Developing and Evaluating Effective ‘Bushfire’ Communication Pathways, Procedures and Products

Report Four – Localities and Bushfire Information: Findings and Recommendations

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About this Report

The Effective Communication Pathways project aims to identify effective strategies for raising awareness of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) or similar service. This briefing report addresses the question of communication pathways at a locality level and lays out a set of findings and recommendations.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>Australian Bureau of Statistics</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Country Fire Authority</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSC</td>
<td>Customer Service Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>CSOW</td>
<td>Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work</td>
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<tr>
<td>CWA</td>
<td>Country Women’s Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>DSE</td>
<td>Department of Sustainability and Environment</td>
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<tr>
<td>FAQ</td>
<td>Frequently Asked Questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEBTA</td>
<td>Lakes Entrance Business and Tourism Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAMH</td>
<td>Multi-Agency, Multi-Hazard</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAV</td>
<td>Municipal Associations of Victoria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MEMEG</td>
<td>Municipal Emergency Management Enhancement Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>VBIL</td>
<td>Victorian Bushfire Information Line</td>
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<tr>
<td>VIC</td>
<td>Visitor Information Centre</td>
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<tr>
<td>U3A</td>
<td>University of the Third Age</td>
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Executive Summary

1. The CFA Effective Communication Pathways project aims to identify effective strategies for raising awareness of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL) or similar service.

2. This briefing report addresses the question of communication pathways at a locality level. While established pathways are in place, they are not fixed, having evolved and developed as media and communication technologies change or come on-line. Further, the effectiveness of such pathways, measured by their focus on preparedness and warning messages, are influenced by changes in the socio-demographic profiles of localities (age, gender, residential status and occupations). In this context, it is important to review these pathways as well as consider new and different ones. Based on the analysis of existing pathways and research in three selected localities, the report presents preliminary recommendations detailing effective communication pathways and procedures for selected VBIL materials (e.g. VBIL DVD, wallet cards and refrigerator magnets).

3. Three locality studies were carried out: Euroa (rural), Koroit (peri-urban) and Lakes Entrance (tourist) (see figure 1).

![Figure 1: The three localities, Euroa, Koroit and Lakes Entrance](image)

The research focuses on six broad areas of interest: 1) Community experience and interactions; 2) Existing communication pathways; 3) Awareness of VBIL and other sources of information accessed during
bushfires; 4) Raising VBIL awareness, 5) Dissemination pathways for the VBIL DVD; and 6) Other natural hazards.

4. The findings from the three locality studies are suggestive of a number of issues around community awareness and acceptance when considering dissemination pathways:

   a. There is generally a limited awareness of the VBIL service and when or why people use it.

   b. With respect to active bushfires, interviewees from all three localities revealed a preference for sourcing information locally and from trusted sources (often through associations with local emergency services). Fire agency websites, and ABC and local ABC radio were also popular. The VBIL was rarely cited as a source of ‘live’ bushfire information.

   c. Reservations were expressed about the effectiveness of the mass distribution of DVDs. Most interviewees expressed doubt that they would physically pick up the DVD, take it home and watch it, without reasonable incentive to do so (e.g. part of school curriculum). It was reported that people were more likely to see it playing in community centres such as libraries and medical waiting rooms.

5. This preliminary research suggests potential opportunities for determining appropriate pathways and products:

   a. Refrigerator magnets and wallet cards are popular and considered effective by many. Suggested sources for dissemination included; market or street stalls, ‘value-adding’ at existing community group meetings, and sports and recreational events. Another suggestion was the inclusion of refrigerator magnets with council rates notices. Including technology such as QR codes on the artefacts may facilitate the storage of emergency numbers on smartphones.

   b. With respect to existing communication pathways, in all three localities local media, such as newspapers, are popular and frequently used sources of information. Other key sources of information include active
community groups, accessible touch-points (physical places, where members of the community pass through or use on a regular basis), local events and festivals, as well as informal communication, such as by word of mouth, often via informal networks.

c. It is likely that distribution of awareness products, such as DVDs would be more effective via local brigades as part of a community engagement toolkit.

6. The following general recommendations are presented:

   a. **Communication pathways are comprised in different ways but should be designed in relation to localities.** Locality-specific issues should be considered when designing awareness initiatives. The overall perception of bushfire-risk, for example, was found to be low in Koroit while the Lakes Entrance community was concerned with the protection of the tourism-based economy.

   b. **Awareness campaigns should not be dealt with as stand-alone activities.** These campaigns should be accompanied by education campaigns, focusing on when and how to use the VBIL service. The use of appropriate imagery in campaigns (e.g. a call-taker on a telephone) may help remove some misconceptions about using this service.

   c. **Stated preferences for accessing information should be taken into account when developing awareness campaigns.** In each locality there was a stated preference for accessing information from local sources. The task is to assess the adequacy of these preferences.

   d. **The organisation and focus of the information line should be developed in a short space of time to provide multi-hazard information.** Findings from all localities indicate that there is a strong interest in a multi-hazard information line, particularly if the contact number is easy to recall.
Chapter One: The Project

This report has been produced as part of a one-year (2012-2013) research initiative led by the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work (CSOW) for the Country Fire Authority of Victoria (CFA). The project aims to identify, develop and evaluate effective communication pathways for increasing awareness of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line (VBIL). This report considers these aims in the context of a new VBIL information DVD. The current report expands on the Briefing Report 3 as well as developing new lines of enquiry. We propose that the current report is considered with reference to the wider context of community bushfire safety. After all it is one measure in a broader suite of activities and provisions in relation to bushfires. Further, the dissemination of VBIL awareness products should take place alongside other community safety education initiatives that address perceived bushfire risk, bushfire planning and preparedness as well as preferences for sources of bushfire information. Given the probable move to a Multi-Agency, Multi-Hazard (MAMH) service model, the methodology employed in this research was designed so that results are generalisable to such a model. This step was achieved in two ways. First, the interview protocols were designed to elicit information about how people communicate at the locality level, and findings are therefore likely to be relevant to any safety/health awareness-type campaigns. Second, interview protocols addressed a potential future multi-hazard model.

The VBIL Service

The VBIL is a public information service provided by the CFA and the Department of Sustainability Environment (DSE). It offers general bushfire information (serviced by a general ‘Frequently Asked Questions’ - FAQ - database), about the following topics:

- What is and is not permitted on a Total Fire Ban day or during the Fire Danger Period (fire restrictions)
• Current Fire Danger Ratings and what the ratings mean
• Current DSE fuel reduction burns and other planned burns
• Key bushfire preparation and planning information
• Programs, publications and services available from both CFA and DSE, including community meetings
• Emergency Relief Centre location details
• Neighbourhood Safer Place location details
• Recovery after a bushfire, including financial assistance essential water replacement and rehabilitation of assets and forest
• Community Information Guides


The VBIL also provides the public with information during and after fire events. A customer call centre delivers this service, which is located at Wendouree near Ballarat. Operating hours are between 8am-6pm on low fire danger days. On days of high fire danger, hours are extended according to Customer Service Centre guidelines and/or upon request of the State Control Centre (SCC).

**VBIL Awareness Products**

The VBIL service is part of a broader attempt by fire agencies, such as the CFA, to develop bushfire awareness as well as provide specific information relating to bushfires. Currently, the promotion of bushfire awareness in Victoria consists of a number of education and communication initiatives and related activities, including the VBIL.

Even so, agencies in Australia have seemingly struggled to engage communities in relation to bushfire risk awareness and preparedness. Research following the 2009 Black Saturday fires suggests that despite a moderate level of bushfire risk awareness among affected communities, preparations and plans for the eventuality of a bushfire were variable at best (Whittaker et al. 2009). More recently, a survey of households in 52 high fire risk townships in Victoria found that
only 52% of households had a current fire plan, while only 18% had a written fire plan (Strahan Research 2010). In view of this finding, it is not surprising that community meetings organised under the auspices of the CFA in relation to bushfire preparedness are poorly attended.

There may be a number of reasons and factors for poor levels of community engagement over bushfire preparedness, including (but not restricted to):

- Quieter than normal bushfire seasons may lead to reduced risk awareness
- Reduced awareness may be a function of time since last major fire
- Competing priorities and demands (financial and time)
- Concerns about other natural hazards (e.g. floods)
- De-personalisation of risk (i.e. bushfires are perceived as a low probability event)

To help address this unevenness and paucity of awareness about bushfire, three products have been developed by VBIL staff to promote awareness and encourage the use of the information line:

1) VBIL wallet cards
2) VBIL fridge magnets
3) VBIL DVD

VBIL wallet cards

The wallet cards are small (business card-sized) cards that provide the contact number for the VBIL and some basic information about other services (e.g. the 000 emergency phone line). Potential advantages of the wallet cards include accessibility (small enough to be carried around in a wallet or handbag or similar item) and legibility (only space for critical information). Potential limitations may include a reluctance to carry around such materials. It may also be the case that members of the public do not frequent or access the sites where they are distributed, such as community fire education sessions.
**VBIL fridge magnets**

As with wallet cards, the VBIL fridge magnets are visible and accessible. The assumption behind this artefact is that most people are familiar with the concept of storing important emergency information on the household fridge. One limitation of this artefact is that in order for them to be effective community members must be at home when they become aware of a bushfire or related threat.

**VBIL DVD (and cover design competition)**

The VBIL management team has commissioned the production of an information DVD for distribution to the general public. The DVD aims to raise awareness of the VBIL service amongst both the community, and also CFA brigade members and volunteers. The DVD comprises a number of short video clips containing information about the VBIL, targeted towards different users such as local CFA brigade members, residents of bushfire vulnerable communities, tourists and travellers entering at risk areas, and diverse and vulnerable populations such as the elderly and international students. From initial viewings, the DVD presents as short video clips that are suited to educational criteria for providing information and learning. This presents the problem of how to best disseminate these types of educational messages.

In association with the artsHub (a website serving Australia’s creative arts industries), the CFA has run a competition to design the cover of this DVD. The motivation for this competition is to increase community engagement through user-participation in the development of their safety-related material. Potential dissemination pathways for this VBIL information DVD are one focus of this report.

**VBIL Dissemination**

Dissemination of the VBIL service occurs in the broader discipline of risk communication. While the current work constitutes a technical report on effective communication pathways at a locality level, an understanding of the broader risk communication context is required. We will briefly report on important issues within
this context. For a more thorough discussion of these issues, we direct the reader towards Paton (2006).

**Current Dissemination Pathways**

Members of the general public can obtain a wallet card or fridge magnet in two ways:

1. Local fire brigades can request supplies of the wallet cards and fridge magnets by contacting the VBIL on 1800 240 677. These artefacts are then distributed to the public at fire safety meetings or similar events.

2. Members of the general public can call the VBIL directly and request these products. This pathway obviously requires prior awareness of the VBIL service.

There are presently other ways in which the VBIL service is advertised, such as ABC radio, recent TV advertisements (e.g. If you are in two minds, leave early), on Community Information Guides and on fire-safety material such as fire ready brochures in rural libraries and “safety tips for visitors” leaflets in Visitor Information Centres. By identifying potential communication pathways that are effective in each type of community it is expected that greater awareness and uptake of the VBIL service can be achieved.

**Dissemination of an Information Service in a Community-safety Context**

Raising awareness of the VBIL service is important, but is likely to be unsuccessful if not considered in a wider community safety context. Ordonez and Serrat (2009: 1) define dissemination as: “delivering and receiving of a message, the engagement of an individual in a process, or the transfer of a process or a product”. The authors go on to state that it is helpful to think about dissemination in three ways: dissemination for awareness, for understanding and for action. This would suggest that raising awareness alone is not likely to be enough. Community members need an understanding of when, why or how to use the service.

Furthermore, we need to consider other factors and barriers that may influence the uptake of such a service. People who have little or no intent to plan and prepare for fires are unlikely to access the VBIL service for information. In the case
of emergency events, people may have a preference for sourcing information from other media sources. With respect to bushfire mitigation and planning information, community members express preferences for how educational material is presented (Rohrmann, 2000). In order to situate the VBIL in a wider safety-related decision-making context, it is helpful to frame VBIL use in terms of an analytic framework (see page 7).
Chapter Two: An Analytic Framework

The goal of the framework is to provide an illustrative representation of the complexity and interactions that are important to consider alongside VBIL dissemination. The analytic framework has been designed to capture the way in which VBIL not only services information but also how it is part of a broader process. We note that the theoretical evaluation of the model is outside the scope of the current work. The section of the model referring to bushfire information sources and social interactions was adapted from the work of Brenkert-Smith et al (2012). The framework is as follows:
Analytic Framework

Bushfire Risk Perceptions
- Probability
- Severity

Bushfire Information Sources
- Expert-specialist
  - Local fire agency
  - State fire agencies
  - Local government
  - Media
- Generalist
  - Neighbours, Friends and Family, Neighbourhood Groups
- No Information

Social Interactions
- Generic Informal
  - Proximity to neighbours
  - Frequency of interaction with neighbours
- Generic Formal
  - Participation in social groups and community groups
- Fire-specific Informal
  - Talking with neighbours about fire
  - Reporting that neighbours have taken action
- Fire-specific Formal
  - Attending fire-related event

Behavioural Intentions
(To prepare/plan; to seek more information)

Attitudes towards the VBIL
(trust of government regulators, expectations)

Preferred/Trusted sources of information

Call the VBIL

Awareness of the VBIL
(incl. knowledge about how, when and why to call the VBIL)
Perceived Risk

Developing an understanding of perceived risk is important as it speaks to residents motivation (or lack thereof) in preparing for bushfires. If bushfire risk is perceived as being low, it follows that people will not actively seek information on preparing for bushfires. Previous research is suggestive that most residents of at-risk-of-bushfire localities are aware that they are exposed to some sort of bushfire risk (McLennan et al, 2011). What may be more difficult for community members is to develop an understanding of probabilistic risk and a deeper knowledge of bushfire behaviour. In other words, develop an understanding of their personal risk after becoming aware of a nearby bushfire outbreak. The authors state:

“The large percentage of residents indicating (in hindsight, it must be remembered) awareness that living in the area entailed risk of a bushfire suggests that what is needed is instruction and assistance about those actions able to be taken by residents to minimise specific threats to life and property posed by bushfires, rather than simply raising general awareness of risk” (McLennan et al, 2011: 10)

Furthermore from a Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre report submitted to the Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission following the Victorian ‘Black Saturday’ fires:

“The overall impression created was that despite a high level of awareness of potential danger among many residents, this awareness failed to translate into decisive action. It appears that there was a general belief that there
would be official warnings (CFA, radio, website) well before any fire arrived from communities” (Bushfire Cooperative Research Centre 2009: 12)

Thus, raising awareness of bushfire risk in general appears to be less of an issue than getting people to act decisively under bushfire threat.

It is also possible that risk perception is context and community-specific; that is, risk perception can be affected by a combination of factors such as local history of bushfire incidence, geography, fuel loads, appraisal of local authorities, activeness of local brigades in engaging local communities, and the availability of preparedness literature. Not only is it important to understand risk perception at an individual level, but it is also how risk is perceived across entire communities. Scherer (2003) proposes a theory of ‘Risk Contagion’ suggesting that individuals adopt the attitudes or behaviours of others in their social networks. For small, tight-knit communities, this effect could be quite pervasive. For example, there is anecdotal evidence for such a strong social effect in the hamlet of Marysville prior to the 2009 Victorian ‘Black Saturday’ fires. Evidence suggests there was a widespread belief in the community that the town was immune from bushfires (McLennan et al, 2011).

During fire events, the challenge appears to be to encourage people to personalise the risk. This includes encouraging vigilance, and to seek more information to inform upon safety!related actions. Thus the importance of information services such as the VBIL. Recent post-fire studies have identified shortfalls in both the personalisation of risk by community members, as well as the provision of personalised risk communication (McLennan and Elliott, 2011, Whittaker et al, 2009). Risk perception is commonly regarded to comprise two components; probability of impact, and severity of impact. What remains relatively unknown in the bushfire context is which dimension leads to failures in risk acceptance and why.

**Bushfire Plans and Preparations**

The promotion of and development of ‘plans and preparations’ is a measure of preparedness by residents, and it is also an indication of the variability in
take-up, awareness, and preparedness in a locality. Recent evidence suggests that the level of household fire plans in some at-risk Victorian localities is sub-optimal (Strahan, 2010). If residents' do not form intentions to develop household bushfire plans, then they are unlikely to seek more information from official sources such as the VBIL (Paton et al, 2005).

**Bushfire Information Sources**

With respect to sources of information the model adopts the framework from Brenkert-Smith et al (2012) who make the distinction between information sources and social interactions. Residents and others may seek bushfire information from a variety of sources, formal and informal, from generalist sources (where opinion can substitute for knowledge) and from specialist sources (in providing and shaping information as well as scientists and related experts who study bushfires, in relation to physical, social and economic impacts). Both have advantages. Whereas information generated by official sources involve expertise and science (leading to accuracy), informal sources can help disseminate messages in a timely manner as well as fostering personal connections. Preferences for informal sources may be reinforced if people have had previous negative experiences with centralised sources of information. This relationship between locality and trust in centralised services as it relates to bushfires is interesting. It is possible that the sociology of rurality is important. For example, farmers may have a history of self-reliance. There is a long history of volunteer fire-fighting and other tensions between local and central may influence broader perceptions. Greater levels of trust may lie locally.

Identifying how residents access information at a locality level contributes to an understanding of how to best construct dissemination messages, what to disseminate and in what form, and promote an increased uptake of the VBIL service, or at least awareness of it. Given the opaqueness of knowledge on the one hand, and its specialist detail on the other, there is not a ready translation between information and appropriateness of that information, so that education messages promoting an awareness of the VBIL are required.
One amongst many

The VBIL service is one of many sources of information and awareness for residents and others in bushfire prone localities. It has both formal and informal relations with other providers of knowledge and information relating to disasters. It is important not only to locate and understand the variety and range of materials, modes of dissemination, scope of messages and their effectiveness, but also to appreciate ways of working together, sourcing information and providing appropriate messages and information.
Chapter Three: Approach and Methodologies

Through an examination of the VBIL process, the research draws on an understanding of communication processes, in relation to communities as localities and social networks within and beyond localities. First, communities are viewed not simply as residences and associated facilities, but as relational processes (Fairbrother et al., in press). Second, central to these processes are the social networks that make up a locality. A relational analysis of these networks allows us to ‘operationalise’ the relational perspective by the identification of actors in networks and the relational processes and structures in which, and through which, power and authority is exercised. Such analysis is critical in the context of voluntary and participative action in relation to bushfire preparedness and resilience, the multiplicity of geographical and organisational scales at which networks are manifested, and the territorial embeddedness of institutional networks (Dicken et al., 2001: 92). This methodology will generate a rich description of these processes to understand the causal mechanisms and underlying factors through which knowledge is shared and the place of VBIL in this process.

The processes of network building and engagement are played out in different ways depending on the social organisation and composition of the populations that make up communities in localities. It may be that men and women hear and respond to messages in different ways, as may be the case with young and old, skilled and unskilled and so on. The other side of this process is that messages and forms of communication are delivered in different ways. While many forms of communication are well established, taking the form of audio messages via radio and telephone, visual modes, via television, and written forms via newspapers, brochures, leaflets and the like, there are, of course other modes and forms of communication that must be taken into account. These latter forms and modes include digital processes, exemplified by twitter, Facebook, YouTube (and related modes of
exchange and interaction), and the internet, as well as text messages and forms of mobile telecommunication. It also may be the case that these modes are more likely to be used by particular segments of the population.

To explore these themes, three localities (Euroa, Koroit, and Lakes Entrance) were chosen to represent three types of communities; rural, peri-urban, and tourist. A further consideration in the selection of the localities is prompted by the proposed move to a multi-agency, multi-hazard information service model. Given this shift, communities were also selected based on risk from different types of natural hazards (e.g. bushfires and floods).

The research data for this report comes from several sources. These include the overview of current pathways presented in Briefing Paper 1, key informant interviews, and focused field research in the three Victorian localities. These interviews were followed up. The transcripts have been analysed, using standard qualitative data analysis techniques, including qualitative software processes. In addition, a systematic search and analysis of publicly available documents was conducted. These have also been analysed, using standard content analysis protocols and procedures.

Research within localities involved semi-structured interviews carried out with residents, community service providers, and CFA brigade members. Interviews were conducted by three members of the CSOW research team. Prior to the field investigations, the three researchers collaborated to develop the interview protocols and decided upon methods for approaching potential participants and conducting the interviews. This was done to ensure consistency of interview procedures.

Two sets of protocols were developed: one for community service providers and one for residents and others in local communities. The protocols were developed as field-guides with prompts to assist the flow and logic of information provision. As a general rule, the participants were encouraged to offer their information without interruption, with prompts used only when an important topic of information was missed or required elaboration.
• The community members’ protocol consisted of a seven-stage interview process with relevant prompts under each section. The seven stages were; 1) About yourself, 2) How you interact with your Community, 3) General bushfire information, 4) Improving awareness of the VBIL, 5) the VBIL DVD, 6) Other hazards and 7) Anything else?/wrap-up.

• The Service Providers’ protocol consisted of a six-stage interview process with relevant prompts. These stages were; 1) About your organisation, 2) Your role in the organisation, 3) Community interactions, 4) VBIL awareness, 5) Other hazards and 6) Anything Else/Wrap up.

Interviews were conducted as either; 1) individual interviews, 2) joint interviews (two interviewees) or 3) small focus groups (between five and seven participants). Community websites were used to identify and acquire the contact details of service providers and representatives of key local organisations, including; service and social groups, churches, schools, tourism industries, various welfare agencies, and local councils. Potential interviewees were contacted via telephone or email, with a snowball sampling strategy employed, with the help of interested parties. Interviews took place in community centres, businesses, offices, cafes, and private homes. They typically lasted between 20 minutes and one hour, and were recorded and transcribed.

A total of 73 participants were interviewed (70 face-to-face, and three follow-up telephone interviews) across the three localities: 56 participants were interviewed either individually or in joint interviews, and 17 participated across three focus groups. The primary aim of these interviews was to identify potential communication pathways for increasing awareness of the VBIL service and dissemination of associated awareness products. Note that focus group participants are not allocated interviewee numbers when quoted in this report, as it was not possible for transcribers to identify individual speakers.
Qualitative Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed using Microsoft Word 2010. These documents were then imported into the nVivo10 qualitative software analysis tool. A content analysis was conducted on the locality interview data using the following procedure:

1. A coding framework was developed by the research team based upon the locality interview protocols

2. The three expert-coders independently code the same transcript (Cfa_Kor_02)

3. The three coders met to compare the coding results from this transcript. Any discrepancies were discussed and disagreements in coding were resolved based upon consensus agreement.

4. The three expert-coders then independently coded all interviews from one of the three localities each.

5. A sub-set of 3 interviews (from one locality) were selected at random.

6. Two researchers independently coded these 3 transcripts to establish inter-coder reliability.

This process helped to ensure consistency across coding approaches, thus enhancing the robustness and internal validity of the findings.
Chapter Four: Locality Studies

The three localities are distinctive.

Part A: Euroa

Euroa is a small rural town situated on the Hume Highway, 150kms north east of Melbourne and of equal distance from Seymour and Benalla. The area surrounding the township is reasonably flat and lies in the Goulburn Valley at the foot of the Strathbogie ranges. The town is at risk of both bushfire and floods. Historically Euroa flourished during the gold rush, and is known for sheep (wool) production, horse studs, and wineries. Farming and manufacturing industries provide the strongest source of employment in the area.

Euroa hosts a number of events, which in part define life in the area. At the beginning of 2012, the local Rotary Club established a monthly farmer’s market. Rotary is also involved in several other major events, including the Australian National Show and Shine (a classic car show) held each October and the Ride the Ranges bike ride held each April. A number of notable
events are scheduled for October, including the Euroa Wool Week Festival (held in the main street), the Euroa Agricultural Show, and the Show and Shine, as well as the monthly farmers market.

**The Town Population**

The town population is aged, relatively cohesive and in the process of adapting to newcomers to the area. There appears to be limited opportunities for young residents and as a result there is a pattern of outward migration by late teenagers and young adults, a feature of many rural towns in Victoria.

**Locality Interviews**

The principle source of data comes from interviews with key informants in the town. A total of 22 participants were interviewed across 18 interviews sessions as per the table below. Interviewees were sourced from local service providers, various community groups and other key informants.

**Table 1: Breakdown of Euroa Interviews**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Interview type:</th>
<th># of sessions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
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<td>18</td>
<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joint Interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>22</strong></td>
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**An Ageing Population?**

Euroa has a population of 3,166 in the town environment and a population of 5,950 in the broader Euroa rural area. It is an ageing population, with a median age of 51 (compared with 37 for the state of Victoria as a whole) and 35.7 percent of residents aged over 60 years (compared with 19.7 percent for Victoria as a whole). This feature is well-recognised by residents
and service providers; it was a common theme when interviewees described the town and its population.

“The community is fairly old. It’s an ageing community.”

Cfa_Eur_21

and again:

“It’s a fairly conservative older population, a retirement town to some extent”

Cfa_Eur_18

Many older residents are engaged in social and service activities (‘active ageing’). It is an area where a number of community services available in the town are tailored to address this elderly demographic. These include home care, meals on wheels, and a volunteer driver service to take people to out of town appointments. Council is also improving footpaths and has installed mobility scooter charge points in several locations.

The down side for the town population is that there is not an obvious future for young people in the area. Several residents noted that there is not a lot in the town for younger people, including employment:

“Not a lot of industry about to encourage young people to stay here”

Cfa_Eur_01

One acknowledged that if they do not play sport then they may be left out:

“I guess in the past and it's probably still the case if you're a kid and you don't play sport you probably are a little bit underserviced”

Cfa_Eur_05

This lack of higher education or employment opportunities for younger residents is reflected in the age profile of the community. Just 6.3 percent of the Euroa population falls in the 20-29 year old range; less than half the state average of 14.3 percent. This figure suggests that these people leave the area in pursuit of education and/or employment.
### Table 2: Age profile of Euroa, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Euroa</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Australia</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>0-9 years</td>
<td>607</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>670,854</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2,772,971</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-19 years</td>
<td>603</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>673,278</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>2,776,852</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29 years</td>
<td>375</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>763,777</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2,973,909</td>
<td>13.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>511</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>755,629</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2,973,913</td>
<td>13.8</td>
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<tr>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>749</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>763,564</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3,047,021</td>
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<tr>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>979</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>671,548</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2,744,648</td>
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<td>60-69 years</td>
<td>1029</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>518,723</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>2,125,435</td>
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<td>70 years and over</td>
<td>1,099</td>
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<td>536,669</td>
<td>10.0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>--</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ABS 2011

### A Cohesive and Active Population

The town population is relatively homogenous, in terms of ethnicity and cultural outlook. Euroa was described by interviewees as ‘conservative’, not culturally diverse, and with high community spirit:

“It's close. Families that have been here for generations so there’s a bit of parochialism. It's very involved in itself. It's not in a negative way. It's very involved in and aware of what's going on. Most of the people in the community participate in some sort of event or some sort of group”

Cfa_Eur_21

Many interviewees described a friendly small town atmosphere in which people generally know each other and in which there is a strong volunteer ethic. A number of active service and social groups were identified by respondents. The more prominent of these include Rotary, U3A, Lions, and Probus. The SES and CFA were also noted as strong organisations. The town was also described as having a strong sporting culture, with some of the more
active clubs including Football-Netball, Golf, Tennis, Bowls, and Cricket. Many interviewees were members or volunteers of a number of groups.

“see the thing is everybody here crosses boundaries from one group to another sort of thing so you're never quite sure which hat people are wearing”

Cfa_Eur_1213

The retail precinct in Euroa is mostly confined to a single main street. With regard to amenities, although some things are lacking in Euroa (such as a public hospital or a dentist), the town contains essential facilities and services:

“we’ve actually got the fundamentals. But people readily go out of town. Sometimes it's for confidentiality because that can be an issue. Other times it is people have always done business somewhere else.”

Cfa_Eur_10

Like many rural towns of this size, there is movement between the town of Euroa and the other larger nearby towns, in this case Shepparton and Benalla. These will be towns that not only provide the services that may be absent in a town like Euroa, they may also provide educational, employment and related business services. Such awareness is indicated below:

"The retail culture is probably one where people are drawn to the larger centres pretty readily and if people have children who are either at Shepparton or another place, quite often they might do their shopping periodically in the other town or city. But a lot of people - particularly older people who live here and are very happy, get everything they want, they don't need a whole lot”

Cfa_Eur_10

Nonetheless, for the older population, Euroa is seen as a town that provides the basics.

However, there are also negative sides to such perceptions. The sense of cohesiveness and comfort can be accompanied by a sense of exclusiveness. As observed:
“Well like all small communities, our services can be limited. Like there’s issues with internet broadband. We’ve got a hospital but it’s not a public hospital, it’s private. Our doctors, only one doctor service and that’s a bit frustrating because yes, we’ve only got two Anglo-Saxon people there, which older people find really frustrating. They’re only there - they share the job. All the rest are people who’ve been brought in from overseas. So it can be a bit frustrating”

Cfa_Eur_04

Such sentiments are part of the complexity of these types of towns, rural, ageing and with limited public services.

The town is also undergoing change, with the arrival of new residents, often coming for lifestyle reasons and often with incomes that support different approaches to small town life. Thus, Euroa consists of a sizeable contingent of newcomers, particularly ‘tree-changers’ and retirees. Several interviewees observed that the town has attracted many new residents in recent years:

“I mean the community’s changed quite considerably in the last 10 or 15 years. A lot of new people come into town

Cfa_Eur_05

This incoming population is seen by many as coming from Melbourne, although in reality the origins of new comers are more diverse. A common view is:

“I mean also we keep getting a lot of new people moving into town that are moving up from Melbourne and/or from other places”

Cfa_Eur_12

Part of the appeal of Euroa is its location between three larger regional centres (Seymour, Benalla and Shepparton). This is coupled with an attractive natural environment and easy access to Melbourne via the Hume Highway.

One interviewee observed that the town has begun to reflect the lifestyles and tastes of these new residents:
“[W]e get an enormous amount of tree changes because we’ve got this wonderful access to the Hume, but within two minutes you’re in the hills, so you’re in the rocks and boulders, which really appeal to people who’ve made a lot of money in Melbourne, want to buy a farm, and it’s a rural lifestyle. So they have a few acres with a few cows and they need to have this beautiful and backdrop as well. So there’s been that change, and they want a good coffee and they want a nice meal and it’s starting - the village of Euroa has started to reflect that. We’ve now got places that are open all weekend, good food is available, good accommodation”

Cfa_Eur_06

Meanwhile, the area surrounding the town continues to attract the horse industry:

“Two hours from Melbourne, so it’s an area that’s growing with the horse studs bringing - buying the local farms because again it’s two hours from Melbourne, so there’s a lot of money coming to the Shire. I think it’s a town with great potential and it is growing”

Cfa_Eur_18

In a number of cases, these incomers now provide opportunities for employment in the area, a feature that may have long term benefits for young people in the area.

“Interviewee 1: As you probably heard with David [Hayes] has got the stables up here so that’s brought a lot of extra people into town...

Interviewee 2: Yes.

Interviewee 1: …and probably other sort of ancillary things that they need. There’s sort of more people coming into town for that and I mean there’s a lot of tree change people anyway I guess”

Cfa_Eur_1213

But, such changes are not without difficulties. Several interviewees discussed a possible divide in this town resulting from this mix of long-term residents and more recent arrivals:
“Interviewee 2: There other thing you’ve got up in the bush, I might just talk about here, but you’ve got a mixture of the old and the new. You’ve got the rural and farming families that have been here for generations and now it’s Ma and Pa Kettle on the farm probably or just one of them running the place, or trying to. Then you’ve got the people like myself who came up from Melbourne nine years ago with their lifestyle sort of stuff and you’ve got oil and water. There’s a lot of social issues about the coming together of these two and a lot of the people like me come in and started committees and things and doing stuff… A lot of the people come in with a view to sort of running the show and doing it and big noting themselves and that sets a few of the locals up against them then, they don’t like that sort of stuff - we know what we’re doing and we’ve done it this way and we’re not going to change our ways just because you come up from Melbourne and try and big-note because you’re a smart educated…

Interviewee 1: City person"

Such developments can cause tension within these towns and rural areas. The verities of the past no longer suffice, and the new residents may want to play active roles within the locality. In these circumstances, established procedures and practices may be challenged. For example, the way the local residents deal with disasters and the possibility of disaster events, such as bushfire or flood, may be questioned. It is also possible that newcomers are unaware of some of the dangers that accompany rural living.

**Risk Perception**

People in Euroa who are most ‘at risk’ in the lead up to or during an emergency event such as bushfire include:

- Elderly residents
- New residents
- Visitors and tourists
This vulnerability stems from several things: inadequate perception of risk; unfamiliarity with information sources or technology mediums (particularly relevant if emergencies are accompanied by power outages); or isolation from the wider community. The Strathbogie Shire Council was noted as an important point of contact to identify vulnerable members of the community.

Interviewees stated that people in Euroa are typically conscious of the threat posed by bushfires.

“people in this area are generally fire aware”

Cfa_Eur_01

and:

“Everybody's aware of bushfires”

Cfa_Eur_08

Of course, these may be over-statements and very much cover one segment of the population, the older long-term residents in the area. One interviewee observed that this awareness of bushfire risk has increased with the major publicity campaigns of recent years run by the emergency services and government:

“Interviewee: If we've got - most people now have been encouraged to have a bushfire preparedness and that's been - we've been bombarded with that through radio, TV and magazines...
Facilitator: Sure.
Interviewee: ...newsprint. That's a bombardment. Now it's becoming something that's fairly high. As soon as we know they're coming - they're talking about coming into the fire season now. Everyone's aware of it could be potentially bad because the grass and everything's looking ripe to burn and all that sort of stuff. So we're already aware of that”

Cfa_Eur_21

Perception of the personal risk posed by bushfires is, however, mixed. One of the key aspects in this risk perception is location; that is, those living on larger farming properties or on the outskirts of town are more conscious of the
possibility of being affected by bushfire than those living in the urban landscape of the town itself.

The town is regarded as ‘safe’:

“The local townspeople - well I think a lot of people who live in the town actually have a very - I think they think they’re safe, they’re immune and probably in most circumstances they would be. Because it’s not like Marysville or - we’re not built in here. So it’s probably unlikely that a fire would be going through the middle of the town here but you never know.”

Cfa_Eur_05

and:

“Inside the township you wouldn’t think that the bushfire’s going to come to - bit of catnap, but it’s going to happen in a northerly direction and where we are at the moment we’re in the centre, again your hoping we’re going to be all right here”

Cfa_Eur_17

While other tragedies involving like towns are known, there is still a view that the town itself is secure and safe from fire, at least:

“[M]aybe I’m complacent but I figure when you live in the town you’re quite a bit more protected. I know that’s probably, in hindsight, with what happened at Marysville and those areas, you shouldn’t think like that, but I think a lot of people do”

Cfa_Eur_18

The contrast is drawn between the town and the ‘bush area’, not an uncommon comparison. As noted, such ‘slack[ness]’ of view means an unjustified reliance on agencies such as the CFA to warn residents in the event of a bushfire:

“Because I live in the town I think I - maybe if I was living out in a bush area, surrounded by bush then I would think of it a bit differently. I think maybe I’m a bit slack, as are most people isn’t it? Which is why a lot of people got into trouble, because they think the CFA will warn them”
As one interviewee, who had moved from a farming property to the outskirts of town, implied: their perception of bushfire risk had decreased with the move:

“That was on the farm, that was what I had, but in the town I haven’t, but because I’ve gone through the bushfire plan before, yes. I think I probably still have the box sitting in the garage with everything in it that I went through just recently. I thought do I really need to worry about this? But having seen also how close the fires got to - well, it was in amongst the urban area at Bendigo - I have no illusions that it could happen here very easily, because I live down the creek end of town and it’s right on the border of bushland”

Likewise, another resident who lives in town has an increased awareness of bushfire threat after buying a second property outside the town:

“I’ve got another interest this year. We’ve always wanted to buy land and we’ve bought land this year in the Strathbogie Ranges so my interest is even greater than it ever was because of my own personal reason”

For those living outside the town, the risk associated with living amid bushland is compounded by limited options for exiting these areas in times of emergency. This perception is the result of few roads and the potential of these being blocked, if wind or fire brings down trees. Several interviewees remarked that they have a single road to access their property:

“Fire related, being a rural community and we’ve got some fairly high risk fire areas being Strathbogie Ranges up in here. It’s hilly country covered in trees and bush a lot of it. Some grazing land in amongst the bush, some up on the top on the plateau we call it. The roads in and out are just country roads. Most of them are sealed and don’t provide very good access in the times of a bad fire. You get a tree come down because of wind or the fire itself has gone through and a tree’s fallen and you’ve got the road blocked. So that
traps people within a certain area. So people are very mindful of fire awareness generally”

Cfa_Eur_01

Meanwhile, a portion of the local residents appears to have a limited conception of bushfire risk. This observation was supported by several stories of residents unintentionally sparking fires or losing control of intentional small fires:

“How within the last two years there have been small spot fires caused by people being less than prudent”

Cfa_Eur_19

Harking back to the changing social composition of the town, several interviewees mentioned new residents in the area, who have moved from less bushfire-prone areas such as Melbourne, as being particularly ignorant of the threat posed by bushfires. As noted:

“The other side of that is in small communities like this, which would be the same everywhere you go now, so Marysville would be a high example, new people coming and they’ve come from the city, so they have no background, no basic knowledge at all of what they’ve moved into”

Cfa_Eur_04

There is a sympathetic understanding of the dilemmas for newcomers:

“I mean we’ve got people here that live fairly close to us. They’re people who have come to live in this community and great people and I love them but they just have an ignorance to what might happen if a fire went through”

Cfa_Eur_05

Attention was also drawn to the need for on-going messaging:

“[P]eople come from Melbourne and they come up here and they buy properties. I think they’re a little bit sheltered down there of what really happens here sometimes, in the country in fire prone areas. They’ve got no idea. So that’s what happened. People move from there. They come to a country town. They might buy some property and think, you know, what a life.
We can come here for a weekend but they’re not educated in what happens when there’s a fire and things like that. So you’ve got to keep the message up, what happens, because people are coming and people are going and if you stop getting the message out there, a portion of the people will forget what’s happening.”

Cfa_Eur_20

One implication of these reflections is that there should be an on-going process of education and drawing attention to risk.

But, these reflections concern not only views about newcomers, but also the complacency that often comes with long-term residence in an area, and the sense of security that comes with dealing with past events. One interviewee suggested that there is a degree of complacency regarding bushfire threat even some long-term residents of the town, themselves included:

“Interviewee: I’m a bit cynical of this stuff as advertising stuff that people just go, oh yeah, something from the CFA and throw it away; it’s a bit like government propaganda I think. I don’t take much notice of it.
Facilitator: You think other people in general would be too?
Interviewee: I don’t think I’m very unusual in that regard. I know it’s important that when that time comes you need to know this information. Somehow you have to break down that, it’s not going to happen in my yard, but at some stage there will be fires in this area. There hasn’t been for quite a few years, but there’s no reason why it couldn’t happen”

Cfa_Eur_18

The worry is that bushfire and disaster information can be viewed as other ‘junk’ information, rightly or wrongly.

A theme that emerged was that some residents simply do not see themselves likely to be affected by bushfire:

“I think a lot of people don’t think it’s going to happen to them. That’s probably the scary part. Whereas we’ve grown up in a country community so historically our parents would have talked about it forever”

Cfa_Eur_04
Nonetheless, this interviewee went on to note their own inadequate preparation:

“So for a person who should be informed I haven’t done much. So that’s probably saying a lot too. There’d be a lot of people like that. Because you probably think I’ll be fine. It may not necessarily always be”

Cfa_Eur_04

These sentiments and reflections are the key reference point for disaster awareness programmes and information dissemination, such as the VBIL.

**Plans and Preparation**

In the lead-up to fire season Strathbogie Shire Council seeks to raise awareness of the threat posed by bushfires and encourages people to prepare their properties accordingly. It does this by developing a publicity campaign which includes disseminating a flier on bushfire preparation to all landowners. The Shire invites residents to communicate in this period and, following inspections of residents’ properties, seeks to have all fuels reduced to the required level prior to the beginning of the fire danger period (Cfa_Eur_01). Part of this process involves sending courtesy letters to those residents who need to reduce fuel on their blocks. Failure to comply results in the issuing of a fire prevention notice which, if ignored, is followed by the issuing of an infringement notice which includes a fine. These fines have increased substantially (by around 500 percent) since the previous fire season.

Of the 11 respondents in a position to have personal fire plans, three respondents did not have a plan. Of the eight other respondents, six had a detailed plan. Of those with a bushfire plan, three planned to stay and defend their property, while five planned to leave. These detailed plans included preparation of land in the lead up to fire season by reducing fuel, the safe storage of valuables, a self-sufficient electricity supply through the use of generators, an understanding of how the threat differs based on the direction of the fire, and the installation of pumps and sprinklers.
In the event of bushfire, many interviewees stated that they would source information from ABC radio, while some also access agency websites (chiefly the CFA website, although DSE and Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) were also mentioned). A number of interviewees expressed a strong preference for information from trusted local sources. In the case of smoke or fire, these individuals are inclined to utilise informal information networks by, for example, directly contacting CFA members, or prominent community members via phone. The stated benefits of this method include timeliness (information can move quickly), clarity (information is tailored to local understanding) and credibility (residents are likely to trust the information). Potential drawbacks to this approach related to practicality. Many of these respondents are likely to be otherwise engaged during an emergency situation (e.g. actively fighting fires or coordinating efforts), and perhaps not in a position to field calls from community members for information. Several interviewees were in a privileged position with regard to bushfire information though their own or a family member’s involvement in the CFA.

Local sources of bushfire information include members of the CFA, the shire office, prominent community members, or simply heading into the centre of town and speaking with other residents. As one said:

“Facilitator 1: Hypothetically in a situation like that, where would you go to get information about what’s happening?
Interviewee: Well, I’d hope either the shire or the CFA would have it and I would hope that - if I was leaving home I’d have to know beforehand, I’d have found out beforehand exactly what I thought my risk was and where the best place to go would be, because it depends on where your fire is. But my feeling would be that if there was something happening in Euroa I’d probably come into the centre of town first, see what was going on”

Cfa_Eur_14

Of course, this presupposes mobility in such events. It may not always be possible to access the centre of the town.
Many residents have contact with CFA members as family, friends, or neighbours, and use these contacts in case of bushfire threat:

“Interviewee: Well, if it’s a code red day and the CFA - because local CFA are fairly involved in all the community. We’re very dependent on them letting us know what’s going on. They do. So if our - fortunately neighbours on both sides are in the CFA. If they say, better go,...
Facilitator: Okay, sure.
Interviewee: ...we’re out”

As often noted, residents tend to rely on advice and guidance from neighbours and friends, especially if these people have a connection with the fire agencies, such as the CFA (also refer to Akama et al, 2012).

Seeking information from people connected with the agencies is deliberate. As noted:

“Facilitator: Do you have any sense of where you’d source your information from if you saw smoke in the distance?
Interviewee: I’d probably ring a friend of mine whose husband is with the CFA, because at least two, probably more, of our parishioners are members of the CFA. I would probably ring - text them, ring them. Whether that’s the right thing to do, I don’t know, but that’s what I’d do”

In line with this reflection, some residents have an expectation that part of the role of the CFA is to field such enquiries:

“Yeah, I think people think that the CFA will - if there is an emergency the CFA will let people know”

Likewise, one interviewee commented that the local CFA is a trusted authority in the lead-up to the fire season:

“The local stuff is really important, supporting the local CFA to get out and work in their community. Word of mouth is the stuff that works to me, talking
to people. If my local CFA captain says to me, look your house is a fire risk, then I'd take notice, but if I read something like that in The Age or The Sun I don't think I'd take much notice, just going through”

Cfa_Eur_18

This preference for local information was driven by several factors. Firstly, the information is seen to be the most up-to-date. One respondent noted:

“Facilitator 1: So have you heard of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line?
Interviewee 1: Yeah, did I have a fridge magnet or something at home, on the farm, on that, or not?
Facilitator 2: Quite possibly.
Facilitator 1: Yeah, possibly.
Interviewee 1: I think I probably did. I think I did, but I don't know - in the time since everything I think I was relying on direct phone calls to people locally, generally, rather than going to something like that. I think that was generally my approach was to find out from somebody who knew what was actually happening on the ground in this area. Because sometimes - and what I'd found with floods and what have you, I often found that the information was a couple of hours out with road blockages and things like that”

Cfa_Eur_14

Secondly, the information from a local source is seen as personalised. There is a preference for who ‘I know’ as a source of information:

“Facilitator: What do you think are the features of those sources of information that lead people to them, say, more so than...
Interviewee: The personalisation of it. If I know Doug down the road, Doug tells me what's happening and Doug's in the CFA, I'm not going to ring that phone number and neither is anyone else around here. Doug's in the CFA. Doug knows what's going on”

Cfa_Eur_21

Thirdly, local information flows are also part of well-established practices in the area. Amongst specific segments of the population, such as the elderly
and long-term residents, there will be ‘trusted’ ways of conveying information. As mentioned:

“Again, you’ve got elderly people - a large community of elderly people that the bush telegraph is the trusted means”

Cfa_Eur_21

These sources, although informal are trusted.

Fourthly, another way that information is spread in the community in case of emergency is through personal visits. There is a practice in this town of doorknocking so as to reach vulnerable / elderly residents:

“We here in Euroa have a very elderly population and it’s through community briefings in time of crisis that there’s people chosen to go round and door knock these older people and look after them. That’s what we’ve got to do in time of need or crisis. Our older people don’t understand computers and if they’re not watching the TV or whatever, they fail to hear about it. They fail to hear about these incidences and it’s only through community, people within the community volunteering to go and door knock or assist them, that we can help them. So we have all spectrums that we’ve got to look after”

Cfa_Eur_09

However, another interviewee noted the difficulty associated with this method:

“With the floods we had here, which is what, two years ago. We had to - the police went around and doorknocked but then we got complaints that they’d actually missed people in units and things like that; well, you can’t doorknock everywhere”

Cfa_Eur_1415

Of course, while there may be problems with this method, it is only one of a suite of measures that come into play during a disaster, in the lead up to one.

The range of sources of local information draws attention to the importance of informal networks and longstanding connections between people in an area. Such arrangements can be complemented by deliberate and planned
measures to reach out to the vulnerable, such as door-knocking as just mentioned. These practices also draw attention to the range of communication pathways that are in play in such towns.

**Communication Pathways**

As a relatively small town lacking significant cultural diversity, the information and communication pathways in Euroa follow fairly traditional avenues. These include the local newspaper, and word-of-mouth through informal networks and individuals’ association with local organisations. Such information flows are facilitated by the existence of several community touch points.

**Newspapers as Information Pathways**

A key source of information for community members in Euroa is the local weekly newspaper - the *Euroa Gazette* (est. 1897). Other local newspapers include the *Seymour Telegraph* and the *Seymour and Nagambie Advertiser*, while community bulletins (such as the *Violet Town Village Voice* and the *Strathbogie Tablelands Bulletin*) provide other published sources of local information. It should be noted that these other publications were mentioned by only one interviewee, while the Gazette was consistently referred to as ‘the local newspaper’.

The *Euroa Gazette* was mentioned as a key source of information by all but one interviewee; a recent arrival to the town who nonetheless mentioned ‘local papers’ as a means by which residents learn about services in a community. Published each Tuesday, this newspaper has a healthy and growing distribution. It is one of the few independent newspapers left in Victoria, and was praised by a number of interviewees for its community-mindedness. The Gazette is reproduced each week in a big print version for older residents with long-sightedness.

Many community group representatives praised the Gazette for its openness and willingness to run diverse stories. The paper is used by community
organisations, service providers, and businesses to publicise services and events. Each edition of the Gazette also usually contains some brochures and fliers. The edition current when researchers were present in the town included a flier on helping to catch bushfire arsonists (from Fire Ready Victoria, Crime Stoppers, and Victoria Police). Such an approach to publishing leads to the observation:

“So the local paper is probably the most effective way we get to the local people”

Cfa_Eur_05

It becomes the medium for the dissemination of locality relevant information. As stated:

“This is the newsletter for the town. If you’ve got anything on, it needs to be in the paper”

Cfa_Eur_18

It is the medium for learning about the town and the activities that take place within the town and its environs. It is an event:

“It’s a focus once a week; when the paper comes out once a week everybody generally has it, because that’s the only way you’re going to find out about things”

Cfa_Eur_1415

As with other rural localities across the State, the ‘local newspaper’ becomes a social ligament in residential life. It is how people learn of and become aware of the locality. As stated:

“I think - well, if you look at our community, the local newspaper is a really important vehicle for news…. I mean, people wait for the local newspaper to come in from the printers. They’re there in droves and they pick it up, take it home…. But our local newspaper is very good, we’re very lucky, with Paul - I mean, … [they] do a fantastic job”

Cfa_Eur_10
Several interviewees noted that, despite the popularity of the local newspaper, not every member of the locality reads it. Therefore, it is important to also use other pathways to disseminate information in the town.

Community organisations and relevant disaster agencies tend to supplement advertising or articles in the local newspaper with other pathways, such as distribution of flyers, posters in places with high foot-traffic, or setting up stalls at local events.

**Television and Radio**

Local radio and television in Euroa come from larger regional centres such as Shepparton or Bendigo (e.g. WIN TV Shepparton). Some community group representatives have used television advertising. A representative from Rotary stated they have used local television to publicise several major events they are involved with (Cfa_Eur_05). The interviewee noted that this is an effective but expensive option. Another interviewee who has been involved with organising the Euroa Wool Week Festival and Agricultural Show stated that they used to use television advertising, but that it became ‘out of reach financially’ (Cfa_Eur_09). Representatives of another community organisation stated that they have used television advertising in the past but stopped because it didn’t appear to make much of a difference to their turn-out (Cfa_Eur_1213). A number of interviewees stated that the radio is a major source of information, while one noted that ‘Everyone watches telly’ (Cfa_Eur_03).

Radio was a commonly cited source of bushfire information. Several interviewees stated that they have ‘hand-cranked’ or battery-powered radios in case of power outages:

“Yes, I listen to the radio. I’ve got my hand-cranked radio and things like that and I’ve got my mobile phone. If something goes down, we are in a really bad black spot for - it used to be horrendous living here about 10 years ago. Before - up until then I should say, you got blackouts every week, so you learn not to rely on television and things like that. You go, yeah, you’ve got to be connected in other ways”
One of the stated benefits of radio is that it does not require effort on the part of the person; they simply listen out for updates. Furthermore, ABC radio presents a trusted source of information for community members, having proved reliable during previous bushfire seasons:

“That’s what we would do; listen to the radio all day, basically. That’s what we did on Black Saturday too”

As indicated, these are reflections based on experience of past events, such as Black Saturday. The ABC radio received frequent mention:

“So that's how we're all tuned in, especially in bushfire, is listening to the ABC”

ABC radio is seen as reliable and informative:

“I mean, if I had that [VBIL magnet] on my fridge, I certainly wouldn’t have that as my first port of call. It would be whatever ABC Radio Local told me was going on. I mean, we've got the text messages that are coming through. So, and just being aware of what's happening in your area. If it's code red day you automatically listen to ABC Local”

Alongside the radio, the websites of relevant agencies and emergency services are also a popular source of bushfire information. The most common site mentioned by respondents was the CFA website:

“It's constantly used during the summer, that's the CFA website so if that went down we would be in trouble. But if it was to go down, then that's a signal to get out”

Other websites that were mentioned include the BOM and the DSE.

There are several stated limitations with using websites to access bushfire information. Firstly, the area of Euroa has been prone to power outages in the
past, although this has been partially overcome by the availability of internet on smart phones, which some residents own. Secondly, some residents are not comfortable with using computers and the internet. This aspect is confirmed by the age profile of the community, although recent evidence suggests that the take up on internet use is increasing amongst this age group (Madden, 2010).

There is a question of awareness and familiarity with internet use for such matters as disaster information. As one respondent amusingly noted:

“It's not something I'd think of. I don't feel as confident on the internet. I'd pack my computer and take it with me [laughs] but I wouldn't think to look on it, so yeah”

Cfa_Eur_13

Nonetheless, the use of websites was common and, like radio, has been reinforced by positive experiences in previous fire seasons.

**Community Touch-points**

One of the features of rural localities is that there are community touch-points. These are defined here as physical places where members of the community pass through or use on a regular basis. They provide an opportunity for residents to meet and learn about matters of common concern.

Touch-points as important social mechanisms in relation to disaster awareness and preparedness emerged as a common theme throughout the Euroa interviews. Shops and businesses in Euroa are mostly confined to a main street and they receive a large amount of foot traffic. Several key community hubs are located in this street where a sizeable portion of the community regularly pass through. These include the shire office, the post office, and the newsagency. Many suggested that these locations also attract some vulnerable members of the community; for example, some elderly residents who use the post office to pay their bills or the council offices to pay their rates. Other places receiving high traffic include the library (recently
refurbished) and the supermarket, while churches, a community-education centre, schools, cafes, and the cinema also attract residents on a relatively regular basis.

**Figure 2:** Euroa Post Office

The Euroa Post Office was cited as one of the town’s community touch-points.

Posters, fliers or brochures provide other means to advertise organisations, services and events in Euroa. These are normally distributed to the prominent locations noted above. There are, for example, noticeboards at the library, the shire offices, the community education centre, and the supermarket, which groups use to publicise events. Touch-points for visitors and tourists include petrol stations and accommodation providers.

**Figure 3:** Noticeboard at the Shire Council Offices

The foyer of the Shire Offices provides one of the noticeboards in the community for advertising services and events.

A number of community organisations set up stalls at markets and community events. At the monthly Euroa farmer’s market, for example, there is a community marquee in which all are welcome to set up and distribute information. Other potential events include the Euroa Wool Week Festival, the
Euroa Agricultural Show, and the Show and Shine. The local CFA brigade already has a presence at some of these events.

Complementing the touch-points, other sources of information provision were in play. Many interviewees observed that ‘word of mouth’ (referred to by two separate interviewees as the ‘bush telegraph’) is a common source of information for community members:

“It's a country town. Word of mouth”

People know each other, have gone to school together, have grown up together, and meet each other, in medical centres, at sports events, at schools and other public settings, and they talk, on the phone on the street and at public venues.

This aspect of information provision was recognised:

“Facilitator: So other than the flyers and the gazette, do you use any other local media to disseminate information about the cinema?
Interviewee 1: No, it's generally word of mouth, and that's strong in a small community like this”

People come across each other in formal and informal settings:

“Word of mouth I guess is the other thing. It's a small town, people talk”

So, alongside more public mediums, such as newspapers, radio, television, and distributed message artefacts, many acquire information by the informal but often effective pathway of word of mouth.

The question is how these modes of information dissemination relate to disaster preparedness, and the place of VBIL in this process. Residents wishing to publicise an organisation or an event often use a combination of the mediums discussed here to raise awareness. Where does VBIL fit into these processes?
The Victorian Bushfire Information Line

VBIL has a mixed and uneven place in the process of information dissemination. Of the 22 interviewed in Euroa 14 had heard of the service, with another three having a vague awareness of its existence. Of those who had heard of the service, one respondent stated that they would use the VBIL to source bushfire information, while two others stated that they might use the VBIL. None mentioned the VBIL service as part of their information sources or bushfire plan prior to mention by the researchers. Two other participants who did not know of the VBIL stated that they would use it after the service was explained to them. They were not sure, however, where to find the number. As one commented:

“Okay, right so where would you get the number?”

Cfa_Eur_12

This relative unawareness does suggest that the VBIL is a secondary player in the process of information dissemination and provision.

Most residents appear to rely on newspapers, television and radio to learn about disaster. Of those who could recall where they heard of the VBIL, advertising campaigns on television and radio in previous bushfire seasons were common sources of this awareness. More importantly, the awareness of the Information Line appears to be related to the moment. As stated:

“Probably not so much lately but probably through the last fire season. When the Black Saturday fires were on, that was plastered all over the place, if you want more information, Bushfire Information Line. Yes, leading into the fire season and through the fire season yes, advertised widely on radio as well”

Cfa_Eur_01

Otherwise, people learnt of VBIL via standard media outlets, newspapers and publicity via the disaster agencies:

“I just saw it just through the marketing, through the Gazette, through the CFA. To tell you the truth I’ve never ever rung it though”

Cfa_Eur_17
There appeared to be an awareness of the VBIL, but not necessarily a use of it. More generally, residents commented on their knowledge of the Line:

“*I have seen a number of television adverts and you hear it on the radio*”

Cfa_Eur_17

Learning about VBIL is a first step; the question is its value.

Events can be critical and can create an overriding impression of the value of the service. Bad publicity following the Black Saturday bushfires was cited by one interviewee as the occasion of learning about VBIL:

“How did you become first aware of the VBIL.
Interviewee: Negative publicity after this big fires.
Facilitator 1: That's interesting. Can you say some more about that?
Interviewee: Listening to talk-back radio about people who had not had it answered, couldn't get through for some reason, and there seemed to be a lot of angst from people who were directly in the line of fire who had rung the line and had either been diverted, if my memory serves me correctly, because that's a while ago now, but there was a lot of angst in the community about not being able to get access to that information, particularly from people who may have tried on the 'net or may have not tried on the Internet. There was seen as a lack of staffing or a lack of infrastructure that supported that line”

Cfa_Eur_06

Such an impression of the Line and its availability is not conducive to use.

Several other interviewees stated that they became aware of the VBIL only after the major fires of 2009:

“*Through the media. Through - after the bush fires a couple of years ago*”

Cfa_Eur_19

It is clear that the awareness of the service is context-bound. Not surprisingly, it is when bushfires occur that residents become aware of the full range of services available to them. Similarly:
“Like I said, I didn’t even know it existed until after the bushfires”

Cfa_Eur_22

Nevertheless, the publicity that comes through the main agencies can also be effective. A number of interviewees are aware of the VBIL through their association with the CFA, whether as volunteers or through another capacity (for example, liaising as representatives of other community organisations).

Although awareness of the VBIL was relatively high, awareness of what the service is or what it provides was sometimes poor. One misunderstanding that emerged on several occasions was that the Victorian Bushfire Information Line is a website:

“Facilitator: Are you aware of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line, VBIL?
Interviewee: I have been onto most of the sites, not that I’ve read them carefully…. Actually I was quite impressed, I remember being impressed with the site but I was at the same time thinking that there would be a lot of people who would not either see this site or use it”

Cfa_Eur_04

In addition, there was generally vague awareness of what the VBIL service offers:

“Look, not having ever called the VBIL, I don’t quite know what sort of information I would get. I don’t know whether you actually talk to a person one or one and you can ask them a question or you get a recorded message saying we now have an event happening in here. We’ve got one here. People in this area are under threat, pack up and leave now while you’ve still got the chance, sort of thing, or whatever it might be. I don’t know quite what it”

Cfa_Eur_01

Such awareness does not bode well for the positive and appropriate use of a service such as the VBIL. This lack of knowledge about the nature of the service was confirmed by others. There seemed to be general view that it would use recorded messages:
“Would you be speaking to somebody, or would you get a recorded message?”

Cfa_Eur_08

and:

“I interviewee: It’s just a recorded message on the phone?
Facilitator: During business hours, it’s a person”

Cfa_Eur_16

Another was surprised to hear that the service provides relevant bushfire information outside the fire season:

“Facilitator: It’s active right throughout the year, so you can get general bushfire information.
Interviewee: I didn’t know that”

Cfa_Eur_22

For this person there was a view that the VBIL was only a fire season service.

This general lack of awareness about the way that VBIL operates and the vagueness about its purpose meant that it was likely that residents would go elsewhere to learn about fire related matters, during the fire season and outside it.

**Sceptical Views**

The non-familiarity with VBIL did not mean that these people did not seek out information about bushfire. Rather people often have ways of learning about these matters, which for them are well established and by and large work. As noted above, three interviewees stated that they would use VBIL after the service had been mentioned or explained to them, while another two stated that they might use the service. A number of others, however, stated that they would not use the VBIL. They did not see it as an appropriate avenue for information.
Several reasons were offered for not using the VBIL service. Firstly, as noted above, there is a preference for local sources of information, which is seen to be more trustworthy and tailored to local understanding:

“Facilitator 2: Would you be likely to call the VBIL in a situation like that?
Interviewee: Absolutely not. Too remote for what’s happening locally”
Cfa_Eur_06

Related to this view, there is some doubt that the VBIL service could provide timely and accurate information:

“[T]he accuracy of the level of information being handed out, if it’s in your local area and it’s happening in your local area, it tends to be more accurate. Not only that, because you’ve got it manned by local people, you know you can trust that information”
Cfa_Eur_09

There is a view that local means accurate; it is provided from and by trustworthy sources. As stated by another:

“Interviewee: Yeah, that’s it, and how accurate the information is. I mean, if they’re in Melbourne and we’re in Strathbogie where my block of land is, you know, well they’re not there, we’re here. The wind’s turned around. They’re still saying that everything’s okay but the wind might turn around on you up there. How quick will they know how accurate that is and how quick will we get on to anyone when we’re really in an emergency? Are we going to be put on hold with beautiful music or what?
Facilitator: So you think local information would be a bit more timely relevant to what’s going on?
Interviewee: Yeah, absolutely. That’s what I believe, yeah. I mean, bushfire happens so quickly, in the case of what I said about the flood, we’ve always got time to prepare but a bushfire is completely different. It can turn on you in a matter of minutes. You think it’s going to bypass you and the wind will brush up and turn the other way and come in straight at you”
Cfa_Eur_20
There is an appreciation amongst the population of the different features of disasters, for example, floods often with a lead time, whereas bushfires often do not.

Secondly, some people are reluctant to tie up the resources of the VBIL type service:

“*I'd use the website if I was concerned about - if I had family at Anglesea or a burn had gone wrong or something, I would then use the website, because I would feel I wasn't taking anybody else's valuable time*”

Cfa_Eur_06

Where people are familiar with different modes of information provision, then it is often the case that there is an appreciation of when it may be more appropriate to use one mode than another. For some a VBIL service was for the more immediate. Even in the case of immediate information, there is a view that the elderly would be unlikely to use a VBIL type service because they do not want to ‘intrude’:

“If you're suggesting an emergency, central emergency centre, yes, it would be a certain amount use it, but our older folk or varying folk within the community would tend to shy away because they would be frightened that they might be intruding, because they don't know somebody there”

Cfa_Eur_09

In part, this comment also pointed to the purpose of a service and thus why and when it might be used. So, the presentation of the service as a particular type of service (e.g. an emergency information service rather than as a general information service) may be germane for its use.

Thirdly, there are those who do not feel they need to source bushfire information because they do not perceive themselves to be at risk:

“Facilitator: Sure. Is this a service you would use?

Interviewee: Probably not, no, because we live in the town, Violet Town, I guess - maybe I'm complacent but I figure when you live in the town you're quite a bit more protected. I know that's probably, in hindsight, with what
happened at Marysville and those areas, you shouldn’t think like that, but I think a lot of people do”

Cfa_Eur_18

In addition, there was some concern regarding the capacity of a service such as the VBIL to cope with a surge in calls during significant emergency events:

“Yes. I suppose when it really hits the fan and you’ve got a big event like Black Saturday and there’s literally thousands of people impacted, I’d imagine there’d have been an overload on that sort of service and jamming up of systems and people getting nowhere”

Cfa_Eur_01

and:

“Facilitator: Having said that, during active fires, they will source the...
Interviewee: They get overrun”

Cfa_Eur_22

These sentiments suggest a general reluctance to use the service as well as a view that it is an emergency service only. One interviewee, nonetheless, stated that, regardless of the reluctance of some people to use the service, if it is used by a few then it is important:

“Because sometimes people won’t or can’t access it doesn’t mean that you shouldn’t have it. I mean I think sometimes that yes things are perhaps underutilised but if it gets to a small number of people and it saves a life it’s good”

Cfa_Eur_05

There appears to be scepticism about the value and appropriateness of the VBIL. It may be that this arises from a lack of a clear understanding of the remit of the service. It may also be because of preference for ‘local’ sources rather than a seemingly remote service. Regardless of the underlying mechanisms, one task facing the VBIL Service is how to draw attention to the provision and how to present it, particularly in relation to alternative sources of information.
The Dissemination of ‘Awareness’ Products

As stated above, VBIL provides three principal awareness products: wallet cards, fridge magnets and a commissioned DVD. Discussion about these awareness products revealed mixed reviews about their effectiveness.

Firstly, there was uncertainty about the VBIL wallet cards and a generally positive view about the magnets. Some interviewees believed the wallet could be effective, while others thought that these artefacts would not be prioritised over the numerous other cards in people’s wallets. In contrast the fridge magnets were generally well received, with interviewees noting that people are familiar with having emergency information on their fridge and that people are likely to add a VBIL magnet if they had one. One interviewee recalled that they might have a VBIL magnet on their fridge, while another recalled that they might have previously seen a VBIL wallet card:

“Yes, that’s always good. I think just about everybody has magnets on their fridge, yes. It’s just one of those - it could be one of those genuine moments when you need that information and you can go and grab it easily, yes”

Cfa_Eur_01

and:

“Yes I’d say fridge magnets are great with emergency stuff, yes”

Cfa_Eur_02

These types of artefacts are a familiar and frequently used medium for such information:

“Everybody’s talking about the new connected generation, but paper still works well. Fridge magnets still work beautifully”

Cfa_Eur_06

Fridge magnets are convenient:

“Fridge magnets can be a very handy way of doing it”

Cfa_Eur_1415
So, overall, there is a positive endorsement of this type of artefact; it is convenient and appropriate:

“Facilitator: Do you think most people would be receptive to having a little fridge magnet with the information…
Interviewee: Yes, yes, yes”

Fridge magnets are generally seen as an artefact that many in the community are familiar with and moreover that they often signify something important. Yet, they also should be placed in context, alongside the way populations learn about disaster type events, and the way localities are organised and operate. As observed:

“By the way I think those things - I think fridge magnets - and I made comment before about brochures and I worried about how effective they are - but I think fridge magnets actually - people actually do stick them on their fridge sometimes. With something as important as that if they receive that through some sort of group that they hold in high regard and it’s said to them you need to go home and make sure you put this on your fridge and know these numbers, have them off in your head and you need to - you know whatever else the message is. People are enforcing it”

This positive assessment of these types of artefacts was complemented by extensive reference to other pathways for learning about disaster related matters. Interviewees in Euroa consistently mentioned a number of pathways for effectively raising awareness of the VBIL service and distributing awareness products:

- Through local newspapers
- Through television and radio
- Though organisations to which residents belong, including service and social groups and sporting clubs
• Through community touch-points and places with high foot traffic, such as the Shire office, the newsagency, the post office, the library, the supermarket, and cafes. This could include placing awareness products on counters

• Making awareness products available in service stations, community information centres, and accommodation providers in order to reach visitors and tourists

• Via letterbox-drops or mail outs of information and awareness products (e.g. a flier with a magnet attached). There are several limitations with this method. Besides the costs associated with a large-scale mail out, information might be discarded as junk mail. Personalised mail (for example, accompanying rates notices) would reduce this possibility, but retains the problem of cost.

• The distribution of information from stalls was commonly cited as a potential strategy. For example, the monthly Euroa farmers market includes a community marquee available to anyone wishing to distribute information or fundraise. In addition, it was proposed that a manned table set up in the main street at a busy time of the week is an effective way to reach a large number of community members.

• A less tangible but significant avenue for information in the community is word of mouth. This could result naturally from the above dissemination pathways if information is perceived to be interesting and/or important.

• Through the local CFA at events, during residential consultations and so on

While it would appear appropriate that the disaster agencies, such as the CFA are actively engaged in bringing attention to the VBIL type service, reservations were expressed about the appropriateness of such engagement. One participant observed that community engagement is not necessarily a motivating factor for CFA volunteers:
“The problem you’ve got is a lot of the CFA staff, for example, around here, the regional guys are put the wet stuff on the hot stuff guys and they’re not about dealing with nana’s and their problems”

Cfa_Eur_03

Another CFA volunteer noted that the use of CFA brigade members to disseminate information needs to be carefully considered:

“I think it’s - a lot of people want to join the fire brigade to be a part of the community. Some people join to go to fires. I don’t know if anyone wants to be there simply and solely to pass on information like that though. We definitely in our - indirectly we pass on the community safety information when your neighbour sticks his head over the fence and says, am I okay to burn a pile of rubbish in the backyard? No better not, it’s a bit windy. There’s indirectly, without even realising you’re just passing on the message. It might prevent something, as opposed to having a brigade door knock 1000 homes and tell them about a phone number. I think that’s a bit beyond any - well it might be okay for some but I don’t think it would suit our brigade. It’s a big time commitment”

Cfa_Eur_17

Another interviewee stressed that CFA members are willing to engage in community education if they think it is worthwhile:

“If they believe that it’s valuable and that it's worthwhile, they'll do it for nothing with vigour, but it's got to be meaningful. A sense of value.

Facilitator 1: Can you say some more about that?

Interviewee: About being meaningful? They've got to believe that it's not just this bloody nonsense of occupational health and safety and bureaucracy gone mad, and that really it's going to happen. So they’ve got to believe that the initiative is meaningful, i.e. it will work; it’s not going to cost an arm and a leg; and it’s not just being done to satisfy some person down in head office who can tick the box with OH&S. They walk on hot coals. We've had hundreds of thousands of volunteers for ever, but we can't afford to piss off volunteers anymore.

Facilitator 1: So again, I don't want to put words in your mouth...
Interviewee: It helps.
Facilitator 1: So they've got to see some sense of benefit to the community?
Interviewee: Absolutely. Not just change or innovation for innovation's sake. It's got to be meaningful for the community”

The significance of these observations is that local CFA brigades may be an appropriate pathway for the dissemination of VBIL artefacts and information about the service, but that the local brigades may not always have the capacity to deliver such services. The CFA after all is a fire service and community engagement is only one part of a complex array of responsibilities for this voluntary organisation. What might work for one locality brigade may not work for another. Volunteer personnel and the degree to which their capacities are stretched may differ across localities.

For engaged community members, as residents seeking to learn and understand, the situation can be different. One resident suggested that the kinds of people and methods used to disseminate bushfire-related information heavily influence the effectiveness of such messages:

“Okay, we've - I know we've had a couple of representatives from the - after Black Saturday when there was very high community awareness about it. We've had the CFA chuffing around, talking to people. Dare I say it, what the message was coming across was very repetitive. I think it lost - this is not a personal opinion - it lost impact because of its sheer methodology of the way in which it was put across. It wasn't put - it was put across by CFA members and they may be very passionate about it, but they're not presenters. They're not professional presenters. Something put together with somebody who is a professional presenter would make a hell of a lot more impact than saying, oh look… can you go - you are aware of it, will you go and talk to your guys about this? But - falls by the wayside”
Consideration thus should be given to both the message and how the message is presented. One further possibility that is in planning is the presentation of an informational DVD.

**The VBIL DVD**

As noted, the VBIL team have commissioned an informational DVD that highlights and explains the VBIL service. The question is how should it be distributed?

Many interviewees were sceptical of the effectiveness of distributing VBIL information DVDs, commenting that it is unlikely that community members would play such a DVD in their own homes. The main reasons offered were lack of motivation or interest to make the effort:

“DVD - I get them from the Meat and Livestock Association, I get them from the Victorian Farmer's Markets. They just don't get played”  

Cfa_Eur_06

One problem is that broad unsolicited distribution of this type of artefact does not mean that it will be watched, discussed and acted upon. The VBIL DVD will be one of many that people receive:

“Giving away freebies, especially DVDs or whatever, the - my thoughts on that are that people will take anything for free, but whether they use it to widen their knowledge on a certain thing, I’m not too sure about that either. I see a lot of freebies and people take them, but I’m not sure they use them”  

Cfa_Eur_09

For many, they are unlikely to watch it, no matter how important it is for safety and security:

“I wouldn’t bother to watch a DVD. That’s the sort of stuff we’re interested in learning. Can you say some more? We don’t watch a lot of movies and stuff like that, and I just wouldn’t bother putting it in the computer”
For many, this DVD would become one of many that are handed out. They would not ‘bother’ to watch it:

“I can assure you I won’t be watching it. I don’t think people watch them. I don’t know, I wouldn’t be bothered watching it”

This very general sentiment should be addressed.

Furthermore, some interviewees noted the age profile of the community as a hindrance to awareness products in this format. Specifically, some older residents may not be comfortable with the technology and may not own DVD players:

“We still have a lot of people who don’t even have a computer here and a lot of people that don’t even know how to use a computer”

As noted elsewhere not all the population have the technology to play DVDs. In some cases, and particularly amongst the elderly this technology may have limited use in their households:

“A problem too though is a lot of oldies don’t have access to DVD players and things like that. People don’t have access to technology”

A representative from one community group pondered the use of technology among the group’s members:

“They’re not computer literate, they just don’t, and they’re not interested. Yeah, they’ve probably got a TV and they may have a DVD, they may, but they’re not of that ilk and not of that ilk”

Despite this scepticism about whether or not a DVD distributed to individuals would be watched, there was also a view that it had value, but within specific contexts. Firstly, interviewees suggested a number of locations with high
community traffic where such DVDs could be made available, probably with positive outcomes. These places include:

- Post office
- Newsagency
- Library
- Council offices
- Community Centres (e.g. Community Education Centre)
- Doctor’s surgery
- Banks

Other suggestions included proposals that VBIL DVDs be made available at stalls staffed by people knowledgeable of the service. Places where such stalls would receive high traffic include:

- Local markets and festivals
- The main street during busy times of the week

Several participants suggested that a VBIL DVD would be most useful in situations where there is an audience:

“I mean DVDs are really handy, particularly - I mean it'd work really well in that school environment example and other environments where people are made to watch that sort of thing”

Cfa_Eur_03

Another potential pathway for distributing DVDs in Euroa is via key community groups with a spread of influence, such as Rotary, CWA, U3A, and so on. Several interviewees suggested distributing or playing these DVDs at group gatherings and observed that this may be most effective if accompanying a short talk and/or Q&A from an informed representative of the service.

**Multi-Hazards**

In addition to risk of bushfires, Euroa is prone to two kinds of flooding which have distinct implications for emergency management. The susceptibility of
the town to floods stems from its location between the Seven and Castle Creeks. These floods can take the form of flash floods and rising river levels. Flash flooding can occur when there is heavy rain in close proximity to the town. Such an event produces rapid but relatively brief rises in water levels. In contrast, prolonged rain spanning the catchment area in which the town is located can produce a slower rise in water levels continuing long after a rain event has passed. Flood levies have helped to reduce the impact of these events on the town.

Other hazards in the area include car and heavy vehicle accidents on the Hume Highway. A number of interviews spoke of such hazards that as local residents they might seek information about. With the possibility of spilled loads and fuel from freight vehicles, some of these accidents also have the potential to become hazmat incidents.

Common information sources on other hazards include the BOM website, as well as local information sources, including the shire office, the police, the SES and CFA:

“Facilitator: So do you think if people were to - during an event like you mentioned, the floods, community members, where would they go to get information?
Interviewee: Here they generally ring the police or they contact the shire if the shire is open and there is generally an emergency line available”

Cfa_Eur_09

There appears to be established ways of learning about hazards, often involving a range of agencies and sources:

“How or where do people seek information during a flood?
Interviewee: Council. Council are generally the real - or the CFA. You know, the agencies. SES, CFA, Shire, they do. There is now an automated warning system that’s been installed”

Cfa_Eur_10
In the case of flood people are also inclined to simply ‘go and have a look’ at the creek to see how high the water has risen. One interviewee recalls the process in place for reaching affected residents during a flood event:

“Well I can probably talk about floods, because we’ve had more of those than what we’ve had with the fire. We’ve had certain areas of the town that’s been threatened. The local SES, fire brigade, police, all combine to set up an awareness and we actually then look at - people that are volunteering to assist, they’re briefed on the situation, what the expectation is, what we can expect for the final peaks and then we go out and door knock the areas that could be affected or going to be affected. We try to assist our older folk if they need to go to a refuge or something like that, we assist to get them there, because it's vitally important we protect our older people”

Cfa_Eur_09

Thus, in an area such as Euroa, residents often experience and are aware of a range of possible hazard situations, including bushfire. In this context, interviewees generally responded positively to the concept of a multi-hazard information service:

“We should have somewhere where we can go for all of these things so, sort of like having 000 you know you go to them for those things always so there should be a centre where you can go to for any of the other things that can crop up”

Cfa_Eur_1213

Residents were generally positive about multi-hazard warnings and simplified access numbers and contact points to learn about hazards and potential disaster situations:

“Yes, good one: love it, love the idea. As somebody who is now - ten years ago it probably wasn’t as much of a worry to me and being out on the farm I didn’t feel the isolation, but at my age now, which is 66, knowing that your physical ability is less than what it was ten years ago, I want something that’s easy to remember and if that’s how I feel then anybody that’s older than me is going to feel similarly”

Cfa_Eur_14
Although the response to the concept of a multi-hazard information line was generally positive, a small number of interviewees did have some reservations. There fall into two categories. Firstly, there is some concern that such a service could not cope with the demand associated with fielding calls on a range of hazards:

“[A]nd the flags that go up - if you can't cope with the bushfires, why would you be expanding yourself to other hazards as well? ...It'll spike, and it'll all spike at the same time. Murphy. It'll all happen. There'll be massive hailstorms in Melbourne, closing roads and damaging buildings, as Rutherglen's burning”

Cfa_Eur_06

Concerns were expressed about the practicality and manageability of multi-hazard arrangements:

“Facilitator: If there was an information line, like the Bushfire Information Line, an all hazards service where people could find out about…
Interviewee: Yeah. Well, that's great but…
Facilitator: Do you think that would…
Interviewee: Yeah, it's great but how much can they handle when there's 100 people ringing in one go, you know? If there's a fire up in the hills then of course, you know how it works, you might have 100 people who are affected up there and you've 500 people down here wanting to know what's going on up there. So you've got 600 people ringing. The people who have really got to know are blocked out by the people down here who are just being sticky noses. That's how it works. Or even the people in Melbourne who want to know what's happening around their relatives. So very difficult. I think radio and things like that work in that sense. The ABC Radio especially, alright, that works”

Cfa_Eur_20

There is thus a perception by some that such a service is not needed, with current structures and (local) information sources in place during other emergencies such as flood being adequate.

The implication of this review of multi-hazards and the associated arrangements is that while broadly welcomed, a number were sceptical of
the practicality of such arrangements. The overall preference is for clear messages and information presented by established communication pathways and local touch points. Further there is a clear recognition of the dangers of complexity in service arrangements and information provision.

**Euroa Locality Recommendations**

1. A generally vague awareness of the VBIL and when and why to use the service means that an awareness campaign should be coupled with educational messages on the service. The VBIL DVD has the potential to fulfil this need.

2. There is a lack of understanding about the remit and purpose of the VBIL service. In part, this situation comes about because of the way in which there is an understandable confidence on the local and the immediate, rather than services that are seemingly remote, and may appear detached from the specifics of the locality itself. It is recommended that the VBIL service (and any alternative to current arrangements) present careful and frequent accounts of the remit, limits and value of the service.

3. Taking into account the potential reluctance or inability of people to play an information DVD themselves, a number of dissemination pathways are available where community members view the DVD playing while going about their day-to-day lives. Places where screens are typically visible to community members and running content include:

   • The library. The Euroa library, for example, has one screen playing inside and another in the window playing to the street. This was the most common pathway proposed by respondents (mentioned by more than half)
   • Council offices
   • Supermarkets, bottle shops
• Service stations
• Pubs
• The cinema, shown prior to films (The Euroa cinema operates Saturday night and Sunday afternoon). This pathway would be limited to digital cinemas (the Euroa cinema is not)
• On community websites

It is recommended that these pathways are examined and appropriate arrangements made to distribute VBIL information through them.

4. An important consideration in playing an information DVD in places such as these is the availability of audio. Some of these screens do not play audio, while others are located in environments that are loud, or where people’s attention is otherwise engaged. For this reason it is recommended that a targeted distribution of the DVD should be considered taking into account the various contexts where DVDs could be used. An additional pathway available is places where groups of people could be shown the DVD. These include:

• Community group gatherings
• CFA gatherings (e.g. Fire Awareness night)
• Schools (that is, to students)

As with distribution of physical copies of the DVD, it is suggested that these screenings would be to maximum benefit if they accompanied an engaging presentation and/or Q&A from an informed representative of the VBIL.

5. It is recommended that VBIL fridge magnets and wallet cards be distributed via the outlets indicated above. Furthermore, because the VBIL number is difficult to recall, it is recommended that screenings of the VBIL DVD be accompanied by the distribution of these artefacts.

6. Consideration should be given to broadcasting the DVD on local television
Part B: Koroit

Koroit is a small town close to the Victorian south west coast, 17km North West of Warrnambool and 278km west of Melbourne. The town is situated on the northern slopes of an extinct volcano, Tower Hill. Koroit remains the centre of a potato growing district, although intensive cropping has declined in comparison to earlier years. Grazing and dairy farming have become increasingly popular. A key source of employment in Koroit is the Murray Goulburn dairy processing plant located on the edge of the urban area of the town. Other sources of employment are food preparation, education and residential care services industries (ABS 2011).

The township of Koroit is expanding and shifting the character of the town to an expanding urban conurbation. Although the areas surrounding Koroit are rural, the township itself is becoming urbanised, in that is becoming a residential area for people working in larger nearby towns. Koroit is serviced by a Visitor Information Centre (located in the Koroit Country Bakehouse) and contains a comprehensive array of services and facilities for locals, including child-care, health-care, education and sporting clubs. Koroit’s town centre

Population:
1,958 (State suburb)
8,890 (Statistical Area Level 2 - see map left)

Median Age
40

Median personal weekly income
$569

Families
569

Avg. Children
1.9

Avg. Household size
2.6

Source ABS: Koroit Locality at level SA2 (Moyne West)
along Commercial Street remains the focus for locals and visitors. Many of the public buildings are located along this street, including the Post Office, the police station, municipal buildings. Aside from these public buildings, the 1.2km stretch of Commercial Street contains other amenities, such as the veterinary clinic, the newsagent, hotel, pharmacy, bakery, and a number of cafes and take-away businesses. Along Koroit’s High Street are a number of sporting clubs and facilities, including cricket and football ovals, indoor and outdoor bowls and croquet.

The largest annual event is the Irish festival during late April. In November there is an agricultural festival as well as the Tarerer festival which is a celebration of indigenous culture. These two events bring many non-town dwellers into Koroit.

**A Rural-Urban Area**

The population of the area is polarised, with a relatively young population on the one hand, and an ageing population on the other.

**Table 3: Age Profile of Koroit, 2011**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Koroit</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>%</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0-9</td>
<td>273</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>670,854</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>2,772,971</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>10-19</td>
<td>280</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>673,278</td>
<td>12.60</td>
<td>2,776,852</td>
<td>12.9</td>
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<tr>
<td>20-29</td>
<td>178</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>763,777</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td>2,973,909</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39</td>
<td>231</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>755,629</td>
<td>14.20</td>
<td>2,973,913</td>
<td>13.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>15.3</td>
<td>763,564</td>
<td>14.30</td>
<td>3,047,021</td>
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<td>50-59</td>
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<td>14.1</td>
<td>671,548</td>
<td>12.50</td>
<td>2,744,648</td>
<td>12.7</td>
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<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>222</td>
<td>11.4</td>
<td>518,723</td>
<td>9.70</td>
<td>2,125,435</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
<td>197</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>536,669</td>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>2,092,970</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median Age</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: ABS 2011*
This profile can be attributed to the history of the town as a centre for a dispersed rural population as well as the recent movement of new residents into the area, following the opening up of housing estates.

**Locality Interviews**

The principle source of data comes from a set of interviews with key informants in the town and adjacent area. A total of 25 participants were interviewed across 13 interview sessions and 2 focus groups as per the table below. Interviewees were sourced from local service providers, various community groups and other key informants.

**Table 4: Breakdown of Koroit Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th># of sessions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint interviews</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group 2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>15</strong></td>
<td><strong>25</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**An Expanding Town**

The town of Koroit is located in the midst of an established rural and agricultural area. It is also close to Warrnambool, a regional centre with a population of 28,413 (at the state suburb level), with a strong industrial base. Over the last few years, housing estates have been opened up around Koroit, part of the urban–rural belt that defines the town.

The town population has increased by 12 per cent in the five year period between 2006 and 2011 (ABS 2006 and 2011). During that period, the age profile of the inward migrants to Koroit was such that 29.8 per cent of the migrants were aged 0 to 9 years with a further 8.5 per cent in the 10 to 19 year age bracket. Further, 42 per cent were in the 20 to 49 age group, suggesting major inward family migration to the town. This data suggests that
the majority of new residents may be young families with young children often moving from Warrnambool.

This recomposition of the town is part of a planned expansion by Moyne Shire (Moyne Warrnambool Rural Housing and Settlement Strategy, 2010). Attention has been given to areas zoned residential and areas of rural living proximate to the town itself. Increasingly there is an incentive for families to move into the Koroit area for life style and economic reasons, including a combination of affordable house and land prices, and proximity to employment opportunities. As one informant stated:

“There’s not much vacant land left in Warrnambool for the purpose of development. So people are starting to look now, particularly younger people and they can come to a place like - and we’re only 20 minutes from Warrnambool so it's an easy commute. If they work in Warrnambool, it’s an easy commute every day in and out. A lot of people do that.”

Cfa_Kor_04

Likewise, another interviewee discussed the town’s appeal to new residents in similar terms:

“Interviewee: You can get a little piece of land around your block, perhaps have a house and a bit of land and it’s a much better lifestyle for children and it’s so easy to commute into Warrnambool too. Most of the people in our road they work in Warrnambool and they take their children to school in Warrnambool. So they don’t really have much of a…

Interviewee: To do with the town”

Cfa_Kor_FG01

While the idea of living in Koroit and commuting to Warrnambool is not a recent development, the opening up of the estates increases the numbers who are commuting.

One of the other appeals of Koroit is its small town atmosphere. The shops along Commercial Street were mentioned as an attraction:
“I mean it’s a great little community and we’ve got most facilities that you need for day-to-day living like the supermarket and the pharmacy, the bakery. Most of the shops, [although] we’ve got a post office although that’s under a bit of a cloud at the moment.”

Cfa_Kor_04

But change is underway. The post office is about to be sold and this will impact upon the residents of Koroit. At present, the Post Office is an established touch-point for residents and this may not remain the case.

For residents, describing the town is no longer as straightforward as had been the case in the past. It is clearly a town that is located in a rural hinterland, but it is also a town that is one of three large towns in the municipality:

“Well actually we call that one of our urban type set ups, Koroit, because it’s a township zone. So yeah in the township zone itself, like obviously outside it’s rural. But it’s one of our bigger towns of the Shire. Like we only have Port Fairy, Koroit and Mortlake are our three big large towns.”

Cfa_Kor_01

This feature of the town is increasingly emphasised.

Further, Koroit is now seen by some as undergoing a process of urbanisation. As noted:

“Yeah, well I think in the mid-80s it was - look, I don’t know this 100 per cent but from what I understand it was changed from rural to rural urban and to both. From what I understand there’s going to be a change if there hasn’t already been a change to just urban.”

Cfa_Kor_04

Despite the increasing urbanisation of Koroit, it retains its sense of a small rural town. Reflecting on what it was like to live in Koroit, for example, one long-established resident said:

“It’s a fairly close knit community. The majority of people know each other or know of each other.”
Meanwhile, another described Koroit as being generally “welcoming to newcomers” (Cfa_Kor_23). This feature of the town was supported by relative newcomers to the town:

“Yeah, it’s true. We’ve found it a very engaging community. As I said, we’ve only lived here 13 years. Many people in Koroit are third and fourth generation Koroit people. So I mean we’re newcomers relatively to them. But we’ve fitted in fairly well. My wife does Tai Chi; she’s got some wonderful friends. She goes walking on a Thursday and all that sort of thing. I mean it’s a great little community and we’ve got most facilities that you need for day-to-day living like the supermarket and the pharmacy, the bakery”

Another interviewee mentioned the relatively short commute to Warrnambool (15 minutes), suggesting that geographical proximity meant newcomers from Warrnambool often knew people from both localities (Cfa_Kor_23).

Such impressions and experiences have implications for bushfire and disaster preparedness. While there will remain a small percentage of new-comers who are from urban areas and potentially unaware of bushfire risk, many will have lived in the broader region for a long time, albeit in an urbanised suburb of Warrnambool. It may be that these new residents also share the perspectives of the longer term residents of Koroit and its environs.

In addition, residents hold views about the way this closeness can be associated, with assumptions that it is relatively easy to move between the two places. Despite the proximity to Warrnambool, some see an inadequate infrastructure between the two towns (in addition to the impending closure of the post office):

“Interviewee 2: If they don’t drive, they’ve got to catch the bus. The buses are not that frequent. Instead of them being able to spend 10 minutes ducking down to the local post office, they might be away four hours just to pay...
Interviewee 1: It'll be the whole day. There's three runs into town.

Interviewee 2: They'll have to catch the bus.

Interviewee 1: Three runs home.

Interviewee 2: Yeah, catch the bus in the morning, spend the whole day in Warrnambool and then catch the bus home in the evening. It's just ridiculous and I just - bureaucrats just leave me cold, I'm afraid"

Travel between the two towns can be difficult, if public transport is used. In addition, there has been some relocation of key services from Koroit to Warrnambool, such as postal services. These types of arrangements tend to reaffirm Koroit as a satellite town of Warrnambool. What this means for the perception of disaster risk is unclear.

**Risk Perception**

Fires are a feature of life in and around Koroit. Yet, there is a perception that they are not a particularly strong risk; the residents in this locality held a collective view that they were living in a relatively safe place, where the fire and disaster agencies could deal with any problems that may emerge. But, it is also an area with a fire history. In 1983, forty kilometres to the east the 1983 Ash Wednesday fires burnt out parts of Framlingham. In addition, there have been fires in and around the Tower Hill reserve, just south of the township. On 19 February 2009, two hectares of grass and scrub burnt at Tower Hill. This was the second fire in the area in three weeks. These small fires appear to be a feature of the area.

Koroit has experienced a number of fires events in recent years. In January 2009 fire claimed a house in Koroit (ABC News, 2009). In late 2010 around 100 firefighters battled a blaze that broke out in the Murray Goulburn Farm and Hardware supplies in Commercial Rd, Koroit (Hargrave, 2010). With potentially toxic smoke resulting from the various chemicals in the store, nearby residents were notified by text message to stay inside with windows closed and air-conditioners off. CFA deputy regional officer Steve Giddens commented that: ‘As fires go it is a fairly significant fire in the district’ (Hosking, 2010). With
this recent experience, it is likely that Koroit residents are conscious of structure fires.

On 2nd January 2012, a day of high fire danger with temperatures in excess of 40 degrees, around 100 fires were fought around the state of Victoria, with the largest burning 10 hectares on Woolsthorpe Rd in Koroit before being extinguished by 17 tankers and two water-bombing aircraft (Thompson & Craven, 2012). By the beginning of February 2012, there had been nine fires in the area around Koroit in one month, with a serial arsonist believed to be responsible (ABC News, 2012). This was followed in March 2012 by three suspicious fires in the space of four hours in the area around Koroit on a day of extreme fire danger (Collins & Thomson, 2012). The arsonist (or arsonists) believed responsible for the spate of fires has not been caught.

As stated previously, Koroit is comprised of both rural farming land and an expanding urbanised centre. Risk perception appears to differ accordingly: with rural landowners, and related residents expressing a view that grassfires can occasionally be a problem and those in the urbanised areas expressing no concern about bushfire or grassfire. The latter mentioned structure fires as a concern.

The only perceived bushfire risk was from the Tower Hill area. Due to the topography, and layout of farmland, however, fires from Tower Hill are not seen as a threat to the town itself. The following exchange illustrated this perception:

“Interviewee: That Tower Hill right there though. That’s a really big fire hazard. So much growth.

Interviewee: Yes but it’s contained though.

Interviewee: Yes it’s contained in the park.

Interviewee: It goes uphill. It’s fast as fast.

Interviewee: It’s got to go over the lake first. There was a big bushfire in there a few years ago.

Interviewee: Yes well that’s where I would think our hazard is.

Interviewee: No I wouldn’t be worried about that either.

Interviewee: There’s people close to...
Interviewee: I think...

Interviewee: We were all - like we were all up around the lake watching it. It was amazing. It was like you had this bird’s eye view of this bushfire that was happening in Tower Hill. You could see the helicopter coming in and dumping the water on the fire. It was great. It was the most entertainment we had in Koroit for years. It was all contained in there…"

Cfa_Kor FG02

So, while there is a memory of bushfires they are not seen as a problem. Quite the contrary bushfires are a spectacle for these residents. Clearly there is a view that if there is a bushfire then it is and will be contained. Such perceptions are contradicted by history, where the 1983 bushfire did go beyond the park and rural residents did lose houses and related property.

The prevailing perception from residents particularly those located in the rural areas around the town is that there is more of a threat of grassfires than bushfires. Indeed, the combination of topography, fuel structures and fire history suggests that this is a valid perception, at least with reference to the frequency of grassfires compared with bushfire.

As stated:

“Yeah, it's more grassfire around, yes, yes. We don't have much bush in the Shire. Especially around Koroit it's just definitely all grass.”

Cfa_Kor 01

There is a view that Tower Hill is not part of the Shire, or at least a problem for the Shire. And again:

“Interviewee: I live on the outskirts of Koroit just on the edge of Koroit. I suppose a bushfire could be like a grassfire, probably more, could affect me in the paddocks.

Facilitator: That's what we've heard, quite a bit. It's less of a bushfire but more...

Interviewee: Yes grassfire probably”

Cfa_Kor FG02
The collective memory tends to downplay the threat and danger of bushfire. Indeed, even grassfire can initially be seen as manageable. In one exchange, the interviewees reflected:

“Interviewee: I never ever thought about having a bushfire near my house. I think - you know if a grass fire came well I’d be there with my hose.
Interviewee: Do you really?
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewee: Yes not as serious. That's probably how a lot of people...
Interviewee: I never worried about it at all.
Interviewee: I used to feel like that until you - I don't know in those days where it's 40 degrees and that wind's coming at you. I don't think you could stand in front of anything with a hose like that”

Insofar as fire is a threat then it is from grassfire not bushfire.

Nonetheless, while there may be a relative frequency with grassfire, it is seen as a manageable matter. With a history of farming and land management and a responsive CFA there is a view that grassfire threats can be dealt with quickly and effectively.

Long-standing residents, particularly with a farming background felt that they were already equipped with the necessary experience to deal with the fire risks and related hazards. This led to views about the importance of a strong local CFA brigade:

“But I'm coming from a farmer's background, we're very much CFA driven.”

These rural residents, and town residents with a rural and long-term town background, thought they had the experience and capacity to deal with disaster and hazards. It is also possible that the perception of risk in Koroit was mitigated by the high regard these people had for the local CFA brigade. One participant spoke of the confidence they had of the brigades in the area, but also of how those familiar with life in a rural setting would readily mobilise in the event of a fire:
“They're all there, if anything happens down there……they have probably four or five brigades there in no time. See it's that closely - we're closely settled … so it's not far to go if something happens. If we're here and they see something, there's a fire somewhere and someone's haystack or something has gone up, we all know, we see all the cars going to that area and you go with them. So they're very good here at defending fires.”

Cfa_Kor_01

The brigades are responsive and ‘you go down with them’. There is a practice and culture of dealing with this type of problem, quickly and effectively, often involving many in the locality. As stated, it is the brigade and the locals:

“Interviewee 1: Oh they’re very good, the brigades around here really know what it's all about. It's get there as quick as you can, before it gets out of hand. So...
Interviewee 2: I think they're all country people who run the land themselves, so they understand a situation can get out of hand if they don't get on it straight away. So I think that's one big help, it mostly would be land owners that are in the brigade”

Cfa_Kor_11_12

Indeed, the cultural outlook is framed in terms of ‘country people who run the land themselves’. They are self-reliant and both have an interest and a history of dealing with fire.

Grassfires were not infrequent and not seen as major events. As stated about a recent spate of grassfires:

“Interviewee: We had a firebug around the area last year, so that was why we had so many extra fires around.
Interviewee: Yes we had lots of fires out here last summer.
Interviewee: Grassfires mostly.
Interviewee: Yes”

Cfa_Kor_FG02
The view is that these rural residents know what they are doing, work together and are prepared for disaster and possible hazards. They know each other, learn from each other and have established approaches to such events. Corroborative evidence comes from our interviews with subject matter experts (CFA:ECP Report 1). A sense of resilience and self-reliance was expressed:

“Interviewee: For what you’re doing, it is quite interesting. So, say, let’s take Horsham. As far as emergencies go, Horsham would have to be one of the most resilient little groups we’ve...
Facilitator: Do you know why that is?
Interviewee: I can surmise.
Facilitator: Yeah, a theory’s fine”

Cfa_Ecp_05

The rural residents are used to dealing with emergencies and they appear quite self-sufficient.

In contrast to the long-term, and largely self-reliant farming community are new-comers to the town and area. The question is whether in the process of social assimilation these new residents also adopt the established attitudes and outlooks towards risk perception. Many spoke about the relative safety that living in town afforded:

“We have a few clients who live rurally out on a farm so they’d be more at risk. Basically the ones inside the town community I think, other than the smoke, we should be fairly safe. Heat’s the other one that we look at as well.”

Cfa_Kor_09

Moreover the terrain was not seen as a threat, compared with localities such as Kinglake, which was mentioned:

“Interviewee 1: I’d be hard ...to see us like the likes of Kinglake and these places that they couldn’t get out of it. Here we’re different where I don’t think that would happen to us here, because there’s too many paddocks that are green in between, if there’s a fire comes it’ll burn itself out...
Interviewee 2: Also you’ve got lots of roads to get out on.
Interviewee 1: Yeah, well they jump roads of course.
Interviewee 2: Yes I know that but because you haven’t got trees or anything, like they do at Kinglake and [unclear]. We don’t have those trees along the road that are going to cause that fire problem.
Interviewee 1: The bushland.
Interviewee 2: Yes, the bush type of land. So you could escape pretty easily I think in those situations. That would go for most areas around here because there’s no thick bushland”

Thus, in addition, to the relative security of the town this is not seen as an area that is enclosed by bush or where there are few roads in and out.

Moreover there is a view that this is an area that is prepared. Not only are the brigades responsive, but the area around the town is kept clean and potential hazards removed. Hence:

“Interviewee 1: But it’s not like the bush, it’s not as - it can be very severe on a bad day, a very hot north windy day, and goes very quickly through grass, fencing. Pretty well preserved around the town of Koroit. There’s usually a lot of cutting and cleaning up and everything before so there hasn’t been any fires.
Interviewee 2: No, we’ve had house fires…”

Rather than bushfire and grassfire, the possible fire problem in the town is ‘structure fires’. As stated:

“Well it all depends, Here, it’d have to be a house fire or something”

Hence, there is an appreciation of fire as a hazard, but one that is not seen as pressing or immediate.

The overall perception of residents in this area is that fire is not a major threat. There is a strong view that bushfires are not a problem here. While there have
been bushfires in the past they are viewed as infrequent and most likely to be contained to the Tower Hill area. They were not seen as a threat to the rural or urban areas that make up the locality of Koroit. While grassfires are a relative frequent occurrence they were not seen as a major problem. The brigades and the rural residents could deal with them quickly and effectively, even when there is a firebug at work. On reflection some interviewees spoke of the possible danger of house fire.

**Plans and Preparation**

In these circumstances plans and preparation for bushfire are unlikely to receive much attention. Service providers attempt to encourage and promote community-level planning for bushfires. A picture, however, emerges that despite service providers’ efforts, there is a lack of engagement at the individual community member level.

One interviewee, for example, talked about bushfire planning for one vulnerable group in the Shire of Moyne. The interviewee described difficulties in engaging family members at the planning level:

> “I mean I've sent out 500 fire plans for people and I don't think one person has completed the fire plan, because they're just very, I don't know, well I think they just have an attitude that it won't probably happen to them. But I mean it will. I mean this coming fire season, well this coming summer is supposed to be a really high fire danger, so I mean to be honest I sit there from November to March just praying that nothing happens because I'm scared that it will happen, and I daresay it will happen”

*CFA_Kor_10*

Given that there appears to be a widespread view that there is little danger from bushfire in this locality then it is not surprising that these measures by the CFA and other agencies meet with little response.

There is evidence that few households in the area have personal or household fire plans. Of the 17 participants interviewed, only a small number discussed personal bushfire plans. None of these had a written fire plan. One
had no plan at all because there was no perceived risk. Most with ‘plans’ talked about vague intentions with little mention of specific details. It would appear that this is a locality where there is a broad disengagement form preparation and engagement in relation to bushfire preparedness.

People had a vague idea of what they might do if they had to deal with a bushfire. One farmer stated:

“Facilitator: Have you ever had to make a bushfire plan or anything?
Interviewee: Well we sort of did have, that we would go to the dairy if we had a fire because that was the biggest clear space that we had and it wasn’t a timber one. It was a [unclear] stone. But not to get in the trough”

Cfa_Kor_FG01

Others also spoke of what they would do in the event of a fire in close proximity to their homes. The common response amongst this group of residents is to leave in such an event, although again these plans were discussed in loose terms:

“Interviewee: I’d be out of there.
Interviewee: Then, you’d put your plan into place before you’re going to ring anyone. You just pack up the kids and go, yes.
Interviewee: If it’s that close you’d be gone.[…]
Interviewee: My plan is just to go when it’s too close.
Interviewee: …just to get your things and go then you’re not going to ring I guess.
Interviewee: I always was going to stay until Black Saturday. I’m just getting out of there now.
Facilitator: What would trigger your plan? What is the trigger and would it be…
Interviewee: It would be the radio telling me how close it is. It would be people telling us to evacuate. That would trigger my plan. If I could see flames from my house I would be triggered to…
Interviewee: Time to go.
Interviewee: I’d just see smoke, I’m out of there.
Interviewee: Really?
Interviewee: Well there’s - smoke travels so far though.
Interviewee: If you knew it was a bushfire or a grass fire, no way, I'd be out of there.
Interviewee: Me too. In the other direction. I wouldn't risk it”

While the discussants in this case were all female, it is not clear whether this was a gendered response, although evidence from elsewhere suggests that this might be the case (see Tyler et al., in press)

Even those with a long history of bushfire experiences also spoke about planning in loose terms:

Interviewee 1: “But we're told here always to prepare around here you know your - keep your paddocks clean and...
Interviewee 2: Keep the high grass down, the grass.
Interviewee 1: We've had no major fires within I don't know how many kilometres you'd say, probably four or five kilometres of the town I don't think, that I can remember. Been here a long time but yeah we've been very lucky, a few house fires but that's natural, electrical or whatever”

Given the lack of risk perception and vagueness of fire plans, it is not surprising that few interviewees talked about accessing bushfire preparedness literature:

“We get the information pack. I don’t read it all.”

Thus, there appears to be a general view that the town is safe, although there is also a recognition that grassfires do occur. Bushfires were not mentioned in relation to planning.

With respect to sources of information during bushfires, local radio and fire agency web-sites emerged most strongly:
“Interviewee: I always just go on the CFA website when I see smoke.
Interviewee: Yes or listen to your local radio.
Interviewee: Yes, which I used a lot last summer coming back and forth to Koroit.
Interviewee: Yes we had [unclear] with fire.
Interviewee: We had lots of fires around.
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewee: Yes. We were out here the same day I think and there was - we were both checking.
Facilitator: Sorry, what?
Interviewee: We had a fire bug around the area last year, so that was why we had so many extra fires around.
Interviewee: Yes we had lots of fires out here last summer.
Interviewee: Grass fires mostly.
Interviewee: Yes.
Interviewee: So we were constantly on the CFA website checking about what was happening”

Cfa_KorFG02

In the situation where there were frequent grassfires, as had been the case in 2011, the radio was listened to and the CFA website checked. ABC radio was frequently mentioned:

“With the radio station - my husband listen’s to the ABC all the time - they give up dates, don’t they?”

Cfa_KorFG01

and,

“Interviewee 1: Oh, it’d come through the radio.
Facilitator: Yeah?
Interviewee 1: Yeah.
Interviewee 2: It will come through the radio, yeah. They always - about every 15 minutes or so it does. It always used to come through the radio before, so it probably still will. Especially when you’re in like - whatever station
you’re on. If you’re on a Melbourne station you’re not going to get it because the fire goes up here. Right, you’re going to have it on a...

Interviewee 3: Local.

Interviewee 2: ...on a local one. That’s where people start ringing up, don’t they? They ring up Tom, Dick and Harry whoever they know - where’s the fire first.

Facilitator: So they telephone each other first, their friends?

Interviewee 2: Well some do.

Interviewee 3: Actually, I think they’ve got that, yeah.

Interviewee 2: I think that came in ages ago.

Interviewee 1: It might be something to do with the country people and not the city people because [laughs]. Yeah.

Facilitator: So you feel that the people in the rural areas are more likely to rely on one another?

Interviewee 1: Yeah.”

The local radio appears to be the medium whereby residents learn about fire events. Once something happens then residents ring each other.

A representative from one local school remarked that parents are encouraged by the school to listen to ABC radio for bushfire information:

“Interviewee: We always put in our newsletter to follow the ABC phone line - radio line.

Facilitator: The radio, yeah.

Interviewee: We always put that in it before summer, as a reminder for parents that this is what you contact, if you’re concerned.”

Overall, radio listening is encouraged and residents listen to the local radio and learn.

The fact that grassfires travel so quickly, places an emphasis on information that can be sourced in a timely fashion. One couple spoke about receiving an alert on the radio (while some distance from home) regarding a fire in
proximity to their property only to call a neighbour and find out that the fire had already been extinguished:

“We were about three quarters of an hour from home, and heard on the radio that the road next door to our farm - there was a fire there. So we pulled over - oh, we’d probably be an hour and a half away. We pulled over, there was an alert, be prepared to evacuate if you are in this - of course, by the time we’d rung up about it, that fire had actually been, was already out....But it was already out, it was already over, before ABC had even got the news that it was happening. So, the radio was a delayed thing. So we need people to - they can't rely on the radio, if it's really, really getting urgent”

Cfa_Kor_02

As noted, there is often an important relation between radio reports and the ability to speak with each other in the area. In this way a comprehensive picture of an event is built up. How people might learn about fire in the long term, however, is not clear.

A further consideration highlighted by the above is that many residents among the commuting population of Koroit may not be at home during a bushfire. This demographic may require different types of information during emergency events (e.g. people may want information about accessibility back to their houses if they wish to defend).

**Communication Pathways**

Historically, as a small, rural farming community, communication pathways follow traditional avenues. These include word of mouth, telephone contact, local media, radio, sporting and social clubs.

The local newspaper (*The Koroit Standard*) was described as a widely read newspaper (Cleland, 2012)
Given the ways in which local newspapers are often key sources of information and awareness in regional localities, it can become a critical communication pathway in such areas.

Alongside, such pathways, active community groups also provide a way of residents learning about the place they live in, ways of dealing with problems and who to contact in a time of emergency. Sporting clubs, for example, bring people from the town and environs together. Sporting clubs were cited as a popular means for newcomers to assimilate into the community. Other service and social groups include Probus, Rotary Club and the Red Cross.

Such groups are not stand alone. As a small community, members of one group were also associated with others.

Even as a rural town which is undergoing change, the main touch points are based in town. Meeting rooms are located around public facilities (e.g. library and sporting grounds around the main Commercial Road in Koroit).

Figure 4: Examples of community touch points, the Koroit Post office, the Local Library
Aside from the more traditional community touch points listed above, the local education system emerged as important in Koroit. This finding is especially important given the recent urbanisation and migration of younger families to the area. Schools encourage the development and use of both formal and informal social networks. Evidence from the interviews suggests the schools are quite pro-active in engaging parents:

“We offer after school community sport programs as well. We’ve got a lot more money into our facilities for activity outside, so we’re trying really hard to - that whole wellbeing. We’re a restorative practices school, so we very much work on children developing resilience, and managing their own behaviours, and building that mutual respect. So, you rarely see children coming into the office to be told off. You see them coming in to work through a problem, and how can we solve this, and make that problem right for them, and what can they use in the future with that. We actually do this with the parents, as well.”

_Cfa_Kor_02_

Schools, thus provide an important venue for developing community cohesiveness.

Equally, festive events often bring people together. A number of local community events were mentioned, including the annual Irish Festival held in late April, the Agricultural Festival, held in October, and CFA Sunday, also held in October.
The Victorian Bushfire Information Line

There was a marked degree of unawareness and uncertainty about VBIL. Although some interviewees had heard of the VBIL service, they were vague what it provides and when it is appropriate to use it. There were also some reservations concerning the use of a centralised information service instead of sourcing information locally.

Some interviewees had heard of the VBIL, including several who had a VBIL magnet on their fridge at home. Nonetheless, comments made by these interviewees highlight the importance of people knowing not only that the VBIL exists, but also having an understanding of what the service offers:

“Facilitator: Have you heard of the Victorian Bush Fire Information Line?
Interviewee 1: I've heard of it but never had anything to do with it.
Facilitator: Are you aware of any of the service that it provides?
Interviewee 2: No, not really”

Members of one of the focus groups also pondered about VBIL. Some wondered what VBIL provides:

“Interviewee: Yes because that’s - I’m not really sure what else they offer.
Interviewee: So what does it provide? Is it just an awareness line? If I ring up and give my address and say there’s smoke all around me, does that then - what do they tell me?”

Even where people had VBIL awareness products they were uncertain of what it might involve and how it might be relevant to them:

“Facilitator: Could I ask what's your awareness of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line?
Interviewee: I’m the same as [name withheld]. I’ve got a magnet on my fridge but I only heard it probably advertised on the radio and stuff. I haven’t heard too much more about it. I suppose I know it's there if I need to call it.
Interviewee: Yes. We’ve had the packages and stuff sent out on how to get a plan ready, how to prepare and get a plan ready. I’ve never rang it.
Interviewee: I don’t know much about it at all.
Interviewee: No I don’t either”

Cfa_Kor_FG02

So people had a degree of awareness, reflected by the magnets. However, as indicated they knew little of VBIL itself.

The question becomes why use VBIL? It is not clear how it should be used, and when:

“Yes and as long as people know what - not only - like as far - I only really know the name and I know I’ve got the number on my fridge, but what actually they do offer. Do you just call when it’s an emergency? Because people are probably unsure. So when it’s an emergency? Do they call when it’s not?”

Cfa_Kor_FG02

This uncertainty and vagueness of response illustrates the importance of educational messages in any awareness campaign of the service in order to inform people about what the service offers and under what circumstances it could help them.

This lack of understanding is a significant obstacle to use of the service:

“But initially, I think it’s got to start with us understanding exactly what it’s about. Exactly what it turns into in a major incident. Exactly does it run all year around because I just don’t know anything about it? Is there 24-7? Does it just run between certain business hours or is it 24 - yeah, I’d have to know every single thing about it first before.”

Cfa_Kor_04

There is a view that because it is unclear what type of service VBIL provides then it will not be used.
A vague awareness of the nature of the service offered is also evident in the misunderstanding that the Victorian Bushfire Information Line is a website. The assumption by some appears to be that VBIL is the CFA website):

“Facilitator: Were you aware of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line?
Interviewee: Yes, I go on there all the time when there’s an emergency, to see where the fires and the state of the fires are. I usually have it in the fire season sitting at the bottom of my computer, so that I can monitor where the fires are. But I don’t actually go on for - I’ve gone on for different bits and pieces of information for my clients.
Facilitator: What about the telephone service?
Interviewee: No, I’m not aware of the telephone service”

and again:

“Facilitator: Now, if an event occurs, how do you think the residents would best use…
Interviewee: Your website? Your…
Facilitator: The Victorian Bushfire Information Line?
Interviewee: …the link - line. Well, I guess they would - I’m not as familiar with the line myself, in particular”

As noted, these misconceptions and lack of understanding may present a barrier to uptake of the service.

A number of interviewees, for example, were unsure of whether they would be speaking with a person if they called the VBIL number. They noted that this concern is typically an important consideration for using the service:

“Well, it’s going to be automated, I think it’s got to be three - just one word - not this do you need to speak to this person, do you need to press one. I honestly believe that you’ve got to wipe that, you’ve got to speak to a person. Do you need an interpreter? Language, is it a flood? Just like when you do when you ring triple 0”
So, questions are raised, but in the context of a local population that has established and for most adequate ways of learning about disaster, and fires in particular, then it is unlikely the service will be used.

In addition, there appears to be a social awareness factor that is not present for other information sources, such as internet and radio. This social awareness plays out in the wishes not to use up resources which may be better left for somebody in more dire circumstances:

“Interviewee: Yes and as long as people know what - not only - like as far - I only really know the name and I know I’ve got the number on my fridge, but what actually they do offer. Do you just call when it’s an emergency? Because people are probably unsure. So when it’s an emergency? Do they call when it’s not?
Interviewee: Or is the smoke so far away you feel like you’re only being a sticky beak for calling, that’s what we’re talking about, tying the lines up. Because I can smell smoke that might be coming from 100kms away or more because that can happen. We had smoke from King Island over here when that was on fire. So it can be a long way away. So you feel like you’re sort of just - I don’t know, being a busy body. Just turn the radio on and hear it on there”

Cfa_Kor_FG02

Choices were made between other sources of information and VBIL.

This uncertainty about VBIL led into reflections regarding the capacity of the call centre. Some prefer sources of bushfire information such as radio and the internet where they are not making any demands on the time or resources of others:

“Interviewee: I’m sort of hesitant - I’d be hesitant to pick up and call the line if there was smoke because you’d think that everyone is calling that line. So whereas you just...
Interviewee: I’d be happier just to get on the internet.
Interviewee: Yes go to the internet or turn on the radio before you’re going to call that line. You’d only call that line if you were at real threat, if it was coming towards you, at a - you know…”
The perception for these residents is that the VBIL should be used only when in immediate danger, and that the resources of the service should be left to help those in such circumstances. As another noted:

“Interviewee: To ring the line rather than turn on a radio? Probably not….. Because I’d be more hesitant like I said because you’d be blocking - I would feel like I’d be blocking the line.
Interviewee: Yes I would too.
Interviewee: I can get that information freely somewhere else. I shouldn’t be on the phone if I’m not in immediate danger I wouldn’t think”

and again:

“[Y]ou don’t want to block the lines for something that might be an emergency. Like there might be someone two kilometres closer to that fire that’s trying to ring and you’re blocking the line or something”

Thus, the barrier presented by perception of a centralised service may be exacerbated in emergency situations where timeliness of information is seen to be critical.

Frequently, interviewees mentioned their dislike towards hearing pre-recorded messages or listening to music. Due to the stated circumstances in which interviewees would use the VBIL service, the importance of quickly speaking with a person is pronounced:

“Interviewee: If you were calling in an emergency you’d definitely want to speak straight to a person not a…
Interviewee: You wouldn’t want to be pressing numbers. I’d just hang up.
Interviewee: Yes, if you got that you’d just hang up, yes.
Interviewee: Especially if you were panicked, like [name withheld] just said, you don’t call it until late.
Facilitator: How critical would that be for you?
Interviewee: Pretty critical. I think I would probably hang up if it wasn’t.”
Facilitator: If it wasn’t a person on the…
Interviewee: Yes, if I was near…
Interviewee: If you’re at the point where you’re making a phone call, you’re at the point where you’re pretty concerned anyway.
Interviewee: Yes, you’re checking whether - how close it is”

One interviewee observed that, due to these perceptions and the resulting hesitancy to ring the VBIL service, it is important for information material on the VBIL to reassure people that they can call the number simply to access information, and not only during an emergency:

“Yes, I guess it’s like I say, it’s just being made aware that it’s okay to call it. If you see smoke and you’re concerned, it’s okay to call that line to find out more about it”

Consistent with some themes revolving around risk perception, there is also some evidence of tensions between the local and the central with respect to attitudes about the VBIL:

“If you put the bushfire line up here, they might read it. If you put the CFA down there - but if put the CFA - if Port Fairy CFA up the top, that’s what they’d ring. Because to them that’s closer, it’s community, they’re us. Do you understand that?”

The ‘centrality’ of the service might not, however, be the issue as such.

What might be more important is a perception that a centralised service is less likely to answer a call and provide accurate information:

“It [information line] should be in the town. One time you rang it like the police. Now you don’t get them direct. But these are things that used to be in the town and you could ring. But now you’ve got to go to these big centres and it’s wait, wait, wait.”
This was supported by comments made in the focus groups which suggested that more important than the location of an information source is people’s confidence in the accuracy of the information:

“I don’t think it would matter so much to our community if they were calling locally or not. I think if they knew they were going to get the right information, they were assured that they were really going to speak to someone and find out whatever it was that they wanted to find out, it wouldn’t matter whether they were calling locally or wherever as long as someone could tell them what they wanted to hear”

Cfa_Kor_FG02

and again:

“Facilitator: One of the things we’ve come across is the issue of trust.
Interviewee: Yeah.
Facilitator: The issue of trust. If it’s a central line you’re going to be speaking to somebody in Ballarat or Melbourne, is that an issue for you?
Interviewee: No not as far as I’m concerned.
Interviewee: No.
Interviewee: Contact is the main thing.
Interviewee: If you were to ring them you know who you’re ringing don’t you?
Interviewee: Maybe I’m a trusting sole but I speak to anybody on the phone”

Cfa_Kor_FG01

So, for some the issue is not who they talk with, a local person or someone from elsewhere, but the accuracy of the information. What this might mean in practice is unclear.

Another theme that emerged relating to locality was that the term ‘bushfire’ in the VBIL title was not helpful, given the prevalence of grassfires in the area. As stated:

“I think that terminology bushfire awareness, too, is a bit of a misnomer for people. They just don’t think that actually them, because we’re all grassfire
area, and slightly residential, as well. They'd be more concerned of a fact - with a factory explosion fire. There was a major fire across here, a few weeks - last year, and that sort of stuff. So, they're - don't think bushfire, that name bushfire, they'll think, oh that's not us. We have got Tower Hill, but that's yeah, not as much.”

Cfa_Kor_02

Nonetheless, others, only one or two, did state or implied that the use of the term ‘bushfire’ is not a deterrent. One said:

“Interviewee: I guess - I don't know that a bushfire name...
[Over speaking]
Interviewee: ...would stop me from calling it. I have not ever looked at that and thought I'm not going to call that because I'm calling about a grass fire not a bushfire. That wouldn't be why I wouldn't call it”

Cfa_Kor_FG02

For this person, the important was the information, not the designation of the line.

Overall, there is a general lack of awareness of the VBIL. Where people are familiar with the name, they are unclear of its focus, the service provided and how it might be of value. For some the centralised basis of the service was a problem, although this view was by no means clear-cut or expressed by all.

**VBIL Dissemination Pathways**

Perhaps unsurprisingly for a traditionally rural, self-reliant community, most suggestions for appropriate VBIL dissemination pathways centred around traditional and labour-intensive methods including door-knocks.

Some community events were mentioned as appropriate venues for raising awareness of the VBIL. These included CFA Sunday:

“Facilitator: If we were to run say - if we were to try and promote this in Koroit, are there particular community events that you can suggest that we could...
Interviewee: Okay, we’ve got CFA Sunday coming up here on the 25th - can I get back to you on the date, would that be…”

When asked about possible ways to disseminate information about VBIL, a frequent reference was made to CFA events. In part, this reference reflects the embeddedness of the CFA in the locality.

There is also an annual agricultural show in November which was reported to be popular not only amongst locals but also with residents of neighbouring townships. As noted:

“Yeah, we’ve got a community show on the oval at the showground. That’s coming up and you’ll get all - everyone just shows up for that. I’m not sure of the date though… That’s the agricultural show…. You’ll get people from Port Fairy and all the surrounds, Kirkstall Woolsthorpe, Woodford, all different areas, all the surrounding areas. So that could be an ideal”

Events such as agricultural shows, bring many people together, both from the immediate locality and further afield.

Other modes of disseminating information about VBIL include word of mouth, chats between residents and then more formal processes, such as CFA door-knocking. As suggested by one CFA member:

“I think face-to-face too. It’s a tall order. I’d like to go to every single door in Koroit. I know it might sound a bit extreme but I think it’s possible. I think it’s plausible and I think it’s something that should happen whether it takes several months, a year. But if we can get people on board. If we can get, on Good Friday, our brigade to go around to every door within a three hour period to collect money. I think we can [also] go face-to-face over several months and get some messages out there.”

Obviously such a step would need to be planned and would involve a number of people over a long period of time.
Given these communication pathways and the touch points associated with them, some reflection occurred on how to better improve awareness of bushfire. One person noted that there may be a role for non-operational CFA volunteers to have a greater involvement in community safety and one participant described how this may be achieved:

“Things will step up from now in the community engagement area. The fire season will start but also through the school holidays we have CFA Sunday coming up so Ivan will have more of a role to play there or more involvement. We also have our FEM rounds again for the township which is Fire Equipment Maintenance. That’s servicing all the extinguishers and fire hose reels around the town. So that’s engaging and also servicing all the extinguishers. So that’s going to all the businesses, the schools, the hospital, the surgery….. Absolutely, yeah. So those sort of things we meet with the people and chat with them as well. That’s just another way of keeping up with things as well in the community. That’s just one thing that we do”

Cfa_Kor_03

further:

“It might be beneficial to get somebody from the information line to a brigade meeting or some such thing to talk to us about it. Make more members more aware of what its function is and how to access it and things like that. I mean if the brigade know about it then they in turn can communicate with the general public, pass on information that way”

Cfa_Kor_03

These type of suggestions point to the way in which the VBIL could be promoted within the framework of activity and events within the town and its environs.

**The VBIL DVD**

The possibility of the VBIL DVD elicited unenthusiastic responses. There was a general reluctance to watch a VBIL DVD, which is consistent with the general lack of awareness about VBIL in the first place. Moreover, when the
suggestion was made that it could be mailed out to individual households, respondents were negative about its value.

Setting aside time to view the DVD was said to be the greatest barrier, competing against other daily household tasks:

“There's no time for watching DVD’s in our lives.”

and:

“Facilitator: If the CFA were to launch a DVD to publicise both for bushfire awareness and for awareness of the information line, would you watch a DVD?
Interviewee: Probably not.
Interviewee: If it was sent to me in the mail, probably not.
Interviewee: No, probably not”

Others also expressed similar sentiments.

Some suggested that the DVD be screened to an audience as part of other organised events such as at school curriculum or during public meetings:

“If it was for the children as in a school thing, you’d probably watch it. If it was for me personally I wouldn’t”

This person reflected on the way she might come to watch such a DVD, as a parent and encouraging her children to think about the locality and life in the area.

One person suggested in relation to local activity that as a school they received a large quantity of unsolicited material, including DVDs. Given this, they have become selective in what is shown. Nonetheless, it was suggested that the VBIL DVD would be considered important and relevant. As stated:

“Look, I think it's a great idea, the trouble is, I can pull out DVDs by the truckload that get sent to us for things, so we have to make decisions on the
ones that we actually make a fuss about, and really launch. Certainly that one [VBIL DVD], because it is so pertinent to our area, would be - we would certainly celebrate that and make it available to people. If it was just - if we just got a one-off copy here, we would show all the students.”

Cfa_Kor_02

Further this person suggested that a launch of the DVD should be held and in this way it might have an impact.

Due to a combination of low risk perception and a reticence to personally watch a DVD, suggestions for its dissemination were minimal. One interviewee suggested YouTube as a mass-awareness medium:

“That's a tricky one. I mean, if it was on a - everybody would - put out a natty YouTube and make it go viral [laughs] that's the way to get it out there. It's got to have some catchy gimmick:

Cfa_Kor_02

And further, suggested that a high-profile identity could help to raise the profile:

“There's nothing like getting absolute celebrities on board, that people respect, and look up to, to promote it all as well, of course. You know, the whole footballer thing. I remember years ago when Molly Meldrum wore the bike helmet, when bike helmets were first introduced as mandatory. You know, that was quite powerful, because he was quite an iconic figure, and people thought, wow, if it's good enough for him, it's good enough for us. So, you know, having high profile people promote the line, or the service, it's got some merit. It's a multi-pronged approach. But I suppose you've got marketers who are looking into all that sort of stuff for you, anyway”

Cfa_Kor_02

The general thrust of these suggestions is that the dissemination of the DVD should be contextualised in relation to organisations and activity within the area.
One strength of the DVD may be as part of a community-safety toolkit that is used to educate local brigade members who can then promote awareness of the VBIL at a local level. A respondent noted:

“Yeah, we’d need to get information from the information line or the people there. They probably have already a communiqué which they can just distribute it out, setting out in detail all the functions of the information line, how to access it and the sort of information that they in turn give back to the public. I think it comes back to the public”

Cfa_Kor_04

There was a concern that the process of dissemination should be accompanied by information that set out the capacities and remit of the VBIL.

Overall, there was scepticism about the DVD. This type of response covered the mode of presentation, the content, and the process of distribution. Many emphasised the importance of contextualising the distribution of a DVD, so that it would be watched and reflected upon.

Multi-Hazards

In Koroit there was general support for the concept of a multi-hazard information line. This may be partially attributed to the perceived irrelevance of a bushfire information line in what is seen as a grassfire prone area. As sharply stated by one person:

“I think the term bushfire, to me conjures up an image like Black Saturday bushfires which not all fires are that sort of situation. They probably still have equal seriousness, a house fire or even floods and cyclones and all sorts of things should be included”

Cfa_Kor_0304

Bushfire was not seen as a danger, despite the proximity of Tower Hill and indeed of bushfire events in the past. Further, it could be argued that the memory of Black Saturday paradoxically had a negative impact in that
residents sought to assess the danger facing Koroit in terms of their assessment of the drastic and tragic impact of the fires on Black Saturday on other localities, seen by these residents rightly or wrongly as more vulnerable.

While this is an area where fire is relatively common, the general view was that this danger is dealt with effectively and efficiently by the local CFA. As stated for many of equal relevance are ‘house fire or even floods and cyclones’. As another stated:

“Well basically I suppose the same, like to even like for structure fires, everything, the whole lot. [The multi-hazard line]Just needs to give enough information out so everybody understands that they can find some information for what they want to know themselves so they know that they can find that. For a structural fire or for, yeah, whatever.”

Cfa_Kor_01

Interviewees described floods, strong wind events and storms, hazmat incidents, road closures and structure fires as other hazards that is important to receive information about.

Other relevant experience was referred to when the multi-hazard reference was mentioned. Another interviewee talked about his experiences in assisting at local emergency control centres in other rural localities, citing that it may create more interest than a bushfire service alone:

“...and that wasn’t just in fires, that was in any disaster that might happen. And I think that type of involvement and connection would create more interest than just fire brigade”

Cfa_Kor_25

There is a concern to move beyond the focus on fire, per se.

Specific suggestions were made by some about the scope and approach that should be adopted in relation such a service. One interviewee spoke about the importance of providing the service from a regional base:

“I think a local centre would be of great value"
And by the same person:

“Ringing up a service like 000 in Melbourne isn’t the connection people are looking for, I think that would be the bottom line”

As frequently mentioned, simple and straightforward processes were stressed. Some participants warned against the use of complex automated menu options:

“Well, it’s going to be automated, I think it’s got to be three - just one word - not this do you need to speak to this person, do you need to press one. I honestly believe that you’ve got to wipe that, you’ve got to speak to a person. Do you need an interpreter? Language, is it a flood? Just like when you do when you ring triple O.”

The recommendation is not only to make such contact simple and straightforward, but also people should be involved as is the case with other similar services.

One participant was cautious and felt that there was also some potential for confusion over the term of “multi-hazard”. The need for clarity may be attributed to the large variety of potential hazards:

“Well, it could well be, as long as people then know what multi-hazard means, too. Sometimes you need to spell it out, and I think you almost [need] five dot points. If - blah, blah, blah, blah - then you ring this number. So, if you want to know which roads are blocked, where the safe place is to be, the five key things, this is the number you ring.”

However, this led them to reflect on the large volume of calls and concerns that the line would be ‘clogged’ up:
“...then they're going to start - chemical spills and all - which is true, and that's important too, but is that going to clog up? If everyone just goes to a multi-hazard line, is it better just to have a fire line? I don’t know how it works.”

Cfa_Kor_02

There is a recognition that multi-hazard includes a range of potential disasters, including ‘chemical spills.

A multi-hazard approach was welcomed. This acceptance should be assessed in the context that this is an area where bushfire is not seen as a major threat. Indeed, residents here tended to deny the possibility of a bushfire threat. In this respect, there is a particular challenge in drawing the attention of a population that thinks disaster events do not pose a problem to them, either because of the infrequency of such events and/or because of the perceived effectiveness of the local disaster agencies.

Koroit Locality Recommendations

Based on the findings in Koroit as a whole, the locality recommendations are:

1. One critical consideration for VBIL is that the approach should focus on how to develop messages and raise awareness where populations do not see danger at all. The importance of presenting information in relation to the specific experiences of localities is clearly brought out here. The relative infrequency of bushfire and the successful responses to grassfire have prompted a sense of complacency in the area. VBIL should review its publicity material on the assumption that some localities do not see a problem with their current awareness and ways of dealing with disaster.

2. An awareness campaign should recognise the segmentation and experiences of peri-urban localities in the design and implementation.

The are two considerations:
a. The history of self-reliance (including a strong relationship between long-term residents and local CFA brigades) indicates that awareness campaigns need to be seen as locally driven as opposed to being ‘pushed’ from CFA headquarters/Melbourne.

b. The recent residential expansion in the area and the associated commuting arrangements suggest that a targeted program should be developed for these residents and commuters.

Note: In a situation where self-reliance is emphasised by an older more long-term population, a younger more recent population can end up being marginalised and even excluded from hazard awareness and preparation.

3. In a locality such as Koroit, risks are perceived to come from sources other than bushfires. **Attention should be given to language, taking into account local perceptions when presenting and publicising VBIL and VBIL-type services.**

4. **An awareness campaign should identify key ‘local’ organisations, such as the local CFA and schools, in an information distribution programme.**

5. While the use of **artefacts, such as refrigerator magnets, was positively viewed, they often lack context and should be accompanied by a brief list of instructions addressing when and how to use the information line.**
Lakes Entrance is a small seaside town of 4,569 people (9,463 at the SA2 level) situated on the Ninety-Mile beach in South-East Gippsland. The township falls within the East Gippsland Shire Council (main offices in Bairnsdale). The nearest regional centre is Bairnsdale which lies immediately to the west of Lakes Entrance, thirty minutes by car. The major bushfire threat comes from more heavily forested areas such as the Colquhoun State Forest to the north and Lake Tyers to the east. There is one major highway in and out of town. The township is also at threat from floods, particularly coastal flooding. This type of event can be exacerbated by storm surges and tidal conditions. For these reasons, isolation (both geographical and provision of utilities) is a concern for residents.

The economy is largely underpinned by tourism and fishing:

“Just a typical coastal town, very heavily involved in the fishing industry. It’s probably the largest fishing port in Victoria and therefore a lot of the businesses are attracted towards the fishing industry. There are net makers and there are people who work on the boats - not necessarily as fisherman
but also in repairing and maintenance and so forth. So there's a lot of work that spins off from the fishing fleets that are based here"

Tourism in Lakes entrance is seasonal:

“Yes, a very seasonal base. Particularly - the heaviest period is between Christmas and Easter. Easter really marks the end of the tourist season. You get school holidays where there's an influx and then you also get the international tourists who come through and the grey nomads and the caravans and so forth. Generally it's a passing point because they're heading north to Queensland or Northern New South Wales or thereabouts.”

In addition to these two sources of employment, there was some suggestion of a commuting workforce due to the appeal of Lakes Entrance as a place of residence. As stated:

“Interviewee: But in Lakes, yeah, a lot of people live here and commute to Bairnsdale.
Facilitator: Okay. So there's some appeal to the location, but...
Interviewee: You see them - they go both ways. Yeah, they live here and work elsewhere”

There appears to be a greater availability and spread of employment in neighbouring townships

Lakes Entrance was commonly described as a typical, close-knit country community. Notwithstanding, there was some suggestion of diverse population sub-groups:

“In terms of, you know, you've got your groups around tourism, you've got your groups around the fishing industry, then you've got your Indigenous groups and then you've got your retirees and so forth. So yeah, there's a number of different sort of sub-clusters. I guess the demographic of the town, even since I've moved here, has changed, just because of that whole sea-
change sort of phenomenon, and just a change in the economics as far as employment and so forth”

Cfa_Lak_25

Thus, a number of different social groupings make up the town.

There was also some suggestion that it can take some time for new residents to assimilate with long-term residents and families from the area:

“People in, for instance, Bairnsdale, from the outside, or from the surface, tend to be more friendly, embracing, that sort of thing, whereas people from Lakes tend to be that bit more guarded I guess. So it takes a little while to break down some of those barriers. But in saying that, once you get to know someone, and sort of get to mingle with those people, you find the people very friendly and very welcoming, but it's just that initial - you know, appears to be a bit standoffish at times”

Cfa_Lak_25

On the whole, Lakes Entrance is a town with an established and evolving incomer population.

The town and area has an ageing population, with the town seemingly appealing to ‘sea-changers’ (people moving to be close to the water), and retirees (one interviewee described Lakes Entrance as the ‘Riviera’ of Gippsland). The notion of an ageing population is supported by the Lakes Entrance age profiles from the 2011 ABS census data (see Table 5) which indicates a higher proportion of people in the 50+ age bracket, compared with both Victoria and Australia.

Adding to the appeal for retirees is a range of sporting clubs, activities and community groups. There is an active U3A group, Probus and sporting options such as Lawn Bowls and Golf. Health services were described as good, although the nearest hospital is located in Bairnsdale.
Table 5: Age profile for Lakes Entrance, 2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Lakes Entrance</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Victoria</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Australia</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>People</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-9 years</td>
<td>996</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>670,854</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2,772,971</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19 years</td>
<td>1,028</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>673,278</td>
<td>12.6</td>
<td>2,776,852</td>
<td>12.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 years</td>
<td>718</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>763,777</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>2,973,909</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30-39 years</td>
<td>885</td>
<td>9.4</td>
<td>755,629</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>2,973,913</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-49 years</td>
<td>1,114</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>763,564</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>3,047,021</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-59 years</td>
<td>1,380</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>671,548</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>2,744,648</td>
<td>12.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-69 years</td>
<td>1,699</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>518,723</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>2,125,435</td>
<td>9.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 years and over</td>
<td>1,643</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>536,669</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>2,092,970</td>
<td>9.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Median age 49 -- 37 -- 37 --

Source: ABS 2011

The tourism industry is seasonal with a large influx of tourists over the summer months, as anything between 40,000 to 70,000 visitors to the area (with a lesser influx over the Easter holiday). A key implication for bushfire safety is that tourists may represent a vulnerable group as they lack local knowledge, may be less vigilant, and are less likely to be aware of the bushfire risk. This may be particularly true for foreign visitors, and especially where English is not their first language. For tourist operators, the summer months provide a large portion of their yearly income with the rest of the year providing a small trickle of tourists. The town is also a popular destination for New Year’s Eve celebrations, with an annual fireworks display.

With respect to population movement, the 2011 ABS census data suggests that most people moving into Lakes Entrance are from neighbouring areas of Gippsland. This suggests that the majority of newcomers to town are likely to
have at least some awareness of bushfire risk. The local CFA brigade appears to be quite active and engaged with respect to community safety and from researcher observations, also appears to enjoy a positive reputation amongst local residents.

There are a number of community-based activities including monthly markets. There is also a community-organised web-presence that operates in consultation with the Lakes Entrance Business and Tourism Association: [www.lakesentrance.com](http://www.lakesentrance.com). The largest community event is the Seafarers Festival held annually in December which includes activities such as the blessing of the fishing fleet.

**Locality Interviews:**

A total of 26 participants were interviewed across 17 interview sessions. Interviewees were sourced from local service providers and volunteers of various community groups.

**Table 6:** Breakdown of Lakes Entrance Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview type</th>
<th># of sessions</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Individual interviews</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joint interviews</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus group</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>17</strong></td>
<td><strong>26</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Bushfire Risk Perception**

With respect to perceived bushfire risk, geographical location appears to be important (a total of 21 comments were coded from 13 of 17 interview sessions). Residents living on the urban-rural fringe (e.g. Colquhoun State Forest) perceive their fire risk to be higher. Conversely, people living in town perceive their bushfire risk as being much lower and at times, non-existent:
“Yeah, it does - it probably varies a fair bit. I think there are some in the community that believe that they're quite safe - they're by the seaside. They've got the beach and the water and so forth. There are others that would think that they're in a higher risk area because they've got the interface with some bushland and so forth. So it goes from one degree to the other”

Cfa_Lak_25

This type gradation in relation to perceived risk may also relate to the approach by residents in the area to preparation and awareness.

The idea that the town is relatively safe may have important consequences. Those living in town spoke about not attending to bushfire safety material:

“If I lived in the middle of the bush somewhere I would get all the information that I had at hand and I would make sure I've got that information. I live in the town. I don’t see myself as certainly anywhere near a higher risk and I might get a call from these people to tell me I’m wrong. But I don't see myself as a high risk so that information isn’t important”.

Cfa_Lak_18

Two issues emerged that may contribute to a low perceived risk of bushfire in built up areas. First, there is complacency due to the recent lack of fire history:

“Interviewee: The rationale was yeah. Maybe they’ve been exposed to it a bit more. Look I grew up in the area. I did move away and then I've come back. But I've never known the town to be under the threat. Under a real threat of fire.
Facilitator: Right.
Interviewee: So I guess the complacency side [is] there”

Cfa_Lak_04

Second, the network of waterways and proximity of the ocean appears to provide a sense of ‘security’:

“But normally we don’t unless there is a local bushfire threat like if the bushfires are - you know they're close-by, yes, everyone starts getting a bit worried. But just as a general thing, we don’t really, because we're surrounded by water
and I think we pretty well feel that we’re a bit too civilised for that. Yeah, you know what I mean? We’re not as vulnerable as lots of communities”

Cfa_Lak_19

Furthermore, many believe that the beach affords a safe option for last-resort shelter:

“Interviewee: I frankly can’t fight bushfires by myself.
Facilitator: Where would you go if you…
Interviewee: Oh I’d head downtown and head for the water”

Cfa_Lak_11_17

This is type of assessment can be problematic due to the risks associated with last-minute evacuations.

As noted earlier, informal social networks play a role in the process of risk perception. There appears to be a general perception (risk contagion) in relation to the unlikelihood of bushfire impact in the built-up areas of Lakes Entrance. A question that arises is; are these social effects more susceptible to perceptions of relative safety as opposed to risk? A number of processes could be involved such as, a lack of recent fire history, undue optimism, increasingly mobile communities, a growing detachment to the land, or competing resources for time and money. Whether this is true, and if so, what are the underlying mechanisms, warrants further investigation. It is possible that such socially-driven perceptions need to be challenged in order to encourage bushfire mitigation planning and uptake of information services such as the VBIL.

In contrast to those living in or close to the built-up township, those living in outlying areas largely acknowledge the risk posed by bushfires:

“But the actually township of Lakes Entrance comes in fairly low, but the area immediately north - so, talking this mythical three houses type thing - between Lakes entrance and the Colquhoun Forest and then above, across to Kalimna and that area, they actually rate fairly high there because quite a considerable - when you look at the number of farms or small acreage farming areas, it’s quite high there”
This risk is defined in relation to proximity to the bush.

The local CFA brigade appears to be aware of the interaction between geography, fuel loads and bushfire risk (and risk perception) targeting the urban-rural fringe areas for community safety campaigns:

“...local brigade members. So what they do is, they'll basically, for instance, set out on the northern interface of the town. They'll target specific areas, and they'll go into each individual household, deliver some information, so in booklet form, but also if the resident wants to, they'll actually have a look, provide a bit of an assessment and provide some advice. That has worked really well. There's been some really good feedback with doing that”

In this way, preparedness and planning is promoted.

**Bushfire Plans**

Planning tended to be *ad hoc*. A total of 17 participants discussed personal bushfire plans (for three interviews with service providers, the question was not appropriate). For those who stated they had fire plans, none were formal, written plans.

Plans appeared to fall somewhere on a continuum ranging from vague intentions (with no details provided), to intended actions with minimal detail (e.g. trigger points, evacuation routes, back-up plans) provided. Overall we identified four levels of fire ‘plan’ from interviews with Lakes Entrance residents; 1) no plan, 2) Intended actions – little or no thought to details, 3) Intended actions – evidence of some thought to details, 4) Detailed plan – unwritten. A lack of formalised bushfire plans may have implications for uptake of a service such as the VBL, particularly with respect to people accessing the non-emergency, preparation-based information.

In summary for the Lakes Entrance locality data:
### Table 7 – Level of personal fire plans for Lakes Entrance interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plan</th>
<th># of participants</th>
<th>Quote</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No fire plan</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>“No. Husband says, no. No, it won’t come, it’ll never happen. He’s a bit stubborn. Yeah, although I think we should have”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended actions – little or no thought to details</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Interviewee: You don’t have plans - and I’m one of them. I don’t have a plan. I do have a plan. It’s hop in the car and drive away. Facilitator: So it’s an unwritten plan. It’s in your head, a plan in your head. Interviewee: A very simple plan, and everyone knows that that’s my plan, hop in the car and drive away, whereas other family members have plans that are written and are enacted every now and again.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intended actions – evidence of some thought to details</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Facilitator: You plan, yeah, yeah. Interviewee: To get out of there really. Yeah, I wouldn’t stay at my property unless I thought it was fairly safe to do so really. Facilitator: Right, okay. Interviewee: Just because of the bush, and where I live now there’s really only one exit out of the place anyway so - and we’ve had storms and the trees have blocked the road and things like that, so I know there’s only two ways - one road out or go to the city.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Detailed plan – unwritten</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Interviewee: I mean everything that is of value in paper wise is in fireproof containers. We’ve got an evac plan and we’ve got equipment around the place that we can put into place. I have a wooden house, basically Weathertex which obviously is not particularly fireproof, my block is clear and I keep the grass really down. There’s nothing around the house. We have a number of large buckets and mops, we’ve got slide-ins to fill the guttering so the guttering becomes a cascade over - all this sort of stuff. Facilitator: Okay, that’s the details, but the actual strategy, is to leave or to defend? Interviewee: The strategy is to get out. Facilitator: Get out, okay. Interviewee: Yeah. Facilitator: So the preparations you made are... Interviewee: The preparations I’ve made are just for the minor blow-ins that we’ve experienced already of ash and dust and if you should get a couple of embers coming over then fight because they can be carried such a distance and are carried such a distance, we can deal with them quickly, effectively and get out of the way. But believe you me if…If it got past Bruthen I’m out.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Financial constraints were proposed as one barrier to planning. It was suggested that a percentage of the Lakes Entrance community was made up of ‘economic’ immigrants who may lack the financial resources to adequately prepare a home for bushfire defence. As stated:

“Well don’t forget, a lot of our people too that might have moved into some of these areas might be economic immigrants. People that can’t afford to live in town and that have moved out, even though it costs them a fortune going backwards and forwards, it’s a little bit all the time. So they might be living there because it’s economic to live there. If they’re living there because it’s economic, they may not balance up all the risks and they may not have the finance to be able to protect themselves against some of the risks”

Cfa_Lak_08

This type of reflection is supported by other data. The ABS 2011 census data indicates that the average weekly median income for Lakes Entrance is some $200 lower per week than that for Koroit. Financial pressures have previously been found to be a barrier to bushfire preparation (Paton, et al, 2006).

**Bushfire Information Sources**

Many interviewees talked about how they currently source bushfire information. With respect to seeking information about active bushfires, the most frequently reported source of information was the radio. This included ABC, ABC local, and the local community station REG-FM, although ABC radio in particular appears to have a good reputation and is a trusted source of emergency information:

“No, I’d listen to the ABC. The ABC - I think the ABC did an amazing job through all those fires here. It was just constant information. In fact sometimes I had to turn it off because it just became too fearful. You had to sort of make choices about how much you’d listen to it”

Cfa_Lak_0102

Clearly for some there is an assessment of source material and its reliability.
Emergency services web-sites were the second most frequently cited source of emergency information. The web-sites were reported to be helpful for giving a broader, state-wide view of current bushfire risks:

“Yeah look for me personally I would probably just go online. I’ve been on there in previous - when there have been previous fires on both the CFA and the DSE website. You can get a bit of an idea of what’s happening and where. I guess also mate in a small community it’s just local talk and word of mouth”

Cfa_Lak_04

As indicated, some respondents are willing to search around for information. Many comments related to local sources of information. These included, ‘word-of-mouth’, local CFA sources (or people with connections to CFA members), local radio or TV, and phone trees. Less frequently cited were sources such as; CFA fire ready brochures, and CFA community safety meetings. The Visitor Information Centre was reported to be the major source of information for tourists.

Despite a stated preference for local sources of information (particularly those associated with friends/relatives in fire agencies), there are some potential issues with this source of emergency information, including accessibility:

“The discussion that we’ve had as the group that would manage that at this stage, though - there’s a number of places that have rung people they know in those organisations. DSE, Parks Victoria - and they’ve had to be, in the end, I think, very careful doing that because you and I could be out there on the fire ground and we don’t know what the picture is”

Cfa_Lak_21

One possible problem is that reliance on a local source can result in partial information.

In general, three factors appear to be important to people when choosing a source of bushfire information; 1) the information is immediate or timely, 2) the
information is current, and 3) the information is relevant and geographically accurate. One respondent spoke of the timeliness of information on a fire risk day:

“Yeah, and I think - and at times like that, I know in my own household, that myself, wife, and kids - it was playing on the radio the whole time, because you could hear it all the time, and you could hear things happening as they happened, rather than, okay, I've got to ring that number and find out what's going on, and then in another 20 minutes ringing them again…”

Cfa_Lak_20

On the one occasion when a respondent mentioned contacting the VBIL during a bushfire, they described their experience as negative. The interviewee cited a lack of geographical knowledge by the VBIL call taker:

“They don't appear to know any other parts of Victoria apart from the one they're currently in, which is, I think, Ballarat or somewhere like that”

Cfa_Lak_03

Notwithstanding, their negative appraisal may be partially explained by their unrealistic expectations of the service:

“I just assumed that they might have known a little bit more than what we were getting, especially if our information is a bit old. But what DSE tend to do now - I don’t know whether it'll continue into the bushfire season, the bushfire notices - but certainly with warnings in relation to controlled burns, they give you a start and finish time of that email, so you know that at that time you're going to get more information. So if you know that, you're looking for it. I think they've only just started doing that”

Cfa_Lak_03

Thus, it is important that local residents have a clear idea of the remit and scope of VBIL, otherwise the experience is likely to be one of disappointment.
**Communication Pathways:**

A common theme across the interviews was a preference for accessing information from local sources as they were more likely to contain relevant, regional news. These sources included ‘word-of-mouth’, media, community groups and common touch-points.

**Word-of-mouth**

‘Word-of-mouth’ was often cited as a way of finding out what is happening around town:

“It's a very close-knit community and word of mouth probably is one of the fastest ways to find out what's going on. You ask the right people and the right people basically - probably the shop owners themselves have an amazing grasp of what's going on, especially the coffee shops, the newsagent and that sort of traditional country grapevine”

Of course ‘word-of-mouth’ discussion and information provision underpins the type of activities that occur at common touch points and within the events organised by local groups, such as recreational and social organisations.

**Media:**

As with the other localities, traditional sources of mass media were commonly mentioned as being accessed, with ABC radio and local newspaper, the Lakes Post appearing to have strong identities in the region. The local radio station REG-FM was also commonly cited as a source of local information:

“RegFM - we have a local community radio and they do a lot of local events and advertising as well. That's free - RegFM - for community events. They survive with lots of volunteers of course and some paid advertisements”

The Lakes Post was discussed across multiple interviews. A number of interviewees suggested that it is widely read by local residents:
“Most people read their local papers in the country, because it’s local, and you’re assuming you’re going to read who’s died and who’s been born, and who won the golf, and who won the cricket, and who won the footy. So I reckon local papers in the country are very important”

Cfa_Lak_03

For many, reading the local newspaper or indeed listening to the local radio were important sources of information about the locality, and potentially in relation to bushfire preparedness. Thus, there are a range of possible outlets for information and awareness development.

As with other pathways we were reminded that these media outlets will not reach all residents in a community. One person noted that there was a partiality in reading the local newspaper amongst some social groups, in this case retirees:

“It always surprises me that not everybody buys it. It’s only once a week, it costs $1.10, and I always can’t believe that people don’t buy the local paper. I think most retired people - do you reckon - no, amongst our friends a number of them don’t get. I’m always so surprised to know that”

Cfa_Lak_01

This unevenness is an important consideration when considering awareness campaigns around something like the VBIL.

A further dimension that was noted by many is that these media are appropriate sites for publicity and information awareness, from VBIL or other like organisations. Some community groups described positive experiences advertising their services via the Lakes Post:

“Facilitator: How have you found - as far as success?
Interviewee: Oh, reasonable success, yeah. Mostly people - down here, we’ve used the local paper. There’s local radio, local radio and community radio. When I say local, it’s local ABC. We’ve got a website. We put stuff on the website. There’s not a huge variety of ways you can get things out, out here. There’s no local television or anything like that, which they wouldn’t be
interested. Unless it's a major story, they're not interested anyway. So yeah, basically then, the local radio and local papers are very supportive”

Cfa_Lak_19

The Lakes Post was reported as being an effective source of disseminating information about local CFA activities:

“Normally what we do is get into the local paper. Local paper is pretty good for the brigade in terms of promoting brigade activities and whatever. So it's generally just a phone call or whatever and say, look, this is what we're wanting to do, and they'll write something up. We'll provide the information and send piccies or something and they'll put it in. In the week or two leading up, we'll put something in the paper and whatever. Normally the CFA corporately will do something as well”

Cfa_Lak_25

There is potential for advertising coverage to be widened by carefully targeting specific newspapers for advertising/articles. As suggested:

“So, the thing is if - back to advertising, you were talking about advertising. It's best only to advertise in East Gippsland News because that automatically goes into Lakes Post. So, instead of paying two bills, you just pay one and it covers both”

Cfa_Lak_0102

When purchasing the Lakes Post on a Wednesday, for example, another regional paper, the East Gippsland News is offered as a free supplement. Consideration could be given to advertising in the Wednesdays East Gippsland News in order to reach a broader readership.

Another common theme was the potential sensationalism of media reporting of natural hazards in Lakes Entrance. Many interviewees talked about the importance for the media to find a balance between providing accurate, safety-related information while protecting the tourist economy. For example, some interviewees expressed concern that media (particularly out-of-town) tend to sensationalise and exaggerate emergency events such as floods,
which can lead to tourists unnecessarily cancelling holiday bookings thus damaging the local economy:

“The latest floods were a prime example of that. I was coming to work watching the news and I’m thinking shit am I going to be able to get through. You drive down town and it’s nothing you know. They pick one street that had a little bit of water on it and that’s where they focused on and knowing people had hospitality venues whether it’s accommodation or other, yeah they were just getting cancellations left, right and centre. No matter what they would say over the phone to try and say no we’re open for business there’s nothing wrong with us blah, blah, blah. They just said oh no we’ve just seen it on the TV, sorry we’ll cancel. So as much as they want to push that initial message out there should be some sort of follow up too I believe”

Cfa_Lak_04

Evidence suggests this is a legitimate concern, with tourism in other localities being negatively affected post-bushfires (Sanders et al, 2008).

**Community Groups:**

A number of community groups have a presence in Lakes Entrance and environs. These include the University of the Third Age (U3A), Rotary, Probus, the Country Women’s Association, and other like groups. Faith groups of various types also offer an outlet for disseminating information and developing awareness campaigns.

With an ageing population in Lakes Entrance, the U3A has become an important active community group. When the U3A were asked about how they advertise their services, the reply indicated that multiple sources of advertising were engaged:

“It’s on the internet. We also keep information at the tourist office but generally its word of mouth. We also have an article in the paper (Lakes Entrance Post), just a short article once a month.”

Cfa_Lak_0102
Members of the group describe Lakes Entrance as an appealing location for an active retirement, with many sporting clubs and other activities for retirees.

Rotary is another active group within the community, although the ageing population presents some challenges with respect to attracting younger people to the group:

“Interviewee 2: It is an ageing population here which is a downfall like for Lions even, or the various groups because the younger people are so involved with their children and running them everywhere is what you do these days. Being in the country it's not jump on a bus or round the corner, but yeah - I've lost my train of thought.

Facilitator: Getting younger people into - you said with Lions.

Interviewee 1: Is impossible.

Interviewee 2: Yeah it is, yeah it's difficult”

So, while active in the area, some of the groups find it hard to attract young members.

With the economy benefiting from tourism, the Lakes Entrance Business and Tourism Association (LEBTA) is another active group. Rotary enjoy a recognisable ‘brand’, whereas LEBTA actively lobby local businesses for membership:

“Well Rotary’s obviously an international company so just knowing from the meetings that people will call in from other areas. There’s a book and they know that meeting’s there so they’ll come. As far as something like the Lakes Entrance Business Tourism Association the local people know that there’s a group and if you’re a member well you get regular contact and as a group it’s up to them to try and get more membership from local businesses”

The LEBTA meet monthly to discuss issues concerning local trade and economy.
There appears to be a strong sporting culture within the town, a feature typical to many rural Victorian localities:

“Tennis clubs, football club, netball and the golf club of course is quite big”

Cfa_Lak_0102

These sporting clubs often provide a ready source of information about events and ways of dealing with potential problems, such as the prospect of bushfire.

Community Touch Points:

When asked about common ‘touch-points’, interviewees cited the local supermarket, post office, main row of shops on the Esplanade, local library and various sporting and community clubs.

Community sporting centres such as the Sports and Community Centre, Bowls Club and Golf Club were also popular for meals and social gatherings (and were described as being particularly busy during the tourist season). A number of the clubs facilities include plasma screens which may be appropriate for displaying VBIL dissemination material:

“I would think it would because there’s nothing there. Well the touch points are basically all the sporting clubs. You know bowls, and U3A, and senior citizens”

Cfa_Lak_0102

Figure 5: Examples of Community Touch Points, the Sports and Community Centre (above) and the local library (below)
The Lakes Entrance library acts as a service centre for the East Gippsland Shire council. The library currently displays leaflets that promote community health and well-being for organisations such as Beyond Blue (see figure 6). The library is also associated with the adjoining Mechanics Institute Hall which is available to community members and groups for event bookings.

Figure 6: Beyond Blue leaflets in Lakes Entrance library

The photograph was taken in the Lakes Entrance community library, a potential touch-point for information about community safety.

The Esplanade (the main street running along the inlet) contains many cafes and shops that are frequented by both local residents and tourists. The may represent product placement opportunities, although the protection of the town’s image as a relaxing, recreational centre may present a barrier.
Visitor Information Centre:

The Visitor Information Centre (VIC) is strategically located at the beginning of the township and is a common first point of contact in town for visitors to the region. As a relatively large tourist town, the VIC is an important and frequently used touch point for visitors to the region. The VIC has visibility and a prominent position at the end of the first roundabout as visitors enter the town from the Western-most point. There is evidence that the Visitor Information Centre plays a vital role in disseminating bushfire safety information (particularly with tourists who represent a major vulnerable group). However, this does not come without challenges.

Although the VIC stocks CFA leaflets promoting bushfire safety, it was suggested that these were not often picked up:

“Like we had these out all summer, and I don’t think anyone took them. Had there been a bushfire, they would have been taking them in their hundreds. So it’s hard to know how to get people to pick up stuff, unless it’s of interest to them”

Cfa_Lak_03

During natural hazards and/or other emergencies, the VIC is used as an assembly and information point for tourists. There is a video screen facing the street that is used to relay warnings and safety advice issued by the DSE from Bairnsdale.

When asked where tourists would be most likely to source information from during an active bushfire, one interviewee suggested about the Information Centre:

“They’d probably pop in here. What we tend to do, we distribute that information that we get out to our operators, but not operator is registered with us. They don’t use our services. So those that are, we do the, here, guys, here’s the latest news on the bushfires, or the algae. We have an emergency screen in our front window, which sometimes works, and that just scrolls through information”

Cfa_Lak_03
However it was noted by some that the plasma screen was unreliable, technically and in relation to the information provided.

Moreover, it was suggested that tourists do not respond to it unless there is a specific bushfire risk:

“That's a TV screen, yeah. It's in the window. Sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't, and that depends on the people in our own emergency management to update that information that's on there. With bushfires, we have our bushfire rating sign in the window, and we have the Tourism Vic family of brochures collateral that we put out there, but people tend not to want to know unless it's going to affect them now”

Cfa_Lak_03

While there is a potential to use the VIC to disseminate material and information it is not really an appropriate or reliable outlet at this moment in time.

There are a range of possible outlets for the VBIL in the town. Given the fluctuating population in the area, and the major influx of tourists at specific times of the year, attention should be given to the way these pathways can be best used.

The Victorian Bushfire Information Line

Awareness of the VBIL service in Lakes Entrance appears to be modest at best. Of the 17 non-focus group participants asked, four said they were completely unaware of the VBIL. Nine participants said they had heard of the VBIL and a further five either said they were vaguely aware of it, or provided an answer that suggested they were confused about the nature of the service provided by the VBIL.

One respondent spoke of the availability of the VBIL telephone number:
“Yes. We have all that here. I have all that - I have all the sites on my computer. Our business manager has all that as well, and I have that phone number, of course, in my phone for VicLine and all the rest of it.”

Cfa_Lak_21

It should be noted however that of the nine participants who stated they were aware of the service, six would have been expected to be aware of the service due to the nature of their work and/or volunteer activities. Of those who had heard of the service, the majority cited ABC radio (especially during previous fires) as their main source of awareness. One participant claimed to have become aware of the VBIL online.

Even amongst those who knew of the service, there appears to be varying levels of understanding of the services the VBIL provides:

“Facilitator: It's not a trick question but if you rung up the bushfire line, do you have a sense of what sort of service you'd be provided or how it would work?
Interviewee1: No, no. No idea”
Interviewee2: I've never rung it but I can imagine it would be a recorded message if you got through to it. Because the thing is that like all these services, they're restricted by the amount of manpower behind the other end of it. More and more are getting to recorded messages. Press this for this, press that for that.”

Cfa_Lak_0102

Furthermore, there was a lack of understanding that information would be locally relevant:

“Interviewee: I would think that if I rang that it would just tell me what was happening all around the State and I'd be standing there thinking well, what's happening around Lakes Entrance? It needs to be - I would think if I rang that number it would need to be somehow worked that you're only hearing about like 200 kilometres from here”

Cfa_Lak_0102

The importance of having a local reference report was frequently noted.
But, as mentioned previously, negative experiences can erode trust:

“Interviewee: It was here, trying to get some more information, and they were useless. They knew nothing.
Facilitator: Sure. Okay. My next question is are you personally likely to call the VBIL if you became aware of a fire?
Interviewee: Probably not.
Facilitator: Not. Okay.
Interviewee: I just - they seem to be very ineffective. I don’t know whether that’s true or not”

Cfa_Lak_03

It is unclear where the VBIL sits as an information service. Information about bushfire planning and preparedness is likely to be more effective as printed material (online or brochures). Furthermore, local sources, agency web-sites and ABC radio appear to be the first preference for emergency information.

The strength of the VBIL may be in providing more ‘obscure’ information, for example:

“Interviewee: The only other thing that is getting a lot of weight around here and I don’t know a lot about it other than the fact that if you are building a new home these days it’s come out of the Bushfire Royal Commission I believe the different things that you need to get on top of.
Facilitator: Right.
Interviewee: When you’re building a home. Now I think they’re all worthy and valid things to tick off when you’re building a home. But the CFA haven’t allocated enough resources or underestimated them so I’m hearing that a lot of people are getting frustrated with that.

Cfa_Lak_04

Thus, it may be valuable to rethink the type of information provided by VBIL, in relation to immediate events as well as in relation to long-term planning and preparation.
As with the other localities there was some scepticism about the ability of infrastructure to support the use of the service including call-taking capacity:

“Will that number though get chock-a-block and we won’t be able to get through in a time of emergency?”

Cfa_Lak_1117

There were also concerns around telecommunication ‘black spots’ in some areas:

“But I mean, for instance parts of Victoria - I mean, I’ve travelled between here and Marlo and there are dead spots, so there’s no way of communicating. I think if anything, that’s probably the biggest issue here in East Gippsland, is the lack of communication. I mean, it’s fine to have a hotline but if you can’t contact them what can you do? I can name at least about six or seven spots just travelling between Lakes Entrance or West Marlo, on the other side of Marlo”

Cfa_Lak_09

Thus the technical coverage of some services is a matter for concern and consideration.

The Dissemination of ‘Awareness’ Products

The VBIL awareness are taken up and viewed positively to different degrees. Interviewees were asked about their attitudes towards the current VBIL dissemination products, as well as suggestions on how to best raise awareness of the VBIL service in Lakes Entrance. With respect to the current VBIL dissemination products, the fridge magnets were received particularly well:

“As I said, these cards and fridge magnets I think are ideal. You don’t want something too big. Obviously fire plans and things like that in - where there’s fire or flood, in those prone areas. You may need an A4 or an A3 process or procedure to go through. Again, you won’t find a lot of people – it will get buried in amongst what’s going on. The benefit of fridge magnets is the fact that it’s accessible. If it’s on the fridge, everybody knows it’s on the fridge”

Cfa_Lak_09
One interviewee suggested a further advantage of the fridge magnets was to provide assistance for children at home alone:

“Interviewee 1: The magnet was a good idea. 
Interviewee 2: Yeah, and for children - especially for children, knowing that was on their fridge. Children could even do this. Because children are often home by themselves”

Cfa_Lak_0102

These magnets are positively viewed, as both an information resource and also as an inclusive mechanism.

The wallet cards were received well by some, but others expressed some concerns about their willingness to carry more material in their wallet:

“Throw your wallet card away because people have got enough in their wallet or purse. You see them all the time, they’re bulging. Your fridge magnet is probably a good one because it will be something that people will have that they stick on the fridge because they know, maybe one day I will”

Cfa_Lak_18

Notwithstanding, the wallet cards may be particularly useful for tourists and tourist operators, if they can be disseminated effectively.

One interviewee talked positively about their previous experiences in producing emergency information cards for tourists:

“So we actually produced a little business card, not as professional as one of those but we actually produced a business card which we gave to every single visitor. It gave them the local police number, ambulance, doctor, hospital on one side, all the usual emergency things, the coast guard and all that sort of thing and on the back was all the different radio stations frequencies as to where they were, plus the shire number and all the rest of it. That was hugely successful”

Cfa_Lak_10
Again, the challenge here is to encourage tourist operators to promote a service which superficially is at odds with the notion of providing leisure-based activities.

With respect to dissemination pathways interviewees were asked if they had suggestions for the most effective way to raise awareness of the VBIL in Lakes Entrance. A large number of suggestions were offered. Due to the diversity of the Lakes Entrance community, responses indicated that campaigns needed to be multi-faceted and to be continually refreshed in order to keep bushfire safety relevant. The data suggested that a number of small, community-centric campaigns would be most effective for this community.

The local newspaper was the only suggestion with respect to traditional forms of media advertising:

“Most people read their local papers in the country, because it's local, and you're assuming you're going to read who's died and who's been born, and who won the golf, and who won the cricket, and who won the footy. So I reckon local papers in the country are very important”

Cfa_Lak_03

Although it was suggested that the local newspaper would only have limited effect in reaching the younger demographic:

“I always find the best thing around here is actually the local paper. The local people in the country do actually read the local paper, even the young ones to a certain degree”

Cfa_Lak_07

One interviewee suggested that a glossy lift-out might capture more attention than newsprint, and it was something they could keep:

“Yeah, or something they can keep, something that's not newsprint, because it's messy, just a little, I don't know, glossy, this is our number and this is what we do, sort of similar to your little thing there”

Cfa_Lak_03
This supports findings from Rohrmann (2000) that suggest a preference for safety-information as detachable brochures (page 7).

There was a suggestion that the more traditional mass-media means of dissemination may miss the tourist population, who represent a particularly vulnerable group:

“I don’t think TV and radio are particularly strong because - you know, I only go on what I’m like when I go away and I mean you’d have to do some more research on that I suppose, but when I go away we don’t watch a lot of TV. If I’m away, we go away at Easter; we don’t listen to the radio”

Cfa_Lak_0506

A number of suggestions related to smaller-scale, localised campaigns such as: letterbox drops, presenting at existing community group meetings, setting up stalls at markets and other community events. The surf-club market appears to be popular. An advantage of manning a stall at such events is that they afford the opportunity for a knowledgeable presenter to disseminate short educational messages with items such as fridge magnets.

With respect to community groups, a suggested approach was to target existing group meetings as opposed to organising dedicated CFA community-safety meetings:

“So there’s quite a few and they meet regularly. That’s probably the audience that you need to pitch it to. So maybe you could tie it into other existing services rather than try and re-invent the wheel and rather than create a new group of audience to target, target the captured audiences that are already in town”

Cfa_Lak_0506

A number of community groups such as U3A and Rotary appeared to be amenable to such an approach. Furthermore a number of interviewees reported that they would be more receptive to bushfire safety type messages if they were presented by a local (CFA member) who possessed local knowledge:
“Interviewee 2: This bloke wasn’t a local and he’s standing there going and where would your worst direction be for a fire, oh, it’d probably be - and he’s gone up there and they’ve all gone no, it’ll actually come from over there. You know, I just [unclear] looking at him going, God, this is looking bad”

Cfa_Lak_0506

It would seem that many of the community organisations would positively respond to approaches to become actively involved in the dissemination of VBIL materials and information.

Letterbox drops were mentioned across a number of interviews. One advantage cited is that it does not rely on people to overcome ‘inertia’ or apathy to seek, pick up or attend to safety-related material during non-bushfire periods:

“Maybe put them in their letterboxes, because if they’ve got to go from A to B to get something - and I think the community is as bad as the tourists. They don’t want to know about it unless it’s happening…”

Cfa_Lak_03

The question becomes how to create situations whereby residents, and tourists, will pick up materials, let alone read them.

A number of interviewees suggested that the fridge magnets could be sent out with rates notices. While this strategy will target all home-owners, it will not reach the group of renters and tourists:

“Why wouldn’t it be an idea just to do a mail out to people? So every household got one. So if you sent one of each, so they take one, leave one at home. Because when things have got to be left somewhere for people to pick up, you’re only always going to pick up very small percentage. I mean, it could be even sent out with your rates notices or something like that so that it’s not like an extra cost. It’s going out with something”

Cfa_Lak_19
It is thus important the way in which different methods of dissemination reach some of the target population but not others.

With respect to traditional community touch points, the supermarket and library were common suggestions for placement of educational material and dissemination products:

“Yeah definitely because they're the sort of things that we do promote is the community assistance sort of stuff. Yeah we've got the beyondblue there as you've seen, as you spoke about - and a few other things. So especially at this time of the year I reckon this sort of information would be very, very handy”

Cfa_Lak_04

It was suggested that these touch points could reach a cross-section of the diverse community:

“Well, again it's because the community's a little fragmented, but you could try putting it in places like libraries, different shops. Try and work out where people - supermarkets. Everybody goes to the supermarket. It's got to be somewhere where everybody goes if you're going to try and get a big section of community”

Cfa_Lak_19

One interviewee suggested campaigns need a higher visibility than existing pathways:

“Well look these are both tried and true sort of methods of marketing. You see lots of different people carrying them. Yeah look I just think in your face is more - like to take a leaf from the TAC guys a couple of big billboards coming in and out of town and major arterials especially around this time of the year; Have you got your fire plan in place coming into the season? I know I do take notice of that”

Cfa_Lak_04

Other suggestions for community touch points that may come under consideration included:
• Community and sporting clubs
• Cafes
• Service stations
• Hotel room information folders
• Hire cars

Thus, there are a number of possibilities that can be explored in relation to dissemination of awareness products.

**The VBIL DVD**

The prospect of a VBIL DVD elicited a range of familiar responses. Interviewees were asked about their personal attitudes towards the DVD as well as potential dissemination pathways that were likely to be effective for Lakes Entrance. As typically noted:

“Yeah and look probably also too, and this might sound a little bit - I don't mean to be that I know it all but you just wonder what extra stuff you'd get out of watching that DVD. It's probably very frustrating for someone who's trying to get the message across when you come across those sorts of answers but that's just the complacency nature of us I suppose. Unless you're actually physically involved and need it right then and there then we're probably not going to look at it. I know I wouldn't”

Cfa_Lak_04

With respect to personal attitudes towards the DVD, the most frequent response indicated that people are unlikely to personally pick up a DVD to take it home and watch it.

An overarching theme is that the most effective way to disseminate the DVD is to gain the attention of a ‘captured’ audience, rather than relying on individuals to overcome ‘inertia' to play the DVD on their own. The most common suggestion was to show the DVD on existing plasma screens around town. The most appropriate places appear to be the Visitor Information Centre, library, sporting and community clubs and doctors surgeries:
“The clinics, I know the community health centre they run ads for various people, they might put something like that up on their screens. That’s in the waiting room while you’re waiting and you do watch them because you’ve got nothing else to do”

Cfa_Lak_2324

The range of suggestions was quite broad, with no one pathway emerging strongly over another.

With respect to targeting the tourist population, the desire to protect the town’s reputation as a relaxing tourist destination, draws attention to specific worries amongst the town population and particularly local businesses. One interviewee, for example, expressed doubts that accommodation providers would do anything useful with the DVD, although the wallet cards and fridge magnets might be more appropriate:

“…the accommodation providers would be destroying them straight away (DVD). Whereas having that number, just here’s a fridge magnet, would you mind putting them on the fridges in your rooms, or whatever. That’s just an information site”

Cfa_Lak_20

Although some café’s around town have plasma screens, it is doubtful that bushfire information DVD’s would be shown when trying to attract tourist business.

Once again, written information, fridge magnets or wallet cards appear to be more appropriate for tourist populations who are unlikely to watch a DVD when pursuing rest and relaxation:

“The tourist influx is quite substantial. I’ve really got to say that in a lot of the cases with that, that’s - the deal around any sort of fire protection is not entered into their psyche because the deal that - they’re on holidays. We’ve had - one of the caravan parks have asked for that level of information. A lot of them I think actually get it anyway now. I guess what I’m saying is that some of that stuff - for that sort of people - would be better in small, written form. Say you get people turn up here that come down with their caravan and
they’ve got their kids and all the rest of it. Nine times out of 10 they’re not going to have that level of technology or entertainment with them. That would probably be the biggest thing I would say if you were asking a question around that time of the year, which is technically the worst time of the year for fires and that sort of thing, is in that tourist time, of course. Look, I’d probably say they wouldn’t because of the actual deal of them being here. They’re not likely to sit at home unless it’s shitty weather and watch it. But if it’s there, they might glance through it, I’ve found anyway. I’m not saying it’s not a good idea. I just think that in the context of tourist influxes, I believe that they wouldn’t, no.”

Cfa_Lak_21

More specifically, the DVD could be used in a targeted way to focus awareness development amongst particular populations. A suggested strength of the DVD was its ability to educate local CFA members about the VBIL service:

“That’s going to be a tough one. Yeah, I don’t think so. I’d have thought the CFA one definitely would be, because they’d play it to us at training and stuff, so…”

Cfa_Lak_20

This in turn could empower these members in their community engagement activities.

In contrast, it would seem that mass media could be used to reach a broad range of people; one of the more frequent suggestions was to convert the DVD into TV advertising.

There was a broad view that the most likely places to pick up a copy of the VBIL DVD are:

- Visitor information centre
- Local supermarket
- Service stations
- Local library
This could be complemented by a consideration of targeted distribution, supplemented by media advertising.

**Multi-Hazards**

The overall response to a move to a multi-hazard information line was positive. Aside from bushfires, floods were the most frequently mentioned natural hazard:

“As a real estate agent I’m conscious of floods because it is perceived to be a bad thing to some people. There’s been a fair bit of negativity in the last few years about flooding in low lying coastal areas and it has very likely affected people’s wanting to buy property in a certain area or more likely what they might be willing to pay for property in a certain area”

Cfa_Lak_18

Storms, and isolation, both in terms of road closures and loss of essential services were also mentioned. As a coastal town, environmental hazards such as blue-green algae blooms and boating and surf hazards were also of concern.

Risk perception potentially remains a barrier to people seeking information about hazards other than bushfires. For example, one pair of joint interviewees did not see floods as a major risk to safety:

“Interviewee 2: Well, no. We occasionally have floods here but that's not a danger to people.
Interviewee 1: It is just a hazard.
Interviewee 2: It’s just a hazard”

Cfa_Lak_0102

Floods were primarily seen as inconvenient as opposed to a safety concern:

“A lot of times with the floods it’s mostly just cutting people off rather than life threatening”

Cfa_Lak_07
The perceptions of different types of hazard and disaster should also be factored into the consideration of information lines.

Gathering user-requirements is an important process in the design of any system. Not all comments were encouraging with respect to information-sourcing behaviours. Some interviewees still expect to receive (or wait for) information from local sources:

“Well usually the SES comes knocking around. They go up to that Evatt Park there and they meet there. They sort of - they get in all the SES and they come doorknocking and everything and leaving sandbags there. When we lived at...”

Cfa_Lak_1117

There were also concerns about a multi-hazard service’s capacity to deal with a large volume of calls:

“It’d be overwhelming. They’d be overwhelmed. I think. Stick to each agency. You know we’ve got SES...”

Cfa_Lak_0102

A number of interviewees spoke about their expectations of a multi-hazard information line:

“Timely and correct is all we really need”

Cfa_Lak_03

and:

“Local knowledge in some cases is a hell of a lot better, because you can nearly rely on it being filtered by local understanding, in some cases”

Cfa_Lak_08

Most significantly, these respondents expected the number to be easy to recall, and the information to be timely and accurate and with an understanding of local issues.
Lakes Entrance Locality Recommendations

1. Reports of ‘town complacency’ and a preference for sourcing information locally suggests that simply “pushing” residents towards uptake of a service like the VBIL is likely to be unsuccessful. **Dissemination should be accompanied by short educational messages such as:**

   - This is one of many sources of bushfire information available if you feel unsure about your current fire risk
   - The information will be as current as that supplied by agency web-sites and ABC radio
   - During business hours (and during a bushfire emergency) you will speak to a person (not a recorded message)

2. It was widely reported that mass distribution of the DVD is likely to be unsuccessful, with few people reporting they would be likely to take a DVD home and watch it. **Consideration should be given to dissemination via the active and engaged local CFA brigade.** Activities such as ‘CFA Sunday’, letterbox drops to vulnerable groups such as the urban/rural fringe, and home property inspections may provide affordances for dissemination of awareness products such as the VBIL DVD and fridge magnets

3. The timing of awareness campaigns is especially important for a tourist town such as Lakes Entrance. Many interviewees described town complacency, and that you have to capture people while risks are front and foremost in their minds. **Hence, dissemination should take place via the annual Seafarers festival which may be appropriate for directing residents’ attention to the VBIL service.** Further, consideration should be given to monthly markets such as the surf club market as appropriate venues for setting up information stalls.
4. **Artefacts such as refrigerator magnets and the like, should be promoted via the multiple outlets indicated above.** Fridge magnets were received encouragingly and people appeared to be familiar with the concept of storing emergency information on their fridge.

5. **When developing a dissemination strategy, consideration should be given to the specificity of the tourism economy.** Such a strategy should target tourists in a sensitive way. They should not be sensationalist and would ideally involve consultation with the Lakes Entrance Business and Tourism Association (LEBTA).
Chapter Five: General Considerations and Recommendations

The focus of the research is on effective communication pathways at a locality level. However, what has become clear from both the current interview data as well as from our previous research in the area is that the landscape of bushfire safety is complex. If we fail to capture this complexity, we run the risk of generating recommendations that are likely to fail. Before moving to a discussion of recommended communication pathways, we will discuss our findings in relation to two broader contexts, namely those of community safety and local government.

Context 1: Community Safety Landscape

Raising awareness of the VBIL service is important, but is likely to be unsuccessful if not considered within a broader framework of relations. In chapter one, we outlined a number of processes which are likely to be relevant to the uptake and use of such a service. These include: risk perception, intentions to prepare and plan for bushfires, understanding of why to use the service, and sources of bushfire information. The data from the interviews across all three localities suggests that an understanding of these issues at a locality level should inform the strategies used to promote a service like the VBIL.

Risk Perception:

Risk perception appears to be an important determinant of safety-related behaviours. This phenomenon is not unique to bushfires. Betsch and Wicker (2012), for example, investigated the factors that predicted decisions made by citizens to immunize against the influenza virus. The authors found that perceived risk was the strongest predictor of the decision to immunise. Following such an approach, our data is suggestive that risk perception is likely to interact with the way in which residents view and use services like the
VBIL. While there appears to be general awareness of ‘some level of bushfire risk’ across all three localities, how this risk relates to appropriate safety-related actions appears more opaque and uncertain. Residents in Koroit, for example, reported that the VBIL was not relevant to their community to a certain extent because the locality was only susceptible to grass fires. In a similar vein, residents living in the built-up areas of Euroa and Lakes Entrance also did not perceive a real risk of bushfires. A failure to personalise risk may lead to complacency and therefore a lack of bushfire preparation and reluctance to use services such as the VBIL.

A tension between local and centralised sources of information?

There appears to be a tension between local and centralised sources of information. All three localities reported a strong preference to source information about bushfires from local sources. This represents a challenge for emergency service agencies aiming to promote uptake of a centralised service. This aspect will have implications for the language and images used in awareness campaigns. More specifically, “push” style campaigns in which a centralised body is seen to be pushing uptake of a service on local communities are unlikely to be effective.

Local residents often face situations where they have to judge the value of one source of information against another. Sometimes there is a tension that people may hold about an event and knowledge of the event. The concept of psychological reactance can be helpful here. Psychological reactance occurs when one perceives a threat to their behavioural freedoms (Brehm, 1966). An example would be trying to push people towards one source of bushfire information over another. Care needs to be taken that people’s freedom to choose their source of information is not removed. At the same time community members need to be aware that local sources of information (e.g. local CFA members) may not always be readily available or indeed accurate in emergency and other situations.
The issue of trust is also important. For example, while it appears that for incidents such as medical emergencies, residents in rural areas are willing to be cared for by centralised hospital and the ‘expertise’ it represents, this willingness appears to disappear when it comes to bushfire and bushfire mitigation. It may be a case of geography, self-reliance and a history of local fire response. This becomes a problem as the size of disasters increase and the source of timely and accurate bushfire safety information becomes centralised. Further research may be required to examine potential gulfs between informational preferences and information provision during bushfires.

The relevance of the VBIL to local communities and levels of trust of centralised services will need to be addressed as a component of awareness campaigns. Targeted campaigns, for example, could begin with the use of local imagery. The VBIL’s relevance to Koroit may need to be emphasised, whereas in Lakes Entrance, a subtle approach that is not seen to be at odds with attracting tourists may need to be considered. These are difficult matters to resolve.

**Context 2: Local Government**

We are mindful that community safety initiatives occur at both a state-wide emergency agency level and at a local government level. Collaboration and knowledge-sharing across the two levels may be advantageous. At local government level there is evidence of a shift towards more community based, ‘ground-up’ approaches to community safety (which reflect the approaches taken in the current research project). Observations from the current research suggest that East Gippsland Shire council is particularly proactive with a ground-up approach. Moreover, this approach is looked upon favourably by other councils with plans to adopt a similar approach (MAV, 2012). The goal of the East Gippsland council is to develop Community Information Guides (CIGs) that are not only based on objective risk as determined by the CFA’s Victorian Fire Risk Register, but that also take into account the perceived risks and major concerns of community members.
While perceived risks should not necessarily drive policy, as public perceptions can sometimes be erroneous, consideration of such risk perceptions does allow a better understanding of where the informational demands of a community lie as well as where gaps may be between perceived and actual risk. Irrespective of where actual risk lies, if people perceive their bushfire risk to be low, then they are unlikely to seek information or plan for the eventuality of bushfires.

Suggestions were also provided by MAV that developing a working relationship with the MEMEG (Municipal Emergency Management Enhancement Group) may prove useful for informing upon VBIL dissemination pathways. The MEMEG is a special interest group that organise regular meetings, encourage the sharing of knowledge across organisations and are sponsored by the OESC. The MEMEG may provide further insights with respect to embedding VBIL awareness campaigns in local government initiatives.

**VBIL Dissemination – General Recommendations**

Across the three localities there was a reported preference for local, trusted sources of information. This presents challenges in relation to centralised sources of information. While rural communities may be wary of centralised services being ‘pushed’ upon them, they often require this centralised expertise in order to act within safe boundaries. Therefore, dissemination needs to occur in parallel with education. Pathways which enable brief educational messages need to be strongly considered.

A number of common pathways were noted in each locality, with a strong preference for local newspapers and radio. Local newspapers are often looking for relevant content and interviews. Rural communities often hold monthly markets, street or other festivals where it would be appropriate for local CFA brigades to establish stalls. Market/festival-stalls staffed by knowledgeable personnel afford an opportunity for dissemination of educational content. Each locality contained active community groups. Most were open to local CFA personnel attending existing meetings to give
short presentations of bushfire safety and information sources. Local, knowledgeable and engaging speakers were also referred to frequently.

Issues around frequency of bushfire occurrence, relevance and risk perception suggest that campaigns need to be frequent (but locality-relevant) and continually refreshed to avoid complacency. One difficult situation is where residents more or less reject the view that bushfire is a threat, as appears to be the case with Koroit. Some suggestions such as roadside billboards offer greater visibility and may help focus attention in such circumstances than more traditional pathways.

Tourists are extremely vulnerable to bushfires, but appear to also be difficult to engage in risk avoidance. Tourists are specifically seeking leisure pursuits and risk awareness may not be a priority. Attempts to engage tourists in bushfire-safety initiatives that require effort on their behalf are difficult. For such vulnerable groups, attempts may need to focus on engineered solutions. Technology such as location services and context-specific devices may need to be explored. Further, the focused provision of artefacts should be considered such as wallet cards and fridge magnets to businesses which attract tourist population (for example, accommodation providers and hire-car companies).

ABC radio appears to be very important in awareness campaigns for a number of reasons. It is a trusted source of bushfire emergency information with a positive track record. It also enjoys a strong followership with ageing populations. The latest 2012 Nielsen Melbourne radio ratings suggest a strong ABC listenership amongst the 55-64 and 65+ age groups. With both Euroa and Lakes Entrance representing ageing populations, ABC and local ABC radio is likely to enjoy a strong listenership. Many interviewees when asked about sources of information (both bushfire and non-bushfire) identified the ABC radio service in positive terms. Koroit represents a slightly different demographic (both ageing rural and new young families), with evidence of a large commuting population. It may be the case that rural drive-time and breakfast programs also enjoy a large listenership in South-West Victoria,
although this was difficult to verify due to the paucity of ratings data for rural radio.

On the basis of the analysis, the following general recommendations are made:

1. Local communities have established and trusted sources of information; (a) local networks and relationships with members or volunteers of emergency agencies, (b) fire agency web-sites, and (c) ABC radio. As such they may push back against another centralised service being pushed upon them. Therefore VBIL should be framed and presented as one service amongst many, and that people should be made aware of the multiple sources of official emergency information (agency web-sites, ABC radio and VBIL). For some (but not all) the VBIL may be more accepted as a back-up information source (for example when mains power fails), if they do not view it as a first port of call. Therefore, people should be encouraged to store the VBIL number on mobile phones as a back-up measure, and to have their mobile phones charged on days of high fire danger. If they do not already exist, the CFA could explore the possibility of creating Quick Response (QR) codes for products such as the VBIL and Fire Ready application.

2. There was weak to moderate evidence of a misconception that information supplied by the VBIL would not be as current as that found on agency web-sites or on ABC radio. This perception might need to be addressed in educational material. Further, one stated advantage of ABC radio was that the information supply was constant and could be playing in the background, whereas information sources such as web-sites and VBIL required people to actively seek this information.

3. With respect to risk perception, very few residents had personal bushfire experiences to draw upon. Instead, many residents drew comparisons between their place of residence and previous fires (e.g. Black Saturday) and in the process downplayed their own perceived level of risk. There was further evidence that those in built-up areas see
themselves at low personal risk of bushfire when compared with outlying rural areas. While a combination of lower fuel loads and natural fire-breaks may suggest a lower objective risk, it appears that people living in peri-urban areas tend to take the view that reduced risk equals no risk. Therefore: **Extra efforts may be required to promote the service to those in peri-urban areas, including educational messages to ensure they personalise their bushfire risk (i.e. that reduced risk does not equal no risk).**

4. **Due to low levels of community awareness and understanding of the VBIL service, any awareness campaigns should be accompanied by (brief) educational messages.** These should promote:
   
   a. What information the VBIL provides and when to use it
   
   b. Confidence that the information will be timely and relevant
   
   c. Confidence that calls will be answered promptly, they will speak to a person (not a recorded message)
   
   d. Trust in VBIL call-taking capacity. In other words, when they call the VBIL, they will not be using up valuable resources that somebody in ‘greater need’ requires.

As an illustrative example, we propose a model of a bushfire event life-cycle and how the VBIL fits into this life-cycle as a community information service.
5. It is recommended that both the MAV and local governments be consulted with respect to possibilities for sharing knowledge and for designing VBIL dissemination programs. Discussions with MEMEG may prove informative.

6. Awareness campaigns should seek to use modes of publicity that employ greater visibility. One suggestion was large roadside billboards, similar to those used for TAC safety messages.

**VBIL DVD Dissemination**

One of the findings from the interviews is that there is generally vague awareness of the VBIL and when and why to use the service.
7. **It is therefore suggested that an awareness campaign should be coupled with educational messages on the service.** The VBIL DVD potentially helps to fulfil this need. According to this educational emphasis the VBIL DVD provides several short video clips aimed at informing several distinct groups of people about the VBIL service, including CFA brigade members, residents of bushfire vulnerable communities, tourists and travellers entering at risk areas, and diverse and vulnerable populations such as the elderly and international students.

Our findings suggest that the DVD has limited value as a mass distribution/awareness product. Whereas most interviewees were receptive to other VBIL dissemination initiatives, there was a general feeling that the DVD would not succeed in this capacity. It was widely reported that community members are unlikely to physically pick up a DVD, take it home and watch it. Most questioned people’s willingness to watch an information DVD unless they formed part of a ‘captured’ audience (that is, where the DVD is shown to people who are present at a location for other reasons).

In the introductory section we posed the question of the appropriateness of the video clips for raising awareness of the VBIL. With respect to the civilian-focused clip, the data suggests some changes may be required. This video has some positive attributes; it addresses some of the concerns raised by interviewees in the locality studies. These include educating on what kind of information and services the VBIL provides, assuring community members that this information will be timely, relevant and tailored, and also that callers will speak with a person, not a recorded message.

One potential drawback of the community member video is it has a longer running time when compared with the other clips. If there is reluctance to sit down and watch a public safety DVD then the running time of around five minutes might be too long to maintain people’s attention. These findings are consistent with those of Rohrmann (2000).
8. **We recommend the CFA consider removing some footage featuring the VBIL call centre.** Although people expressed a desire to speak with a human operator, some images of the call centre may not reassure people with respect to call-taking capacity or professionalism. We refer to car insurance commercials as an example, where call centres appear as highly-organised, well-resourced operations.

The strength of the DVD may be in its ability to assist and educate local CFA brigade members to take ‘ownership’ of dissemination in their local communities. The content of the brigade-focused video is appropriate for achieving this goal in several ways. First, the service is framed as something to which information demand could be diverted in order for brigades to fully dedicate their time to managing operational processes and tackling emergency situations. Second, advice is given on how CFA brigade members can disseminate information on the VBIL when in the community, including through avenues identified as effective by this research. The DVD could therefore be utilised as part of a community safety toolkit distributed to local CFA brigades.

The data suggests, however, that the CFA have a considerable barrier in engaging civilians to watch the DVD in private. Notwithstanding, there were several ideas as to how to disseminate the DVD. A number of interviewees noted that there are a small number of community markets and festivals in each locality in which the local CFA brigade could set up a stall. This allows dissemination to occur with value-added educational messages from those manning such stalls. What this does not do is overcome the inertia about watching the DVD once people arrive home. It should also be noted that those who would watch the DVD at home are likely to be already interested in bushfire safety and information sources. It is highly unlikely that this approach will be successful with those who are not engaged in these topics; a crucial audience.

Taking into account the potential reluctance or inability of people to play an information DVD themselves, a number of dissemination pathways are
available where community members view the DVD playing while going about their day-to-day lives.

9. **It is recommended that specific and identified pathways for the dissemination of the DVD are examined and appropriate arrangements made to distribute VBIL information through them.** The data supports a condensed version of the civilian-focused video in places where screens are typically visible to community members and running content. These include:

- local libraries
- medical waiting rooms
- local cinemas (shown prior to films)
- (council offices, supermarkets, service stations, pubs)

An important consideration in playing an information DVD in places such as these is the availability of audio. Some of these screens do not play audio, while others are located in environments that are loud, or where people’s attention is otherwise engaged. For this reason

10. **It is recommended that a targeted distribution of the DVD should be considered taking into account the various contexts where DVDs could be used.** As previously mentioned, the most promising method of showing the VBIL DVD to members of the public is in situations in which a captive audience already exists. These include:

- Community group gatherings (groups that were receptive to this included Rotary and U3A)
- CFA gatherings (e.g. Fire Awareness night)
- Schools (that is, to students)
11. It is suggested that these screenings would be to maximum benefit if they accompanied an engaging presentation and/or Q&A from an informed representative of the VBIL.

This will be more effective where:

- The local CFA brigade is already engaged in community education and safety
- There are active community groups who are amenable to having a (local and engaging) speaker present at existing organisational meetings.
- From our research findings, the suggested messages in such a presentation would be:
  - This is one of a number of sources where you can find the most up-to-date official advice, including web-sites and ABC radio
  - During business hours (and during a bushfire emergency) you will speak to a person (not a recorded message)
  - You would be helping your local brigade members by allowing them to defend the township and community during an event without responding to information requests

12. It is recommended that screenings of the VBIL DVD be accompanied by the distribution of VBIL fridge magnets and/or wallet cards.

Due to the nature of these gatherings, it is likely that non-residents would be missed by such a campaign. This highlights that there are significant challenges in presenting the DVD to tourist populations

13. Consideration should be given to broadcasting the DVD on local television

Other Possibilities: Alternative forms of Media and Design
Other forms of media afford some possibilities for dissemination, especially amongst tourists. Currently CFA provide Facebook and Twitter updates, and have created a Fire Ready application for both iPhone and Android-based mobile phones. On days of high fire danger, emergency warning messages generated through the OSOM system are uploaded to social media in a timely fashion by a dedicated social media group within the State Control Centre.

Information on social media and alternative forms of dissemination did not come out as a strong source of bushfire information across the three localities. There may be a number of factors in play. First it is possible that ageing, rural demographics are not adopting these forms of media. But, this can change and one interviewee contrasted the “bush telegraph” with the technology his son uses. As stated:

“No because that's change. We never have [relied on VBIL]. We ask the neighbour. Is your power out too? ... The old bush telegraph. But the younger generation... I mean, another 20 years it [VBIL] be just, common knowledge, something's going oh, let's just - that's like my kid now, my son he's 21. I can ring him up - if I hear a newsflash, ring him up any side of the day because he'll just hit a button on his iPhone and go straight to the newspaper. Oh it's got the headlines in here in the Herald Sun. Oh yeah righty-o. Whereas I'd wait until the 6 o'clock news. You heard a newsflash in the arvo - younger ones they're just changing; they just know it straight away.

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Second while the uptake of social-based media continues to increase, it is the long-established and more entrenched modes of communication that are more easily discussed by interviewees (irrespective of age: 29% of interviewees were less than 50 years old). Meanwhile research from the United States suggests that social media is becoming more prevalent, even amongst the ageing population (Madden, 2010). ABS census data suggests similar results for Australia, with nearly 75% of adults aged between 50-64 having accessed the internet in the previous 12 months (see figure 8 below).
With respect to young adults and social media, Lenhart and others (2010) suggest trends within social media use. Facebook appears to maintain a strong following in comparison with other social media networks:

Some key findings:

- Since 2006, blogging has dropped amongst teens and young adults while simultaneously rising amongst older adults (roughly one in ten online adults maintain a personal online journal or blog).

- 47% of online adults use social networking sites, up from 37% in 2008.

- Facebook is currently the most commonly-used online social network among adults. Among adult profile owners, 73% have a profile on Facebook, 48% have a profile on MySpace and 14% have a LinkedIn profile.

Although specific applications may become less or more popular over time, the use of social media and technology more broadly is not going to decline.

**YouTube:**

Popular media sharing sites such as YouTube also affords potential cheap and mass-distribution pathways. As an example, Metro trains appear to have
had some success (at least in terms of number of mass-exposure), of their recent train safety campaign “dumb ways to die”

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJNR2EpS0jw

Some use-data on the video was taken directly from the YouTube site on 14/12/2012 suggests that some 33 million people have now viewed the video clip. Its success in terms of reaching a large number of people is therefore proven. Furthermore, the follow-on publicity has also broadened the number of people who have become aware of the video. The track is available to purchase on iTunes which further increases exposure at little cost. What remains to be evaluated is its value as an educational device in terms of encouraging safety-related behaviours.

Media technologies such as YouTube also allow for the possibility of advertising to a ‘captured’ audience. This comprises advertising segments a user must watch prior to screening their selected media clips (i.e. advertisements that you can skip in 15 seconds, etc.). Nonetheless, such a practice may put viewers off.

**Mobile Applications:**

There is an existing Fire Ready application for Android and iPhone systems. Information on the VBIL is included. One Lake Entrance resident talked about creating a Lakes Entrance application for tourists and locals, however was hesitant to include bushfire-safety material, citing the potential negative appraisals associated with false alarms:

“Yeah, we’re creating a Lakes Entrance app, starting off with an Android app - just an app for Lakes Entrance, which, once again will be tourist related but we also want to heavily get the locals using it. So we want to get things like the footie club, so they can just upload their roster each week, the surf club upload their rosters each week, things like that. So trying to get the locals really using it. We can see that things like the fire alerts and that, but because of the debacles and the blame games that have happened in years gone by, I would prefer to not have anything to do with it, because an alert comes
through and it's wrong and it's this and it's that, and it upsets this group but not that group"

Given the existing CFA Fire Ready application, the creation of a VBIL mobile application would be superfluous, however other avenues of VBIL dissemination using mobile technology such as QR codes and VCards could be explored.

**QR (Quick Response) codes:**

Quick response codes provide a quick and easy opportunity for people to avail themselves of applications and emergency information. The utility for the VBIL or VBIL-type service to use QR code is a possibility to explore.

**VCard:**

Vcards are electronic business cards that transmit important contact details of individuals, organisations and services. Their advantage is that they do not rely on users having to manually input phone numbers into their mobile phones.

**Vcard, QR code and mobile technology:**

It may be possible to include QR code on artefacts such as fridge magnets and wallet cards. This step removes the need for people to input the VBIL number into their mobile phones. Community members can scan the VBIL contact number directly into their phone and this may also cut down on costs as wallet cards and fridge magnets need not necessarily be distributed on mass. For example, stands placed in strategic locations such as Visitor Information Centres and Post Offices, could allow people to scan the contact details quickly into their phones while they wait in queues.

**Location Services and Context Sensitive Devices:**

With mobile technology and increasingly smartphones becoming ubiquitous, it becomes possible to explore the use of new technologies such as location
services and context sensitive devices. Location services employ mobile technology which allows messages to be sent to mobile phones as they move into specific locations.

**Figure 9:** An example of business cards containing QR codes for .vcf electronic contact details.

![Business cards with QR codes](http://yeblon.com/vcard-on-business-card-with-qr-code)

**Formative design techniques:**

There are even further possibilities open to the emergency agencies with respect to designing systems for enhancing community safety, that are known as “formative” techniques. These may be particularly important as agencies move to designing new service models such as a multi-agency, multi-hazard information service.

There is a suite of existing design techniques that are used to predict how, when and why people use artefacts in decision-based scenarios. These design techniques can occur in parallel with formative research methods (sometimes known as action research). Designs and use-scenarios can be quickly mocked up in the field and observational research can rapidly inform upon the adequacy of artefacts for providing users with information and advice that will enhance their safety-related decision-making. Often participants can be given some basic material so that they can mock up their own use artefacts.
An example of such a use-case scenario for the current research would be:

Manny and Frieda are German tourists who are recently arrived in Australia. It is Australia Day 2015 and climate change has led to 8 consecutive days of extreme weather. The township of Rivers Edge (very popular with tourists) is on high alert for bushfires. Manny and Freida arrive at the local tourist information centre, looking for information on leisure activities such as water-skiing, platypus spotting and gold fossicking.

How does the Three Rivers council ensure that Manny and Freida’s experience in the Vic enhances their safety if threatened by bushfire?

Recommendations:

14. The VBIL management team should undertake a consideration of the use of social media in relation to information dissemination.

15. The video clips from the VBIL DVD should be edited for an online presence (e.g. YouTube)

16. Formative design techniques should be utilised when considering potential technology-based dissemination pathways

Multi-Agency, Multi-Hazard Information Line:

Findings from all three locality studies suggest general acceptance of and support for a Multi-Agency, Multi-Hazard (MAMH) service model. Again perceived risk appears to be critical. In particular, residents of Koroit who perceive their bushfire risk as low suggested that a MAMH service model would be more appropriate for their locality. Observations in Lakes Entrance suggest that the threat of flooding is more salient than that of bushfire. This may also be a result of a more recent history of flooding (June 2012) when compared with bushfires.

Again these findings present a challenge for emergency service agencies. There are potential trade-offs (time, efficiency, resources and community safety) between raising awareness of the VBIL for the current fire season, and raising awareness of a potentially altered service with very different branding.
(multi-hazard information line). There are obvious motivations for raising awareness of a service that helps protect community members in the short-term, however significant resources will then have to be put towards re-education when the service model changes for the 2013/2014 fire season.

At the time of research the East Gippsland Shire Council were in the process of assessing risk perception amongst local communities. It may prove useful to the VBIL team to approach organisations such as Municipal Association of Victoria or local councils to collect data on community risk perception. This may guide strategy with respect to which localities are more heavily targeted for VBIL awareness campaigns. In other words, communities where bushfire threat is high (and perceived as high by community members) will be more appropriate for immediate VBIL awareness campaigns, whereas townships like Koroit might be better served by contributing to the development of the MAMH service model.

This service needs to hit the ground running. Based on the interview data, consideration needs to be given to how to rapidly engender trust and uptake of this service. One suggestion from the data is that consideration is given to a service model that is regional. For example, one potential service model could comprise five regional service centres of the one service provider that employ local expertise (Melbourne & surrounds, East Gippsland, NE Victoria, NW Victoria and SW Victoria). Of course there may be trade-offs with such a model such as running costs, infrastructure requirements and training requirements. The point is that a review of tenders needs to carefully consider user requirements, and how residents view such services.

Gathering user-requirements is an important process in the design of any system. A number of interviewees spoke about their expectations of a multi-hazard information line. The service should have the following features to it:

17. **A locally-based service**: Many interviewees wanted call-takers to have local knowledge so that information could be provided in a timely manner.
18. **The contact number should be easy to recall:** The number 555 was cited by a number of interviewees as appropriate. Some even referred to the letter F(ive) also being the first letter of Fire and Flood. This could also help to engender trust in the service as 000 is associated with community protection and well-being.

19. **A service that can operate in a technically responsive and quick way:** There should be confidence concerning volumetrics and the capacity to handle a large number of simultaneous calls.

20. **Geographically relevant information provided in a timely fashion:** This requirement greatly increases the demands on call-takers’ expertise and knowledge as the service expands to cover multi-hazards, state-wide.
References


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Municipal Associations of Victoria (2012). Personal communication.


Appendix A – Community members interview protocol

Effective Communication Pathways: Community Interview Protocol:

1. About yourself
   a. What is your occupation?
   b. Years lived in community?
   c. Other members of household?

2. How you interact with your community
   a. Could you describe what it is like to live in your community in a few sentences?
   b. Do you belong to any groups in your community?
   c. Can you tell us more about regular community events?
   d. How did you find out about these services and events? Was it easy?
   e. What are your experiences with these services?
   f. Could you talk about the community or council services that your household uses?
   g. Has there been any service which you became aware of only after you received information?
   h. What media do you use for local information?

3. General bushfire information
   a. Do you have any experience of bushfires?
   b. Have you made any bushfire preparations, e.g. plan?
   c. Do you feel you have enough information to prepare and execute your plan?
   d. Are you aware of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line? If YES, how did you become aware of the VBIL?
   e. Are you likely to call the VBIL if you became aware of a local fire?
   f. If so what information will you seek?
   g. What would be your expectations of this service?
   h. Where else would you be likely to source information about a fire?

4. Improving awareness of the VBIL
   a. Wallet cards, fridge magnets
   b. Drawing on your experiences of other services, what are some suggestions for disseminating information to make people aware of the VBIL? Why do you think these methods will work?

5. The VBIL DVD
   a. Would you watch a DVD containing information about the VBIL? In what context, e.g. at home, library?
   b. Drawing on your experiences, how would people’s attention be drawn to the VBIL DVD?

6. Other hazards
   a. What natural hazards in your environment are you concerned about?
   b. What other types of emergency information would you be interested in accessing?
   c. When/how would you be most likely to access this information?
   d. What would be your expectations of this service?
   e. Do you feel you are able to reduce your risk?

7. Anything else?/wrap up
   a. Is there anything we haven’t covered that you think is important for us to know?
Appendix B – Service providers interview protocol

Effective Communication Pathways: Service Provider Interview Protocol:

8. About your organisation
   a. What is your organisation?
   b. Does this involve interacting with other organisations?
   c. Does this involve interacting with community groups?

9. Your role in the organisation
   a. Is that a full / part time or voluntary role
   b. If you are a volunteer, what is your usual field of employment?

10. Community interactions
    a. How does the community learn about your services?
    b. What are your experiences in delivering these services?
    c. What are the community expectations of your service?
    d. Do you use local media to disseminate information?

11. VBIL awareness
    a. Are you aware of the Victorian Bushfire Information Line? If YES, how did you become aware of the VBIL?
    b. Drawing on your experiences, what are some suggestions for distributing information to make people aware of the VBIL?
    c. Why do you think these methods will work?
    d. Where would people watch a DVD containing information about the VBIL? In what context, e.g. at home, library?
    e. Drawing on your experiences, how would people’s attention be drawn to the VBIL DVD?

12. Other hazards
    a. What natural hazards in your environment should people be concerned?
    b. What other types of emergency information would you be interested in accessing?
    c. When/how would you be most likely to access this information?
    d. What would be your expectations of this service?
    e. Do you feel you are able to reduce your risk?

13. Anything else?/wrap up
    a. Is there anything we haven’t covered that you think is important for us to know?
About the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work

Established in 2009, the Centre for Sustainable Organisations and Work promotes theoretically informed analyses across a number of disciplines. Unified by common enquiries into Work, Sustainability and Organisations, and Globalisation, Centre staff develop highly relevant evidenced-based theories and applied analyses of the contemporary social world. The aim is to inform and promote effective policy, practice and debate. A distinctive feature of the Centre’s work is its use of historical and comparative reference. Thus, the work of the Centre is focussed on developing an understanding of people in the context of significant social, economic and organisational change.

The Centre is structured around a series of research clusters which enable high-quality research outputs as well as strong collaborative links with other research centres. These clusters include: The Arts of Design and Management; Emergency and Disasters Research; Entrepreneurship and Business Futures; Geopolitics, Business and Government; Green IT; Organisational Value and Social Media; Ports and Maritime Logistics; Social Enterprise Research; Sustainable Management and Innovation; and, Women and Work.

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