



A Report to the ACT Government on

The Recovery Process for Canberra's Bushfire Emergency 18 - 28 January 2003

**By
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Acknowledgements:

Research compiled by Dr. L Tonkin, Research & Policy Unit with assistance from Sgt P. Laidlaw, SRS, ACT Policing.

Acronyms

AC	Alternate Controller
ACTAS	ACT Ambulance Service
AFP	Australian Federal Police
ASNSW	Ambulance Service of NSW
CPO	Chief Police Officer
DEYFS	Department of Education, Youth and Family Services
EMC	Emergency Management Committee
EP	<i>ACT Emergency Management Plan 2000</i>
ESB	Emergency Services Bureau
ME	Management Executive of the Emergency Management Committee
NSW	New South Wales
NSW RFS	New South Wales rural fire service
POC	Police Operations Centre
TC	Territory Controller
TEOC	Territory Emergency Operations Centre
TGCC	Territory Government Coordination Centre

Caveat

The attached document represents an account of the recovery process and can not be held as a definitive statement. The report aims to be as accurate as possible, given available information. Data is being constantly reviewed as agencies fully assess costs and damage. Where relevant this report offers a brief sketch of events to serve as a context rather than a comprehensive analysis or portrayal of the fire event or emergency combat response.

Preamble

Emergency Management in the ACT – An Overview in the Context of the January 2003 Bushfire Emergency

In events leading up to and including 18 January 2003 the ACT, experienced its most significant emergency situation to date, during the course of which 4 lives were lost, 515 houses were destroyed or damaged (29/1/03 figure), major social disruption was experienced and essential infrastructure was affected. The severity of the situation rapidly became such that the ACT Chief Minister declared a State of Emergency, in force from 18 to 28 January 2003.

The ACT Government in 1999 established the *Emergency Management Act 1999* to prepare for, respond to and manage such emergency events. The *Act* enabled a standing Committee, known as the Emergency Management Committee (EMC), comprising senior officers from all emergency services as well as representatives from other relevant groups appointed by the Minister. Under normal circumstances, the EMC would convene approximately every 6 weeks, and is responsible for developing, testing and reviewing emergency management arrangements for the ACT (refer to EP Pt 3 Sect.8). The *Act* stipulates that the Minister for Police and Emergency Services will establish and maintain an ACT Emergency Plan (EP). The EP outlines the broad arrangements for coordination and has a number of sub-plans that outline the roles and duties of key agencies during such an event.

These plans provide a framework of responsibility for agencies in order that those involved in responding to an event effectively satisfy communication, infrastructure, and community needs arising from any disaster situation. The EP and accompanying sub-plans are regularly reviewed to ensure their relevance, and mock exercises are held to ensure that agencies have sufficient practical experience and knowledge to fully operationalise plans in the event of a real emergency. The most recent test of emergency arrangements was ACT participation in *Exercise Minotaur* – a national simulation of a foot and mouth disease outbreak – which was held during September 2002.

Under general conditions, the five ACT response agencies, ACT Policing, ACT Fire Brigade and ACT Emergency Services are responsible for managing and coordinating emergency responses until such a time as a State of Emergency is declared. Under the provisions of the *Act* if a State of Emergency is declared, the ACT Chief Police Officer is automatically appointed as Territory Controller (TC). Under these conditions the TC assumes responsibility for the coordination and management of the

response to, and process of recovery from, the emergency, on behalf of the ACT Government. Under the provisions of the *Act*, the TC is required to establish a Management Executive (ME), consisting of EMC members and others with relevant expertise, whose role is to support the TC to exercise his/her functions and powers. The EP is automatically activated upon the declaration of a State of Emergency. The TC is also required to activate relevant sub-plans, as well as monitor and review progress until a sufficient degree of order is restored to the community to enable the ACT Chief Minister to revoke the state of emergency. The Chief Minister may, however, make this decision at any time.

The January 2003 ACT bushfire emergency was the first time a State of Emergency had been declared in the ACT and was the first full activation of the ACT emergency management apparatus in a genuine crisis. As a consequence the situation is of historical significance and should be documented for this alone. The declaration of a State of Emergency provided the TC with greater than normal jurisdictional powers and responsibilities. In the exercise of these enhanced powers, public trust had to be assumed as, for a brief period, the TC effectively governed the ACT and made decisions that bypassed normal processes. Such assumption of powers and responsibilities represents a significant issue in the matter of the governance of the Territory. In light of this, the CPO/TC instructed that a report detailing the actions and decisions taken regarding the community and infrastructure recovery effort be prepared in order to provide a public account of recovery events from 18 – 28 January. Members of the ME supported this initiative.

This document is one of a number of reports that will be generated in response to the recent bushfire emergency. A coronial inquiry and inquest is underway into the tragic events that cost four people their lives. In addition, the ACT Government has announced an independent inquiry into the Emergency Services Bureau's response to the bushfire emergency, prompted in part by public and media concern at the management of the emergency response and the high losses sustained in the fire event as well as to satisfy obligations of accountability (Stanhope 2003 a). The aim of the inquiry is to gather knowledge to 'help minimise fire risk and damage in the future' (Stanhope 2003 a).

The attached document focuses on the recovery process which accompanied the fire fighting effort and is intended to support principles of good government by seeking to account for the actions and decisions taken throughout the emergency recovery period, especially with reference to emergency management legislation and plans. It should also serve to identify issues in light of the recent emergency that the Government and the EMC should consider when reviewing and revising the ACT's emergency management arrangements.

John Murray APM
ACT Chief Police Officer
Territory Controller 18 - 28 January 3002

Objective

This document reports on the management of the recovery process undertaken in response to the ACT bushfire emergency of 18 - 28 January 2003. As stated in the *Emergency Management Act 1999* and the ACT Emergency Plan Version 1 2000 (EP), the Territory Controller (TC), Mr John Murray APM, ACT Chief Police Officer (CPO), in consultation with Management Executive (ME) was responsible for the coordination and implementation of plans for the restoration of damaged infrastructure and for organising the provision of social services that would enable Canberra citizens to deal with impacts arising from the bushfire disaster. This report on behalf of the CPO/TC provides a brief account of this effort detailing:

- the extent of the recovery task by outlining the disruption to Canberra services and community;
- the activation of the EP and its sub-plans, and the efforts and progress made by agencies in order to restore physical services and to meet the unfolding social needs arising from the fire event; and
- issues arising from these operations, which should be of relevance to future reviews and subsequent revisions of emergency management arrangements.

Background

On 17 January, fires were burning in the Brindabella, Namadgi and Kosciuszko National parks (refer to Figure 1). These fires were exacerbated by extreme weather conditions, a fuel-rich environment, a prolonged drought and remote location. By the evening of 17 January, fire fronts in the Namadgi National Park had escaped containment lines, forcing fire crews to withdraw due to the dangerous and worsening conditions. The fires fuelled spot fires in pine plantations at Uriarra and placed Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve under threat. By the following day (18 January) the fires had rapidly traversed the intervening bush and forest and were threatening infrastructure, homes and personal safety along the western edge of the rural/urban interface. Although the fire was under observation and a focus for attention and action, its speed and ferocity due to the severe fire weather conditions enabled it to develop a momentum subsequently described as a 'fire storm'. Such fire intensity is almost unprecedented, especially in the context of the ACT, and made the fires in large part unmanageable. To suppress the fires would have seriously endangered the lives of fire fighters while the 'storm' conditions limited the use of aerial fire fighting operations.

In response to the imminent fire danger, the ACT Chief Minister, on advice from emergency services personnel, declared a state of emergency at 2.45 pm on 18 January (Attachment 1). With this declaration, the ACT CPO was automatically appointed as the TC (see Attachment 2) and the EP activated, as specified in the *Act*. The EP served as the guiding framework to respond to and manage the disaster. The Deputy Chief Health Officer activated the Health Emergency Management sub-plan as well as the Emergency Management Health Sub-committee. The Director of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS) also activated the

Community Recovery Sub-committee, which actively established services including evacuation centres, registration and community support infrastructure. Infrastructure agencies also began to activate their relevant emergency plans as soon as possible after the incident, formalising this process on 20 January.

Given the specific task at hand, namely fighting the fires, the TC delegated certain powers and appointed an Alternate Controller (AC) as specified in the *Act* (nominated as Mr Lucas-Smith, Chief Fire Control Officer for the ACT Bushfire Service) (see Attachment 3). A division of labour was established that enabled the AC to maximise the fire fighting effort and established minimum impediments to the fire services calling upon and deploying resources as required to combat the immediate fire threat. The TC continued to exercise his full powers to progress the recovery process more generally.

At the height of the fire storm on Saturday 18, three meetings of varying membership of the ME took place at the ESB offices, Curtin to discuss response and recovery issues. As the fire threat receded and agencies began to assess and report on damage caused by the fire storm, civil issues began to assume increasing significance. Accordingly, on Sunday 19, TC continued the coordination of the recovery process, parts of which were commenced the previous day.

The recovery process

The EP defines recovery as the process of supporting emergency affected individuals and communities in the reconstruction of physical infrastructure and the restoration of emotional, social, economic and physical well-being. Optimally the recovery process should occur from the moment of disaster impact (EMA 1996) and involves restoring and/or maintaining infrastructure such as roads, transport, electricity, gas, water, drainage, sewerage, communication and hospitals whether such need arises through damage or increased demand. It also involves coordinating the provision of welfare assistance and relief services efficiently and in a timely manner so that community recovery may occur quickly and effectively. From Sunday 19 until the 28 January when the state of emergency was revoked, the TC, with assistance from the ME, was responsible for the coordination of such infrastructure restoration as well as emergency and recovery-related social and medical services.

A chronology of events preceding, during and immediately subsequent to the declaration of a State of Emergency in the ACT

Before examining management of the recovery process, it is relevant to provide a chronological overview of events. This serves a number of functions. It outlines the efforts of emergency services personnel, their degree of situational awareness as well as the challenges that they faced in dynamic operating conditions. It also provides a context from which to examine the recovery management process. As with most disaster events, logistics and coordination are affected by the speed of the disaster, communication issues arise as damaged infrastructure affects information exchange, and the need for resources to be rapidly deployed on numerous fronts and in various roles becomes crucial. How such issues were addressed or unfolded is best described in a chronology.

Thursday 16 January 2003

- NSW was experiencing a state-wide fire emergency with fires extending from Canberra to the Victorian border. It is believed that most of the fires were the result of lightning strikes on 8 January. As part of this general fire activity, bushfires were burning in the Namadgi National Park (please refer to Figure 1) with the Bendora and Stockyard fires a focus for attention (ESB 16/1/03). Other fires of note in the region were the NSW fires at McIntyres Hut and Mount Morgan.
- The ACT ESB requested additional assistance from the volunteer NSW Rural Fire Service to combat the Namadgi National Park fires. Additional resources from NSW were supplied to the ACT effort (NSW RFS 16/1/03).
- Officers from the ACT Ambulance Service were also in attendance at ACT night back burning operations while the Commonwealth provided military assistance such as bulldozers and helicopters (ESB 16/1/03).
- The CPO and Commander Operations were briefed by the Executive Director, ESB in relation to the fires.

Friday 17

- NSW fire fighters worked to establish control lines for the fires west of the ACT/NSW border and had put in place containment lines near McIntyre's Hut. Their efforts were supported by the deployment of 11 aircraft operating in the Yarrowlumlra rural fire district. The NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) estimated that the NSW fires west to the ACT border had destroyed 7000 hectares (ha) (NSWRFS 17/1/03 a).
- The ACT fire fighting effort had established containment lines around the south-eastern sector of the Bendora fire but there had been some outbreaks from this blaze to the north and south. Water bombing and back burning continued for the Stockyard fire. A total fire ban was imposed from 17 January to midnight 21 January 2003 (ESB 17/1/03 b). ACT crews were also liaising with NSW fire fighting crews regarding managing spot fires from McIntyres Hut (ESB 17/1/03 a).
- The ACT Ambulance Service (ACTAS) and the Ambulance Service of NSW (ASNSW) supported the fire fighting and back burning operations in the Brindabella National Park.
- By that evening some spot fires which had escaped containment lines had still not been contained and the fire threat to property at Tidbinbilla was rated as serious with crews from the ACT and NSW deployed to undertake property protection. Later, NSW fire fighters combating fires at the west of the ACT border were forced to abandon their work on containment strategies as weather conditions deteriorated and the fire danger increased (NSWRFS 17/1/03 a and b).
- Officers of the Department of Education, Youth and Family Services (DEYFS), in their role as coordinators of emergency social services for the

ACT, met with the ACT ESB and were briefed on the fire situation. From this, they commenced preparations for community recovery operations in case of a fire impact. Staff who would be involved in such an emergency response were placed on standby.

- ACTEWAGL officers met with representatives from the DEYFS re events.
- An officer of ACT Policing, appointed to liaise with the ACT ESB during the previous week, advised senior managers that contingency plans involving police resources were in place and members who would be involved in a fire emergency had been contacted and were on call for the weekend.
- The Health Control Office was established at ESB.

Saturday 18

AM

- The fires north, west and south of the ACT border escaped containment lines. The fire at McIntyre's Hut had overnight initiated spot fires that crossed the ACT/NSW border and entered the north-west corner of the Uriarra pine plantation. The Bendora fire had also spotted and threatened properties in Tidbinbilla and Paddy' River Valley. Residents were contacted by ESB and alerted about the fires. Recovery contingencies were put in place. The Stockyard fire had spotted as well and was threatening property at Nass and Top Naas (ESB 18/1/03). Given the conditions, the NSW Rural Fire Service advised residents in Goobagandra, Talbingo, Brindabella, Adaminaby and Wollondibby Valleys to be on alert (NSWFFS 18/1/03).
- Weather conditions deteriorated as high temperatures combined with very low humidity and strong winds. Correspondingly, existing fires around the region flared up (see NSWRFSS 18/1/03).
- The *Canberra Times* and fire authorities urged residents to avoid timbered areas and notified the public that road and parks around Tidbinbilla and the Cotter Road had been closed due to possible fire danger.
- Early in the day, the Police Operations Centre (POC) was activated to serve as the Territory Emergency Operations Centre (TEOC) in response to the approaching fires, which had moved towards the ACT faster than originally predicted.
- The AFP established two forward control centres, whose role was to monitor and report on the approaching fire and assist with evacuations if required. Evacuation plans were developed.
- Officers from ACT Policing were sent from the POC to work at the ESB offices at Curtin in order to assist liaison between the two centres.
- ASNSW Liaison Officer commenced working at the ESB while ACTAS on-road resources increased and ASNSW resources were deployed to increase the ACTAS response capacity.
- Commander Newton reviewed the *Emergency Management Act 1999*. Following this, the Commander briefed the CPO that in her opinion the ACT

met the criteria for a State of Emergency. The rationale for this recommendation was that an emergency was likely to occur and would be of such a scale as to cause significant disruption of essential services in the Territory and to constitute a significant danger to the health and safety of persons, property and environment in the Territory (see Div. 3.1 20.1). Specifically, the Commander believed that the authority to order people from their homes for their own safety would need to be invoked. Although fire fighting research indicates that people, if they are well prepared should be encouraged to stay with their houses to protect them from embers generated by the fire, residents especially in rural areas had shown a general reluctance to leave properties which could have been problematic in the case of worsening conditions. The CPO agreed with this analysis and called for a meeting with the ESB executive officers, the Chief Minister, and the Executive Director, Department of Justice and Community Safety to discuss declaring a State of Emergency. Under a State of Emergency the powers assigned to the TC would ensure greater public safety including evacuation of reluctant residents if they were in imminent danger.

- ESB established a significant information management section to provide regular updates to the community on the fires.

PM

- The public were advised not to use roads west of the Murrumbidgee River or visit Murrumbidgee recreational sites and to take fire precautions around their homes. Existing water restrictions were lifted (*Canberra Times* 2003 a).
- At 2.45 pm the Chief Minister declared a State of Emergency, the first for the ACT. The CPO assumed the role of TC 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 TC immediately appointed an Alternate Controller (AC), ACT Chief Fire Control Officer Peter Lucas-Smith, and delegated certain TC powers to the AC in order to assist the fire fighting effort.
- The Territory Emergency Operations Centre (TEOC) was staffed with representatives from key agencies and hourly briefings were held.
- ESB issued standard emergency warning signals alerting the public about the fire during the afternoon.
- With the fire visible, police in the affected suburbs sought advice from the local fire brigades, as is standard operating procedure at fire scenes, and began to evacuate people from the worst affected area. Evacuations were underway 40 minutes after the State of Emergency declaration.
- The first of four evacuation centres was established at Phillip.
- First reports of residential losses were recorded.
- ACTAS and NSWAS attended approximately 54 cases of persons having sustained injury as a result of the fires.
- DEYFS in conjunction with ACT Policing established an information hotline - the Bushfire Information Service. The Department provided emergency payments for those displaced by the fires that were in need of clothing,

accommodation, transport and medical supplies, and found people accommodation.

- ACT Housing assisted public housing tenants as well as members of the public affected by the fires with short and medium to long term accommodation.
- ACT Policing assisted with evacuations, worked at the evacuation centres, undertook road closures and traffic duties, maintained road blocks and began investigations into reports of deaths from the fires.

Sunday 19

- The AC maintained his base at the ESB, Curtin to remain in close contact with the fire service management team. The TC moved the management of the recovery process to Winchester Centre. An arrangement was confirmed whereby the AC would continue to manage the fire fighting aspects and the TC would manage the recovery. Commander Newton managed the TEOC at Winchester.
- TC requested that arrangements were put in place to hold the first formalised regular meetings (daily initially) of the Management Executive (ME), specifically focusing on recovery aspects (see Attachment 4).
- Deaths in Duffy and significant home losses were reported. Figures for house losses increased during the week. Over 515 houses were damaged or destroyed (Refer to Figure 2).
- ACT fire crews undertook an extension of the containment line. NSW crews worked on a continued fire threat around the Fairlight area (north-west to ACT), and managed to hold a fire in check east of the Monaro Highway while simultaneously dealing with spot fires started from this blaze. (NSWRFS 19/1/03 a and b).
- The immediate fire threat to the ACT eased as weather conditions improved. Authorities claimed that all ACT fires were under control by 4pm (*Canberra Times* 2003 b), although fires still burned in NSW.
- The ACT Government announced its intention to provide financial relief arrangements (*Canberra Times* 2003 b; Stanhope 2003 b).
- Infrastructure agencies such as Telstra initiated assessments of the damage to their networks.
- ACT Policing continued to advise the public on whether fire-ravaged areas were sufficiently safe to enable people to return to their houses. Officers continued to provide traffic duties and monitor road closures and dealt with looting in damaged suburbs.

Monday 20

- All recovery control functions were centralised at the POC, at ACT Region Headquarters, Winchester Centre, Belconnen.
- The fire that had impacted on NSW and the ACT reportedly covered 200,000ha (NSWRFS 20/1/03). It appears that the NSW rural fire service was

undertaking back burning operations in the north and south of the ACT (ESB 20/1/03 a).

- The CPO chaired the first formal ME meeting focusing on recovery, which was held at the POC, Winchester Centre, Belconnen. This was the first of daily meetings until Tuesday 28 January.
- ME included chiefs or senior officers of the main emergency service agencies in the ACT including police, fire, health and ambulance services, and other key private and public groups covering utilities, welfare services, public infrastructure and government as required. A list of member organisations involved is attached (see Attachment 4).
- At the first recovery ME meeting on 20 January, the issue of governance and accountability under the EP was discussed and confirmed. Agencies agreed to provide a representative at the POC on a 24 hour basis to ensure communication and centralised information exchange. The TC formally activated the emergency Sub-plans which were relevant to the recovery effort for the ACT. This focused on restoring infrastructure and responding to community needs given the degree of house loss and deaths from the fires. Coordinators were formally appointed to manage the implementation of various Sub-plans; however, many representatives knowing their role as Coordinators (as defined in the EP) had undertaken recovery crisis work before the meeting.
- From this time, agencies continued to work on repairing infrastructure and to provide social services. Details of these activities are contained in the Appendices and an overview of the recovery effort over time is provided in Table 1 and 2.
- Reportedly a comprehensive door knock was undertaken throughout the Belconnen, Gungahlin, Hall and inner ACT suburbs in response to fires potentially threatening the northern ACT.
- By the evening alerts to residents in north-west Canberra had been issued given weather forecasts (ESB 20/1/03b). The fire at Burrunjack was a potential risk.
- The Health Control Team commenced planning for possible evacuations of north-side nursing homes and disability houses in response to weather forecasts.

Tuesday 21 – Saturday 25

- On 21 January more ACT suburbs were placed on fire alert and the fire ban extended (ESB 21/1/03 a and b). The McIntyres Hut fire had been of concern. Additional interstate fire fighting units from Queensland arrived to assist the ACT service (ESB 21/1/03 c). By Wednesday 22 January the fire threat to the north-west had eased given a change in weather. Containment work on the bushfire to the south of the ACT (from Mt Bimeri to the Murrumbidgee river) also continued (ESB 22/1/03). From Wednesday containment work continued and the fire threat, although remaining, diminished (ESB 24/1/03).

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- Although fires still burned in the Namadgi National Park, fire breaks had been established along the ACT border (NSW RFS 22/1/03) and they no longer posed a direct threat to the ACT. (Also refer to Figure 2). Fire fighters kept blazes at bay to the north of the ACT, dowsing spot fires using helicopters
 - The Recovery Centre commenced operation at Lyons Primary School replacing the Evacuation Centres. (The latter ceased operation on 27 January.)
 - ACT Policing assisted with maintaining public confidence, charged an individual with arson and dealt with issues of looting in suburbs where houses were damaged. Officers also patrolled high-fire-risk areas to prevent arson attempts. A member was appointed to lead the investigation team for the Coronial inquiry into the 4 deaths from the fires.
 - Environment ACT prepared mass graves for stock lost in the fires and the first news of large wildlife losses in Tidbinbilla reserve were reported. The agency also had to manage public panic chopping of trees.
 - A Bushfire Recovery Appeal was launched (Quinlan 21/1/03).
 - Work was undertaken to identify a location for demolition rubble.

Sunday 26

- Most agencies reported that the majority of their infrastructure and services had returned to normal (see Table 1 and 2).
- The demand for short-term disaster-related services had also dramatically reduced with the focus for community recovery moving towards dealing with the longer-term effects such as housing and psychological impacts.
- ACT Fire fighters continued to patrol containment lines and undertook precautionary property protection in the north around Hall, surrounding NSW and Wallaroo areas while additional containment lines to the north west of Canberra were established (NSW RFS 27/1/03).
- Fires still burned in the McIntyre and Burrinjuck Dam areas. Fire fighting efforts using water bombing, and containment work continued (ESB 25/1/03; 26/1/03).

Monday 27

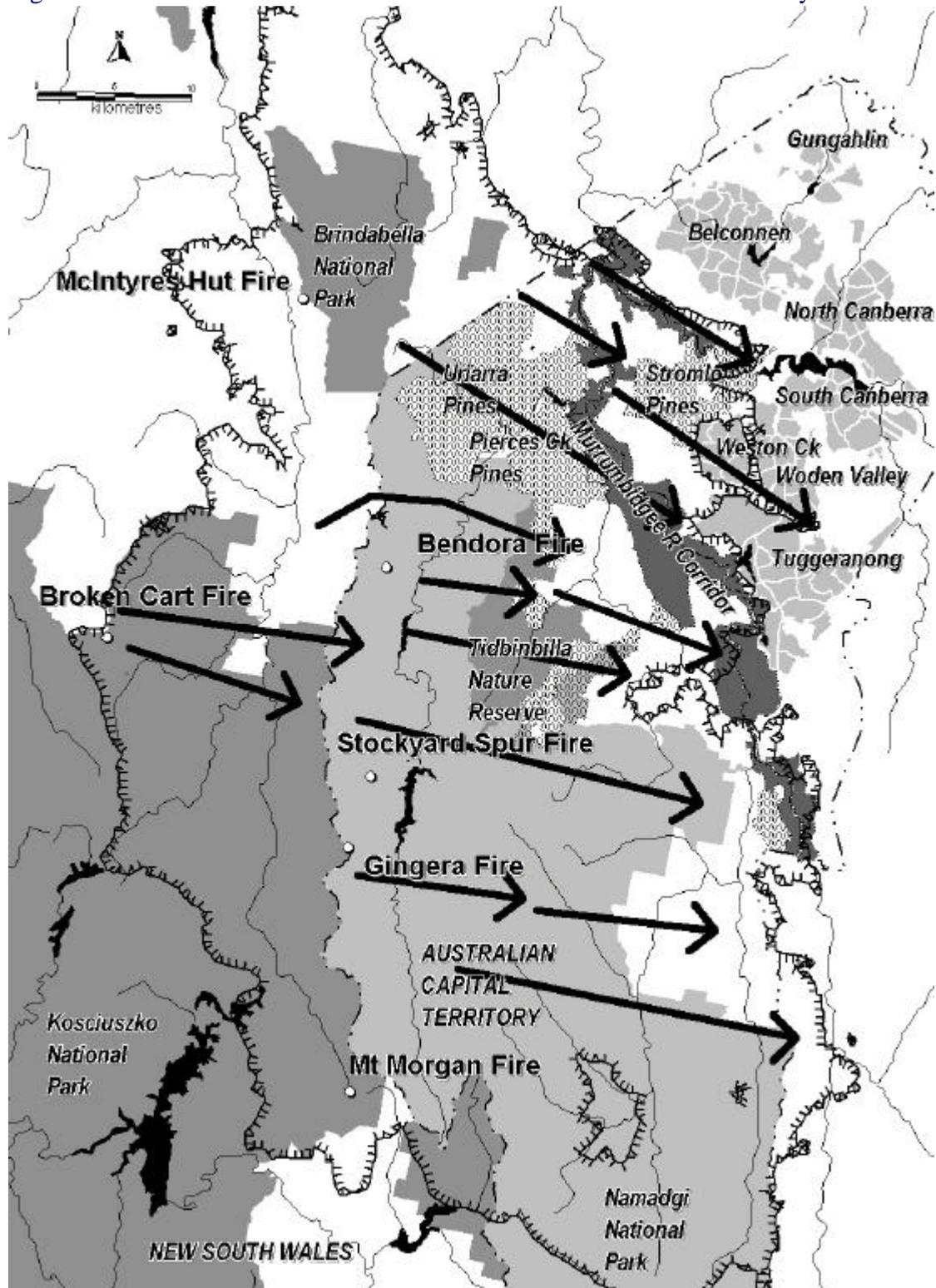
- Fires remained burning around the ACT to the north-east of Wee Jasper, in south near Michelago, the north of the Brindabella National Park and in the centre and south of the Namadgi National Park. The fire ground was estimated to cover 227,935 ha (NSW RFS 27/1/03).
- Despite worsening weather conditions, the fires did not move in such a way as to pose a direct threat to the ACT although residents were asked to be calm but vigilant.

Tuesday 28

- The Chief Minister revoked the State of Emergency. With most services returning to normal, the need for emergency powers no longer existed.

-
- The Government announced the full membership of the Canberra Bushfire Recovery Taskforce, headed by Sandy Hollway. This Taskforce will continue the work of recovery, providing advice to those affected by the fires and coordinating the actions of organisations involved in the recovery process and the rebuilding phase.
 - The ACT Government has been in and continues to be in close contact with the Commonwealth Government on access to Commonwealth Natural Disaster Relief Arrangements. The Commonwealth provides funding assistance aimed at alleviating the financial burden associated with the provision of natural disaster relief payments and infrastructure restoration. States and Territories are partly reimbursed for natural disaster relief once their expenditure exceeds certain thresholds.
 - Agencies involved in the emergency response and recovery processes have initiated processes to debrief staff.
 - The process of counting the costs and finalising statistics on the damage from the fires as well as the resources deployed to fight the fires and repair damage has been initiated in earnest as resources are now free to be applied to these tasks.

Figure 1: Fire Movement towards Canberra from 17 PM to 18 PM January 2003



Source ESB (2003)

Key:
 Arrows - represent fire movement
 Cross-hatching – extent of burnt area
 Shading - represents different land uses
 Circles- ignition points

Table 1: ACTEWAGL Recovery Process

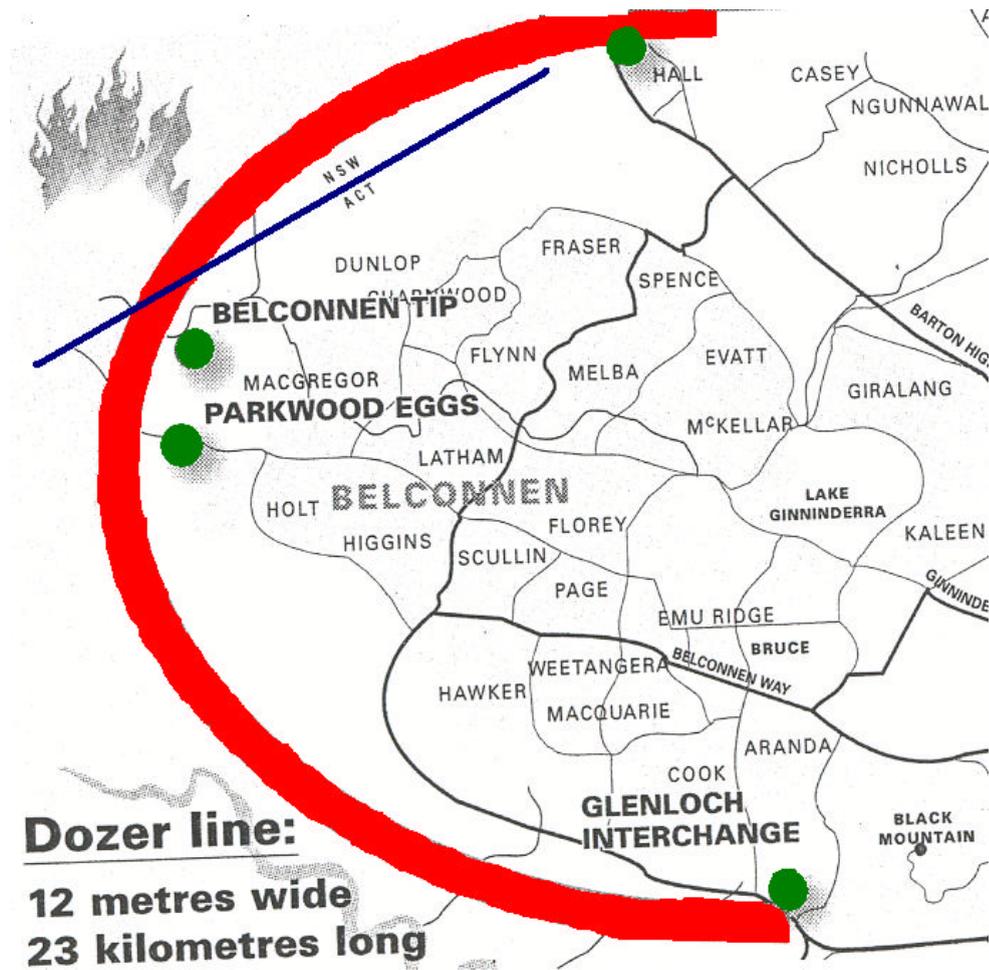
				Tuesday 21/1/03 Midnight
ACTEWAGL	<p>Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Googong Water Treatment Plant shut down Mt Stromlo Water Treatment Plant shut down and evacuated. Chapman Reservoir roof blown off. Two water pump stations without power About half of the water reservoirs and pump stations not reporting to the central monitoring and control system <p>Sewerage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre power restored, but internal damage to electrical control cables allows only 5% of sewage flow to be treated while the remainder is diverted to the onsite holding tank. <p>Electricity</p>	<p>Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supply available to all customers, all reservoirs within normal storage level range Inspections of all sites completed Emergency generator connected to one pump station; normal power available at all others. <p>Sewerage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre treating 30% of inflow while the remainder is being diverted to the onsite holding tank Power restored to all sewage pump stations Inspections of all sites completed, confirming that no sewage overflows occurred <p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 6,500 customers remain without electricity Gas system inspections and isolations commenced. Mains supply restored to 500 customers in Woden Valley and Tuggeranong. 	<p>Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Chapman reservoir cleaned and refilled, “boil water” notice issued to customers in this supply zone while test results awaited All other customers receiving normal supply <p>Sewerage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre treating 100% of inflow. Customers requested to maintain reduced use of sewerage system while backlog in holding tank is reduced. <p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 5,040 customers remain without 	<p>Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> “Boil water” notice suspended in Chapman reservoir zone. <p>Sewerage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lower Molonglo Water Quality Control Centre continues to operate normally. Customers advised that full use of sewerage system is now available. <p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 4,000 customers remain without electricity Gas inspections and isolations continue.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 37,750 customers without supply (initial estimates had been 50,000) • Woden to Wanniasa 132kV sub transmission line unserviceable • 6,900 customers without gas supply <p>Saturday 18 January - Mid-night</p> <p>Water</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Googong Water Treatment Plant back in operation • Mt Stromlo Water Treatment Plant back in operation. <p>Sewerage</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No change <p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 30,000 customers remaining without electricity • Gas system inspections and isolations being undertaken 		<p>electricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gas - No change 	
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					Sunday 26/1/03
ACTEWAGL	<p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3,000 customers remain without electricity • Gas mains supply restored to 800 customers in Weston - 5,600 remain off supply. 	<p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,500 customers remain without electricity • Gas mains supply restored to 2,300 customers in Waramanga, Fisher and Stirling. – 3,300 remain off supply 	<p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1,300 customers remain without electricity • Woden to Wanniasa 132kV sub-transmission line restored to service • Gas mains supply restored to 2,400 customers in Rivett, Holder and part of Chapman. – 900 remain off supply 	<p>Electricity & Gas</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 520 customers still awaiting electricity • Gas mains supply restored to the remaining customers in Chapman and Duffy. All gas mains supply now fully restored 	<p>Electricity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 280 customers still awaiting electricity

Source: ACTEWAGL Media Release, February 2003

Figure 2: Containment Lines as at 21 January 2003



Source: *Canberra Times* 21/1/03

Table 2: Telstra Recovery Process

		SCOPING FOR NETWORK DAMAGE STARTED			TEMP REPAIRS COMPLETED
Sat, 18 Jan 03	Announcement of Telstra Bushfire Assistance Package for residential customers. Commenced arranging diversions, interim services and special assistance including credit management.	+			
Sun, 19 Jan 03	Customer assistance vans set up at evacuation centres Telstra staff assisted at Canberra Connect call centre.	Kambah – 2 pm			
Mon, 20 Jan 03	Customer assistance vans at Duffy Shops Assistance Package extended to small businesses		Kambah	Kambah	
Tue, 21 Jan 03	Announced services restored to 1500 homes.	Mawson, Rivett, Stirling, Weston, Holder, Fisher, Duffy, Chapman, Lyons, Chifley, Curtin, Grace, Watson, Tuggeranong (Kambah already started)		Mawson, Rivett, Stirling, Weston, Holder, Fisher, Duffy, Chapman, Lyons, Chifley, Curtin, Grace, Watson, Tuggeranong	

		SCOPING FOR NETWORK DAMAGE STARTED			TEMP REPAIRS COMPLETED
Wed, 22 Jan 03	Letterbox drop commenced.		Mawson, Rivett, Stirling, Weston, Holder, Fisher, Duffy, Chapman, Lyons, Chifley, Curtin, Grace, Watson, Tuggeranong Except DA66 Mt Stromlo & Cotter Rd – unsafe to access Telstra Network in parts of Mt Stromlo and Cotter Rd.		
Thu, 23 Jan 03	Commitment given to service restoration by Saturday 25 January Announced \$100,000 donation to Canberra Bushfire Recovery Appeal Satellite Bigpond set up at Duffy Shops for customer use.		Mt Stromlo and Cotter Rd.		
Fri, 24 Jan 03	Phone cards and brochures provided to Lyons Recovery Centre.				Kambah

		SCOPING FOR NETWORK DAMAGE STARTED			TEMP REPAIRS COMPLETED
Sat, 25 Jan 03	Announced that Canberra services restored. Attended community meeting at Rivett shops.				Mawson, Rivett, Stirling, Weston, Holder, Fisher, Duffy, Chapman, Lyons, Chifley, Curtin, Grace, Watson, Tuggeranong Except DA66 Mt Stromlo & Cotter Rd – unsafe to access Telstra Network in parts of Mt Stromlo and Cotter Rd.

Source: Telstra 2003

Damage arising from the ACT Fire Emergency

As indicated above, the fire resulted in significant infrastructure and social losses. The January 2003 ACT bushfires have been classified as the second worst on record, only surpassed in terms of casualties and home losses by the Ash Wednesday fires in Victoria 20 years ago. At time of writing, 515 houses had been damaged or destroyed (refer to Figure 3). A comparative assessment of homes lost in Canberra equates to approx 6,150 homes in Sydney. Of the overall number of houses lost in Canberra, approximately 80 were owned by ACT Housing and of these 55 were rural properties. The Insurance Disaster Organisation estimated that insured losses may reach \$250 million while initial government estimates have calculated the loss in public infrastructure to be \$65 million. The extent and nature of damage is outlined below to illustrate the challenges confronting those involved in the recovery process (also refer to Figure 4 and 5).

Electricity outages

- There were major disruptions to electricity for many suburbs (Figure 4). Around 37, 750 customers experienced full or partial disruption to electricity supplies. It was estimated that 52 of Canberra's 123 suburbs on Sunday 19 had full or partial disruption to electricity supplies.
- With extensive electricity outages, there was a corresponding loss of phone (as an estimated 500 poles were destroyed or damaged) and traffic lights. Reportedly, 36 sets of lights were affected with most in the Woden, Weston Creek and Kambah areas but some outages also occurred in Ainslie and Dickson. These impacts generated subsequent hazards for residents and emergency workers alike.

Telecommunications

- It was estimated that tens of kilometres of telephone cable was damaged and needed to be replaced as a result of the fires.
- Key communication services such as the Telstra network were also affected due to damage sustained to equipment at the Roadside Multiplexing Equipment in Scullin, Weston Creek and Kambah; the Small Exchanges at Tharwa, Top Naas, Brindabella and Uriarra and two Mobile sites. This damage resulted in a loss of about 4,500 services.
- 5,100 TransAct customers had their services affected by the fires and 150kms of fibre cable needed to be replaced.
- Both TransAct and Telstra diverted between them 970 and 500 phones.

Rural and forestry

- Environment ACT estimated that 4,000 sheep, 150 cattle, and 35 horses had been lost while 61 rural lessees (50% of Canberra's rural lessees) reportedly had sustained damage to their properties.
- Of the 16,000 hectare of ACT Forests, it was estimated that 11,000 ha had been damaged in the fires along with some commercial premises and infrastructure. Such losses are estimated to have significant impacts for the local industry extending into the long term.
- ACT Forests reportedly lost its headquarters at Stromlo, which resulted in significant losses in its computer facility and data.

Environment

- Some estimated that up to 90% of wildlife had been lost at Tidbinbilla Nature Reserve (although the information huts at both Tidbinbilla and Namadgi had survived).
- There was a degree of community panic; Environment ACT and Urban Services had to contend with citizens undertaking panic pruning and the cutting down of street trees.

Information

- There was en mass demand for information. On Tuesday 21 and Wednesday 22 January Canberra Connect was getting 10,000 calls a day and on the Wednesday it recorded 35,000 website hits from residents seeking information.

Road and transport

- Wooden bridges, signs, barriers, pavement, stormwater sumps, manholes, and street lighting were damaged. The Cotter Bridge (the one lane bridge near the pub) was rendered unusable and other roads were affected by debris including dead animals and tree litter.
- Action Buses halted normal services on the Saturday and assisted with evacuations from the Marajani Nursing Home at Weston and was available to help transport people from affected suburbs to the Phillip evacuation centre.

Health and health utilities

- Calvary Hospital, Queanbeyan and Canberra Hospital had respectively 95, 34 and 312 presentations and 9, 1 and 69 admissions related to the fires from 18-23 January. Injuries ranged from burns which resulted in 3 patients being transferred to specialist units in Sydney to lacerations from falls off ladders and roofs.

-
- Health services were also affected by utility damage. The Health Protection Service Building in Holder was significantly damaged, which resulted in the relocation and/or temporary suspension of services such as the ACT Immunisation Unit.
 - Elective surgery was suspended in the ACT on 21 January as resources were deployed elsewhere.
 - Evacuations like that of a Weston Creek nursing home resulted in residents being relocated to hospitals, which absorbed hospital and other medical resources.

To combat these problems, agencies called in additional resources. Examples include:

- ACTEWAGL received assistance from AGL (Vic) and Integral Energy (NSW) while local contractor O'Donnell Griffin provided machinery and equipment to assist in replacing phone services.
- ACT Policing received additional assistance. The NSW Police Service provided 25 officers from Sunday 19 to Monday 20, 44 AFP agents were deployed, and 70 college recruits were placed on stand-by. ACT Policing members worked 12 hour shifts rather than their normal 8 hours. Stations on the Saturday were staffed in some cases to double normal staffing strength. Extra staffing resources were maintained during the week following the fire in case the situation deteriorated. Officers were taken off normal duties - the water police were placed on the streets to manage evacuations. On 18 January officers who were off duty went to areas that they knew needed assistance and helped with things such as traffic duties and evacuations prior to being officially called in.
- NSW Ambulance officers assisted their ACT colleagues with 44 NSW officers rotating through duty in the ACT during 17 to 28 January. Extra resources were also called upon and deployed as the St John Ambulance Service provided first aid at recovery centres and at staging areas. The Defence Force was called upon to assist with logistical support for potential evacuations of nursing home.
- By 21 January Telstra had moved over 120 people into Canberra from regional areas of New South Wales (Newcastle, Dubbo, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong, Gosford and Coffs Harbour) and from Sydney. Five local contractors companies were also engaged to help with repairs. Workers worked long hours.
- Organisations like Canberra International Airport made facilities available such as accommodation for helicopters involved in fighting the fires.
- Many employees of agencies involved in providing community recovery services and other related services worked long hours with staff called back from leave to meet the demands placed on each organisation. Employees put

in a 300% effort with some working 12 days straight and in other cases more than a month without time off. Many had to be ordered home to rest. Community groups assisted with the recovery effort, with charities and volunteer groups assisting government agencies and emergency services.

- Emergency service facilities such as the Kambah Fire and Ambulance Station and the ESB workshop were significantly damaged in the fires, resulting in infrastructure and equipment losses. One ACT Fire Brigade pumper was destroyed.
- The army provided assistance in building a bridge at Cotter and gave considerable assistance in grading fire breaks around the city and removing fallen trees from rural roads and tracks. The defence force also provided equipment and accommodation for those displaced by evacuation as detailed below in Table 3.

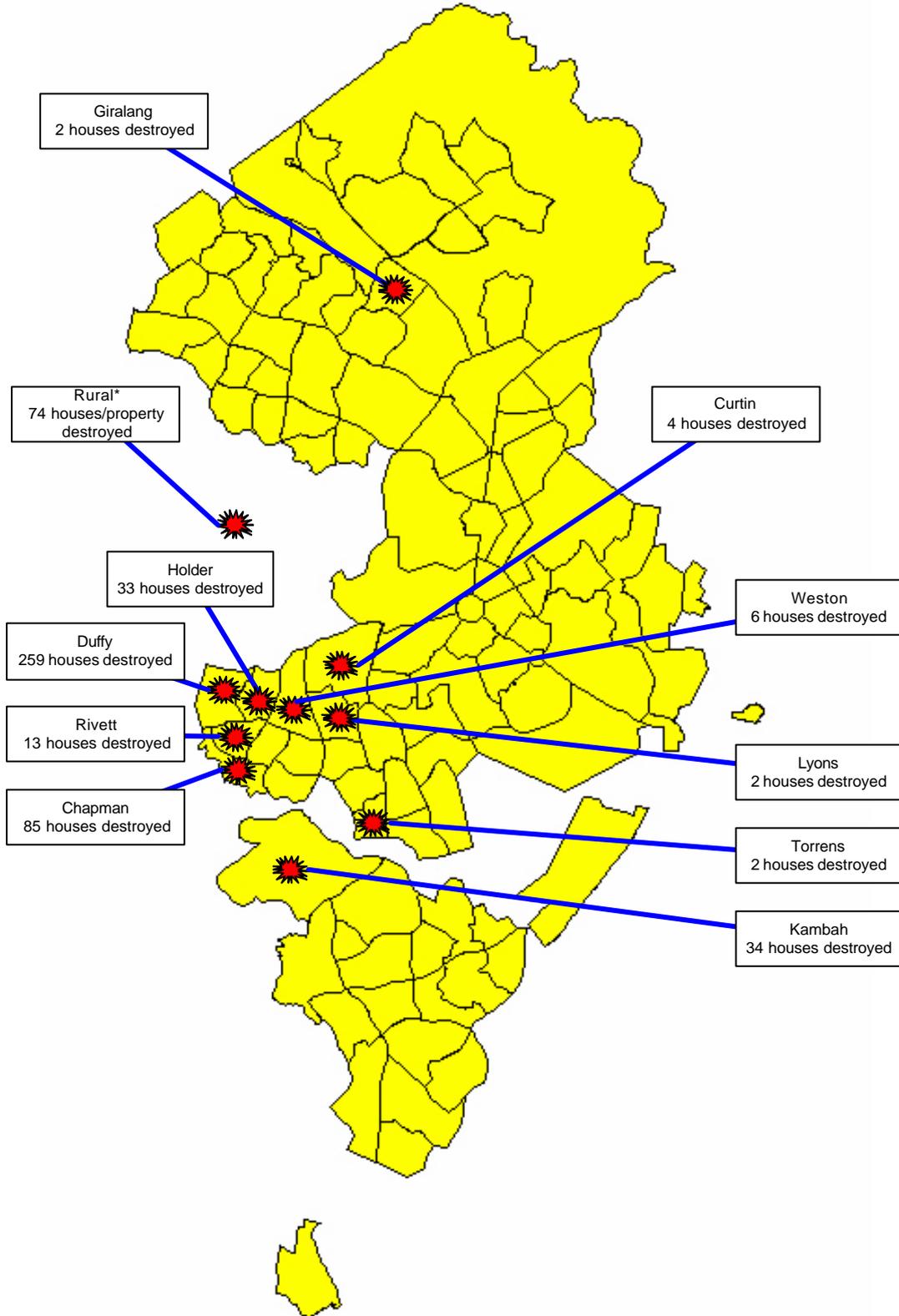
Coordinating the efforts to rectify such damage and effectively deploy extra resources, especially from interstate, was a major logistical and organisational challenge. Much of the responsibility for overseeing this effort rested with the TC and those coordinators appointed to manage the implementation of Sub-plans.

Table 3: Summary of Commonwealth (Australian Defence Force) Assistance Provided to ACT Emergency Services Bureau for January/February 2003 Bushfires

	NUMBER REQUESTED	NUMBER PROVIDED	DURATION
Helicopters	4	4	13 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Bulldozers	4	4	13 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Fuel Tanker Jet A-1	1	1	14 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Fuel Tanker Diesel	1	1	19 Jan to 2 Feb 03
Water Tankers	7	7	16 Jan to 2 Feb 03
15KVA Generators	10	10	19 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Graders	10	5	19 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Accommodation	400 personnel	400 personnel	19 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Chainsaw Operators	30	34	19 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Fire Tender	1	1	20 Jan to 28 Jan 03
Buses	2	2 x 12 seater	19 Jan to 23 Jan 03
Planning & Logistics Officers	6	6	19 Jan to 28 Jan 03

Source: Emergency Management Australia February 2003

Figure 3: Property Destroyed on January 18



Note: Rural* incorporates Cotter Pump Station, Urriarra, Mt Stromlo, Stromolo, Paddies River, Pearce Creek and Angle Crossing

Figure 4: Electricity Supply across Canberra as at 19 January 2003

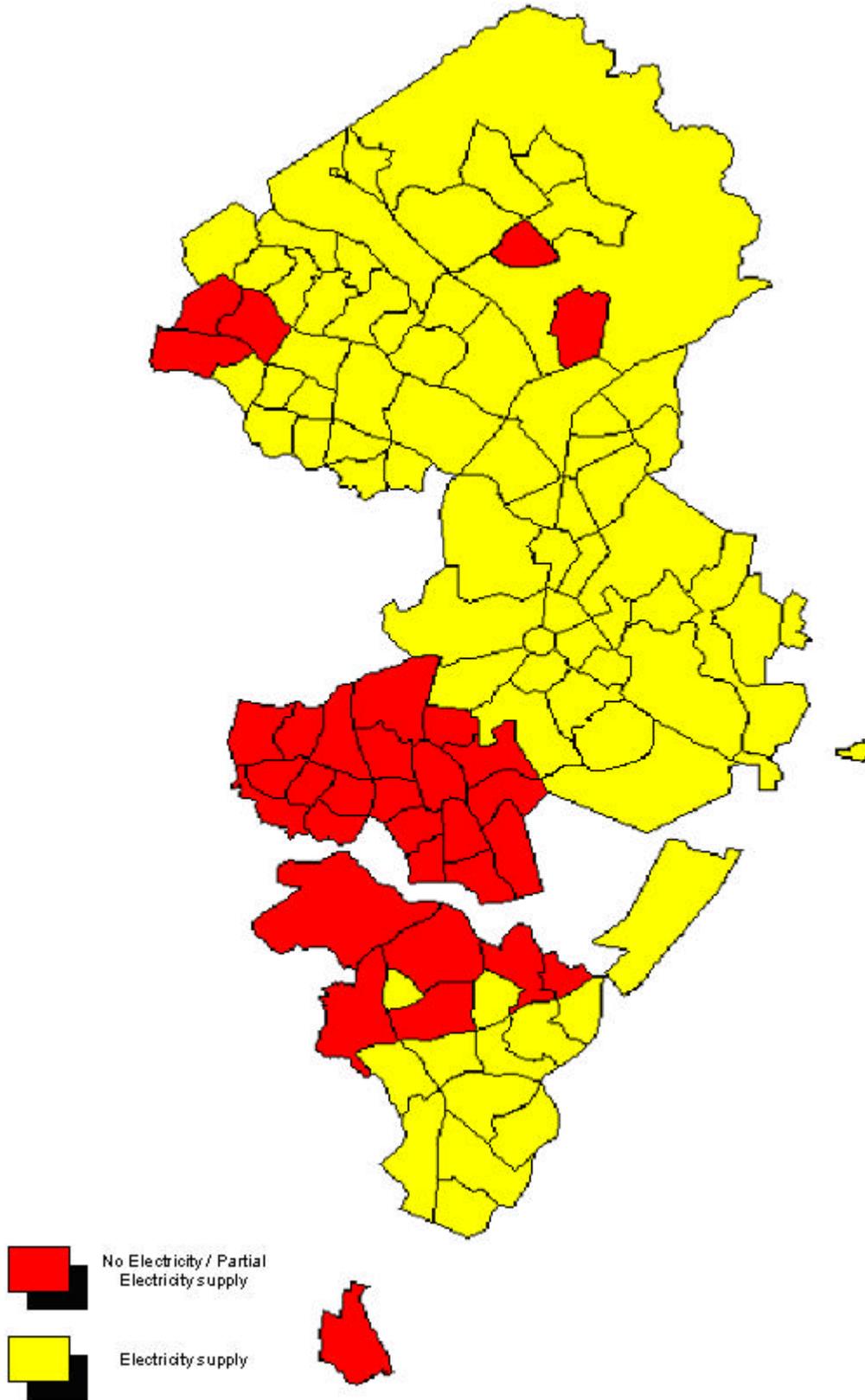
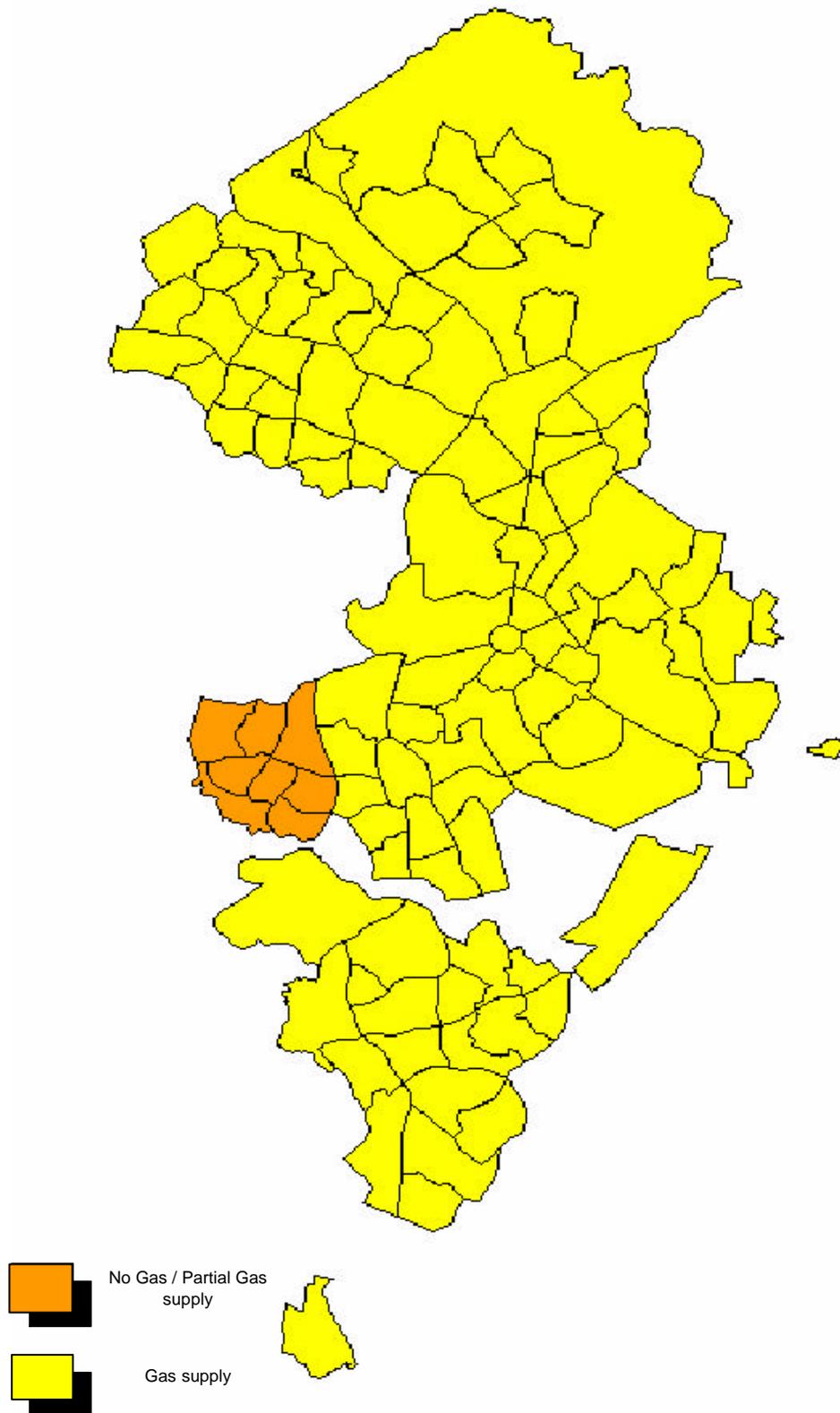


Figure 5: Gas Supply across Canberra as at 19 January 2003



The ME and activating Emergency Management Sub-plans

As stipulated in the EP and the *Emergency Management Act 1999*, the TC was required to convene an ME meeting as soon as practicable following the declaration of a State of Emergency in order to consult with relevant agencies, develop a plan of action and activate sub-plans to coordinate and progress the recovery process. The first of formalised ME meetings focusing on recovery was held on 20 January. ME personnel have expertise and access to resources relevant to emergency management.

During the emergency, this Committee encountered unfolding and, at times unexpected contingencies, undertook planning under pressure, and managed communication where essential services had been damaged. One of the ongoing challenges for the group was obtaining reliable data as it often operated in an environment that was necessarily dynamic as information accuracy was constrained by the circumstances.

Given the nature of the damage from the fire emergency, the TC formally activated the following instruments at the first ME meeting:

- the ACT Community Recovery Sub-plan;
- ACT Infrastructure Recovery Sub-plan; and
- Media Liaison Sub-plan.

The Health Emergency Management Sub-plan had already been activated prior to this meeting while aspects of the other Sub-plans had also been underway in response to service demand during the weekend. The EP stipulates who should be appointed as coordinators of Sub-plans and these people had already activated their groups in order to be able to provide aspects associated with the recovery process required in the early moments of the crisis such as evacuation centres.

As required by the EP, the TC made the following appointments:

- Barbara Baikie, Director of DEYFS was appointed chair of the ACT Community Recovery Sub-plan;
- Hamish McNulty, Director of Roads ACT, Urban Services was appointed as the chair of the ACT Infrastructure Recovery Sub-plan;
- Mike Castle Executive Director of ESB was appointed as the liaison officer between Emergency Services and the Management Executive;
- George Tomlins, Executive Director of Policy, Chief Ministers Department was appointed as the liaison officer between the Government and Management Executive;
- Jane O'Brien, AFP was appointed as the Media Liaison Coordinator.

The ACT Chief Health Officer acting as coordinator of the Health Emergency Management Sub-plan had activated the plan and organised a Health Sub-committee meeting while also coordinating health services for the emergency.

The activation of the Sub-plans ensured cross-agency communication and coordination, which assisted in developing a holistic approach to the recovery program. The ME served as a forum where coordinators of Sub-plans and many of those agencies involved in delivering the objectives of these instruments reported progress and raised issues. If needed, members would use the forum to develop actions that were best solved through inter-agency cooperation.

The meeting dealt with cross-agency matters such as Qantas's offer to provide catering was made to the ESB. This offer was relayed to the Coordinator of the Community Recovery Sub-plan as evacuation centres could most benefit. The Chief Health Officer and the Occupational Health and Safety Commissioner were also keen to enlist other agencies assistance with distributing masks in suburbs where damaged houses were posing potential asbestos risks. At other times, organisations suggested information that needed to be included in the press releases of all ME agencies in order to provide a coherent line on an emerging issue.

All agencies involved in the ME had roles and responsibilities to fulfil as defined in the EP and its associated instruments. Coordinators of Sub-plans and the TC especially had requirements to satisfy. These are discussed below.

Duties of the TC

The TC has responsibilities and powers as defined by the EP and Sections 22 to 34 of the *Act*. Under a State of Emergency these functions include:

- a) managing the response to and the recovery from the emergency by ensuring that agencies, organisation and other persons committed to dealing with the emergency are appropriately deployed;
- b) coordinating the disposition of other resources to manage the emergency;
- c) ensuring that appropriate emergency management is implemented;
- d) providing advice to the Minister of Police and Emergency Services about the emergency;
- e) undertaking activities in cooperation with other persons which the controller considers appropriate for the purpose of discharging his or her functions; and
- f) performing any other functions conferred by the Controller by the *Act* or any other law (refer to Sect. 14 EP 2001).

In discharging these duties, the TC is responsible for specific actions listed throughout the EP, especially in Annex E. The following details how the TC fulfilled these duties and responsibilities.

- As required in the EP, the TC managed the coordination and deployment of resources that were effectively applied to undertake the recovery process. Much of this was achieved through ME meetings where each agency provided situational and progress reports and through activation of Sub-plans.

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- The TC drew on the expertise and intelligence (as available at the time) of the ME to identify issues, prioritise restoration work, as well as develop and review action plans. Resources were managed and assigned as part of the daily briefings and discussion at ME meetings. It should be noted that much decision making occurred at the Sub-plan level, as is evident from the attached reports. The TC has the authority, should the need arise, to direct resources and could have re-organised work being undertaken by agencies if he had thought it was misdirected. This need did not arise in the ACT fire recovery process as the teams working on the Sub-plans had matters well under control and were making solid progress.
 - The TC also activated Sub-plans and held ME meetings ensuring that appropriate emergency management tools were implemented as required by the EP. As is evident in the attached reports, work and procedures occurring as part of the Sub-plans effectively and efficiently allocated resources to restore and/or provide services in a timely manner. The TC at the first recovery ME meeting on 20 January appointed relevant coordinators and briefed them and the ME on lines of communication, authority and on duties. The TC structured ME meetings so that all key agencies and coordinators involved in implementing Sub-plans provided regular briefings on progress and could raise pertinent issues. Coordinators also convened separate sub-group meetings, as needed, feeding information from these meetings to the larger ME. This ensured that operational issues and priorities informed decision-making at all levels.
 - As required, the TC provided regular advice to the Minister via daily ME meetings as the Minister or a representative was in attendance.
 - The TC is also required to organise the TEOC and establish communications and reporting arrangements between the TEOC and Territory Government Coordination Centre (TGCC). As stated in the *Act* the POC was established and manned as the TEOC. Under the delegation of certain powers to the AC and the emphasis placed on the fire fighting effort in the first days of the emergency, the office of the ESB also served as a base for operations for the AC and the fire fighting effort. A TGCC was established in the Chief Minister's department.
 - The TC with responsibility for media liaison appointed Jane O'Brien, ACT Policing, as the Media Liaison Coordinator and activated the relevant Sub-plan. At the first ME meeting on 20 January, protocols and dissemination channels for media information were determined. By 22 January, however, the ESB had been given the role for general media coordination as it had a direct input into the Canberra Connect website and so could disseminate material readily through this channel.
 - During the course of the emergency as required by the EP, the TC was in constant communication with police field controllers and functional coordinators for recovery operations as field controllers for fire operations were reporting through and under the control of the AC. Contact was achieved

with the latter through the ME meetings and with the former via daily briefings from Commander Newton who was in charge of the AFP's operational response.

- Under the EP, the TC is able to make authorisations. In this case, the TC authorised that an AC be appointed and was to have the ability to exercise certain TC powers. He also authorised fire officers to enter premises, establishment of road blocks and evacuations when chemicals posed a potential health hazard to areas, and approved access for authorities to enter land to begin repairs. Most authorisations were to restore infrastructure and reduce threats to public safety and bypassed normal planning consultation/approval mechanisms.
- The TC has the ability to request external assistance in a time of emergency. In the case of the ACT bushfire crisis, assistance was obtained from interstate but this often occurred internally within organisations. Given that groups were effectively using their own methods to gain additional assistance, and the extra resources obtained appeared sufficient to the tasks at hand, there was no need for the TC on behalf of the ME or the Territory to formally seek external assistance.

Sub-plans

During the fire emergency, sub-plans were activated to coordinate and manage the recovery process. Significant work occurred through the instruments. The implementation of sub-plans relied on substantial allocations of community and corporate resources. The progress made by agencies under these sub-plans is briefly detailed below. Full reports are contained in the appendices.

Health Emergency Management Sub-plan

This Sub-plan was responsible for maintaining medical services and responding to emerging health issues during the emergency. The hospital system reported one of its busiest days on Saturday 18 January. It contended with unfolding medical demands that absorbed resources and required significant logistical organisation while also maintaining regular essential services. Agencies within the health service sector operationalised their own emergency instruments and dealt with demands arising from increased need for casualty services, from displaced nursing homes residents who had been evacuated, destruction of medical facilities (Health Protection Service at Holder), disruption to some community services as well as environmental health hazards such as asbestos and potential water contamination. Health issues and associated responses by relevant agencies were reported to the ME and TC via the ME meetings as the ACT Chief Health Officer, Dr Paul Dugdale and represented at times by Dr Charles Guest were members of the Committee. The list of services provided under the Sub-plan and the issues managed by the ACT Chief Health Officer and assisting agencies is recorded in [Appendix 1](#). Much of this work required the coordination and cooperation of a number of agencies within and external to the health sector.

Infrastructure Recovery Sub-plan

Under the stewardship of Hamish McNulty, Director of Roads ACT, Urban Services, the Infrastructure Recovery Sub-plan guided the restoration of electricity, telephone and water services and road infrastructure. Through the efforts of those involved, most agencies could report a week after the fires that most services had returned to normal. The procedures followed and details of this aspect of the recovery process are presented in the attached report (see [Appendix 2](#) and Tables 1 and 2). It is important to note the number of private infrastructure companies involved in this Sub-plan. These organisations had their own internal emergency management plans and access to substantial interstate resources which they called upon to assist them in the recovery process. In the light of this, the sub-group did not meet frequently outside the ME meetings as agencies had the recovery effort well under control. As most members were also on the ME, they had direct lines of communication to other agencies involved in the recovery process and could access their assistance if required.

Community Recovery Sub-plan

DEYFS, under the leadership of Barbara Baikie, managed the Community Recovery Sub-plan. With housing assistance from many agencies, DEYFS organised evacuation centres, crisis counselling, financial assistance, information dissemination as well as recovery centres. Its work was challenging as it coordinated government and non-government groups with varying levels of internal resources and organisational procedures. It also often dealt with highly emotive tasks. As stipulated in the EP and relevant Sub-plan, the Department coordinated a comprehensive and timely roll out of services that has and will continue to provide the necessary assistance enabling the community to manage the rebuilding phase. A full report into the work, objectives and achievements under the Community Recovery Sub-plan is attached. (Refer to [Appendix 3](#)).

Media Liaison Sub-plan

Prior to the declaration of a State of Emergency, the ESB media team had provided information dissemination on the ACT fire threat. On Saturday 18 January ACT Policing called in its media staff as part of the POC activation and sent a media officer to assist ESB media staff in light of their increased work load due to public demand for information regarding the fires. Once the State of Emergency was declared, a division of labour was established where the ESB media team would respond to fire inquiries and related press releases while the AFP team at POC would manage police and bushfire recovery process media inquiries and issues. ESB coordinated the Standard Emergency Warning Signals. On 20 January at the first formal ME meeting focusing on recovery, all media communication was centralised with the formal appointment of a media coordinator and the official activation of the Media Liaison Sub-plan. The ways this plan was implemented and how agencies worked to achieve the objectives contained in this instrument are presented in [Appendix 4](#).

Speed of recovery

As documented in the sub-plan reports, agencies implementing the recovery returned services to normal and provided assistance in a timely and effective manner as specified in the EP framework (see Table 1 and 2). The speed of recovery and the magnitude of the task is illustrated by the examples below.

By midnight 26 January there was expected to be 280 customers in Canberra without electricity, while gas supplies had returned to normal by 25 January.

Telstra claimed that in the height of the disaster an estimated 4,500 services were affected by the fires. By 23 January Telstra claimed that the phone services (though on temporary lines) had been fully restored.

In terms of road closures, on 18 January there were 26 closures but by 8.45pm on the 19 January, only 7 roads remained closed. On 20 January this had reduced further to 5 closures. As of the 28 January, there were still 4 roads closed as these require major repair or pose risks to the community.

The army was asked as part of the recovery to build Paddy's River Bridge bypass at Cotter Dam after the current one was destroyed. They were tasked on 21 January and had completed the bridge by 24 January.

DEYFS had 2,500 people left homeless from the fires on 18 January. By 20 January all but 40 people had accommodation.

Significant community cooperation and support

The community's response and good will was instrumental in enabling those agencies involved in the ME to achieve their objectives. Volunteering ACT coordinated casual volunteer work as there were many offers of assistance from the community. Volunteers, for example, assisted at evacuation centres, with people delivering equipment and food. (There were cases where people came in to deliver specially made home baked cakes). Goodwill was amply demonstrated when the public assisted with voluntary calls to reduce water use in response to potential sewerage contamination of water supplies. This compliance enabled ACTEWAGL time to fix the problem and avoid a potential health problem. The level of support was also indicated by not only those making contributions through working at evacuation and recovery centres or being on the front line risking their personal safety to save houses or lives, but also by those people who were willing to cover the normal duties of those working on the recovery effort.

The process also demonstrated community spirit as agencies cooperatively worked together to resolve issues. It highlighted the strength of intra-government as well as government and non-government cooperation in achieving effective and timely solutions.

There has been strong support and thanks expressed from the community and elected representatives as evident in local newspapers, electronic media and letters of appreciation conveyed to individual agencies working on the emergency recovery

effort. The AFP has, for example, received letters of appreciation from Senator Kate Lundy, Minister for Police and Emergency Services Mr Bill Wood and the ACT Opposition Leader, Mr Brendan Smythe while officers have received countless personal thanks from the members of the public for their work.

Issues arising

During the state of emergency, a number of matters arose as key issues affecting the implementation of the emergency management plan and management of the emergency. These should be subject to further review by both the EMC and ACT Government.

Key issues identified were:

- the need for greater legislative clarity on the role and powers of the TC and AC and the relationship between the two, specifically as in this bushfire emergency, the TC's appointment of, and authorisation to delegate powers to the AC raised certain legal ambiguities concerning whether or not the TC was indeed handing over all or some of his powers. In the case of the ACT bushfire emergency, the TC and AC positions were necessary as they were required to provide the specific expertise to manage different aspects of the crisis (the fire fighting response and recovery work). Both positions needed to exercise similar powers in order to take actions that would best manage these different facets of the emergency response. The *Act* and EP instructions are, however, generally ambiguous on lines of authority between the two positions and on control arrangements when the TC delegates powers or responsibilities to the AC. Literal interpretation of the words alternate and delegate implies all powers are handed over but it is unclear whether even in this reading the TC is effectively replaced by the AC or whether the TC retains overall responsibility for the total emergency response and control, even if not an active control. Delegation, however, may also be partial with only certain functions or powers being allocated to another. The interpretation adopted for the entirety of the ACT emergency was that the two positions could co-exist but would focus their efforts and be responsible for managing different aspects of the emergency response. Had there not been the high degree of harmony and mutual cooperation, however, the legal ambiguity could have given rise to some confusion regarding governance, communications and command and control more generally;
- the issue above also led to a lack of clarity in terms of whether the AC's base of operations should have been the TEOC or the fire fighting headquarters (ESB) at Curtin;
- resolution of practical communication difficulties as emergency services encountered phone problems as the mobile network became jammed and there were also problems with radio relay between forward control centres and base. Having two key centres of operations also generated communication issues as there was physical difficulties securing lines of communication between the TEOC and ESB offices at the height of the emergency;
- consistency and coordination of information dissemination, which has major impacts for levels of public trust and confidence in the emergency response and recovery effort; and

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- clarification of whether the infrastructure recovery function has responsibility for work on private leases.

A number of key strengths emerged from the emergency experience. According to those involved, the ME and POC served as significant and useful mechanisms through which to communicate and coordinate cross-agency actions as organisations had their senior representatives present who were able to authorise action and make immediate decisions. These arrangements also ensured informed and timely decision-making. Such decisiveness was instrumental to the development of effective solutions.

Agencies often had their own emergency procedures and plans, which they activated to manage their recovery effort, and had internal lines of authority which they used to coordinate in-house resources. These abilities were instrumental in enabling agencies to organise and achieve their work loads during the recovery phase.

The work of the EMC in preparing the EP and putting in place arrangements for emergency management also greatly assisted the effectiveness of the recovery response. With existing plans and arrangements for coordination and roles, the recovery effort was operationalised quickly.

As part of good practice, these issues as well as other lessons to be learnt from the bushfire emergency will be considered in the future in order to strengthen operational outcomes and existing ACT emergency management instruments.

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