

NOTES FROM WYE RIVER/SEPARATION CREEK COMMUNITY UPDATE
SUNDAY January 31st 2016 – 11.00 am at the Surf Life Saving Club

CHAIRPERSON: Sue Wilkinson *CEO, Colac Otway Shire*

GUESTS & SPEAKERS:

Hon. Lisa Neville MP *Minister for Environment, Climate Change and Water*
Craig Lapsley *Commissioner, Emergency Services Victoria*
Karl Sullivan *Insurance Council Australia*
Tim Bradford *Major Projects Victoria*
Brian McAdam *Grocon*
Frank Buchanan *Colac Otway Shire Mayor, and Councillors.*

Meeting Recorded & Pod Cast on OCR FM

Craig Lapsley apologised for the short notice of the meeting.

- Some of the fences have been removed, but, mainly due to trees, behind properties there will be 2nd line fences, which may need to be moved further back, as there will be heavy 'gear' going in during the clean-up.
- Applications for the Community Resilience Committee will be considered with Colac Otway Shire on Wednesday 3rd February.
- Communications must be improved. As an alternative to email, a single 'portal' through which all can access the latest information is being considered.

Karl Sullivan

- A big event like our bushfire is automatically classified as a catastrophe. In our case there are 28 different insurance companies involved and a taskforce has been established to deal with issues needing mutual agreement.
- People affected should have lodged their claims by now.
- 1200 claims relating to businesses, houses, business income loss etc. have been lodged – estimated total value of \$100-150 million.
- 116 homes have been destroyed of which 10 – 15 were not covered by insurance.
- Also some have likely been under-insured, in which case negotiating a cash settlement, then making own arrangements to rebuild (or otherwise) should be considered.
- Debris removal is very expensive and the cost can eat into insurance cover. Even in good terrain this can cost up to \$50,000. In our difficult terrain, average cost could be up to \$70,000 plus. By agreement between the State Government, ICA and Grocon – insurers will cover costs up to \$25,000 and the Government will cover any excess.
- Insurance steps are –
 - Lodge your claim and obtain a Claim Number,
 - Meet with Assessor and provide a description of the house etc.,
 - Scoping of works,
 - Decision between cash settlement or rebuild.
- With different policies there may be misunderstandings. If you encounter difficulties with your claim, talk to your insurer, then ICA in need – 1800 734 621.
- Karl was available to answer questions on an individual basis after the meeting.

Tim Bradford

- Major Projects Victoria is co-ordinating the clean-up with Grocon – led by Brian McAdam – to achieve the best outcome.
- This part of the recovery process is a most important step in physical recovery. Inspection has started, but the quicker it can be co-ordinated the better.
- Grocon, the property owner, and insurer will discuss beforehand what needs to be done - and when.
- The task will not be easy due to our difficult terrain, but would be greatly facilitated if all affected properties are registered with Grocon.
- Tim urged people to call **1300 799 232** and register as soon as possible.

Brian McAdam

- Has had experience in the 2009 bushfire clean-up at Marysville, Kinglake etc. However, our challenging terrain and lack of adequate turning circles will make it much more difficult.
- They will establish a local site-shed during the process.
- The most important thing people should do is to register with Grocon. This will facilitate contact with individual property owners to meet the challenges of the clean-up.
- The limited access to some properties, driveway conditions, asbestos and other safety issues will need to be addressed. It must be safe for owners to have access.
- Grocon will work with individual owners in the salvage of precious items etc.
- Multiple steps will be taken as needed, including traffic management, turning circles, access in and out when the big machinery moves in to remove the debris.

Questions from the audience

My daughter is working overseas and finds communication difficult due to the time difference. Can she call outside normal business hours?

Grocon will liaise with her on this.

Her house complied with BAL40 but was still destroyed, will the rebuild also need to comply?

Lisa Neville – BAL assessments will be applied and complied with. We expect all assessments will be done by March. There will be no downgrading. Pre-2009 builds will be assessed, but post-2009 bushfire regulations determined by the Royal Commission will apply. The State Government will pay for the assessments.

My 44 year-old house didn't comply with the current planning controls. If a re-build can't comply with the 2009 requirements, will there be consideration of pre-existing controls? My insurance company (RACV) needs to know what Planning controls will apply before going ahead.

Sue Wilkinson – Has a planning background, but can't comment on specific cases. BAL's, waste-water treatment requirements etc. that have changed have been discussed. Some properties will not meet current requirements due to pre-existing conditions such as size of allotment, set-back from boundaries, height, steep slope etc. Difficult, and may need to be assessed on a site-specific basis, with consideration also given to neighbourhood character. There are various controls to be considered, not just Planning. This is very complex, but she is confident COS and the State Government are committed to the rebuild. The drafting of planning controls is a work in progress and will require navigating and the balancing of competing objectives. Our landscape is steep, unstable - not easy.

Lisa Neville – The State Government is working to get answers – waste-water management, Geo-tech, BAL's etc. are site-specific and ideals may need to be worked around. The Government is talking with Colac Otway Shire – planning controls are anticipated to be finalized by March this year.

My block is difficult, the heavy machinery may destroy the driveway. Will this be given consideration by Grocon during the clean-up?

Brian McAdam – Owners should raise their concerns with Grocon which needs consent to gain access and start work. This is easier to do in neighbourhood groups, so community co-operation is essential. Arborists may need to be consulted regarding tree assessments. Safety problems may arise around asbestos, arsenic, tin etc. Other agencies such as EPA, WorkSafe, RTA, will work with Grocon on these issues during the clean-up. Everybody affected needs to register.

There are trees behind our house marked with a yellow X – we assume these massive trees need cutting down. Who is responsible for this - DELWP, Grocon?

Sue Wilkinson – Will facilitate tree removal and pass on concerns re trees. Specific arrangements will be made for some tree removals in Wallace Street.

When the fences come down, will there be security for empty houses?

Sue Wilkinson – will follow this up. Once Grocon starts, security will be their responsibility.

If I want to bring my architect on-site, who do I contact?

Sue Wilkinson – Contact Colac Otway Shire. Access will depend on safety aspect.

Who should register for the clean-up? Vacant blocks, partly affected houses, as well as those totally destroyed?

Grocon – It is most important that any property affected at all by the fire is registered.

Sue Wilkinson – It is proving difficult to compile a community contact list. Vacant block owners should certainly contact Grocon, although they can't be compelled to do so. The community must co-operate.

Will Grocon accept responsibility for driveways damaged during the clean-up process?

Grocon – Stability of roads and the siting of vehicles will be taken into account when the fire debris is removed. Grocon will liaise with authorities and property owners. It is Grocon's intention and objective not to damage driveways wherever possible.

When the fencing is removed, if it needs to be re-sited, could more appropriate fencing be used?

Grocon – We will work with property owners, but access may have to be restricted for safety reasons.

How will septic systems be dealt with?

Grocon – The objective is to remove everything and ready the blocks for rebuild. Septic tanks are part of the reconstruction program on a site-by-site basis. Grocon has extensive experience with septic tanks. When people register, they will be asked to identify where their tank/system is located on their block. The plan is to disconnect the feed pipe to isolate the system prior to emptying by a contractor and removal if necessary. Effluent systems that can stay can be identified by a local plumber.

Will unaffected footings be left in place?

Grocon – If the property owner requires they be left intact and in place, they will be. This matter is addressed on the consent form.

I am concerned about resident access to and from their properties during the clean-up. Will there be traffic control of the large trucks/machinery on our narrow, unmade roads? As damage occurs, will repairs be made continually? Weather conditions – especially during our winter - may have an effect on loose untethered debris.

Grocon Road safety and management is a big issue for us. There will be a team working with the community on this. Community involvement after the 2009 fires was a great success.

With regard to all the registrations – will priority be given to residents?

Grocon – If possible, but will be looked at and worked through.

Will there be a One Stop Shop located in Wye River? Will there be one in Melbourne?

Sue Wilkinson – As previously advised, there will be a local 1SS in Wye River, as well as Apollo Bay. In Melbourne it is likely to be in the City of Yarra in Richmond. Other Melbourne locations are being sought – will be announced on Face-Book when agreement(s) are finalized.

When will the clean-up be finished?

Grocon – We will need to estimate all the issues including safety (which is a priority), access etc. Once started – aiming for late February – it will hopefully take 4 – 8 weeks to complete. It is all about property-owner registration, as your availability to give consent is important. But we can do the scope assessment without you if necessary. The process will be much more efficient if done street by street.

Will Grocon be able to work through the townships systematically to do the clean-up?

Grocon – This is preferred, especially as the local topography is so difficult. This is why it is most important that everyone affected registers as soon as possible.

Will there be access to nearby unburnt houses during the clean-up?

Grocon – We will manage access to properties being cleaned-up, but won't control adjacent access unless there are safety issues ie. hosing down to minimise dust, air testing, after which tip transport will be in sealed trucks. Inspections will provide certification to property owners and Government as a sign-off on the completed job.

The registration form has missed an opportunity to gather further contact information and could be improved in other ways.

Sue Wilkinson – Good comment, will be looked into.

My property has been marked in the Red Zone with no water allocation. Why? This is not needed.

The Shire needs to sit down with a few of us to discuss issues needing improvement.

Sue Wilkinson – Colac Otway Shire is not responsible for the erection of the fences. It is a Government decision based on a balanced assessment by multi-agencies responsible for looking at individual risks. Such decisions require a balanced approach.

The Shire is always available to discuss various issues, but reiterate that COS is not the sole arbiter of the fencing.

When Grocon has completed the clean-up, will there be unrestricted access to properties?

Sue Wilkinson – Generally, yes – provided there are no safety issues. There will be work needed to repair driveways, roads etc. We need to get people back to their lives as soon as possible. Although everyone trying to build at the same time could present serious problems!

Will residents be given priority to rebuild? 'Opt-outs' from the clean-up process could be a hindrance.

Sue Wilkinson – No legislative controls that can give residents priority to re-build. Would be community decision. There are legislative powers to deal with 'opt-out' people, but it is a lengthy process. We must act co-operatively as a community, even though we may be inconvenienced by the clean-up. The Shire doesn't want to go in, but will do so if necessary.

Grocon – Making properties safe is of paramount importance. COS does have emergency powers and if there is a danger, it will step in.

Rebuilding logistics. Will insurers work with COS regarding builders? Do insurance companies have to rebuild?

Karl Sullivan – When the clean-up is completed, your insurer works with you regarding the cost of rebuild. They can engage a builder for you. It is advisable to use their recommended builder as the work will be guaranteed and insured right from the start.

We will be working with COS. There will be a mix of responses regarding design, size etc. Property owners planning to delay rebuilding should carefully reconsider the cash settlement option, as costs can increase by 6% per quarter.

With Complete Replacement Cover, are insurers required to rebuild?

Karl Sullivan – They can offer a cash settlement, but you don't need to accept it.

The meeting ended at this point, except for the following announcements.

Mark Stokes Yesterday's Wye Sep Band Together concert at the hotel raised \$60,000.

Carolyn Tatchell The Lions Club of Lorne have made available two caravans in the Big 4 Camping Ground for the free use of people who have lost their dwellings and need somewhere to stay if they need to visit Wye River for a day or two during the recovery phase.
After Easter the caravan accommodation will be replaced by cabins.

Sue Wilkinson Thanks to everyone, including the COS Councillors present, for their attendance. A podcast of the meeting will be loaded later in the day. Also a schedule of future meetings will be posted on the COS website Noticeboard. Hopefully there will be some developments in the short term regarding communications.