

NSW State Emergency Management Committee

Annual Report 2022-2023

Acknowledgement of Country

The NSW State Emergency Management Committee and the Premier's Department acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this Annual Report for 2022-2023.

NSW State Emergency Management Committee Annual Report 2022-2023

Published by Premier's Department

First published: January 2023

This report has been compiled in accordance with Section 17 of the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* to describe the work and activities of the State Emergency Management Committee during the financial year 2022-2023.

More information

NSW Premier's Department can be contacted at:

GPO BOX 5341

SYDNEY NSW 2001

Telephone: (02) 9228 5555

Website: nsw.gov.au/premiers-department | nsw.gov.au/emergency

Contents

1	From the SEMC Chair	1
2	State Emergency Management Committee	2
	Roles and Functions	2
	Membership.....	2
3	Emergency Management Plans	6
	State Plans.....	6
	Sub and Supporting Plans.....	7
4	Significant Work and Activities	10
	Projects, Policy and Guidance	10
	Operational events.....	11
	Sub Committees.....	13
5	Continuous Improvement	15
	Lessons Management.....	15
	Exercises	18
	Emergency Management Training	20
	Disaster Inquiries and Audits	20

1 From the SEMC Chair

The State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) ensures that New South Wales (NSW) has robust, effective, and flexible arrangements in place to cope with any emergency that occurs. The Committee plays a lead role in coordinating efforts to prevent, prepare, respond to, and recover from emergencies and disasters of all kinds.

This report has been prepared in accordance with section 17 of the State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989 to report on the key work and activities of the SEMC for the year ended 30 June 2023.

NSW has faced multiple years of catastrophic and compounding disasters since 2019. Along the South Coast, communities still feel the impact of the 2019-2020 bushfires, while throughout the Northern Rivers and the Hawkesbury Nepean Valley, communities are still relatively early in their recovery journey after February-March 2022 floods.

In 2022-2023, SEMC member agencies were called upon to respond to more flooding in Central NSW, and biosecurity threats including the varroa mite and the unprecedented fish death event in the Menindee River. I thank all our emergency service personnel, both volunteers and staff, who continue to show such dedication to their community and for their efforts responding to these events.

The focus of the SEMC throughout the year has been continuous improvement across the sector, to ensure that the lessons learnt in these past years are captured and embedded into our processes for the future.

The Independent Flood Inquiry and the Parliamentary Select Committee's Inquiry into the Response to major flooding across New South Wales were handed down in late 2022. The inquiries found that existing emergency management arrangements in NSW were in need of review to ensure that plans and agencies meet the needs of the community.

In line with these recommendations, the NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022 passed Parliament in November 2022, establishing the new Reconstruction Authority to realign disaster recovery efforts with mitigation and disaster preparedness planning. SEMC members are working closely with the Reconstruction Authority in the development of the state's first State Disaster Mitigation Plan. The SEMC also began a comprehensive review of the State Emergency Management Plan and endorsed updates to ten state level sub and supporting plans.

Member agencies have continued implementation of recommendations from the 2020 NSW Bushfire Inquiry and recommendations from the SEMC's State Lessons Report. The SEMC will continue to oversee the actions and initiatives being taken across Government agencies to address these major disaster inquiries and drive improvement in how we prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters.

Finally, as the new Chair, I would thank the members who left in this last year for the significant contributions they each made to emergency management in NSW. The work of this Committee has consistently relied upon the knowledge and commitment of its members, and I look forward to working with the Committee in 2023-2024.

Simon Draper
Chair, State Emergency
Management Committee

2 State Emergency Management Committee

Roles and Functions

The SEMC is a standing committee established under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989* (SERM Act). As at 30 June 2023, the Minister responsible for administering the SERM Act is the Hon Jihad Dib MP, Minister for Emergency Services.

The SEMC's functions are to:

- advise the Minister on all matters relating to the prevention of, preparation for, response to and recovery from emergencies (including the coordination of those activities of government and non-government agencies in connection with those matters).
- review, monitor and advise the Minister on the adequacy of the provisions of this Act relating to emergency management.
- provide strategic policy advice to the Minister in relation to emergency management.
- review, monitor and develop emergency management policy and practice at a state level and to disseminate information in relation to any such policy and practice.
- promote the continuous improvement of emergency management policy and practice at a State level, including through consideration of reviews and inquiries into emergency operations, exercises, and training evaluations.
- review the NSW State Emergency Management Plan and to recommend alterations to it.
- To endorse any sub plans or supporting plans established under the NSW State Emergency Management Plan.
- facilitate strategic State level emergency management capability through interagency coordination, cooperation and information sharing arrangements.
- carry out such other functions as conferred or imposed on the Committee by or under the Act or as are related to this Act and assigned to the Committee from time to time by the Minister.

The SERM Act also establishes a tiered structure for emergency management at the regional and local levels through Regional and Local Emergency Management Committees. Regions are determined by the Minister for Emergency Services and published in the NSW Gazette. The local level is based on Local Government Areas. These committees are responsible to the SEMC in their functions.

Membership

In accordance with the SERM Act, the SEMC membership is required to consist of:

- the State Emergency Operations Controller,
- the State Emergency Recovery Controller,
- the Commissioner of the NSW Ambulance,
- the Commissioner of the Fire and Rescue NSW,
- the Commissioner of the NSW Police Force,
- the Commissioner of the NSW Rural Fire Service,
- the Commissioner of the NSW State Emergency Service, and
- representatives of relevant government and non-government agencies as the Minister may from time to time determine, and other persons as nominated by the Minister from time to time.

In addition to these positions, the SERM Act establishes nine functional areas to coordinate support for emergency operations. These functional areas are set out in the table on page 4.

Membership

State Emergency Recovery Controller

Mr Simon Draper PSM

State Emergency Operations Controller

Deputy Commissioner Peter Thurtell APM

NSW Ambulance

Commissioner Dominic Morgan ASM

Fire and Rescue NSW

Commissioner Paul Baxter QSO

NSW Police Force

Commissioner Karen Webb APM

NSW Rural Fire Service

Commissioner Rob Rogers AFSM

NSW State Emergency Service

Commissioner Carlene York APM

NSW Volunteer Rescue Association

Commissioner Brenton Charlton

Marine Rescue NSW

Commissioner Alex Barrell

Emergency Information Coordination Unit

Ms Narelle Underwood

Department of Education

Ms Diane Van Berlo

Infrastructure NSW

Ms Maree Abood

Maritime Combat Agencies

Mr Shayne Wilde

Office of Local Government

Mr Keith Baxter

Agricultural and Animal Services Functional Area Coordinator

Dr Leigh Pilkington

Energy and Utilities Services Functional Area Coordinator

Mr Jamie Caldwell

Engineering Services Functional Area Coordinator

Mr Martin Dwyer

Environment Services Functional Area Coordinator

Mr Stephen Beaman PSM

Health Services Functional Area Coordinator

Mr Wayne Jones

Public Information Services Functional Area Coordinator

Mr Tarek Al-Issawi

Telecommunications Services Functional Area Coordinator

Ms Kylie De Courteney

Transport Services Functional Area Coordinator

Ms Tara McCarthy

Ms Sally Webb

Welfare Services Functional Area Coordinator

Mr Feargus O'Connor

Department of Premier and Cabinet

Ms Sarah Cruickshank

Ms Natasha Luschwitz PSM

Department of Planning and Environment

Ms Santina Camroux (Planning)

Mr Andrew Lewis (Environment and Heritage)

Changes to SEMC Membership

The following members were farewelled in 2022-23:

- Commissioner Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM AO
- Commissioner Mark Gibson ESM

In June 2022, the SEMC resolved that representatives should be invited from Aboriginal Affairs NSW, Multicultural NSW and Service NSW. These representatives have been invited to participate in each meeting commencing September 2022:

- Mr Shane Hamilton, Aboriginal Affairs NSW
- Mr Joseph La Posta, Multicultural NSW
- Ms Alexandra Geddes, Service NSW

Functional areas established by the SERM Act

Functional Area / Agency	Role
<p>Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area (AASFA) NSW Department of Primary Industries</p>	<p>The AASFA is responsible for the coordination of government agencies, non-government organisations and the private sector to provide key agriculture and animal services before, during and after an emergency (excluding native wildlife).</p>
<p>Energy and Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA) Office of Energy and Climate Change</p>	<p>The EUSFA coordinates support during emergencies to and from the energy and utility sectors and includes the coordination of response to significant and widespread disruptions to the supply of energy and utility services.</p>
<p>Engineering Services Functional Area (EngSFA) NSW Public Works</p>	<p>The EngSFA identifies the necessary arrangements at State level to effectively and efficiently coordinate the mobilisation of all engineering resources available within the State for emergency response and initial recovery operations.</p>
<p>Environment Services Functional Area (EnvSFA) NSW Environment Protection Authority</p>	<p>The EnvSFA coordinates support to assist with managing the response to environmental impacts across the elements of land, air and water. This includes cultural and natural heritage assets as well as wildlife.</p>
<p>Health Services Functional Area (HSFA) NSW Health</p>	<p>The HSFA coordinates arrangements to ensure health resources are effectively and efficiently coordinated in the event of emergencies.</p>
<p>Public Information Functional Area Coordinator (PIFAC) NSW Police Force</p>	<p>The PIFAC supports the operation of the Public Information Arrangements during an imminent or actual emergency operation not under the control of a combat agency and will co-ordinate the public information activities of agencies involved to ensure the effectiveness of the information and where required, warnings provided.</p>
<p>Telecommunications Services Functional Area (TelcoFA) Department of Customer Service</p>	<p>The TelcoFA coordinates emergency telecommunications support and resources required by the community, combat agencies and other essential services, in the event of an emergency.</p>
<p>Transport Services Functional Area (TSFA) Transport for NSW</p>	<p>The TSFA coordinates arrangements to effectively and efficiently coordinate the mobilisation and deployment of transport resources available within the State for emergency response and recovery operations.</p>
<p>Welfare Services Functional Area (WelFA) Department of Communities and Justice</p>	<p>The WelFA coordinates the provision of key welfare services to meet the immediate needs of disaster affected people and the provision of immediate hardship and distress relief.</p>

Meetings

The following meetings were held during the reporting period ending 30 June 2023:

- SEMC 126 – 15 September 2022
- SEMC 127 – 01 December 2022
- SEMC 128 – 14 March 2023
- SEMC 129 – 01 June 2023

Changes to emergency management legislation

The *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* was passed on 17 December 2022 in response to the Final Report of the NSW Flood Inquiry 2022. This established the NSW Reconstruction Authority to proactively reduce the impact of future disasters across NSW and to help communities recover from them faster.

The *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* amended the SERM Act to reflect that office of the State Emergency Recovery Controller is to be held by the chief executive officer of the NSW Reconstruction Authority. The chief executive officer is also empowered to designate the position to a senior executive of the NSW Reconstruction Authority or the NSW Police Force.

3 Emergency Management Plans

State Plans

The State Emergency Management Plan (EMPLAN) describes the New South Wales approach to emergency management, the governance and coordination arrangements and roles and responsibilities of agencies.

Review of the NSW EMPLAN

The NSW Independent Flood Inquiry 2022 recommended that following the catastrophic floods in February-March 2022, all emergency management plans be reviewed to ensure they are fit for purpose. The Parliamentary Flood Inquiry 2022 also made a similar recommendation seeking that plans be reviewed regularly and ensure clarity on the role of non-government partners.

In line with these recommendations, the SEMC began a comprehensive review of the EMPLAN in March 2023 to ensure lessons learned from previous reviews and inquiries have been incorporated into the plan and to formalise the new emergency roles and responsibilities of agencies following the machinery of government changes in late 2022.

The SEMC established a working group in March 2023 to progress this review of the EMPLAN. Key considerations of the review include:

- a detailed evaluation of the EMPLAN based on recommendations and lessons learned, in particular following the series of catastrophic level disasters impacting NSW since 2019,
- evaluation of the roles and responsibilities for each agency, identifying any gaps or required changes to ensure the right organisations are represented, and
- ensuring the EMPLAN includes and complements the role and functions of the NSW Reconstruction Authority.

Concurrently with the review of the EMPLAN, the SEMC have tasked the NSW Reconstruction Authority to review the NSW Recovery Plan to ensure that it similarly captures the changes to the roles and responsibilities of agencies in the disaster recovery space and considers the lessons learned from the 2022 floods and previous disasters. As part of the review, the NSW Reconstruction Authority are undertaking a state-wide stakeholder engagement process to ensure feedback from community groups, community leaders and representatives from Aboriginal communities is captured.

The review of the EMPLAN and the NSW Recovery Plan will be completed in December 2023.

State Disaster Mitigation Plan

The NSW Independent Flood Inquiry 2022 recommended the establishment of the NSW Reconstruction Authority, and that the Authority be tasked to lead development of a State Disaster Mitigation Plan, to improve risk reduction and disaster adaptation in high-risk areas.

To implement this recommendation, the *NSW Reconstruction Authority Act 2022* was passed by Parliament in November 2022, creating the Authority and establishing a legislative requirement that a State Disaster Mitigation Plan be developed and maintained. Under the Act, the Plan must include:

- potential strategies and actions for mitigating the impact of disasters on the State,
- an assessment, and consideration, of the impacts of climate change on disasters,
- priority areas or regions for projects to mitigate the impact of disasters, and
- the basis on which the Authority will monitor and report on the implementation of the strategies and actions.

The SEMC Risk and Resilience Sub-Committee and its State Risk Assessment Advisory Group were tasked to support the Authority in the development of the State Disaster Mitigation Plan, particularly through the provision of technical input and the development of the risk assessment tool for the Plan.

The State Disaster Mitigation Plan will be delivered to Government in December 2023 and is required to be reviewed at least every 5 years.

Sub and Supporting Plans

Under the *State Emergency and Rescue Management Act 1989*, the SEMC has responsibility for the review of the EMPLAN and for the endorsement of all sub and supporting plans established under its framework. Sub and supporting plans are reviewed and endorsed by SEMC every five years.

Sub Plans

A Sub Plan sets out arrangements for a specific hazard, or emergency event. Sub Plans may be prepared when the emergency management arrangements necessary to deal a hazard or requirements of an event differ from the general coordination arrangements set out in the EMPLAN.

The table below lists the Sub plans endorsed by the SEMC in the reporting period ending 30 June 2023.

Sub Plan	Lead Agency	Status
Blue Mountains Snow Sub Plan	NSW State Emergency Service	Endorsed SEMC 127 on 01 December 2022. The plan describes the arrangements in the event of significant falls of snow within the Blue Mountains Local Government Area.
Coastal Waters Marine Pollution Plan	Maritime Combat Agencies	Endorsed SEMC 126 on 15 September 2022. The plan details arrangements for dealing with marine oil or chemical spills in state waters and maritime incidents (such as groundings, collisions, disabled vessel or fire on a vessel) that could result in an oil or chemical spill.
Heatwave Sub Plan	NSW Police Force	Endorsed SEMC 129 on 01 June 2023. The plan details the arrangements for the control and coordination of, the preparation for, response to and immediate recovery from heatwave events within NSW.
Lucas Heights Emergency Sub Plan	NSW Police Force	Endorsed SEMC 129 on 01 June 2023. The plan details arrangements for responding to advice that there is a loss of control with the potential for or actual release of radioactive material from the Lucas Heights Science and Technology Centre (LHSTC).
Mine Emergency Sub Plan	NSW Police Force	Endorsed SEMC 128 on 14 March 2023. The plan describes the arrangements for the preparation for and response to an emergency at a mine.

Sub Plan	Lead Agency	Status
Sydney CBD Safety Plan	NSW Police Force	Endorsed SEMC 129 on 01 June 2023. The plan describes arrangements for emergency incidents occurring in the Sydney central business district (CBD).

Supporting Plans

Supporting Plans are prepared by a NSW Government agency or Functional Area. These Plans describe the support which is to be provided to the coordinating authority during emergency operations and how the agency or Functional Area will operate during an event in order to fulfil the roles and responsibilities allocated to them.

The table below lists the Supporting Plans endorsed by the SEMC in the reporting period ending 30 June 2023.

Supporting Plan	Lead Agency	Status
Agriculture and Animal Services Supporting Plan	Agriculture and Animal Services Functional Area	Endorsed SEMC 128 on 14 March 2023. The plan details emergency control and coordination arrangements for agricultural and animal resources in NSW.
Energy and Utility Services Supporting Plan	Energy and Utility Services Functional Area	Endorsed SEMC 127 on 01 December 2022. The plan sets the arrangements for the coordination of managing severe and sudden disruptions to the supply of energy and utility services within NSW.
Telecommunication Services Supporting Plan	Telecommunication Services Functional Area	Endorsed out of session on 23 May 2023. The plan sets out the arrangements for the coordination of telecommunications support and resources during emergency response and recovery operations.
Transport Services Supporting Plan	Transport Services Functional Area	Endorsed SEMC 127 on 01 December 2022. The plan sets the strategic arrangements for the management and coordination of transport support during an emergency in NSW.

Regional Plans

Region Emergency Management Committees are responsible for preparing plans in relation to the prevention of, preparation for, response to and recovery from emergencies in their region.

The table below lists the Regional plans endorsed by the SEMC in the reporting period ending 30 June 2023.

Regional Plan	Lead Agency	Status
South-West Metropolitan Region Emergency Management Plan	South-West Metropolitan REMC	Endorsed SEMC 128 on 14 March 2023. The plan provides a coordinated and comprehensive approach to emergency management in the South West Metropolitan region of Sydney.
Sydney Harbour Maritime Emergency Management Sub Plan	Sydney Metropolitan REMC	Endorsed SEMC 126 on 15 September 2022. The plan seeks to support marine response operations within Sydney Harbour including its islands and traversing structures and support emergency operations on adjacent land interfaces.

4 Significant Work and Activities

Projects, Policy and Guidance

The SEMC considers strategic policy issues, whole of government emergency management coordination, and state level capability and practices. Over the reporting period, the SEMC has considered and progressed a number of key issues and initiatives.

Review of Emergency Services Volunteering

The NSW Independent Flood Inquiry 2022 recommended a review of emergency services volunteering with consideration of an increasing demand on emergency services volunteers and what it considered to be declining volunteer availability:

To plan for volunteerism into the future, the SEMC commission a review of volunteerism in NSW, acknowledging it is essential to the state's emergency response to protect life and property. This review needs to recommend how to respond to declining formal volunteerism and to make better use of Community First Responders.

To address this recommendation, the Department of Premier and Cabinet commenced a review on behalf of the SEMC with a focus on:

- the current nature of emergency volunteering in NSW and trends, including a particular focus on trends in regional and remote NSW,
- opportunities to integrate informal volunteers into the emergency management framework, and
- how well-placed NSW is to meet projected future demand for emergency volunteers, and actions that would assist.

The review is being informed by a comprehensive stakeholder engagement process including face-to-face focus groups with current volunteers in both metropolitan and regional areas, online workshops, an online survey of current volunteers and a survey of community members. The review will be completed in early 2024.

Guidance on use of emergency exemptions for using personal and health information

In November 2021, the *Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998* (PPIPA) and the *Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002* (HRIPA) were amended to allow for a limited exemption to the use and disclosure information protection principles in the Acts where the use or disclosure of the information is necessary to assist in a stage of emergency.

At its meeting in December 2022 the SEMC considered and endorsed updated guidance on the use of the exemptions, providing advice on:

- examples of situations when the exemptions may be used,
- factors to consider when determining whether to rely on the exemptions,
- destruction or disposal of information dealt with under the privacy exemptions,
- interaction with the *State Records Act 1998*, and
- application of Commonwealth privacy legislation to NSW government agencies.

Member agencies were asked to refer to this guidance in the update of their own privacy policies and information management procedures with respect to the emergency exemptions.

Evacuation Management Guidelines COVID-19 Supplement

The SEMC first endorsed the COVID-19 Supplement to the Evacuation Management Guidelines in 2020.

The supplement was developed to ensure agencies were aware of and could activate COVID safe options for evacuation processes and for people located in evacuation centres during an emergency.

Noting the changes in context and the lifting of restrictions, the Welfare Services Functional Area and NSW Health updated the COVID-19 Supplement to the Evacuation Management Guidelines to reflect current COVID-19 risks. The SEMC endorsed updates to the supplement in March 2023.

Review of NSW's COVID-19 Response

In June 2023 the SEMC considered the "As one system: The NSW Health System's Response to COVID-19", prepared by Robyn Kruk AO. The report considered the NSW's operational response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The report noted the impact of multiple concurrent natural disasters on the operational response and considered that emergency management planning will need to further consider how to address sequential and concurrent emergencies, similar to those experienced in NSW from 2020 to 2022.

The recommendations and action areas from the report related to:

- Making governance and decision-making structures clearer
- Strengthening communication and engagement
- Investing in integrated data and analytics and enhancing the speed and transparency of data sharing
- Prioritising vulnerable people and communities and working with communities/clinicians
- Supporting the health and wellbeing of the workforce

The Health Services Functional Area will lead the implementation of the recommendations from this review.

U-Turn Safety Upgrade Implementation

The SEMC has maintained an overview of works led by Transport for NSW in collaboration with NSW Rural Fire Service and Fire and Rescue NSW to improve the safety of U-turn bays on NSW motorways when being used by emergency services vehicles.

Transport for NSW has completed replacement of the superseded 'Police, NRMA, Roads and Maritime Services & Emergency vehicles excepted' baseplates with 'Emergency vehicles excepted' baseplates at assessed U-turn bays on the M1.

To support this change, the Road Rules 2014 were amended in November 2022 to include clarification that 'emergency vehicles excepted' signs apply to certain emergency vehicles in non-emergency situations. Emergency vehicles include vehicles permitted to display blue and red flashing lights and used by NSW Police, NSW Ambulance, Fire and Rescue NSW, Transport for NSW, NSW State Emergency Service, Government accredited rescue units (such as the NSW Rural Fire Service) and Airservices Australia.

Operational events

SEMC member agencies responded to a range of emergencies throughout 2022-2023 including new biosecurity challenges, and continuing recovery operations following the catastrophic floods in 2021-2022.

February-March 2022 Northern Rivers Flooding

Extensive flooding in February and March 2022 resulted in damage across 62 Local Government Areas.

It particularly impacted the Northern Rivers communities including Ballina, Byron, Clarence Valley, Kyogle, Lismore, Richmond Valley and Tweed. This event was the biggest flood in modern Australian history, with floodwaters reaching a record 14.4 metres in Lismore.

SEMC member agencies continue to support disaster recovery from this event in the 2022-2023 financial year. Over 35 recovery and reconstruction programs have been launched to support recovery across all recovery domains, including infrastructure, community, economic, social and environment over the short, medium and long term.

Central West Floods

Widespread and intense rainfall resulted in further flooding events throughout the state of NSW from August 2022. Several areas reported damage including Northern NSW, Hunter, Greater Sydney Metropolitan, the Illawarra and South Coast, Riverina Murray, Central West and Far West. Many of the communities in the affected areas were also recovering from significant flooding earlier in the year causing major disruptions to local communities.

The NSW SES led the response, working with the Bureau of Meteorology to proactively monitor and respond to flood impacts. Almost 15,000 requests for assistance were received during this period and close to 1,000 tonnes of flood waste was collected and disposed of in the clean-up. SEMC member agencies continue to support disaster recovery from all 2022 flood events throughout 2022-2023.

Varroa Mite biosecurity response

The Department of Primary Industries continue to lead the biosecurity response to the Varroa mite in NSW. Varroa mite was detected in beehives near Newcastle on 22 June 2022 and spread to over 1000km from Newcastle by mid-2023 with eradication zones covering over 2% of NSW's landmass.

Since June 2022 close to 28,000 hives have been destroyed in the effort to contain the infestation. The Department of Primary Industries continue to work with affected premises to euthanise infected hives and to bait wild bees in areas where managed hives have been removed.

Menindee Fish Death

On 17 March 2023, the Department of Planning and Environment identified a large fish death event upstream of Lake Menindee in the lower Darling-Barka River, with additional fish deaths between Menindee town and Menindee Creek. This was the largest event of its kind with fish dying in the millions, and was around 20 times the size of the fish death event in Menindee in 2018-19.

An emergency management response led by the Local Emergency Operations Controllers, and supported by the Fisheries Branch of the Department of Primary Industries, was established in the Central Darling and Wentworth local government areas. Emergency Operation Centres, were established to coordinate management of fish removal, water quality monitoring, transportation of potable water and community messaging and liaison. As part of the recovery effort, over 10 tonnes of fish were removed and disposed of safely.

In March 2023, the NSW Government announced an independent review into the fish deaths to consider the cause of the event, its effects and the overall response. This review is being led by NSW Chief Scientist and Engineer, Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte and is due to be completed in August 2023.

Türkiye Earthquake February 2023

In February 2023, an earthquake struck southern Türkiye resulting in large scale structural collapse requiring substantial rescue and recovery operations.

NSW deployed its multi-agency Urban Search And Rescue (USAR) capability to provide support the earthquake response in Türkiye, coordinated by Fire and Rescue NSW. The USAR deployment included 72 people with personnel from Fire and Rescue NSW, NSW Police Force and other agencies.

Sub Committees

Schedule 2 of the SERM Act allows the SEMC to establish committees to assist it in connection with the exercise of any of its functions.

The SEMC is currently assisted by three subcommittees, the Risk and Resilience Capability and Development, and Community Engagement sub-committees. The table below highlights their activities in this reporting period ending 30 June 2023.

Sub-Committee	Key achievements and activities
<p>Risk and Resilience Sub Committee (RRSC)</p> <p>Chairperson:</p> <p>Ms Dawn Routledge, Executive Director, Resilience NSW</p> <p>Mr Sam Toohey, A/Executive Director Emergency Services Coordination, Department of Premier and Cabinet</p> <p>Ms Maree Abood, Executive Director Risk Reduction and Disaster Adaptation, NSW Reconstruction Authority</p>	<p>Purpose</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The RRSC supports the SEMC by taking coordinated action to reduce disaster risks and limit adverse impacts on communities through advice, direction and advocacy. <p>Key Activities</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assisted in the evaluation of research proposals submitted for the NSW Disaster Risk Reduction Program – Knowledge stream (co-funded by the Commonwealth Government) to ensure proposals addressed key outcomes of the fund. Completed a customer needs assessment and high level product design for the next State Level Emergency Risk Assessment. Provided support and input for the NSW Reconstruction Authority’s development of a State Disaster Mitigation Plan. The State Disaster Mitigation Plan will be finalised in late 2023. The Climate Change Advisory Group engaged members on the development of the Climate Risk Ready Program and Roadmap and provided training in climate risk management for government staff and a Climate Masterclass for Deputy Secretaries. <p><i>Governance Changes</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Following the dissolution of Resilience NSW, responsibility for the RRSC initially moved to the Department of Premier and Cabinet before being formally transferred to the NSW Reconstruction Authority in May 2023. Work commenced in May 2023 to update the RRSC Terms of Reference and Strategic workplan to reflect the updated structure of emergency management agencies and responsibilities.
<p>Capability Development Sub Committee (CDSC)</p> <p>Chairperson:</p> <p>Commissioner Carlene York APM, NSW State Emergency Service</p>	<p>Purpose:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The CDSC supports the SEMC by taking coordinated action to develop the capacity and capability of the emergency management sector to respond to disasters emergencies by providing advice, direction and advocacy. <p>Key Activities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oversaw the development of the 2022 state level exercise, Exercise Grim Spectre, to test the state’s capacity to respond to an outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in NSW. The exercise was conducted in September 2022.

Sub-Committee**Key achievements and activities**

- Completed a Maturity Assessment process to develop an understanding of the sector's capability maturity and identify priority areas for further action. This work builds on the Capability Development Framework for the NSW Emergency Management Sector and utilised the BNHCRC capability maturity assessment tool.
- Held the 2022 State Lessons Analysis Workshop, coordinated by the Lessons Management Advisory Group and with attendees from twelve agencies to analyse the observations and data collected and determine lessons and recommendations. This work was then used to develop the 2022 State Lessons Management Report, finalised for SEMC consideration in March 2023 (see Part 5 for further information)
- Commenced data collection and analysis activities to support development of the 2023 State Lessons Report.

Governance Changes

- The CDSC Terms of Reference and Strategic workplan were updated in February 2023 to reflect the updated structure of emergency management agencies and responsibilities.

**Community
Engagement Sub
Committee (CESC)**
Chairperson:

Mr Dominic Lane,
Executive Director,
Recovery, NSW
Reconstruction Authority

Purpose

- The CESC assists the SEMC to ensure that communities are active participants in building a safer and more resilient NSW; that information about emergency risks and safety are made available to communities in an effective manner; and that emergency warnings are robust and effective.

Key Activities

- Reviewed the #GetReadyNSW disaster preparedness campaign to support development of the 2023 Get Ready launch in late 2023 with updated tools and resources.
- Continued implementation of the 'Tell your story once' project including implementation of the digital platform and development of improved data sharing arrangements.
- The NSW Reconstruction Authority on behalf of the RRSC are working closely with Aboriginal Affairs to support the Aboriginal Community Emergency Management Project.

Governance Changes

- Following the dissolution of Resilience NSW, responsibility for supporting the RRSC moved to the NSW Reconstruction Authority.
- Work is underway to review the Community Engagement Strategy and Action Plan to ensure projects align with the new State Disaster Mitigation Plan and the updated structure of emergency management agencies and responsibilities.

5 Continuous Improvement

Lessons Management

The SEMC has an explicit statutory function to promote continuous improvement in policy and practice in the NSW emergency management sector, through the consideration of reviews and inquiries into emergency operations, and the evaluation of exercises and training.

The Lessons Management framework was developed by the SEMC to ensure lessons from all stages of an emergency can be identified, shared, and embedded by member agencies through action and change. The framework consists of four key phases:

- a data collection phase and data analysis phase, where insights and lessons are identified, and
- an implementation phase, where lessons are embedded, and
- a monitoring and review phase, where learning is verified.

Data was collected and analysed by the Lessons Management Advisory Group during the State Lessons Analysis Workshop using the methodology outlined in the *Lessons Management Framework for the NSW Emergency Management Sector* (2018) and the *Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Lessons Management Handbook* (2019).

The State Lessons Report 2022 was approved by the Capability Development Sub-Committee (CDSC) and endorsed by the SEMC in March 2023. 10 lessons were identified in the 2022 state process consisting of one lesson in regarding an area of positive performance to be sustained, and nine which relate to areas for improvement. The CDSC is overseeing implementation and monitoring of the related recommendations against each lesson.

State Lessons Analysis Report 2022 – lessons and recommendations

Core Capability	Lesson	Recommendations	Status
Emergency response	Interoperability facilities facilitates response to large scale events	Conduct regular (at least annual) large scale multi-agency training and exercising to maintain interoperability	In progress
	Increased awareness of chemical contamination of first responders from chemical suicides	Expand standard information safety products on chemical suicides and share with all agencies	Monitoring*
		Develop an awareness program for emergency service operators on risks associated with chemical suicides and the need for hazmat response to these	Monitoring*
		All agencies should include in Computer Aided Dispatch (CAD) operator scripts for self-harm events, questions relating to potential signs of threat/ risk/danger to first responders and members of the public	In progress

Core Capability	Lesson	Recommendations	Status
Emergency response	Importance of planning and engagement from response to relief and recovery	NSW Reconstruction Authority to consult with all combat agencies and functional areas to clarify roles and responsibilities for recovery and its intersection with emergency management arrangements	In progress
Emergency management planning	Inconsistent understanding and application of NSW emergency management arrangements	Provide education for ministerial staff to increase their awareness of emergency management arrangements	In progress
		Where appropriate, invite elected officials to attend, as observers, emergency management exercises at a state and local level where appropriate	In progress
		Develop consistent role descriptions and training of potential liaison officers for agencies	Monitoring*
		Raise with the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities (AFAC) the inclusion of Liaison Officer in the Emergency Management Professionalisation Scheme	In progress
		Agencies to take advantage of training in emergency management arrangements provided and consider the suitability of personnel attending training	In progress
		Consider implementation of crisis management exercises targeted for senior officials at a state level (similar to the program being developed by the National Emergency Management Agency at a Commonwealth level)	Monitoring*
	Delays to firefighting efforts due to an absence of access controls and inappropriate positioning of emergency vehicles at fire incidents	Increase awareness for all emergency services regarding the impact of congestion at the incident scene and the dangers of entering the hazard zone without adequate PPC/PPE and training	Monitoring*

Core Capability	Lesson	Recommendations	Status
Emergency management planning	Hazards associated with lithium-ion battery technology pose an emerging risk to emergency service operations	Encourage further research and development in the hazards associated with lithium-ion battery technology and the impact of lithium-ion battery incidents on worker health as well as community impacts and share this across agencies	In progress
Impact assessment	Inconsistency in rapid damage assessment across agencies	Publish a data dictionary of the agreed terminology to be used by all agencies	Monitoring*
		Conduct cross-agency training and exercising of damage assessments	In progress
		Develop strategies to improve sharing of damage assessment data across agencies/functional areas	Monitoring*
		Develop an agreed terminology and criteria for damage assessments to be used by all agencies/functional areas	Monitoring*
Organisational resilience	Contingency for communication network failures	Provide increased visibility of major telecommunication outages that impact areas of operations to facilitate planning by emergency service organisations	Monitoring*
		Develop preparedness messaging to inform communities of strategies to implement when critical infrastructure is not functioning	In progress
		Agencies to ensure business continuity plans include plans for telecommunication and/or radio disruptions that may impact their emergency management functions	In progress
		Increase awareness across the emergency management sector of the mobile communication assets available and their capabilities to support response, relief and recovery arrangements	Monitoring*

Core Capability	Lesson	Recommendations	Status
Situational intelligence, information sharing and interoperability	Robust information and data sharing is required for effective operations	Continue development of a Common Operating Picture at state level to improve situational awareness and understanding of hazards	In progress
Evacuation and support	Establishment and operation of evacuation centres	Finalise the Welfare Services Functional Area doctrine	In progress

*Monitoring means actions have been taken to address the recommendation and these will be monitored to determine lesson has been implemented

Exercises

Exercises are an essential tool to support emergency management planning by testing arrangements in as close to real event scenarios as possible. The SEMC and its member agencies supports state level exercises to test the capability, planning and capacity of NSW's response to severe and catastrophic events as identified by the State Level Emergency Risk Assessment.

SEMC member agencies also participate in exercises at the local, regional and national level.

State Level Exercise - Exercise Grim Spectre

Exercise Grim Spectre was conducted on 20 September 2022 as the NSW Government's 2022 state level emergency response exercise. The response was led by the NSW Department of Primary Industries Incident Management Team with the support of SEMC member agencies.

Exercise Galvanise

Exercise Galvanise was conducted in November 2022 to test the response to a mass casualty passenger plane crash at Sydney Airport. The exercise was attended by representatives from NSW Police, Fire and Rescue NSW, a Sydney Airport Disaster Victim Registration team and NSW Ambulance.

Exercise Bombora

Exercise Bombora was conducted in Brisbane in August 2022 and explored the national arrangements and cross jurisdictional management of a catastrophic level tsunami.

Participants examined the impact of a tsunami along the east coast of Australia between QLD and NSW, and explored the processes and challenges associated with this event during the response phase. The exercise was conducted by Emergency Management Australia, supported by agencies including NSW SES, QFES, and the Bureau of Meteorology. More than 130 members from 46 emergency services or functional areas from Queensland and NSW attended the exercise.

Exercise SydEx22

The Sydney Metropolitan Emergency Management Exercise (SydEx22) was conducted in October 2022 to test the City of Sydney Local Emergency Management Plan, the Sydney CBD Safety Sub Plan, the Sydney '10 Sector' Plan, and relevant supporting plans. The exercise considered the response to a high-rise structural fire within the CBD.

Outcomes of the exercise were used to inform the review of the Sydney CBD Safety Sub Plan.

Exercise Evaluations

Exercise Grim Spectre

Exercise Grim Spectre was conducted in September 2022 to test NSW's response to a Foot and Mouth Disease outbreak in accordance with the EMPLAN and the Biosecurity (Animal and Plant) Emergency Sub Plan. The response was led by the NSW Department of Primary Industries Incident Management Team with the support of SEMC member agencies.

Foot and mouth disease is a highly contagious disease affecting cloven-hoofed animals including cattle, sheep, goats, pigs and deer. With a heightened risk of a foot and mouth disease outbreak in Australia, the NSW Government, along with its jurisdictional counterparts, industry partners and the Australian Government, reviewed and strengthened its measures to prevent, detect and respond to a foot and mouth disease outbreak.

The three objectives of the Exercise were:

- practice the response to an identified risk (biosecurity emergency) from the State Level Emergency Risk Assessment, including connecting private industry partners with Government response agencies.
- test existing command, control, and coordination processes across the response stage of a biosecurity emergency.
- validate the functionality of the NSW Rural Fire Service State Operations Centre to host the NSW Department of Primary Industries Incident Management Team.

An evaluation report was prepared for the SEMC's consideration detailing the methodology, exercise preparation/conduct and applied learnings.

From the exercise, there were nine lessons identified; seven to improve and two to sustain across planning, information flow, engagement, and the NSW Department of Primary Industries Incident Management Team.

The accompanying recommendations were accepted by the Department of Primary Industries and actions put in place to implement with the lessons fed into the State Lessons Process.



Emergency Management Training

The SEMC continued to deliver emergency management training for all agencies, local councils and the public. Emergency management training is delivered by the Department of Premier and Cabinet and the NSW Police Force on behalf of the SEMC.

Seven multi-agency, all-hazards emergency management training courses are available to all government employees and the public and are provided at no cost. Courses are available online or delivered face-to-face by NSW Police Force Regional Emergency Management Officers.

There were more than 3,500 course completions in 2022–23.

Course	Completed
Overview of Emergency Risk Management	308
Foundations in Lesson Management	138
Local Emergency Management Committee Foundations	299
NSW Emergency Management Program	1864
Disaster Recovery Concepts	356
Disaster Recovery Arrangements in NSW	250
Welfare Services Functional Area Overview	299
Total	3514

Disaster Inquiries and Audits

As part of its function to promote continuous improvement, the SEMC has oversight of disaster related reviews and inquiries requiring whole-of government or multi-agency response and the actions and initiatives being taken across Government agencies to implement recommendations.

Major disaster inquiries and audits that were published during the 2022-2023 reporting period include:

Inquiry/Audit	Type	Released
Bushfire recovery grants	Audit Office	February 2023
Coordination of the response to COVID-19 (June-November 2021)	Audit Office	December 2022
Response to major flooding across New South Wales in 2022	Parliamentary Select Committee	August 2022
2022 NSW Flood Inquiry	Independent Inquiry	July 2022

Addressing Inquiry Recommendations – Highlights from 2022-2023

SEMC member agencies implemented a wide range of projects and initiatives to deliver significant improvements across the sector throughout the reporting period.

Protecting frontline emergency services personnel

- Following the release of the NSW Bushfire Inquiry, more than 300 new light, medium and heavy Tankers have been built and provided to NSW RFS Fire Brigades. A further 97 heavy tankers have been refurbished with additional crew protection systems.
- Flood rescue capability across multiple agencies has been enhanced with additional training and new equipment. Emergency services staff and volunteers are receiving training as flood rescue operators, and flood rescue kits are being procured for emergency services vehicles and personnel in high-risk locations.
- A new catering service standard was published in February 2023 to ensure firefighter sustenance has sufficient volume and quality.

Improving operational capability

- Night-time firebombing trials were successfully completed in 2023. All RFS-owned medium helicopters can now undertake night-time aerial observation and aerial incendiary missions.
- Comprehensive planning to enable integration of the Strategic Fire Trail Assurance system into RFS operational systems was completed. This will enable ongoing fire trail condition assessment data capture and facilitate reporting through the RFS Guardian mitigation works management system.
- A memorandum of understanding between NSW and QLD was signed in April 2023 to deliver cross-border radio interoperability for emergency services. Work is underway to onboard Victorian fire agencies to the NSW Public Safety Network. These developments will help improve fire ground communications between NSW fire agencies and cross-border state counterparts.

Addressing community needs

- To support the development and implementation of the Australian Warning System framework for floods, NSW SES implemented dedicated media officers to support connection between the agency, media and local community for warnings and implemented community flood wardens in high risk areas and the ongoing establishment of community action teams where required.
- Disaster recovery supports have been uplifted. Service NSW have prepared additional surge capacity to support grant assessments as needed, and NSW Reconstruction Authority have a three year service agreement with the non-government organisation GIVIT to provide donations management.
- The Department of Communities and Justice expanded training to approximately 900 of its staff to operate in evacuation centres and developed a detailed Evacuation Centre Manual including strategies for supporting people with severe disabilities. This builds on other measures to ensure the safety and wellbeing of vulnerable people during an evacuation.
- A whole of government emergency preparedness communication strategy was developed to support hazard specific communications and preparedness campaigns. The Department of Customer Service will continue roll out of the strategy to government agencies in late 2023.

Risk reduction and risk mitigation

- In early 2023, NSW RFS are supporting the Natural Hazards Research Australia (NHRA) Project to scope a national bush fire database. The database will enable the monitoring of trends in bush fire activity and impacts across all land tenures and vegetation types; the tracking trends and identifying patterns in associated weather and climate signals that contribute to severe bush fires; and the evaluation of the cost and effectiveness of risk mitigation efforts, including hazard reduction, and fire suppression activities.
- NSW RFS is developing a risk modelling platform to underpin bush fire risk-based decision making and can be updated to leverage new scientific development.
- Goat grazing trials have been carried out as an alternative method of fuel reduction capability. 20 sites totalling approximately 163 hectares have been grazed across NSW since the trial began, with positive results.
- The Department of Environment and Planning integrated the National Smoke Forecasting System into its forecasting systems to improve air quality forecasting and monitoring in NSW. This will improve alerts for air quality incidents and all pollutants of concern, including bush fire smoke and ozone.
- The “Hazards Near Me” app was launched as a single platform for community warnings about floods and fires, building on the success of the NSW RFS’s “Fires Near Me” app. The app was further extended in April 2023 to integrate warnings related to tsunamis.

Protecting environment and biodiversity

- Habitat protection initiatives have been developed by the Department of Planning and Environment to enhance agency capability to assess at-risk species and ecosystems and to identify long term recovery actions. Since this project began, 279 sites have been declared Assets of Intergenerational Significance to protect the habitat of 108 species.
- To enhance injured wildlife response capacity, over 700 firefighters have attended Wildlife First Responder Training and more than 200 wildlife rehabilitators and veterinarians have completed bush fire awareness training.
- Agency liaison officers from RSPCA and Animal Welfare League have been included into emergency response arrangements to enhance animal welfare response after disasters.
- The Department of Regional NSW are continuing to administer the Riparian Stabilisation Package to restore riverbanks impacted by the February-March 2022 flood event, including the Wilsons and Richmond Rivers.

Strengthening governance & accountability

- As recommended by the Independent Flood Inquiry, the NSW Reconstruction Authority (RA) was established in December 2022 as the lead agency for disaster preparedness, recovery and reconstruction and is working with disaster-prone communities, local government, and government agencies to develop a State Disaster Mitigation Plan.
- A fifth Deputy Commissioner was appointed as a full time SEOCON within the NSW Police Force for a 12-month trial beginning in late 2022.
- The NSW RFS’ Emergency Logistics System was introduced to ensure timely payment and maintenance of positive ongoing supplier relationships during large scale bush fires.
- A principle-based Disaster Cost Benefit Analysis Framework is under development by Treasury for use by government agencies to evaluate disaster resilience initiatives, with an initial focus on flood risk mitigation. The framework will be launched in October 2023.

Premier's Department

52 Martin Place
Sydney NSW 2000

GPO Box 5341
Sydney NSW 2001

T: 02 9228 5555

E: semc@premiersdepartment.nsw.gov.au

W: nsw.gov.au/premiers-department | nsw.gov.au/emergency



OFFICIAL