

**ORDINARY MEETING OF COUNCIL
23 FEBRUARY 2009**

ORDER OF THE DAY

ORDER 3	THE CITY OF PORT PHILLIP'S RESPONSE TO THE VICTORIAN BUSHFIRES
LOCATION/ADDRESS:	N/A
RESPONSIBLE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR:	DAVID YEOUART, COMMUNITY ASSETS AND SERVICES
AUTHOR:	SAM HEWETT, MANAGER ASSET SERVICES (MUNICIPAL EMERGENCY RESOURCES OFFICER)
FILE NO.:	N/A
ATTACHMENTS:	1. OTHER LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTIONS

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. On Saturday February 7 2009, Victoria suffered what is being called the worst natural disaster in its history.
- 1.2. At least 200 lives and 2000 homes and were lost in 400 major bushfires that swept the State on that day.
- 1.3. The immediate response and recovery from such a disaster will take many months with the full recovery expected to take many years.
- 1.4. Local Government has Emergency Management responsibilities for emergency risk mitigation and later, emergency response and recovery.
- 1.5. This report outlines the City of Port Phillip's immediate response to the Victorian Bushfires and makes recommendations on future commitments.

2. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1. On February 7, 2009, Victoria experienced its hottest day on record. The top temperature reached 46 degrees Celsius and came with northerly winds in excess of 100 kilometers an hour.
- 2.2. As many as 400 fires swept Victoria on that day resulting in significant loss of life and property.
- 2.3. While a cool change hit Melbourne and other parts of Victoria later that day, 10 significant fire fronts remained burning for most of the week.
- 2.4. Over the course of the next 7 days, at least 200 lives were lost, with the Victoria Police cautiously estimating that the number could rise to as many as 300.
- 2.5. Almost 2000 homes were lost to fire as well as many other public buildings, public infrastructure, outbuildings and at least 61 businesses. As many as 7,000 people are reported to be homeless as a result of the fires.
- 2.6. In addition, countless livestock, wildlife and domestic pets have also perished or have been destroyed as a result of their injuries.
- 2.7. On February 8, 2009 the State Government (via the Department of Human Services) assumed responsibility for the response and recovery stage of the disaster. The Premier also announced the establishment of a Bushfire Appeal Fund which would be established in partnership with the Federal Government and the Red Cross.
- 2.8. Since the appeal began, approximately \$100million has been raised to go to those affected by the bushfires.

The City of Port Phillip's Response

- 2.9. On Sunday February 8, 2009, the City of Port Phillip hosted the St. Kilda Festival and collected a total of \$14,000 for the bushfire relief, from visitors to the festival.
- 2.10. On Monday, February 9, 2009, the City of Port Phillip announced that it would match "dollar for dollar" the money raised during the St. Kilda Festival bringing the total initial donation to \$28,000.
- 2.11. The Municipal Association of Victoria (MAV) wrote to all Councils on Monday February 9, to advise that they were working closely with the Department of Human Services (DHS) to co-ordinate a response from all local governments in Victoria to assist those municipalities requiring assistance to respond to and recover from the disaster.

- 2.12. At that time, the City of Port Phillip's Municipal Emergency Resources Officer (MERO) was appointed to co-ordinate the external response from Port Phillip to the MAV and DHS. Council's Municipal Recovery Manager (MRM) and Council's Manager People and Culture were appointed to manage internal communications with staff, contractors and volunteers.
- 2.13. The MAV indicated that immediate assistance was sought from qualified emergency management personnel (later placed on hold until a 'gap analysis' was completed). In addition, Council received a request for the following expertise
- Municipal Building Surveyors
 - Environmental Health Officers
 - Trained Counselors
 - Local Laws Officers with animal management experience.
 - Administrative support staff
- 2.14. The following is a summary of the immediate response from Council, management, staff, businesses and residents of Port Phillip towards the bushfire relief effort.

Council

- Council responded to calls from the MAV and DHS by sending 2 Environmental Health Officers (EHO) to Alexandra on Tuesday 10 February for 4 days to assist this community to respond to immediate health and food related issues. Council also supplied a fax/printer/scanner to assist the operations.
- Council responded to requests from the Country Fire Authority and VicRoads by sending two Arborists from contractor CitiWide to the Melba Hwy region to assist to clear the roads.
- A donation of \$14,000 to match the donations of visitors to the St. Kilda Festival
- Council immediately placed fundraising collection tins at each of the Town Halls and libraries throughout the municipality.
- Council's Municipal Operations Centre (MOC) Manager is conducting an audit of its physical resources if and when a call is received for physical resources (e.g. graders, generators, backhoes) to assist the clean up.
- Provision of Council facilities and open space at no cost to groups raising funds for the Bushfire relief for a period of 3 months.
- There are Bushfire Condolence Books at each of the Town Halls and libraries throughout the municipality.

- All fines from overdue library books from Council's Library Service in March are being donated to the Bushfire Appeal (approximately \$2,000)

Management/Staff

- A staff lunch fundraiser held in the auditorium on Friday February 13, 2009, raised \$3,581.30.
- Council staff have begun registering their interest and commitment on a centralized register, to assist the recovery and clean up, if and when a request is received. To date, the following skills are being offered by staff – additional EHO support, animal management expertise, child care workers, bus drivers, administrative support and emergency management staff. Decisions on the deployment of these resources will be made at a future time should a request be received.
- Council staff are collecting animal feed for Coldstream Animal Aid
- Council staff are collecting old mobile phone chargers to send to Telstra (who are co-ordinating their distribution to relief areas).
- Council staff are planning a Summer BBQ in early March with proceeds going towards the Bushfire Appeal.

Businesses/Other

- St. Kilda Festival organizers donated 1,000 bottles of water to emergency services personnel currently fighting the fires and assisting in the relief activities.
- A donation of \$14,000 by visitors to the St. Kilda Festival
- South Melbourne Market Stallholders raised \$333.90 from a fundraiser at the weekend of 14 and 15 February.
- The Oxfam Family Day will now be directing all proceeds from their gathering in Alma Park on 22 February towards the Bushfire Appeal and Council will provide the park at no cost to assist the fundraiser (Council's contribution \$212)

- Council updated its website to direct the Port Phillip Gives information towards the Bushfire Appeal. A total of \$25,000 has already been raised from staff, businesses and residents.

Total City of Port Phillip Contribution (From Council, staff, businesses, residents, stallholders and contractors)

Contributor	Cash Contribution	In Kind/Other Support
Council	\$16,000	\$7,712
Management Staff	\$3581.30	
Businesses/Other	\$39,333.90	\$2,000
TOTAL	\$58,915.20	\$9,712

Port Phillip Community Responses

- Two events held over the weekend of 14 and 15 February were fundraising for the Bushfire Appeal – the Hookstock kite boarding event were donating funds raised from a sausage sizzle and the St. Kilda Cycling Club were donating all entry fees.
- St. Kilda Open Air Cinema is donating \$5.00 from tickets sales to ‘Could this be love’ to the Bushfire Appeal.
- On Tuesday 17 February a fundraising concert for InternationalPEN and the Bushfire Relief was held at the St. Kilda Town Hall.
- On Thursday 19, Luna Park ran a fundraising event for the Bushfire Appeal with rides tickets at half price and with total rides revenue going to the relief fund.

Other requests of the City of Port Phillip

- Council has received the following requests from community groups, corporate groups and individual residents;
 - Providing the St. Kilda Town Hall at no charge to a Salsa dancing event in March with all proceeds going to the Bushfire Appeal (Council in-kind contribution of \$4,500)
 - Providing traffic management for a fundraising motorcycle ride from St Kilda to Ferntree Gully in early April.
 - Council is being asked to donate its 12-seater buses to a finance company in South Melbourne who plan to transport their volunteers at weekends to assist the clean up if and when the request is received.

- Councils are being asked to send messages of support to the Victorian Local Government Association (VLGA) who will pass on messages of support to the affected municipalities.

3. RECOMMENDED OPTION

Council is asked to endorse a recommendation to provide public buildings (including Town Halls) and public parks and open space at no charge, for 3 months, to groups who plan to use the space to raise funds for the Bushfire Appeal.

Council to note the response so far to the Victorian Bushfire recovery and to consider further options of assistance and support in the coming months.

3.1. Criterion for recommendation

The communities that have suffered from the Victorian Bushfires will need recovery support for many years and some individuals of those communities will never return to that community.

The City of Port Phillip has made an initial offer of support while it considers longer term support and assistance options. The above recommendations are a reasonable initial response and gives Council an opportunity to fully consider other offers of support when further information is available in order to inform a more sustainable response.

3.2. Sustainability assessment

SOCIAL EQUITY

Social Pillar	Communities that have suffered as a result of the Victorian Bushfires will need much support and assistance over the coming months and years in order to re-establish themselves. The communities in Port Phillip would acknowledge Local Government's responsibilities to assist to build communities. This report indicates ways that Port Phillip is able to contribute from our community to other affected communities.
---------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

ECONOMIC VIABILITY

Economic Pillar	The measures outlined in this report are a financially responsible initial response. The total cost to Port Phillip ratepayers of the measures outlined in this report (\$16,000) is commensurate with an initial response. Council also has an opportunity to lodge a claim for reimbursements for some support services from the Department of Human Services at an appropriate future time.
-----------------	------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Environmental Pillar	Municipalities affected by the Victorian Bushfires will suffer long term environmental consequences as a result of the fire damage. Any and all requests from affected municipalities to restore and repair their local environment can only benefit the rest of Victoria.
----------------------	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

CULTURAL VITALITY

Cultural Pillar	There are communities that exist in Port Phillip that have a reasonable expectation that if an opportunity exists to assist another community suffering then this should be a priority.
-----------------	-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

3.3. Policy and legislative implications

Councils have a legislated responsibility under the Emergency Management Act 1986 to have a Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) and to appoint a Municipal Emergency Resources Officer (MERO). Council has complied with this obligation.

For larger scale emergencies, the State Government can declare a State of Disaster which allows for significant powers to be delegated to the Co-ordinator in Chief (Chief Police Commissioner). These include power to direct government agencies, restrict movement to an area, compel evacuations and commandeer property.

Where requested (and where able) Councils will support other municipalities with resources to respond to, and recover from, an emergency.

3.4. Risk implications

There are risks associated with Council allocating staff and physical resources to assist with the recovery from the Victorian Bushfires.

There is a risk that affected communities are overwhelmed by well meaning but ill-placed 'volunteers' when the community is not ready for them. The allocation of resources needs to be at the direction of co-ordinating agencies, MAV and DHS.

Occupational Health and Safety and Workcover considerations need to be clearly communicated prior to any deployment. Staff also need to be fully trained in the discipline for which they are being deployed (eg Environmental Health Officers).

Resources should only be allocated when it impacts least on Port Phillip's operations. While Council can suspend some operations for short periods of time in order to assist with the bushfire response, residents and ratepayers have an expectation that normal operations are not disrupted for extended periods.

3.5. Resource implications

The allocation of human and physical resources will be managed by the Executive Team on recommendations from the Municipal Emergency Resources Officer and the Municipal Recovery Manager. Recommendations will be made on evidence that the resource can be spared for the short term and that costs associated with the resources are clearly documented (in the event that Council makes a claim for reimbursement through DHS).

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

4.1. Alternative 1

Council may choose to consider its response to the Victorian Bushfires at a future time when more information is available. That is, Council may choose to suspend any other offer of assistance until it is clear what is likely to be the most appropriate level of support.

As it is still unclear as to the full extent of the tragedy, the months to come will bring more information about what assistance is required to ensure a sustainable rebuilding of affected Victorian communities.

4.1.1. Policy and legislative implications

NA

4.1.2. Risk implications

Risks will be deferred until Council makes its decisions about the level of its intervention.

4.1.3. Resource implications

There will be no resource implication until Council makes its decision on the support it will offer the Bushfire victims and their communities.

5. PARTICIPATION AND ENGAGEMENT

5.1. Internal

5.1.1. The people who have been engaged with in relation to this issue are:

- Executive Director Organisational Systems and Support
- Executive Director Community Development and Planning
- Deputy MEROs (Manager Building Services, Service Co-ordinator Operations)
- MRM (Manager Community Development)
- Deputy MRM (Co-ordinator Meetings and Events)

- MOC Manager (Manager Infrastructure Services)
- Manager Health and Amenity
- Manager Statutory Planning.
- Manager People and Culture
- Manager Culture and Recreation
- Manager Parks and Open Space
- Other Co-ordinators and Staff from across the organisation.

5.1.2. The response from staff wanting to assist has been overwhelming. Most people are eager to do what they can to assist in the response and recovery. Most people acknowledge that the initial recovery phase will be many months coming and that if and when a request is received, they will then be willing to assist.

5.2. External

5.2.1. The external people and/or organisations who have been engaged with in relation to this issue are:

- The Municipal Association of Victoria
- The Department of Human Services
- The Inner South Community Health Service (ISCHS)
- Port Phillip Community Group (PPCG)

5.2.2. The MAV and DHS understand that we have staff and physical resources at the ready and waiting to be deployed should the need arise.

5.2.3. Both ISCHS and PPCG were engaged in relation to support services local people might need, as this disaster touches many people – even those not directly impacted upon.

6. COMMUNICATION

6.1. Council's Website has been updated with some key messages about Council's response to the disaster.

6.2. An article is being written for the Divercity magazine which will outline the response received via the Port Phillip Gives website.

6.3. At a future time, appropriate press releases will outline Council's contribution to the Bushfire recovery process.

7. RECOMMENDATION

- 7.1. That the Council resolve to endorse a recommendation to provide public buildings (including Town Halls) and Parks and Open Space at no charge, for 3 months, to groups who plan to use the space to raise funds for the Bushfire Appeal.
- 7.2. Council to note the response so far to the Victorian Bushfire recovery and to consider further options of assistance and support in the coming months.