Station		40			
Bushfire Awareness Campaign		511			
Additional Firefighting Equipment/Vehicles		286			
Broadband Data Links to ESB Suburban and Volunteer Stations		431			
Emergency Operations Centre Upgrade		57			
Risk Management and Community Education		403			
Expansion of Community Fire Unit		79			
Improved Training Capacity		352			
Command and Control Capability for Bushfire and Emergency Services		168			
Computer Aided Fire Data Management		185			
Implementation Team for McLeod Recommendations		449			
Commitment to Aerial Fire Fighting Strategy		902			
Fire Fuel Management - Accelerated Works, Rural Road Verges, Increased Management Planning	250	730	400	400	150
Spatial Data Acquisition - Interpretation of Recovery Plan		130	40	40	40
Bushfire Recovery Program - ACT Heritage Places	100	200			
Completion of Recreation Recovery Strategy		100	30		
	1,619	7,324	470	440	190
Total Cost Over Event	29,694	22,864	3,775	1,391	190

Appendix 8

Summary of related inquiries and studies

The Non-Urban Study

On 19 February 2003 the Chief Minister announced that a major study would be conducted into the non-urban areas of the ACT to address the effects of the bushfires.

On 18 March 2003, the Government announced the Non-Urban Study Steering Committee to oversee the study. Mr Sandy Hollway was appointed Chair of the Committee. The Committee consisted of all the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce members and seven supplementary specialist members:

- Professor Peter Cullen - Chair, Natural Resource Management Advisory Committee;
- Professor Bob Wasson - Chair, Sustainability Expert Reference Group;
- Mr Kevin Jeffery - Member, Bushfire Council;
- Mr Ted Evans - Former Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Treasury;
- Ms Dorte Ekelund - Director, Territory Planning Branch, ACTPLA (later represented by Ms Catherine Keirnan);
- Ms Annabelle Pegrum - Chief Executive, National Capital Authority (later represented by Mr Graham Scott-Bohanna); and
- Professor Peter Kanowski - Professor of Forestry and Head of the School of Resources, Environment and Society, ANU.

A dedicated study team was appointed to investigate the issues and options in detail on behalf of the Steering Committee. In appointing this team, a two-stage open and competitive tender process was held. The team included Bovis Lend Lease as project managers, together with a number of local and national experts in a wide range of areas.

The aim of this study was to provide the Government with recommendations for the best uses of non-urban areas for the sustainable development of the Territory.

The study's first report, *Shaping Our Territory: Options and Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT*, was released on 12 August 2003 for consultation and comment.

The six-week consultation period closed on 23 September 2003. Following consideration of input received and further investigations, the final report (including recommendations) was completed for presentation to the Chief Minister.

The final report of the Non-Urban Study *Shaping Our Territory: Final Report: Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT* was released by the Chief Minister on 5 November 2003.

McLeod Inquiry—Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January Bushfires

Following the devastating ACT bushfires of 18 January 2003, the ACT Government engaged Mr Ron McLeod AM, the former Commonwealth and ACT Ombudsman, to undertake an Inquiry into the ACT's operational response to the January bushfires.

On 4 August 2003 the Chief Minister publicly released Mr McLeod's Report. The Report is entitled *The Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires*.

ACT Coroner's Bushfire Inquiry

The Coronial Inquiry into the cause and origin of the January 2003 bushfires and the Inquests into manner and cause of the four associated deaths formally opened before Coroner Maria Doogan on Monday, 16 June 2003. The Coroner called for written information and submissions from the public regarding events and issues surrounding the bushfires and hearings commenced on Tuesday, 7 October 2003.

Urban Edge Review

The Urban Edge Review is being conducted by the ACT Planning and Land Authority to look at the conditions, design standards, guidelines and management approaches around Canberra's urban edge and to investigate whether any areas in the ACT need to be declared bushfire prone. The Review will be completed by December 2003.

Spatial Plan

The purpose of *The Canberra Spatial Plan*, being developed during 2002 and 2003, will be to provide Canberra with a clear and visionary framework for where we want Canberra to be in 25 to 30 years. Its focus is on spatial planning - how we use space (the land and environs of the ACT) and manage competing demands for space. A draft *Spatial Plan* will be completed by December 2003.

House Select Committee on the recent Australian bushfires

On 26 March 2003 the House of Representatives established a Select Committee to inquire into the recent Australian bushfires.

The Committee invited interested persons and organisations to make submissions addressing the terms of reference and their report of its seven-month inquiry into the 2003 summer bushfires was released on 23 October 2003. The 465-page report, titled *A Nation Charred*, contains 59 recommendations.

Appendix 9

Rebuilding summary as at 29 October 2003

Destruction Summary

	Gov't	Non Gov't	Total
Properties with destroyed structures	92	399	491
Structures on destroyed properties			
Urban dwelling	27	374	401
Rural dwelling	64	23	87
Total dwellings	91	397	488
Urban other buildings	1	7	8
Rural other buildings	16	69	85
Total other buildings	17	76	93
Total structures	108	473	581

Rebuilding Summary

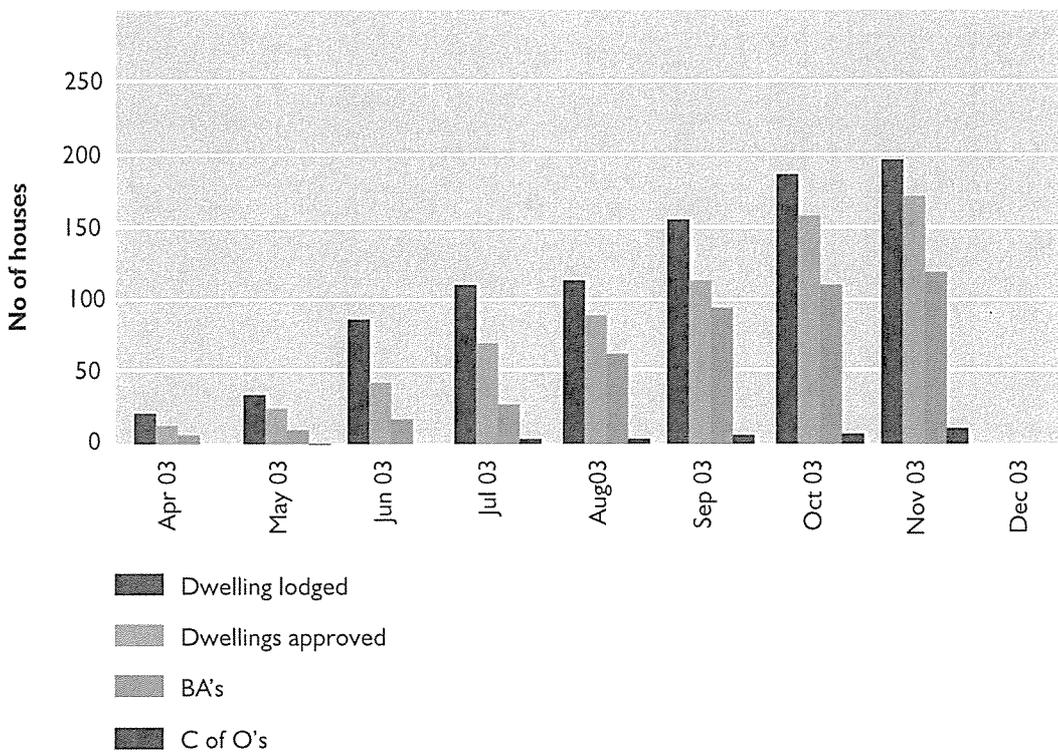
	Approved	Certificate Issued		
Demolitions*	470	451		
Rebuilding Activity	**Dwellings Lodged	**Dwellings Approved	BA Lodged	
Non Gov't	173	152	103	
Gov't 64	25	14	14	
Total properties	198	166	117	
Development Application	Cat1	Cat2	Cat3	#Tran
	8	49	123	18

Total properties	491
Sites with DA's lodged***	185
Rural Gov't dwellings	64
BA lodged, without DA recorded	2
Bushfire affected properties sold	82
Housing futures****	125
Actual DA's lodged*****	178
Sold with DA lodged*****	17

Footnotes to table opposite

- * Some demolition activity has been approved as part of a rebuilding approval and those properties are not included in these numbers
- ** Dwellings lodged/approved refers to actual 'dwelling' count from DA's submitted
- *** Refers to NI 'sites' that an actual DA has been lodged over (eg includes Tanjil Loop blocks)
- **** Refers to all NI sites with No DA, No BA, No Sale, minus Gov't Rural Blocks (ie NO ACTIVITY)
- ***** Refers to an actual number of DA's that have been lodged for destroyed dwellings
- ***** This measures rebuilding activity on properties on which titles have been transferred since 18 January
- # Tran refers to fire affected 'dwellings' subsequently sold that DA categories do not apply to

Rebuilding after the bushfires



Appendix 10

Phase II of the Bushfire Recovery Action Plan—Moving Forward

September 2003–March 2004

Recovery from the ACT's bushfire emergency of January 2003 has been widely recognised as a very successful community based effort to date. This, in no small part, is due to the resilience of the ACT community itself, but also the leadership and coordination arrangements established by the Government through the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and its many partnerships across the public and private sectors.

With the completion of the Taskforce's formal role, eight months on from the event, there is a natural evolution of the recovery work which needs to progressively shift much of the ongoing effort into mainstream arrangements.

Yet the work is far from over. In fact experts in the field acknowledge that recovery is a long term process with many phases for individuals, families and organisations.

A focus for the next phase of recovery

Recognising the significant progress that has been made to date, four critical areas have been identified as a focus of our recovery efforts in the coming months:

- **Facilitate Housing Futures**
everything that can be done is done to support fire-affected households to make their own decisions about whether to rebuild or sell their blocks, and to assist individuals working through the rebuilding process.
- **Renewing Key Public Places**
residents of the ACT are able to again enjoy the recreational and public places which are important to them.
- **Community and Personal Support**
those directly affected by the fires are adequately supported, and provided with the resources to assist them fully recover.
- **Bushfire Season Readiness**
the Government and the whole community is prepared for the coming bushfire season.

The Bushfire Recovery Executive is a leadership and coordination group that will support the next phase in close collaboration with the Community and Expert Reference Group. The Executive will report regularly to the Chief Executive of the Chief Minister's Department and the Government and will retain a focus on getting the job done and keeping the community aware.

It is important that the Bushfire Recovery Executive continues the work of the Taskforce, maintaining the momentum and ensuring that recovery is strongly supported by all parts of Government and the community. The major function of the

new Executive will be to ensure that recovery remains a high priority across all areas of Government, with a strong focus on implementation.

The Bushfire Recovery Executive recognises that a large part of the recovery process has been achieved very successfully, yet some aspects will need to continue over years, not months, and that strong leadership and oversight of all aspects of the work will still be needed. The Executive is also determined to remain alert to new issues which will continue to arise in the recovery process.

There are a number of advantages of these arrangements for the next phase:

- Longer term strategies and learnings can be clearly coordinated and implemented across Government with direct participation by very senior representatives of all Departments;
- The experience and input of Taskforce members is retained yet applied in a different way;
- Renewed and strengthened links are established between the community and the public service, building on the positives so far.

Community Relations

The advice of the Community and Expert Reference Group will remain a critical component in anticipating issues and gaining feedback. To keep abreast of progress the Executive will also undertake visits, inspections, receive reports and ensure that there is direct contact with the wider community.

The Recovery teams will also maintain the strong relationships with community groups that have become so central to the recovery effort, including Weston Creek Community Council, the Phoenix Association, the Mount Taylor Estate Residents Association, the Chapman Residents Action Group, and welfare and community organisations such as The Salvation Army and Anglicare, and service clubs such as Rotary and Lions.

What the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat does

The Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat is made up of people brought together from across the ACT Government to provide a dedicated focus on recovery. The Secretariat fulfills a range of functions:

Case management through the Recovery Centre

The Recovery Centre provides a wide range of support services to fire-affected people using a case management and community development model. These services include personal support, counselling, support for local communities and neighbourhoods and access to the Bushfire Building Costs Advisory Service.

Community and Rebuilding Support

Recovery Centre case managers facilitate community development, and participate in a large number of community events and activities. The Secretariat provides administrative support for the Garden Regeneration Scheme sponsored by the Phoenix Garden Group and other activities. In addition, the Secretariat provides support for those seeking to rebuild, and monitors statistics on rebuilding.

Communications and Community Relations

The Secretariat produces the weekly Community Update newsletter and twice-weekly bushfire recovery advertisements in the local press.

Secretariat Support

The Secretariat provides support for the Community and Expert Reference Group and the Bushfire Recovery Executive, as well as providing a range of administrative support functions.

Membership

Recovery Executive: Lincoln Hawkins (CMD Chair), Lucy Bitmead (Executive Director), Sue Birtles (DEYFS), Shane Radnell (DT), Hamish McNulty (DUS), John Meyer (ACTPLA), Michael Ockwell (DJACS), Colin Adrian (DDHCS), Linda Trompf (DHCC)

Community and Expert Reference Group:

David Dawes

Chief Minister's Office:

Judith Downey

Secretariat:

Di Butcher (Recovery Centre), Chris Healy (Community Support), Felicity Prideaux (Communications), Judith Therkelsen (Program Management and Budget/Secretariat), George Tomlins (Non-Urban Study)

Role

The Bushfire Recovery Executive will ensure that:

- recovery from the January 2003 bushfire remains a *high priority* for the Government and the community;
- there is *continuity* and a coherent recovery strategy;
- there is a high level of *responsiveness* by the Government and partners in responding to recovery issues; and
- *adaptable* organisational arrangements are in place that are able to respond to the changing priorities of the recovery process.

Terms of Reference

1. Provide advice to Government regarding bushfire recovery issues, priority issues and areas where additional assistance is required.
2. Guide and monitor the implementation of Government recovery activities, ensuring a consistent and whole of government approach.
3. Implement and review the key activities of recovery outlined in the Recovery Action Plan, focusing on areas including assistance to bushfire affected residents and restoration of bushfire affected areas.

4. With the Community and Expert Reference Group, facilitate community involvement in the recovery process through business, community sector and other activities.
5. Investigate ways that learnings from the recovery process can be integrated into mainstream services, with a view to implementing changed practice and service delivery.

Principles

In undertaking this work, the Executive will:

Support the Community

- seek to ensure that the recovery takes place in a way which empowers people to help themselves; *community empowerment*
- actively seek, and respect, individual and group views from the community and respond constructively and rapidly to all issues raised; *community participation*
- ensure that dedicated bushfire recovery support structures are not withdrawn or mainstreamed until the level of demand allows this to happen without undue impact on people affected by the bushfires; *community support*
- ensure that the community is kept informed about the recovery process and provided with the appropriate information to prepare themselves for future bushfire seasons; *community information*
- further develop the key alliances with both community and business groups; *community partnerships*

Look forward

- seek opportunities to not only return to the level of the past but position the ACT better for the future; *moving forward – take the opportunities*
- incorporate the lessons learnt into the development of an even more responsive and efficient public service; *apply the lessons learnt and “lift the bar”*
- ensure that the ACT does not simply return to the pre-bushfire situation, but that the community moves forward positively on the basis of the community spirit, cohesion and pride which the response to the fires demonstrate; *a stronger community*
- ensure that the needs of all sectors of the community (fire affected and not, urban and rural) are addressed appropriately; *a whole community*
- plan and manage the transition of ongoing recovery activities with Government Departments and other agencies; *seamless transition*
- work together as a team to ensure that the ongoing Bushfire Recovery effort is delivered very well and in a timely way; *teamwork*

Key Theme 1. Support those who have been significantly impacted by the fires

Support is provided to:

- Assist the community to manage its own recovery
- Assist people to re-establish their lives
- Help prevent future health and well being problems
- Create and maintain community confidence, and
- Build on the positive aspects that have emerged and to become stronger

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
<p>1.1 Provide Recovery Centre Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing support and assistance to bushfire affected people <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - case management - analysis of all open cases, in terms of risk, and need for continuing service from mainstream agencies - negotiation with agencies for service provision 	Recovery Centre	31 Mar 04	In progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing Futures - Support for decision making <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - contact with 174 households - analysis of data to identify households requiring further assistance and information - provision of assistance and information in format preferred by household, street, community 	Recovery Centre	Sept – Dec 03	All contacts made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coroner's Inquiry personal support to community witnesses at Coroner's Court 	Recovery Centre team for the Inquiry	31 Mar 04	In progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Memorial <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - advice and assistance to Arts ACT through steering committee membership 	Team leader, Duffy	31 Mar 04	In progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Hardship <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - update Executive on severe hardship work with Health on rehabilitation plan for burns victim(s) 	Manager, Recovery Centre	to 30 Nov 04	In progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community development activities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - street meetings - support to local leadership 	All staff, Recovery Centre	31 Mar 04	In progress

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Staff futures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assistance to staff for next career move 	Director, Manager and team leaders	Nov – Mar 04	In progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bushfire Awareness <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - assist people with disabilities and frail aged to access assistance re preparing their houses - brief NGOs and govt agencies re assisting people to develop their emergency plans - assistance to ESB. 	All staff	31 Mar 04	In progress
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disaster Relief Grants Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - evaluate program in terms of effectiveness and coverage - brief Executive on learnings 	Director	30 Nov 03	Commenced 1 Nov 03
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assist urban and rural businesses affected by the fires <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - provide information and advice - provide grants of \$3000 	CMD	Sept 03	In progress
1.2 Assess new needs of directly affected community members arising from the CERG or other sources and provide advice to Government about how best to respond to these needs	Secretariat/ Recovery Exec	Monthly	In progress
1.3 Monitor and respond to the cases of people affected by the bushfires who are experiencing severe hardship * Prepare report for Recovery Executive	Secretariat	12 Nov 03	In progress
1.4 Anniversary - 18 January Develop a strategy to recognise the anniversary of the January 2003 bushfires in ways that are appropriate, dignified and reflective of what has been achieved.	Director Community Support	18 Jan 04	In progress
1.5 Support community events <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - planning for, and organisation of government events - supporting and facilitating community events 	Recovery Centre	Nov 03	In progress

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
1.6 Prepare a comprehensive list of those Secretariat functions to be mainstreamed, and a plan for how this will be progressed.	Secretariat/ Recovery Exec	Mid Nov 03	To commence
* Develop strategy and implementation plan which ensure that services remain available for those who need them.	Sec, CMD, DHCC, DEYFS	Mid Nov 03	To commence
- Facilitate the transfer of Recovery Centre services to mainstream agencies.	Sec, CMD, DHCC, DEYFS	Mar 04	To commence
- Strategy is in place for transition of Recovery Centre staff.			
- Ensure that all of those affected (Recovery Centre staff, clients, broader community, ACT Government agencies) are well informed about the arrangements.	Sec, CMD, DHCC, DEYFS	Feb 04 up to Mar 04	To commence
- Implement the agreed transfer plan			

Key Theme 2. Ensure that the community actively participates in the process of rebuilding and recovery

- To facilitate the healing processes for individuals in partnership with the community
- To ensure rebuilding meets community expectations and needs
- To build on community spirit generated
- To encourage community involvement

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
2.1 Establish a strong working relationship with Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) and its reconstituted membership for the next phase of recovery	Secretariat, CERG, Recovery Executive	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
2.2 Provide support to CERG until 31 March 2004 in their role of providing community input and feedback into the recovery process	Secretariat	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
2.3 Facilitate and support Recovery Centre community development programs and associated programs (eg garden regeneration)	Secretariat/ Recovery Centre	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
2.4 Evaluate the success of community based recovery programs, such as the Community Grants Program.	Secretariat	Nov 03	In progress
2.5 Joint Community Reference Group to coordinate key partnerships with community organisations (eg Scouts/Greenhills, Combined Charities Group)	CMD	Nov 03	In progress
2.6 Provide resources to encourage and manage volunteers (harness the available effort). Match volunteers to jobs and ensure they are adequately engaged and supported	CMD (MCAG)	Nov 03	In progress
2.7 Promote programs and encourage community involvement through media, newsletter, clubs	Secretariat	Nov 03	In progress
2.8 Ensure that the Social Plan capitalise on opportunities that retain the strong sense of community cohesion following 18 January 2003	CMD	mid Nov 03	In progress

Key Theme 3. Ensure clean up of the Territory occurs in a way that is safe, timely, efficient, cost effective and respectful

- To restore the “bush capital” visual amenity
- To enable the community to again use its favourite recreation areas and spaces
- To reduce any domestic and other safety hazards
- Consider regeneration efforts within the context of the Non-Urban Study (including the Urban Edge Review) the McLeod Report and community opinion

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
<p>3.1 Key Public Places</p> <p>- Ensure that key places are identified, cleaned up and restored as quickly as practical</p> <p><i>Note:</i> The attached schedule highlights the program for key places identified by community feedback</p> <p>- Refer the three major Recovery plans managed by Urban Services and the related progress reports:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Environment ACT - Bushfire recovery progress report; b) DUS Bushfire Recovery Workplan; and c) The Canberra Connect Bushfire Recovery Report 	DUS	Program scheduled to Mar 04	
3.2 Monitor and report to the Government and the community on cleanup and restoration achievements	Recovery Executive	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
3.3 Implement a communications strategy to assist the community to better understand the operations of the clean up and restoration programs.	CMD, DUS	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
3.4 Reconsider programs in light of the outcome of the Non Urban Study and Urban Edge Review.	DUS	End Feb 04	To commence

Key Theme 4. Facilitate rebuilding in a way that is safe, timely, streamlined and provides individuals with real choices

- To allow people severely affected by the bushfires to be able to exercise real choice and practical options in re-building their properties in the context of the major building activities currently underway
- To rebuild and re-develop community and government facilities and public institutions to support and re-establish Canberra communities
- To ensure the rapid rebuilding and restoration of Government assets.

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
4.1 Establish and implement a program for redevelopment and restoration of open spaces, natural areas, infrastructure and public places.	DUS	Nov 03	DUS programs established and are being implemented
4.2 Monitor and report to the Government and the Community on the progress with renewing key public places.	Secretariat/ACTPLA	31 Mar 04	Continuing
4.3 Facilitating Housing Futures Support for decision making around housing futures:			
- contact with 174 households	Recovery Centre	Oct 03	Completed
- analysis of data to identify households requiring further assistance and information	Secretariat	Nov 03	Completed
- provision of assistance and information in format preferred by household, street, community. (See Note)	Executive		In progress
4.4 Publicly recognise those who have completed the rebuilding process.	Secretariat	Until 31 Mar 03	In progress
4.5 Liaise with the AFP to ensure focused patrols around rebuilding sites.	DJACS	23 Sep 03	In progress
4.6 Ensure that HQSD and Development Applications for those seeking to rebuild are assessed sympathetically and approved efficiently wherever possible	ACTPLA/ Recovery Centre	Continuing	In progress

Note: Support for residents will include:

- provision of information, advice and case management through the Recovery Centre;
- provision of advice on building costs;
- waiver of a range of fees relating to development applications, building approvals, etc;
- payment of the training levy on behalf of those rebuilding;
- provision of a \$5,000 grant to rebuilders who have achieved a certificate of occupancy;
- waiving stamp duty of up to \$7,000 for those who choose not to rebuild, but to purchase a replacement home elsewhere in the ACT;
- waiving rates and land tax for those who have not yet rebuilt and who have not sold their blocks until 30 June 2004; and
- waiving water and electricity charges for those who have not yet rebuilt and who have not sold their blocks until 30 June 2004.

Key Theme 5. Provide up to date, relevant and useful information to assist with the recovery process

- To ensure community confidence
- To demonstrate to the whole community that lessons learnt from 18 January have been applied
- To help people to make well informed decisions
- To confirm the continuing priority being given to the recovery effort

Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
5.1 Continue to provide bushfire recovery related communications channels. Community Update Newsletter and newspaper advertising at the current level until the end of the Bushfire Awareness Campaign and then adjust the frequency/size/focus based on feedback.	Secretariat	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
5.2 Adjust the Recovery Communications Strategy to respond to the focus of Phase II.	Secretariat	From Oct 03	Continuing
5.3 Implement the Public Information sub-plan of the ACT Emergency Plan	CMD	Throughout bushfire season	Continuing
5.4 Clearly explain the status and relationship of all related studies and consultations in a single clear brief format	Secretariat	November	To commence
5.5 Monitor the impact of the Bushfire Awareness communications strategy.	CMD	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing
5.6 Provide project specific status reports with clear explanations of objectives and outcomes.	Recovery Executive	Until 31 Mar 04	Continuing

Key Theme 6. Learn lessons from this event so the ACT community moves forward positively

- To become a stronger, safer and more resilient community
- To be more prepared for emergencies
- To further promote Government and community working in partnership
- To build an even more responsive public sector

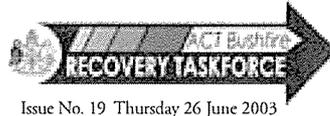
Key Tasks	By Whom	By When	Current Status
6.1 Develop a consolidated list of legacies from the recovery process, both tangible and intangible, and communicate these to the community (eg, insurance, community projects)	Secretariat, Recovery Executive	Dec 03	In progress
6.2 - Ensure the BF Recovery process is a positive integrated part of Canberra's future strategic directions; including strategies outlined in the Canberra Plan - Explore the opportunities to build safer communities with strong links to the Social Plan	CMD	Dec 03	In progress
6.3 Apply lessons learnt from the recovery process.	Recovery Executive	31 Mar 04	In progress
6.4 Continue the emergency awareness program to assist individuals and the community to be better prepared for emergencies.	Emergency Services	Ongoing	In progress
6.5 Resolve with Emergency Management Australia definitional issues associated with property damage data required during a large scale emergency	ACTPLA	31 Dec 03	In progress
6.6 Positively communicate within Government the role of each Department and agency during Phase II of the recovery process outlining key priorities and timelines	Recovery Executive	End Dec 03	In progress

Appendix 11

Example of Community Update



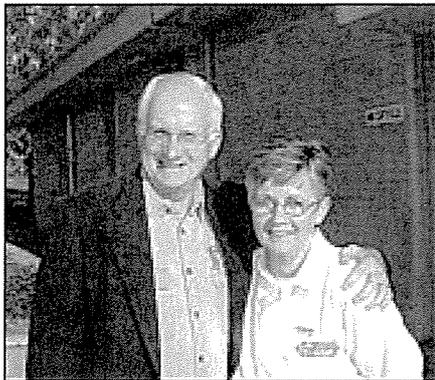
COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

Coping with kids: *parenting after a disaster*

A message to parents from leading child psychologist, Dr John Irvine



Dr John Irvine pictured above with the Manager of the ACT Recovery Centre, Di Butcher.

I really wasn't prepared for it all. I had been asked by the ACT Recovery Centre to conduct two post bushfire seminars on parenting after the ACT bushfire disaster that damaged or destroyed over 500 homes, four precious lives and the confidence of over 1,500 people.

So we started my part in recounting the events at that time, what they experienced, what role they played and what action they took. We went through some of the common reactions to a personal crisis, and I share this with readers because all of us, at some time, will face some crisis and need to know what's normal.

Normal feelings and emotions include:

- **fear** - of being hurt, of breaking down or losing control or being left without loved ones - in this case the victims rejected that term and agreed on 'terror'
- **helplessness** - so often it's the crises that show up our powerlessness in the face of forces beyond our control;
- **sadness** - for deaths, injuries and loss to property, people or pets;
- **longing** - for all that was lost - many victims longed for their old familiar sounds, smells, sights and just the feel of their old home and all its trimmings;

Message continued on page 2

Concrete pour marks start of ACT housing reconstruction

Reconstruction of the twenty-six ACT Housing properties destroyed in urban Canberra during the January bushfires has commenced, with the pouring of concrete footings for a Kambah house last week.

ACT Minister for Disability, Housing and Community Services, Bill Wood, attended the pouring of the first footings by Renaissance Building and Design for a five bedroom house to be rebuilt in Lyaal Crescent.

Mr Wood said most of ACT Housing's replacement houses would be four or five bedroom project homes, with ensuites and double garages, with some units to be built at Tanjil Loop and Pinefield Court in Duffy.

"Last week's concrete pour represents another significant step on the road to recovery for public housing in the ACT," Mr Wood said.

Wood accepted Lanyon Real Estate's \$40,000 bushfire donation

On behalf of the ACT's Volunteer Brigades Association, Emergency Services Minister Bill Wood accepted a donation of \$40,000 from Lanyon Real Estate in Conder.

Mr Wood said the fundraising effort by Lanyon Real Estate was an act of tremendous generosity that exemplified the inspiring way the ACT community had pulled together in the wake of January's disastrous bushfires.

"Lanyon Real Estate and its agents raised \$40,000 for firefighters by donating part of their commissions on sales since the January fires," Mr Wood said. "This is an extraordinary response to the extraordinary heroism shown by hundreds of volunteer firefighters from the ACT and interstate.

"It is also the largest single donation the ACT Volunteer Brigades Association has received, and in return the Association's Treasurer, Michael Taylor, will present Lanyon Real Estate's Principal, Daryl Saxon, with a Certificate of Appreciation.

Special six month anniversary edition of *Community Update*

The ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and ACT Recovery Centre invite you to contribute to a special *Reflections* edition of *Community Update* to mark six months after the 18 January firestorm. The special edition will be published on 17 July 2003, and will feature stories, poems, pictures or other submissions that reflect on the bushfires and recovery process.

All submissions must be received before 3 July 2003 to bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au, mailed or dropped off at the ACT Recovery Centre at 67 Launceston St, Lyons. For more information, please call the ACT Bushfire Taskforce on 6207 8111 or ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733.



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

HEALTH AND WELLBEING

Coping with kids: parenting after a disaster

A message to parents from leading child psychologist, Dr John Irvine

Continued from page 1

- **anger** - for who or what caused it, at the injustice of it all, at God, at the shame and indignities, at the lack of understanding, lack of coordination, or resources or support - many of the residents were still seething over the lack of fire brigade and police and emergency services that were overstretched, at the conflicting communications that had them totally confused, at the lack of warning, and even when they were ordered to get out, their cars were grid-locked in at the end of the street and many thought they would 'cook in their car';
- **memories** - of feelings, of loss or of love for those affected, or injured, or who have died;
- **let down** - it's normal to feel let down by others who don't seem to understand what you're going through, let down by authorities, insurance companies, tradespeople etc;
- **hope** - this tends to come through the human spirit no matter how traumatic the events, but it often takes time, often big time.

The important point for us as parents, trying to struggle on for our family after a disaster, is that our role is critical in the coping and adjustment of our kids. For pre-school children, apart from the shock, their interpretation of the event is really read through their parent; if their parents panic, then the child will react to that, if they're sad, they will react to that. So while our emotions are on overload, it's important to reassure the children that you're OK and they're OK. Often it's best, I believe, if the going is really tough, to put the kids in the comfy care of family or friends where they feel safe and secure and so parents can get space to do what needs to be done, unencumbered physically or emotionally by upset children.

Primary children have a brain that can reason and think things through, and that needs to be respected. Answer their questions as simply and honestly as you can and try to apply

positive imagination to the future rather than the negative one that will heighten their trauma. It's also important that teachers give the children the opportunity to talk things through as the peer group is now an important reference point for the individual child.

Teenagers will experience the same array of feelings that adults do, but it may be even more traumatic as it may be their first brush with loss or death. It's also a very lonely time for them in many ways; the reassurance of parents is now not enough, they need to work it through their friends too. Many parents get upset unnecessarily when their own children refuse to talk about the event and choose to lock it away or talk to friends' families more than their own. They are trying to cope independently.

It was a very therapeutic time for all of us as victims started to talk and share what helped them though - family, faith, new found friends, their kids' reminders that they still had each other, buying old (not new) furniture and crockery that were family familiar. Many months after, are still left with intrusive thoughts, sleeping problems, preoccupation with the event, loss of energy and hyper-vigilance (on red alert for any warning signs - fire engine siren, smoke, barbeque smells even), and it was reassuring for them to know that this was normal and that counsellors were available and equipped to help their recovery. It was a humbling experience for me, and the autopsy that they're doing on the whole event is just so thorough and will provide a blue print for the management of disasters elsewhere in Australia.

There's an old saying 'no pain, no gain' and maybe there's some truth to it. As one dad, who had lost his home and all its contents said, "People have called Canberra the plastic city with no soul, well I've got to tell you that we've found it and it feels great."

For more information on counselling services, please contact the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733.

Looking forward - small group chat sessions

Are you interested in meeting with others in your local community to share stories, establish support and social networks, and offer and gain information?

Woden Community Service and the Salvation Army have arranged support for a series of FREE informal small group gatherings in local areas through the ACT Recovery Centre. Sessions are available for:

- young girls 10-16 years;
- young boys 10-16 years;

- young adults 17-25 years;
- women;
- men; and
- other sessions can be arranged if required.

Sessions are free and can be available on a drop in basis, but it would be helpful to advise of your intention to attend. **For more details, please contact the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733.**

ACT Recovery Centre
or visit 67 Launceston Street
Lyons, ACT, 2606
weekdays 9:00am-5:30pm.

Ph: 6205 5733

Salvation Army
St Vincent de Paul
Canberra Connect
or www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au

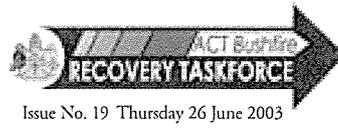
Ph: 6247 3635

Ph: 6282 2722

Ph: 13 2281



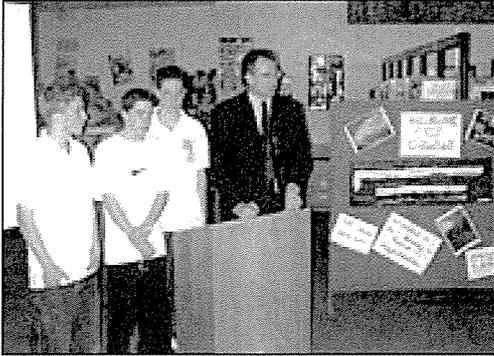
COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

REGREENING

Students find nature healing itself



Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, Jon Stanhope with Environmental Science students at Stromlo High School.

Chief Minister and Minister for the Environment, Jon Stanhope, visited Stromlo High School this week where Environmental Science students presented their findings on how nature is healing itself after the bushfires.

"Through their observations on how nature is regenerating at Mt Arawang in Coleman Ridge Nature Reserve, these students have given all of us a valuable insight and confidence in the knowledge that nature is recovering from the bushfire phenomenon that occurred in January," Mr Stanhope said. "The students have displayed scientific skill and initiative in examining issues which must be difficult and personally confronting for those who were affected by the bushfires.

"For the past four months, the students have walked the one-hour round trip from Stromlo High School to the base of Mt Arawang each week to record their observations on ground cover regeneration, features of regenerating trees, and evidence of fauna. They made a note of the climate for that week to help them draw conclusions between the climate and the rate of regeneration, and completed wider research relating to fire on the natural and man-made environment.

"I would also like to commend Stromlo High School for taking this valuable opportunity to look at how our Australian native vegetation regenerates after fire and how nature copes with such devastating events."

The students' final research reports will be on public display in the Library at Stromlo High School, Badimara St Waramanga, until the end of term.

For more information on the project, please call the Garden Regeneration Project Committee on 6207 0142.

Garden talk at the Canberra Home and Lifestyle Show

Has your garden been affected by fires or droughts? And what should you consider if you're planning your garden from scratch? Come along to the Canberra Home and Lifestyle Show this Sunday 29 June 2003 to hear a variety of entertaining speakers talk about these two topics from 1:00pm-2:00pm.

Guest speakers Mark Carmody (2CN Gardening Program) Geoff Butler (Weeds Officer of the Conservation Council), Catherine Kiernan (landscape architect and rural lessee), and Paulene Cornish (coordinator of the Phoenix Garden Group) will join a panel to discuss:

- *Fires, Drought and Gardens*; and
- *Garden Design: 101 things to consider when planning your garden*

The Canberra Home and Lifestyle Show runs from 10:00am-5:00pm on Friday 27 to Sunday 29 June 2003 at Exhibition Park. Visit the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and ACT Recovery Centre stand for information on rebuilding, recovery and regreening.

Garden clean-ups



From left to right: Vicky McGrath-McKie, whose garden needed a bit of TLC, Paulene Cornish, coordinator of Phoenix Garden Group, with volunteers Sean Burroughs, Libby Laurie and Grant Morey.

Despite the rain, the Garden Day on Sunday 22 June 2003 was another success, with several gardens receiving some much-needed treatment and many, many trailer loads of soil and mulch transported to other needy gardens! The next Garden Day is on Sunday 27 July 2003.

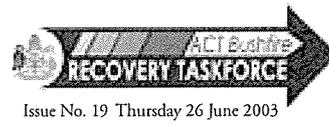
To register your fire-affected garden for assistance or to volunteer to help, fill out the forms on www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au or phone the Garden Regeneration Project Committee on 6207 0142.

For information regarding the ACT Government Plant Issue Scheme, please contact Yarralumla Nursery on 6207 2444.

For information on regreening please contact the Garden Regeneration Project Committee on 6207 0142.



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

MOVING FORWARD

Changes to planning start next week

From next Tuesday, 1 July 2003, fire-affected residents who are rebuilding will need to seek development approval from a new authority - the ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA).

ACTPLA replaces Planning and Land Management (PALM) and will continue all of the functions of PALM, and in addition, will have some extra responsibilities.

The set up of ACTPLA will not change any of the streamlined development application (DA) processes or waived fees that apply to people affected by the bushfires.

However, from 1 July 2003, the organisation responsible for determining a DA will alter. ACTPLA will have the power to make DA decisions in its own right. Previously, DA decisions were split between PALM and the Commissioner for Land

and Planning. This change makes the development process simpler and ensures consistent decision-making.

In addition, ACTPLA has the power to reconsider its own decisions on DAs. Applicants who are given a decision on a DA from 1 July onwards will be able to ask ACTPLA to reconsider a part of or the whole of the decision.

Formal mediation will be available for people who make an appeal in the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. The Administrative Appeals Tribunal will hear and decide appeals within 120 days. This time limit applies from 1 July 2003.

For more information, pick up a copy of the planning and land reform brochures, available at the ACT Planning and Land Authority, 16 Challis Street, Dickson or phone the ACTPLA Customer Service Centre on 6207 1923.

Spotless Services volunteers for Garden Regeneration Project

It's 7:30am on a foggy Canberra morning, and the entire staff of Spotless Services Open Space Management in Holder have gathered in the chilly yard for a photo. Some of the 30-odd staff had been at work since 5:00am, cleaning the shopping centres at Woden and Weston before most of the general public even began their day. There's the usual mischief and jockeying going on in front of the camera. But back track six months, and the picture wasn't so cheerful.



Staff of Spotless Services Open Space Management in Holder are rebuilding following the bushfires.

"The January fires basically put us to a standstill," Manager Phil Hodges said. "We lost the back sheds with all our tools and equipment, most of the trailers, and some of our trucks. A couple of our guys lost their homes, they lost everything except the shirt on their back, yet the very next day came back to work to see how they could help."

With a contract to manage all the parks and public places in Woden and Weston, all five divisions of the business were involved in the clean-up immediately after the fires: the

Asset Maintenance team ensured playgrounds were safe, the Horticultural team rebuilt public garden beds and flower displays, the Chemical team treated weeds, the Cleaning team cleaned up the shopping centres and public BBQs, and the Tree Services team removed trees that were damaged by the fires.

"We just did everything we could to make it safe for the public with the few tools we had at the

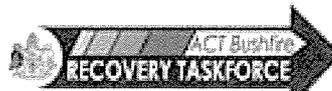
time," he said. "Now, with most of its equipment replaced and business back to usual, Spotless Services has volunteered its staff and equipment to help regreen fire-affected gardens as part of the Garden Regeneration Project. Because you work in this area you get to know the people, and we were very concerned about the community. It's certainly brought everybody closer, and we'd like to help in whatever way we can."

For more information, please contact the Garden Regeneration Project Committee on 6207 0142.

Insurance	Ph: 1300 780 808	Design Institute of Australia	Ph: 6288 0237
Planning and Land Management (PALM)	Ph: 6207 1926	Master Builders Association	Ph: 6247 2099
BEPCON	Ph: 6207 6400	Housing Industry Association (HIA)	Ph: 6249 6366
Design Advisory Service	Ph: 6205 5738	Environment ACT	Ph: 6207 9777



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

REBUILDING

Design advice

Need professional design advice to help rebuild your home? Then why don't you use the Design Advisory Service run by Planning and Land Management (to become the new ACT Planning and Land Authority as of 1 July 2003). The Design Advisory Service provides advice on house plan designs and information about rebuilding processes. To make an appointment call 6205 5738.

Replacement of public housing following the bushfires

The ACT Government is well on track to replace its public housing stock destroyed in the ACT bushfires. As a direct result of the bushfires, the Department of Disability, Housing and Community services is buying 55 properties in urban areas to temporarily replace those rural properties that were lost. There was a total of 81 properties lost in the bushfires, and of those about 18 are expected to be replaced by the end of this financial year.

In addition to this, two older persons units at Pinefield Court in Duffy are under construction, footings have been poured for a five bedroom house in Kambah (see page 1) and most of the development applications for the project homes to be constructed by Renaissance Homes have been agreed.

All tenants who have expressed a desire to return to their rebuilt properties have now personally selected internal colour schemes for their properties.

The Tanjil Loop redevelopment in Duffy is also progressing well, having been discussed with tenants and the community. A Development Application for Tanjil Loop will be lodged this week.

"The Government set itself a target to replace all the properties lost to the fires by Christmas this year, and we are well on way towards achieving this goal," Disability, Housing and Community Services Minister, Bill Wood said.

Waiver on stamp duty

A waiver of up to \$7,000 of the stamp duty payable on the purchase of a property to replace an owner-occupied house destroyed by the ACT bushfires is still available for residents buying new properties.

For more information contact the ACT Revenue Office on 6205 0346 or visit the ACT Revenue Office web site at www.revenue.act.gov.au

Key directions for the new Birrigai



Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Katy Gallagher says the new Birrigai will be developed as a world-renowned outdoor and environmental education centre.

A community consultation forum hosted by Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Katy Gallagher, in late May 2003 has provided key directions for the development of a new Birrigai as a world-renowned outdoor and environmental education centre.

The forum was part of a consultative strategy on the rebuilding of Birrigai.

The general view of participants at the forum was that there should be an increased focus on science and science education as an integral part of the new environment education programs.

Key principles agreed upon to guide the new Birrigai include:

- providing a focus on sustainability, inclusiveness and inspirational learning;
- developing programs that are unique and innovative;
- creating facilities, which are complementary to existing facilities and multi-campus;
- expanding key partnerships and links with the community;
- including the local indigenous community cultural heritage and links with the land;
- aiming for a broader client base with a variety of access options;
- including students from preschool to Year 12;
- building upon the experience of the ACT bushfire; and
- offering experiences beyond typical school opportunities.

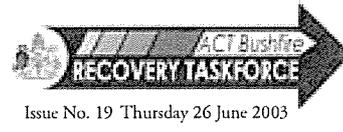
The new Birrigai will see children and youth experience education programs that will be remembered as relevant to their current and future lives.

For further information on the development of the new Birrigai, please contact the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce on 6207 8111.

Insurance	Ph: 1300 780 808	Design Institute of Australia	Ph: 6288 0237
Planning and Land Management (PALM)	Ph: 6207 1926	Master Builders Association	Ph: 6247 2099
BEPCON	Ph: 6207 6400	Housing Industry Association (HIA)	Ph: 6249 6366
Design Advisory Service	Ph: 6205 5738	Environment ACT	Ph: 6207 9777



COMMUNITY UPDATE



REGREENING

Garden Regeneration Project Volunteer Expression of Interest

Are you interested in helping those residents whose gardens have been affected by the January bushfires? If you are, then register your interest as a volunteer below.

Anglicare, the Phoenix Garden Group, Chapman and Kambah Residents Action Groups and the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce have joined forces to form the Garden Regeneration Project which aims to provide assistance to those residents whose gardens have been affected by the January bushfires.

By indicating your interest in volunteering, you will be placed on a database where we will endeavour to match you with a fire affected resident and their garden or an upcoming gardening project.

Fill out your details below and fax the form to the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce on 6207 9021. Alternatively you can post this form to ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, ActewAGL House, 221 London Circuit, Canberra City ACT 2601.

Name:

Address:

Phone: (H) (W) (M)

I would like to nominate my club or organisation as a volunteer

Club Name:

My position with this organisation:

I can/my organisation can assist with the following:

• **Plants** Please describe what plants and cuttings you can provide

When can you offer this if we can find a recipient?

• **Labour/Time** Please describe what type of labour you can offer (planting in garden, pruning, digging etc)

When can you offer this if we can find a recipient?

• **Advice** Please describe what advice you can provide (landscaping, horticultural etc)

When can you provide this advice if it is required?

• **Other** Is there any other assistance that you can offer that is not mentioned above?

I understand this information will be entered into a database and will be used in the coordination of garden regeneration projects.

Signature: Date:

**For information regarding the ACT Government Plant Issue Scheme, please contact Yarralumla Nursery on 6207 2444.
For information on regreening please contact the Garden Regeneration Project Committee on 6207 0142.**



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

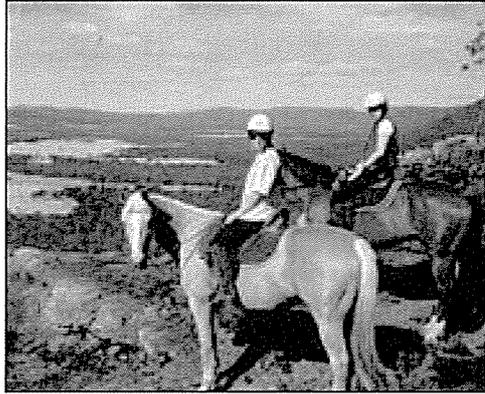
Community grant used to get *Back in the Saddle*

Back in the Saddle is a project developed by Kate O'Connor and Sharon Limon to assist fire-affected equestrians return to normal riding activities after the bushfires, funded by a community grant from the ACT Government. Specifically, the project gives riders of all ages affected by the bushfires the opportunity to attend free clinics with professional equestrian instructors.

The clinics include a lunch session that will provide riders with an opportunity to discuss horse issues with the coach for the day, and at some clinics, a vet. Most clinics will provide a private lesson and either an information session, or a small group lesson. Riders are encouraged to attend for the whole day.

All riders who feel they have been fire-affected are welcome to apply to attend the clinics. Riders need to fill in a form to support their application available from the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733 or visiting them at 67 Launceston St, Lyons, ACT.

If you have any questions about *Back in the Saddle*, please call 0413 008 824 or 6238 3673 or email: ocoton@bigpond.com or the ACT Recovery Centre 6205 5733.



Canberra's horse riders affected by the bushfires are welcome to attend the clinics.

ACT Recovery Centre forges strong community links

The ACT Recovery Centre has been working closely with community groups during the recovery process to help residents and community organisations heal from the bushfires.

One of the ways they do this is by attending community meetings on the bushfire recovery. This included attending the Mount Taylor Estate Residents Association meeting on 17 June 2003 to discuss possible garden and open space regeneration, and the Association's constitution. Representatives from the Phoenix Group and Rotary also attended the meeting and pooled resources and practical assistance where required.

The resilience and camaraderie of the residents who live in the Colquhoun Street area was most impressive, as ideas were floated on how to assist friends and neighbours regain their position before the bushfires. Add to that plenty of good-natured humour, and it was clear that residents of Mount Taylor Estate are keen to do some hard work, while enjoying the company of people who understand the experiences they have been through.

Future plans include restoring the environment, possibly establishing a community garden, and creating plenty of opportunities for community get togethers.

For further information on the Mount Taylor Estate Residents Association, please call 6252 7183 or 6231 3591.

Canberra Grammar extends a helping hand to Galilee

The Galilee School lost their school building and much of their equipment in the January bushfires. Galilee Inc provides services to disadvantaged and homeless young people, and the Galilee School is a learning centre for at-risk children in the Canberra area.

On Friday 20 June 2003, the Coordinator of Galilee School, Margaret Robertson, accepted a cheque for \$25,000 from Dr Jane Thompson from the Board of the Canberra Grammar School to help the school get back on its feet. The Canberra Grammar School was represented by the School Captain, John Bartholomew and other student representatives.

Headmaster of Canberra Grammar, Simon Murray spoke of how the Grammar students had been galvanised in their efforts to support those affected by the bushfires. He wished Galilee well in their rebuilding efforts. The Chairman of the Galilee Board, Bruce Kennedy, also thanked the Canberra Grammar School and spoke warmly of the common goal that the two schools share in providing opportunities for young people to progress in today's society.

For more information on the donation, please call the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733.

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce: bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au Phone 6207 8111



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 19 Thursday 26 June 2003

EVENTS

Bushfire regeneration walk

Come for a walk through Canberra's hills and see nature's regrowth after the bushfires. The walk is being lead by the National Parks Association (NPA) accompanied by the local Park Care Groups on **Saturday 5 July 2003**.

There are three stages, so you can enter or leave the walk at any stage.

Stage 1: Starts from 9:30am at the end of Kathner Street Chapman and finishes at 10:30am at the Kambah Fire Station Sulwood Drive, Kambah.

This stage will take you over Cooleman Ridge and Mount Arawang.

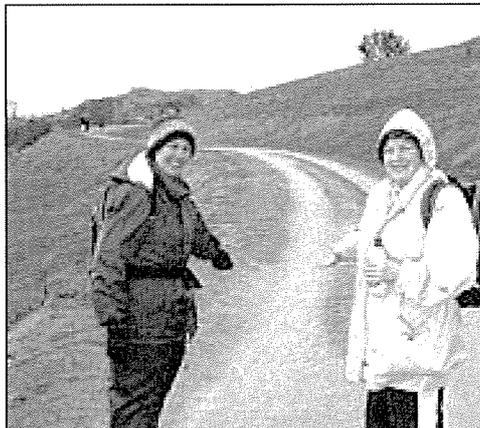
Morning tea at Kambah Fire Station from 10:30am to 11:00am provided by the Salvation Army.

Stage 2: Starts from 11:00am at Kambah Fire Station, Sulwood Drive, Kambah just off Tuggeranong Parkway and finishes at 12:30pm at Parks and Conservation Headquarters, Athllon Drive, Farrer.

You have a choice of walking up Mt Taylor or around the base.

BBQ lunch at Parks and Conservation Headquarters, Athllon Drive, Farrer from 12:30pm to 1:30pm, provided by the Salvation Army.

Stage 3: Starts at 1:30pm at Parks and Conservation Headquarters, Athllon Drive, Farrer and finishes at 3:30pm at Isaacs. This stage will work it's way through Farrer Ridge, Mt Wanniasa and Isaacs Ridge.



A bushfire regeneration walk lead by the National Parks Association is being held on Saturday 5 July 2003.

If you leave your car where you join the walk, there will be a lift to return you to your car.

What to bring: water bottle, warm jumper, raincoat, hat, sunscreen and something to nibble.

Please RSVP to the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733 for catering purposes. For further details, please contact the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733 or email peter.hendriks@act.gov.au or National Parks Association on 6291 4830 or email david.large@bigpond.com

How did the fire know we lived here?

Ginninderra Press and Pirion Pty Ltd invite all Canberrans to attend a sausage sizzle to celebrate the launch by Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope of the second edition of *How Did the Fire Know We Lived Here?* at **12:00pm on Sunday 29 June 2003 at 30 Chauvel Circle, Chapman.**

The Chief Minister will present a cheque to the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal for \$73,300, which is the result of funds raised from sales of the first edition of the book.

RSVP for catering purposes to 6258 9060.

How Did the Fire Know We Lived Here? can be purchased from all good book stores, or directly from Ginninderra Press.

Music fundraising concert

Canberra Youth Music (CYM), in conjunction with Weston Creek Community Centre and the Graphic Design Department at the University of Canberra, are presenting a fundraising concert for fire-affected people on **Saturday 28 June 2003 at 7:30 pm at Weston Creek Community Centre.**

The concert will feature the James McCusker Orchestra, conducted by Philip Hartstein and the CYM Cello Ensemble conducted by Karla Drazenovic.

Some of the families in the orchestra were deeply affected by the bushfires, and this concert fundraiser is a small way Canberra Youth Music can show its support for the victims and all who were affected by the fires.

Paper note donations will be taken at the door, with gold coin donations accepted for the concert program.

For further information contact Canberra Youth Music on 6247 4714.

EVENTS CONTACTS: ACT Recovery Centre Ph: 6205 5733 or visit 67 Launceston Street, Lyons, ACT, 2606.

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Appendix 12

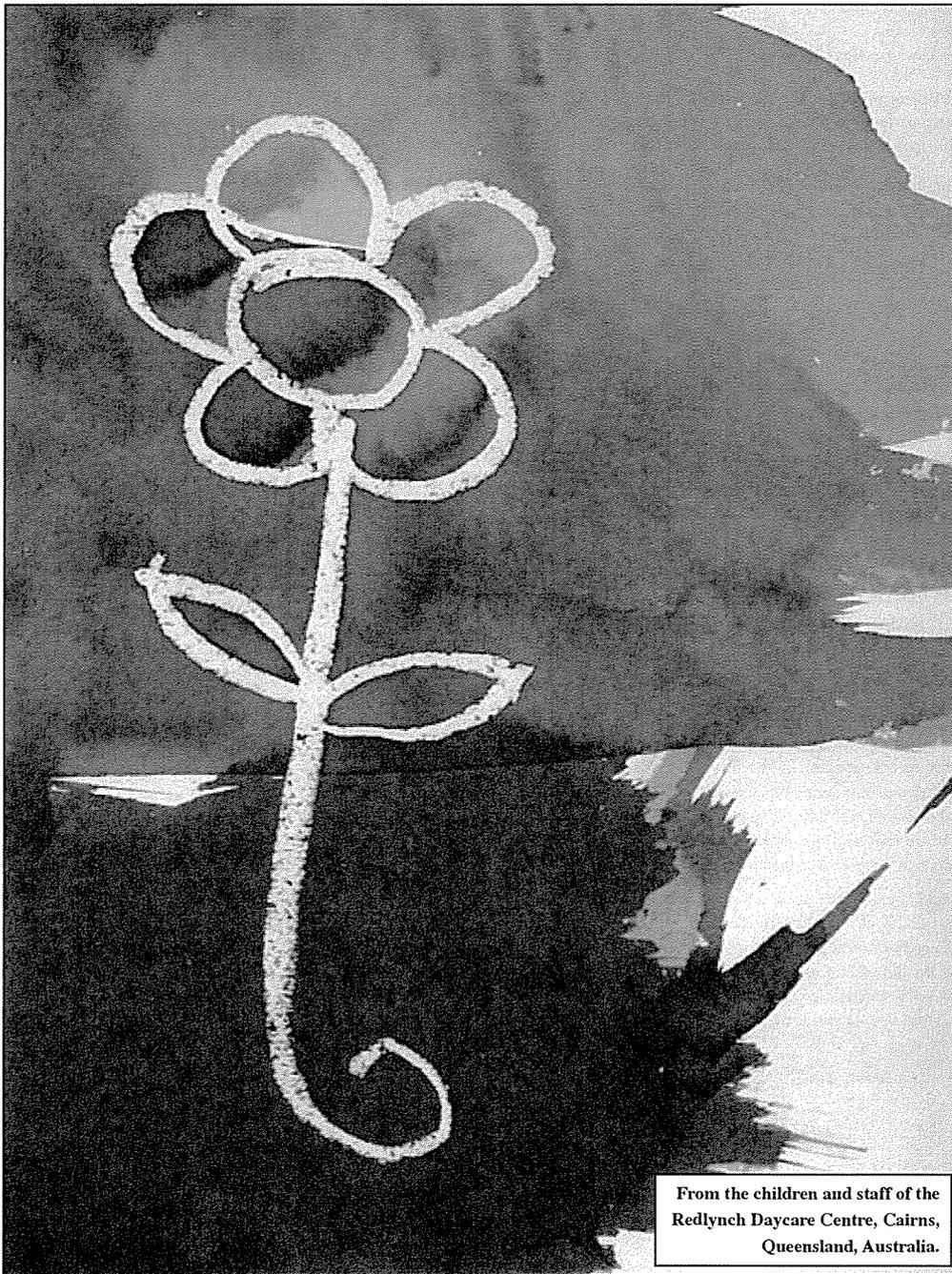
Reflections Edition of Community Update



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 22, Friday 18 July 2003



From the children and staff of the
Redlynch Daycare Centre, Cairns,
Queensland, Australia.



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 22, Friday 18 July 2003

INTRODUCTION

Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope

It's six months today since the 18 January firestorm. That was a day when Canberrans were confronted by a disaster unprecedented in our history. The firestorm extracted a heavy toll on the ACT, tragically causing the loss of four lives, the destruction of around 500 homes, and around 90 community, commercial and rural buildings. It also resulted in the loss of an enormous number of livestock, and damage to many other homes in surrounding suburbs.

But despite this enormous toll, the ACT community rallied together to support one another through the immediate emergency, and the days and months that followed during the recovery process. To many outside our borders, the outstanding community response was surprising, but to Canberrans, it was no surprise. It has been inspiring to observe the courage, camaraderie and support first hand. I have never been more proud to be a Canberran.

The strong partnerships between community groups (including volunteers, charities, service organisations and associations) and the thousands of individuals, neighbourhoods in fire-affected suburbs and surrounds, schools, businesses and the ACT Government have helped fire-affected people through the healing process.

This special Reflections edition of *Community Update* has been developed to enable children, parents, neighbourhoods, community organisations, businesses, rural communities, and other organisations involved in the recovery process the opportunity to reflect on the six months following the bushfires, as part of the healing process. As leading child psychologist, Dr John Irvine said, it is important for us to acknowledge that we are still on the road to recovery, and recognise that it is normal to feel fear, helplessness, sadness, longing, anger, as well as hope as a result of this disaster. Dr Irvine also said it is important for you to talk and share your experiences with your family, friends and professional counsellors to help you through the recovery process.

The response to *Reflections* has been outstanding, with over 90 submissions received from individuals, community organisations, businesses and other groups involved in the recovery process. This edition provides a snapshot of your stories, and we will continue to publish your contributions in upcoming editions of *Community Update* and post on the Canberra Connect website. I would like to take this opportunity to personally thank you for sharing your experience of the bushfires, and in doing so, helping yourself and others learn from your experiences and continue on the road to recovery.

Big picture

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Chair,
Sandy Hollway

Reflecting on the past six months, there are some key 'big picture' points that occur to me.

The first is that we must not drop the ball in relation to support for the people affected by the fires. Certainly the moving and spontaneous outpouring of support in the immediate aftermath of the disaster will naturally give way to a more measured and sustained process. But sustained it must be; there are still fellow Australians who are hurting and need a helping hand.

Second, I am struck again as I was during the Olympics that Australia has the capacity to take on even the most challenging and urgent projects if we put our minds to it and work together. It is because of the united effort of dedicated people that the recovery is proceeding well.

This is the continued result of the steadfastness of the people affected by the fires; the commitment of community groups, businesses, individual citizens and volunteers; to the skills of public servants and others in the official machinery set-up to coordinate the recovery; and the leadership provided from the top of the ACT Government in what has been, to the credit of others in the ACT political system, an essential, non-partisan effort.

And third, I reflect that the way ahead is fairly clear and, thanks to the recent budget, adequately resourced. It will take time, but we can now see beyond the clean up to the restoration of Canberra and its surrounds and even to a safer and better Canberra.

Absolutely nothing can make up for the suffering and destruction of 18 January 2003, but given that it happened, we must seek out and capture a positive legacy wherever possible.

Canberra was hit hard this January. Six months later it is well on the way back. I cannot think of a greater demonstration in the history of the National Capital of the resilience and character of the people who live here.

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Special Reflections Edition



COMMUNITY UPDATE



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REFLECTIONS

Lasting Memories

Greg Bateman

I was helping at the Northside Evacuation Centre after the fires, and one of my lasting memories of that weekend was at the Evacuation Centre at Lake Ginninderra College. On the Sunday following the firestorm, a boy aged about seven was going through the piles of clothing donated to the fire victims. He pulled out a brand name t-shirt about the right size, and said, "This is the shirt that Mum wouldn't buy me because it's too expensive. This is GREAT!"

It was heartening, amongst the sadness and despair at the centre, to see someone's happiness at such a small thing.

The First Word

Jan Vaughan Donnelly

"The land I came through last was dumb with night"
by Christopher Brennan, *The Wanderer*

*Mid-February. A month since the firestorm.
I'm standing on Curtin ridge, looking west.
All the earth is black. A carpet of soot.*

*Stretches across the valley, through the horse paddocks,
From the far black scarecrows of Stromlo Forest
Right to my feet. Scorched eucalypts at intervals
Stand contorted, frozen in agony. Behind me
Is the shell of a house that burned. And, look! —
There's a seat I used to sit on. It was made
Of flogs, solid and thick. It's charred. One leg
Is burnt away to a fragile spindle, almost gone.*

*Here is a landscape without language. No flower
Articulates a meaning, no greening fronds
Express their joy in gestures. Our scenes of childhood
Are blotted out in black. Only stillness,
Frozen pain, dark blank non-being, coma.
This country is shocked speechless. It will need
Its own poet to bring forth its words again.*

*With heavy flaps, a magpie lands nearby
On a twisted travesty of a branch. Its claws
Dislodge black flakes from its ghostly perch.
The bird seems thoughtful — surveys the scene
With a bright sardonic eye, and the
The powerful beak opens and emits
A faint trickle of song, puzzled, questioning ...*

Listen! The poet speaks

The Great Australian People

Les Thurbon of Duffy

In all of the history of the great country, whether by internal or international conflict, or by other disasters and times of sadness and mourning, in this year of terrible disasters, never have so many people done so much for so few.

(Adapted from a quote by Winston Churchill)



Les and Linda Thurbon of Duffy are rebuilding their home.

Time to heal

Susan Clarke

*Bright green leaves, new life begins
From tortured tall and blackened limbs*

*These new leaves hide what lies beneath
'cause many times I feel so weak
I show some strength to those who ask
But I know inside it's just a mask*

*So give me time to heal and grow
Beyond this fire that changed me so
It may take time, the fire took so much*

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REFLECTIONS

Recovery

Jo Forestier

Nature, amazing in its recovery

Wastes no time

Slaves to establish

What has been taken away

Healthy grey shoots

Appear on blackened trunks

Bowing to the elements

In survival and acceptance

Just a little rain

Changed charcoal to green

The cycle continues

Nature at work

But as I drive along

The landscape is very unfamiliar

O'Connors

Anglicare volunteer, Karen Ott

Sandra and Dennis O'Connor were visiting the coast when the fires came to Canberra. Like many others, the O'Connors feared for their home in Rivett, and indeed a house next door was unfortunately destroyed during the firestorm. Their back yard (including two garden sheds and shed contents) were also destroyed. Miraculously, a small wooden wheelbarrow planter in the centre of the yard, handmade by Dennis some time previously, was unscathed.

As a hobby, Dennis restores cast iron pots and other metal objects. The intensity of the fire melted parts of some of these pots, and blew holes through others. Fortunately many collectables were on other parts of the property, or survived the fire.

They were sad to find their beautiful garden destroyed, but have been determined to restore their backyard. The results are truly inspiring - both sheds and fence have been rebuilt and painted. The garden beds cleaned up and plants are thriving. They were able to purchase plants from coast markets, and these have now taken well to their new conditions. The lawn initially presented some problems, as the fire had sterilised the ground, but after two attempts the grass has grown back. Of course, the garden is not the same as it was, but it is indeed a beautiful place and testimony to the O'Connors determination and hard work.

My story

Francis Lawrence of Chifley

As a mountain climber from Chifley, I often run to Mount Taylor to keep fit. Occasionally, I simply walk there, taking my time. Over the years, the vegetation and bird life has greatly improved. Thanks to the Friends of Mount Taylor, there is much more to see on the way up besides the obvious panoramic rewards.

At around 2:00pm on that Saturday afternoon, I took a walk towards my favourite hill. I was hoping somehow through the smoke to gain an idea of how those distant Brindabella fires were doing. As I entered the reserve, I found myself in front of the most amazing sight I had ever seen. The hilltop was painted a fiery dark orange as if Mount Taylor had just erupted. Immediately above, the sky was absolutely black. On the exposed ridge, the wind blasted tussock grasses, and gum trees had an amazing ghost-like silvery appearance.

On the top, still bathed in that dark orange glow, I shared with a few speechless Canberrans, the mother of all apocalyptic visions. Looking west, the scorching wind carried the most horrible sound from the advancing fire-front below, complete with the screams of the sirens and the choppers. To the south, Tuggeranong was invisible, overwhelmed by black smoke. From north to south, great flames rose above burning pine forests and woodland, while a grass fire ran towards the first houses.

To the east, it was almost business as usual in a smoky grey Canberra, even a bit of blue sky above a dishevelled fountain, but those ugly sooty smoke clouds began to pour over the bush capital. As I ran back to Chifley, people were engaged in frantic watering around their houses, radios blaring all sorts of warnings. From the black clouds, it rained burned twigs and leaves. It was the darkest day of all in Canberra; the day Mount Taylor erupted.

WIN TV

WIN Television Canberra Chief of Staff, Fiona Dear

It's hard to know when to stop talking about the January bushfires. The day the sky turned black is one which Canberrans will never forget, but when is it time to stop talking and start moving forward?

Over the past six months we've reported on some amazing stories of heroism and plenty of heartache. 18 January is a day I thought would never end but it's also a day events sped by. The following days seemed even longer. Each day I sent the WIN News crew out to interview ordinary Canberrans affected by an extraordinary event. These are journalists rarely affected by news stories, but the Canberra bushfires took us all by surprise.

As the months passed, the reporting became easier as stories of recovery and community spirit shone through. So where to now? The questions about "why" are just starting, and it seems the blame game has only just begun. The stories are sure to continue for at least another six months. One of the hardest questions for me is when have people heard enough?



COMMUNITY UPDATE



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REFLECTIONS

SAO Salute

Bernie and Halina Collins

*Coffee and cake at old Holder High
A handshake, a hug, a tear in the eye
The Saga, the Salvos, Sue and the team
The human touch, it's no dream
The Taskforce, tangible and real
Has helped us endure this ordeal
A teddy, a BBQ, words in right places
Smile and compassion on the human faces
To Sue, Mark and others, too numerous to mention
Your actions and concern have helped ease the tension
It's tough, it's hard and at times we fret
But you our dear friends, we will never forget.*

ABC 666 Radio

ABC 666 Program Manager, Andrew Henley

Even though the January bushfires were horrific, they've had an energising effect on 666 ABC Canberra. The role we play in the Canberra region is an important one, and one that we are very proud of. Our mission is to be central to the lives of the Canberra community and we take this lofty goal very seriously. Sometimes, however, we do question the importance of what we do, and whether we connect in the way we'd like to.

The fires put an end to those doubts. On the worst days of the disaster we were one of the most important news suppliers in the region. Our reporters stationed in the ESB Headquarters and in the field were able to supply the best and most accurate information as soon as it became available. Our website collected this data and made it freely available to everyone. The stories and photos posted there since are a much-visited section of the site, and try to give everyone an understanding of what happened in those dark days.

666 ABC Canberra became a touchstone for the healing that needed to take place in the aftermath of this tragedy.

The outpouring of thanks that we received from the community, as well as awards from within the ABC and the Belconnen and City branches of Rotary, has made us all walk just a little taller. That feedback has continued and pushes us to meet the high standards of broadcasting that the Canberra community expects and deserves.

The Canberra Fire

Christopher Norris, age 10

*I could feel the ash in my eye
I could see the ruby red sky
I could touch the burning ash in the air
I could smell the boiling air
I could taste the crisp pieces of burnt bark in my mouth
I could hear the deafening sound of trees exploding*

National Capital Authority

Jeremy Lasek assisted with communications at the Emergency Services Bureau

As a journalist, covering bushfires during an Australian summer has been a part of my life for more than 20 years. I've seen hundreds of fires, and together with camera crews, I've witnessed some amazing things - enormous flames leaping through trees, incredible acts of heroism and too many moments of great sadness and loss.

The events in Canberra on 18 January 2003 were like nothing I had ever experienced. This was nature at its most destructive.

Dorte and I lived in the most wonderful house in a great street. This wasn't a house ever at risk of being lost in a bushfire - or so we thought! Even as we drove back to Canberra that Saturday, listening to the radio for updates of the fire's progress, we never once felt even the slightest possibility that our home could be in jeopardy.

Arriving home almost at the moment that the fire-front hit did two important things. It gave us a valuable first hand experience of the sheer power of this fire, which was unstoppable. It also made us realise the importance of life.

We made a very early decision to rebuild. We are determined that when we do decide to leave Chapman, we will do it on our terms. We have been determined not to look for people to blame for our loss. This community, from the Chief Minister down, has given all of us 'victims' great strength. We appreciate and value every bit of the support and comfort we have received, emotionally and financially. We cannot say 'thank you' enough for helping us to deal with this difficult time.

The year 2003 will go down as the year we lost our most-treasured house and a lifetime of wonderful possessions. We know that in the years ahead we will also look back on it as a time when we survived a significant personal crisis, took great strength from our wonderful family and friends and played a small part in helping to rebuild our shattered community.

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REFLECTIONS

The Canberra Times

The Canberra Times Journalist, Megan Doherty

Covering the January bushfires and the aftermath for *The Canberra Times* has been challenging and unforgettable. As a journalist, it is difficult to deny feeling that while the unfolding drama was horrific to watch it was also exciting to be there to record history. This was a huge story. I felt privileged to be part of a team, which told that story.

There are some images I will never forget - a wedding car driving along a darkened Hindmarsh Drive on the afternoon of 18 January was a jolt of normality too surreal for words; a woman sobbing as she drove out of a fiery Dixon Drive knowing her house was burning down; people shell-shocked as they found their homes turned to rubble; and the Davidson family of Rivett wandering dazed along Darwinia Terrace the day after the fire, simply not knowing what to do as everything they owned had been destroyed.

Apart from the magnitude of the disaster, I think what I will always remember about the fires is the reaction of the people who lost their homes. I have been constantly amazed by the generosity of all people who told their stories to *The Canberra Times*. I can't recall anyone who has refused an interview request, and after losing everything and still being able to give in that way is simply remarkable.

I have also enjoyed being able to report some of the recovery. The kindness people have shown to each other is inspiring. Seeing the Lucey family move into their rebuilt Chapman home was a highlight.

Of course the story continues and the recovery is far from over. Reporting the problems, the despair, the frustration and the anger is just as important. It's not a story that can be neatly told. I look forward, with my colleagues at *The Canberra Times*, to continuing to report the news of the fires.

Talkforce Communications

Talkforce Communications Partner, David Marshall

A telephone call on Monday 20 January from Department of Urban Services Chief Executive, Alan Thompson, propelled me into the Media and Communications Centre at the Emergency Services Bureau (ESB) at Curtin for two weeks. Such an experience will remain with me always.

As Canberrans maintained their 'high anxiety' until early February, the pressure under which so many worked at ESB was extraordinary. Decisions needed to be made virtually hourly on how the media would be briefed and the public informed on the latest position of fires, and the weather forecasts for the following days.

It was amazing to see members of the public outwardly praising the efforts of senior personnel and the entire team at ESB. Many businesses dropped in food for the workers; a young girl painted two pictures for the fire-fighters; an unknown man at a local club bought a round of drinks for a few ESB personnel late one evening as a thank you; phone calls were made to ESB expressing appreciation; and often, people in the street stopped simply to say 'well done'.

The magnitude of the crisis and its impact will never leave many Canberrans, and my time at ESB Headquarters has sharpened my awareness of the sacrifice made by so many and the personal impact such a disaster has had on those intimately involved.

At such times in the future I will always ensure I take the time to acknowledge and congratulate those who serve in any capacity to assist others in a crisis or in need. Simple words of encouragement can mean so much to those who give of themselves.

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce
Chief Executive Officer, Alan Thompson

Within a few days of the 18 January firestorm, I moved out of my normal role (with the Urban Services Department) into a bushfire recovery role. This was chaotic at first, but has been a source of personal satisfaction, albeit with some great and continuing challenges. I could provide a long list of impressions over the past few months, but there are two, which give food for thought.

"We want to help" - as soon as the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce was announced, we were inundated by people wanting to help. This included many of the staff who now work in the Secretariat and at the ACT Recovery Centre, and also many other people from around the ACT offering voluntary help. The incredible willingness to help from all these people has shown me what a strong and genuine community the ACT has now become. And offers of help are still coming in.

"Sorry, it's not all over" - in recent weeks, I have made brief interstate trips and met with various people who said words along the lines of "Oh yes, we know you had a bushfire last summer, but isn't that all fixed up now?" to which I have responded "Sorry, it's not all over. Sure, we have largely completed the clean-up, but much rebuilding of people's homes and their lives remains to be completed." The ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and ACT Recovery Centre are both very aware of the difficulties still facing families impacted by the bushfires, and will be there to support these families through it.

I think the key message for me is that from here on the recovery will be largely up to us here in the ACT, but we are a strong community and we will succeed.



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 22, Friday 18 July 2003

KIDS... TWO TERMS LATER

Minister for Education, Youth and Family Services, Katy Gallagher

We have certainly come a long way since the devastating bushfires six months ago. We have learnt a good deal more about ourselves and our neighbours, and what it means to be part of a community. A number of ACT schools became evacuation centres helping to coordinate the work of lending a helping hand to families and individuals most affected. This work has continued and schools have played a critical role in assisting the local community to rebuild and recover.

School teachers and staff have worked hard to support the local community since the fires. Very early after the disaster we saw how schools, as the hub of the community, helped many of us link together to share stories, support and comfort neighbours and regain a positive focus for recovering and rebuilding. ACT schools continue to provide a range of programs for students that actively focus on building their personal resilience and optimism for the future. Students from many schools have shown their community spirit through initiating events such as fundraising drives, donations and get-togethers.

We still have many challenges facing us as a community. It takes time to recover from such a traumatic event. As a community we need to give ourselves time and continue to support our friends and loved ones and to be positive about the opportunities and challenges facing us. In this spirit we will rebuild Birrigai Outdoor School that was damaged during the fires, as a new world-class environment school.

I would like to thank all of those who have worked so hard, and continue to strive to support the community and those most affected by the bushfires.

My Hero

Rebecca is a Year 6 student at St Jude's School in Holder. She recently chose to talk at her school's Rostrum competition on the topic of *Heroes*. Rebecca's story is the basis of her talk, which won her 2nd prize.

'Oh Mum, where are you?'

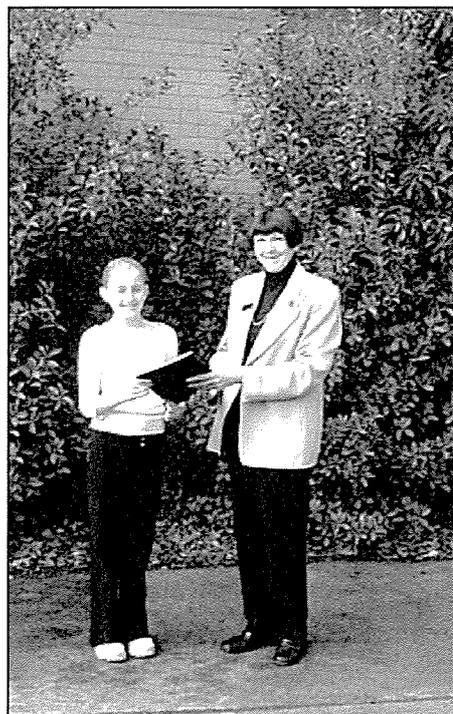
Have you ever wondered who a real hero is? I have, many times. Well, now I think I know.

This is how it happened. I was on holidays at the coast. I had just come home from a bike ride. I decided to turn the TV on when a news flash hit the screen. The first thing I saw was fire. The second was the house down the road from my place - burning.

It occurred to me there and then that my home area and the rest of Weston Creek was being destroyed by fire. I was now very worried. By this time my whole family had come to join me. No one spoke, but we knew we had to do something. Mum was still in Weston Creek. We couldn't watch any more, although we kept the TV on. We rushed to the phone. We called Mum - she didn't answer. We called our friends, but they didn't answer. We tried every phone number until we finally got through to someone who told us that people were being evacuated and no one had died yet. This relieved us. But where was Mum?

Hours passed, and we still didn't know if she was okay. We'd been told that she was at an evacuation centre, but every time we called she had moved from one place to another. It was midnight before we found out she was staying with family, and was safe.

Before the fires, I'd always asked what made a hero, 18 January showed me who a real hero was. It wasn't the fastest runner or the most popular movie star, it was someone who had done something courageous at their own risk. In my case, it was the fire-man who saved my mum. If it wasn't for this man I may not have her with me today.



Rebecca shares her story with here Principal, Lesley Gray.

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KIDS... TWO TERMS LATER

Stromlo High School

Every Wednesday this term, Stromlo Students most affected by the January bushfires have had the opportunity to meet individually and in small groups to tell their stories, to share experiences, memories and reactions, to air fears and to find some light relief in the amazing ironies and coincidences of that Saturday. We have shared photos, mementos, videos, new house plans and stories of pets reappearing after months gone by. We have also shared stories of loss, bravery and scary bits. Above all, we have shared tales of the help and comfort all received, in some measure after the fires.

Typical reactions over the months have included scary dreams, obsessive turning off of heaters and BBQs, no candles, recalls during dust storms and the first fogs of winter, the disruption of moving several times, frustrations of family decisions, including reselling or rebuilding, 'shorter fuses' all round, and whinging over trivial matters. Some students have also reported concentration problems, especially in relation to focussed tasks such as extended reading and structured writing, but these are generally improving. Students have managed, in the main, to keep their schoolwork going, finding it almost therapeutic in some cases! They are to be commended on their resilience, perseverance and maturity.

We have also worked on replacing or obtaining copies of school reports, certificates, Stromlo School Mags and 2002 year photographs lost during the fires. Above all, we have discovered that our diverse reactions to such a huge event in our lives are totally OK and normal, and what a great story we will have to tell our grandchildren!!!!

"Now kids, did I tell you what happened to me way back in January, 2003 when I..."

Orana School

Art as therapy

As one of the bushfire recovery initiatives carried out by Orana School for Rudolf Steiner Education in Weston, local art therapist, Catherine Sawkins, was asked to develop a program for fire-affected children. Eleven school families had lost their homes and others had had traumatic experiences while trying to protect their home and/or school during evacuation. The school itself was not spared in the fires, so pupils returned to a significantly changed school environment.

Ms Sawkins used various artistic media to assist small group sessions of children from classes two to nine to process and integrate their challenging experiences. The children talked about and illustrated their experiences, listened to carefully chosen stories, painted and drew pictures, and modelled with clay. Stories were based on fairy and folk themes about everyday life being suddenly torn apart, finding inner resources, dealing with loss, daily rhythms being re-established and possibilities of renewal.

Some of the children had lost pets during the fires, or identified strongly with the plight of animals during this time. One child's cat has run away eight times since the fires. The children made clay models of animals to reflect these experiences.



The photograph shows some of the clay models of animals, especially their cats, made by Jack, Sarah and Wendy.

Older children made memory books depicting life before and since January 18. These included plans, photos and newspaper cutouts, pencil and pastel drawings, stories and poems of their experiences during and after the fires, and their plans for the future.

Lyons Primary School

The ACT Recovery Centre and Lyons Primary School have a special bond, as the former is located on the school premises. It is not surprising, therefore, that the children at Lyons would be keen to understand more about the work of the Centre.

As part of the Discovering Democracy unit of study, the children in years five and six have been looking at how groups work. Their visit to the ACT Recovery Centre showed them how people needed to work cooperatively to get things done. The children were required to choose which activity they could do to help the work of the Centre. Choosing an activity was a challenge because everyone wanted to work with the teddybears but by negotiating and discussing, the four groups were each able to choose their activity.

Last year, the year four, five and six class worked with Jenni Cumberland from Greening Australia to propagate several varieties of native trees. The children decided after the fires that they would like to donate their trees to some of the schools that had damage to their grounds, including St Jude's in Holder and Mt Neighbour Primary School and the Orana School in Weston.

Special mention needs to go to Jenni Cumberland from Greening Australia for her workshopping skills and enthusiasm. Greening Australia provided everything and we have learned a lot from the process and know even more will survive next year. Sandor Hevesi-Nagy, our school janitor, has also been wonderful in helping to look after the plants.



COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 22, Friday 18 July 2003

KIDS... TWO TERMS LATER

St Jude's School

The small Catholic school of St Jude's in Holder has lost its back fence, and many of the school community have been affected by the fires through loss of homes and gardens and the irrevocable changes that they see around them.

Acting Principal, Lesley Gray, is sure that the pastoral care approach through which fire-affected families were 'buddied' with a helping family was a source of comfort for many. Being a buddy might have meant ferrying family members to meetings with insurers, providing a meal or warm blankets, but it was all practical needs that buddies were fulfilling in the early days after the fires.

Before school resumed, the staff at St John Vianney joined with those at St Jude's in establishing a morning 'crèche' for the students. This allowed parents time to do the myriad of jobs that needed to be attended to during those first few weeks, or to share some private time together. This also gave the children time to talk to their friends who had also experienced the fires or the aftermath.

St Jude's, with the assistance of the Catholic Education Office, has recently run a *Seasons for Growth* program. The program was run out of school hours for fire-affected students and others with major life changes. The children were grouped according to age, and the three-week program provided a concentrated activity that helped children to come to terms with the fires and their impact on them.

The spiritual side of the school curriculum has been greatly affected by fire issues, and the attention to individual needs has been reflected in the focus of many of the school's prayer sessions. The children have been very open and wanting to help those in need and they see the prayer sessions as an opportunity to do this.

Tharwa

The Tharwa school community, like many others, has struggled to come to terms with the bushfires. Sixty per cent of students and 100 per cent of staff experienced the immediate impact of the fires, including loss and damage to homes and stock, damage to property, on top of fighting the fires over an extended period.

A wide range of activities have been undertaken through the school community to help make meaning of the disaster and to understand more about the road to recovery. One of the most meaningful has been the Regeneration Program. This program began with small groups of children photographing their group's site in the village on a regular basis to observe the way nature goes about the task of regeneration. The school-based project has resulted in the Lanyon Cluster School's Community Grants Project that involves an Artist in Residence Program, and a Regeneration Website Project.

Lots of other one-off activities, such as the *Helping Hand* initiative, made a significant difference to locals who lost property in the fires. Amanda, a teacher at the school arranged to collect and

distribute donations, sell off other donations and buy needed items, such as wheelbarrows, for distribution to those in need.

Peter Henry, the Principal at Tharwa, says one of the priorities throughout these six months has been to provide a stable and secure base for the children and the community and there is an ongoing need for this. The staff, parents and children are still on the recovery journey. This has included dealing with behavioural problems (acting out and withdrawal) that did not exist before the fires, helping children deal with physical conditions that appear to be stress-related, and assisting staff and parents to deal with their own adjustments to life.

This small and pretty rural community still has fire-related issues to work through and the school is providing a caring and supportive base through which this can gradually happen.

Canberra Grammar

Following the January bushfires, Canberra Grammar School students have been involved in a wide range of activities to assist with the recovery efforts.

Six boys from the School, led by teacher Jeff Knowles, were involved in a 'Clean up Australia' backyard program in Chapman after the fires. The boys used their involvement to find out how best they, and their school could participate in future backyard clean-up operations to be organised by Anglicare, Clean-up Australia and Gardening Australia.

During May, 18 Grammar boys were joined by parents and volunteers from the Phoenix Garden Group, Anglicare and the Chapman Residents Action Group in the Great Gardening Gig. The boys worked on backyards, moving mulch and performing other gardening tasks in Chapman, Duffy and Rivett.

Following the destruction of Galilee School in the fires, Grammar senior students, with the support of the school's Parents and Friends Association and the School Board, raised \$25,000 towards helping Galilee get back on its feet.

More help came from Grammar's Primary School students, who raised \$600 through a non-uniform day held at the Southside Infants Campus and the Early Learning Centre. In addition, the School Board donated \$15,000 towards providing education resources for Galilee's School.

The four student residences (houses) within Boys Grammar have also rallied round the recovery efforts. Seventeen students from Garnsey House, with the help of their fathers, rebuilt a retaining wall for one of the gardens located within the Scout camp at Camp Cottermouth. Edwards House students took on board the project of providing rebuilding support to Galilee School.

Garran House students raised enough money to purchase a saxophone for Year 12 Grammar student Stephen Rees, who lost his much-loved saxophone in the bushfires along with his family home. In addition to undertaking landscaping and other rebuilding works for Birrigai Outdoor School, Eddison House students are raising funds through the school fete to assist with providing resources and equipment for Birrigai School, once it is fully rebuilt.

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KIDS... TWO TERMS LATER

St Thomas Mores Littlies provide comfort to families

Following the 18 January bushfires, year one and two students at St Thomas Mores Primary School, in Campbell, with the help of their families and teachers, prepared 13 washing baskets full of towels, linen and blankets for bushfire-affected families.

The children were asked to choose what kind of family they were going to pack their basket for (i.e. a family with children, a couple or just children). They then each wrote a note explaining why they chose a particular family, and included the note inside the basket for the family. Some of the kids wrote the following notes:

"I am making my basket up of just blankets because I want my family to be really warm this winter."

"I am making my basket up just for the children in a family because I want them to be happy. I have included toys for them to play with, a sewing kit for them to be creative with, so they do not get bored, books to read in bed, a blanket to keep them warm, while they watch television and a brand new towel."

"I am making my basket up for two young people in love because when people are stressed they fight and I want to give my couple lots of beautiful things so they do not fight or get upset."

The baskets were delivered to families in need, who were deeply touched by the children's act of kindness and comforting words.

Mt Neighbour Primary School

The environment is a focus for the children at Mt Neighbour, and the bushfires have clearly demonstrated to them the vulnerability of the environment and the power of the environment to regenerate. The Principal, Wayne Prowse, says that it has been easy to get children interested and involved in their environmental program, *Journey of Enrichment Together* (JET).

The environment area being developed will provide an outdoor area for classroom activities and a garden for each year to own and look after throughout their time at the school. The ACT Government Community Grants Program, and the donation from the Wanniasa School, have boosted funding for the development.

Clearing of trees affected by the drought and the fires has already been completed, and a parent has drawn up the plans for the environment area. Also, a permaculture garden has been established in a school courtyard where the children are planting vegetables and fruits, which will be used by the school community.

Through the Program the children are developing a sharpened awareness of the importance of the environment and how they can have a positive impact on their local school environment.

Duffy Primary School

The six months since the fires have been difficult for the children and staff at Duffy Primary School as they work through the post-fire issues that have affected their community. However, the last day of school this term was a time for celebration, recognition and sharing.

As part of the school assembly, *Certificates of Recognition* were presented to the staff for their work in helping the children and their families through this period. This was the initiative of the Schools and Community Worker, Amanda Knight and the Principal, Sue Mueller, and supported by the ACT Recovery Centre. In the spirit of this celebration many staff members and children coloured their hair or wore bright and shiny party wigs.

An important part of the assembly was the presentation to the school of a magnificent quilt designed and made by the year nine Child Studies students of Karabah High School in Queanbeyan. The teacher of the unit, Leonie Hancott, and students Jess McEwan and Nicole Wadsworth were on hand to make the presentation.

Leonie has taught in the Weston Creek area and was keen to do what she could to help after the fires. When she suggested that the year nine's might like to think about making something for the fire-affected families for the practical part of their studies, the students responded enthusiastically to the idea. The textiles teacher, Robin Szczepanik, provided a lot of practical assistance, as did the school community in donating fabrics and money. The result was ten gorgeous quilts, which have gone through the Centre to worthy recipients including the Duffy Primary School.



Jess McEwan and Nicole Wadsworth with a quilt designed and made by the year nine Child Studies students at Karabah High School.



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Anglicare

Anglicare Bushfire Recovery Team Pastoral Care Coordinator, Reverend Sarah Hubert

The 18 January bushfires and their aftermath have caused our city and its people to be in a time that few would choose to be in. It is very much an in-between time, a time between what was then and what will be, and it is a difficult and lonely time for many people to be in. It is also difficult for those of us watching and trying to help the fire-affected people.

For many people this transition to recovery and rebuilding is really highlighting their loneliness. This problem is being addressed through the recovery teams, counselling, support groups, community art projects, networking and rebuilding. This will involve weaving together people and their needs with other people and ideas, thereby creating a strong community fabric.

This task is much broader than the bushfire situation. We need to constantly remind ourselves and instill in our children to 'love your neighbour'. Be they family, friends, colleagues, or the person next door, love them in a regular life-giving way that will bring ongoing companionship, but also allow shared tears and hope.

Making links and reducing isolation also applies to our charitable, religious, community, business and government agencies. Since the bushfire tragedy we have broken down many barriers, overcome many assumptions and established great rapport and respect among ourselves. We have worked effectively on many levels between apparently diverse agencies and organisations. We need to maintain and build on this for the regeneration of our community in the fire-affected areas and further out into our city and region. We need to invest thought, time and care in our relationships to enrich our individual and collective future, our community fabric.

People can never be the same after surviving an event as destructive as the January fires. With time, however, new life will without doubt grow out of the knowledge of what has been faced and overcome, and of the support and love of caring and encouraging 'neighbours'.



Anglicare volunteers help clean up a garden.

The Salvation Army

The Salvation Army ACT Bushfire Recovery Support Officer, Captain Lindon Kinder

Long before the firestorm hit Canberra, The Salvation Army was hard at work deep in the Brindabellas. The Salvation Army Emergency Service personnel were supplying fire-fighters with refreshments, working long hours under difficult circumstances to ensure that those on the front lines were being looked after.

Since then, many people have worked under the banner of The Salvation Army, at the evacuation centres, on the field supplying refreshments to both emergency personnel and civilians. There were the Fire Brigade Chaplains from the ACT Fire Brigade, NSW Fire Brigades and the NSW Rural Fire Service who moved about performing many tasks. There has been a small army of people who have provided assistance through the workings of The Salvation Army to many.

Within the first 24 hours, through to this day, officers and personnel have been available to offer assistance in many areas to the victims of the fires, those communities affected by the fires, and those who are working in the recovery process. For me personally, I have been working along side others at the ACT Recovery Centre since May. I have found this to be the most rewarding period of service so far. To be able to help people heal their wounds and repair their lives is a privilege. To know that at the end of a day's work, your input has had an effect upon another's life is awesome.

Though the event will be remembered as one of great suffering, I believe it will also be remembered as a day that sparked into life a true display of Canberra's ability to care for its own with much compassion and care.

Vinnies helpers catch their breath

St Vincent de Paul Society, Canberra/Goulburn Archdiocesan, President, Tony Thornton

As darkness descends on Kambah on Saturday afternoon, 18 January, St Vincent de Paul CEO, Bob Wilson evacuates three generations of his family to headquarters in Phillip and activates the disaster plan in the absence of the coordinator. Power is down, phones follow soon after.

Staff and volunteers head for evacuation centres and start coordinating distribution of mattresses, blankets, and toiletries. The donations keep rolling in from anonymous and generous Canberrans.

Everyone works feverishly. BCB Beverages from Melbourne delivered 14 pallets of spring water, and youth team and night patrol volunteers take donations out to worst hit areas. People are encouraged to register at evacuation centres. Donors are asked to give cash if possible. Outgoing President Russ Walls

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keeps talking to the media to let people know what help is available and where to access it.

Over \$200,000 worth of clothing vouchers are issued in the first week, and tonnes of items pour in, exceeding our storage capacity. Phones keep ringing. The organisation holds up well. Registration procedures are streamlined. More generous people offer storage space and tables for sorting and display. People are pouring in, trying on clothes, and collecting bedding, furniture and vouchers now totalling \$400,000. The enormity of the disaster continues to hit home.

Beds arrive and distribution begins. We distribute a queen size bed, donated by Grace Bros and Sealy, to everyone whose house was destroyed. Phones begin to die down from frantic to very busy. End of May comes, and we finally finish sorting donations. The \$120,000 collected in our Bushfire Appeal is donated to the Winter Warming Program. It's time to catch our breath and assess the backlog of work that needs to be done. A sense of normalcy begins to emerge.

We have made it through the crisis. Great teamwork by the Vinnies staff and volunteers, great community spirit by all Canberrans. What a great place to live!



St Vincent de Paul volunteers provided assistance to hundreds of fire-affected families.

Volunteering ACT

Canberra's volunteering spirit

CEO, Mary Porter

On the morning of 19 January, many people woke up to a different Canberra. Things were markedly different for many of us, including our personal and work lives. For Volunteering ACT it was a day spent finding out how best to live up to our name.

By 20 January, over 1,000 people had come forward to help, and it was clear the avalanche of volunteers wasn't going to abate. We swung into gear, set up a special database to register these volunteers, and put calls out to offer volunteers to community groups and Government departments. Enquiries kept pouring in and volunteers were needed for many hours a day to answer the phone.

Volunteering ACT received offers of assistance, in cash and in kind, from as far as the USA, and from across Australia and the ACT.

Then, anxious members of the community not yet directly

affected by the firestorm, in Belconnen in particular, began to call for help. These included the aged, the sick, the isolated in our community, the recently incapacitated, or people with disability, and people who were afraid and had nowhere to turn to get help to clean up their backyards. With the help of Belconnen Rotary Club, Belconnen Community Service and some of our registered volunteers, we responded to their calls by conducting a weekend cleanup at Belconnen.

Since then, we have been working alongside many community organisations, responding to calls for assistance, placing volunteers, and dealing with a myriad of other issues.

We are now putting together our thoughts on lessons learnt from the whole experience to inform any review of our Disaster Plan. The lessons learnt will also help all of us to more effectively utilise the wonderful and spontaneous goodwill of Canberrans in any future emergency.

Lifeline

Looking to the future

Lifeline, Executive Director, Marie Bennett

The past six months have been an amazing experience for Lifeline and the Canberra community. I don't think that we will ever be the same again. On 18 January, our understanding of ourselves, our community and our place in the Australian landscape changed forever. The firestorm hit Canberra with such speed and ferocity that many were taken completely by surprise.

Throughout that Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning, Lifeline staff and volunteers worked at the Lifeline call centre, which was an integral part of the recovery process. Noticeboards were cleared, new call sheets developed, counsellors and staff put on standby, and plans for managing the crisis put in place.

On Monday the 20th, Lifeline received the most calls it has ever taken in one day, more than three times our normal rate. Lifeline Canberra assisted the community over the weeks following the firestorm in many ways, while continuing to provide its normal counselling service. We conducted face-to-face counselling for people in Duffy, Chapman and other areas in the city. We distributed over 500 bushfire information kits to community groups, libraries, schools, and health centres. We also supported a deaf family by SMS (text) messages. On the Monday after the firestorm, we took over the ACT Bushfire Hotline, which was set up to provide information and support for people affected by the fire.

Lifeline Canberra continues to support and counsel people who were directly affected by the firestorm and the wider community that in one way or another, was traumatised by the bushfires. We are managing a 75 per cent increase in calls to our crisis lines every day, including many that are suicide-related. We will continue to provide our support to the community.



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The Lions Club of Australia

The Lions Canberra Bushfire Committee Chair, Gary Parker

The motto of the Lions Clubs is 'We Serve'. There was a very strong feeling to serve following the establishment of the Canberra Lions Bushfire Appeal, but there was also an overwhelming feeling of frustration in the early days as our group endeavoured to source 'real' information so that we, as a group, could assist.

The International Association of Lions Clubs Foundation made a US\$10,000 grant available within 24 hours of the fires. We gave money to The Salvation Army to supplement their food voucher purchases, and gave linen items to the St Vincent de Paul. The balance of our money went towards the purchase of fodder for the farmers in the surrounding area.

The Lions Club of Canberra has established a farm on Kambah Pool Road known as Lions Youth Haven. This property was badly affected by the fires, so there has been much effort to assist the needs of the farm because it was the home for Galilee and Fusion program. Galilee has moved back to the farm. Clubs throughout Australia have made direct donations towards Lions Youth Haven.

One of our major donations went to the 23 Bushfire Brigades in and around the ACT. Assistance has also been given to ACT Recovery Centre projects, and in recent weeks, assistance is being given to the rural families, with loads of water being delivered with the help of The Salvation Army. Lions has been very generous in its donations, and locally we have had the opportunity to support projects, which have given special assistance to a number of areas. It is our intention to continue with some of the special projects while there are still funds available for distribution.

Woden Community Service Inc.

Chief Executive Officer, Woden Community Service Inc, Betsy Gallagher

The non-Government sector has been delighted to work closely with the ACT Government in the recovery process. This cooperation has drawn upon the skills and resources of both the public and non-Government sectors, and enabled us to provide a range of support strategies for people who have been affected by the bushfires. I believe we have all learnt a lot, and we have much more to learn, but our aim has always been to assist in the regeneration, both physically and emotionally, of our community. As a service provider, it has been a privilege to work with, and for, such a strong and resilient community.

ACT Recovery Centre

Manager ACT Recovery Centre, Di Butcher



Some of the staff of the ACT Recovery Centre

The birth of the ACT Recovery Centre brought together a group of experienced ACT community and government workers who needed to deliver the most urgent and basic human requirements with little time to consider what approach or model they should adopt.

Looking back over that time, I believe that the willingness, motivation and flexibility of the Centre staff has been critical in delivering what people needed and anticipating needs as they emerged. The staff in the Centre know the Canberra community has strong links into all areas of Government and community services. They were inclusive in their approach and have a strong 'can do' approach to their client issues and problems.

An outreach model of service delivery, offering personal support and community development was introduced. The Centre became a one-stop centre for the Canberra fire-affected community.

The Centre has offered an opportunity to develop a new method of delivering human services to the community. This rare opportunity has been embraced by the staff as they search for new ways to provide a higher level of customer service to their very special group of clients. It's a rare privilege to work with these people and with staff who share a passion for making a positive difference in these people's lives.

Relationships Australia Reconnecting with the community

Relationships Australia Executive Director, Mary Pelkin

For some people the fear was that when everything fell to pieces with the fires, the foundation of life itself was lost. Relationships, the lives people had built, and the future people had felt confident about, were all now cause for review. What some people lost connection with was their sense of self, which got fractured with the fires. There is so much new information about 'me' and 'you' that people need to take on board now. Things that people might have taken for granted came up for review and reconsideration. The good news is that all of this is bringing a renewed sense of excitement and strength to our work with people. Things that were lost are being reconnected to or rebuilt.

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Uniting Church

Uniting Church Presbytery of Canberra Region,
Presbytery Secretary, Campbell Macknight

Nobody knew the power of fire better than the 90 or so fire fighters who had been using the Greenhills conference centre as a base while battling two massive fires in the Brindabellas. As both fires joined at the mouth of the Cotter, leapt the Murrumbidgee and tore up the hill towards them, there was nothing they could do but secure the main building and hunker down in it. The firestorm howled across the oval, hit the bank on the other side and passed clean over the top of the building, not even scorching the gardens beside the walls. Perhaps it was the design of the building, perhaps it was something else, but all was safe. It wasn't the building that mattered though, but the people inside.

Of course, Greenhills lost other buildings, and is now operating with reduced facilities. There is also the major task of finding the funds to rebuild and set things up for the future. But it could have been so much worse!

Then there is what we have gained. A week or so ago, a big parcel arrived on my desk; the members of a congregation in Brisbane had knitted a wonderful collection of teddy bears for the Winter Warming Packs distributed to families. These Australians remembered that there were children in 'Canberra' and did something practical to show their love and concern.

Communities @ Work

Communities @ Work Chief Executive Officer,
Maureen Cane

Unforgettable. 18 January 2003. Three o'clock in the afternoon. Stifling heat, black sky, electricity gone. Strangely threatening, feathery sounds of debris falling on roofs and gardens. Neighbours anxiously comparing notes.

In the event, ours was among the fortunate suburbs that day. The flames licked the hill up the road above Bugden Avenue but a fire truck put them out.

A week or so later, I was invited to be a community representative on the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce. My organisation, Communities @ Work, operates in the Tuggeranong and Weston Creek regions and across the ACT, and offers a wide range of community programs and childcare services.

To be part of the formal bushfire recovery effort is a wonderful privilege. Teamwork, frankness, concentration on what needs to be done and healthy impatience when things seem to be going too slowly, have been hallmarks of the Taskforce's operations. We have asked for, and have been freely given from the public service, the community and experts in the ACT and across Australia, ideas, advice, information, and the lessons of experience. And while the Taskforce has focused on major

recovery strategies, countless others, in both professional and voluntary capacities, have worked without stint to assist those in need with practical and compassionate support.

One of the Taskforce's aims is that there will be positive legacies for the ACT from this disaster. So while the memories of 18 January 2003 will be unforgettable, I hope that the extraordinary level of community energy and cooperation that has inspired the recovery task and lifted our spirits, will not only endure but gain in purpose and strength.

The Community and Expert Reference Group

Community and Expert Reference Group Chair,
Elizabeth Whitelaw

It has been a privilege for me to chair the Community and Expert Reference Group. Its members have put in an extraordinary effort. The passion and level of personal commitment by the members has been astounding.

The diversity of the representation on the Reference Group is one of its real strengths.

In the early days, the Group recognised that urgent action was required on many fronts. These included establishing communication channels, addressing health and safety concerns, assisting with matching needs and providers, providing a forum for volunteer organisations to work together, and addressing transportation, clothing, rehousing and rebuilding needs. There were also the needs of businesses and not-for-profit groups, such as sourcing and distributing replacement computers, and assisting with recovery of records, forums on Government assistance packages, and tax issues.

The Group has assisted with resolution of a multitude of issues for rural lessees such as fencing, seeding, control of feral animals, insurance, removal of dangerous trees, and use of Commonwealth funded helpers to work to greener the rural areas.

The Group's focus over the last few weeks has been on how to support people with the decisions surrounding rebuilding. We are not just talking about rebuilding homes. We are talking about supporting the whole community, which has been affected.

The overwhelming message we are getting is that the community wants its fabric back – its people, its general amenity, and an environment within which all can feel supported by Government and the rest of Canberra's people. The Group has laboured hard to achieve this goal and will continue to do so.

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COMMUNITY UPDATE



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HEALTH AND WELLBEING

ACT Minister for Health, Simon Corbell

Ensuring that the ACT Government continues to support the health and wellbeing of fire-affected people has been an essential component of the recovery process. The ACT Recovery Centre has worked tirelessly, with health professionals, and care organisations in the ACT to encourage fire-affected people to introduce healthy routines in their lives. This includes walking with neighbours and family members, and the yearly 'timetable' of routine health checks.

Reminders to fire-affected people about the importance of looking after their basic health and wellbeing since the bushfires has been the focus of community events: such as the Party in the Park in Weston Creek; the boat cruise for the elderly on the Lake Burley Griffin; the 'Parenting after a disaster' seminars by leading child psychologist, Dr John Irvine; the practical seminar by disaster clinical psychologist, Dr Rob Gordon; the recent bushfire regeneration walk through Canberra's hills; and the Living Well, Being Well Expo at Woden Plaza today (18 July 2003).

It is important for us to recognise that the recovery process will continue for a long time yet, and that everyone will recover at a different pace. But, it is comforting to know that help is readily available to assist you through the healing process.

CIT

Wanting to do what they could to assist those struggling after the fires, students from the Health Sciences Department at Bruce CIT made seated massages available to teachers at Weston Creek Primary School during term two. So welcomed were these massages that the students have been invited to return again in term three.

The willingness of students to offer massages was very generous, and has been built on by the Health Sciences Department. This massage activity will be integrated into the students' field placements for the coming semester. In partnership with the ACT Recovery Centre, the massages will be offered to those who continue to face challenges after the fires.



CIT students and staff. Front row: Katherine Mashford, Judy McPherson (from the ACT Recovery Centre) and Ian Butt. Back row: Kerry Plunkett, and Penny Nevendorf.

A different view

Fire Controllers Group President, Vivien Raffaele, a resident of the Tidbinbilla Valley.

When the fires began in January, my whole lifestyle changed. I began working very long hours as a fire controller, which I have always been able to mix with being a single mum. My family support network kicked in and assisted greatly with my three children: Ross eight, Rosie six, and Shaun four.

My personal life stopped, having become focused on the job. Six months on, and it is still difficult to describe what happened. When the firestorms started to hit on the Friday night at Tidbinbilla, none of us knew how devastating it would be. After this, apart from my work as a Fire Controller, I spent a lot of time helping close friends and family.

At Tidbinbilla we lost all power and phones, mobiles weren't an option as there was no service. It would be weeks before any of it would be restored. There was so much to do. The whole infrastructure of our farm was gone, and 98 per cent of pasture, all the baled hay that had been accumulated for the drought, and 30km of fencing were lost or badly damaged. Yet life had to continue.

I remember the first time I saw the Tidbinbilla Valley from one end to the other after the smoke had finally cleared, I just cried. I had lived here for over 11 years and there was nothing recognisable left.

The work is only partially done, it will take several years for it to reach any sort of normality, and even then it will never be the same. But I have refocused, and the love and closeness that has deepened and become more intense with my children and my family is priceless. We have a better relationship, and above all, we all still have a future. I have made so many friendships that are lifelong. Everyone is blessed with a future; we just need to ensure we make the most of it and not lose the opportunity.

RURAL RECOVERY

It's time to go!!

Jenny and Mike Parker

As the end of the month draws nearer, we start 'our road to recovery' literally. You may recall us being two years into travelling around Australia. We arrived in Canberra in November to catch up with family. We choose the Mount Stromlo campgrounds situated on Cotter Road; we couldn't have selected a more idyllic site. Christmas came and went and Mike managed to get some work at Scrivener Dam. This was an added bonus, as we hoped to save enough to fly to the UK to see his aged parents, our daughter Angela and three grandchildren. So we prepared ourselves to stay till the end of February 2003.

We all know what happened next without repeating and reminding each other. Slowly we have gathered together items needed to set up a home again, mainly donated from the generosity of The Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, LG, K-Mart and Target. To the Bushfire Recovery Appeal, and to everyone who supported us in our great hour of need, we thank you. Our road to recovery begins when we collect our 'new home' (a 24-foot caravan), and head north to much warmer climates.

So, goodbye Canberra, you will be remembered in our tales to tell while travelling around the beautiful country. Thanks again for your support, otherwise we couldn't have 'moved on.'

Community nursing

Community Nurse, Mary Hodda

The morning had been hot and smoky, just like the previous few days. By noon the smoke began to thicken, a sign that the fires from the distant ranges were closer to Canberra. Around 2:45pm the sky began to turn red. Soon it darkened and the wind began to howl. The smoke was thicker than ever.

Suddenly Weston Creek was hit from the west, from over the pine plantations. Driving through the streets to deliver care for insulin-dependent clients in Stirling, Rivett and Kambah, through rivers of flying red hot embers that bounced along the road and through the air was surreal. To see so many houses on fire, trees burning and grasslands alight was beyond belief. Several power lines were down, across the road, but somehow the dangers seemed irrelevant. At one stage I drove near my own home, only to be turned back by the firemen. I could see my neighbours' homes on fire and our fence alight. There was nothing I could do.

I continued my rounds as best I could, and when these were complete I returned to Duffy. Fortunately, my home was still standing, singed and now without a garden. Six of my nearest neighbours' houses had been completely destroyed. Facing the neighbours and clients later, was not easy. While reactions varied, all were in need of support. Listening to their stories seemed to help. A 'street gathering' a week later - a casual get together in our driveway - was a resounding success.

Since then, working and living in the 'war zone' has been difficult at times. Everything will improve with time but 18 January 2003 will never be forgotten.

Stromlo BBQ

Only three of the 20 homes at Stromlo remain after the 18 January bushfires. Residents were scattered far afield after the event and the BBQ, at Royals Rugby Club on 10 May 2003, was the first opportunity for them all to catch up. The children had a wonderful time being together again. A group has been formed to maintain contacts and work together in the recovery process. Another barbeque get-together is being planned for September 2003.



Stromlo Forestry Settlement residents, together again for the first time after the fires.

The Gregorys of 'Gibraltar Creek'

Robert Mack, property owner 'Gibraltar Creek'

The January firestorms destroyed much of the farming infrastructure of 'Gibraltar Creek'. Lost was a three bedroom cottage which was home to the Gregory family, a 100 year old shearing shed (restored), a machinery shed, an 'as new' tractor, sheep yards, sheep, some cattle, rams, fencing, machinery, pasture, and reserve feed.

It was a day where determination and courage, with minimal resources, saved the homestead sheds, horses and our own lives. Without the courage shown by mates Rob Morrison, Grant Gregory and Scott Kendall, much more would have been destroyed. My sincere thanks go to you men and also the many people who helped afterwards, where confusion and emotion made it difficult to respond because of the devastation and enormity of the task that lay ahead.

GIO Insurance settled my claim quickly which enabled the Gregorys and I to travel to Wagga to choose a new home. Betterlook Homes fast tracked construction when they heard what had happened and we now have the completed Cottage. My thanks also to Cusacks Furnishings and staff who bent over backwards to speed things up to enable Grant, Kim, Glenn and Grace to move into their new home.

We look forward to the future and rebuilding more of what was lost. I have learnt that our community is alive and well. Thank you all again.



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REGENERATION

ACT Minister for Urban Services, Bill Wood

When I reflect on the last six months, and the way residents of the ACT have dealt with the aftermath of the terrible events of 18 January 2003, the word that springs to mind is 'spirit'. I have been amazed by the spirit shown by people who were badly affected by the fires, by the spirit of those who have helped, and by the spirit the whole community has displayed in recovering from the disaster.

The amount that has already been done in a relatively short period of time is remarkable - the clean-up, the planning, and the rebuilding. We must remember, however, that the recovery may not be a finite process. Some people and some infrastructure will recover quickly, but for others the fires will have a lasting impact.

The same is true of the environment. Much of the burnt area is now green again as native trees and grasses regrow, but the recovery of the wildlife population will take much longer, and the recovery of the forests could take years.

No matter how long the recovery takes, I am sure that the community will be stronger as a result of the shared experiences that have brought us closer together, and that the spirit Canberrans have shown over the last six months will endure.

ACT Forests

ACT Forests Director, Tony Bartlett

It still saddens me each time I go to Weston Creek or Uriarra and see the magnitude of what we lost on 18 January 2003, as well as the significant soil erosion that is occurring in some places. I am heartened, however, by the way everyone has worked together to implement the massive recovery programs, and from a forestry point of view, it is just marvellous to see the first trees being replanted this winter among the otherwise devastated landscape. It gives me great hope that we can recreate an even better future.

Black Saturday

ACT Forests Harvesting Supervisor, Cliff Stevens

At the start of the day I commented to my crew members that they were likely to see some very unusual things happen that day, and they were not disappointed.

We were on standby at Stromlo Depot with tanker 11. My crew members were Rebecca Blundell and Steve Hrast. We were waiting for deployment. After waiting around for about two hours, we were sent to Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve and were tasked with property protection at 'Congwarra'.

During the day we put numerous spot fires out, a couple of scary incidents occurred. One was when the first of the winds hit us while we were on a sidling (but not directly to the wind) the wind was so strong that it lifted the truck (our tanker, when full, weighs 18 tonnes). I have no doubts that had we been directly on the side we would have been flipped over.

The second incident was watching a metre high wall of flame, about a kilometre wide, coming down the valley burning over country that had already been burnt. The colours in the flames were unbelievable - it must have been the minerals and trace elements in the soil - and it looked just like waves rolling backwards and forwards onto a beach.

We felt very isolated as all communications went out, including our mobile phones.

Greening Australia

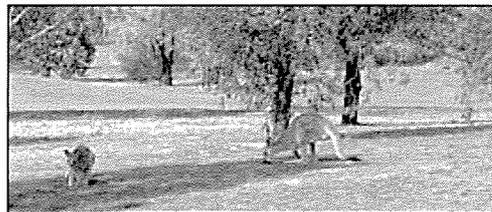
Greening Australia's immediate response to the bushfire crisis was to develop a series of short, medium and long-term projects, aimed at providing practical support to the ACT rural community in particular.

One of Greening Australia's first actions after 18 January was to commit \$20,000 worth of labour from its staff, who lent an urgent helping hand to assist farmers with cleanup work, including fence removal, repair and/or replacement.

Greening Australia was quick to forge a partnership with the ACT Government to create a custom-designed project to assist those ACT rural lessees hardest hit by the fires. This ACT Rural Recovery Project, funded by the ACT Government continues to provide advice and assistance through fencing, off-stream watering, soil stabilisation and revegetation.

As part of the national Green Corps Program, Greening Australia has begun coordination of a complementary fire recovery project, which also brings the enthusiasm of Australia's youth to the aid of fire-affected rural lessees. The Green Corps team is currently working on properties along the Cotter Road.

Looking ahead, Greening Australia is working in partnership with CSIRO on a 'Landscapes Under Fire' monitoring and evaluation work on different areas and vegetation types in the ACT. The aim is to assess bushfire impacts and inform future planning decisions in the ACT.



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COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 22, Friday 18 July 2003

GETTING ON WITH BUSINESS

ACT Minister for Business and Tourism, Ted Quinlan

The bushfires brought such devastation to people's lives, however I've watched the business community rally around to support those businesses affected. It's great to see everyone working together - this is when the community spirit shines through.

Solid Data helps small businesses and farmers

Solid Data Managing Director, Kevin Jeffery

One key area that small and home-based businesses and farmers had to deal with during and after the fires, was their data and information. It was all too easy to lose data when computers were lost, and so were backups, which were often onsite.

Solid Data, a small Narrabundah-based business managed by Kevin Jeffery, a volunteer fighter from Tharwa, has done much to prepare businesses for events such as the fire. The company also donated services to support and assist businesses affected by the fires. A number of farmers in the Tharwa and Tidbinbilla areas have their computer data backed up automatically through the Solid Data Storage service. Consequently during the fires they didn't worry about their computers while the fire was racing across their properties

Some fire-affected businesses have also benefited from Solid Data's generosity. They have taken advantage of their offer of free assistance to try and recover data from any hard drives, and to set up disaster recovery strategies for future contingencies. Solid Data has also offered a free six-month subscription to its automated online backup service, which has been well received and is still available to any fire affected businesses or individual

Business ACT

Despite all that has been lost in the January fires, the spirit of the ACT business community is stronger than ever.

The ACT Government has had contact with over 200 businesses, operating across a diverse range of industries that were in some way affected by the January fires. The majority of these businesses had home-based operations and have had to focus on rebuilding their personal lives and homes as well as their business.

The way that the business community united has been crucial in enabling many businesses to again provide the valuable services that the people of Canberra rely on. A substantial number of businesses have provided products and services to help get the affected businesses back up and running including free office space, business services, computers, travel and even a place to have a cup of coffee and think about future business activities.

In addition to the assistance already provided, the ACT Government has commissioned a consultant to provide business counselling and mentoring services to assist business owners in making strategic decisions about the way forward.

Remarkable Alliances

ACTCOSS Director, Daniel Stubbs

Soon after the bushfires, a group of very special Canberrans met to discuss how to best coordinate the huge number of donations that flowed into Canberra from all over Australia for those people who had been affected by the bushfires.

Sitting around the table were representatives of The Salvation Army, the St Vincent De Paul Society, Red Cross, the Smith Family, Volunteering ACT, Anglicare, Lifeline, the Uniting Church, the Recovery Centre, ACTCOSS and the ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry. Later the group was joined by Rotary, Lions and Apex.

At first, there was a desperate need to store the donations and get them out to those who needed them as soon as possible. During this very busy time many lessons were learnt including the need to seek cash rather than donated goods as the things people often want to donate are not necessarily the things affected communities can most readily receive. The ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry and a range of other businesses worked miracles to find storage locations, whilst the charities worked their own miracles in sorting and distributing all that arrived.

With the first rush of donations over, the group continued to meet. The needs of those affected were varied and many ideas were developed to assist. There was the community billboard in The Canberra Times, strategies for looking after staff in all the organisations who were stretched far beyond their normal workloads, and the Winter Warming Project. The matching of service clubs, community groups and the Recovery Centre provided a variety of services including Dr John Irvine seminars, help with garden clean-ups and community visiting services.

I feel privileged to be part of this group as it continues to meet and find solutions to the issues that arise during the recovery of Canberra. It is my hope and expectation that out of this intense period of working together ongoing partnerships and associations between the large charities, service clubs and a wide range of community services organisations will be formed.

I thank all those involved for their tremendous commitment and goodwill, which has ensured a creative spark and remarkable alliances of the kind not seen in Canberra before. I look forward to the legacies of these relationships continuing for many years.

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COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 22, Friday 18 July 2003

GETTING ON WITH BUSINESS

Weston Woden Animal Hospital

Kippax Veterinary Hospital, John Aspley Davis

The homing pigeons rose above the assembled crowd at the memorial service, bearing with them some of the grief and sorrow of those pet owners who had lost a member of their family. As they banked and wheeled in the bright but hazy morning sky, they raised their heads, set their course and there was an almost audible sigh of relief from the 250 pairs of eyes watching their progress. They flew northward and our spirits rose. Their release from the site of blackened beams, broken bricks, shattered glass, sickening smells and twisted metal that once held 48 pets gave rise to hope in those earth-bound human hearts.

These souls had gathered to reflect on that sudden loss of life in a regular suburban street from a wildfire that had consumed thousands of hectares of vegetation, and over 500 houses in its fury. That Saturday had started normally enough, with people going into town for coffee and organising their kids sporting activities.

The menacing black clouds rising from forests many miles away gave little cause for concern. Once the temperature and the winds rose, blowing towards the city, apprehension was felt. By early afternoon, a front many miles wide seemed to be approaching the city under the pressure of strong westerly winds. The pine forests on this edge, tinder dry from months of no rain, were quickly consumed, helping to create a local environment that some thought increased the 70km per hour wind speeds to 140km per hour.

The south-westerly suburbs that lay in the lee of the forest were suddenly treated to the most terrifying display of nature's power, the fireball passing overhead at enormous speed. Telegraph poles were ripped out, trees exploded and houses were engulfed. It was amazing that only four people lost their lives in the firestorm.

At the hospital, the police called to request evacuation in the next half hour. The pets in the old stables were moved into the main practice for safety. Within ten minutes bushes on the opposite side of the hospital from the fire seemed to explode into flames. The two vets and two nurses, one of whom was unable to get his own car, leapt into their cars, and one, with tyres burning, escaped down the long driveway.

The stables were spared. They did not burn just as the fickleness of fire was exposed by the nearby school plastic play equipment looking as bright as the day of purchase. Within the stables are the archived records, five years or more old. The vets have nothing more to work with. A neighbouring practice has offered them space and they are trying to rebuild a practice from nothing. The local AVA is coordinating supplies and equipment from wholesalers and suppliers. This phoenix will rise again to carry their hopes and aspirations.

Small business

Small business owner and Certified Practising Accountant, Lynnette McLenaghan

At the time of the January fires, I was away from home visiting my mother. I lost my home and my car, and all the business records, computers, and other items relating to my tax agent business, which I had operated from home for over 20 years. My initial reaction was that rebuilding the business was too big a task, but the support from ACT Government, clients, family and friends encouraged me to rebuild the business.

A retired tax agent friend generously offered me office space in his home. Then with a new computer and great support from the Tax Office, I was able to begin again. I cannot replace all the old records, but each client has a copy of the previous return I prepared for them, and that is the base I am using to rebuild. The current work I had on hand became the biggest problem, but it has been amazing how many records were able to be replaced with companies and businesses providing duplicate group certificates, share details, and so on.

My biggest problem has been time and energy. It is taking an enormous effort to do this while trying to meet Tax Office deadlines. I do not want to extend these too much further as the current year will then become a problem too. As well as rebuilding a business, there is considerable additional energy involved in the planning of the rebuilding of our home and my office space.

ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry

ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry Chief Executive, Chris Peters

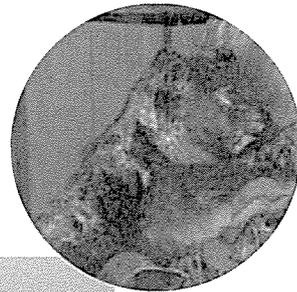
The support that the business community has shown to those who have been affected by the January bushfires has been enormous.

From the day of the bushfires, the Chamber has been coordinating the very generous contributions from the business community. From the beginning, this support has been provided to both business people and non-business people affected by the bushfires. Five Chamber staff have been working long hours to facilitate this process. This includes maintaining a database that has been instrumental in bringing together the needs of our community, with the businesses that are offering goods, services, assistance and cash. Over the past six months, we have seen the business community of Canberra demonstrating their strong community spirit in providing their assistance to those in need, including providing items such as computers, data recovery, software, office furniture, counselling, underwear, clothing and holidays.

The Chamber has been working very closely with the ACT Recovery Centre and the major charities to identify areas of need where the business community has been able to assist. The disaster of the January bushfires has certainly strengthened our sense of community in Canberra.

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Lucky, Our Superstar



Above: Lucky at the start of her journey on the road to recovery.

Other pictures: Lucky on the mend!



Lucky's Vet, Dr Will Andrew

My first thoughts on visiting Tiddinbilla after the fires were, "What could survive this", "It is so quiet - no animals or bird noise. A strange eerie presence". When I was told a koala may have survived, I rushed to the site, found the

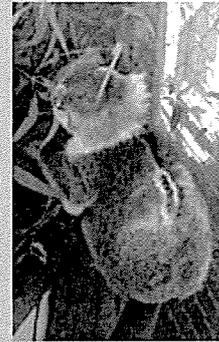
koala, but could not detect movement or create any form of movement. Total despair and a sense of everything lost. On reconfirmation that the koala had survived, my first thought was, "This animal will survive - I will see to that". My first examination of *Lucky* came to pass. The worst was yet to come. A lot of unseen problems: eyes, ears, lips, bad skin burns, respiratory damage. The first couple of weeks were a cycle of ups and downs. Hope was followed by fear in a cyclic pattern, but as long as she wanted to try, that was the green light to keep helping.

The public interest was phenomenal once they knew I was treating a surviving koala. Even a friend bought me a bottle of koala wine. The questions and comments were endless. Even today, more than five months on, a farmer asked me how she is going. I have come to realise that koalas are not just a conservation issue; they are a unique passion with the public.

To sum up my feelings about *Lucky*, she is stubborn, a battler, and for an animal that is supposed not to have a personality, she definitely has one! I feel somewhat blessed to be the one to have somehow come out of this mess, and be her doctor. *Lucky* is a challenging patient, yet I never thought for one moment I was doing the wrong thing in helping her. She has helped so many others find their way through the tragedy of 18 January, including me.

Lucky, you are my little superstar!

You can contact *Lucky* at: luckythekoala@act.gov.au



Further *Reflections* will be published in *Community Update* over the coming weeks.

Special Reflections Edition

Appendix 13 Example of regular newspaper advertisements



Bushfire Recovery Information

23 August 2003

ACT Government response to McLeod Report

Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope this week tabled the ACT Government's formal response to the Report of the Inquiry into the Operational Response to the January 2003 Bushfires in the ACT (the McLeod Report) in the Legislative Assembly.

The response provided further details of the Government's plans to implement the 61 recommendations made by Mr McLeod and was supported by a Supplementary Appropriation Bill that provides the necessary funding to implement the report recommendations and related initiatives.

Bushfire and Beyond - children and young people telling their stories

Children and young people are invited to write about their experiences of the January bushfires as part of a writing competition *Bushfire and Beyond* - children and young people telling their stories hosted by the ACT Recovery Centre and National Library of Australia, with support from the ACT Writers Centre and the ACT Public Library.

Launched by the Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope yesterday, the competition offers children an opportunity to tell their story their way.

Entry forms are available from: www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au as well as the ACT Recovery Centre, National Library, ACT Public Libraries, and ACT Writers Centre. Book vouchers will be awarded as prizes, and entries close 9 October 2003. For more information on the competition contact the ACT Recovery Centre on 6205 5733.

EVENTS

FREE taxation seminar

The ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry in association with the Australian Taxation Office are holding a free taxation seminar for fire-affected small and rural business from 5:45pm-8:00pm on Thursday 28 August at the Southern Cross Club in Tuggeranong.

Topics to be covered include tax application on business grants, capital losses, improved and unimproved value of land, GST implications on insurance, payouts, depreciation of assets, substantiation, replacement or repair, forced sales of livestock in a tax year and farm management deposits.

For further information or to reserve your place, please contact the ACT & Region Chamber of Commerce & Industry on 6283 5245 by Tuesday 26 August 2003.

FREE building information

Ten builders, three building designers, three architects and the ACT Planning and Land Authority will be presenting a FREE building information session for people planning to rebuild after the January bushfires from 10:00am-06pm on Saturday 30 August 2003 at the Canberra Building Information Centre on Northbourne Ave. Lyneham.

For more information on the session contact the Canberra Building Information Centre on 6247 2099.

Want to help shape our Territory after the bushfires?

You can help shape the future of areas outside urban Canberra by providing feedback on the options and opportunities presented in the report *Shaping Our Territory: Options and Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT*.

Public comments and feedback on the options must be received by 23 September 2003.

Shaping Our Territory: Options and Opportunities for Non-Urban ACT is an options paper prepared by the Non-Urban Study Steering Committee to determine the best and most appropriate long term use of non-urban land. The report is wide-ranging, and issues for comment include fire protection, water resources, recreation, forestry, rural leases and agriculture, small villages, rural residential, and the future of the Tidbinbala, Cooper and Deer's Forest Park areas.

The full report, overview and feedback form are available from: www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au, ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce (ground floor, ActewAGL House, 221 London Circuit, Civic), ACT Recovery Centre (67 Launceston St, Lyons), ACT Government Shepphons, ACTPLA Shepphons (Game Patisserie House, 16 Challis St, Dickson), and the Environment Information Centre (Macarthur House, 12 Wattle St, Lyneham).

Public comments and feedback on the options should be addressed to the Non-Urban Study Steering Committee via email: NonUrbanStudy@act.gov.au, fax 6207 8123, mail GPO Box 158, Canberra City ACT 2601, or delivery to the Secretariat Ground Floor, ActewAGL House, 221 London Circuit, Civic.

Prescribed burning

A successful prescribed burn was conducted by Environment ACT on Black Mountain Reserve on Wednesday 20 August 2003.

Weather permitting, it is expected that Environment ACT and ACT Forests will conduct another 15 prescribed burns before the onset of the 2003-2004 bushfire season.

Why do we conduct prescribed burning?

Prescribed burns are designed to remove or reduce combustible material that builds up over time. The fuel load, weather conditions and moisture all contribute to the intensity of a bushfire.

Three means to manage potential fire intensity are:

- reduce fuel amount;
- fire breaks or the creation of a fuel reduced zone, between a property and areas from which a fire may approach; and
- changing or altering the fuel type to another less flammable type such as the application of a scrub layer with native grasses.

These means can be achieved by undertaking the following activities:

- prescribed burning;
- grazing;
- mowing and stacking;
- physical or mechanical removal of fuels; and
- herbicide application.

For more on prescribed burns contact the Bushfire Liaison Officer on 6207 5452.

Community fire-fighters wanted



The Chapman Residents Action Group is organising a public meeting at 10:00am on Saturday 27 September 2003 at the Chapman School Oval, Perry Drive, Chapman to seek expressions of interest for volunteer community fire-fighters.

The purpose of the meeting is to establish community fire units, hear how the Community Fire Unit program will be managed and receive training as part of the ACT Fire Brigade. Training for community volunteers will entail two evenings of theoretical work and one day on the use of equipment, with follow-up days as necessary. Initial training is being scheduled for the first half of October 2003.

For more information on the meeting call 0414 681 110.

Regreening Canberra's Gardens

Do you have a garden of work mates or friends and want to do something good for the community? We're looking for volunteers to shovel dirt, dig out stumps or help shovel soil in fire-affected gardens from 9:45am-1:00pm on Sunday 31 August 2003, before joining us for a sausage sizz.

If you're feeling fit and strong and would like to help others, call the Regreening Canberra project on 6207 0142 during business hours.

INFORMATION & SERVICES

ACT Recovery Centre	6205 5733
ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce	6207 8111
bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au	
Canberra Connect	13 22 81
www.canberracconnect.act.gov.au	
ACT Planning and Land Authority (ACTPLA)	6205 5738
Bushfire Support Service	www.actpla.act.gov.au
Master Builders Association	6247 2099
Housing Industry Association	6241 6366



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Appendix 14

Sample Taskforce Meeting Agendas

FIFTH MEETING OF THE BUSHFIRE RECOVERY TASKFORCE

Tuesday 25 February 2003
8.30am – 10.30am
VENUE: Ground Floor, ACTEWAGL

AGENDA

- | | |
|---------|---|
| 8.30am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Welcome (Chair)2. Housekeeping (Chief Executive)3. Previous Minutes (Chair) |
| 8.40am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">4. Report from Recovery Centre staff on emerging issues (Community Support) |
| 9.00am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">5. Rural Issues (Community Support) |
| 9.15am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Corporate Sponsorship (Strategy) |
| 9.30am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">7. Community Support Update (Community Support)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- consumer protection issues- update on progress on rebuilding ACT Housing properties |
| 9.45am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">8. Construction Update (Construction)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- progress on clean up- proposed policy regarding properties assessed as inhabitable by insurance companies but habitable by PALM |
| 10.00am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Communications Update (Communications)<ul style="list-style-type: none">- resources for Communications Team- public information update |
| 10.15am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">10. Report on emerging issues from Community and Expert Reference Group (Communications) |
| 10.30am | <ol style="list-style-type: none">11. Other Business12. Next meeting |

SEVENTEENTH MEETING OF THE BUSHFIRE RECOVERY TASKFORCE

Tuesday 15 July 2003
9.00am – 12.00 pm

**VENUE: Recovery Centre (Lyons Primary School)
Launceston Street Lyons**

AGENDA

- | | |
|------------|--|
| 9.00am | 1. Welcome |
| | 2. Previous Minutes / Actions Arising |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• hardship paper• Final report of the Taskforce: table of contents• rebuilding assistance |
| 9.45am | 3. Briefing on the Review and Revision of the Community Recovery Sub Plan of the Emergency Management Plan (DEYFS) |
| 10.30am | 4. Update on emerging issues from the Recovery Centre (Chris Healy, Di Butcher) |
| 10.45am | 5. Report from Community and Expert Reference Group (Elizabeth Whitelaw) |
| 11.00am | MORNING TEA |
| 11.15am | 6. Updates, paying particular attention to TF Priorities |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Construction Update- Community Support Update- Communications Update- Strategy Update |
| 11.55am | 7. Other Business |
| | 8. Next meeting: 29 July 2003 (ACTEW AGL House) |
| 12.00 NOON | Lunch with the staff of the Recovery Centre |

TWENTY SECOND MEETING OF THE BUSHFIRE RECOVERY TASKFORCE

Joint meeting with the Bushfire Recovery Executive

23 September 2003
9.00am – 12.00 pm

**VENUE: Ground Floor Conference Group
ACTEW AGL HOUSE**

AGENDA

- | | |
|------------|---|
| 9.00am | 1. Welcome and introductions |
| | 2. Previous minutes and actions arising |
| 9.20am | 3. Final Report of the Taskforce:
- Executive Summary
- Full Report |
| 10.00am | 4. Lessons for Public Administration |
| 10.45am | 5. Report from Community and Expert Reference Group |
| 11.15am | 6. Assistance for people who are yet to commence rebuilding |
| 11.30am | 7 Updates:
- Construction Update
- Community Support Update
- Communications Update
- Strategy Update |
| 12.00 NOON | 8. Other Business |
| LUNCH | |

Appendix 15

Insurance: Lessons learnt from the January bushfires

Article prepared by Mark de Kleuver, Insurance Advisor, ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

This article was written to provide the Canberra community with a legacy of the lessons learnt concerning the handling of insurance matters in a major disaster.

Introduction

According to the Insurance Disaster Response Organisation, insured losses for natural disasters in Australia are up from over \$200 million in 2001 to around \$415 million for the past year, with the ACT bushfires costing \$350 million alone. The uninsured losses cannot be estimated.

Research undertaken by a major insurance company estimates one in six of Australia's 7.4 million homes are not covered by a building or contents insurance policy.

Don't take the risk of not taking out insurance!

Don't take the risk of going without insurance; particularly cover for your home and contents. If your house burns down, you stand to lose much more than the cost of your premium, and each time there's a major bushfire or storm, too many people are stranded without insurance or with too little cover.

Issues experienced by Canberra residents following the bushfires

Since the ACT bushfire disaster on 18 January 2003, underinsurance, new-for-old replacement versus indemnity value, public liability insurance, demolition, removal of debris, extension of temporary accommodation and architect fees are the common issues being faced by residents pursuing claims with their insurance company. Data obtained by the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce reveals that approximately 1% of destroyed houses were not covered by building insurance and some 20% of householders did not hold contents insurance.

As a consequence of the bushfires, Canberra residents have had to make claims against their home and contents insurance policies. The Bushfire Recovery Taskforce through an insurance advisor assisted residents to deal with their insurance companies.

This role has enabled the Taskforce to gain a valuable insight into the issues Canberrans should consider in relation to their insurance. This article provides information on:

- 1) what events and losses are covered;
- 2) how to calculate the replacement value of homes and contents;
- 3) what to consider in renewing policies;
- 4) some of the issues experienced by Canberra residents; and
- 5) how to make a claim.

1) What events and losses are covered by insurance?

Policy Wording

As a home owner, you should familiarise yourself with the protection provided by your policy. You should read your policy carefully, and if you have difficulty understanding any policy clauses, seek advice from your insurer.

Home insurance provides you with cover against loss or damage to your home arising from a variety of incidents (eg fire, escaping water, storm damage or earthquake). Insurers provide different levels of cover, details of which are contained in their home insurance policy wording.

Contents insurance provides you with cover against loss or damage to your possessions contained within your home. Insurers provide different levels of cover (eg items which are portable and limits on specified items such as artwork and jewellery).

Don't forget to review policy exclusions!

When reviewing your policy wording, it is important to consider the policy exclusions contained within the policy. Exclusions often include flood, wear and tear and terrorism.

Importance of Additional Benefits

When selecting home insurance, it is important that you understand whether the insurer includes the following items within their insurance policy:

- Demolition and removal of debris;
- Temporary accommodation should you be unable to live in your home;
- Architects, planning and legal fees;
- Liability cover (provides protection against third parties injuring themselves);
- Inclusion/non inclusion of GST;
- Sub-limits on landscaping and plants; and
- Increased costs allowance for associated regulations (eg Building Code of Australia).

The inclusion of such items can result in you being financially better off and not having to dip into your personal savings in the event of a loss.

2) How do you calculate the sum insured?

Importance of adequately insuring assets

To avoid insurance problems at a stressful time, it is important that you correctly value your home and contents to ensure that they are adequately insured.

If you undervalue your home, you will be underinsured and will probably be out of pocket in the event of a claim. Alternatively, if you overvalue your home, you will be paying higher than appropriate premiums and will be unlikely to receive the full insured value.

Most insurers will provide a calculation methodology to determine the value of your home and/or contents.

Calculating the sum insured for your home

A basic method to calculate a home building value is to multiply the area of a home in square metres by a building rate dependent upon the home's construction type and then make allowances for internal fit-out such as carpets and drapes. Different construction materials (eg fibre cement, brick veneer, double brick) and nature of construction (eg project home, architect-designed, luxury) will attract different rates.

Have building rates increased?

In August 2003, the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce established a Building Costs Monitoring Committee to investigate a range of issues influencing buildings costs in the ACT and to report on whether or not the January 2003 Bushfires have in any way caused an increase in building costs. The report revealed that costs rose only slightly since June 2002 with spiked increases in December 2002/January 2003. The report stated that builders are generally doing their best to quote and build for reasonable prices and do not appear to be taking undue advantage of the bushfire situation.

The report also shows that building costs for residential housing currently average about \$1,060 per square metre. This average rate is based on the building costs across the footprint itself, including any garage. This rate does not include additional costs for landscaping, fencing, paving and site work, or internal expenses such as floor coverings, drapes and movable appliances. These additional items are usually priced separately and, indicatively, can add a further \$300 to \$500 to the building cost per square metre, depending upon the site conditions and the level of luxury chosen.

The Committee's findings indicate one of the factors that may be impacting on building costs is an increase in trade shortages. In particular, costs of bricklaying and plastering had been rising. There is no indication that the present costs of these trades have been further spiked by the bushfire event.

Calculating the sum insured for your contents

An efficient method to value your contents is to go through your home, room by room and make note of all items, listing the replacement value next to each item. It is essential that customers list the replacement cost even for items such as books or furniture that may have been purchased second hand. Some companies will provide a form to assist you in preparing your inventory.

Nowadays, the majority of policies are "new for old" replacement policies requiring the contents values to accurately reflect the replacement value of items.

When purchasing contents insurance, you should investigate the additional benefits different insurers will provide (eg portable assets cover, temporary accommodation, liability cover). Check your policy. Some policies for contents require you to itemise and specify the cost of high value items.

Good housekeeping

A common difficulty raised by the bushfire-affected residents has been their inability to recall all their personal belongings destroyed in their homes.

To avoid missing out on your entitlement to compensation, it is recommended you keep a record of your belongings off site (eg at your workplace, with family or friends, bank safety deposit box). Records of your possessions could include inventory list of items in each room of your house, videotape or photographs of your possessions (especially artwork and jewellery) and valuation certificates.

3) What should I consider when renewing my insurance?

Generally, home and contents insurance policies operate for 12 months. Upon renewal, you have an ideal opportunity to reassess the value of your home and contents. To minimise the effects of any loss that you may incur you should ensure that you have adequate cover for the home and contents. In particular when taking out insurance or paying your renewal it is best to discuss the amount and type of cover that best suits your needs with your insurer. It is too late to review your cover when an event occurs.

At renewal time, you should increase the sum insured for your home to allow for improvements/additions (eg kitchen/bathroom renovations, reverse cycle air conditioning, addition of pergola) undertaken during the past 12 months. You should also account for gifts and electronic goods (eg DVD player) acquired during the year. Most insurers will generally provide a renewal notice with a Sum Insured in line with the Consumer Price Index to incorporate changes in inflation.

Should you acquire a major item or renovate your home during the policy period, contact your insurer to increase the sum insured rather than wait until the annual renewal period.

4) Some of the issues experienced by Canberra residents

Difficulties experienced with Loss Adjusters

The loss adjuster's role is to assess the value of lost property. It has been noted that some loss adjusters have not taken into consideration the wider experience of loss and the trauma involved for their clients. A large number of disputes have been caused by loss adjusters not providing enough information to the residents who have lost their homes or whose homes have been damaged. Should people experience difficulties with their loss adjuster, they should contact the customer relations department of their insurance company and detail the difficulties being experienced.

Public liability insurance over your vacant block

In many cases where a home is destroyed and the claim is settled, the public liability insurance component of the policy will cease, either when the home insurance claim is settled or the insurance policy expires.

Following the January bushfires, many owners were unable to obtain public liability insurance to cover their vacant blocks. These people were concerned about the consequences of a third party being injured on their block.

It is recommended that residents review their policy wordings to determine the extent of their public liability insurance cover.

Temporary Accommodation

In the event of your home being destroyed, insurance companies generally pay reasonable accommodation expenses of either 10% of the Sum Insured or up to 12 months rental accommodation.

As many bushfire residents will still be in the process of rebuilding, selling or deciding what they will do on 18 January 2004, the insurance advisor has contacted a number of insurance companies to ascertain their position in relation to rental accommodation. Most insurance companies contacted have indicated that they will consider each claim for accommodation assistance beyond 18 January 2004 on an individual “case by case” basis.

Accordingly, residents who have not rebuilt their homes by 18 January 2004, should contact their insurance companies and ascertain whether they will grant an extension of their rental assistance.

New-for Old Replacement versus Indemnity Clause

Following the bushfires, a small number of residents who lost their homes were unable to recover the full cost of their sum insured due to their insurance policy’s “indemnity clause”.

Generally, this clause states that the insurance company will reinstate (rebuild) the property up to the Sum Insured. However, if the policy holder decides to not rebuild and sell the land, the insurance company will only pay the Indemnity Value (depreciated value) of the property. Under an indemnity policy, insurers will only reimburse you for the value of your buildings in the condition it was just before the building was damaged. In one case, an insurer was only prepared to settle a home claim for \$150,000, whereas the sum insured was \$200,000.

To ensure home owners obtain value for money and flexibility, homeowners should carefully read their insurance policy wordings to ensure their policy provides “new for old replacement”.

5) How do I make a claim?

Loss of home and/or contents

When an event such as a fire or storm results in a loss of home or contents, it is important that you immediately contact your insurer to ascertain the process for lodging and making a claim.

In most circumstances, your insurer will appoint a loss adjuster to assist them quantify your claim. The loss adjuster will seek information from you on the possessions located in your destroyed or partially destroyed home. You will then be asked to complete an inventory of individual contents located within your home at the time of loss.

It is important that you hold discussions with the insurer or their representative.

In the event of a total loss, your loss adjuster will meet with you to discuss the settlement of your claim and this may require specific details of the construction of your home. The insurer's representative will be interested to know details such as building construction, builder (eg MBA or Project designed home), internal finishings such as kitchen design, internal timber finishings, number of dimmer switches, features that distinguish your home from other homes in the area in which you live.

Conclusion

The queries raised by bushfire-affected residents have highlighted the need for all Canberrans to review and if appropriate amend their home and contents insurance policies.

Adequate insurance will give you peace of mind and, in the event of a loss, provide you with enough money to replace your home and/or replace your home contents.

As a consumer, it is worthwhile to shop around, compare different insurers' policy wordings and purchase an insurance policy that best suits your requirements.

Preparing an inventory of your belongings will assist greatly in calculating the value of your assets. Keeping this inventory up to date and offsite will assist greatly in compensation you receive in the event of a claim (eg theft, loss or damage).

It is important that you regularly review the sum insured and adjust it to reflect increases in the values of your assets. Over time, especially at renewal time, it is important that you adjust your asset values. For example you need to reflect any recent renovations, major household purchases (eg whitegoods, entertainment system, major gifts received). You also need to make allowances for increases in the Consumer Price Index.

Should you suffer a loss it is important that you notify and cooperate fully with your insurer. Should you be unable to reach agreement with your insurer, various claim dispute resolution solutions are available.

Further Information

Further information on insurance can be obtained from the:

- ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce at www.bushfirerecovery.act.gov.au
- Insurance Council of Australia at www.ica.com.au
- Insurance Enquiries and Complaints Scheme at www.iecltd.com.au
- Insurance Disaster Response Organisation at www.idro.com.au and individual insurance company websites.

Appendix 16

A report on the activities and experiences of the Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG)

Purpose

The following report has as its central themes:

- An overview of the activities and experiences of CERG as a key advisory body to the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce since its establishment on 3 February 2003, and
- A record of the personnel, organisational and administrative attributes regarded by CERG as being central and critical to the successful operation of community and expert reference groups either in a future emergency response context or in non-emergency scenarios where use of the CERG model is judged to be appropriate.

Chronology of events

- **18 January 2003:** A ferocious firestorm struck Canberra resulting in the loss of four citizens, around 500 homes and around 90 community, commercial and rural buildings. An enormous number of livestock were killed and many urban and rural properties suffered extensive damage.
- **18 January to 28 January:** A State of Emergency was declared.
- **24 January:**
 - ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce was established supported by the Bushfire Recovery Secretariat; and
 - ACT Bushfire Recovery Centre at Lyons was established.
- **29 January:** First meeting of the ACT Bushfire Taskforce.
- **3 February:** The Community and Expert Reference Group was established with broad representation from the ACT community including representatives from the business, community and expert groups; fire-affected residents (both rural and urban) and the Commonwealth Government.
- **10 February:**
 - The formal recovery period commenced; and
 - ACT Bushfire Taskforce assumed responsibility for the Recovery Centre.
- **October:** ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce was replaced by the Bushfire Recovery Executive Group.

The Recovery Response

The ACT had never experienced a natural disaster of the magnitude of the firestorm on 18 January. The community was shocked by the ferocity of the fires. Emergency agencies and everyone associated with the fires found themselves trying to cope with an event that held unprecedented challenges and perils. Understandably in the circumstances, there was a degree of confusion until measures were initiated to restore leadership largely through the creation of a structured response to assist the community recover from the devastation in the short, medium and long term.

The first step in the process was the creation of the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce. It was recognised immediately that there was a need to involve the community as part of the structured response and consequently the Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) was established as the key link between the Taskforce, those affected by the Bushfire emergency, and the ACT community as a whole. CERG, by bringing together community groups, fire-affected residents, unions, the business community, experts and the Commonwealth, ensured that the recovery strategy and processes were informed of community views and needs as well as providing, through its members, essential input from relevant professional, business and union perspectives.

Attachment A outlines in more detail the administrative structure put in place by the ACT Government in response to the bushfire emergency in order to lead, assist, coordinate and manage the recovery process. The terms of reference of the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and CERG are included as well as CERG's membership as originally constituted.

Effectiveness of the CERG model

All members of CERG agree that the creation of CERG and its operation through a period of significant turmoil was clearly a positive and effective initiative. Active community participation and self-help in the process of rebuilding and recovery was found to be fundamental to the recovery process. The CERG model has provided a vehicle which was instrumental in fostering community participation and increasing community confidence in the recovery process.

A key factor for CERG's success was its ability to work across all areas of Government and the high degree of Ministerial support it enjoyed. Another key factor has been CERG's flexibility in adapting to changing circumstances by being able to draw on additional expertise and knowledge as required.

Anecdotal evidence strongly suggests that it is widely accepted by the Canberra community as a whole, the business community, charity groups and fire-affected residents (urban and non-urban) that CERG has been successful in fulfilling its charter and achieving results critical to the recovery process. In particular, the role of CERG was seen as providing a vital link between the community, the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and the Public Service and cannot be underestimated. The speed with which CERG was established is seen as being significant in assisting the community cope with the short-term firestorm aftermath as it provided a strong community voice and leadership function. A lesson learnt from the current experience is that a community consultative process should be an immediate priority in future emergency situations.

Some of the key achievements of CERG were the immense benefit in ensuring that community issues were followed up expeditiously, including:

- Provision of direct intervention and assistance to the Taskforce in all relevant issues including the areas of banking, insurance, community recovery, health and re-building;
- Identifying and monitoring community health and safety issues;
- Providing early warning of issues and a channel for communication between the Taskforce, the Taskforce Secretariat, Government Departments and the community to address community concerns;
- Working together with community groups on a wide range of community projects including the rebuilding of community assets;
- Providing feedback to Government to assist in tailoring and streamlining program delivery; and
- To be freestanding of Government with the capacity to work across all Government agencies.

CERG Issues Log

In fulfilling its charter, CERG provided extensive briefing and background information on major matters of substance to the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce as well as to many interested parties associated with the recovery process. It is critical that the comprehensive and detailed logs of issues prepared by CERG not be lost in the current climate of activity associated with bushfire enquiry and review processes.

The logs not only provide specific comment on issues directly attributable to the bushfire, but also serve to identify, in a direct and uncompromising way, breakdowns and critical issues associated with key Government processes that have applications far more broadly than in a critical incident response context.

CERG suggests that the logs are an excellent resource for any post-emergency review and that they be made available to relevant agencies, by a co-ordinating agency, as part of any post-emergency review process.

A Framework for the Future

Given the speed and the unprecedented nature of the bushfire emergency, the membership and breadth of representation within CERG and the administrative support arrangements for it, CERG has been successful and effective. It would be reasonably expected, therefore, that a similar approach could be used in future emergency situations and that emergency management planning will incorporate a 'CERG-style' community consultative body.

Therefore, CERG regards it as imperative that those who develop strategies for future emergencies have the benefit of CERG's experience. CERG has reviewed its experience to date, identified attributes that have contributed to its success in meeting the terms of reference and sought to outline areas and additional attributes which could be incorporated into future planning where a CERG-style model is appropriate. A summary of the outcomes of this process follows.

Acknowledgements

CERG members wish to acknowledge, during this unprecedented emergency situation, the leadership and the outstanding contribution made by members of the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce.

It also acknowledges the substantial support and assistance provided to CERG by the Taskforce Secretariat, ACT Government Departments and the ACT Bushfire Recovery Centre. Without the unstinting efforts displayed by officers over a long period of time the recovery process could not have reached the level that it has.

Over the remainder of its term, CERG looks forward to establishing a highly productive relationship with the newly-constituted Bushfire Recovery Executive Group charged with completing the recovery process and overseeing the return to mainstream Government Departments of many of the bushfire recovery programs.

Elizabeth Whitelaw
Chair (3 February to 1 August 2003)
Community and Expert Reference Group
November

David Dawes
Chair (from 1 August 2003)
Community and Expert Reference Group
November 2003

Framework for the Future

Attributes Critical to the Success of Community and Expert Reference Groups in an Emergency Situation

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
(I) Operational & administrative	
(a) Personnel selection processes and CERG representation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish key selection criteria to ensure representation is broad & reflects the nature of the emergency <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership to include those directly affected as well as business, union & relevant professional representation in critical areas such as planning, health, housing, rehabilitation, etc. • Appointment of representatives from Commonwealth or State Governments to be expedited and concurrent with other appointments, where possible. • The appropriateness of appointing a full-time chair – depending on the scale of the emergency – should be considered. • CERG membership could usefully include a senior Recovery Centre representative to facilitate the two-way flow of information. • As an ongoing process, it is suggested that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Skill sets (and perhaps individuals and groups) appropriate to various emergency scenarios be identified – this would be an ongoing activity and part of the emergency management process; • Consultative arrangements be established and updated as appropriate; and • An information kit for potential members of consultative groups be developed outlining organisational arrangements, contact details, reasons for inclusion, representational responsibilities and other relevant background information.
(b) Group size	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CERG membership at 16 was sustainable, but larger numbers may have impeded efficiency and made the group unwieldy. • Group numbers within the range 10 and 16 are suggested as optimal to cater for the breadth of representation required without impeding efficiency: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core membership can be augmented on a 'needs' basis if additional expertise is required as a way of keeping membership to a manageable size and drawing on the willingness of community members and expert groups to assist.

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
<p>(c) Roles, management of expectations and secretariat support</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear definition of roles of individual members is essential. • Agreement on expectations to be met by group members prior to appointment is also essential. • Members should be appraised of the realistic level and nature of support that will be provided. • Flexible secretariat support needs to be inbuilt in order for members to be fully productive and for the group to meet the expectations of the community and the Government as well as meet prescribed objectives. • Managing the efficient and timely flow of information and feedback between the Taskforce and the CERG-style group is an important function of secretariat support. • Secretariat support should be flexible and be able to accommodate a variety of factors that impact on the capacity of group members to perform effectively. Examples could include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensuring meeting times meet the needs of the majority of members and that there is flexibility; • Reimbursing members as appropriate and relevant to individual group members (some will be affected by the emergency) for parking, child-minding and other incidental costs of attending meetings; • Recognising that some members will require greater secretariat support than others e.g. some members will have access to knowledge and resources not available or accessible to others; and • Recognition and acknowledgement that members are contributing time and expertise at considerable personal cost and inevitably at a considerable cost to their respective organisations.
<p>(d) Transitional arrangements</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms need to be identified early in the process to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to the need for a CERG-style group extending beyond the time scale initially envisaged; • Reflect changing needs of CERG and the Taskforce; and • Formalise procedures to allow an orderly and accountable conclusion of CERG-style activities and, where appropriate, provide transition arrangements for such activities to another group or government agency.

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
(e) Interaction between CERG and the Taskforce	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To enhance communication it is suggested that the community group chair be a member of the Taskforce in the interests of efficiency and eliminating scope for duplication and/or overlap.• Presentations relevant to both CERG and the Taskforce should be made (where possible) to a joint meeting.• Issue logs or task lists produced via information management and project management tools should be electronically accessible simultaneously by CERG members and Taskforce members in the interests of sharing information.• Exchange and feedback of information between the Taskforce and a CERG-style group is essential and should be a priority for the Secretariat.

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
(2) Communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consistent, credible, well informed and constant communication with the community and within Government agencies should be recognised as key factors in ensuring a successful recovery process. • Responsibility for the development of a communications strategy should be assigned to a central coordinating group with input from all mainstream ACT Government agencies. The communications strategy should address issues including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of a specialist and senior communications manager to oversee all communication issues; • Identification of credible, articulate, inter-agency spokespeople with the ability to communicate effectively and engender confidence; • Improving communication skills of ACT officers interacting with the community; • Ensure that up-to-date, factual and informative briefings are provided prior to media and community exposure; • Briefings should be coordinated through the communications manager who will ensure that all spokespeople provide a consistent message; • Means of communicating be assessed for effectiveness and incorporated into the planning strategy; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-prepared information sheets – particularly in the areas of public health – are seen as being particularly important as a means of quickly responding to and allaying public concerns because a number of public health concerns can be anticipated in an emergency situation e.g. asbestos, mosquito borne diseases etc; • The “community newsletter” is viewed as a particularly valuable means of communication and should be readily accessible to the wider community as well as those immediately affected by the disaster, but must remain focused on the needs of those affected by the emergency; • Community notification processes in an emergency should be clearly articulated, publicised and readily accessible to all members of the community.

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
<p>(3) ACT Public Service, its Interaction with Emergency Structures and post-emergency policy review</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As part of emergency management procedures, internal communication processes between mainstream government agencies and emergency structures (e.g. Taskforce, community group etc) should be designed for immediate implementation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimise the delay between requests and responses for information or program delivery by clarifying from day one the role of CERG and its relationship with Taskforce and Government Departments; and • Facilitate CERG in fulfilling its role as a conduit between the community and Government on safety issues in the community and in having those issues addressed and corrected quickly. • High level project management skills are a key factor governing the speed and effectiveness with which program delivery responses commence and are implemented in emergency situations and emergency planning should incorporate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training of key departmental personnel in project management; and/or • Appointment of senior project manager to coordinate program delivery across government agencies. • In broad terms, CERG would anticipate that as part of the post-emergency review there will be a focus on examining the effectiveness of administrative procedures and interactions between Government agencies under emergency conditions and, where deficiencies are apparent, action is taken to clarify decision making processes to eliminate similar situations arising in the future: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of CERG's issues log to inform the process will be valuable to inform this review; • It is essential to understand and then correct any Government administrative practices that may have impeded or hindered the recovery process .

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
(4) Recovery Centre	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The level of resourcing provided to the Recovery Centre be examined in the light of experience as a guide to resourcing similar arrangements in future emergency situations and in particular ensuring that in the initial stages of an emergency that there is an “overgenerous” allocation of case worker resources to satisfy the demands of people traumatised by events: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In CERG’s experience there were times when the Recovery Centre was under-resourced; • The recovery process is not sustainable where the workloads and commitments of individuals are beyond reasonable levels; and • Flexibility of staff resources is required to reflect the demand and nature of services required by those affected. • Experience shows that a location-specific Recovery Centre has been highly successful in meeting local community demands and should be considered in future emergency situations. • A close relationship between CERG and the Recovery Centre is required to ensure effective communication.
(5) Volunteers and Donation Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The overwhelming response of volunteers and incoming donations experienced following the bushfire suggests that a management structure to coordinate the public response could be developed as part of emergency response planning and could incorporate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appointment of a project manager to coordinate volunteers and donations of goods and services from day one; • Emphasise the importance of cash donations as opposed to donation of goods; • Where donation of goods would be of value (eg bedding etc) this should be communicated at an early stage to avoid donations of inappropriate and unsuitable goods; and • Storage facilities that could be appropriate be registered and updated on an ongoing basis.
(6) Rural sector (ACT)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration of rural landholder interests and residents of rural villages into planning for emergencies such as bushfires is essential given the areas of rural land affected, the interface they have with urban areas and the contribution they can make to fire management: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Efforts need to be made to ensure that this group is included in planning and decision making and is kept informed as well as recognised as being part of the broader ACT community.

Issue	Critical Attributes for Success
<p>(7) Business Sector</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The value of establishing a formal communication and consultative process between the Government and the banking sector as a whole during an emergency situation should be considered as almost any emergency situation will result in financial issues for people who would benefit from an authoritative and quick response to minimise distress. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establishing better communication links and inclusion of the insurance sector (e.g. Insurance Council of Australia) in emergency management planning to evaluate the likely impacts of insurance issues broadly within Government and to facilitate assistance to residents experiencing insurance-related difficulties. • It is suggested that the appointment of an independent insurance advisor on a full-time basis during the emergency and recovery process would add value in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluating the impact of insurance issues on Government, on affected individuals and the recovery process itself; • Developing and maintaining communication links with the insurance sector; • Ensuring insurance implications are included in the emergency planning processes; • Negotiating arrangements with the insurance industry to facilitate insurance claim processing in an emergency; • Acting as a contact point for the community and a source of relevant insurance information including alerting the community to the risks associated with under-insurance; • Assisting in mediation between affected people and their insurers; and • Implementing a public awareness campaign to inform and assist the community as to their rights in terms of insurance coverage.
<p>(8) Educational role of Government</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It should be seen as a normal role for Government to prepare citizens for emergency situations through education programs targeting the general and school communities. Some examples include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pre-prepared information dealing with community safety and health risks that may arise because of natural disasters such as bushfires, floods and earthquakes; • Information regarding emergency response responsibilities; and • Assisting community in self-help activities that may be appropriate e.g. community firefighting.

ATTACHMENT A

Background and structures

Following the disaster of the ACT firestorm on 18 January the ACT Government moved quickly to establish a formal, tiered mechanism and structure, as follows:

- **ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce** (the Taskforce) was established on 24 January;
- **The Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG)** was established on 3 February;
- **A Taskforce Secretariat** established concurrently with the Taskforce to support the work of the Taskforce and provide a strong policy and program management team to coordinate and manage the wide range of recovery issues both within the Government and across the community; and
- **The ACT Bushfire Recovery Centre** was established in Lyons on 24 January to provide a central point for providing community care services and information for residents impacted by the bushfires. The Recovery Centre was initially established by the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services, but later was brought under the direct control of the Taskforce Secretariat.

Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG)

CERG's terms of reference were to:

- Reflect the views of the community to the Taskforce and input the views of the community into the recovery process;
- Facilitate dialogue between the Taskforce and the community so as to regularly advise the Taskforce on issues of concern;
- Work with the Taskforce to tackle specific issues; and
- Assist coordination between the many recovery initiatives being taken in the community.

Membership of CERG

The membership of CERG brought together community groups, urban and rural fire affected residents, unions, the business community and the Commonwealth Government. Membership of CERG as *originally* established was as follows:

Members	Background
Ms Elizabeth Whitelaw (Chair)	Partner, Minter Ellison Lawyers
Ms Catherine Townsend	The Royal Australian Institute of Architects
Ms Claire Middleton	ACT Division, Planning Institute
Mr Jeff Carl	Weston Creek Community Council
Mr Peter Malone	Unions ACT
Mr David Dawes	Master Builders Association of the ACT
Ms Nicola Davies	ACT and SE Region Conservation Council
Mr Daniel Stubbs	ACT Council of Social Service
Mr Chris Peters	ACT and Region Chamber of Commerce
Mr Richard Tindale	National Zoo and Aquarium
Ms Karla Ries	Duffy Primary School P&C
Ms Liz Tilley	Duffy resident (home destroyed)
Ms Joanne Matthews	Kambah resident (home destroyed)
Ms Annette Ellis MP	Member for Canberra
Dr Tony Griffin	Vice President of the ACT Rural Lessees Association
Senator Gary Humphries	Commonwealth Government Representative

Initially, CERG established six working groups which addressed:

- Construction and Infrastructure;
- Community Liaison;
- Charitable Organisations and Non-Government Organisations;
- Communications;
- Rural Lessees; and
- Business.