



ACT BUSHFIRE TASKFORCE SECRETARIAT

SUBMISSION TO

**THE INQUIRY INTO THE OPERATIONAL RESPONSE TO THE
JANUARY BUSHFIRES**

‘Completion of the Emergency Response’

7 May 2003

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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 |

(1) PRE STATE OF THE 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.

(2) 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 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 Plant 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.

(3) 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.

(4) 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. A team with skills across a range of portfolios was useful in managing this process. Membership of the Taskforce, CERG and Secretariat are listed in Attachment B.

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 has 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 within 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, Master Builders Association;
- Ms Nicola Davies, 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).

ATTACHMENT C**DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND FAMILY SERVICES****Interface between response and initial recovery services² 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 resources required. Limited access to essential equipment including photocopiers,

² 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.

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 ³ 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.
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.

³ "recovery" is used in this table to describe initial recovery, which preceded the longer term process being oversighted by the Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

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	<p>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.</p> <p>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.</p>
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

18 January 2003	<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>
19 January 2003	<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>

20 January 2003	<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>
21 January 2003	<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>
22 – 24 January 2003	<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>

25/26/27 January 2003	Additional staff at the middle management level on active duty providing a central coordination role if needed. Senior management on standby.
28 January – March 2003	Daily conference with key senior management. A decision made to reduce daily briefings to staff to 3 days per week. Commencement of daily information briefings to Chief Minister. Emergency briefing and update disseminated to staff and clients. Routine client activities and Respite services resumed from 29 January 2003. Employee Assistance Program IPS representatives briefed managers on the effects of traumatic events and provided possible coping strategies. Brief prepared on clients who lost equipment through the bushfires. 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. 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.
March 2003	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.

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 firefighting 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 burnt 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"> • Liasing 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.

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.
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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

15 February 2003 to 27 February 2003	<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:

21 February 2003 onwards	<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>
28 February 2003	<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.
28 March 2003	<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).

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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.
4 April 2003	<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. • 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.

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 <u>Communities@work</u> 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	<p>Final detailed MARS survey report received. 403 households were interviewed. Key findings were as follows:</p> <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. 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. 4. Useful information sources to assist bushfire victims were identified, but further effort is required.
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	Liaised with banks to progress and resolve issues identified by individuals and by the Community and Expert Reference Group. Liaised 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.
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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	Secretariat met with Chair of Community and Expert Reference Group (CERG) to discuss concept of a national memorial.
13 March 2003	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.
Early April 2003	The Minister for the Arts and Heritage agreed to assume responsibility for the coordination of bushfire commemoration and memorials.
17 April 2003	Minister for the Arts and Heritage met with Community and Expert Reference Group to discuss memorial ideas and develop options.

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.

ATTACHMENT J

EXAMPLE OF

COMMUNITY UPDATE

AND

**CANBERRA TIMES
NEWSPAPER ARTICLES**



ACT Government

COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 10 Thursday 17 April 2003

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Next Community Update

The next *Community Update* will be published on Thursday 1 May 2003.

For further information on *Community Update*, please contact the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce on 6207 8111 or email bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au

Planning for a 'better' future

Significant legacies coming out of the ACT bushfires will help make Canberra an even better place if used wisely and well, ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, said in a recent keynote address to senior representatives of Government.

"We now have the opportunity to make an even better Canberra following the ACT bushfires," Mr Stanhope said.

"We need to carefully consider and plan what to do about our distinctive assets that are the true 'icons' of Canberra, including the Scouts' Camp at Cottermouth, the YMCA's Camp Sturt, the tree-covered mountains that are now black, Uriarra Crossing, the Murrumbidgee Corridor, Kambah Pool, Namadgi National Park and Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, and other nature reserves and urban parks that have been stripped of life by the bushfires.

"We also need to set priorities on the future of the burnt-out areas, the management of the urban fringe and the softwood forestry industry.

Mr Stanhope said the ACT's extraordinary recovery from the bushfires was not an accident.

"Day by day, week by week, Canberra and the ACT is recovering and rebuilding as the result of some key decisions made by this Government, which laid a platform for a recovery that is now being seen as truly world class," he said.

"Our challenge was to set a clear vision and time frames for the way ahead, motivate community participation, widely share information, effectively co-ordinate Government and non-Government



ACT Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope

resources, and recognise the immense value that 'non kin' support brings to fire affected residents.

"The recovery has been and will continue to be truly community based, and is very much a partnership between many organisations with the Government working as a catalyst and as a co-ordinator.

ACT Bushfire Recovery, chair, Sandy Hollway, said dollars plus momentum are the two essential ingredients for a successful recovery project.

"The ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce was very fortunate because the ACT Government injected the dollars into the recovery process quickly and assisted by the community, provided the momentum for a successful recovery," Mr Hollway said.

"The budget process also is an opportunity to resource and communicate the vision of Canberra and the way forward."

For further information on the recovery process, please call the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce on 6207 8111 or email: bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au ■

Enjoy this BUMPER 12 page issue of your information news, Community Update!

This newsletter and further editions are available from Canberra Connect shopfronts, ACT Government Libraries, ACT Government schools or visit the Canberra Connect website at:

www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au Phone 13 2281

COMMUNITY ASSISTANCE

Bushfire Recovery Appeal distributes funds to eligible households

Close to \$5 million from the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal was distributed to 871 eligible households last weekend, with the remaining eligible applicants to receive cheques by mail this week.

\$780,000 will be distributed to eligible small business, rural properties and community groups after Easter 2003.

The Appeal received over 1260 applications before the first round of funding closed on 3 April 2003 from home-owners, tenants, community groups, small businesses and rural residents. Information on the number of successful small business, rural and community groups will be available after Easter.

"The Board would like to expressly thank the Appeal's volunteers who worked tirelessly at the Recovery Centre in Lyons to help make the process easy for those who have been devastated by the fires," Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal, co-chair, Bishop George Browning, said.

"The volunteers showed patience and kindness to people who were often stressed and very upset as a result of the disaster".

"The volunteers guided these people through the necessary paperwork and they will have received their money today or later this week."

The Appeal has now reached \$7.4 million in banked and pledged funds, Bishop George Browning, said.

"We sincerely thank the people of Canberra and Australia for supporting this Appeal," he said.

"Funds raised will still be gratefully accepted over the coming months and distributed in a second round at the end of June which will top up the original applicant payments and go to any successful appellants."

"I encourage people to continue fund-raising, and there is still time to make donations on the Appeal hotline."

For further information on the Appeal, please contact 1800 182 100.

Appealing the Board decision

"Applicants have a fair and independent avenue to pursue if they are dissatisfied with the decision of the Board," Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal, co-chair, Michelle Thorne, said.

Applicants who have been deemed ineligible by the Board, should receive notification by mail later this week or straight after Easter.

People who wish to appeal the Board's decision can write to the Board of the Canberra Bushfire Appeal c/- GPO Box 515 Canberra City. A form can be collected from the Public Trustee's Office Level 4, 4 Mort Street, Canberra City or at the Recovery Centre in Lyons or from www.canberraconnect.gov.au.

Interstate women's group raises money for Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal

An interstate Asian Women's group called 'Way in Network' has rallied together to donate \$80,000 to the Canberra Bushfire Appeal.

Cecilia Pak from Way in Network says the women's group raised the money from a charity ball held at the Westin Hotel in Sydney on 15 March 2003.

"We heard about the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal through the national media coverage and a press release on the Appeal needing money from the Honourable, Gary Hardgrave and thought we'd like to help families affected by the bushfires," Ms Pak said.

"We organised a charity ball and over 450 guests attended, mainly from Hong Kong, and through an auction and other donations from guests, we raised \$80,000."

Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal, co-chair, Bishop George Browning said the Appeal welcomed all interstate donations and was very grateful that fundraising activities were continuing nationally and the ACT.

"The more money we receive from the community and businesses in Australia and overseas, the more money we will be able to distribute in the second round of distribution to people affected by the bushfires," Bishop Browning said.

For further information on the Appeal, please contact 1800 182 100. ■

Community Update

is a newsletter produced by the ACT
Bushfire Recovery Taskforce about the
bushfire recovery process.

Please feel free to pass *Community Update*
on to your family and friends.

We value your feedback on the content
of *Community Update*, so if there is anything
you would like included in future editions,
please contact

the Taskforce at bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au
or phone 6207 8111.

REGREENING

Chief Minister announces Bushfire Recovery Plant Issue Scheme



Yarralumla Nursery Garden Centre, Garden Supervisor, Amber Howe with some of the trees and shrubs eligible residents with damaged gardens can collect between 8:30am-4:30pm seven days a week.

The Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, has announced the Plant Issue Scheme for residents whose gardens were affected by the bushfires.

The Scheme allows an allocation of trees and shrubs for blocks severely damaged by the bushfires to a value of \$110 per block.

"Many gardens and plants were damaged or destroyed in the ACT bushfires and while the impact of this is not as severe as the loss of life or homes, it has still caused grief and trauma in the community," Mr Stanhope said.

"Residents of the ACT are particularly proud of their gardens and my Government is keen to help people re-establish fire damaged gardens."

You can collect your allocation of plants from the Yarralumla Nursery Garden Centre any time between 8:30am-4:30pm seven days a week. You will need to provide some evidence of ownership of your block, such as a combination of recent rates notice and proof of identity, such as your drivers licence.

For further information, please phone the Yarralumla Nursery Garden Centre on 6207 2444. ■

Garden Regeneration Project



This damaged garden has regenerated following the bushfires.

As part of the ACT Government's activities to regreen Canberra and surrounding areas following the bushfires, various community groups and individuals have met with the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce and formed a Steering Group.

Anglicare, the Phoenix Association and Chapman Residents Action Group, along with the Taskforce are providing support to community activities related to the regreening of the ACT.

Anglicare have already been working very closely with the community and the ABC Radio on regreening initiatives and are pleased to be part of the Garden Regeneration Project.

"This project will give some hope to the community during the bleak winter months ahead," Bea Brickhill of Anglicare said.

"One of our first priorities is to understand the needs of residents, as well as what the community has to offer."

"This will be done by a quick expression of interest form, which will be distributed to allow people to indicate the kind of assistance they require or can give."

Chris Stamford of the Phoenix Association said "It is great to see the Taskforce working with community groups such as ours to achieve outcomes for residents and suburbs affected by the bushfires."

The expression of interest form for interested residents will be available in the coming weeks in *Community Update* and from community groups participating in the Garden Regeneration Project.

Community Update will continue to feature gardening information and regreening activities taking place in the ACT. If you would like to contribute or know of a gardening project, please contact the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce at bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au ■

REBUILDING

Concerned about the tax implications to your fire-affected property?

The Australian Taxation Office have received a number of queries regarding the tax implications to damaged and destroyed properties from residents of fire-affected properties. This includes tax implications of work related items, personal property and repairs to rental properties, discussed below. Following is advice from the Australian Taxation Office for residents with fire-affected properties.

Destroyed or damaged house

Any insurance pay-out you receive for a destroyed or damaged house is not taxable. It does not have to be included as income in your tax return. The pay-out needs to be taken into account for capital gains tax purposes.

If the house was only ever used as your principal residence, disregard capital gains tax as you cannot make a capital gain or loss.

If you acquired the house after 20 September 1985 and you used it for income producing purposes - for example, a rental property - you will need to subtract the relevant cost base from your insurance pay-out to work out whether you made a capital gain or loss. It is likely that you will be able to elect for roll-over relief from capital gains tax or to preserve the pre-CGT status of your property.

If you think you will make a capital gain or loss following the destruction of your property, you can find out more in the Guide to Capital Gains Tax at: www.ato.gov.au

If you are a small business operator, you may be entitled to a range of small business concessions; you can find out more in the booklet Capital Gains Tax Concessions For Small Business at: www.ato.gov.au

Cars and motorcycles

Insurance pay-outs received for destroyed or damaged cars and motorcycles are not taxable. These pay-outs do not have to be included as income in your tax return.

If the car or motorcycle was destroyed and was a depreciating asset used for business or income producing purposes, you may need to include an amount in your assessable income or claim an amount as a deduction. Any insurance pay-out you receive is used to work out the amount to be included in your income or allowed as a deduction.

Work related items

Insurance pay-outs received for destroyed or damaged work related items - for example, computers and tools are not taxable. These pay-outs do not have to be included as income in your tax return.

If the item was destroyed and was a depreciating asset, you may need to include an amount in your assessable income or claim an amount as a deduction having regard to the extent to which you used it for work purposes. Any insurance pay-out you receive is used to work out the amount to be included in your income or allowed as a deduction.

If you used the asset for work, but you also used it for private purposes, any gain or loss that relates to your private use will be treated as a capital gain or capital loss. However, if you used the asset mainly for private purposes any capital loss is disregarded and a capital gain is disregarded if you acquired the asset for \$10,000 or less.

You can find out more in the Guide to Depreciating Assets and the Guide to Capital Gains Tax. at: www.ato.gov.au

Personal property

Insurance pay-outs received for destroyed or damaged items you used solely for your personal use - for example, household goods are not taxable. The pay-out may need to be taken into account for capital gains tax purposes.

If a personal-use asset that was destroyed and cost you more than \$10,000 (or \$500 if the property was a collectable such as a painting or jewellery), you will need to subtract the cost base from your insurance pay-out to work out whether you had a capital gain. Capital losses on personal use assets are disregarded, but you can make a capital loss on a collectable acquired for more than \$500. These losses can only be used to reduce capital gains from collectables.

Repairs to rental property

You can claim a deduction for the cost of repairs to a rental property if they do not involve substantial reconstruction or substantial repair or the replacement of an entire structure such as a fence.

If the repairs are deductible, you need to reduce your deduction by any insurance pay-out you receive.

For further information, please visit the ATO's website at: www.ato.gov.au 'and click on Tax and Bushfires' on their home page or call 13 1142 from 8:00am - 6:00pm weekdays. ■

Having difficulties with your insurance?

Are you experiencing difficulties negotiating your claim settlement with your insurance company?

The ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce has an insurance advisor who may be able to assist you resolve your claim, or alternatively provide advice on where to seek further assistance to resolve your claim.

For help, please contact the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce's insurance advisor on 6207 9035. ■

Are you still deciding whether to rebuild or move?

Community Update will focus on planning and building in future editions, which will help you make a decision to rebuilding or move.



ACT Government

COMMUNITY UPDATE



Issue No. 10 Thursday 17 April 2003

REBUILDING

Useful contacts

ACT Recovery Centre — for referral to support services.

67 Launceston Street, Lyons, phone 6205 5733 (weekdays 9am-6pm, Saturdays 10am-3pm).

ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce

email at bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au or phone 6207 8111.

Canberra Connect — for the latest bushfire and recovery information.

Phone 13 22 81

(weekdays 8am-8pm, Saturdays 9am-5pm) visit www.canberraconnect.act.gov.au or call into shopfronts at Civic, Woden, Belconnen and Tuggeranong (weekdays 9am-5pm).

ACT Health public health inquiries.

Phone 6205 1700

WorkCover — for inquiries on fire-damaged materials on properties, including asbestos.

Phone 6205 0200

BEPCON — for building requirements including site plans, phone 6207 6262 during business hours.

PALM — for information on demolition, planning, building and insurance advice, phone 6205 5738 or visit www.palm.act.gov.au

Environment ACT — for information on access to Canberra Nature Parks, Tidbinbilla and Namadgi Phone 6207 9777 ■

Contact us

If you have any questions on *Community Update*, or would like to submit articles for future editions, please contact us at: Ground Floor, ActewAGL House, 221 London Circuit, Canberra City, ACT, 2601, phone: 6207 8111, fax: 6207 9021 or email: bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au ■

Improving the look and safety of areas around Duffy shops



Canberra Urban Parks and Places are managing a maintenance program to improve the look and safety of the areas surrounding the Duffy shops.

A maintenance program for Duffy shops has been developed to improve the look and safety of the areas surrounding the shops.

So far, walls surrounding the rear of the shops have been repainted and damaged playground equipment has been removed.

While detailed planning will continue, plans for the shops over the next few months include installing two new standard lights in the car park

areas, repairing concrete paving, and creating a mural by Duffy school students on the [repainted] walls.

Work on the playground equipment will start mid May 2003.

For further information, please contact Canberra Urban Parks and Places on 6207 2500. ■

Proper removal of burnt trees

Residents in fire affected suburbs are encouraged to leave burnt trees in their private yards standing until Spring 2003, as in many cases the tree will regenerate.

If the tree is in a dangerous position or likely to cause any danger to public safety, a qualified tree surgeon should be called in to assess the tree for removal or pruning, as well as suggesting a management or maintenance program for the tree.

For trees on nature strips residents are urged to contact CityScape on 6207 1000, and for all other public areas (such as parks) phone 6207 2500.

For information on trees on leased land and private home blocks, please phone Environment ACT on 6207 9777, email:

EnvironmentACT@act.gov.au, or visit: www.environment.act.gov.au ■

REBUILDING

Check the credentials of your builder

A message from David Dawes, Master Builders Association



Steve Douglas from Duffy examines his house plans.

The rebuilding process in the wake of Canberra's devastating bushfires is now getting into full swing and, not surprisingly, our local residential building industry is becoming increasingly busy as it seeks to meet demand.

As demand increases and as our local builders get busier, it is inevitable that some new faces will begin emerging in the Canberra industry - companies or builders from interstate and even overseas. This was certainly the experience in the aftermath of Sydney's damaging 1999 hail storms.

And it is an unfortunate fact of life that in the aftermath of the hail storms some people found themselves dealing with 'tradesmen' who were not appropriately qualified, delivered a sub-standard job and lacked the insurance cover necessary to guarantee poor workmanship could be repaired at no cost to the consumer.

It is in these circumstances that Canberra people need to be a little cautious about who is undertaking building work on their behalf and the circumstances in which that work is being carried out. They should carefully check the credentials of the firms and tradesmen who they are considering retaining to work on their homes.

Canberra people should be particularly cautious in circumstances where companies or tradesmen suggest that they, the person seeking to have work done, take out a building license on their own behalf and have the builders then work for them as contractors. Such an arrangement would mean that the person holding the building license carries almost sole responsibility for the work carried out.

The key questions, which should be considered by people looking to have building work done is whether the people they want to retain are appropriately qualified, licensed and insured. In most instances, the credentials of a builder can be checked by contacting either the Master Builders Association of the ACT or the Housing Industry Association.

It is also important for consumers to check whether the companies they are retaining are suitably insured. If a builder carries the appropriate building indemnity insurance then a consumer can be satisfied that any future problems with the work carried out will be rectified. It is a matter of pride to me that Canberra's home building industry is one of the best in Australia. Our members prove this every year by dominating the annual Master Builders Australia Building in Excellence Awards.

These words of warning are not intended to suggest that Canberra people should deal solely with Canberra-based companies when having their homes rebuilt or repaired. Rather, they are intended to alert people to the pitfalls.

At the MBA in the ACT, we believe it is important to ensure that people already traumatised by the bushfires are not subject to more worries or concerns about the quality or reliability of the companies retained to rebuild their homes.

The best advice we can give people is to **check the credentials of the companies they are dealing with and to satisfy themselves that the companies are appropriately licensed and insured.**

Please contact the MBA on 6247 2099 or HIA on 6249 6366 for further information. ■

How to replace service medals lost in the bushfires?

If you were awarded a service medal and it was lost, stolen or destroyed by the ACT bushfires, you may be eligible to apply for a free replacement medal.

To apply, you must be the original recipient of the award. The only exception is where the award was issued after the death of the eligible person, in which case the widow or next of kin can make an application.

To apply to replace a service medal, please visit the Department of Defence website and download an Application and Statutory Declaration Form at http://www.defence.gov.au/dpe/dpe_site/honours_awards/resources/forms/ac694.pdf

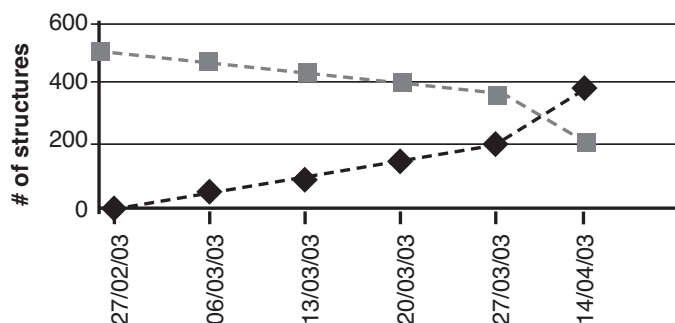
If you would like further information or assistance regarding the application process, please contact 6277 7820. ■

REBUILDING

Blocks cleared in fire affected suburbs

The following graph shows the number of blocks cleared in fire affected suburbs.

**BUSHFIRE CLEARANCE PROGRESS
as at 14 April 2003**



Are you experiencing difficulties with your finance company?

Have you lost household items, which were not insured, but are still subject to finance?

The ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce is interested in receiving any feedback and may be able to assist residents experiencing problems with their finance companies.

If you have any queries, please contact the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce on 6207 8111 or email bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au ■

Hours for Stromlo temporary landfill during April

ACT No Waste hours at the Stromlo temporary landfill are:

Monday to Friday: 7:00am-5:15pm Saturday: 7:30am- 4:45pm

The landfill will be closed on:

Friday 18 April 2003

Saturday 19 April 2003

Monday 21 April 2003

Friday 25 April 2003

For further information on the new landfill hours, please call Bovis Lend Lease on 6205 5682. ■

Help needed to record Canberra's experience of the bushfires

Two projects are seeking your help to record Canberra's experience of the bushfires and its aftermath.

Chapman Residents Action Group, together with five final year social work students from the Australian Catholic University are seeking people to write stories, poetry, create a painting, sculpture, or something as an individual, family or street group.

The Phoenix Association and Australian Catholic University have also joined forces to develop a permanent community history that will help everybody understand and remember what it was like to live in fire affected suburbs before, during and after the bushfires, and through the recovery process.

The history may include themes such as:

- what was lost;
- recovering
- a story from every street;
- what the community did;
- the outside coming in;
- settlements (eg Uriarra and Pierce's Creek)
- schools; and
- community and the media

If you are interested in giving your story, please phone 6288 8368 or 6288 1263 or email mcneill@webone.com.au or alison.young@dewr.gov.au

The Phoenix Community History Group can also be contacted via the Recovery Centre by emailing: jodie.herbert@act.gov.au ■

Public meetings Construction in bushfire affected areas

The ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce has arranged for speakers from the construction industry and Government to talk about the likely impact of the rebuilding process for people living in fire affected suburbs.

The meetings will be held on:

Wednesday, 30 April 2003 from 7:00pm-8:00pm at the

Canberra Royals Rugby Football Club,

1 Liardet Street, Weston; and

Tuesday, 6 May 2003 from 7:00pm-8:00pm at the

Burns Club, 8 Kett Street, Kambah

For further details, please contact the ACT Bushfire Recovery Taskforce on phone 6207 0136 or email karen.white@act.gov.au ■

HEALTH AND SAFETY

Influenza vaccinations for winter

As winter is approaching, ACT Health recommends individuals who are at increased risk of influenza-related complications, should be vaccinated.

The Commonwealth Government provides free influenza vaccine for:

- all Australians aged 65 years and over;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 years and over; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 years and over who have a chronic medical condition.

For these groups, influenza vaccine is provided free of charge, however, the delivery of the vaccine may be associated with a general practitioner (GP) consultation fee.

The National Health and Medical Research Council also recommends influenza vaccination for any individual who wishes to reduce the likelihood of becoming ill with influenza, people with immunodeficiency, including HIV, staff of nursing homes and other health care providers.

If individuals feel that they are susceptible, vaccinations can be obtained from their local GP.

It is important to understand that Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) is caused by a different virus to the influenza virus. Influenza vaccines do not protect against SARS.

If you have any questions regarding influenza vaccinations please contact Health Protection Services on 6205 1700. ■

Controlling ants in fire affected suburbs

Some residents in fire affected suburbs have experienced problems controlling ants. The following article provides information on where ants are found, the types of species found in the ACT and how to control them.

Where are ants found?

Environment ACT says ants are social insects, which live in nests. The nests vary in size depending on their age and the species of ant. They are generally found in the ground, in wood or under rocks, although ants can also nest in walls, fireplaces, under paths and in buildings. They are most active from October to March.

Ants are a very successful insect group with over 1200 species in Australia. All species can be beneficial to the environment - some eat insect pests, such as termites, their nests improve the soil, they quickly recycle nutrients back into the soil and are food for a wide range of native birds, reptiles and other small animals.

Although ants are environmentally important, some can also be pests to people. Their nests and the ants themselves may be considered unsightly, and they may kill or damage seeds or seedlings. Some ants bite or sting, such as the bull ant. Ants can also cause damage to houseplants, nursery plants and crops by cultivating sap sucking insects, such as scale and aphids. Ants use the honeydew produced by these pests as a food source, and in turn protect the sucking insect from attack by predators.

What are the most common species of ants in Canberra?

The most common species of ant in Canberra:

The Black House Ant (*Iridomyrmex glaber*) and **White Footed House Ant** (*Technomyrmex albipes*) These are small black ants 2.5-3mm long. They nest in rockeries, near or under paths, in wall cavities and in potted plants. They eat a variety of foods and are attracted to sweet substances. They give an annoying bite, but do not sting.

Meat Ants (*Iridomyrmex purpureus*) are 12-14mm long and are red/purple and black. They like sunny areas and often build large gravelly mounds. They feed mainly on animal material, and honeydew. They can bite but do not sting and rarely enter houses.

Sugar or Carpenter Ants (*Camponotus* species) are 5-15mm long, they have orange/brown bodies, black abdomens with an orange/brown band and black heads. They nest in decayed moist wood or sometimes in the soil. They feed on dead and live insects, honeydew, household waste and are attracted by sweet food. These ants do not sting and rarely enter houses.

Bulldog or Bull Ants (*Myrmecia* species) have red bodies and black abdomens. They are about 20mm long. These ants can cause a painful sting. They rarely enter houses and are usually found in the garden or bushland areas.

Argentine Ants (*Iridomyrmex humilis*). Are about 3mm long and are light to dark brown in colour. They do not have the formic acid smell ants usually have and are very active in their movements.

How to control ants?

Sanitation

Sanitation is important in preventing infestations by ants. Inside the house, pet food bowls, dirty dishes, food crumbs on the floor, benches or tables and sap sucking insects on indoor plants can all attract ants. Outside the house, unemptied rubbish bins, food and old drink cans also encourage ants. Keeping these areas clean and controlling sap sucking insects indoors will greatly reduce the chance of ants becoming a problem around the house. Placing pet food bowls in a tray of water may lessen the problem.

Chemical control

Chemical control may be warranted if a persistent infestation of ants causes a problem/nuisance.

There are several options available:

- using a commercially available or homemade ant bait may be all that is required.
- if the ants are more persistent, then the ant nest may need to be chemically treated. This treatment can be carried out by the householder if desired but seek professional advice first.
- the application of chemical barriers between the nest and food source can be used where it is impossible to treat the nest.
- application of insecticides to the surfaces where the ants are travelling can also be used but this does not provide very effective control.

Your local garden centre can recommend appropriate controls and insecticides.

The next edition of Community Update will publish an ant bait recipe.

For further information on ants, please phone Environment ACT on 6207 9777, email: EnvironmentACT@act.gov.au, or visit: www.environment.act.gov.au ■

HEALTH AND SAFETY

It's time to think about yourself



Bushfire Recovery Centre Director, Chris Healy says there are many decisions to make now around rehousing and this affects our capacity to concentrate at work and at home.

If you have not had much time to pay attention to your thoughts and feelings about things you experienced and saw in the firestorm, now is a good time to do it.

Professor Beverley Raphael, Director of the Centre for Mental Health, NSW, visited Canberra last week and provided some helpful information on the mental health effects of the firestorm.

Professor Raphael, who has worked on disasters such as the Granville train crash, Ash Wednesday fires, Newcastle earthquake and Bali bombings, believed Canberra residents are in a good position to recover.

"This is a very strong community, Canberra, with a lot of resilient and courageous people. From what I've seen and heard, there's a lot of community spirit which has provided support," Professor Raphael said.

"But the trouble is it has to be there for a long haul. Everyone comes together in the beginning but keeping it up is a bit difficult."

She said post-traumatic stress disorder might be diagnosed a month after a life-threatening event in which someone continued to suffer acute symptoms such as being preoccupied with fear, being highly aroused and also, paradoxically, feeling numb.

"The majority of people settle over time. They don't forget what's happened but their mind isn't stuck on it, preoccupied with it," she said.

"In post-traumatic stress disorder, our mind is locked into it, sometimes our feelings are shut down because we're so afraid of re-experiencing it again. And sometimes we're very hyper-alert."

The rate of post-traumatic stress disorder varied between disasters but five to ten per cent of survivors could be suffering from that and/or chronic depression.

The difficulty with the Canberra bushfires was that it wasn't "one shocking event" but a disaster that would continue to reverberate. Professor Raphael

said most people would not feel truly recovered until they were living in their own permanent home again.

"Deep inside, when something like this happens what people really want is things to be the way they were and it takes us a while to know that's not going to be the case," she said.

"So a lot of the angry, irritable feelings and some of the more difficult things that come up at this time, are to do with people gradually confronting that - they won't have the same house again, it won't be the way it was, they won't have those possessions."

"But on the most part people deal with that well."

The positives of the fires might be that people had a real chance to assess what was important in life.

Bushfire Recovery Centre Director, Chris Healy, said that the demand for counselling sessions after the January 18 firestorm had been manageable but that might be because not all affected people were seeking them out.

"I'm thinking of some men, for example, who have done their best to remain strong for their families, but who are now not travelling well," Ms Healy said.

"Children will often not talk about their anxiety and depression, for fear of adding another burden to their worried parents. Women may choose not to speak to their partners and relatives about the stresses of living in cramped temporary accommodation."

The Recovery Centre is providing a series of opportunities for men, in particular, to talk about matters important to them.

"Many men still worry about the decisions they made around staying or going on the night of the fire," Ms Healy said.

Parent networks were involved in distributing information after the disaster. E-mail groups and informal meetings for women were also being organised.

"There are many decisions to make now around rehousing and this affects our capacity to concentrate at work and at home," Ms Healy said.

She said that those living in burnt-out suburbs are also being considered.

"Their homes and gardens were damaged; many who have lost their neighbourhoods face change and uncertainty," she said.

People struggling with flashbacks, nightmares, or sleep disturbances, and people still feeling jumpy and anxious or distressed in other ways, can get help to assist them through this.

Parents and relatives can consult with counsellors as to how to help their children and loved ones.

Counselling services for adults and children are available through the Recovery Centre on phone 6205 5733.

School counsellors are available through schools.

Murrungu Men's Health Centre is providing a program for men and can be contacted on 6230 6999.

The University of Canberra has developed a program for individuals, couples and family members (not including young children) called Rebuilding Personally: A Group Program to Help Survivors Cope with the Psychological Impact of the Canberra Fires and can be contacted on 6201 2653.

Parentline also provides information and advice for parents on 6205 8800 or 6287 3833. ■

Professor Raphael's comments are published courtesy of The Canberra Times.

EVENTS

Community spirit shines through at barbeques for bushfire residents



Thrills and spills on the jumping castle.

Duffy fun day

Hosted by Duffy Primary School, the fun day was designed for families to relax, have fun and share stories with others who had been affected by the bushfires.

Around 400 people attended the fun day, which enabled the Recovery Centre Duffy team to gain valuable community feedback on the future needs of residents affected by the bushfires and ideas for upcoming events.

Kambah community BBQ

The Kambah Residents Group organised a BBQ at the Kambah Adventure Playground on Saturday, 12 April 2003.

Organisers of the BBQ said it was a great success, with over a hundred residents attending the BBQ and children given donated toys and books from the community.

Helium balloons and face painting were also a big hit!

Uriarra Settlement fun day

Coordinated by the Uriarra Community Organisation, the Uriarra Settlement fun day was attended by recent and former residents, as well as people from other rural settlements and Recovery Centre workers.

The Country Music Association provided live music and residents took every opportunity to enjoy the good weather, company and fun.

For further information, on these events, please visit the ACT Recovery Centre at 67 Launceston Street, Lyons between 9:00am-6:00pm (Mon-Fri) and 10:00am-3:00pm (Sat) or phone 6205 5733. ■

Last weekend the ACT Recovery Centre coordinated three events to assist rebuild the spirits of families affected by the bushfires. These are detailed below:



One of the super-hero's emerging after the bushfires.

EVENTS

Information night on the Stromlo Forest Review

The Weston Creek Community Council is hosting an information night on the Stromlo Forest Review from 7:30pm on Wednesday 14 May 2003 in the auditorium of the Royals Football Club, Weston.

The information night will include a presentation by Planning and Land Management.

To register, please phone the Weston Creek Community Council on 6288 8975, fax 6288 9179 or email info@wccc.com.au

Bushfire EVENTS

Is your community organisation running a bushfire related event?

Community Update can promote community events relating to bushfire recovery activities.

If you would like to include details of your community event in the *Community Update*, please email bushfirerecovery@act.gov.au

Tidbinbilla opened for limited public access



Chief Minister, Jon Stanhope, has announced that Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve has partially reopened to the public from 9:00am-6:00pm seven days a week.

"Canberrans can now return to Tidbinbilla's Visitors Centre and the main picnic area," Mr Stanhope said.

"Visitors to Tidbinbilla can expect to see a number of Eastern Grey kangaroos, a few surviving emus, a great deal of birdlife, including birds of prey such as the wedge-tailed eagle, and reptiles such as skinks.

"Visitors will also see first-hand the effects on Tidbinbilla from the fires and how it is beginning to recover."

Other parks and recreational areas now open include: • Casuarina Sands; • Point Hut Crossing; • Tharwa Bridge; and • Angle Crossing

Within Namadgi National Park areas open include:

- Boboyan Road; • Orroral Valley Road;
- Old Boboyan Road; • open grasslands of the Orroral Valley below the tree line;
- open grasslands of the Gudgenby Valley below the tree line; • Yankee Hat Aboriginal Art Site;
- Yerrabi Trail; and • unburnt southern areas, including Naas Creek upstream of Horse Gully Hut, Grassy Creek, Long Flat and the Mount Clear Campground.

Barbeques are available at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve, Cotter campground and Orroral Tracking Station.

For information about national reserves and parks reopening, please call Environment ACT on 6207 9777 or visit www.environment.act.gov.au

KIDS PLAYGROUND



'Lucky' the koala

Lucky the koala is continuing to improve and the hair on her back has started to grow back very quickly. Her burns are healing and her keeper Simone and vet, Dr Sue are rubbing special cream on her back to help prevent any infection. **Lucky's** usual vet, Dr Will, is away for a couple of weeks and Dr Sue is taking wonderful care of **Lucky** in his absence.

Although she continues her physiotherapy and continues to climb, she still won't walk on the 'parallel branch' that is in her enclosure. Despite this, she is eating very well!!! Her friend Matt spends hours every third day searching for appropriate gum leaves for her, and **Lucky** is extremely grateful for all Matt's efforts.

Lucky has a new favourite game - she tries to take the hat and sunglasses off her keeper, Simone's head! She is very cunning when playing this game and looks for any opportunity to grab them!

A letter from Ella & Bamma

the teddy bears who are visiting children affected by the bushfires from the United States

Dear Mum and Dad,

No, 'Mum' is not a spelling error - that's what Australian children call their moms. I told you they speak funny over here, but we are learning!

This has been a really exciting week with lots of new people to meet, and places to visit, and things to see and do, and learn. At times it has been quite scary because we worry that we won't be understood or we will do the wrong thing but so far so good.

Last Friday we were on a national breakfast television show called Sunrise. They had heard about all the teddies that have been sent here from all over the world so they wanted to find out more about us. It was fun to be famous for five minutes but not every day.

We have not started at our new school yet because it is now the Easter vacation (oops - holidays) but we will soon. What happens if we don't know what the other kids know? Will they think we are dumb?

Although it is fall (oops - Autumn) here, the days are really lovely and mild and it is great fun to go scrunching through the leaves and scatter them everywhere. We have been told the weather will turn much colder after ANZAC Day on April 25 2003, so we have to do some shopping for some warmer clothes. ANZAC Day is a day Australia recognises the return service men and women who fought in the wars. I wonder if there is an Abercrombie and Fitch store here?

Bamma wants to get an Akubra hat and a drizabone - I wonder if they make them for teddies?

Love Ella and Bamma



ATTACHMENT K

**ACT BUSHFIRE
RECOVERY TASKFORCE**

ACTION PLAN



ACTION PLAN

FEB 2003

INTRODUCTION

On 18 January 2003, the ACT experienced an unprecedented fire disaster. The mission of the Taskforce is to lead and facilitate the efforts of individuals and the community as a whole to recover from this disaster.

The recovery will involve considerable rebuilding and restoration, but should not aim simply at a return to the pre-bushfire situation. Apart from the fact that this may not always be feasible, the objective should be a Canberra more secure and revitalised, having learnt the lessons of the disaster and, moreover, having captured and built upon the community spirit, cohesiveness and pride which the fires brought to the fore.

The Taskforce therefore looks not just to a return to the past but to position the ACT better for the future.

As the principal advisor to Government about the fire recovery process, the Taskforce has set out the following goals and principles.

GOALS

The Recovery Taskforce, in partnership with the Government and the community, will work 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
6. learn lessons from this event so the ACT Community moves forward positively

PHILOSOPHY / PRINCIPLES

The following will guide how the Taskforce goes about its business:

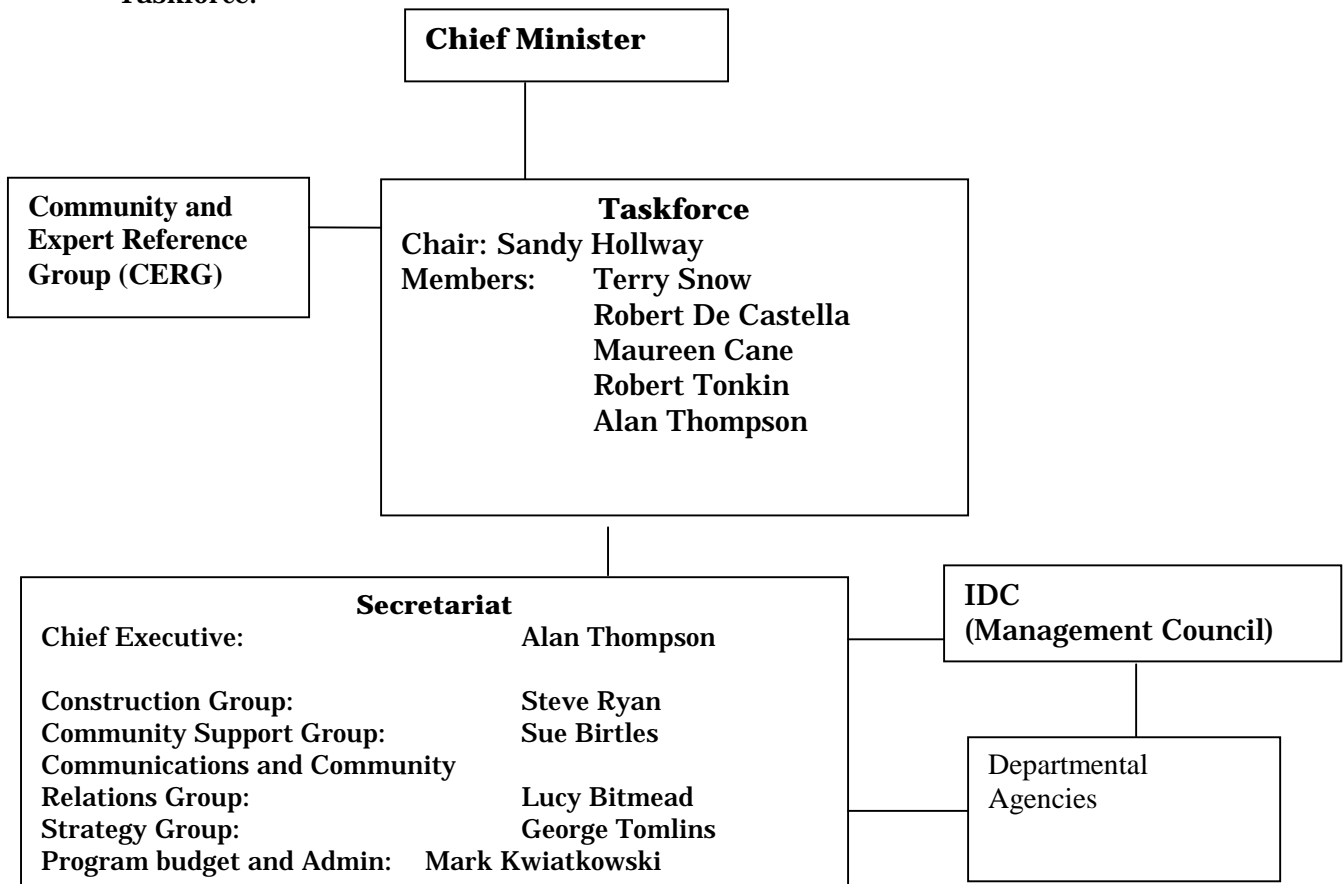
- being decisive, and ensuring that speed and efficiency is a focus of the rebuilding and recovery process;
- driving the whole recovery process, whether by picking up issues itself, providing coordination with other organisations or supporting them in taking recovery action;
- building an Alliance of key contributors to the recovery process including business and community groups so that the ACT community as a whole takes the recovery challenge together as a united team
- being inclusive, and responding to the issues raised by the community;
- ensuring constant communication regarding the activities of the Taskforce;

- ensuring recovery takes place in a way that people are empowered to help themselves;
- giving people real options and ensuring people can make informed choices;
- respecting the needs of different groups in the community; and
- acknowledging the different timeframes of individuals involved in the rebuilding and recovery process.

An important philosophical point is the appropriate role of government and of the Taskforce as an advisor to government in the recovery. In some respects this will involve direct intervention (eg. in emergency support to people who lost their homes), establishment of necessary facilities (eg. disposal sites for waste) special arrangements (eg. for overall project management of the cleanup). In other respects, however, the best approach will be to clear the way for people to make and implement their own individual decisions (eg. streamlining approval processes for the rebuilding of homes).

STRUCTURE OF THE TASKFORCE

The diagram below outlines the organisational and reporting structure of the Taskforce:



1. Taskforce

The membership of the Taskforce includes:

- Mr Sandy Hollway (Chair)
- Mr Rob de Castella, representative of people whose homes were destroyed
- Mr Terry Snow, Executive Chairman of the Canberra Airport Group
- Ms Maureen Cane, Chief Executive Officer of Communities@work
- Mr Robert Tonkin, Chief Executive of Chief Minister's Department, ACT Government
- Mr Alan Thompson, Chief Executive of the Bushfire Taskforce Secretariat

The Taskforce is a deliberately small group, able to grasp issues quickly and formulate advice to Government. It has already begun to do so.

It must operate with excellent knowledge of community views and concerns and outreach into the community, and in this will be greatly assisted by the Community and Expert Reference Group.

2. Community and Expert Reference Group

The Community and Expert Reference Group comprises representation from each of the areas where there has been a major impact, including the rural areas, and people in a position to provide expertise and to assist with the recovery.

Membership includes representatives of those who have lost homes and property; rural lessees; those from the community sector, from the business sector, from unions, those with expertise in planning, architecture and the environment; and relevant Commonwealth stakeholders and representatives. The members of the Reference Group are:

- Elizabeth Whitelaw, Minter Ellison (Chair);
- David Dawes, Master Builders Association;
- Nicola Davies, Conservation Council of Canberra and the South East Region;
- Peter Malone, Trades and Labor Council;
- Karla Ries, Duffy Primary School Parents and Citizens Council;
- Chris Peters, ACT Chamber of Commerce;
- Catherine Townsend, Institute of Architects;
- Claire Middleton, ACT Div Planning Institute;
- Liz Tilley, Duffy resident;
- Jeff Carl, Weston Creek Community Council;
- Daniel Stubbs, ACT Council of Social Service;
- Richard Tindale, Business;
- Joanne Matthews, Kambah resident;
- Tony Griffin, Rural Lessee; and
- Ms Annette Ellis, Commonwealth Member of Parliament.

The key role of the Group is to support the work of the Taskforce and to be a principal focus for stakeholders to raise and discuss issues.

The role of the Reference Group will be 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.

3. Canberra Bushfire Recovery Taskforce Secretariat

The Secretariat has been established to support the Taskforce in its activities.

It is important to recognise that the Secretariat is not merely an administrative unit supporting the Taskforce and Reference Group meetings but a strong policy and program management team to lead the recovery. A team from ACT Government has been brought together and is located at ACTEW House, London Circuit Civic. The structure of the Secretariat includes:

Chief Executive (Alan Thompson):

Responsible to the Chair of the Taskforce and to the Chief Minister for the support of the Taskforce and the direction of the Taskforce Secretariat.

Construction Group (Steve Ryan)

Coordination of the cleanup of sites and infrastructure restoration (immediate and permanent). Coordination 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 (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 (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 (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.

Project Management and Budget (Mark Kwiatkowski)

Provision of project management, budget and administrative support for the Taskforce and secretariat. Secretary to the Taskforce.

BUDGET

A budget submission to Government will be proposed urgently costing (as best it can be estimated) the main actions needed for recovery. This should seek to take a 'whole of Government' view so that the Government can have an understanding of the overall likely costs.

Naturally, implementation of programs and actions will often – and better – be undertaken by the relevant line agencies rather than the Taskforce. The role of the Taskforce is to encourage and coordinate a unified tackling of the recovery challenge, not to supplant the responsibilities of agencies, their accountability to their Ministers and their direct role in the recovery of the ACT from the fires.

Regarding the work of the Taskforce itself, the budget for the work of the Taskforce should be determined, based upon the Action Plan. Because of the inevitable uncertainties about the precise dimension of the task, it should include a contingency. While the possibility should be recognised of the Taskforce coming back to government for extra funds for significant unforeseeable needs, the allocation of the budget would set an indicative ceiling and facilitate the Taskforce getting on with the job.

ACTION PLAN

1. SUPPORT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANTLY IMPACTED BY THE FIRES

Key issues:

The very real trauma of the fires and of 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 to this, plus 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
- 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
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 will 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.

2. 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:

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	When Ongoing	Who* 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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:

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 callcentre because of the high recognition of these within the community. Ensure that formats such as frequently asked questions are used

When
Feb 03 &
Ongoing

Who
Communications
and Community
Relations

through this process

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:	Directory of services bulletins to be posted at least weekly in 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.

6. 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
- 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	May 03	Secretariat and

and government agencies during and after bushfires, and drawing widely from the experience of affected people, review current advice manuals		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:	<p><u>NSW guide for councils, planners, fire authorities, developers and homeowners</u> produced by the rural fire service and planning NSW is being assessed</p> <p>A Web search is underway</p> <p>Mapping is underway</p>
Government and community response:	<p>Expert briefings have been obtained from interstate experts</p> <p>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</p>

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.