



VICTORIAN CLIMATE  
RESILIENT COUNCILS

## Community Emergency Risk Assessment Review

### ***Project Overview: Why is this project relevant to you and your council?***

Victorian councils are required to plan and undertake their municipal emergency management responsibilities in collaboration with other emergency, health and allied service providers in their region. This collaboration is formally achieved through *Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees (MEMPCs)*, which are now responsible for the preparation and implementation of their local *Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMPs)*, which address their particular circumstances, needs and risks.

As climate change is a foreseeable risk, councils' responsibilities in relation to climate change require both immediate action and long-term planning across their operations, including their emergency management role. With climate change increasing both the frequency and intensity of extreme weather events, emergency management planning now **must** include consideration of climate change in the development and updates of each municipality's MEMP. However, the [Community Emergency Risk Assessment \(CERA\) Tool](#), which has been developed to help MEMPCs assess their local emergency risks, does not currently include provision for the consideration of climate change impacts – as it is reliant on past historical events to assess potential risks.

To help the local government sector meet its responsibilities with regard to climate change, this project aims to be a catalyst for change, by demonstrating the imperative for MEMPCs to consider climate change in the development of their MEMPs and modelling ways in which this can be done.

### ***Project summary***

**The purpose of this project, as a component of the broader development of Victorian Climate Resilient Councils, is to collaborate with partners and key stakeholders to develop an approach which enables consideration of climate change in the existing CERA Tool's framework.**

In Victoria, MEMPCs are responsible for undertaking regular emergency risk assessments to understand and manage their risk profiles and to support planning. These committees may review their assessments every few years prior to audit, after an emergency or exercise which has used their plan, or after a change to relevant legislation, policy or agencies. At the municipal level, the assessment is achieved through community emergency risk assessments (CERAs), which draw on local and expert knowledge to identify risks and strategies for risk management and create safer, more resilient communities.

The CERA Tool, developed and maintained by the SES, is an all-hazards risk assessment tool which aims to identify, mitigate and reduce risk in the community. The Tool is used to inform the development of a MEMPC's MEMP.

However, currently the CERA Tool uses only past historical events to identify and plan for risks, so there is no specific opportunity for the consideration of climate change in the Tool.

The planned review and update in 2023/24 by Greater Dandenong Council and its MEMPC of its previous CERA assessment will be used as a 'proof of concept' for a proposed approach and process of working with MEMPCs for all Victorian councils.

Based on learnings from the initial work with the Greater Dandenong MEMPC, the process and approach will be presented as a model and piloted with a number of other councils as they undertake their own CERA reviews in 2024. The findings from this project to review the CERA Tool by councils will then be used to demonstrate to the Victorian Government, including Emergency Management Victoria (EMV), other relevant emergency management authorities and the local government sector how the current CERA Tool may be updated to be fit for purpose and assist councils to comply with requirements to consider climate change pursuant to the *Local Government Act 2020*:

*8 (1) The role of a Council is to provide good governance in its municipal district for the benefit and wellbeing of the municipal community, including:*

*9 (2) b: - achieving the best outcomes for the municipal community, including future generations*

*9 (2) c: - the economic, social and environmental sustainability of the municipal district, including mitigation and planning for climate change risks.*

## **Project Background**

The *Emergency Management Legislation Amendment Act 2018 (EMLA Act)* established a new integrated, comprehensive and coordinated framework for emergency management planning at state, regional and municipal levels. MEMPCs are now required to develop and have oversight of the implementation of each council's MEMP. **Previously, it was the role of councils themselves to develop and have responsibility for the implementation of the MEMP.**

The MEMPC consists of the local council, government emergency services (SES, fire, police, ambulance, etc), Department of Health and other local community service providers, such as the Red Cross and local community health organisations.

## **Project Aims**

1. To demonstrate that the reliance on MEMPCs to use the CERA Tool to identify and prioritise risks for each MEMP does not currently enable councils to meet their legislated roles and responsibilities with regard to climate change
2. Develop and test a process for councils to work with MEMPCs to consider climate change (limited to heatwaves and storms only for this initial project)

## **Key objectives**

- Develop an evidence base to:
  - Assess the extent to which climate change is currently being considered in the development of the MEMP using the existing CERA Tool
  - Determine if the CERA Tool is currently fit for purpose for councils to ensure they:

- Have a robust and transparent process as part of the MEMPC's decision-making processes
- Meet their legislated responsibilities to address climate change
- Demonstrate due diligence in the discharge of their duty of care in exercising their functions and powers under the *Local Government Act*, Sections 9(2)(b) and (c), to avoid potential litigation
- Act as a catalyst for change, as 'business as usual' is no longer acceptable with the climate emergency we are facing
- Develop and demonstrate the feasibility of a potential model for change
- Enable advocacy within the local government and emergency management sectors

## ***Proposed Methodology***

1. Collation and summary of evidence about how and why climate change risks and impacts should and can influence municipal emergency management planning and response, mainly through a review of the existing extensive evidence (e.g., relevant legislation and policy, reports from relevant government agencies such as the Department of Energy, Environment and Climate Action (DEECA) and Emergency Management Victoria and research bodies such as the IPCC (Sixth Assessment Report) and Climate Council)

*Timing: May – July 2023*

2. Review of current strengths and weaknesses of the current process used by MEMPCs to consider climate change as part of the risk analysis that forms the basis of their MEMPs, and whether there are opportunities for improvement to reduce liabilities for councils regarding their legislated climate change roles and responsibilities.

*Timing: August – September 2023*

This includes:

- a. The SES's CERA Tool
- b. Other relevant tools that may be fit for purpose for local government needs (such as the National Emergency Risk Assessment Guidelines)

3. Development of initial 'proof of concept' approach – with Greater Dandenong Council (2023/24).

*Timing: October 2023*

This includes:

- a. Provide evidence (based on Steps 1 and 2 above) to increase understanding of issues and opportunities to consider climate change risks and impacts within local government emergency management planning and response, particularly the current process to undertake a CERA and develop a MEMP.
- b. Work with and provide guidance for the Greater Dandenong MEMPC through:
  - i. An initial analysis of the CERA Tool and opportunities to include climate change in it
  - ii. Collaboration with key stakeholders and partners. (Note: at this early stage of the project, conversations are being held with several potential partners and stakeholders.)

4. Pilot of approach with several councils. (Councils will be invited to submit EOIs before final numbers and councils are selected)

**Timing: October 2023 onwards. Note: Timing of council CERA pilots can be flexible depending on when other councils are doing their own CERA review**

Working with councils may involve:

- a. Establishing a working group convened by the VCRC project team to enable information-sharing and collaboration amongst interested councils
- b. Sharing lessons to increase broad awareness of the project from:
  - i. The analysis of strengths and weaknesses of current MEMPs' development with regard to climate change as a result of the use of the current CERA Tool as well as opportunities for a process that meets the needs of councils and MEMPCs
  - ii. The initial 'proof of concept' approach trialled with Greater Dandenong Council's CERA review
- c. Opportunity for a number of councils to directly participate in a pilot of the processes developed and initially tested for Greater Dandenong. This is likely to be suitable for those interested councils undertaking their own MEMPC / CERA review in 2024/25.

### **High Level Deliverables**

***(Please Note: any additional specific outputs require further consideration at this stage)***

- An approach to enable councils to consider climate change impacts as part of the existing process to develop their MEMPC's MEMP, which has been tested with a number of councils / MEMPCs
- Material / approaches available to all councils through the broader Victorian Climate Resilient Councils program
- An evidence base to enable advocacy within the local government and emergency management and health sectors for increased support to embed consideration of climate change into the CERA process and MEMPs.

**To express your interest in participating in the CERA pilot, please email**

**[VCRCprogram@gmail.com](mailto:VCRCprogram@gmail.com) by July 7, 2023. We look forward to your involvement!**