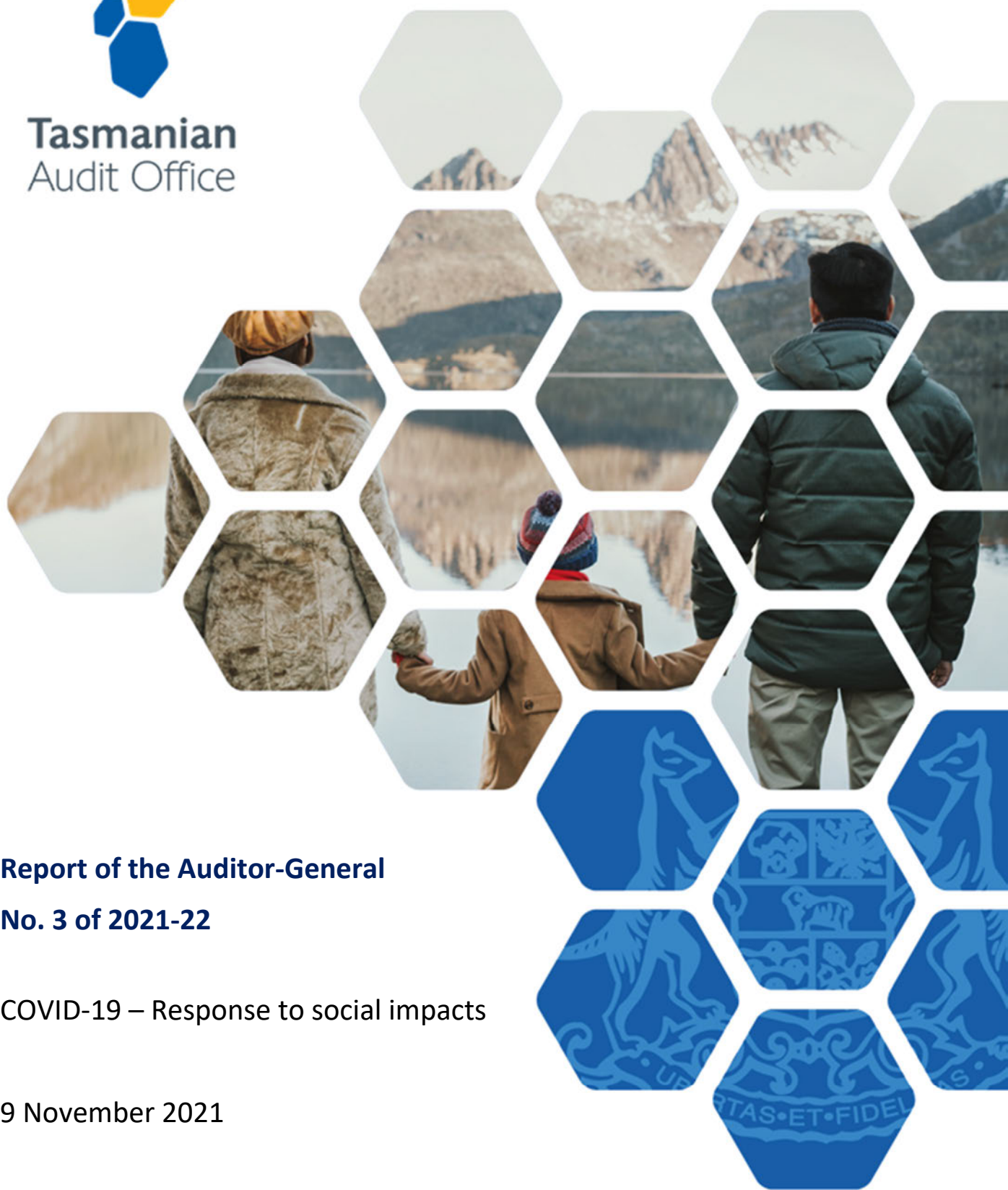




**Tasmanian**  
Audit Office



**Report of the Auditor-General  
No. 3 of 2021-22**

COVID-19 – Response to social impacts

9 November 2021

## The Role of the Auditor-General

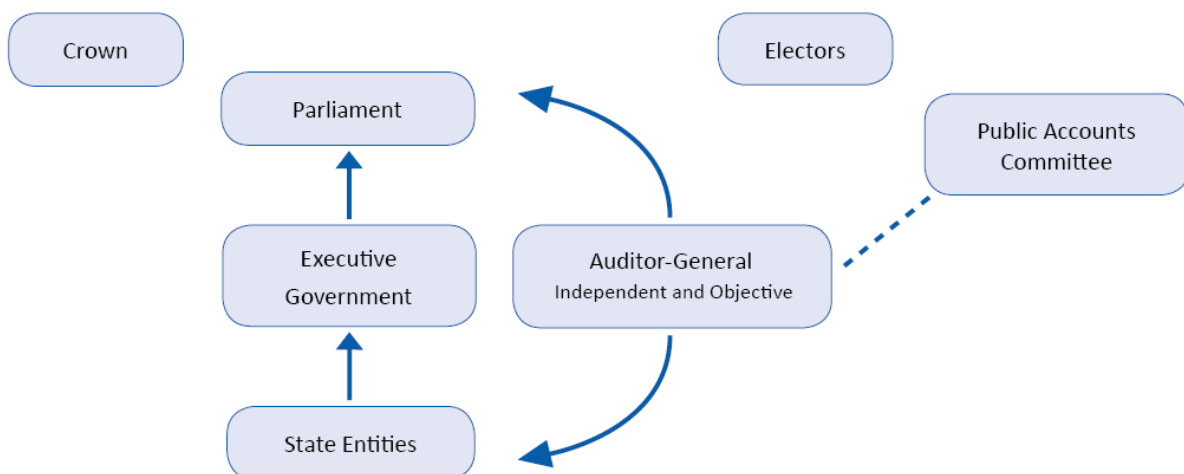
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Where relevant, the Treasurer, a Minister or Ministers, other interested parties and accountable authorities are provided with opportunity to comment on any matters reported. Where they choose to do so, their responses, or summaries thereof, are included within the reports.

## The Auditor-General's Relationship with the Parliament and State Entities





**2021**  
**PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA**

**COVID-19 – Response to social impacts**

**9 November 2021**

Presented to both Houses of Parliament pursuant to  
Section 30(1) of the *Audit Act 2008*

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Auditor-General's reports and other reports published by the Office can be accessed via the Office's website. For further information please contact:

Tasmanian Audit Office

GPO Box 851

Hobart

TASMANIA 7001

Phone: (03) 6173 0900

Email: [admin@audit.tas.gov.au](mailto:admin@audit.tas.gov.au)

Website: [www.audit.tas.gov.au](http://www.audit.tas.gov.au)

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9 November 2021

President, Legislative Council  
Speaker, House of Assembly  
Parliament House  
**HOBART TAS 7000**

Dear President, Speaker

**Report of the Auditor-General No. 3 of 2021-22: COVID-19 – Response to social impacts**

This report has been prepared consequent to examinations conducted under section 23 of the *Audit Act 2008*.

This report is the first of two reports examining the effectiveness of arrangements put in place by the Tasmanian Government to identify and address the high priority social impacts of COVID-19. This report assesses how robust Tasmanian Government's processes were in identifying and agreeing high priority social impacts to be addressed as a consequence of the pandemic.

Yours sincerely



Rod Whitehead  
**Auditor-General**

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# Foreword

It would be difficult to look back at 2020 without framing it in terms of the impact of COVID-19 on our lives. Tasmania, like every jurisdiction in the World, had to grapple with how to position its health, education, social and economic responses. Those responses have needed to be rapid.

The pandemic affected all parts of the Tasmanian population but was particularly detrimental to members of those social groups who were most vulnerable, for example, children and young people, older people, people with disabilities and people already living in poverty. The Australian and Tasmanian Governments recognised early on a response was required to address the most severe immediate impacts of the pandemic, caused not only by the impact on people's health, but the wider social impacts resulting both from the virus and the suppression measures.

This report assesses the Tasmanian Government's response to the social impacts resulting from COVID-19. It reviews the effectiveness of the State-coordinated processes to identify and agree the high priority social impacts to address. A second report on this topic will focus on how effectively resources have been allocated to address the identified high priority areas of mental health and digital access.

Although this audit examines aspects of the Tasmanian Government's activation of COVID-19 response and recovery activity, this does not signal an end to the pandemic. At the date of this report, the public health emergency and consequent response and recovery activity were still continuing.

My aim in undertaking this audit is twofold. Firstly to bring some assurance to the Parliament and, more broadly, the community about the effectiveness of the recovery effort and the commitment of those involved. Secondly, to provide some pragmatic recommendations to help improve our State led emergency recovery processes in the event we may have to face a similar challenge in the future.



Rod Whitehead  
**Auditor-General**

9 November 2021

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# Independent assurance report

This independent assurance report is addressed to the President of the Legislative Council and the Speaker of the House of Assembly. It relates to my audit of the strength of the Government's<sup>1</sup> processes to identify and agree high priority social impacts to be addressed as a consequence of the pandemic.

## Audit objective

The objective of the audit was to express a reasonable assurance opinion on the effectiveness of the Government's processes to identify and agree the high priority social impacts to address as a consequence of the pandemic.

## Audit scope

The timeframe for this audit was the period leading up to 19 March 2020, when the State of Emergency in Tasmania was declared under the Emergency Management Act (EMA) 2006, up until completion of audit fieldwork in April 2021.

The audit involved the following agencies:

1. Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC)
2. Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management (DPFEM)
3. Department of Communities Tasmania (Communities Tasmania)

The audit included arrangements and activities at both statewide and regional levels.

The audit did not examine the Government's management of the COVID-19 outbreak, including the adequacy of the suppression measures in controlling the health impact. Nor did it include the operation of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) and the arrangements being put in place to support longer-term recovery.

Although the audit examined the process undertaken by the Government to identify high priority needs, it did not assess the validity of the Government's decisions in determining which social needs to prioritise.

## Audit approach

The audit was conducted in accordance with the Australian Standard on Assurance Engagements ASAE 3500 *Performance Engagements* issued by the Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards Board, for the purpose of expressing a reasonable assurance opinion.

The audit evaluated the following criterion:

How robust were the Tasmanian Government's processes to identify and agree high priority social impacts to address resulting from the pandemic?

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<sup>1</sup> All references to Government refer to the Tasmanian Government unless otherwise stated.

The audit also evaluated the following sub-criteria:

1. Were sound structures put in place at statewide and regional levels to facilitate well-informed, timely and agile decision-making?
2. Were effective communication channels established to enable Government entities and the community sector to communicate with Government decision-makers about the nature and severity of specific social impacts, including within local communities, to assist the Government in targeting support?
3. Were there effective mechanisms for disseminating information downwards to enable Government entities (at statewide, regional and local levels) and the community sector to operate effectively to address social impacts, for example, through coordinating resources, conveying information to their local communities and identifying any gaps in provision?
4. Was effective use made of information from relevant sources, including information obtained from Government and other organisations representing specific social groups to:
  - understand the issues and risks posed by the pandemic to the wellbeing of specific social groups
  - identify and agree the social needs to be prioritised and addressed by Government?

## Responsibility of management

In the context of this audit, management of lead agencies were responsible for State-coordinated recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic according to the powers, functions and responsibilities set out in relevant legislation, policies, procedures and plans.

## Responsibility of the Auditor-General

My responsibility was to express a reasonable assurance opinion on the effectiveness of the Government's processes to identify and agree the high priority social impacts to address as a consequence of the pandemic.

## Independence and quality control

I have complied with the independence and other relevant ethical requirements relating to assurance engagements, and apply Auditing Standard ASQC 1 *Quality Control for Firms that Perform Audits and Reviews of Financial Reports and Other Financial Information, Other Assurance Engagements and Related Services Engagements* in undertaking this audit.

## Conclusion

It is my conclusion that, except for the matter described below, processes put in place by the Government to identify and agree high priority social impacts to address resulting from the pandemic, as measured against the audit criterion, were, in all material respects, effective.

The strength of the Government's processes for identifying and agreeing the high priority social impacts to address resulting from the pandemic were not effective, as measured against sub-criterion 1, due to there being inadequate training and scenario testing. Some training had been provided to role holders at a State level, but this training was inadequate for a pandemic situation, and no training had been provided to incumbent regional and municipal recovery coordinators.



Rod Whitehead  
**Auditor-General**

9 November 2021

# Executive summary

## Summary of findings

The COVID-19 pandemic has been of a different magnitude to any pandemic experienced in Tasmania before<sup>2</sup> and continues to have impacts across regional, state and national levels. Managing the pandemic has required resourcing and coordination for a protracted period at a level never required previously. The Government needed to respond in an escalated manner, including making decisions quickly without complete information, to preserve public health and ensure people received crucial social support, such as food relief and housing security. We identified very few significant gaps in the Government's identification of the key social impacts to address during the pandemic. Assessing how well these social impacts were addressed was outside the scope of this stage of the audit. We will explore this issue further through our second report examining aspects of the arrangements put in place by the Government to address the identified high priority areas of mental health and digital access. We are aware many of the social issues targeted had existed prior to the pandemic and the support provided during the pandemic is unlikely to have addressed the underlying ongoing social needs.

The Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements (TEMA) are guided by the principles in Australia's *National Principles of Disaster Recovery*, including that recovery should be locally and community led. However, TEMA also provides flexibility and scalability for events with high complexity and high impact that necessitate a State-coordinated approach to recovery (Level 3 response). Due to the nature, scale and widespread impact of the COVID-19 emergency across all sectors of the Tasmanian community, the Government determined such an approach was necessary.

Although Level 3 recovery responses were activated during the 2013 bushfires, 2016 floods and the 2018-19 bushfires, in the case of COVID-19 the recovery arrangements were operationalised differently. This led to some stakeholders, in particular those from regional and municipal levels, comparing the State-led recovery response to previous experiences in dealing with localised short-term emergencies, such as fires and floods, which are completely different to a pandemic event.

Some aspects of the State-level governance arrangements were particularly effective in supporting decision-making. However, the way the State-coordinated approach was applied resulted in missed opportunities for incorporating benefits of the tried and tested regionally and locally led approach, particularly in utilising the capability and capacity existing at these levels. Some key role holders at State, regional and local levels were also unclear about the governance arrangements adopted, their roles and responsibilities. This lack of clarity

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<sup>2</sup> The most recent health pandemic with cases in Tasmania was the influenza virus H1N1, which occurred in 2009. Due to the moderate severity of this pandemic, a move from decision-making about restrictive actions to address 'health' issues to 'whole-of-government' decision-making to address broader pandemic issues was not widely tested. (*Review of Australia's Health Sector Response to Pandemic (H1N1) 2009*, Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing).

appears to be partly due to inadequate training and scenario testing for this type of emergency.

Sound structures existed at State-level for agencies to communicate with the State Control Centre (SCC) about social impacts they were identifying. In late March, once the regional governance arrangements were fully established, the SCC introduced a formal Weekly Needs Assessment (WNA) process for escalating issues from the regions and local areas requesting State-level support, which proved mostly effective. A forum of community sector representatives from the Recovery Partners Network<sup>3</sup> (RPN) was also successfully engaged to exchange information between the Government and community sector.

Communication from State-level to the regions through the formal governance routes was only partly effective, being hampered by the limited capacity at State-level. For a time the SCC addressed this communications gap through the attendance of SCC Government Liaison role holders at Regional Social Recovery Committees and the RPN. However, once these role holders were deployed back to their substantive roles in August 2020, the SCC Recovery Cell had little time to dedicate to two-way communication.

Council Municipal Recovery Coordinators, in particular, felt they did not have all the information they needed about funding provided by the State in their areas to lead an informed local response. This was important because councils knew the vulnerable people needing support in their areas and how to communicate with them. It also meant it was difficult for them to coordinate support locally and identify gaps in provision. To address this Municipal Recovery Coordinators sought information through other routes, including from the Local Government Association of Tasmania (LGAT) and through attending RPN meetings.

While it was not always easy for regional and local coordinators to seek the response to issues they had escalated, they found the large volume of information they received through different channels made it difficult for them to extract information directly relevant to them.

The need for the Government to act promptly meant initially it had to make decisions without them being tested through the formal recovery governance structures. This meant not all the early stimulus measures were well targeted, though as far as possible the SCC Recovery Cell sought to remedy this. When introduced in late March 2020, the WNA process enabled triaging to ensure decisions were made at the most appropriate level. As time went on this process continued to be refined to support better decision-making.

Capacity for managing COVID-19 recovery was challenging at all levels of government, making this a key focus for future emergency recovery planning.

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<sup>3</sup> The Recovery Partners Network (RPN) brings together non-government and community organisations and Government agencies to build relationships for collaborative and coordinated recovery efforts during and after emergencies.

## Recommendations

Government agencies incorporate the following lessons into the planned review and/or future operationalisation (as appropriate) of the Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements (TEMA) and supporting State and regional emergency recovery plans:

1. In planning recovery for each emergency event which is statewide or involves multiple local areas and has significant impacts, clearly communicate the specific roles and responsibilities of the governance bodies and role holders at State, regional and local levels.
2. Effectively use regional and municipal recovery capabilities in state coordinated recovery.
3. At a regional level, ensure recovery committees have oversight of the different relevant recovery domains and causal links, including the link between economic and social recovery.
4. Ensure training and scenario testing for emergency recovery for all identified role holders occurs at State, regional and local levels.
5. Build an understanding of the needs of local users in order to strengthen communication from State-level to the regions and municipal areas by:
  - enhancing those communications mechanisms that have worked well
  - examining opportunities to streamline information flows.
6. Establish effective operational mechanisms for State-level recovery working groups to escalate issues they identify to the State Recovery Committee.

## Submissions and comments received

In accordance with section 30(2) of the Audit Act, a summary of findings or Report extract was provided to the Premier and Treasurer and other persons who, in our opinion had a special interest in the Report, with a request for commissions or comments.

Submissions and comments we receive are not subject to the audit nor the evidentiary standards required in reaching an audit conclusion. Responsibility for the accuracy, fairness and balance of these comments rests solely with those who provided the response. However, views expressed by the responders were considered in reaching audit conclusions.

Section 30(3) of the Act requires this Report include any submissions or comments made under section 30(2) or a fair summary of them. Submissions received are included below.



## Response from the Premier and Treasurer

Tasmania's previous recovery arrangements have served us well through a number of emergencies in recent years. However, the scale of social and economic disruption caused by COVID-19 has necessitated a State-coordinated approach and required the Government to be innovative, flexible and decisive in applying these arrangements. This is consistent with the State Recovery Plan, which states that *'every recovery process is different. Arrangements in this Plan are intended to be applied flexibly, and tailored to meet the circumstances and needs of affected communities. Government decisions following an emergency should consider alternative structures and innovative approaches when determining the most appropriate recovery arrangements'*.

At the earliest possible opportunity, the Government signalled its intention to drive the State's recovery from COVID-19 differently, including through processes managed and administered by the State Control Centre.

Recovery begins on day one of an emergency and evolves over weeks, months, and years. As a Government, we must be agile and adaptable in these circumstances, which inherently necessitates regular evaluation, monitoring, improvement and refinement of decisions, policies, arrangements and plans. We anticipate that the impact of COVID-19 will yield learnings for all levels of government for years to come. My Government will take every opportunity to improve and enhance our State's recovery arrangements as a result of this experience, to strengthen our capacity to respond effectively to an emergency of any nature. However, we will always act in the best interests of Tasmanians, and we will not hesitate to think and act differently if that will yield the best possible outcome for our State.

**The Honourable Peter Gutwein MP**

## Response from the Secretary of the Department of Premier and Cabinet

DPAC notes that the Report provides a point-in-time analysis of activities undertaken in the State Control Centre (SCC) and that this timeframe was particularly crucial due to the urgency and fluidity of the COVID-19 public health emergency. Further, while DPAC is the lead agency for recovery, for the purpose of accuracy it should be noted that responsibility for the management of COVID-19 recovery activities rested with the State Control Centre, and the existing recovery arrangements that supported that, until it formally transitioned to DPAC on 11 December 2020.

Notwithstanding these important considerations, DPAC's comments on the three focus areas of the Report and the final recommendations are provided below.

### **Effectiveness of processes to facilitate well-informed, timely and agile-decision making**

To the greatest extent possible, existing recovery governance structures, arrangements and communication pathways were utilised to ensure crucial information about COVID-19 impacts and needs was promptly obtained and triaged. Importantly, the approach to dealing with a bushfire or flood emergency did not necessarily cater for the complexities of dealing with COVID-19, and this drove some of the decisions to operationalise the recovery arrangements differently.

While forums did exist for information and decisions to be clarified, we acknowledge that the pace of decision-making may have created some confusion or uncertainty about roles and responsibilities at the local and regional levels. With the knowledge that we now have, we will consider how the responsibilities of authorities at the local, regional and state levels can be clarified and better communicated. While DPAC has previously facilitated training on the recovery arrangements for State Service and council employees, disease outbreak scenario testing and training is an acknowledged area for improvement. DPAC is committed to working with our colleagues in Public Health Services and the emergency management and non-government sectors, across all regions, to improve our collective preparedness, capability and capacity to respond to, and recover from, future pandemic emergencies.

### **Effectiveness of communication channels**

Following the public health and state of emergency declarations in March 2020, the SCC's recovery cell established prompt and regular communication with State Government agencies, regional authorities and non-government organisations to seek and convey information about the effects of the pandemic and associated public health measures on communities and businesses. This included establishing dedicated liaison points for regional and non-government stakeholders. This arrangement was mutually advantageous, but we recognise that these stakeholders valued having a conduit into the SCC to facilitate timely responses to the issues they identified.

DPAC will review these arrangements to ensure capacity and engagement is maintained in future.

### **Use of information for decision-making**

The Tasmanian Government recognised very early in 2020 that COVID-19 was becoming an imminent threat to the State. The Inter-departmental Committee I chaired in the early weeks of 2020 provided a forum for agencies to discuss their preliminary assessments of likely recovery needs. This meant that when the public health emergency and state of emergency were declared, the Tasmanian Government was able to swiftly mobilise financial support measures to give confidence and assurance to Tasmanians during an uncertain period, and encourage compliance with public health measures.

In March 2020, under the leadership of the State Recovery Committee (SRC), the SCC's recovery cell quickly established a whole-of-government and recovery partners needs assessment process, which involved extensive and regular consultation to ensure up-to-date social and economic needs and issues were reported to Government promptly.

Representation from all Tasmanian Government agencies and regional authorities on the SBC allowed sector and region-specific issues and causal links to be identified and considered. As the Report suggests, this process matured and improved with time.

### **Recommendations**

The State's recovery arrangements are continually improving and evolving, as lessons are learned during every emergency. DPAC is committed to ensuring lessons learned during the management of COVID-19 are considered and, where appropriate, incorporated into the State's recovery arrangements.

However, the principle of a flexible, scalable and adaptable recovery framework needs to be maintained, including the ability to move away from established arrangements if they are not fit-for-purpose in a particular emergency.

**Jenny Gale**

### **Response from the State Controller**

This response is from the perspective of the Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management's State Control Centre (DPFEM)/COVID-19 Coordination Centre's (CCC) role in the emergency management response to the COVID-19 pandemic. I note that the Department of Premier and Cabinet, as the responsible agency, will provide a response regarding recovery related findings and recommendations detailed in the report.

DPFEM and the CCC acknowledge the audit report and its findings, and will action, where appropriate, the recommendations in light of current and future pandemic response activities.

I note that Tasmania's Emergency Management Arrangements (TEMA) are due for update in 2022, and the recommendations from this audit will be considered as part of that update.

Further, the TEMA has proven to be robust and clean in its guidance, with the legal, administrative and governance frameworks it details being sufficient for the COVID-19 response. However, any recommendations to improve the way the TEMA can be implemented are always of value.

It is important to acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic was unprecedented for Tasmania, and whilst the TEMA addresses and influenza pandemic response, the complex issues presented by COVID-19 required agile and timely decisions, in sometimes ambiguous situations.

**Commissioner Darren Hine**

### **Response from the Secretary of the Department of Communities Tasmania**

COVID-19 continues to present the Tasmanian community with challenges including social impacts. As noted in my response to your other audits related to COVID-19, the way that Tasmanian Government Agencies have responded and continue to respond is to be commended.

Throughout the early stages of the pandemic, and as it has continued, my Agency has worked closely with many stakeholders with which we had existing relationships such as TASCOS and other peak bodies, sector representatives and service providers, and established new or closer relationships with other organisations to ensure that we understood the issues impacting on people across the community. Working with our colleagues across the various emergency management structures, and through existing forums, we were able to respond to identified needs in a responsive manner. We also aimed to ensure Government decisions were, and are, administered efficiently and in accordance with the policy intent.

We note the recommendations from this audit and their focus on the Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements (TEMA). Communities Tasmania supports the recommendations.

**Michael Pervan**

# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Global pandemics are unpredictable events that can have severe health, social and economic impacts for an extended period. The COVID-19 pandemic and the suppression measures introduced by the Australian and Tasmanian Governments to contain the virus have affected all parts of the population. They have been particularly detrimental to members of those social groups who are most vulnerable, for example, children and young people, older people, people with disabilities and people already living in poverty.
- 1.2 Both governments recognised early on that a response was required to address the most severe, immediate impacts of the pandemic, including the wider social and economic impacts resulting from the suppression measures. Nationally, the Australian Government introduced a series of stimulus and support initiatives for households and individuals, such as supplementary income support payments under JobSeeker and the introduction of the JobKeeper payment. To further assist Tasmanian families, individuals and businesses, the Government announced the implementation of economic and social stimulus measures on 17 and 26 March 2020, totalling over \$1 billion<sup>4</sup>.
- 1.3 The Government committed \$4 million to the Community Support Fund, administered by Communities Tasmania, to provide support to Tasmania's most vulnerable through food relief, emergency accommodation, essential transport and effective communication. In addition to the Government's economic and social stimulus measures, local councils provided an estimated \$40 million<sup>5</sup> to support their communities.
- 1.4 Although Tasmania has not been subject to the type of prolonged outbreak experienced in some other jurisdictions, the State entered the pandemic with high levels of entrenched social disadvantage. Education attainment is lower among young people than the rest of the country, with high levels of job casualisation and regional disadvantage. About 17% of Tasmanian households do not have access to the internet and in some regions this is as high as 32%<sup>6</sup>, which would have impacted on their ability to access essential health and social services remotely while physical distancing restrictions were in place.
- 1.5 The extent to which the known impacts will continue into the longer-term is uncertain. PESRAC has highlighted that data is patchy and not immediately accessible to enable targeted pre-emptive action to be taken to manage ongoing social impacts.

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<sup>4</sup> The first package, totalling approximately \$420 million, focused on providing immediate relief and assistance to individuals, households and businesses. The second package, totalling approximately \$565 million, included more economic and social support measures targeted at the health system; businesses and jobs; households and individuals; and community organisations.

<sup>5</sup> PESRAC Interim report July 2020

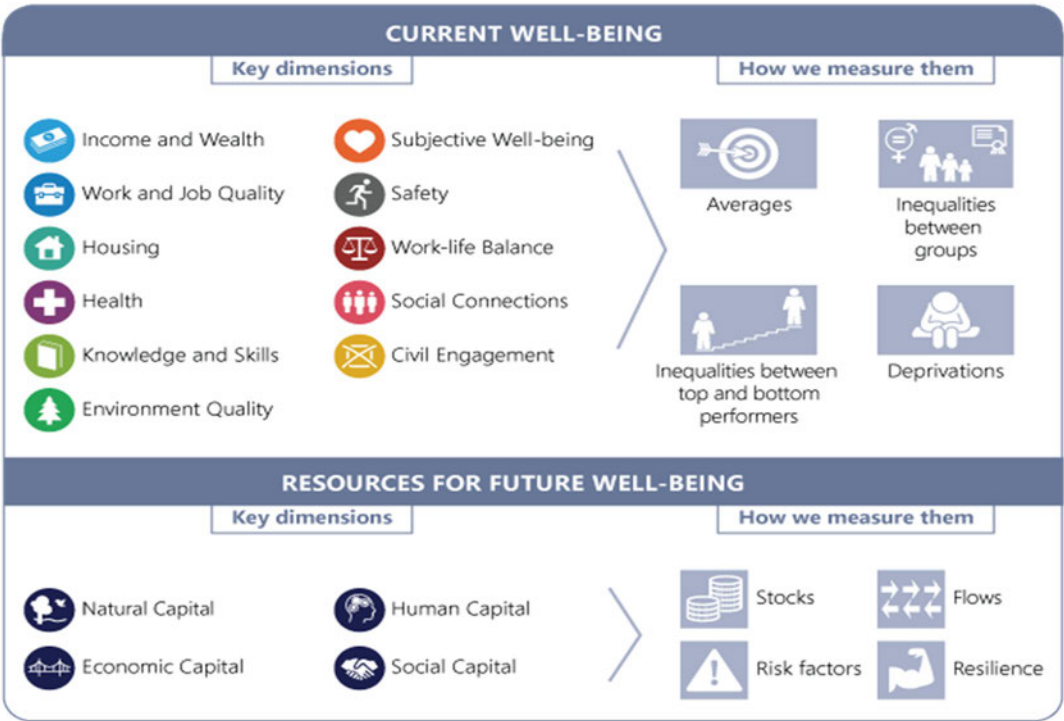
<sup>6</sup> PESRAC Interim report July 2020

However, the State Recovery Plan<sup>7</sup> recognises neglected needs or insufficient support provided in the short term can lead to broader long-term consequences for community wellbeing and economic viability.

## Defining ‘social impact’

- 1.6 We have defined ‘social impact’ as the effects the pandemic and the Australian and Tasmanian Government suppression measures had on the well-being of Tasmanians. Communities Tasmania has aligned its response activities with the key dimensions of the well-being framework developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) shown at Figure 1. PESRAC also used the OECD framework as a basis for its Phase Two review.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 1: OECD Framework for measuring well-being and progress \*



Source: OECD

\* ‘Societal progress is about improvements in the well-being of people and households. Assessing such progress requires looking not only at the functioning of the economic system but also at the diverse experiences and living conditions of people. The OECD Framework for Measuring Well-Being and Progress is built around three distinct components: current well-being, inequalities in well-being outcomes, and resources for future well-being’<sup>9</sup>.

<sup>7</sup> Issue 3, approved 7 January 2019

<sup>8</sup> PESRAC final report, 16 March 2021

<sup>9</sup> Extract from OECD website [www.oecd.org](http://www.oecd.org)

## Arrangements for recovery from emergencies in Tasmania

- 1.7 The Government understood addressing the wider social impacts caused by COVID-19 and suppression measures was a key part of recovery from the pandemic.
- 1.8 Recovery is defined in the TEMA<sup>10</sup> as ‘the process of dealing with the impacts of an emergency and returning social, economic, infrastructure and natural environments to an effective level of functioning’.<sup>11</sup>
- 1.9 Tasmania is guided by Australia’s National Principles of Disaster Recovery<sup>12</sup>, which are based on six central themes:
- understanding the context: successful recovery is based on an understanding of the community context
  - recognising complexity: successful recovery acknowledges the complex and dynamic nature of emergencies and communities
  - using community-led approaches: successful recovery is responsive and flexible, engaging communities and empowering them to move forward
  - ensuring coordination of all activities: successful recovery requires a planned, coordinated and adaptive approach based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs
  - employing effective communications: successful recovery is built on effective communications with affected communities and other stakeholders
  - acknowledging and building capacity: successful recovery recognises, supports and builds on community, individual and organisational capacity.
- 1.10 The State recovery objectives described in the TEMA build on Australia’s National Principles<sup>13</sup>:
- support the restoration of social, economic, infrastructure and natural environments to minimise long-term consequences for individual and community wellbeing, the economy and environment
  - facilitate community participation in recovery planning and decision-making
  - ensure that government and non-government support is targeted and appropriate

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<sup>10</sup> TEMA (issue 1, December 2019) is established under the Emergency Management Act 2006. The TEMA outlines the authority (governance, administrative and legal frameworks) as well as the ‘who’, ‘what’ and ‘when’ in terms of the emergency management arrangements in Tasmania. It covers all phases of emergency management: Prevention/Mitigation, Preparedness, Response and Recovery.

<sup>11</sup> TEMA Section 7.1

<sup>12</sup> TEMA Section 7.2

<sup>13</sup> TEMA Section 7.3

- assist communities to rebuild in a way that enhances resilience across social, economic, infrastructure and environmental values and encourages risk management
  - learn from experience and continually refine arrangements to enhance future recovery processes.
- 1.11 The TEMA recognises partnerships underpin emergency management; ‘An effective state framework for emergency management requires a high level of collaboration and coordination within and across all levels of government, and with non-government stakeholders...’.<sup>14</sup>
- 1.12 The State Recovery Plan (described below) further elaborates; ‘Recovery coordination and management involves governance structures, planning processes and the management of resources to ensure recovery efforts meet community needs, are effective and efficient, and occur in a planned and coordinated way’. As such, recovery efforts ‘generally involve all levels of government, including municipal, regional and state emergency management structures, as well as non-government and community organisations. Poorly coordinated recovery efforts can result in over-servicing, unequal distribution of assistance or conflicting priorities, and make it difficult for the community to participate in planning and decision-making’.<sup>15</sup>

### **The State Recovery Plan**

- 1.13 DPAC is responsible for whole-of-government recovery planning, preparedness and coordination. DPAC maintains the State Recovery Plan on behalf of the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) as a State Special Emergency Plan in accordance with section 35 of the EMA 2006.
- 1.14 The State Recovery Plan describes Tasmania’s State-level recovery arrangements. The purpose of the Plan is described as being to:
- establish a state level governance framework, and management and coordination responsibilities for recovery
  - describe arrangements for transitioning from response to recovery, activating state level coordination structures and supporting local government and communities to manage longer-term recovery
  - clarify roles and responsibilities across government and supporting organisations in relation to recovery in Tasmania
  - ensure that all stakeholders involved in recovery can work together within a planned, coordinated and scalable framework.

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<sup>14</sup> TEMA, Executive Summary, Chapters 2 and 3 - overview of key points

<sup>15</sup> State Recovery Plan, para 2.13



## Recovery phases

1.15 The TEMA recognises every recovery process is different and that recovery is ‘an incremental process which often takes a long time’. It ‘starts during the emergency response and encompasses linked and overlapping phases of relief and short term recovery, early recovery planning and medium to long term recovery’<sup>16</sup>. The State Recovery Plan further recognises recovery ‘can continue for months, years or even decades’. The Plan describes four phases of recovery<sup>17</sup>:

1. *Ongoing preparedness* – planning, policy development, exercises and other actions to build resilience and preparedness.
2. *Short term recovery* - the period during and immediately after an emergency (hours to weeks), when recovery efforts are focused on relief and emergency assistance, rapid impact assessment, needs assessment and early recovery planning.
3. *Long term recovery* - covers medium to long term recovery efforts (months to years), and includes processes for community engagement and participation, ongoing impact and needs assessment, recovery programs and projects.
4. *Review* of recovery arrangements when formal recovery winds down to inform continuous learning and improvement.

## Three recovery levels

1.16 A key intent of the TEMA, reflected in the State Recovery Plan, is to provide a broad, scalable framework for recovery that can be tailored to meet the needs of each emergency event and affected community. In particular, the TEMA recognises medium to long-term recovery coordination depends on event-specific needs, described as three levels: locally coordinated (Level 1); state supported (Level 2); and state coordinated (Level 3).<sup>18</sup>

1.17 In the case of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government decided, because of the scale and complexity of support required, Level 3: state-coordinated recovery was necessary. This recovery level usually requires the appointment of a State Recovery Coordinator (in accordance with section 24(D) of the EMA 2006) by the Premier to lead a Recovery Taskforce. There is a formal handover to the State Recovery Coordinator from the State Controller. However, in the case of COVID-19, it was agreed the State Recovery Advisor (referred to below) would also assume the role of State Recovery Coordinator and PESRAC would be established as the Recovery taskforce, with an independent Chair.

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<sup>16</sup> TEMA, section 7.1

<sup>17</sup> State Recovery Plan, paras 2.26 and 2.27

<sup>18</sup> TEMA, section 7.7



## State and regional governance structure established for COVID-19

- 1.18 The governance structure actually established to manage recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic at State and regional levels is shown in Figure 2, noting that the recovery arrangements were integrated as part of the overall emergency management response structure.

Figure 2: Overview of governance structures for managing COVID-19 recovery in Tasmania



Source: Tasmanian Audit Office

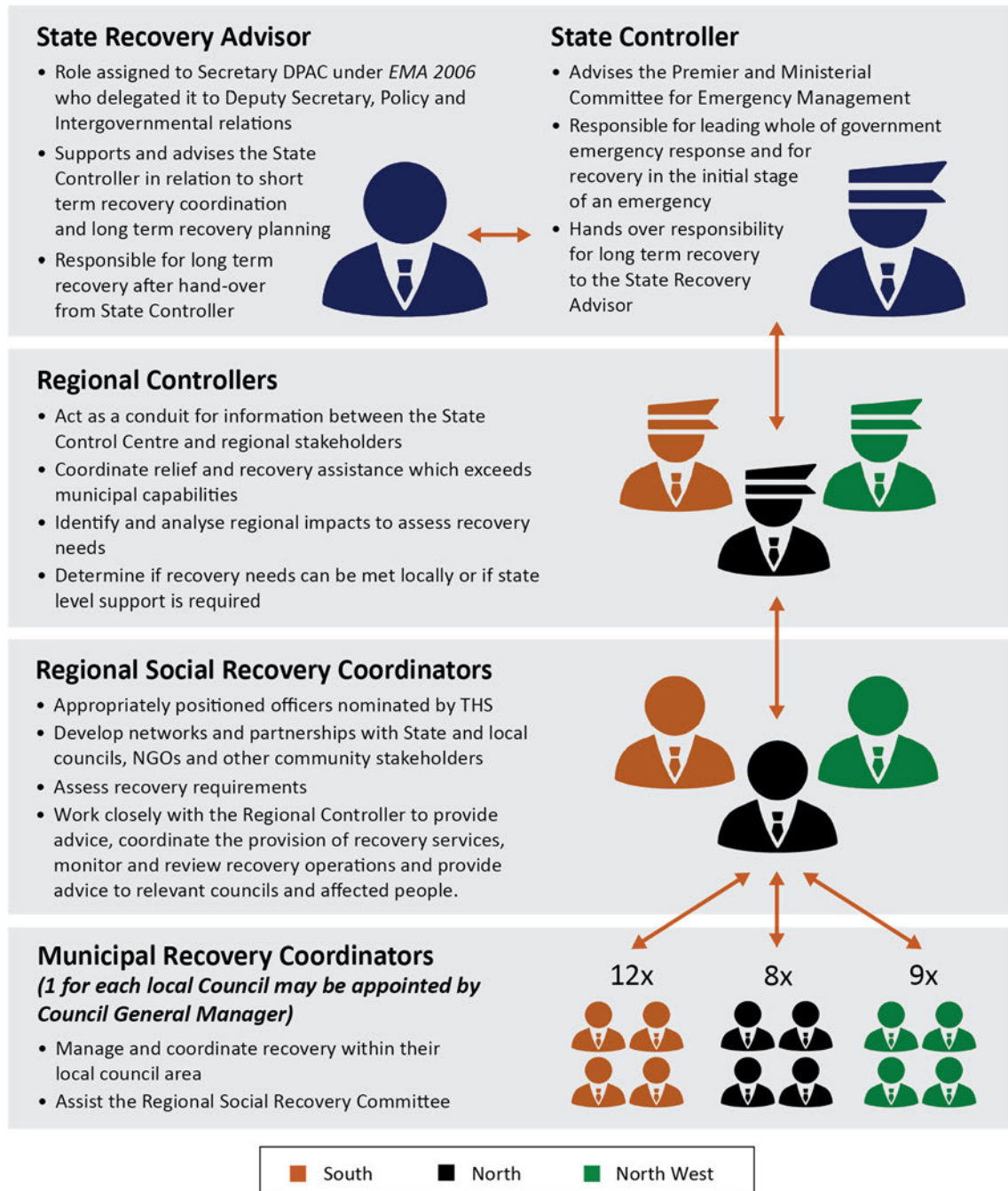
- 1.19 The role of the Office of Security and Emergency Management (OSEM) is to support the State Recovery Advisor through:
- maintaining state level recovery plans and arrangements
  - supporting the municipal and regional coordination of relief and recovery assistance during emergencies

- supporting the State Recovery Committee and Recovery Working Group
- if required, leading the coordination and management of longer-term recovery efforts through a Recovery Unit or Taskforce.

For COVID-19, OSEM and other DPAC staff were transferred to the SCC Recovery Cell.

1.20 Figure 3 outlines key individual roles and responsibilities relevant to this governance structure. A detailed description of roles and responsibilities are included in the TEMA.

**Figure 3: Overview of individual roles and responsibilities for managing COVID-19 recovery in Tasmania**

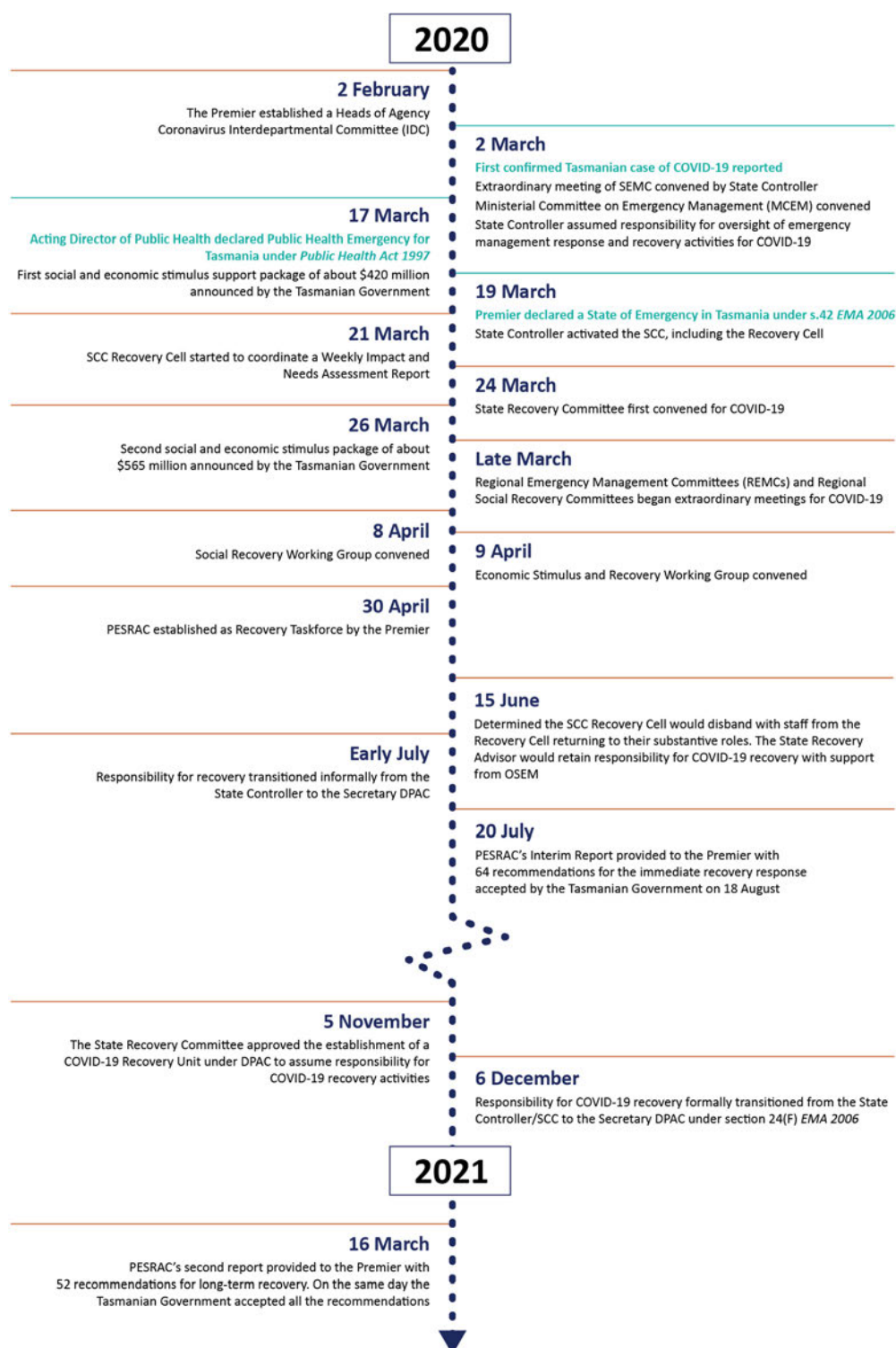


Source: Tasmanian Audit Office

## The pandemic response timeline

1.21 Tasmania managed its emergency response and recovery concurrently, using the integrated governance structure set out in Figure 2. Figure 4 shows some key recovery dates with a more detailed timeline at Appendix 1.

Figure 4: Overview of the pandemic timeline



Source: Tasmanian Audit Office

## 2. Effectiveness of processes to facilitate well-informed, timely and agile decision-making

In this chapter we assess whether sound structures were put in place at statewide and regional levels to facilitate well-informed, timely and agile decision-making.

### Chapter summary

Due to the scale, complexity and rapidly evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government opted at an early stage for a Level 3, State-coordinated approach to recovery. The TEMA allows for flexibility in how emergency management arrangements can be applied. However, the Government was aware even Level 3 was not entirely fit for purpose, specifically in fostering community engagement early on to support decision-making in accordance with Australia's principles that emergency management be locally and community led.

We identified some aspects of the State-level governance arrangements that were particularly effective in supporting decision-making. However, the approach taken to operationalising State-coordinated recovery resulted in opportunities being missed for incorporating benefits of the tried and tested regionally and locally led approach, particularly in using the capability and capacity already existing at these levels.

Some key role holders at State, regional and local levels were unclear about the governance arrangements, their roles and responsibilities. In particular, local councils did not fully understand their roles and how it linked to the State-level governance arrangements. Despite this uncertainty, we found evidence of councils taking the initiative to identify some gaps in the State-led support to address social impacts and provided vital support to their local communities. The lack of clarity of some key role holders about the governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities appeared to have been partly due to inadequate training and scenario testing for this type of emergency.

At a State level, the causal link between economic and social impacts was understood, with a holistic approach taken to considering the two types of impacts when making decisions. However, regional governance arrangements did not facilitate easy oversight of this causal link.

Capacity for managing recovery from this type of unprecedented emergency was challenging at all levels of government, which is a lesson for future emergency planning.



## Aspects of the State-level governance arrangements were particularly effective to support decision-making

2.1 The TEMA covers statewide events and allows for flexibility and scalability in how emergency management arrangements are applied. The State Recovery Plan describes Level 3 as generally applying in emergencies which involve:

- emergency response coordination at state or regional levels
- multiple and/or widespread affected areas (multiple local government or regions)
- significant and complex impacts across multiple recovery domains which require extensive support from multiple Government agencies for a prolonged period (months to years)
- financial assistance measures, and
- the need for extensive community engagement and participation in recovery.

2.2 In accordance with Australia's National Principles of Disaster Recovery, the TEMA provides for a local, community-led approach to managing recovery from emergency events. The Government chose a Level 3 response but did not consider this level entirely fit for purpose, particularly in its ability to foster community engagement early on in decision-making. The Government intends to review the TEMA based on its experience of managing COVID-19.

2.3 We identified some aspects of the State-level governance arrangements which were particularly effective in supporting decision-making:

- The State Recovery Advisor had:
  - oversight of both the social and economic impacts and could identify the links between these impacts in advising on the response
  - a direct relationship with National Cabinet and was well-placed to learn about decisions being made at a national level to enable the Government to take timely action required at State level.
- Four weeks before the State Controller formally assumed responsibility for the emergency response and recovery, the Premier had established daily Heads of Agency Coronavirus Interdepartmental Committee (IDC) meetings, led by the Secretary of DPAC and attended by all State departmental heads. These meetings were effective in coordinating the recovery effort in the short term and before State recovery governance arrangements were fully established. The meetings were mainly operational, enabling department heads to bring issues identified by their departments to the table for a cross-government response.
- The RPN was a key forum for the exchange of information between the Government and the community sector. DPAC established the network in

2017 and it had been used for a number of emergencies prior to COVID-19. With COVID-19, the role of the network was enhanced by using it as a principle means of the two-way flow of information between the Government and the community sector. The Tasmanian Council of Social Services (TasCOSS) led in initiating weekly Community Services Update meetings involving network members and subsequently received \$100 000 in Government funding to coordinate the community sector response, acting as a funnel of information to the SCC.

## **The way the State-coordinated approach was operationalised resulted in missed opportunities for incorporating key benefits of the previously tried and tested approach for Level 3 emergency recovery**

- 2.4 The State Recovery Plan describes Level 3, State-coordinated recovery as applying where coordination is required through a state level Recovery Taskforce under the leadership of a Recovery Coordinator, responsible for strategic leadership and direction of recovery efforts. The Recovery Taskforce works with Affected Area Recovery Committees (AARCs) to develop long-term recovery plans, and coordinate assistance and capability across Government agencies. It 'supports the Recovery Coordinator and AARCs to plan and coordinate recovery efforts, establishes and operates recovery centres, administers government assistance measures and ensures coordination of recovery across government agencies and with other recovery partners'.
- 2.5 For previous emergency Level 3 recoveries, Affected Area Recovery Committees took a strong lead in managing recovery in their areas with a Recovery Taskforce established to support them<sup>19</sup>. In the case of COVID-19, the State Controller decided to activate the SCC and the State Recovery Advisor was assigned the role of Recovery Coordinator. Key recovery activities previously undertaken by the AARCs were carried out by the SCC. PESRAC was established as the Recovery Taskforce and produced recommendations for medium and long-term planning. However, it was not involved in coordinating the recovery effort.
- 2.6 At the regional and local levels, consistent concerns were raised with us that the State-led arrangements were introduced without a full understanding of how the existing recovery arrangements operated. In particular, Tasmania had well-established regional and local arrangements for recovery, which we were told had proved effective in managing past emergencies. Role holders had established relationships over many years, including through regular meetings of the REMCs and Regional Recovery Committees between emergency events. The role holders had tested these through real-life events, which provided good outcomes for recovery.

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<sup>19</sup> The 2013 and 2019 bushfire recovery and 2016 floods.

- 2.7 Although the Government had a clear justification for its approach, we found evidence the Level 3 State-coordinated approach to recovery resulted in missed opportunities for utilising existing relationships, networks, capabilities and capacity at regional and municipal levels. Some key role holders at both State and regional levels were unclear about the recovery governance arrangements, their roles and responsibilities
- 2.8 At State-level, we found some evidence there was an incomplete understanding on the part of some agency staff of the responsibilities of different Government agencies and structures already in place for emergency recovery management. The role of the Premier and Ministers had not been defined previously for a health pandemic. There was little time for agency staff to develop their understanding before having to 'hit the ground running'. There was a good understanding and experience of operating under the EMA 2006 at regional and some local levels. However, confusion at a State-level impacted adversely on the operation of standing arrangements at regional and local levels.

### State-level understanding

- 2.9 Evidence of this incomplete understanding on the part of some agency staff was demonstrated through:
- An initial lack of clarity on the part of some agencies about their relationship with and reporting obligations to the MCEM and SCC. Government agencies received many directions from the Premier and Ministers and therefore understood they should report on delivery through these routes. The agencies did not always keep the SCC well informed on who they were funding and for what purpose, though this improved as time went on. Ultimately, the State Controller was accountable for decisions about recovery and needed to have this oversight. For a time the State Controller and State Recovery Advisor may not have had full knowledge of which social needs agencies were addressing, where there may be gaps and where a coordinated response was required.
  - At first, some key staff from the Communities, Sport and Recreation Division in Communities Tasmania involved in recovery activities were not aware of the existence of the Regional Social Recovery Committees. Once they became aware, they arranged a meeting with the Regional Social Recovery Coordinators on 23 April 2020.
  - Communities Tasmania established a 'Recovery Network Partners' group for the COVID-19 Self-Isolation Essential Support Program involving the Salvation Army, Red Cross and Rural Business Tasmania. However, OSEM already had an established forum for NGOs and other community organisations under the emergency management framework called the RPN. Although Communities Tasmania responded quickly in re-naming its group as soon as it became aware of the similar names, the initial naming created confusion for others involved in recovery at a State level.

## Regional-level understanding

- 2.10 The TEMA describes the regional recovery arrangements but regional and local role holders were still confused about their role in social recovery for COVID-19. They were experienced in leading recovery with State support, and were familiar with this dynamic. Activation of the SCC and the way the State-coordinated approach was applied resulted in them struggling to understand their role under the statewide governance arrangements. This included the division between State and regional/local responsibilities. The different reporting lines also confused them and some regional and municipal coordinators devised flow charts to assist their personal understanding.
- 2.11 This lack of clarity persisted despite some arrangements put in place to facilitate the coordination of State and regionally led recovery. Regional Emergency Management Controllers (Regional Controllers) were already members of the SEMC. The State Recovery Advisor also arranged for them to attend the State Recovery Committee as observers. This meant they were positioned to understand the statewide view and should have been able to make decisions about recovery in their areas aligned with the State's response.
- 2.12 REMCs were convened promptly following the declaration of the State of Emergency. All three Regional Social Recovery Committees held extraordinary meetings in March to start to address the social impacts of COVID-19. Membership of these committees included key stakeholders at State, regional and local levels and some statewide NGOs. This should have assisted coordination of State and regional recovery support, including the sharing of information. However, these Committees were not able to function fully effectively due to limited advice on how their role had changed under the State-coordinated approach and from issues with the flow of information from State-level through the formal communication mechanisms (as discussed further in Chapter 3).

## **The lack of clarity became amplified at the local council level although some local councils proactively provided vital local support regardless of this uncertainty**

- 2.13 A view consistently expressed across each regional area was the role of local councils' was not well defined under the COVID-19 arrangements and therefore they were not used effectively for recovery activities or to provide advice. Municipal Recovery Coordinators were concerned they received no advice about how their role had changed for COVID-19 and they were not sure if they had fulfilled their role or acted effectively. A core business activity of larger councils is community development. This meant they usually led in supporting recovery efforts across wider areas and incorporated smaller councils who did not have this capacity. They knew which community organisations operated within the broader area and had defined relationships with them. However, because they were unclear how their role fit with the wider governance arrangements and they did not have a well-informed understanding of the support being provided within their local area by the Government, they carried out recovery activities that were not necessarily well-



coordinated with State activities. Had councils been better informed they could have provided a better, targeted communication flow to local people needing support.

2.14 Despite this level of uncertainty, we found evidence of local authorities and other stakeholders adapt well and taking a lead in identifying and providing vital local support that supplemented Government support. Examples of this support included:

- Hobart City Council supporting a local church that was providing food support for up to 600 international students.
- During its closure, North-West Regional Hospital cooked all the food for Meals on Wheels.
- Launceston City Council staff who were unable to perform their substantive roles during COVID-19 assisted with recovery activities such as supporting the Red Cross and Meals on Wheels through delivering meals.
- Together with TasCOSS, NGOS and local authorities assisted with identifying the different providers and locations for State-provided emergency food relief to enable a coordinated response and identify gaps in provision. For example, connecting community transport services with school canteens to coordinate delivery of food to school families.
- During the North-West lockdown, TasCOSS convened a meeting of 75 providers operating regionally to share information about the support being provided by and contact details of each provider to facilitate service coordination.

## There had been inadequate training and scenario testing for this type of emergency

2.15 The training provided to role holders at a State level was inadequate. This reflects our finding from our previous review, *COVID-19 – Pandemic response and mobilisation*, published March 2021, which found the orientation for those staff without an emergency background brought into assist the whole-of government response could have been stronger. At a whole-of-government level, a pandemic was not a focus of detailed training or preparation. The COVID-19 response was the first time the SCC was activated and the State Recovery Advisor was new to Tasmania. Some heads of departments also had little practical experience of being involved in emergency and recovery management.

2.16 No training was provided for regional and municipal recovery coordinators. One Regional Social Recovery Coordinator told us they received documented emergency management plans but did not get any training on emergency recovery structures or the exercise of their role. We received similar feedback from Municipal Recovery Coordinators.

2.17 Although regional interviewees were concerned about the lack of training, they saw relationship building as equally, if not more, important. Regularly convening all the

partners around the table when not in a crisis, including Communities Tasmania, was important to assist their understanding of recovery arrangements in local areas and to build relationships.

## **The causal links between economic and social impacts were addressed well at a State, but not regional, level**

- 2.18 The Government quickly recognised there was an important link between economic and social impacts. Many economic impacts, such as those on small businesses, have associated social impacts. Conversely, economic stimulus measures should support social recovery. Initially, the Recovery Working Group, managed by OSEM, was split into two separate working groups, the Social and Economic Recovery Working Groups, to manage these two types of impacts. However, the State Recovery Coordinator decided they should revert to the Recovery Working Group, which continued to have oversight of both types of impacts. At a State level, there was evidence a holistic approach was taken to considering both types of impacts. For example, a conscious decision to fund rent relief packages to encourage economic stimulus as well as provide relief for financial stress.
- 2.19 However, at a regional level there was a view that economic data was not used effectively in identifying social impacts. One Municipal Recovery Coordinator resorted to communicating directly with the Department of State Growth and Tourism Tasmania about economic impacts rather than discussing these with the Regional Social Recovery Committee.
- 2.20 A network of Local Government Economic Development Officers existed, but operated outside the recovery governance structure. This group could have been used to provide advice and supporting data on economic impacts at regional and local levels.

## **Capacity was challenging at all levels of government**

- 2.21 At State level, based on their experience of past events, OSEM had already established a recovery register of people who had previously taken part in recovery so, when an emergency arose, they could tap into these people to provide support. For COVID-19, given the scale of the emergency, many more people were required to assist with recovery than for previous events. The State Recovery Advisor and 21 other people from DPAC were transferred to the SCC on the day it was activated. These people needed to be provided with roles and trained rapidly. We were told people seconded quickly came up to speed and operated effectively.
- 2.22 By August 2020, most of these staff had returned to their substantive roles. This left fewer people to maintain relationships with stakeholders, in particular with the Regional Social Recovery Committees and RPN, and contributed to the disconnect many felt between the State and regional/local role holders outlined in Chapter 3.
- 2.23 Tasmania is a small jurisdiction in the national context and its capacity to backfill roles for public sector employees is limited when substantial numbers of staff, particularly senior staff, are performing more than one role for extended periods. This impact was

felt by the people we interviewed at the State, regional and municipal level, who expressed frustration in not being able to focus on doing one role well while also performing another. Innovative ways to support bodies established for recovery were observed, such as a Regional Controller offering one of their staff to support the Regional Social Recovery Coordinator.

- 2.24 Some local councils also struggled with the resources available for recovery management. This was particularly true for smaller councils where backfilling capacity did not exist. Smaller councils tended to rely on the larger councils who had dedicated Emergency Management and Municipal Recovery Coordinators to take a lead on social recovery in their regions.<sup>20</sup>
- 2.25 Regional role holders recognised the workload at State level was high. An observation was that a more effective use of regional and local recovery role holders may have resulted in better sharing of the workload between the State and regional levels.

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<sup>20</sup> Many councils share resources and collaborate on plans and arrangements such as regional emergency management plans that outline, among other things, arrangements for resource sharing. A Protocol for Inter-Council Emergency Management Resource Sharing was developed in 2018 and can be triggered if required.

### 3. Effectiveness of communication channels

In this chapter we assess the effectiveness of:

Communication channels to enable Government entities and the community sector to communicate with Government decision-makers about the nature and severity of specific social impacts, including within local communities, to assist the Government in targeting support.

Mechanisms for disseminating information downwards to enable Government entities (at statewide, regional and local levels) and the community sector to operate effectively to address social impacts, for example through coordinating resources, conveying information to their local communities and identifying any gaps in provision.

#### Chapter summary

Mechanisms for escalating issues from across the State were mostly effective. Sound structures existed at State level for agencies to communicate with the SCC, enabling them to bring issues to the table affecting their stakeholder communities. From late March, the SCC introduced a formal WNA process for raising issues from across the State, including from regional and local levels and the community sector, enabling effective targeting of significant social impacts requiring support. Early on, a forum of community sector representatives from the RPN was also used successfully for the exchange of information between the Government and community sector.

Communication downwards from State-level through the formal governance routes was only partly effective, being hampered by the limited capacity at State-level. This included the State being slow or not feeding back to the regions on what was being done to address a number of issues they had escalated. The SEMC and State Recovery Committee, attended by Regional Controllers only dealt with high level strategic priorities and did not discuss issues at the level of granularity required for the Regional Controllers to disseminate all relevant information back to regional and local coordinators. Competing priorities prevented Communities Tasmania from being able to attend all Regional Social Recovery Committees to report back on support being provided at regional and local levels.

For a time this communications gap was addressed through the State Recovery Advisor deciding to allocate a SCC Government Liaison role holder to attend Regional Social Recovery Committee meetings. Another SCC Regional Government Liaison role holder attended RPN meetings. However, once these role holders were deployed back to their substantive roles in August 2020, the SCC Recovery Cell had little time to dedicate to two-way communication.

Problems with the information flow left Municipal Recovery Coordinators in particular feeling they could not rely on information received from regional committees, which they required to lead an informed response at a local level. This was important because councils knew the vulnerable people needing support in their areas and how to reach them, and gaps in information meant it was more difficult for them to coordinate support, identify gaps in provision and respond to enquiries from local people about the support available. To

address this some Municipal Recovery Coordinators started to attend RPN meetings. They also relied on liaison LGAT had with the SCC rather than information disseminated through REMCs and Regional Social Recovery Committees.

Although regional and local coordinators said they did not always receive responses to specific issues they had raised, they found the large volume of information they received through different communication channels often made it difficult for them to extract the information directly relevant to them.

## **Mechanisms for escalating issues to the SCC from State, regional and local government levels and the community sector were mostly effective**

### **Effective arrangements existed for Government agencies to communicate with the SCC**

- 3.1 There were sound structures in place for agencies to communicate with the SCC. Daily IDC and SEMC meetings enabled department heads and other senior managers to bring issues to the table affecting their stakeholder communities. This ensured there was timely reporting to the SCC on these ongoing social impacts enabling them to be addressed and monitored at the State level. The State Recovery Committee, which was attended by representatives from all agencies, also provided a forum for senior agency representatives to escalate issues.

### **The SCC introduced a formal WNA process was for raising issues from across the State, enabling effective targeting of significant social impacts for support**

- 3.2 From late March to mid-July 2020, the SCC introduced a process for the escalation of social impacts from across the State, including issues raised by regional and local recovery role holders and the RPN. These issues informed WNA reports produced by the SCC Recovery Cell.
- 3.3 At a regional level, REMCs would request Regional Social Recovery Committee members produce documented Situation Reports at least weekly, advising of locally emerging issues. They would then send these to the Regional Controllers/REMCs for review and collating before escalating to the SCC.
- 3.4 The State Recovery Advisor presented the WNA reports to the State Recovery Committee before they were escalated as necessary to the State Controller/SEMC and MCEM. The purpose was stated as being 'to support the appropriate allocation of resources and supports in response to the identified impacts'.
- 3.5 A good momentum was established across the State in collating and reporting social impacts to be escalated through this process. The role of the SCC Recovery Cell in structuring this information for decision-making is described in Chapter 4.

## **Some regional representatives had concerns about the effectiveness of some aspects of the WNA process**

- 3.6 Although the WNA process was viewed as useful overall, regional representatives, particularly from smaller communities, had some concerns about how issues they raised were prioritised.
- 3.7 Regional and municipal recovery coordinators already had well-established relationships with local NGOs, with good knowledge of their capacity and capability. As part of their established emergency management arrangements, the larger councils kept lists of NGOs operating in their areas to be used for recovery and they would have liked the opportunity to share these lists with the Government to help inform funding decisions.
- 3.8 Municipal Recovery Coordinators were only asked to gather and escalate information about local social impacts they observed. They were not given the opportunity to inform the Government about NGOs already operating in their areas who had local knowledge and capability, in some cases acquired over many years, to provide targeted support. This meant funding decisions made by the Government might have resulted in an inefficient use of resources, for example, through the effort involved in building the capacity and capability of NGOs funded by the State to provide services in areas where they did not usually operate.

## **Mechanisms for the RPN to escalate issues to, and receive feedback from, the SCC initially operated effectively**

- 3.9 Early on, the RPN was successfully used as a key forum for the exchange of information between the Government and the community sector. TasCOSS facilitated weekly online Community Services Update meetings with up to 65 members, including chief executives of community organisations, Government and Commonwealth partners. At these meetings RPN members were provided with accurate, reliable information from the SCC and Communities Tasmania, for example about issues concerning food relief, family violence and support for young people, and they were able to raise issues they wished referred to the SCC. TasCOSS maintained an issues register, which it shared with the RPN and SCC and the SCC Recovery Cell could extract information from this register to the WNA report.
- 3.10 Communities Tasmania also met separately with some NGOs from the RPN it funded to help coordinate the recovery effort. For example, they established a COVID-19 Emergency Food Relief Response Group with the purpose of bringing together organisations who received funding from them for emergency food relief to discuss and collaboratively resolve issues affecting the emergency food relief sector. Meetings involved representatives from TasCOSS and the SCC Recovery Cell, which would have ensured effective sharing of information across these participants.
- 3.11 From late August 2020, with the departure of the SCC Government Liaison role holder who had a key role in communicating with the RPN, the RPN felt it had lost its ability to provide feedback on how different issues were tracking or escalate any new issues

that arose. However, regular communication was still required because RPN members were continuing to identify and address social impacts.

- 3.12 The role of the SCC Government Liaison role holders and the communications gap created with their departure is referenced further below.

### **Effective mechanisms did not exist for the Social Recovery Working Group to escalate issues**

- 3.13 The Social Recovery Working Group was convened to support the State Recovery Committee in ensuring whole-of-government coordination and management of social recovery issues. It was chaired by a Department of Health (Health) representative from the Emergency Preparedness and Response Unit and meetings occurred between 8 April and 6 May 2020. Its membership included (among others) the Regional Social Recovery Coordinators and representatives from Communities Tasmania. After 6 May 2020, its functions were transferred to the OSEM Recovery Working Group.
- 3.14 One stated function of the Social Recovery Working Group was to provide advice and support to the State Recovery Committee on social recovery impacts, needs and activities. However, members considered there was a lack of sound operational mechanisms for them to escalate information to the State Recovery Committee. In other respects, the Social Recovery Working Group functioned well, which we describe in Chapter 4.

## **Communication from the SCC was hampered by limited capacity at State-level**

### **The Government lacked the capacity to provide feedback to regional and local role holders through formal governance mechanisms on all issues they had escalated**

- 3.15 We were informed the Government was slow or did not provide feedback to the regions on all the issues they had escalated and this appears to have been because of the limited capacity at State-level and the fast pace at which the pandemic was developing. We also understand it was not always possible for the Government to provide a quick response to some issues where further research was required.
- 3.16 Regional Controllers attended the SEMC as members and were observers at the State Recovery Committee and these were mechanisms for them to receive information. However, these committees only dealt with high-level strategic priorities and did not discuss issues at the level of granularity required by regional role holders. The Social Recovery Working Group, attended by Regional Social Recovery Coordinators, also focused on State-level issues such as seasonal workers and quarantine hotels. Regional Social Recovery Coordinators considered this was good information for them to have, but only of partial relevance to them.



- 3.17 If Regional Controllers needed immediate assurance regional and local issues raised were being addressed, they would circumvent the formal communications channels and either call the SCC directly or shop around to seek answers from other people who might be able to help.
- 3.18 Communities Tasmania were unable to attend all Regional Social Recovery Committee meetings given they had a large number of other competing priorities. Also, some Communities Tasmania attendees had a narrow remit, such as housing, and were not in a position to provide comprehensive updates. However, Communities Tasmania said they would discern issues raised at meetings through minutes they received, which they could then follow up. They also said the Regional Social Recovery Coordinators could contact them directly.

**Initially, issues with the use of formal governance mechanisms for communicating downwards were successfully addressed through the involvement of SCC Government Liaison role holders**

- 3.19 The SCC Recovery Cell established SCC Government Liaison role holders to liaise with the Regional Social Recovery Committees and the RPN. The SCC Recovery Cell established this role based on experience in a previous emergency where there was a perceived gap in communication between State and regional recovery levels.
- 3.20 A SCC Government Liaison role holder attended all regional meetings to provide information and clarification but was not meant to override the emergency management governance structure, including the Regional Controller's role. They were able to escalate issues more quickly than through the formal route and get responses through informal channels to issues raised by Committee members. They led in other initiatives, such as arranging for the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner to attend meetings to discuss how discrimination might occur in the context of the pandemic and what regional and local coordinators should look out for in their communities. On one occasion, they compiled a comprehensive information pack for the Regional Social Recovery Committees to address concerns from members about the lack of information provided on local funding to NGOs. We received consistent, very positive feedback from the Regional Social Recovery Committees about the value the Government Liaison role-holder provided.
- 3.21 Like the RPN, Regional Social Recovery Committees perceived a significant communication gap when the SCC Government Liaison role holders from the SCC Recovery Cell were moved back to their substantive roles in late August 2020. The staff remaining within the SCC Recovery Cell had little time to dedicate to these ongoing two-way communication channels and therefore they reverted to previous mechanisms for communicating through a newsletter and attempting to set up Yammer, a social networking service for private communications. However, they acknowledged these communication mechanisms were not successful.



## **Local council Municipal Recovery Coordinators became very reliant on other communications mechanisms to access information they required**

- 3.22 Outside Regional Social Recovery Committee Meetings, Municipal Recovery Coordinators took advantage of well-established relationships with individual committee members, especially other Municipal Recovery Coordinators, to seek their advice and share experiences. However, problems with the information flow from State-level to REMCs and Regional Social Recovery Committees resulted in Municipal Recovery Coordinators feeling they did not have enough information from the State-level through this communication route to lead an informed and coordinated response at a local level.
- 3.23 Communities Tasmania commissioned NGOs directly to coordinate recovery efforts at regional and local levels, which the Government considered was more efficient than these services being procured individually by regional and local government entities. Funding decisions were published on the Government Coronavirus disease website but this did not include information about specific support within individual regions and municipal areas. Some of these funded NGOs, such as the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul attended Regional Social Recovery Committee meetings and provided regular updates on initiatives they were undertaking. Otherwise, Municipal Recovery Coordinators received very little information about the providers funded in their areas or the scope of their contracts and performance measures. Municipal Recovery Coordinators knew the vulnerable people needing support within their areas and how to reach them. The lack of information about State funding to NGOs made it difficult for councils to coordinate support provided in their areas, identify gaps in provision and disseminate information to their local population, including responding to enquiries about the support available.
- 3.24 One council described to us how as far as possible they collected information about the programs and resources available to people in their area and published this information on their website, together with links to health and other information, enabling one-stop community access. They also provided information to people who might not have website access, for example, through distributing leaflets to elderly people. However, they never felt well-informed about the support being provided through the Government, which they could then communicate to their local population.
- 3.25 Another council described how they supported small businesses through the Council's funding program. However, when this funding ran out they found it difficult to establish what support options were available at a State level.
- 3.26 To address gaps in the information they were receiving, some Municipal Recovery Coordinators started to attend RPN meetings to learn about the support provided by NGOs in their local areas and to establish relationships with them. However, they still felt excluded from being able to raise issues and be part of solutions, which they said appeared to be NGO-led.

- 3.27 LGAT also undertook a liaison role between the SCC and local councils. The LGAT Chief Executive sat on the SEMC as an advocate for local government and was therefore aware of strategic emergency priorities being addressed by the Government. LGAT had requested full membership of the State Recovery Committee, which it saw as providing an important link in managing recovery between the State and local government, but this was not granted<sup>21</sup>. However, a LGAT Liaison Officer was engaged with the SCC Planning Team from March 2020 to enable collaborative planning and to progress local government related issues through the SCC as required. In doing so, they established informal networking relationships with some OSEM staff, which they used in a two-way exchange of information.
- 3.28 LGAT sought responses to issues raised by Municipal Recovery Coordinators and became a good source of information for them. For this reason, some Municipal Recovery Coordinators started to rely on LGAT for information rather than the Regional Social Recovery Committees.
- 3.29 Council General Managers received briefings from LGAT with updates on State-led social recovery. Some Municipal Recovery Coordinators said their General Managers passed information down to them from these briefings. This especially appeared to be the case where Municipal Recovery Coordinators were also senior managers. However, LGAT's communications to General Managers did not always filter down to Municipal Recovery Coordinators. As a result, LGAT enhanced their communications to include direct communication with Municipal Recovery Coordinators.

## **The volume of information received was unmanageable for many**

- 3.30 Although regional and local coordinators said they did not always receive responses they required from State-level to specific issues they had escalated, they also said the continually changing circumstances meant they regularly received a large volume of information from different agencies. They found it onerous and time consuming to sift through this information in order to extract information directly relevant to them and their communities.
- 3.31 The different communication channels also resulted in some confusion. One Regional Social Recovery Coordinator said the first few meetings of their Regional Social Recovery Committee were helpful in determining which agencies were responsible for responding to specific social impacts. However, after a few weeks the different channels of communication introduced, including through the SCC, DPAC, Communities Tasmania, Department of State Growth and later LGAT, resulted in confusion about the different communication flows and some inconsistent messages.

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<sup>21</sup> 3.36 LGAT's Chief Executive was a 'corresponding member' of the State Recovery Committee, which meant usually they did not participate in meetings, but might be provided with meeting papers and reports (*State Recovery Committee, Terms of Reference vs 3.5 Nov 2020*).

- 3.32 One Council with separate Municipal Recovery and Emergency Response Coordinators found the Coordinators were receiving different communications from State-level, which they needed to continually cross reference to ensure they both had the information they needed to respond at a local level. Another of the smaller councils, who said they were swamped with emails from some agencies, said they decided to use the Premier's press releases and the COVID-19 website as the source of truth.
- 3.33 We were also informed approval mechanisms did not always allow for timely uploading of regional information on WebEOC<sup>22</sup>. One Regional Social Recovery Coordinator said Health had to get everything approved through multiple levels and it was sometimes not clear who had the delegation to approve. This meant by the time information was published on WebEOC, it was often out of date.

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<sup>22</sup> Web-based online system used by Tasmanian emergency responders to provide a single repository of information, situational awareness, intelligence, decisions and actions to guide the whole-of-government response.

## 4. Use of information for decision-making

In this chapter we assess whether effective use was made of information from relevant sources, including information obtained from Government and other organisations representing specific social groups to:

- understand the issues and risks posed by the pandemic to the wellbeing of specific social groups
- identify and agree the social impacts to be prioritised and addressed by the Government.

### Chapter summary

The Government needed to act promptly, which meant initially it had to make decisions in the absence of complete information and without its decisions being tested through the formal State, regional and local recovery governance structures. However, it could rely on advice from the SEMC and daily IDC meetings. The need for prompt decisions meant some of the early stimulus measures were not well targeted, though as far as possible the SCC sought to remedy this.

When introduced, the WNA process enabled triaging at regional and State levels to ensure decisions were made at the most appropriate level. As time went on this process continued to be refined to support better decision-making. This included refinements to the information reported to the State Recovery Committee.

The State Recovery Working Group was used effectively to lead on responding to many issues raised at State level, including identifying and coordinating with the most appropriate organisations for advice and to find a solution. The State Recovery Committee also took a wider view through determining how social impacts reported in one area might present opportunities in another.

### The Government needed to act promptly, which meant initially it had to make decisions with incomplete information

- 4.1 The TEMA states recovery starts at the same time as the emergency response. The Government recognised this was especially important to manage the social impacts of COVID-19. This meant it had to respond promptly and make decisions about the prioritisation of social impacts and support required in the absence of complete information.
- 4.2 Therefore, initially the Government had to act without its decisions being tested through the formal governance structures, which were still becoming operational for COVID-19. As previously described, the Premier announced economic and social stimulus measures, totalling over \$1 billion, on 17 and 26 March 2020, complimenting the Australian Government's multi-billion response. However, the SCC Recovery Cell

was not established until 19 March 2020, after the first economic and social stimulus package was announced. It introduced the process for coordinating WNA information on 21 March 2020 with its first report dated 30 March 2020.

- 4.3 The Premier led the funding allocation with advice from the State Recovery Advisor, Secretaries of DPAC and Treasury who in turn were informed by feedback from the daily IDC meetings and information from the Commonwealth. However, it was the Premier's prerogative to decide on the final funding allocation.
- 4.4 Issues were allocated to specific agencies through consultation with the IDC and SEMC. We were informed decisions were usually made collectively and often aligned with the agencies' core business activities. For example, Communities Tasmania was given lead responsibility for food supply and the Department of State Growth for public internet access. This ensured there was clarity about who was leading in addressing specific impacts.
- 4.5 When the economic and social stimulus measures were announced, the SCC Recovery Cell also had to work quickly to ascertain what the measures were and determine which agencies and NGOs should be involved in implementing the measures.

### **The Government relied on advice from the SCC Policy Team about the possible social impacts of suppression measures**

- 4.6 The Government needed to determine rapidly where changes in restrictions to population movement might result in other impacts. Risks to this approach were mitigated to an extent by the SCC Policy Team, who when drafting directions to contain the pandemic identified the possible social impacts. In doing so, they took into account key principles such as equity, individual liberty and proportionality. One example is the list of specified persons who were pre-approved to come into the State, such as freight workers, or people who were allowed to travel on compassionate grounds. They also took account of the positive social impacts of easing restrictions. Access to parks and reserves was allowed early on because it was an enabler of physical and mental well-being.

### **The need for prompt decisions meant some early stimulus measures were initially not well targeted**

- 4.7 The Premier's announcements directed Communities Tasmania and other agencies to administer funding to specific NGOs, such as TasCOSS and Loaves and Fishes, and to undertake some competitive grants processes. Where Communities Tasmania had discretion, they used different mechanisms to identify specific social impacts requiring support. This included linking information from three sources – Commonwealth funded agencies, TasCOSS and other community networks to identify the key issues to address. They also set up specific groups, for example for food relief, involving State representatives and others to monitor the support provided.
- 4.8 There was a shared view the funding areas announced in March 2020 may not all have been well targeted or helped to reduce longer-term needs. As there was no time to do

a comprehensive needs analysis, the Government had to make some assumptions about who the vulnerable groups were and what the impacts on them would be.

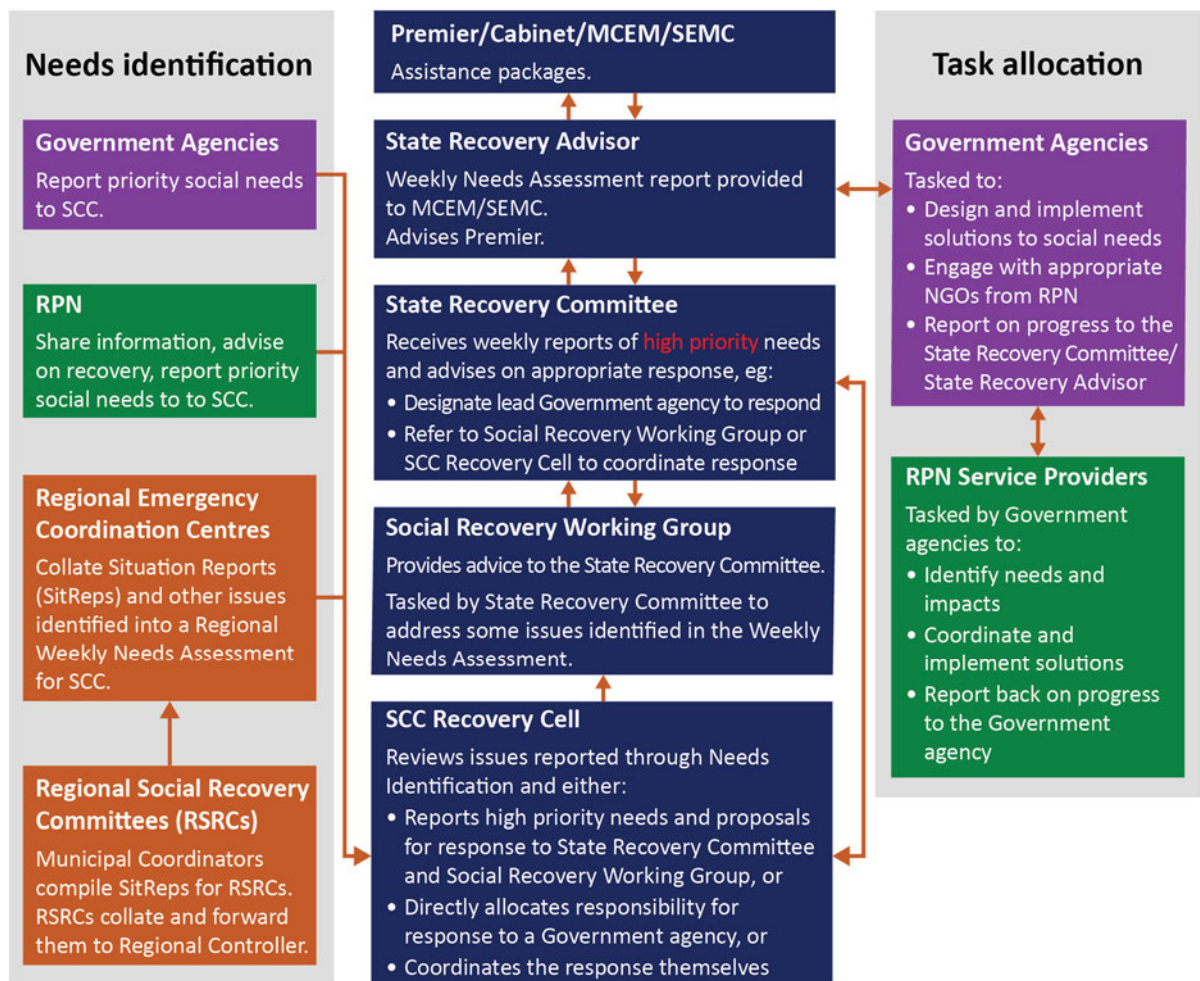
- 4.9 Also, funding was directed to known providers without there always being an assessment of those organisations' capacity to deliver the additional work, creating a risk of partial or non-delivery.
- 4.10 As we have highlighted previously, regional role holders were concerned decisions on funding allocation did not consider existing regional recovery frameworks but instead used established State-level funding streams. The view was consistently expressed that changing coordination of operational recovery from the REMCs and Regional Social Recovery Committees to State-level resulted in some statewide NGOs receiving funding for services they were not well placed to provide and some relief and recovery organisations being underfunded for social recovery activities they were already performing or better placed to provide.
- 4.11 To an extent, issues identified in early funding decisions were later resolved. This included where funding had been announced for organisations to carry out recovery activities which they were already funded for, or where another provider was carrying out the activity. In these cases, we found examples of the SCC Recovery Cell negotiating with the organisations concerned to adjust funding allocation. This resulted in some funding for Meals on Wheels being redirected to the Red Cross. Volunteering Tasmania was also funded to provide services for people having to quarantine when entering Tasmania but it became apparent they would not be able to provide these services as many of their volunteers were older people who had to self-isolate. The Council of Churches stepped in of its own volition to provide support to people arriving in Tasmania. The Council of Churches was reluctant to receive funding, but Communities Tasmania was able to redirect a small amount of unspent funding retrospectively to the Council.
- 4.12 With the benefit of hindsight, some interviewees considered the Government could have taken more time to make certain funding decisions so they were better targeted. For example, economic impacts take time to become apparent, so more time could have been allowed to assess the flow-on social impacts.

## **The formal WNA process enabled triaging of decisions to be addressed at the most appropriate level and the SCC continued to refine this process as time went on**

- 4.13 From relatively early in the pandemic response, the SCC Recovery Cell started to produce WNA reports for the State Recovery Advisor and State Recovery Committee. WNA reports provided a process for the escalation of issues from across the State, including from regional and local representatives and NGOs, which were used for decision-making. Figure 5 shows the process used to identify needs and allocate tasks, which incorporates the WNA process.



Figure 5: Needs identification and task allocation



Source: Tasmanian Audit Office

- 4.14 Initially, Regional Controllers would triage issues escalated from Regional Social Recovery Committees to determine which Government committee or agency they should refer them to, for example, the SCC or Health. Through this process, they determined many issues could be dealt with locally without being escalated.
- 4.15 The SCC Recovery Cell would collate and triage issues they received from needs assessments received from Regional Controllers and would either:
- Enter issues into WebEOC, tasking them to the relevant organisation or deal with issues directly themselves.
  - Escalate issues to the Social Recovery Working Committee to be addressed or if necessary, produce proposals for the State Recovery Committee. The State Recovery Committee had two options when it received proposals:
    - refer to the State Controller for sign-off, or
    - task the SCC Recovery Team to do more work on the proposal, then have the proposal approved by the State Recovery Advisor and/or State Controller.



- 4.16 From 9 April 2020, the SCC Recovery Cell separated social needs for reporting into high or medium priority and those to be addressed over the longer-term. Reports to the State Recovery Committee only provided recommendations for the Committee's endorsement on high priority needs identified. Medium to longer-term needs and those that did not require endorsement by the State Recovery Committee were to be monitored and actioned by the SCC Recovery Cell.
- 4.17 From 9 April 2020, it was also agreed high priority needs identified in previous needs assessment reports would be included as a separate table enabling the State Recovery Committee to track progress on actions to address those needs. This supported more focused monitoring.
- 4.18 The SCC Recovery Cell introduced further structuring of WNA reports from 23 April 2020 to clarify the input required from the State Recovery Committee, dividing the reports into two sections where:
- the State Recovery Committee's decision was required, such as to designate a lead agency to work with the SCC Recovery Cell to oversee food security and develop a plan for a coordinated approach
  - endorsement of the SCC Recovery Cell's recommendations was required, for example, that the SCC Recovery Cell should liaise with Health to understand work being undertaken to inform the public about channels to access medical services, such as Telehealth.
- 4.19 The State Recovery Advisor included representatives from all agencies on the State Recovery Committee to improve the coordination and allocation of recovery tasks, even though this was not a requirement of the State Recovery Plan.

## **The Social Recovery Working Group was used effectively to lead on responding to many issues raised at State-level through the WNA Reports**

- 4.20 The State Recovery Committee referred many issues to the Social Recovery Working Group to assist with resolution, rather than these issues being further escalated. The Social Recovery Working Group would identify and liaise with the most appropriate organisations to seek advice and try to resolve these issues. This is demonstrated through the Social Recovery Working Group being tasked to liaise with Shelter Tasmania, Housing Connect and other agencies to seek advice on whether current funding for emergency accommodation for homeless Tasmanians was sufficient. They were also asked to develop a strategic, coordinated approach involving several agencies to manage increased risks for children and students with complex needs requiring specialist support.
- 4.21 This useful role continued when the Social Recovery Working Group was superseded by the Recovery Working Group chaired by OSEM. We were told the Recovery Working Group enabled an open, discursive exchange. It was not as formal as the

Social Recovery Committee and included practitioners who had operated in the emergency management space for some years.

## **The State Recovery Committee recognised social impacts in one area might present opportunities in another**

- 4.22 In some cases, through escalation of issues from individual agencies, the State Recovery Committee identified that impacts in one area might present opportunities in another. For example, the Committee determined the shortage of seasonal workers usually brought in to Tasmania to harvest fruit and vegetables might be addressed, to an extent, through linking producers with workers from other impacted industries such as hospitality and tourism. It also determined excess stock held by farmers and cafes from reduced demand might be used as part of the wrap around services for people self-isolating.

# Acronyms and abbreviations

EMA	<i>Emergency Management Act 2006</i>
Audit Act	<i>Audit Act 2008</i>
Communities Tasmania	Department of Communities Tasmania
CRU	COVID-19 Recovery Unit
DPAC	Department of Premier and Cabinet
DPFEM	Department of Police, Fire and Emergency Management
Government	Tasmanian Government (unless otherwise stated)
Health	Department of Health
IDC	Heads of Agency Coronavirus Interdepartmental Committee
LGAT	Local Government Association of Tasmania
MCEM	Ministerial Committee for Emergency Management
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
OSEM	Office of Security and Emergency Management
PESRAC	Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council
Regional Controller	Regional Emergency Management Controller
REMC	Regional Emergency Management Committee
RPN	Recovery Partners Network
SCC	State Control Centre
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
State	State of Tasmania
TasCOSS	Tasmanian Council of Social Services
TEMA	Tasmanian Emergency Management Arrangements
THS	Tasmanian Health Service

# Appendix 1: Detailed pandemic response timeline

## December 2019

A novel coronavirus was first identified in Wuhan, China and became known as coronavirus disease of 2019 (COVID-19).

## January 2020

- 25 January The Australian Government confirmed Australia's first case of COVID-19.
- 30 January The World Health Organisation declared the outbreak of COVID-19 a Public Health Emergency of International Concern.

## 2 February 2020

The Tasmanian State Premier established an IDC which met regularly throughout February 2020 to provide cross-agency oversight and coordination of the pandemic response.

## March 2020

- 2 March First confirmed Tasmania case of COVID-19 reported.  
The State Controller assumed responsibility for oversight of emergency management response and recovery activities for COVID-19.  
Extraordinary meeting of SEMC convened by State Controller. MCEM convened.
- 11 March World Health Organisation officially declared COVID-19 a global pandemic.
- 17 March Acting Director of Public Health declared a Public Health Emergency for Tasmania under the Public Health Act 1997.
- 19 March Premier declared a State of Emergency in Tasmania under the EMA 2006.  
The State Controller activated the State Control Centre (SCC). Prior to activation of the SCC, the OSEM within DPAC supported recovery activities relating to COVID-19.  
SCC Recovery Cell activated (staff from OSEM and other DPAC staff were transferred to the Recovery Cell).
- 17 and 26 March Two social and economic stimulus support packages were announced by the Government totalling over \$1 billion.
- 21 March SCC Recovery Cell started to coordinate a Weekly Impact and Needs Assessment Report, which detailed high priority needs for consideration by the State Recovery Advisor and State Recovery Committee.

- |            |   |
|------------|---|
| 24 March   | State Recovery Committee first convened for COVID-19 and met weekly thereafter. Its meeting frequency reduced to fortnightly and then monthly following the establishment of the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council (PESRAC) and improvement of the situation in Tasmania. |
| Late March | Extraordinary meetings of the REMCs and Regional Social Recovery Committees (RSRCs) were held. Lines of communication were established between the RSRCs and the REMCs.   |

### April/May 2020

An outbreak in North-West Tasmania was found to have started on or around 3 April 2020. This was a significant event that occurred early in the emergency.

- |                      |  |
|----------------------|--|
| 8 April to 6 May     | Social Recovery Working Group convened and met weekly to provide advice to the State Recovery Committee on immediate social and economic recovery strategies and respond to issues tasked to it by the State Recovery Committee. |
| 9 April and 30 April | Economic Stimulus and Recovery Working Group (ESRWG) convened and met twice on these dates   |
| 30 April             | PESRAC was established as the Recovery Taskforce by the Premier under s.24C EMA 2006.  |

Following the establishment of PESRAC and lifting of Stage 1 restrictions, membership of the Social Recovery Working Group and ESRWG transitioned back to usual recovery governance arrangements, with the Recovery Working Group chaired by the Director, OSEM (or in his absence the Acting Director, OSEM) taking on these working group roles.

### June 2020

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 4 June  | The State Recovery Committee agreed OSEM, together with the Recovery Working Group, would continue to monitor emerging and evolving issues, identify options and make recommendations to the State Recovery Advisor.   |
| 10 June | <p>Determined:</p> <p>PESRAC would be responsible for providing high level policy advice to the Government on strategies and initiatives to support the State's medium and long term recovery from the pandemic.</p> <p>The State Recovery Advisor would oversee the implementation of PESRAC's recommendations.</p> |

15 June            Determined the SCC Recovery Cell would disband with staff from the Recovery Cell returning to their substantive roles. The State Recovery Advisor would retain responsibility for COVID-19 recovery with support from OSEM.

### July 2020

Early July            Responsibility for recovery transitioned informally from the State Controller to the Secretary DPAC

20 July            PESRAC provided its first report to the Premier. This Interim Report provided an overview of the economic and social impacts of COVID-19 and made 64 recommendations to support social and economic recovery. The Government accepted all the recommendations on 18 August 2020.

### November 2020

5 November        The State Recovery Committee approved the establishment of a COVID-19 Recovery Unit (CRU) under DPAC to assume responsibility for COVID-19 recovery activities. The structure of the CRU was approved by the State Recovery Advisor on 20 November 2020.

20 November      The State Recovery Advisor initiated the establishment of three *Regional Recovery Committees* (North, South and North-West), previously agreed by Cabinet. At the time of this report, the structure and membership of these committees was under development.

### December 2020

Responsibility for COVID-19 recovery formally transitioned under EMA 2006, section 24(F) from the State Controller/SCC to the Secretary DPAC.

### January/February 2021

1 January 2021 – The functions of the SCC transitioned to the newly established COVID-19 Coordination Centre.<sup>23</sup>

Recruitment for the CRU took place and the CRU formally took on responsibility for COVID-19 recovery initiatives, including establishing the Regional Recovery Committees and oversight of the Government's implementation of PESRAC recommendations.

### March 2021

16 March 2021 - PESRAC delivered its second report to the Premier, providing advice to the Government on strategies and initiatives to support longer-term recovery. The report makes 52 recommendations, based on five priority areas: jobs and income, health and housing,

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<sup>23</sup> The COVID-19 Coordination Centre is the same as the SCC - the name change is to prevent confusion with the SCC which is perceived as having a specific role in managing COVID-19.

community connectivity and engagement, environmental sustainability, and public sector capability.

On the same day the Government accepted all the recommendations. The State Recovery Advisor was made responsible for overseeing their successful implementation.



# Audit Mandate and Standards Applied

## Mandate

Section 23 of the *Audit Act 2008* states that:

- (1) The Auditor-General may at any time carry out an examination or investigation for one or more of the following purposes:
  - (a) examining the accounting and financial management information systems of the Treasurer, a State entity or a subsidiary of a State entity to determine their effectiveness in achieving or monitoring program results;
  - (b) investigating any matter relating to the accounts of the Treasurer, a State entity or a subsidiary of a State entity;
  - (c) investigating any matter relating to public money or other money, or to public property or other property;
  - (d) examining the compliance of a State entity or a subsidiary of a State entity with written laws or its own internal policies;
  - (e) examining the efficiency, effectiveness and economy of a State entity, a number of State entities, a part of a State entity or a subsidiary of a State entity;
  - (f) examining the efficiency, effectiveness and economy with which a related entity of a State entity performs functions –
    - (i) on behalf of the State entity; or
    - (ii) in partnership or jointly with the State entity; or
    - (iii) as the delegate or agent of the State entity;
  - (g) examining the performance and exercise of the Employer's functions and powers under the *State Service Act 2000*.
- (2) Any examination or investigation carried out by the Auditor-General under subsection (1) is to be carried out in accordance with the powers of this Act

## Standards Applied

Section 31 specifies that:

'The Auditor-General is to perform the audits required by this or any other Act in such a manner as the Auditor-General thinks fit having regard to -

- (a) the character and effectiveness of the internal control and internal audit of the relevant State entity or audited subsidiary of a State entity; and
- (b) the Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards.'

The auditing standards referred to are Australian Auditing Standards as issued by the Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards Board.



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*Photography: Laura Helle, Tourism Tasmania Visual Library*

**Phone** (03) 6173 0900

**Fax** (03) 6173 0999

**Email** [admin@audit.tas.gov.au](mailto:admin@audit.tas.gov.au)

**Address** Level 8, 144 Macquarie Street

Hobart, 7000

**Postal** GPO Box 851, Hobart 7001

#### **Launceston Office**

**Phone** (03) 6173 0971

**Web** [www.audit.tas.gov.au](http://www.audit.tas.gov.au)

**Address** 4th Floor, Henty House

1 Civic Square, Launceston