

October 2024

1. Does Council, along with other local and/or state government agencies, actively plan for emergency scenarios, like a power outage, in a proactive manner? If so, could you describe what that looks like?

Yes, in the past, we have conducted exercises for common events such as bushfires, floods, and recently a Fish Kill exercise in 2024. No other exercises have been undertaken due to the need to respond to emergency incidents in recent years, including the 2022/23 floods and Fish Kill events in 2019/20 and 2023, all following the Covid-19 pandemic. A train crash exercise is planned for the future.

2. Your evidence noted that the Central Darling Shire Council stood up its Local Emergency Management Committee on the afternoon of the first day of the power outage, Thursday 17th October.

a. Can you advise on what date the Central Darling Shire's LEMC combined with Broken Hill and the Unincorporated Areas to collectively host Emergency Management meetings?

Central Darling and Unincorporated Area LEMC Thursday 17 October 2024 at 3pm.

Most Government and NGO's agencies cover or are based in Broken Hill.

b. How were action plans from the daily meetings communicated to affected community members in the Central Darling Shire?

Media Releases and facebook posts through various media and social media outlets, such as radio, email, Media Releases, facebook. Refer to <https://www.centraldarling.nsw.gov.au/News-articles/Latest-information-on-Power-Outage> as example.

c. How was the LEMC communicating and collaborating with the combat agency and other agencies involved in the emergency response to provide support to residents and respond to the emergency?

Combat agencies' attendance at LEMC meetings

3. On what date was Central Darling Shire made aware that only one of the two backup power generators relied on by Transgrid was functioning?

17 October, only one turbine generator was operational.

Further to this, was the Council given any description of what a "shared load" from that single backup generator might look like for your communities at Wilcannia, Menindee and White Cliffs?

Load shedding was implemented on an ad-hoc basis across the region depending on demand and location, until additional generators were brought in from Sydney.

4. Going forward, do you see that the below listed venues will become your regular emergency management centres for those communities?

- The Sporting Hall in White Cliffs
- The Town Hall in Wilcannia
- The Civic Hall in Menindee

And to this end, would you further see Council seeking grant funding from state or federal governments to ensure a more permanent back-up generator solution?

Yes, would require funding by either State or federal Governments.

5. In Council's submission you note a possible expanded role for State and Federal Aboriginal government agencies. As well as this role of Aboriginal agencies being more helpful to Council, how else might those other two levels of governments (state and federal) better support remote communities with limited resources, like the Central Darling Shire, in the event of major disasters (e.g. power outages, floods, fires, fish kills, etc)?

Staff of Aboriginal government agencies who live and work within their regions are granted autonomy and authorisation by their respective departments to make decisions. They can react swiftly and provide financial responses to crisis situations without needing approval from senior management, who may not be as well positioned to make these decisions.

6. Were the specific needs of Aboriginal people considered/consulted when planning and delivering emergency response actions?

Police Aboriginal Liaison Officers were deployed to Wilcannia and Menindee. Government and NGO agencies representing Aboriginal people participated in the Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) and provided emergency responses to communities. On Friday, 18 October at 4:30 pm, a meeting (face to face and via video link) was held with Wilcannia and White Cliffs business representatives, Wilcannia Local Aboriginal Land Council members, and several elders from Wilcannia to provide an update on power outages and discuss community needs. Following this meeting, an Aboriginal Elder from Wilcannia attended the LEMC meeting on Saturday at 10:00 am. Police present was in Menindee regularly and attended the Community Hall.

7. Did the Council approach Aboriginal Affairs for information about Aboriginal residents who may have needed particular support?

Yes, through the LEMC meetings.

8. Council's submission noted that an option which may work better than food hampers would be to provide a localised business approach, whereby individuals or households are given a store credit to shop locally.

a. Would you be confident that the local supermarkets and general stores would be able to accommodate the sudden demand on their resources?

The necessity for intervention is contingent upon the crises occurring at the time. During the Covid-19 pandemic, food distribution and logistics were impeded on a national scale, thereby creating a significant need. Conversely, the Far West power outage was a regional issue, and given that most of our food supply originates from South Australia, which remained unaffected, the impact on food distribution was minimal.

b. If so, could you explain the reason for your confidence?

Large Supermarkets and storage facilities in Broken Hill have generator power back up.

Menindee & Wilcannia supermarkets, and White Cliffs Store have generator power back up.

9. Does Council typically have an after-event debrief to analyse what worked well and what didn't work well?

Council has a Business Continuity Plan which was debriefed at a Senior Management meeting following the event.

a. Has the Council conducted a review of its operations during the power outage in October and November 2024?

Not in a formal process, discussion at senior management level on funding and procurement of generators for critical council owned infrastructure and services.

b. If so, can you provide a copy of this review? If such a review is confidential, then can you provide a summary of the key findings?

Informal discussion, no documentation can be provided.

c. What were some key learnings for Council from the emergency response and LEMC process?

Combining the three Far West LEMCs for quarterly meetings and coordinating responses to emergencies affecting the entire Far West region helps reduce the duplication of efforts and optimizes resource allocation.

10. Has the Council (or REMC or LEMC) conducted training exercises in relation to an emergency caused by a power outage?

This has not been considered previously. However, it has been discussed for telecommunication purposes related to our mobile network in isolated areas, which require enhanced power backup systems.

11. In your submission, you mentioned that Council supported non-government organisations with necessary resources and information. Could you elaborate on what resources were provided to NGOs and what role these organisations played in the emergency response?

Maari Ma Aboriginal Health actively participated as a member of the CDSC LEMC, providing welfare checks and distributing food hampers. Willcannia Golf Club obtained an exemption to allow minors into their premises and was promoted as a location for mobile phone charging during operational hours. Assisted Food Bank in organising the unloading and storage of food hampers.

12. Some affected community members told the Committee that they received limited support and information from Council. Do you have any comment regarding this experience reported by residents of the Central Darling Shire?

The council did not receive any criticisms, or requests for additional support or information during or immediately following the power outage events.

Attachments have been redacted.