

Response to IGEM Review of the
Initial Response to the 2015
Wye River-Jamieson Track Fire

February 2016

Introduction

The Minister for Emergency Services requested the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) to provide the Minister with an interim and final report on the lessons to date from the 2015 Wye River-Jamieson Track Fire by 21 January 2016 and February 2016 respectively.

The IGEM provided the final report to the Minister on 18 February 2016.

The report finds that the fire was started by a lightning strike on 19 December 2015. On Christmas day it escalated and destroyed 116 houses in Wye River and Separation Creek. It grew to 2,260 hectares by Boxing Day and was declared contained on 21 January 2016.

The IGEM review examined:

- the detection of the fire and initial attack on it
- incident action planning and the fire control strategy between 19 and 25 December
- community information, warnings and engagement over the same period and
- evacuation and traffic management planning and execution on 25 December 2015.

In summary, the IGEM's Report highlights several positive aspects to the response to this fire, most notably:

- appropriate resource allocation to the initial attack on the fire (with firefighter safety being the foremost consideration)
- an appropriately scaled approach to control, resource allocation and strategic planning and implementation
- positive community engagement and effective public warnings and information
- a well planned and executed evacuation and
- effective integration of the Colac-Otway Shire into the incident management structure and participation in traffic management, evacuation and relief planning.

Given the destructive force of this fire and the fact that no lives were lost is a significant achievement. That is not to underplay how devastating the loss of 116 houses is to the residents, home owners and community; however, as the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission emphasised, the protection of human life is, and should always be, the primary objective.

The IGEM also made four recommendations on areas for improvement.

These recommendations relate to the operational management of bushfires. Accordingly, the Minister for Emergency Services has sought the Emergency Management Commissioner's advice on each recommendation.

The Commissioner has developed the following response in collaboration with the chief officers of the Country Fire Authority, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning and the Metropolitan Fire and Emergency Services Board (referred to collectively as "responder agencies").

The Commissioner and response agency chief officers welcome the IGEM Report as an opportunity to further their commitment to continuous learning and improvement in the emergency management sector.

Response to IGEM Recommendations

Recommendation 1

IGEM recommends that the fire agencies review their resource allocation recording mechanisms and systems to ensure that an accurate reflection of resources deployed to an incident at any given time can be ascertained.

The Emergency Management Commissioner and responder agency chief officers accept this recommendation and recognise that the source of the problem it seeks to address is agencies' use of agency-specific resource management systems during multi-agency response to major emergencies.

While there are joint standard operating procedures that set out how the agencies operate together in an integrated manner, the use of these agency-specific systems mean resource allocation recording and tracking in multi-agency and major emergencies often relies on manual intervention and application (for example through radio communications and log books). This can make it difficult to have a near real-time overview of the resources allocated to manage complex incidents.

The proposed solution is to design a single system and integrated processes with the following attributes:

- Develop and implement common systems of work for resource management
- Storage and Single View of relevant resources with pertinent accompanying information to enable appropriate management and allocation
- Reporting capability for audit and improvement purposes
- Ability for all personnel to record availability and capability, and
- Modular process and system design which is expandable to add other functions and agencies.

Emergency Management Victoria will develop a plan aimed at achieving this systems integration in collaboration with the responder agencies.

Maximising the effectiveness of this solution is closely related to Emergency Management Common Operating Picture (EM-COP) system outlined in the response to the IGEM's second recommendation.

Recommendation 2

IGEM recommends that the fire agencies review their documentation system and information recording processes to ensure that all operational activities are captured, and to maintain the accuracy and relevance of all developed products. This includes the need to ensure that all significant points of reference entered into mapping products are geo-coded to facilitate accurate transfer of information from one mapping product to another.

The Emergency Management Commissioner and responder agency chief officers accept the intent of this recommendation. A large part of the solution relates to document and information management processes across responder agencies including integrating data into a single system.

A common operating picture is the solution that can be implemented across all agencies for the 2016-17 summer period and be available in a staged implementation to all personnel involved in emergency management.

EM-COP has been piloted as the single Emergency Management information system built on information sharing and collaboration to improve timely decision making. Moving EM-COP from the pilot to the mainstream environment will assist in overcoming these information management issues that IGEM has identified.

The implementation of EM-COP will also include a significant commitment to training and change management across the sector.

Recommendation 3

IGEM recommends that fire agencies consider an earlier classification of Level 3 incidents for fires that present significant complexity such as was evident in the Wye River-Jamieson Track event.

The Emergency Management Commissioner and responder agency chief officers support this recommendation.

A key consideration in the State Command and Control arrangements is linked to ensuring the correct classification of incidents to ensure relevant resourcing and management structures are in place at the earliest possible time.

The Commissioner will ensure the State Response Controller and Regional Controllers actively oversee the initial assessment of incidents and monitor the potential need to escalate them from a Level 2 to Level 3 incident in accordance with the Joint Standard Operating Procedures 3.14 *Control of Class 1 Emergencies* and 3.15 *Transfer of Control and IMT Relocation*.

This critical requirement will be emphasised in future State Response Controller, Regional Controller, Incident Controller and Agency Commanders briefings.

It has been, and continues to be, a key focus of the Emergency Management Commissioner and chief officers. The Commissioner and chief officers are committed to the continued education and active management of this issue with State, Region and Incident Controllers.

Recommendation 4

IGEM recommends that Emergency Management Victoria and relevant agencies review the response to the Wye River-Jamieson Track fire with a view to preparing case studies of areas of leading practice, and that the developed case studies are then shared with and within agencies at the state, regional and local level.

The Emergency Management Commissioner and responder agency chief officers support this recommendation.

The sector has instituted an end-to-end service delivery review cycle designed to support continuous improvement in the emergency management sector by sharing lessons.

An example of this approach is contained in the latest end-to-end service delivery review for the 2014-15 financial year and was published in two parts:

- Pat 1: Overview and Case Studies
- Part 2: Themes and Insights.

These reports were published in hard copy and are also available on EMV's web-site.

Emergency Management Victoria intends to develop case studies of leading practice from the Wye River-Jamieson Track Fire along with other lessons highlighted from the 2015-16 season for inclusion in the next report and in accordance with the IGEM's recommendation.

The key Wye River-Jamieson Track Fire case studies will focus on:

1. Community engagement and evacuation
2. The operational strategy and tactics adopted as the fire entered Wye River and Separation Creek