

Halls Gap Resilience Group

A sub-committee of the Community Association of Halls Gap

Submission to the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee

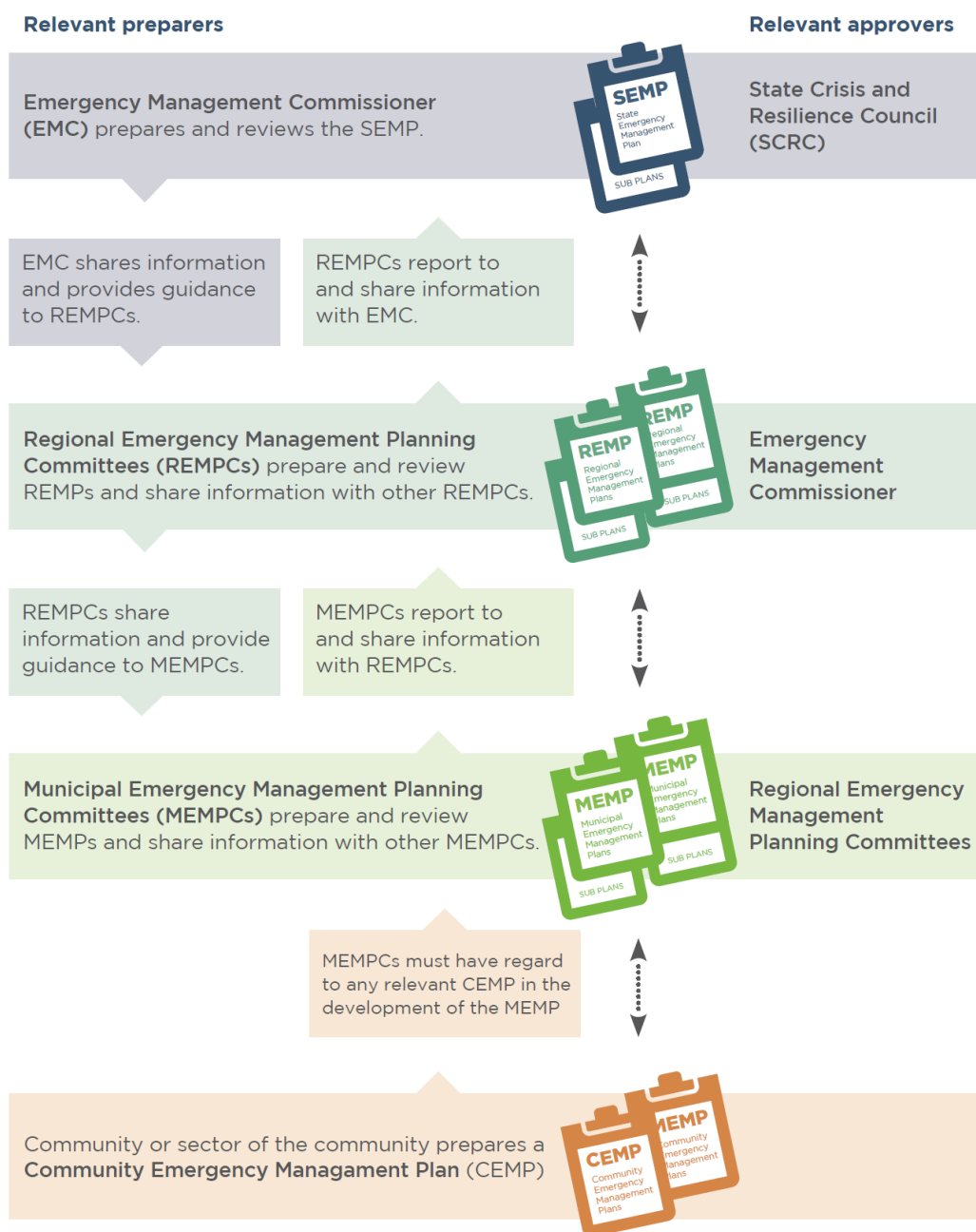
1 Background

The structure for emergency management planning is provided in the SEMP (see Figure 1.)

The upper levels are 'top down' i.e. the SEMP provides the framework for the REMPs, which in turn provide the framework for the MEMPs.

However the lowest level is 'bottom up', as communities are the entities that all the upper level plans are targeted to protect, and every community is different.

Figure 1: SEMP Planning Hierarchy



Source: Victorian State Emergency Management Plan, p.15

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In this context, Community Based Emergency Management (CBEM) is central to EMV's approach - see <https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/how-we-help/community/community-based-emergency-management>.

The first two principles that underpin the community based approach are:

- Each community is unique, with existing and evolving levels of safety and resilience.
- Locally tailored planning and engagement processes are to support community and organisational leadership, through the development of mutual goals and solutions.

Consistent with the first principle, Halls Gap is different than most other communities in the Northern Grampians Shire. For example,

- it sits immediately below a dam wall which represents a unique risk, and
- 95% of its residents are visitors during peak tourist season.

No other community in the Northern Grampians has these characteristics. They mean that emergency management plans and processes are sometimes required to be locally tailored to meet community-specific needs. This does not imply that there is anything wrong with the existing emergency management plans and processes. It simply means that they need to be adapted to address Halls Gap's differences.

2 An Emerging Problem

In the Resilience Group's experience, some (not all) emergency management agencies appear reluctant to accept community based emergency management.

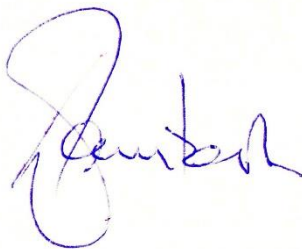
They appear to believe that policies, plans and processes developed at municipal level (or higher) are all that is required, and anything different proposed by the Halls Gap community should be passively or actively resisted. This is likely to be because an agency responsible for a given emergency does not want emergency messages over which it has no control being issued by a third party.

Examples of the problem, based on the two differences described above, are provided in Table 1 (attached.) These examples are not intended to be complaints. They are simply intended to demonstrate the differences in perspectives between emergency management agencies and the Halls Gap community.

3 Request for Clarification

The Resilience Group would like the MEMPC to clarify the following:

1. Does the MEMPC subscribe to the EMV's community based emergency management approach?
2. If so, are the agencies that make up the MEMPC prepared to commit to work with the Resilience Group in developing mutually-agreed locally-tailored community emergency management solutions, where they are needed? (If the agencies commit, the Resilience Group will commit to not use an emergency management solution that has not been mutually-agreed with the responsible agency. However, if the agency fails to provide feedback on how a solution can become mutually agreed, within four weeks, the Resilience Group may proceed with the solution.)
3. Regardless of the above, what support can the Resilience Group expect from the MEMPC and its member agencies going forward?



Rod Lambert

Chair, Halls Gap Resilience Group, on behalf of the Community Association of Halls Gap

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Table 1: Examples of Halls Gap Differences and Agency Resistance

Difference	Example Community issue	Example Agency Response
Halls Gap sits below a dam wall, which represents a unique risk.	<p>At a minimum a <i>Dam Break Evacuation Plan</i> is needed, as the time required for evacuation may be greater than the time it takes to flood the valley.</p> <p>More generally, there is no formal Halls Gap <i>Evacuation Plan</i> for any emergency, other than the relevant JSOPs, which do not meet the dam break need. Access and egress are a major priority for the CFA, which attempts to ensure that Grampians Road is always free of fallen trees and branches. Similarly the Department of Transport views Halls Gap as a high risk town from an evacuation viewpoint.</p>	<p>NGSC (2021): An evacuation plan is not needed as NGSC already has one, which is included in the Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP.) There are links in the MEMP to the 'Joint Standard Operating Procedure' or JSOP.</p> <p>Community reaction: The MEMP and JSOP are necessarily general in nature, whereas Halls Gap has some unique challenges (e.g. a dam break) that justify an <i>Evacuation Plan</i> which is specific to the community, and which supplements the JSOP.</p> <p>VICPOL (2022): No VICPOL response (yet) to a request to jointly develop a <i>Dam Break Evacuation Plan</i>. A preliminary draft was sent to VICPOL on 9 November. (To be fair, they may simply not have the time to deal with the issue right now.)</p>
	<p>Community alerts must be immediate in the event of an imminent dam break. As a minimum, 'push' alert technologies are required to attract the attention of residents and tourists.</p> <p>The 'push' technologies available are</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the VicEmergency app, Emergency Alert, door knocking, and community alert sirens. <p>Inter-state and overseas tourists cannot be relied upon to download the VicEmergency app. VicEmergency and Emergency Alert are dependent on networks that are overwhelmed during peak tourist season (although in February Telstra announced a network upgrade.) Door knocking takes up to 4 hours i.e. is not immediate.</p> <p>Community alert sirens are immediate and are used for dam warnings throughout the state of Queensland.</p>	<p>NGSC: The Fire Committee has considered the issue and is not supportive of sirens. (This meeting was held without Resilience Group knowledge or input.)</p> <p>CFA: CFA policy is generally against the installation of new sirens.</p> <p>Community reaction: A dam break is a unique risk, and the decision to use (or not use) sirens needs to be made on the basis of community risk mitigation, not on the basis of perceptions or policies.</p>

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Difference	Example Community issue	Example Agency Response
About 95% of Halls Gap residents are visitors during peak tourist season.	<p>Based on pre-COVID data, about 350,000 visitors to Halls Gap each year are from inter-state or overseas. They cannot be expected to be aware of Victorian emergency management arrangements (e.g. VicEmergency.) We have a responsibility to inform them about the risks they may face, and how they can respond. They cannot rely on online information due to overwhelmed networks during peak tourist season*, so hard copy handouts in accommodation provider Welcome packs, or at Reception desks or Visitor Book side-tables, and at Visitor Centres, are desirable. To meet this need, the Resilience Group has drafted one-page double-sided factsheets for each key risk. They are based on existing agency factsheets, but adapted to the specific Halls Gap environment, and in most cases are limited to just the information a tourist needs to know (not the more extensive information permanent residents need to know.)</p> <p>* Note: In February 2022 Telstra announced a network upgrade in Halls Gap, but its capacity has not yet been tested as tourist numbers have not yet recovered from COVID. Other network providers (e.g. Optus, Vodafone) will still have inadequate network capacity during peak periods. (This is a network capacity issue, not a network coverage issue, although there are also several 'dead spots' in Halls Gap.)</p>	<p>VICPOL: VICPOL is not supportive of any group putting out independent counter-terrorism or evacuation messaging. They suggest that we use agency factsheets and not alter them in any way.</p> <p>Community reaction: Unfortunately,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the VICPOL evacuation factsheet refers to the old fire danger ratings, has a broken web link, and does not provide the specific emergency broadcasters relevant to Halls Gap, and surprisingly, there is no Australian National Security counter-terrorism brochure available. (A draft brochure was provided to VICPOL on 9 Nov, and again on 25 Nov, but no acknowledgment or response has been received.) <p>Overall, it is not practical to use unaltered agency factsheets.</p> <p>CFA (2021): The CFA withdrew printed <i>Community Information Guides</i> and replaced them with local web pages. This is because online versions were easier to update, and not printing was environmentally responsible.</p> <p>Community reaction: Online services in Halls Gap are overwhelmed during peak tourist season, so printed advice is required. Saving lives should have a higher priority than ease of updating.</p> <p>CFA (2022): No CFA acknowledgement or response (yet) to a request for feedback on a draft one page double-sided bushfire visitor guide. (To be fair, they may simply not have the time to deal with the issue right now.) The draft was sent on 25 Nov.</p>
	<p>Many tourists camp in tents pitched in the sun, as pitching tents under trees is strongly discouraged. Tents give little relief from extreme heat events. Some of the more vulnerable or more active tourists may suffer from heat cramps or heat exhaustion. If not relieved, this may ultimately lead to heatstroke. The Centenary Hall may be an appropriate site for a cooling centre which offers relief to those heat-affected visitors who have no other options for relief.</p>	<p>NGSC**: The NGSC does not offer 'cooling centres' during extreme heat events. There is a risk in encouraging people to leave their homes to travel in a hot car in the heat of the day to a place that may not remain open long enough to cover the hot period. (Council does not have any public facilities that are open late in the evening.) They would then have to travel back home in a hot car in the heat, to a house that has not been cooled.</p> <p>Community reaction: Volunteers could staff the cooling centre well outside business hours using a roster, so that the centre would remain open during the hours of heat, rather than closing at 5pm.</p> <p>** Note: NGSC is currently reviewing its position on this issue.</p>