



**STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

**GUIDELINE E  
COMMUNICATIONS AND  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

**STATE DISASTER RECOVERY FRAMEWORK**



**Government  
of South Australia**

| STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN (SEMP)  |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| Part 1 Arrangements   | Part 2 Strategies, Guidelines and Frameworks  | Part 3 Supporting Plans   |
| Governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities, and structures in place to reduce risk from hazards, and to plan and prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies. | Various strategies, guidelines and frameworks that support the state's emergency management arrangements. | Required plans that support the state's emergency management arrangements (including hazard plans, capability plans, control agency plans, functional support group plans, zone emergency management plans and operations manuals). |

Figure 1: The SEMP is a series of documents split over 3 parts with accompanying annexes. This Guideline sits under Part 2 of the SEMP.

The *Guideline* can be found at: <https://www.recovery.sa.gov.au/>

The *Guideline* is reviewed every two years.

The custodian of the Guideline is the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) who may delegate this responsibility the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) who may delegate this responsibility to a sub-committee of SEMC. At the time of publication, the Strategic Advice and Coordination Sub-Committee has been delegated this responsibility.

#### Document Control

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# PURPOSE

This *Guideline* outlines approaches to communicating and engaging with affected communities during their recovery process.

*Recovery* is the process of restoring or improving the livelihood and health, as well as the economic, physical, social, cultural and environmental assets, systems and activities of a disaster affected community. It is a complex process that provides an opportunity to enhance community resilience and to 'build back better' to avoid or reduce future hazard/disaster risk.

*Communications* in the context of recovery refers to the practice of sending, gathering, managing and evaluating information following an emergency. 'Communication' is the process and 'information' is the message being sent or received.

*Community engagement* is a generic term for any process or interaction with community groups, individuals or other community stakeholders.

## AUTHORITY

The *Emergency Management Act 2004* (SA) (the Act) sets out the arrangements under which emergencies and disasters are managed in South Australia, while the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) outlines the responsibilities, roles, authorities, and systems by which emergencies and disasters are managed. This Guideline sits under Part 2 of the SEMF.

## SCOPE AND AUDIENCE

This *Guideline* forms part of the State Disaster Recovery Coordination Framework (the Framework) and is for recovery practitioners, decision-makers and those seeking additional guidance on the financial and administrative arrangements required for recovery support.

Although the *Guideline* is particularly focussed on government agencies, it can be helpful for recovery workers in private and non-government organisations (NGOs), as well as for communities and the public.

# COMMUNICATION

Successful recovery is built on effective communication between affected communities and other partners and stakeholders. Putting the affected community in the centre of recovery and communicating effectively with them is pivotal in successful recovery.

From a government perspective, well-planned and well-executed communications approaches should go beyond merely sending information, to forming a two-way dialogue with affected communities delivered in a compassionate and caring way given the rawness of emotions, post trauma.

Government stakeholders involved in recovery must:

- ♦ recognise that communication should be two-way, and encourage input and feedback
- ♦ ensure that information is accessible to audiences in diverse situations, addresses a variety of communication needs, and is provided through a range of communication channels and networks
- ♦ establish mechanisms for coordinated and consistent communications between all service providers, organisations and individuals and the community
- ♦ ensure that all communication is relevant, timely, clear, accurate, targeted, credible and consistent
- ♦ identify trusted sources of information and repeat key messages to enable greater community confidence and receptivity.

Employing effective communication is a key principle of disaster recovery, and is critical to facilitating community involvement and sustainable, evidence-based practice.

People will not tolerate being without the information they need. In the absence of accurate, trustworthy information they will actively seek it out through their own sources, and if they cannot obtain official information, they will fill the gap with rumour and speculation.

Informal community information systems should be recognised and catered for so that they do not confuse the situation and distort what is made available. These channels are a vital means of communicating with the community, and often people who do not trust or have access to official channels will rely on them for what they need.

Rumours and speculation should be actively managed and understood as an important indicator of the community's need for information

## MOVING FROM RESPONSE TO RECOVERY

In the response phase of an event, relevant agencies start to prepare for the recovery process. In this phase of recovery, the development of positive, tailored, consistent and appropriately pitched messaging goes a long way to establish awareness and trust in information sources that will surge in active recovery.

When recovery becomes active, timely, clear and relevant information means that people who need support after a disaster know where to get help. Communication can literally bring people together (e.g. through public meetings) and help affected individuals, or a community, find their feet more quickly to begin their recovery journey.

The lead agency for recovery (usually the Department of the Premier and Cabinet (DPC) for state-led events) will have representation in the public information working group to ensure key messages are appropriate and easily understandable prior to the conclusion of the response to an event.

As recovery coordination is activated to **stand up** (during the relief and early recovery phase), agencies responsible for recovery activities should activate their own channels to engage directly with their relevant communities and stakeholders.

During the relief and early recovery phase of a state-led event, a whole-of-government working group focused on aligned recovery messages will usually be stood up. The scale and complexity of the event will dictate the frequency of the working group meetings. These meetings will be chaired by the recovery lead agency with updates provided by each member.

Communications operators are expected to:

- ♦ align communication requirements with the recovery operations affecting the local area;
- ♦ identify, agree to and document opportunities for a collaborative approach with relevant stakeholders.

## COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING

Any communications undertaken by agencies regarding recovery operations should be developed through a communications plan that supports key messages across government.

The recovery lead agency will develop a communications plan in the early stages of recovery and share that across the communication and media working group to assist in consistent messaging. It can also be shared to all relevant stakeholders to assist with consistent messaging and activities.

Table 1 outlines some helpful approaches when planning communications.

**TABLE 1: COMMUNICATIONS PRINCIPLES IN RECOVERY**

| Principle   | Explanation   |
|---|---|
| <b>Public information, not public relations</b>                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Broadly speaking, the aim of public relations (PR) is to promote an organisation; the aim of public information is to channel information to the relevant audiences. The aim of all recovery communications should be to assist the community, not to promote an organisation.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Respect people</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ When people are displaced or affected by an emergency, it is easy to only see their vulnerability. Communications should be respectful at all times.</li> <li>♦ It is imperative that all communications recognise that affected people are rational beings able to make decisions for themselves. Communications materials that forget this principle can be viewed by the community as paternalistic and patronising.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>The right to know</b>  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Put the community at the same status as your manager or funding source. They have a right to know about the recovery process, your services and other organisations' programs.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Acknowledge the impact</b>   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ People affected by an emergency have potentially experienced a life-changing event. They have a need to have their story told, acknowledged and their experience validated.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Build on local assets—Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ ABCD refers to the practice of using and building upon existing local networks and strengths in the community.</li> <li>♦ ABCD can also influence communications practices. Simply put, don't reinvent the wheel. For example, if a community already has a functioning and respected community radio network, use it to inform the community rather than developing new, and potentially ineffective, communication channels.</li> <li>♦ Following ABCD principles means you are working with the community rather than merely working alongside them. ABCD empowers the community to participate in their own recovery.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Ask the community how they want to receive information</b>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Consulting with the community and actually asking them how they want to receive information will increase the effectiveness of communications and increase community participation.</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Remember the 'unaffected'</b>                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Be careful not to focus solely on those directly affected in an emergency (for example, people whose properties were burned or those relocated due to a flood). Those not directly affected can often experience significant stress following an emergency.</li> </ul>   |

|                           |   |
|---------------------------|---|
|                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Care should be taken not to alienate or differentiate between the 'affected' and 'unaffected' in an emergency.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Repeat information</b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ After an emergency people often have trouble remembering information. People will be looking for information to assist their specific needs at that specific time and ignoring everything else. What may be irrelevant to someone at week three may be the exact information they require at week five. Therefore, information must be repeated and re-communicated periodically throughout the recovery process.</li> <li>♦ An effective system of receiving and recording feedback from the community will help you know when to repeat your information.</li> </ul> |
| <b>No 'spin'</b>          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ People recovering from an emergency have specific requirements and want information solely to address their needs.</li> <li>♦ Communications containing rhetoric or brand leveraging information is counterproductive, as it will damage your reputation and just add to the communication 'noise' in the community.</li> </ul>  |

## COMMUNICATIONS CHANNELS

Communicating in recovery, more than in most other contexts, requires sensitive consideration of the audience's needs and capacity to receive and process information, both psychologically and practically.

In addition to any personal distress, impacts on electricity and telecommunications networks, and the loss of personal technology, such as computers and printers, all have a significant impact on how people receive, and can respond to, information.

A range of communication tools and channels should be considered and used to support the various recovery phases and trajectories of different audiences, i.e., including communities, individuals, businesses, primary producers, children and youth, etc.

Key communications channels to consider are outlined in Table 2.

**TABLE 2: COMMUNICATIONS CHANNEL**

| Channel             | Considerations  |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>Websites</b>     | A trusted single source (agency) website is the optimal way for impacted individuals and other stakeholders to obtain information. It can also serve as a hub for information dissemination. DPC is responsible for maintaining the recovery website which includes static year-round information and information relevant to events.   |
| <b>Social Media</b> | Social media is increasingly seen as a primary source of up-to-date information. Social media can provide timely and targeted recovery updates and reminders to stakeholders, with key information and direct links for further information. In addition to public social media e.g. Twitter, the use of closed groups, e.g. on Facebook, can facilitate targeted community recovery messaging for local communities, and create a 'safe space' for the community to share with each other.   |
| <b>Media</b>        | <p>Media interest in disasters is high, and as recovery progresses it is important to ensure that spokespeople are prepared, and accurate information is offered to media. The different phases that individuals and communities might experience post-disaster should also be considered. All agencies with recovery responsibilities are expected to maintain a positive narrative where possible, while acknowledging the impact of the disaster. This will assist in instilling confidence in both impacted communities and other stakeholders.</p> <p>To ensure the release of appropriate, reliable and consistent information:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ media events should be held jointly where appropriate</li> <li>♦ media conferences and announcements should be coordinated to avoid conflicts between state or local statements</li> <li>♦ all relevant agencies should carefully check statistics before release</li> <li>♦ each agency is only to comment on its own areas of responsibility</li> <li>♦ any joint announcements with the Commonwealth to support Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements eligibility must be adhered to.</li> </ul> |
| <b>Paid Media</b>   | To ensure information is cutting through, paid media (advertising) may sometimes be required. Advertising provides guaranteed placement of messages without distortion, and in digital channels can be effectively targeted and measured. The recovery coordination lead agency may employ paid media to assist messaging, ensuring that it is functional and without spin in order to maintain an uncomplicated relationship and build trust with the community. Please see the most up-to-date Government Communications Guidelines.  |



|       |  |
|-------|--|
| Other | <p>Other avenues of communications can be useful depending on the community context. This can include community meetings, newsletters, flyers put up in key community gathering points/hubs (e.g., the local supermarket or service station), localised communication groups using various mobile applications, word of mouth through trusted community leaders, etc.</p> <p>Local community and social service organisations should be provided with relevant advice and information on an ongoing basis to enable them to inform clients who may be vulnerable, marginalised or hard to reach.</p> |
|-------|--|

Below is a graph with suggestions for different ways to communicate with various audiences (Figure 1).

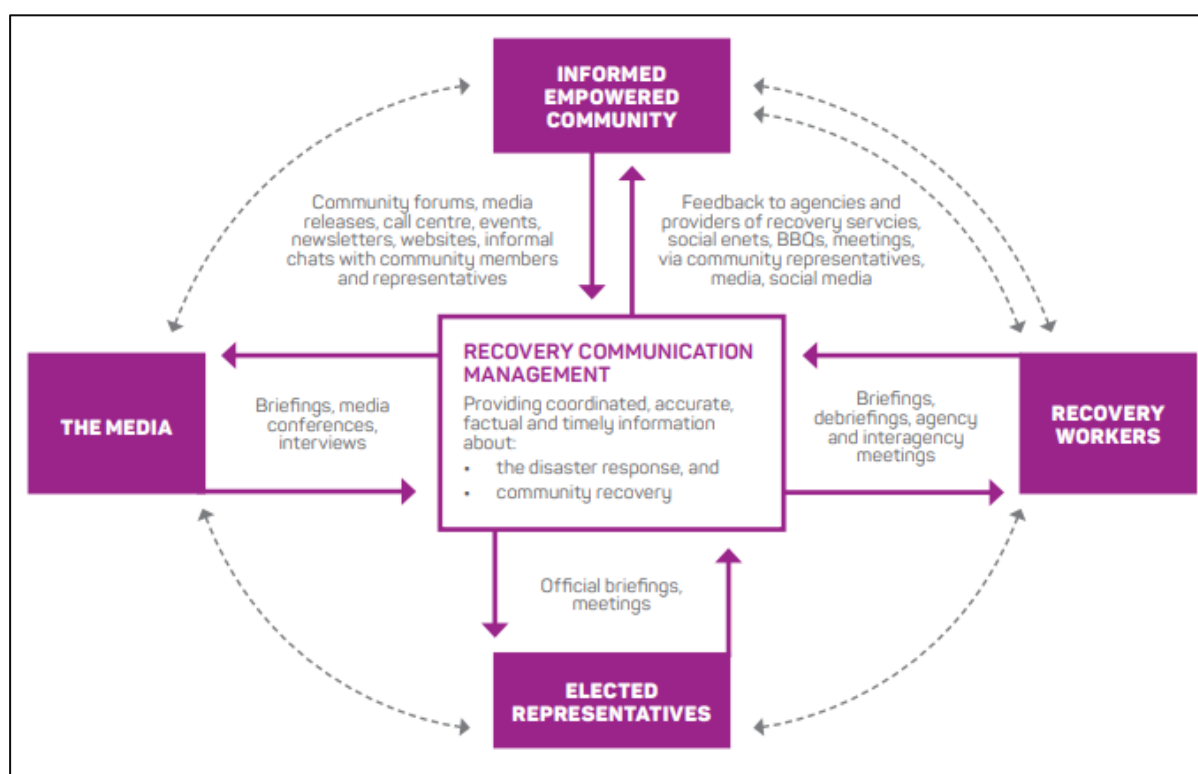


Figure 1: Communication with various stakeholders through a variety of means; Source: AIDR Community Recovery Handbook (2018)

Communications should:

- ♦ begin as early as possible in an emergency
- ♦ include an event-specific website and/or other medium that show all available information and is updated regularly
- ♦ specifically address the needs and concerns of local communities
- ♦ be expressed in clear, consistent, plain English (and/or translated if possible)
- ♦ be tailored to local communities and delivered to the various groups within communities
- ♦ be provided in easy to understand formats with the aid of visual comparisons
- ♦ include practical information and advice.

# COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

A key principle of recovery is that it should be community-led; this means that clear communication and engagement with the impacted community leading to meaningful community involvement is critical to a successful recovery effort. Best practice community engagement is underpinned by a set of principles, including:

- ♦ **Inclusiveness** – the involvement of people potentially affected by, or interested in, projects or activities, including individuals and groups from culturally diverse backgrounds: engagement should be undertaken in ways that encourage people to participate and that seek to connect with those who are hardest to reach.
- ♦ **Commitment** – engagement should be genuine and aimed at identifying, understanding and engaging relevant communities, and should be undertaken as early as possible.
- ♦ **Building relationships and mutual respect** – development of trust through personal contact and keeping promises is a priority: effective relationships between government and non-government sectors, industry and community should be maintained by using a variety of communication channels, by acknowledging and respecting community capacity, values and interests, and by exploring these areas to find common ground.
- ♦ **Integrity** – genuine community engagement is a means through which the integrity of government and the democratic processes of government are maintained.
- ♦ **Transparency and accountability** – engagement should be undertaken in a transparent and flexible manner so that communities understand what they can influence and to what degree.
- ♦ **Feedback and evaluation** – engagement processes should inform participants of how their input contributed to decision making.

Recovery managers need to be clear when engaging with communities about the degree to which the community will have input (e.g., whether community input will be considered and policy programs adjusted accordingly, or whether the community engagement process is only about informing the community of the practice to be adopted).

Trust can be eroded if the community engagement methods used inappropriate, or promise a level of involvement, resourcing, funding or decision making that is not delivered. It is important that engagement and consultation with communities continue over the longer term, as needs and circumstances change over time.

## ENGAGEMENT PLANNING AND DOING

Engagement is essential to ensure impacted communities' unique needs are understood, and thus gain clarity over where to target and tailor recovery efforts.

Engagement is also crucial to guiding communications in recovery, so that appropriate channels are identified, and feedback loops established. This allows communications and engagement to be responsive and therefore, most effective.

A successful community-led recovery requires a strengths-based approach. To facilitate this, engagement must first build relationships, which in turn lead to an understanding of what skills and strengths already exist in the community.

Community engagement ensures strong connection and relevance to the impacted community of any recovery activities and plans. During state government-coordinated recovery, the appointed Community Recovery Coordinator and/or the Community Development Officer will build community engagement plans in consultation with a breadth of stakeholders ensuring relevant recovery programs. Regional representatives of state government departments and agencies, local government, local community groups and NGOs are all part of this engagement to ensure a holistic community view.

By hearing a wide range of stories and perspectives, this information can be distilled into the local recovery plan, and also shared with relevant agencies and other stakeholders to flag recovery issues and needs.

State government follows the IAP2 principles of engagement as outlined in 2015 IAP2 - A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery Report , and with reference to the Better Together Planning Tools.

Going to community meetings, organised community groups, meeting one-to-one with impacted individuals, or attending community events and functions, allows for relationship-building across the diversity of the community, and ensures a range of voices are heard, including those not already engaged.

Establishing processes and structures such as community meetings and the more formalised structures of a Recovery Community Reference Groups or Local Recovery Committee will support a collaborative approach to the recovery process, with local intelligence informing the recovery programs.

Many stakeholders and partners collaborate to provide recovery services, policy and advice. The principle of shared responsibility is primary and provides the strongest outcomes for impacted communities.

Different state government agencies will have their own channels as well as strong relationships with their own stakeholder networks, such as industry. These relationships can both inform recovery communications and engagement planning and assist with sharing information.

Successful recovery is built on meaningful community engagement and effective communication.

# APPENDIX A

## COMMUNICATING IN RECOVERY– AUSTRALIAN RED CROSS GUIDE

Following the 2009 Victorian fires, Australian Red Cross developed an evidence-based Communicating in Recovery guide (Australian Red Cross 2010). The following provides a brief overview of the foundation principles for communicating in recovery. More information about the 'how' can be found in the guide.

### THREE RULES FOR RECOVERY COMMUNICATIONS

Before communicating, ask yourself these three questions:

#### 1. Is it relevant to the affected people?

People affected by disaster are often overwhelmed by huge amounts of information. Following an emergency, people want to know:

- ♦ What is happening with the recovery process?
- ♦ What support is available?
- ♦ What they need to do to qualify for support?
- ♦ What they can do if they have questions, concerns or complaints?

If material does not address one of these four broad categories, ask yourself: does it actually need to be provided?

As communication is a two-way process, asking affected people what they need will help ensure your communications are relevant.

#### 2. Is it clear?

After an emergency, people often have trouble remembering or understanding information. It is not appropriate to use jargon, overly complicated or technical language.

- ♦ Short, sharp amounts of relevant and practical information is best.
- ♦ Ensure there is a clear call to action in the communication (what does the person actually have to do?).
- ♦ Ensure that there are formats available for people with a sensory impairment, and/ or people from CALD backgrounds. When using text-based communications, ensure the font and size of the text is readable.

#### 3. Is it targeted?

The method of communication you use should fit the audience. Know your audience and the best way to reach them. Just because you can send information or use a certain communication channel doesn't necessarily mean you should. For example, if you want to alert women in a small community about a maternal health clinic opening, placing posters in the local chemist, doctor's surgery and shops may be more effective than simply updating your website.



# APPENDIX B

| Key resources on communication and community engagement           |   |
|---|---|
| Australian Disaster Recovery Framework, Version 3.0, October 2022 | <p>The Framework reflects the current approach to recovery and is another step to enhance disaster resilience, and a shared commitment to develop Australia's disaster recovery discipline.</p> <p><a href="https://knowledge.aidr.org.au">https://knowledge.aidr.org.au</a></p>  |
| Community Recovery Handbook 2018                                  | <p>This document is a comprehensive guide about community recovery in Australia. It is intended for use by planners, managers and those involved in working with communities to design and deliver recovery processes, services, programs and activities.</p> <p><a href="https://knowledge.aidr.org.au">https://knowledge.aidr.org.au</a></p>  |
| National Principles for Disaster Recovery                         | <p>The National Principles for Disaster Recovery can be used by communities, governments and recovery agencies to guide our efforts, our approach, our planning and our decision-making. Australian and New Zealand government departments, recovery support agencies and two Australian communities impacted by major disasters have worked in partnership to revise and update the principles.</p> <p><a href="https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-for-disaster-recovery/">https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-principles-for-disaster-recovery/</a></p>   |
| Stronger together: SA Disaster Resilience Strategy, 2019-24       | <p>Stronger Together - South Australia's Disaster Resilience Strategy provides a foundation upon which all sectors can work together towards a more resilient South Australia and provides direction for resilience building work across four key focus areas and two cross cutting themes.</p> <p><a href="https://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/initiatives/stronger-together-south-australias-disaster-resilience-strategy/">https://www.safecom.sa.gov.au/initiatives/stronger-together-south-australias-disaster-resilience-strategy/</a></p>  |
| People at risk in emergencies framework for South Australia       | <p>This framework provides guidance for how State and Local governments, businesses, nongovernment organisations, community groups and individuals can work together to strengthen the preparedness, safety and wellbeing of people who are most at risk in emergencies.</p> <p><a href="https://www.dpc.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/34254/People-at-Risk-in-Emergencies-Framework.pdf">https://www.dpc.sa.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/34254/People-at-Risk-in-Emergencies-Framework.pdf</a></p>   |
| A Guide to Engaging in Disaster Recovery, 2015                    | <p>This guide is intended for anyone involved in a disaster recovery situation – community leaders, politicians, engagement practitioners, workers from specialised agencies, those without prior recover experience or for experienced professionals working in a community they are unfamiliar with. The content focuses on the 'human' element of recovering, examining the importance of effective engagement, and identifying useful strategies that maximise the potential for sustained, strategic disaster recovery that is genuinely community-led.</p> <p><a href="https://iap2.org.au/news/a-guide-to-engaging-in-disaster-recovery/">https://iap2.org.au/news/a-guide-to-engaging-in-disaster-recovery/</a></p> |
| SA Government, Better Together Planning Tools                     | <p>The Better Together program offers South Australian public sector employees practical support through advice, training and events, and partnerships to support and deliver innovative engagement strategies.</p>   |

## Key resources on communication and community engagement

|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <a href="https://www.bettertogether.sa.gov.au/planning-tools/prepare">https://www.bettertogether.sa.gov.au/planning-tools/prepare</a>  |
| SA State Emergency Service, Community Engagement Strategic Plan, 2018-2023 | <p>This strategic plan adopts the following Community Engagement principles that are closely aligned with the “National Strategy for Disaster Resilience Community Engagement Framework”<sup>2</sup>.</p> <p><a href="https://www.ses.sa.gov.au/about-us/community-engagement/">https://www.ses.sa.gov.au/about-us/community-engagement/</a></p> |
| Communicating in emergencies and disasters                                 | <p>A website on communications in emergencies with advice, guidance and tools.</p> <p><a href="https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/phone/communications-emergencies-and-natural-disasters">https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/media-communications-arts/phone/communications-emergencies-and-natural-disasters</a></p>    |

# APPENDIX C

## Acronyms used in the Framework, Guidelines and Procedures

| Term    | Definition  |
|---------|---|
| ASC–R   | Assistant State Coordinator – Recovery                                    |
| ABCD    | Asset-Based Community Development   |
| CCRC    | Council Community Recovery Coordinator                                    |
| CDO     | Community Development Officer   |
| CRC     | Community Recovery Coordinator  |
| CRO     | Community Recovery Officer  |
| CRCttee | Community Recovery Committee  |
| DPC     | Department of the Premier and Cabinet                                     |
| DRFA    | Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements                                    |
| EMCC    | Emergency Management Cabinet Committee                                    |
| EPA     | Environmental Protection Authority  |
| ERFSG   | Emergency Relief Functional Support Group                                 |
| LGFSG   | Local Government Functional Support Group                                 |
| LRC     | Local Recovery Committee  |
| M&E     | Monitoring and Evaluations  |
| NGOs    | Non-government Organisations  |
| PPRR    | Prevention and Hazard Risk Reduction, Preparedness, Response and Recovery |
| PR      | Public Relations  |
| RRE     | Resilience, Recovery and Engagement Subcommittee                          |
| SDRCF   | State Disaster Recovery Coordination Framework                            |
| SEMC    | State Emergency Management Committee                                      |
| SEMP    | State Emergency Management Plan   |
| SERM    | Security, Emergency and Recovery Management                               |
| SRC     | State Recovery Coordinator  |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| SRCPG  | State Recovery Coordination and Planning Group |
| SROG   | State Recovery Operations Group                |
| VSA&NT | Volunteering SA&NT                             |
| ZESTs  | Zone Emergency Support Team(s)                 |





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