

PANDEMIC AND STORM RECOVERY ACTION PLAN

Report Author: Executive Officer – Emergency Management
Responsible Officer: Director Communities
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

The author(s) of this report and the Responsible Officer consider that the report complies with the overarching governance principles and supporting principles set out in the Local Government Act 2020.

CONFIDENTIALITY

This item is to be considered at a Council meeting that is open to the public

SUMMARY

This report provides a final update on the completion of the outstanding components of the Municipal Recovery Plan - Pandemic and Storm Recovery, Version 3 (MRPv3) (Attachment 1). The Municipal Recovery Plan v3 – Actions to June 2024 (Attachment 2) highlights the actions completed and actions that progress beyond the life of the Municipal Recovery Plan – Pandemic and Storm Recovery. It is important to note status updates in the Action Plan summary and highlight the integrated transition of recovery actions into council business-as-usual teams, to ensure there is a sustainable, seamless continuity of community connections and support, along with organisationally embedded recovery lessons.

The MRPv3 covered actions and programs at the local level, to support municipal-wide recovery from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the significant 2021 storm events (June and October). This is an opportunity to acknowledge the investment and work completed and to formally close out the MRPv3.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Formally closes out the Municipal Recovery Plan - Pandemic and Storm***
- 2. Acknowledges the ongoing integration of community support through existing Council programs.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 13 December 2022

- Item 10.8 Municipal Recovery Plan Version 3 for endorsement

Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 14 June 2022

- Item 7.1 Municipal Recovery Plan update for noting

Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 12 April 2022

- Item 7.1 Municipal Recovery Plan update for noting

Yarra Ranges Council meeting 14 December 2021

- Item 7.1 Municipal Recovery Plan for endorsement and Storm Recovery update for noting

Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 14 September 2021

- Item 7.5 Draft Financial Plan 2021/2022 for adoption in principle

- Item 7.6 Community Recovery Committees

Yarra Ranges Council meeting 13 July 2021

- Item 9.1 Urgent Motion – Storm Recovery Assistance

DISCUSSION

Purpose and Background

The Council endorsed the Municipal Recovery Plan in December 2021, it has since undergone three iterations, with the MRPv3 endorsed by Council in December 2022. The current version, MRPv3 was revised substantially from previous iterations drawing on additional consultation, updated storm and pandemic impact data, expenditure data, cultural recovery priorities, and anticipated recovery timeframes. The refined and amalgamated actions in Attachment 2, are based on the feedback from both internal and external stakeholders.

MRPv3 includes six recovery streams that were based on the latest data and consultations at the time of its development, including:-

1. Advocacy
2. People, Culture and Wellbeing
3. Business, Tourism and Economy
4. Planning and Rebuilding
5. Environment and Biodiversity
6. Public Infrastructure

The purpose of this report is to provide the Council with an overview of

- Recovery actions completed
- Six actions that are scheduled to continue beyond the life of the plan

Recovery timeline

Previous reports to the Council have highlighted a key recommendation from the Melbourne University “10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report” to guide this recovery. That is, a five-year framework for the recovery is established to support major disaster recovery efforts.

Reflecting this, MRPv3 provided a basis for many actions to have an end date of 30 June 2024 (3 years post-Storm), with the recognition that some recovery activity would continue with a reduced level of engagement and support for our community.

Recovery activity that falls within this scope, will be conducted and integrated into the existing Council departments as part of business-as-usual operations. Ensuring continuity of community connection and embedding of recovery lessons into council operations.

To date, specific support has been provided to address complex recovery needs in affected communities, during the transition out of the fully operational Recovery Directorate, these recovery activities have been delivered with the existing council Directorate structure.

Table 1: Timeline of recovery status and staffing for completing recovery actions

Date	Recovery Status	Staffing
July 2021 – December 2022	Recovery Directorate fully operational – purpose to deliver recovery actions	Full state funding of staffing of all recovery roles.
January 2022 – June 2024	Transitioned recovery action into business as usual Council structure	Specific and reduced recovery roles state funded.
July 2024 and beyond	Recovery works fully integrated with BAU – no further specific recovery actions.	Dedicated community recovery roles wound up, and recovery integrated into BAU roles within the Council.

Transition to Standard Council Business Structure: Jan 2023 - June 2024

The initial spike in recovery demands following the Pandemic and June 2021 Storm stabilised during the development of the MRPv3, allowing for the ongoing recovery work to integrate across organisational business units.

Recovery Directorate team members transition recovery activities into the existing Directorate structure, with the cessation of the dedicated recovery Directorate on 31 December 2022.

Importantly the Community Recovery Team contracted roles, continued in the Communities Directorate under the Emergency Management team to June 2024, and due to underspend with a Council Support Fund grant, one Project Officer role was extended to December 2024 to continue resilience and response training for community groups.

The sustainable arrangements have been established so that resources are realigned to support outstanding recovery actions are maintained and continue to provide community connection and support, with minimal adverse impact.

Table 2: Integrations of responsibility from Recovery to BAU teams with key contact

Recovery Stream	BAU responsibility	Key contact
1. Advocacy	Strategy & Transformation	EO Advocacy & Government Relations Advisor
2. People, Culture and Wellbeing	Community Partnerships & Investment Creative Communities	EO Partnerships & Community Building EO Creative Communities
3. Business, Tourism & the Economy	Economic Development and Investment	Coordinator Business Investment & Support
4. Planning & Rebuilding	Planning and Rebuilding	EO Planning & Rebuilding
5. Environment & Biodiversity	Resilient Environment	EO Resilient Environment
6. Public Infrastructure	Infrastructure Operations Recreation, Parks &	EO Infrastructure Maintenance

	Facilities	EO Property & Facilities
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The activities have been primarily supported through the resources funded through the Council Support Fund, and/or externally provided Recovery funding. Support for the integration of recovery actions in BAU frameworks has been reflected in team budgets and staffing considerations.

MRPv3 Recovery Activities

The MRPv3 specifies 32 Recovery Activities under the six Recovery streams. A large proportion of activities were completed by 31 December 2023 and 30 June 2024. Two were not progressed due to budgetary constraints. An overview of the progress made against active and completed actions is provided in Attachment Two. There are a total of six actions that have an end date beyond 30 June 2024, as specified in the MRPv3, outlined in *Table 3*

Table 3: Six actions that continue to 30 June 2026

Action	Timeframe	Department
Better Telco & power infrastructure – advocacy	30/06/2026	Advocacy
Business recovery – advocacy	20/06/2026	Economic Development
Betterment of impacted Council assets – advocacy	30/06/2026	Infrastructure
Damaged private property data	30/06/2026	Planning & Building
Planning support to impacted residents	30/06/2026	Planning and Building
Fee waiving for storm impacted landowners	30/06/2026	Planning and Building

Evaluation Summary

To determine the effectiveness of the council's efforts in helping the community recover from the pandemic and the June storm event, several project evaluations have been undertaken.

Below is a summary of the independent recovery evaluations completed.

Regional Community Recovery Committees (RCRCs) Evaluation Report (1 & 2)

As a pilot program, there were several challenges to work through and significant lessons learnt. The evaluation highlights insights and improvements to strengthen Yarra Ranges work in community-led recovery in the future. Based on findings, the Yarra Ranges RCRC Project evaluation produced nine recommendations for consideration.

Review of Yarra Ranges Council recovery efforts following June 2021 severe storm event.

The purpose of this review was to provide a comprehensive and nuanced assessment of the effectiveness of council recovery efforts following the June 2021 storm event, this review makes 15 recommendations based on the findings against three key questions that will support improvements to the effectiveness of Councils recovery efforts in the future.

Enactment of the recovery Directorate

Evaluation of the enactment of the recovery Directorate from completed July 2024, aims to gain clarity in understanding the enactment of the recovery Directorate, focussing on the appropriateness of the activation, the effectiveness of its operations, and the sustainability in the transition to business as usual.

A comprehensive analysis of all three evaluations has been conducted and compiled into a summarised report and will be presented at a later time. The report will highlight the primary discoveries and recommendations stemming from three external evaluations.

Options considered

Only one option was considered

- to complete the actions committed to in the MRPv3 and support the full integration of recovery into business as usual to ensure that communities with recovery needs are supported; and;
- to combine evaluation reports into one evaluation summary to inform Council approach to recovery preparedness and planning.

Recommended option and justification

It is recommended that 26 MRPv3 actions that were completed by 30 June 2024 are closed out, while continuing to deliver on six MRPv3 actions that have an end date beyond 30 June 2024 within the scope of BAU functions

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

At endorsement, delivering the full outcomes outlined in the MRPv3 was expected to cost \$24.5 million. Unlike previous versions of the MRP, MRPv3 was fully funded excluding those actions that are identified in the Advocacy section of the Action Plan.

- Mental Wellbeing Project completion on 30/06/2025: The Mental Wellbeing Project Co-ordinator role will continue for a further 12 months to ensure these deliverables are achieved, funded via the Health & Wellbeing operational budget and aligning with Municipal Health & Wellbeing Planning cycle.
- Planning and Rebuilding on track for completion 30/06/2026: This work will be needed beyond June 2024 through to at least June 2026 as people work through the rebuilding and repairing process and will be part of the respective business units BAU resourcing and operational budgets.

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan: This report contributes to the following strategic objective(s) in the Council Plan: Healthy Connected Communities; Economy, Agriculture and Tourism; Enhanced Natural Environment.

- Council Plan 2021-2025
- Health and Wellbeing Plan 2021-2025
- Municipal Emergency Management Plan 2023
- Australian Institute Disaster Resilience – National Recovery Framework

RELEVANT LAW

Emergency Management Act 2013 - Council is responsible for municipal recovery tier co-ordination, which includes oversight of all recovery environments and associated activities and coordination of community recovery services.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

Economic Implications

Analysis of expenditure data has shown the local economy to have largely recovered following significant downturns in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic and the June 2021 storm event. The continuation of remaining recovery actions has been sustainably absorbed by business as usual and the operational budget.

Social Implications

There have been significant social benefits from the implementation of the MRPv3 notably a further reduction in the experience of trauma by residents. Analysis of expenditure data has shown the local economy to have largely recovered following significant downturns in 2020 and 2021 due to the pandemic and the June 2021 storm, which had an impact on the well-being of medium to small business owners.

Environmental Implications

The environmental impacts on the Yarra Ranges from the June 2021 storm were extensive. The key concerns in the council's jurisdiction remain the rehabilitation of impacted bushland reserves and supporting biodiversity and habitat loss more broadly.

The MRPv3 actions talk to the local efforts and partnerships that will support the environment and biodiversity through habitat creation in bushland reserves and on private property.

The impact of extreme weather events is an increasing risk and Yarra Ranges municipality has been flagged as the second highest impacted municipality for disaster events in the nation according to the Climate Council "Too Close to Home" report. The lessons from the 2021 Storms will help inform our climate mitigation activities.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Consultation with internal and external stakeholders has guided the implementation and completion of MRPv3, including:

- Consultation with key community groups and schools
- Three in-depth and independent evaluations
- Intelligence sharing and monitoring through the Storm and Pandemic Evaluation and monitoring meetings

Project evaluations have shown that community satisfaction with Council approach to recovery is high.

COLLABORATION, INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Council established a municipal recovery governance structure to oversee the delivery of recovery services for both the pandemic and storm response and to support co-ordinated approach. This included representation from the State Government, support organisations and the community. As such, all recovery activities are driven by collaboration, consultation and input from the community,

State representatives included Emergency Recovery Victoria, Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning,

Department of Education and Training, Melbourne Water, Parks Victoria. Other key agencies include the Country Fire Authority, Anglicare, EACH, Eastern Community Legal Centre, Inspiro and Windemere.

As the scale of actions has reduced in MRPv3, a revised, tailored governance structure was implemented with the Storm and Pandemic Recovery Evaluation and Monitoring Meetings (SPREMM).

These meetings have now concluded as the MRP actions to 30 June 2024 are completed. The final six actions for delivery will be governed by respective business units as part of their BAU responsibilities.

RISK ASSESSMENT

As a legislated responsibility of Council under the *Emergency Management Act 2013*, it was a requirement that the Council have oversight and at the time make investments into the recovery efforts within the municipality. All significant decisions toward the MRPv3 were presented to the Council throughout the life of the plan.

The Yarra Ranges MRPv3 was fully funded through Council with the support of the State and federal governments. Previous concerns regarding significant financial risk to Council of funding recovery activities have been avoided through the adaption of the scope of the recovery works.

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

No officers and/or delegates acting on behalf of the Council through the Instrument of Delegation and involved in the preparation and/or authorisation of this report have any general or material conflict of interest as defined within the *Local Government Act 2020*.

ATTACHMENTS TO THE REPORT

1. Municipal Recovery Plan - Pandemic and Storm, Version 3
2. Municipal Recovery Plan v3 – Actions to June 2024