

MUNICIPAL RECOVERY PLAN VERSION 3

Report Author: Executive Officer - Evaluation & Service Planning
Responsible Officer: Director Recovery
Ward(s) affected: (All Wards)

The author 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

The Municipal Recovery Plan (MRP) Version 3 (Attachment 1) details the actions Yarra Ranges Council, in partnership with the State Government, support agencies and community groups, will undertake in response to the storm and pandemic. Through these initiatives, Council will support recovery from impacts of the 9 June storm event and the Covid-19 pandemic.

The first version of the MRP was endorsed by Council at its meeting held on 14 December 2021. This third version of the MRP has been extensively updated with the most recent storm and pandemic impact data, expenditure data, cultural recovery priorities, and details the anticipated recovery timeframe going forward and a revised action plan.

Unlike previous versions of the MRP, version 3 is fully funded excluding those actions that are identified in the Advocacy section of the Action Plan.

The MRP clearly identifies that the majority of the remaining recovery activities will be delivered by June 2024, with a small number of activities continuing beyond this point supporting residents still progressing with rebuilding and ongoing trauma.

With the maturing of this recovery strategy we enter the next phase of recovery, focusing on the medium and long-term needs which can be sustainably supported through Council's standard business units.

Included with this report is Attachment 2 – Progress Against Recovery Activities. This document provides an overview of recovery activities to date and includes the expected completion dates for each stream of recovery activity as it is defined in the MRP.

RECOMMENDATION

That Council

- 1. Notes the recovery activities completed to date; and***
- 2. Endorses the attached Municipal Recovery Plan Version 3.***

RELATED COUNCIL DECISIONS

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 on 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 2021/22 – 2030/31 for adoption in principle
- Item 7.6 Community Recovery Committees

Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 27 July 2021

- Item 9.1 Special Resident Storm Branch Kerbside Collection

Yarra Ranges Council meeting on 13 July 2021

- Item 9.1 Urgent Motion – Storm Recovery Assistance

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this report is to provide Council with an overview of the MRP Version 3, and request Council endorsement of this plan.

Version 3 of the MRP has been revised substantially with updates drawing from additional consultation, data gathering and research.

This version of the MRP includes refined and amalgamated actions in the Action Plan. This rationalisation of actions is based on feedback from both internal and external stakeholders.

In addition, the MRP clarifies the expected timeframe required to support the remaining complex needs in the community and the transition of these ongoing needs into sustainable arrangements within the standard Council structure.

Eighteen months after the June 2021 storm

18 months after the storm event, progress has been made against many of the actions that were detailed in the first two versions of the MRP. The first two versions were ambitious, detailing actions to address both the needs that had been identified and also those that were anticipated (e.g. an increase in family violence).

However, with research indicating that major events require at least a five-year recovery window, it is unsurprising that several recovery priorities remain. On this basis, Council is expecting to have some level of engagement with the impacts of the June 2021 storm for at least a further 3.5 years.

The MRP continues to include six action plans that have been revised based on the latest data and consultation. These are:

- Advocacy;
- Planning and Rebuilding;
- Environment and Biodiversity;
- Public Infrastructure;
- Business, Tourism and Economy; and
- People, Culture and Wellbeing

An overview of the progress made against active and completed actions is provided in *Attachment 2 – Progress Against Recovery Activities*.

Although the number of respondents is reducing, results from Council's most recent *Pandemic & Storm Impact Survey* (undertaken in June 2022) show some improvement in levels of anxiety or trauma relating to the storm (down 9% since June 2021), a reduction in green waste on private property (down 19% since June 2021) and a reduction in dangerous trees on private property (down 3% since June 2021).¹

However, there remains many ongoing issues identified through this survey and several other engagement avenues, the most critical of which are explored below.

Trauma

Many residents that are in contact with both Council Recovery Teams and partner agencies, have discussed feeling anxious when there are strong winds and heavy rain, particularly in relation to the recent heavy rains. 23% of respondents to Council's June 2022 *Pandemic & Storm Impact Survey* -continue to experience anxiety or trauma related to the June 2021 storm.² Trauma in The Hills region is

¹ Yarra Ranges Pandemic & Storm Impact Survey – Jun 2022

² Yarra Ranges Pandemic & Storm Impact Survey – Jun 2022

even higher with 35% of respondents reporting ongoing trauma / anxiety as of June 2022.³

This level of trauma is particularly concerning with the pending closure of the State Government Funded - Recovery Support Program. This service provides case managers to support our most impacted residents with the logistics and stress of coping after a significant event. This service is currently winding down for closure in December and the pre-existing support services are already at capacity. Advocacy has occurred across 2022 and continues, for the continuation of an adequately resourced Recovery Support Program.

The People, Culture and Wellbeing Action Plan includes actions that should help manage this ongoing trauma within the community. However, Council will not be able to mitigate for the loss of the Recovery Support Service if this occurs.

Rebuilding & Temporary Housing

Over the course of the storm event in 2021, 79 homes were deemed non-habitable. Of these 79 homes, only one planning permit has been submitted which was approved in October 2022. Many of these properties have undertaken repairs that do not require a planning application, and nine have been on-sold.

There are still 20 remaining non-habitable properties. The timeline for rebuilding these homes is hard to predict, but it is expected that most of the significant rebuilds would have submitted a planning application (or been sold) within the next 3-4 years. There is also an expectation that the rebuilding process will be hampered by significant delays caused by weather impacts as well as materials and trades-people shortages.

Yarra Ranges has a severe shortage of rental properties, with access to these made harder by the steep increase in rental fees due to increases in interest rates across 2022. As such, temporary accommodation options for those whose homes were seriously damaged by the June 2021 storms are increasingly limited.

This is made worse as insurer provisions for temporary accommodation (rentals) comes to an end. Council will seek to remain connected with 'displaced residents' to maintain an understanding of their overall needs to inform ongoing advocacy for short- and long-term accommodation solutions to the State.

Private Property Clean-Up

The volume of debris remaining on resident properties is now significantly reduced. However, it is evident that a number of resident properties are still struggling to deal with the significant amount of fallen tree debris.

There are a number of projects and partnerships underway which are supporting residents in this situation.

³ Yarra Ranges Pandemic & Storm Impact Survey – June 2022

Recovery timeline

The key recommendation coming from the '10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report'⁴ is that a five-year framework for recovery from major disasters be established. In line with this recommendation, this version of the MRP acknowledges those few areas that will still be evident up to the five-years from the date of the storm. However, the majority of activity will be completed by June 2024, and the available resources have been realigned to limit the impact on Council's standard business teams during this timeline.

Transition to Standard Council Business Structure

The initial influx of actions following an emergency event have now stabilised which is allowing for the ongoing work to be integrated through Council's permanent business units. The transition of this work from the stand-alone Recovery Directorate to the permanent teams commenced in April 2022 and is expected to be fully integrated by the end of December 2022.

Recovery activities by completion date

The table below details the number of recovery activities discussed in the MRP by their expected completion date. It indicates that a high proportion of recovery activities are expected to be completed by June 2023 (53%) and that by June 2024 it is anticipated that 78% of active activities will be completed.

The anticipated timelines shown below are associated with the activities that can be supported primarily through the resources funded through the Council Support Fund, with longer term activities being driven by issues that cannot be determined by Council directly e.g. the time it will take some residents to rebuild.

An overview for all recovery activities is provided in *Attachment 2 – Progress Against Recovery Activities*.

Table 1: Recovery Activities by Expected Completion Date

Active recovery activities by expected completion date							
Activity completion date	Bus Tourism & the Economy	Environment & Biodiversity	People Culture & Wellbeing	Planning & rebuilding	Public Infrastructure	Total	% of total
Dec-22	0	0	0	0	1	1	3%
Jun-23	6	2	6	2	0	16	50%
Jun-24	1	0	7	0	0	8	25%
Jun-25	0	1	1	0	0	2	6%
Jun-26	0	0	1	4	0	5	16%
Total	7	3	15	6	1	32	100%

Source: MRP Recovery Action Plan at November 2022

Note: Advocacy activities have been omitted from this table as there is no confirmed funding for these tasks

⁴ Gibbs L, Molyneaux R, Harms L, Gallagher H C, Block K, Richardson J, Brandenburg V, O'Donnell M, Kellett C, Quinn P, Kosta L, Brady K, Ireton G, MacDougall C, Bryant R. 10 Years Beyond Bushfires Report 2020. University of Melbourne, Melbourne, Australia

Consultation with Advisory Committees

Consultation has been undertaken with all seven of Council's Advisory Committees, with a particular emphasis on the indigenous community, young people and the disability sector.

Regional Community Recovery Committees (RCRCs), who are formally linked to Council in a similar way to the other Advisory Committee until June 2023, have developed clarity on the localised impacts of the pandemic and storm through consultation activities they have led. This information has directly supported this version of the MRP and will inform the continuing distribution of funding as recommended by the RCRCs.

Evaluation of the MRP

To determine the effectiveness of Council's efforts in helping the community recover from the pandemic and the June storm event, Council will ensure a neutral evaluation is undertaken of the activities defined in the MRP.

Options considered

The MRP has evolved over its three versions from an advocacy document that described the preferred level of works required to enable the recovery of the impacted communities, businesses, environment and infrastructure to this version, which is a more modest scope of works, maximising the grant funding for programs and rehabilitation in combination with the budget Council allocated for recovery in May 2022.

Recommended option and justification

This third version of the MRP is built on a suite of data sets, research and consultations that have enabled the development of a strategic plan that is well evidenced in its recommendations. It aligns with the demonstrated pattern of how communities recover from disasters and continues with the work plan agreed to in May with minor modifications associated with changes in funding or context.

This MRP is fully funded, excluding those activities clearly identified in the Advocacy section of the Action Plan.

FINANCIAL ANALYSIS

Delivering the full outcomes outlined in the Municipal Recovery Action Plan is expected to cost \$24.5 million.

Table 2 summarises the forecast cost per action plan within the MRP, identifying that the likely cost to Council of delivering this Plan will be \$6.2M.

Table 2 Revised Cost To Delivery The MRP Version 3

Work Stream	Revised Cost	Revised External Funding	Revised Net Cost to Council
People Culture & Wellbeing	2,841,835	1,479,563	1,362,272
Business Tourism & Economy	664,165	0	664,165
Public Infrastructure	1,593,341	1,009,129	584,212
Environment & Biodiversity	11,138,858	7,980,440	3,158,418
Planning & Rebuilding	740,000	440,000	300,000
Recovery Directorate	6,122,321	6,122,321	0
Storm Branch Collection	1,337,305	1,337,305	0
Evaluation	100,000		100,000
Total	24,537,825	18,368,757	6,169,068

APPLICABLE PLANS AND POLICIES

The MRP has direct links to the recently adopted Council Plan 2021-2025 and is one of the key strategic documents for how Council will achieve its Council Plan objective for a community safety strategy.

The MRP is also complementary to the Health and Wellbeing Plan which aims to deliver major initiatives to improve mental health.

Council has delivered, and continues, to deliver a range of projects and activities that seek to address the impact of the pandemic, guided by Council's Pandemic Recovery Framework. While the majority of actions in this MRP address the impact of the June 2021 Storm, this plan does include a number of significant actions that also address the impact of the pandemic. These actions have been included where the impact of the pandemic and storm, and undoubtedly the increasingly frequent weather events, have compounded each other.

RELEVANT LAW

Not applicable.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS***Economic Implications***

Analysis of expenditure data over the first half of 2022 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. However, future economic performance is uncertain with numerous factors underway that are outside the control of government including high inflation, rising interest rates, high oil costs, rising energy costs and the possibility of a recession.

Social Implications

There should be significant social benefits from the implementation of the MRP, notably a further reduction in the experience of trauma by residents from the most impacted areas as well as increased resilience and community capacity building through activities such as those championed by the RCRCs.

Environmental Implications

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

The MRP actions talk to the local efforts and partnerships that will support the environment and biodiversity through habitat creation in Council bushland reserves and on private property. These projects will be monitored and evaluated to improve our understanding of how best to support local species through these types of programs.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

While no whole-of-municipality consultation has been undertaken to inform this version of the MRP, its development has been informed by:

- feedback from Council's seven advisory groups;
- results from three iterations of the Storm and Pandemic survey;
- an Indigenous community engagement event;
- surveys and consultation undertaken by the four Regional Community Recovery Committees; and
- direct feedback through our recovery partners and impacted residents.

This provides a high degree of confidence that these actions are those that will be of greatest community benefit.

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 a coordinated 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,

Community Recovery Committees, township groups, Council's standard advisory committees and government agencies.

State representatives including 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 have reduced in the third version of the MRP, a revised, tailored governance structure will be implemented.

Some of the more unique approaches that Yarra Ranges has undertaken to date to ensure effective and accessible recovery services includes:

- Pop-up community hub model that was developed to provide a COVID safe means of engaging residents;
- The *Re-imagining Your Rebuild* model that has enabled the most impacted residents to engage in a highly trauma-informed approach to support the rebuilding process;
- '*Hard Place/Good Place*' augmented reality project for young people impacted by the storm; and
- The *Private Property Clean Up Partnership* model developed with not-for-profit organisations and recovery support agencies to enable vulnerable residents to have debris cleared from their properties.

RISK ASSESSMENT

The Yarra Ranges Council MRP is now a strategy that is fully funded either through Council or with the support of the State and Federal Governments excluding those activities described in the Advocacy section of the plan. Previous concern about there being a significant financial risk to Council of funding recovery have been avoided through the adaptation of the scope of works.

The risk associated with the level of direct involvement from State partners is of current concern due to a change in focus caused by the extensive flooding across Victoria.

There is also a current risk that recovery for some residents requiring case-management and some other specialist support may be hindered by the reduction in support services being funded by the State Government.

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. Attachment 1 – Municipal Recovery Plan Version 3
2. Attachment 2 – Progress Against Recovery Actions