



## Local Knowledge

### Background

Knowledge obtained from local communities and organisations is a valuable part of the picture available to emergency services before, during and after emergencies. This local knowledge provides an invaluable 'on the ground' understanding of an unfolding situation from the people who understand the area best.

With this in mind, Victoria State Emergency Service (SES) is committed to bringing local knowledge into the decision making process for emergencies.

This commitment aligns to the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience (February 2011)* and recommendations 22 and 93 of the Victorian Floods Review.

As the Victorian Emergency Management Reform White Paper states:

*'Local Knowledge on people, history, risks, vulnerability, operational requirements, infrastructure and services significantly enhances emergency preparation, response and recovery.'*

### What is SES doing?

SES has developed a Local Knowledge Policy to provide principles and strategic direction for how SES will ensure local knowledge is incorporated before, during and after emergency response.

SES is implementing its local knowledge initiatives by:

- Identifying and working with existing networks that can provide local knowledge to help inform decision making, including those affiliated with Melbourne Water, water authorities, Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), Catchment Management Authorities (CMAs), other emergency services and Local Government.
- Identifying community observers to perform a role of providing information and observations.
- Appointing Local Information Officers (LIOs) within SES units to liaise with SES, community observers and other sources of local knowledge.
- Developing role statements to provide direction to identified community observers and LIOs.
- Documenting community observers and LIOs within relevant emergency plans.
- Ensuring input from local knowledge sources is obtained for information within maps and Emergency Plans.
- Establishing command and control arrangements with other emergency service providers, particularly in communities where no SES unit exists.
- Building local knowledge into SES' operational management.

### Why is incorporating local knowledge important?

Local knowledge, when added to other available information, can help contribute to a informed response to an emergency.

Partnerships with community members, local authorities and other relevant organisations are essential for emergency services to be effective. These relationships can complement the work of emergency services and contribute to a more effective emergency response. Local knowledge is an important part of that.

Reviews of past emergencies demonstrate the value of local knowledge. The Victorian Floods Review 2011 identified occasions during the 2010-11 floods where local knowledge was used to good effect to inform decision making and cited examples of local knowledge allegedly being ignored, discounted or not used as an information source, impacting on the response.

## How can you support these local knowledge initiatives?

Organisations such as Melbourne Water, water authorities, BoM, CMAs, other emergency services and Local Government can support these local knowledge initiatives by:

- Notifying SES regional staff of existing networks that should be captured within emergency plans.

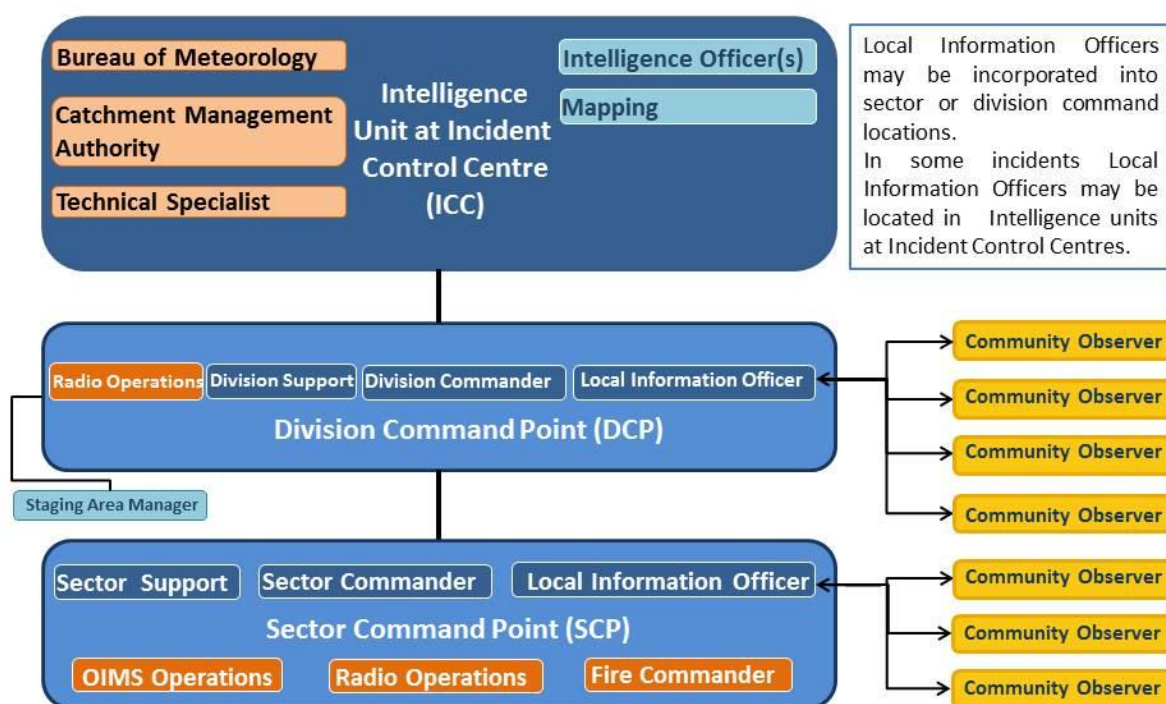
Community members can support these local knowledge initiatives by:

- Nominating yourself to be identified as a community observer to your local unit, and
- Considering how you might share and access information from social media during an emergency.

## How local knowledge is incorporated into the Incident Management Structure

During an emergency an Incident Management Team (IMT) may be formed to co-ordinate the emergency response. Within that team, an Intelligence Unit works to provide information about what is happening on the ground and will access information from local knowledge sources as a part of that. This may include information provided by community observers and LIOs and other networks such as ground and air observers.

Refer to the diagram below for a proposed IMT structure incorporating Community Observers and LIOs.



The pre-identification of community observers, LIOs and other networks via emergency plans will help ensure local knowledge is able to be incorporated effectively into emergency management.

## Next steps to develop the local knowledge initiatives

- SES staff will be identifying sources of local knowledge within emergency plans.
- SES Unit Controllers will be identifying LIOs to perform this role within their jurisdictions.
- Relevant staff from VICSES and other organisations, volunteers, identified Community Observers and LIOs will be provided with briefings and awareness sessions.

## Further Information

For more information please contact your local SES unit, regional office or the SES State Operations team on [stateoperations@ses.vic.gov.au](mailto:stateoperations@ses.vic.gov.au) or **(03) 9256 9000**.