VICSES Community Resilience Strategy 2016-2019

July 2016

Safer Communities - Together

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Acknowledgements

This strategy was developed by the VICSES Community Resilience and Communications Team in consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. Our People contributed through workshops, volunteer forums and project groups. Their contributions are greatly appreciated.

Current research, both qualitative and quantitative, has given us evidence and built our confidence in what we propose. We will continue to build on our findings and commission further research to ensure continuous improvement is considered and adopted as an end-to-end process during the lifetime of the strategy.

External stakeholders, including our colleagues in other agencies and the Victorian public, have taken part in briefings, discussion sessions and have provided online feedback to our team. This research and consultation process has shaped the strategy below.

Foreword

I am pleased to commend the VICSES Community Resilience Strategy (the strategy) to all staff, volunteers and to our colleagues in the emergency management sector.

This document is intended primarily as an internal framework that lays out the thinking and strategy developed from significant research and consultative activity the VICSES Community Resilience and Communications team has undertaken over the past number of years. The process also highlights the collaborative conversations and strong relationships that are a major feature of this strategy.

Community resilience is not a new buzz phrase. It's part of what we have always done and is a primary value that drives volunteers.

Communities are changing in all ways – demographically, socially and in terms of need and expectation. There are so many new ways of communicating effectively with communities in times of an emergency.

This strategy explores the present and the future, connecting the two. It envisages a long-term pathway that empowers communities and helps them share the challenges that the future offers. We will always be part of that future, and we will always respond.

Stephen Griffin
Chief Executive Officer

Capacity
Collaboration
Connections

Introduction

The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) is a volunteer based organisation committed to working with every Victorian to achieve its corporate vision:
Safer Communities - Together.

Our People – volunteer and paid - are professional, highly trained and dedicated to their mission of making their local communities safer through preparedness and response activities for flood, storm, earthquake and tsunami emergencies.

VICSES is a key agile player in Victoria's emergency management landscape. Our People work in the front lines, in the control centres, in rural and metropolitan locations – anywhere there is a community need.

This strategy outlines the way we will work with communities and partners, to achieve more aware, informed and prepared communities; supporting them to understand their risk and the relevance of taking action before, during and after emergency events.

This will support the long-term vision of the VICSES Service Delivery Strategy 2025 in contributing to safer and more resilient communities, by providing sector leadership on building stronger community connectivity and better engagement practices.

It sets out our strategic objectives, goals and the outcomes that will align all our collective efforts and achieve our vision.

The strategy is not a moment in time. It is the next step in a long-term evolving approach, to delivering services and value to the community. It is underpinned by our commitment to build the capability and capacity of Our People and programs.

The strategy will complement the Community Resilience Framework for Victoria's emergency management sector[1]. It is also aligned with the Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities[2].

[1] Community Resilience Framework for Victoria's Emergency Management Sector, Emergency Management Victoria, 2016.

[2] Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities Version 1, Department of Premier and Cabinet, December 2015

Purpose

The purpose of this strategy is to provide guidance to Our People on how we can work together to build safer and more resilient communities. Together, we can do this by building **capacity**, increasing **collaboration** and fostering **connections**.

The strategy outlines how we will work with communities to build resilience. It provides a three-year road map for the future design and development, and delivery and evaluation of our programs and resources.

It sets out our commitment to better understanding community attitudes, key drivers and barriers. It details how we will join with communities before, during and after emergency events, develop positive partnerships and provide timely, effective reporting to the Victorian Government.

Enabling VICSES vision and goals

The strategy is an important part of realising the VICSES vision of ***Safer Communities – Together***. To achieve this vision, VICSES executes a variety of organisational strategies – *see Figure 1*. They are dependent on each other and work together to help VICSES deliver on strategic priorities.

The strategy:

- is an integral part of supporting VICSES vision for the three-year period and it provides the roadmap to achieve the mission of "partnering with the community and other agencies to provide timely and effective emergency services whilst building community preparedness and resilience", as set out in the VICSES Corporate Plan 2015-2018.
- is underpinned by the guiding principles of VICSES key organisational strategies, with initiatives that are innovative, reliable, evidence and risk based, representing value for money and meeting the needs of diverse communities - VICSES Service Delivery Strategy 2025; and where Volunteers are recognised for their contribution to their community - VICSES Our People Strategy 2014-2017.
- also complements the strategic reform priorities of the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan 2015 – 2018 and shares the principles to support community-centred approaches, knowledge and continuous learning, enhancing leadership and encouraging the sharing of responsibilities.

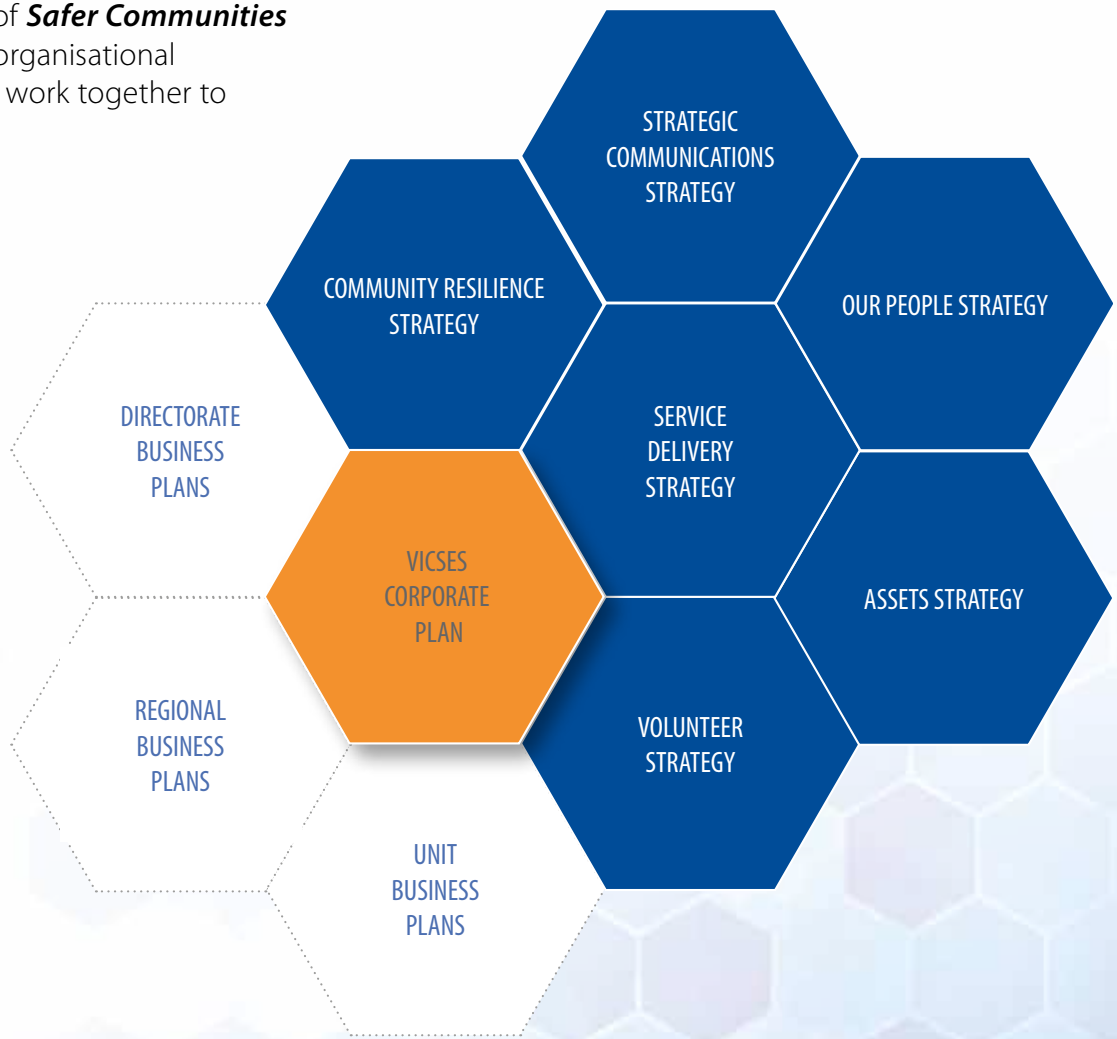
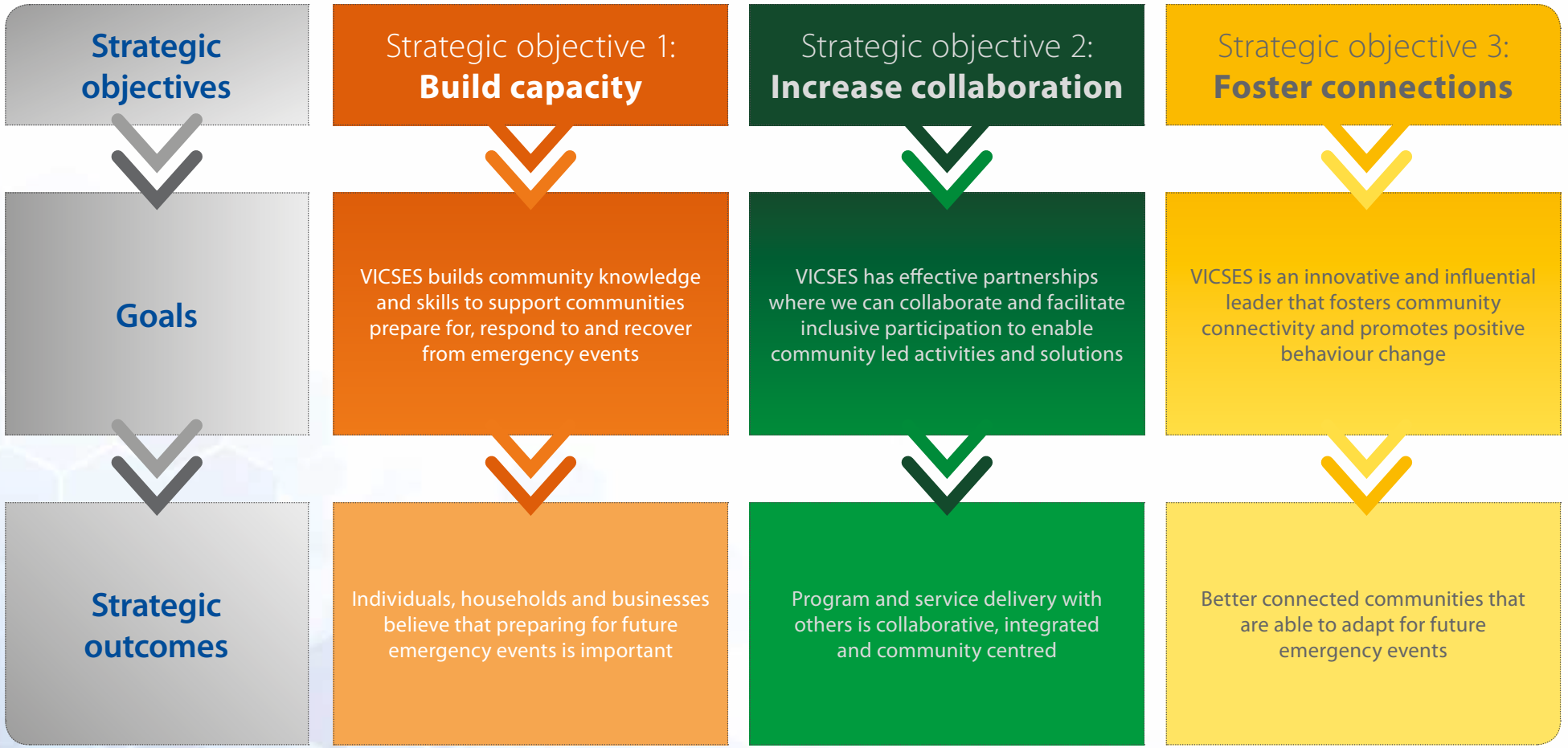


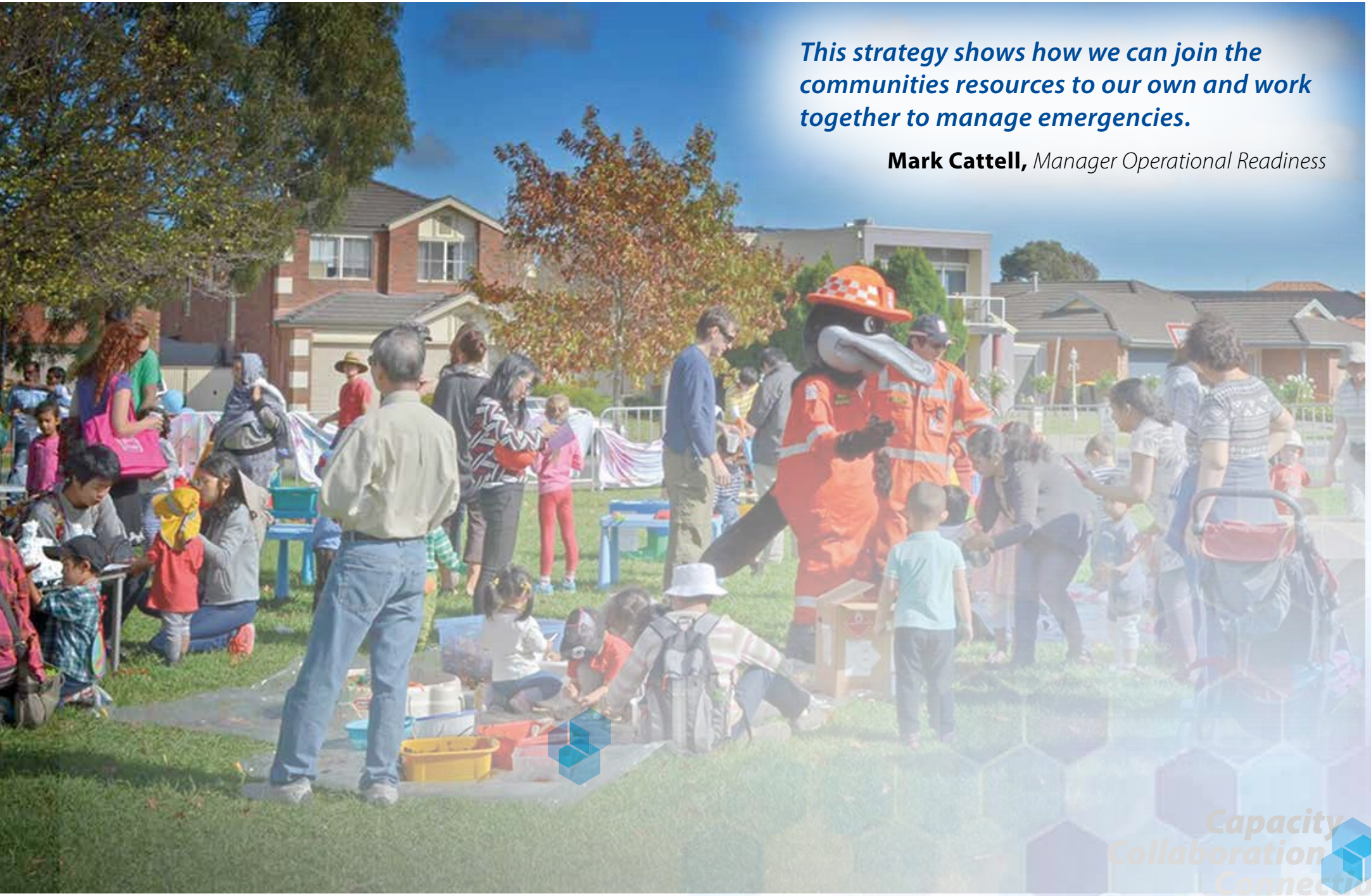
Figure 1 VICSES Strategy Framework May 2016

Capacity
Collaboration
Connections

Strategic objectives, goals and outcomes

The dashboard below outlines our strategic objectives, goals and outcomes for the lifetime of the strategy.





This strategy shows how we can join the communities resources to our own and work together to manage emergencies.

Mark Cattell, *Manager Operational Readiness*

Capacity
Collaboration
Connections

Chronic stresses

Challenges that weaken the fabric of a city on a day-to-day or cyclical basis. Examples include sea level rise, increasing pressures on healthcare services, unemployment and deeper social inequality.

Acute shocks

Sudden events that threaten a city. In Melbourne, examples of acute shocks include heatwaves, bushfires, floods, influenza pandemics and extremist acts, including cyber-crime.

Resilient Melbourne Strategy 2016[1]

[1] Resilient Melbourne Strategy, 2016, sourced from http://resilientmelbourne.com.au/strategy/

Community resilience

Defining community resilience

A disaster resilient community is one where people work together with emergency services, local authorities and other organisations to understand and manage the risks that may affect them. This approach is supported by the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030[1] (to which Australia is a signatory) and in the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (2011)[2].

Disaster risk reduction requires an all-of-society engagement and partnership. It also requires empowerment and inclusive, accessible and non discriminatory participation, paying special attention to people disproportionately affected by disasters.[3]

A resilient community is one that can *'survive, adapt and grow'*[4] in the face of **stresses** (everyday challenges) and **shocks** (emergency events). It is self-sufficient and able to maintain systems and structures without being wholly dependent on external help.

VICSES has adopted EMV's definition of a resilient community, as outlined in A Modern Emergency Management System for Victoria (October 2015)[5]:

"Increasing a community's resilience involves a focus on the strength and sustainability of a community's infrastructure and institutions, as well as building and strengthening the links between people and the services, systems and structures that support the community to function."

[1] Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, sourced from http://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

[2] National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, Council of Australian Governments, 2011.

[3] Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015-2030, sourced from http://www.unisdr.org/files/43291_sendaiframeworkfordrren.pdf

[4] 100 Resilient Cities, Rockefeller Foundation, sourced from http://www.100resilientcities.org/resilience

[5] A Modern Emergency Management System for Victoria, Emergency Management Victoria, 2015.

Benefits of community resilience

We know that the impacts and costs of extreme weather events are expected to increase[6]. This may lead to an increase in community reliance on the emergency management sector when faced with future emergency events, with a consequent greater demand on services.

We therefore recognise the importance of working in partnership with communities. When communities play a role in their own safety, resilience is enhanced[7].

We also know that an ageing population, land-use planning, building controls, population growth, urbanisation and climate change adaptation may have an effect on the capacity and capability of communities before, during and after future emergency events.

The benefits of building community resilience and investing in disaster preparedness (disaster risk reduction – DRR) initiatives include:

- safer communities
- less demand on emergency services for assistance
- less damage to property and infrastructure
- speedier recovery
- reduction in overall (impact and recovery) costs to the national economy[8].

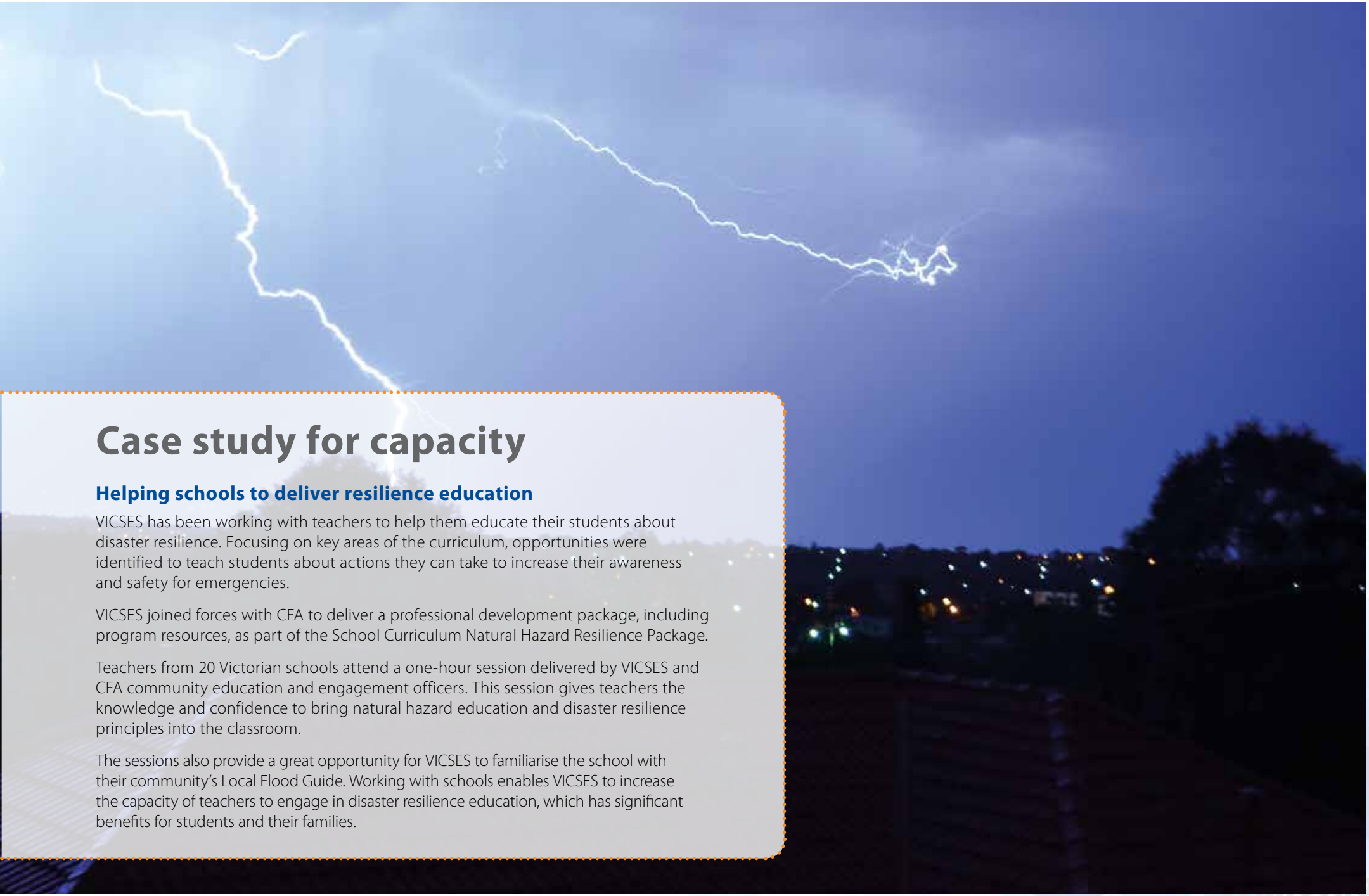
The benefit of engaging with and empowering communities is not just limited to "disaster resilience", but has a far broader impact. Connected and resilient communities are "ready to look after each other in times of crisis, whether that be a flood, bushfire or an incident of violent extremism"[9].

[6] Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, Productivity Commission Enquiry Report V1, Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014.

[7] National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, Community Engagement Framework, 2013.

[8] Natural Disaster Funding Arrangements, Productivity Commission Enquiry Report V1, Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2014.

[9] Strategic Framework to Strengthen Victoria's Social Cohesion and the Resilience of its Communities, 2015.



Case study for capacity

Helping schools to deliver resilience education

VICSES has been working with teachers to help them educate their students about disaster resilience. Focusing on key areas of the curriculum, opportunities were identified to teach students about actions they can take to increase their awareness and safety for emergencies.

VICSES joined forces with CFA to deliver a professional development package, including program resources, as part of the School Curriculum Natural Hazard Resilience Package.

Teachers from 20 Victorian schools attend a one-hour session delivered by VICSES and CFA community education and engagement officers. This session gives teachers the knowledge and confidence to bring natural hazard education and disaster resilience principles into the classroom.

The sessions also provide a great opportunity for VICSES to familiarise the school with their community's Local Flood Guide. Working with schools enables VICSES to increase the capacity of teachers to engage in disaster resilience education, which has significant benefits for students and their families.

Challenges of community resilience

By definition, emergencies are disruptive, largely unpredictable, sudden and potentially dangerous. For most people, emergencies are not part of their day-to-day life experiences.

It is well evidenced that the ***stresses*** of everyday life faced by a community, whether at home, at work or elsewhere, can influence their capacity to prepare for, and respond to ***shocks*** being sudden, sharp events that may threaten lives, property and the environment.

Recent research conducted by VICSES found that resilience is influenced by the understanding and exposure of communities to differing levels of stresses and shocks that in turn shape community attitude and awareness of emergency events.

This can vary significantly across our diverse communities and that hazard awareness does not necessarily translate to higher levels of preparedness or action. This is influenced by a number of key drivers and barriers for communities across the preparedness chain – *see figure 2*.

Some members of the community were found to be actively preparing and maintaining for the next emergency event, whilst a large proportion of the community was found not to be interested and therefore, not planning to do anything about preparing for future emergency events[10].

A better understanding of community attitudes, key drivers and barriers will allow VICSES to engage, collaborate and connect with its targeted audiences to replace current preparedness behaviour and practices with community supported actions.

[10] VICSES Community Awareness Final report, New Focus, September 2015.

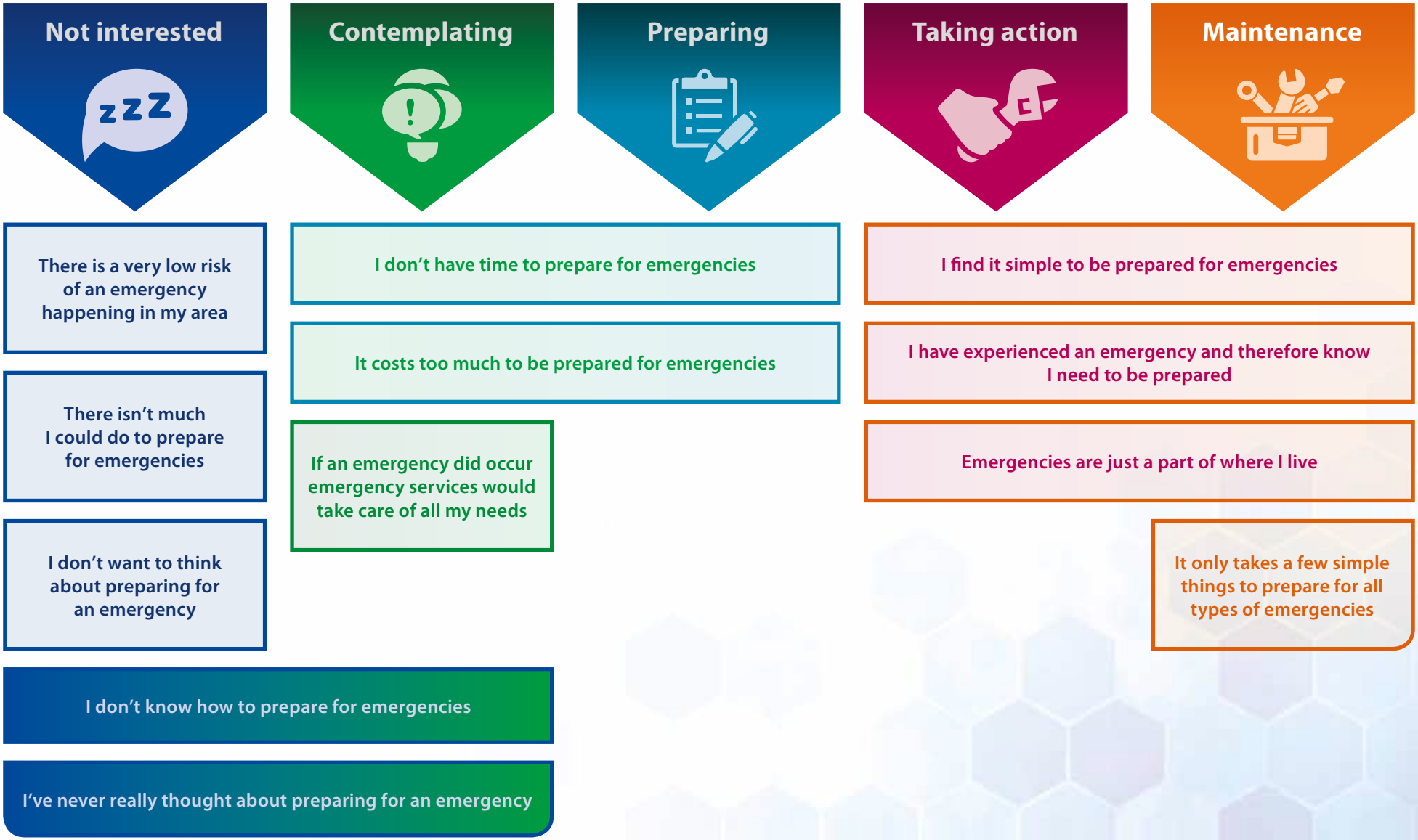


Figure 2 Preparedness chain - key drivers and barriers[11]

[11] VICSES Community Awareness Final report, New Focus, September 2015.

Capacity
Collaboration
Connections

We're quite excited about developing this potential resource pool to expand our capability capacity beyond our incident management response during operations, to also include community education and engagement before and after operations.

Kelvin Jewell, *Controller, State Support Unit*

Community resilience approach for VICSES

How we will support community

The role of the community in disaster resilience is based on individuals taking their share of responsibility for preventing, preparing for, responding to and recovering from disasters. They can do this by drawing on guidance, resources and policies of government and other sources such as community organisations[12].

The strategy enables Our People to support communities to better understand the who, what, when and how for emergency events by:

- building competency in knowing what to do in the future
  Believe they know how to do it
- increasing their individual capacity and capability to respond
  Believe they can do it
- increasing awareness of their role, and role of VICSES and others in the community
  Believe everyone has a role to play
- realising the positive outcomes of preparing for future emergencies
  Believe it will make a difference.

How we will support Our People

According to the strategy, VICSES will deliver to the community by continuing to support Our People to have the skills, competencies, support and structure in place to meet our current and future needs.

Capacity
Collaboration
Connections

[12] National Strategy for Disaster Resilience, Council of Australian Governments, 2011.

How we will deliver

We are well placed to deliver the strategy, having skilled and committed people who live and work in their communities and embody the spirit of community service. Our People play an important role in influencing and supporting community actions and decisions before, during and after emergency events.

VICSES acknowledges that there is no-one-size fits-all-approach: Victorian communities are diverse, speaking more than 260 languages and dialects, and following 135 faiths and religions[13].

What works well for one community may not necessarily be meaningful in another, and with such diversity, our programs and service delivery may vary considerably across the state.

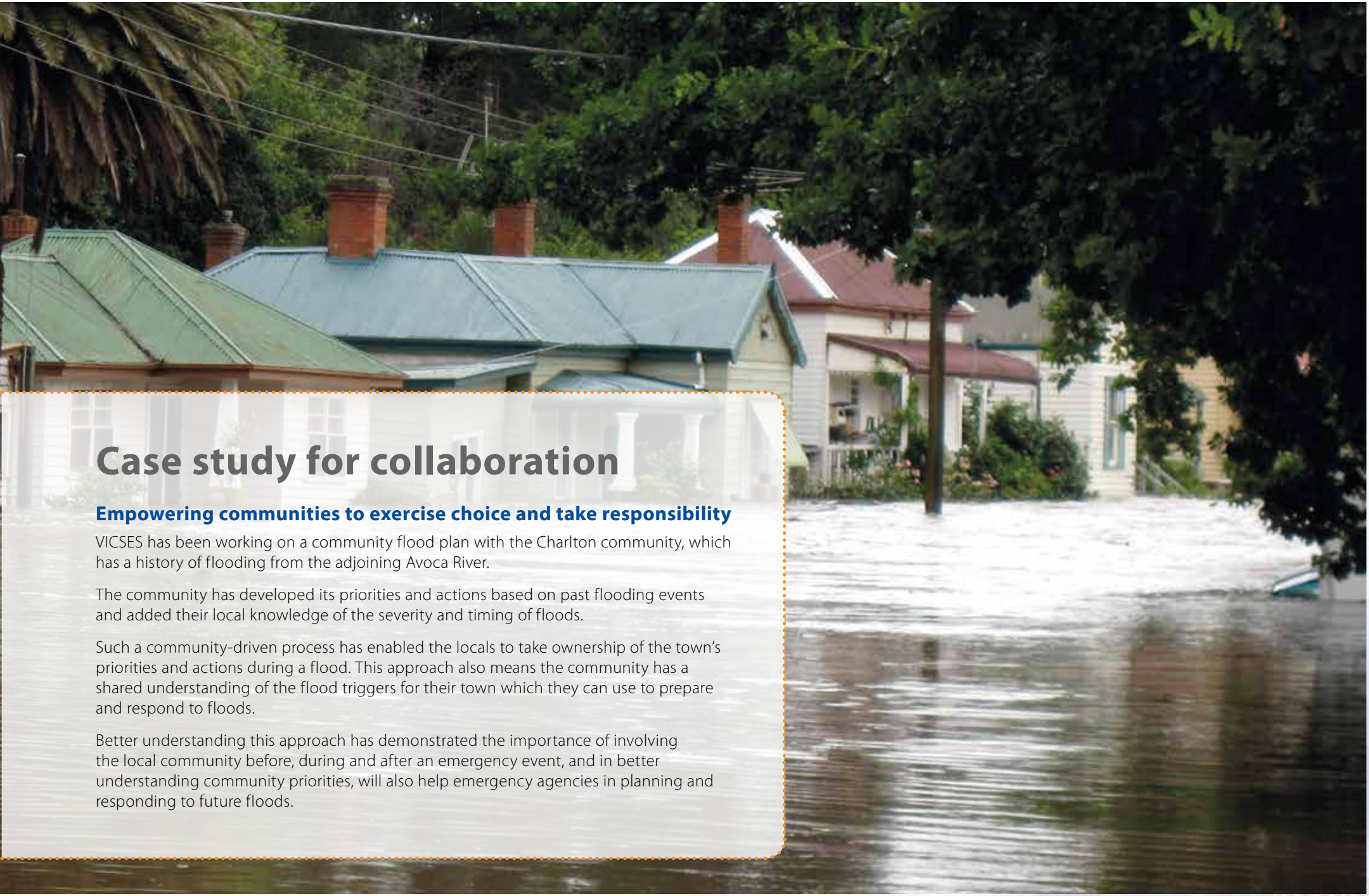
Our programs will adapt accordingly and be targeted to diverse community attitudes, needs and expectations, be cost effective and flexible; delivered efficiently in a dynamic emergency management environment to meet and measure the key deliverables of the strategy.

The term community resilience may be new to us, but we already engage with the community by doing school fetes, visits and even local community events.

My unit will specifically recruit for members who can build networks and increase community engagement.

George Haitidis, *Controller, Monash Unit*

[13] Victorian Multicultural Commission, sourced from http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/population-and-migration , July 2016.



Case study for collaboration

Empowering communities to exercise choice and take responsibility

VICSES has been working on a community flood plan with the Charlton community, which has a history of flooding from the adjoining Avoca River.

The community has developed its priorities and actions based on past flooding events and added their local knowledge of the severity and timing of floods.

Such a community-driven process has enabled the locals to take ownership of the town's priorities and actions during a flood. This approach also means the community has a shared understanding of the flood triggers for their town which they can use to prepare and respond to floods.

Better understanding this approach has demonstrated the importance of involving the local community before, during and after an emergency event, and in better understanding community priorities, will also help emergency agencies in planning and responding to future floods.

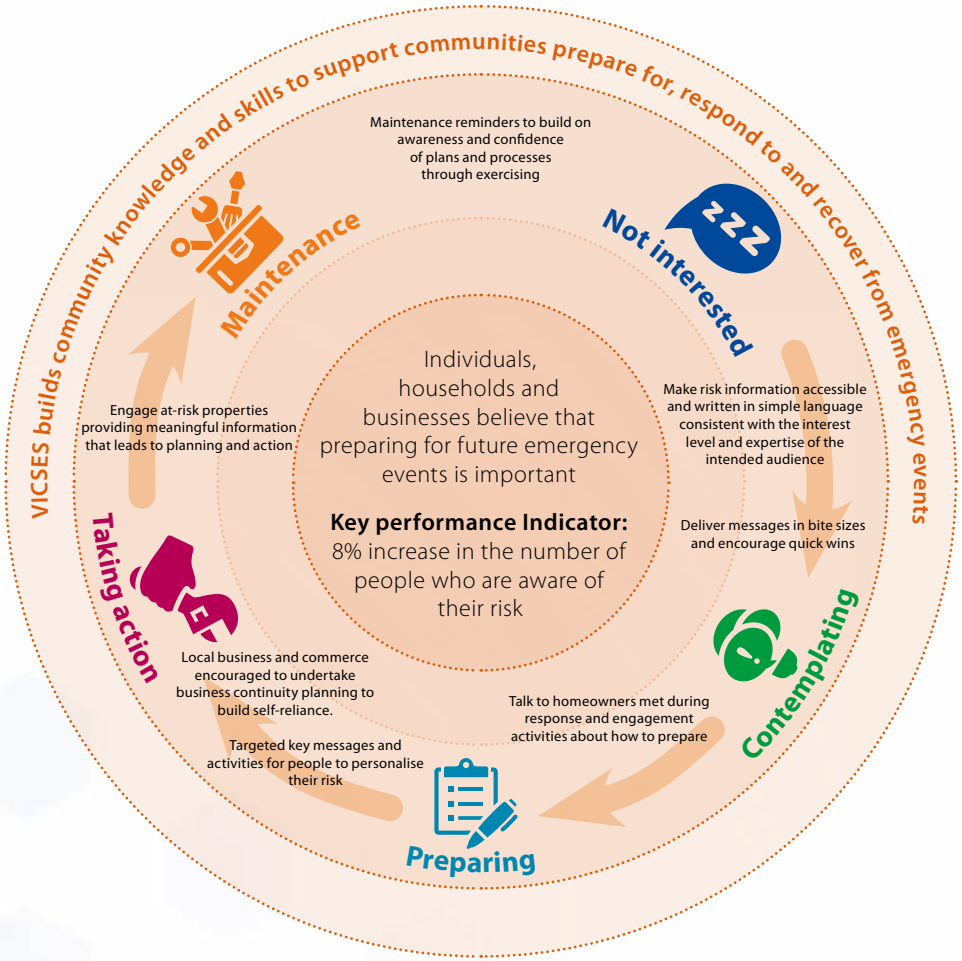
Evaluating our success

A key and measurable outcome of the strategy is to increase the level of interest, and support behaviour change within our communities, so they are more aware, informed and prepared for emergencies – supporting them to understand their risk, and the relevance of taking action before, during and after emergencies.

VICSES has developed a series of resilience models for **'Capacity'**, **'Collaboration'** and **'Connections'** that will provide guidance in setting out this commitment, and to achieving our key performance indicators (KPI) to ensure we:

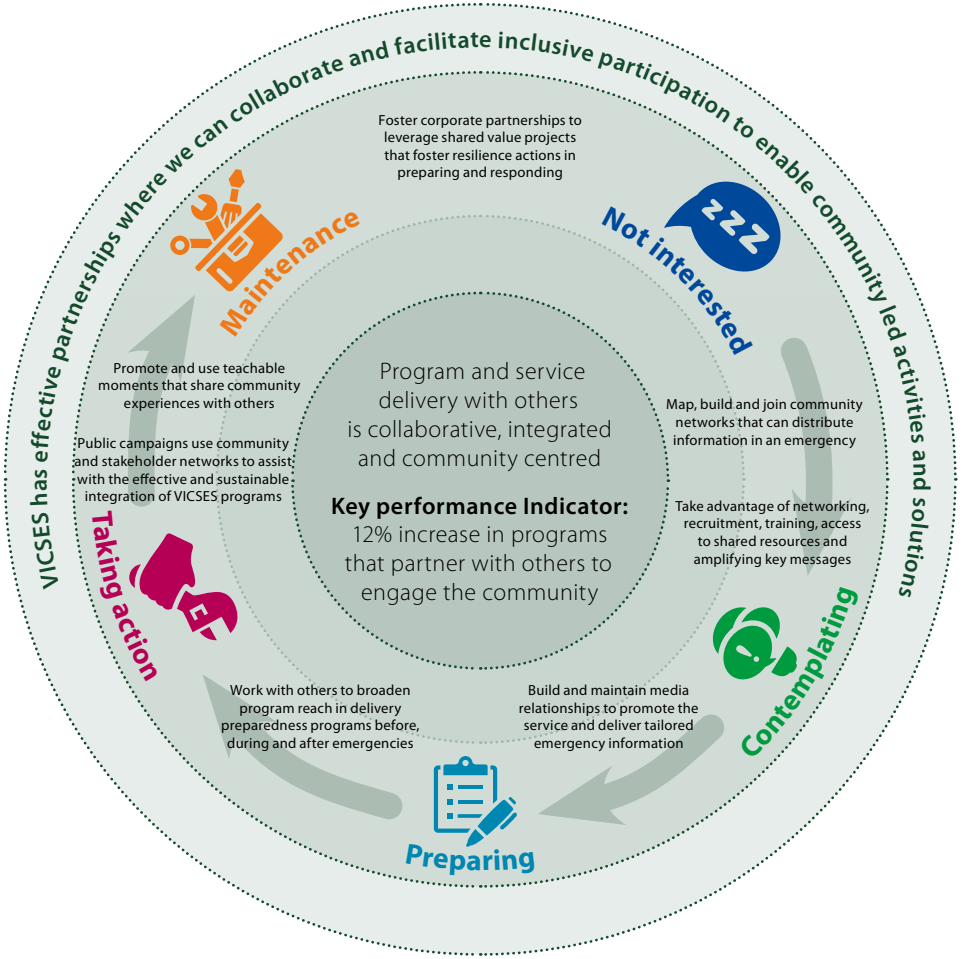
- invest our efforts in those members of the community that are **not interested**, to increase awareness of local risk and the relevance of taking action that is local, relevant and community centred
- design programs, services and resources to build knowledge and tools that foster meaningful participation by the community. This will help VICSES engage those members of the community who have not yet begun to prepare but are **contemplating** a start in the near future
- utilise innovative practices that are contemporary, collaborative and practical: that support greater self-reliance by individuals and communities that have commenced **preparing** for and are **taking action**
- foster a learning culture within communities where experiences and outcomes are shared in order to **maintain** levels of preparedness before, during and after emergencies.

Strategic objective 1: **Build capacity**



'Capacity'

Strategic objective 2: **Increase collaboration**



‘Collaboration’

Strategic objective 3: **Foster connections**

‘Connections’

How we will practically apply

Year one of the strategy implementation phase commences in 2016-17. A number of initiatives have been identified for implementation in this period that will be delivered through a range of activities detailed in business plans at the state, region and unit level.

At a practical level our programs and services can be supported and maintained with all levels of community including:

- businesses and commerce
- children and youth networks
- councils
- faith groups
- industry
- local sports clubs
- neighbourhood houses
- not-for-profit organisations
- other emergency service organisations
- schools
- tourism networks
- voluntary groups.

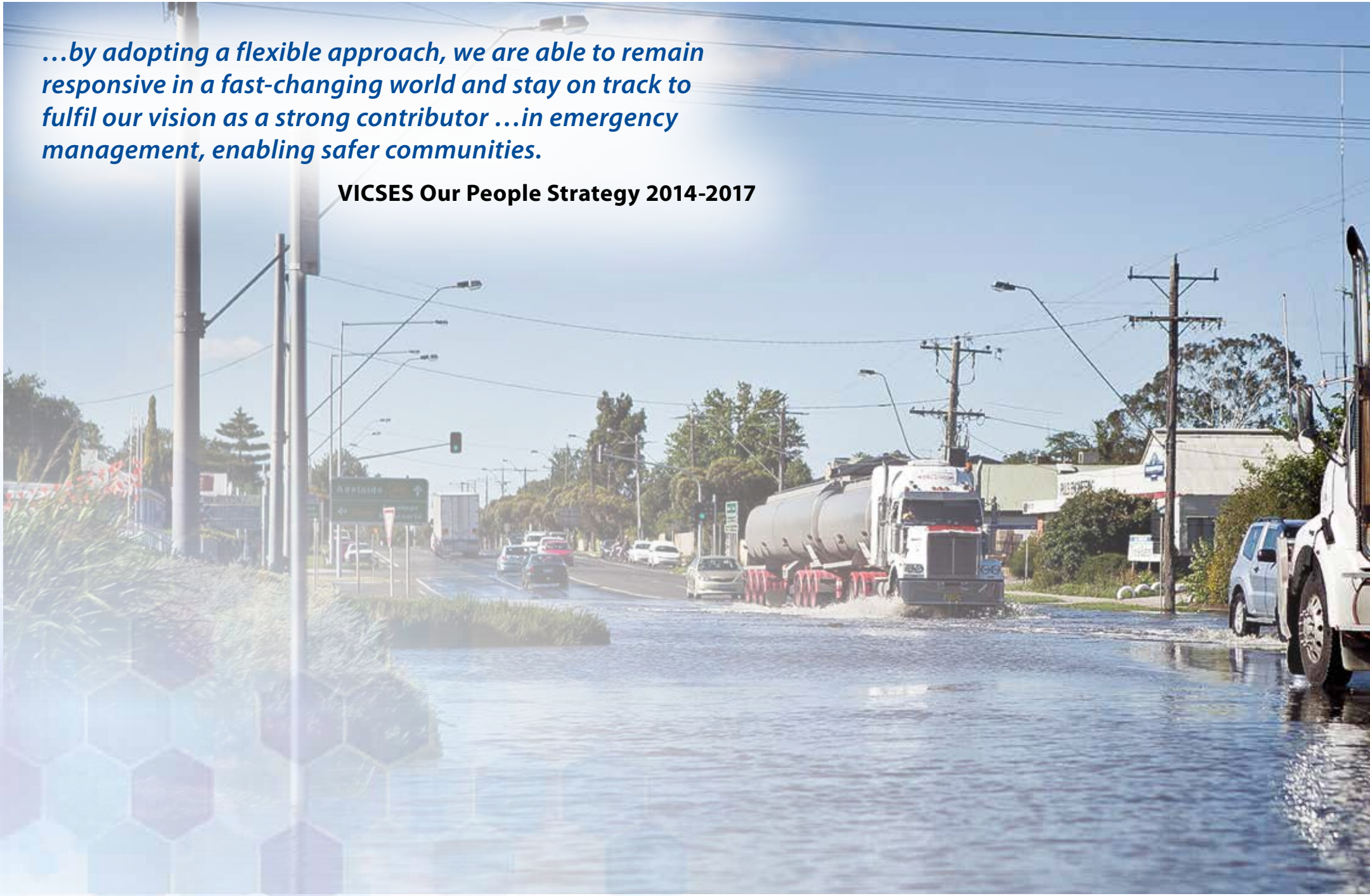
To support continuous improvement, these initiatives will be reviewed annually to realise opportunities, inform decisions and positively influence the focus and direction of what we have committed to. They will help us find innovative solutions to address the various challenges faced by VICSES and community.

Case study for connections

Building preparedness through relationships in Koori and culturally and linguistically diverse communities

In an effort to improve community resilience and preparedness, Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) and Melbourne Water joined forces to create the Flood Management Strategy – Port Phillip and Westernport.

This strategy demonstrated the importance of involving groups that are often marginalised. VICSES concentrated its efforts on leaders and members of Koori and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, using events created by the community to build understanding and relationships within communities, rather than for them. As well as Koori projects in Maroondah and Darebin areas, relationships have been forged with Jewish, African and Islamic communities. Resources have also been developed to help volunteers communicate with non-English speaking people during emergency incidents.



…by adopting a flexible approach, we are able to remain responsive in a fast-changing world and stay on track to fulfil our vision as a strong contributor …in emergency management, enabling safer communities.

VICSES Our People Strategy 2014-2017

How we will measure

A substantial change in behaviour is not expected in the first three years as sustained behaviour change is a long-term goal requiring a number of years to successfully achieve, track and measure.

VICSES will engage operational partners, external stakeholders and academia to explore how to best define and develop key indicators/markers that measure our achievement against our strategic objectives, report on our KPIs and to help identify and embed best practice.

They will help us answer crucial organisational questions such as '*where are we now?*', *'where do we want to be?*', and *'how can we progress in the most efficient way?'* with Safer Communities – Together by providing data on not only our community reach, network strength and connectivity, but also on the capacity of communities – their attitudes, knowledge, skills and behaviours. All of which enable communities and their individual members to prepare for and respond before, during and after future emergency events.

These indicators, and the theory of change[14] into which they will be embedded, will be reviewed throughout the life of this strategy and there will be development of further specific measures for each component as required.

How we will report

Findings will be published annually during the life of the document as an outcomes report and made available online and via www.ses.vic.gov.au

Reports will also be provided to government in accordance with the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2015-2018, and establishment of the Emergency Management Performance Framework and Standards (EMV).

[14] A Theory of Change is a detailed description and illustration of how and why we expect change to happen, and how we will be able to observe that. As such it is an approach to the planning, participation, and evaluation that is used for charting the course of social change

Contact us

We welcome stakeholder feedback and input to assist us in the implementation and delivery of the strategy.

You can contact us at resilience@ses.vic.gov.au or through your local VICSES regional office.

The strategy lays out our work over the next three years to strengthen community resilience. It's making sure we all know what to do before, during and after an emergency event.

Kate White, *Director Community Resilience and Communications*

Appendix A

Key references

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