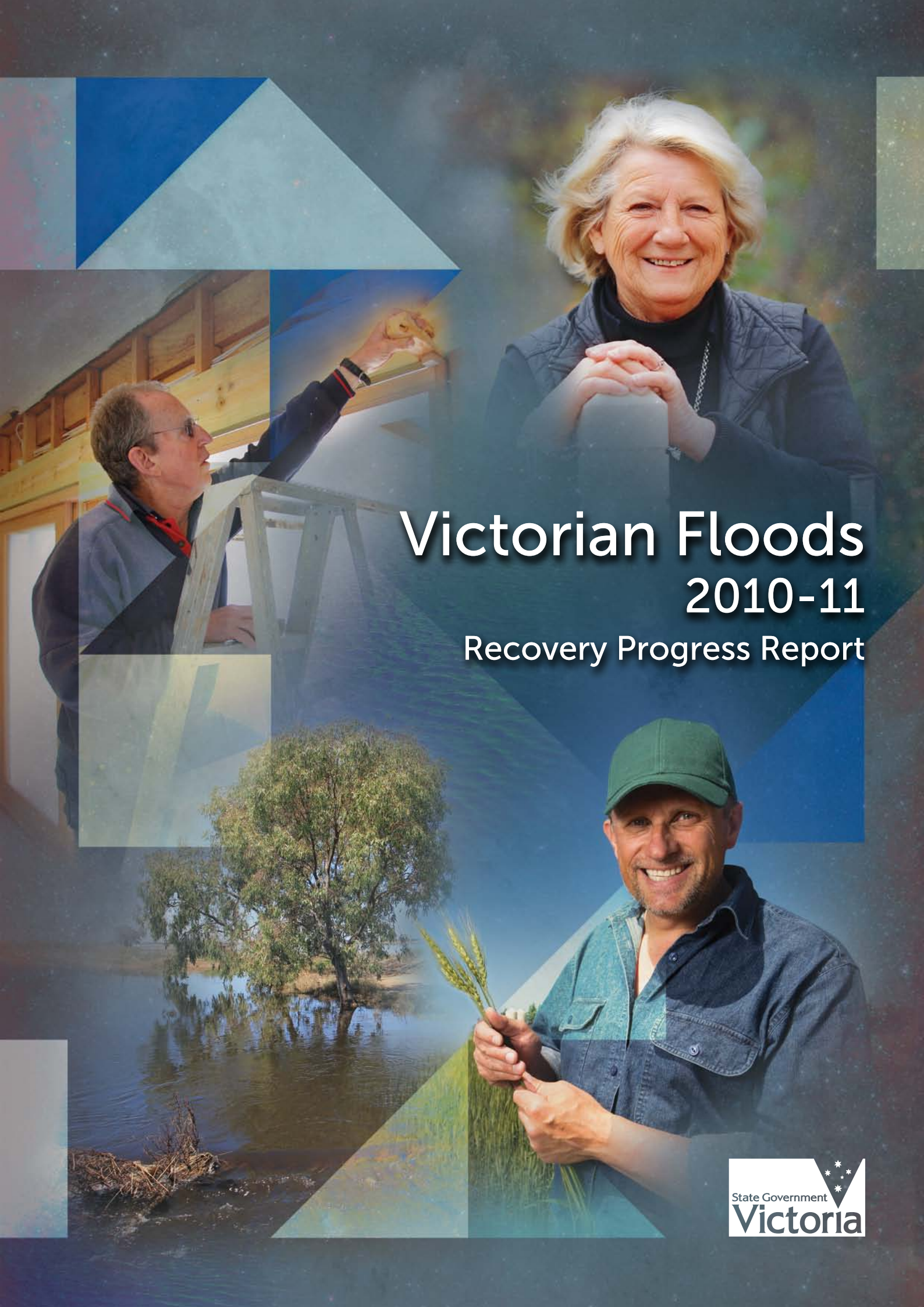




Victorian Floods 2010-11

Recovery Progress Report

If you would like to receive this publication in an accessible format please phone the Health and Human Services Emergency Management Branch on (03) 9096 8103, using the National Relay Service 13 36 77 if required, or email emb@dhs.vic.gov.au

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Victorian Floods 2010-11 Recovery Progress Report 2011

Statistics in this report relate to support provided to specific flooding activities that took place across Victoria at various times between 4 September 2010 – 23 March 2011. Most programs and statistics were enacted in response to a specific event. Reference in this report does not mean all programs related to all events.

Information is accurate at the time of printing.



FOREWORD

Floods can wreak havoc on everything in their path and the numerous flooding events that hit most of Victoria from late 2010 to early 2011 were no different. Homes, businesses and farms were damaged, communities were dislocated and, in many cases, the recovery process seemed daunting.

The water that drenched the state over those six months created destruction, heartache and a huge repair and recovery task for affected communities and the state as a whole. Homes were uninhabitable, businesses suffered, tourism was disrupted, livestock, crops and pastures were lost, and water still lies across some land.

The Victorian Government responded to each event, providing immediate assistance and targeted support for those impacted.

Throughout the year we have visited many of the areas impacted by the floods and have seen the spirit and resolve of those affected and the outstanding efforts they have made so far to restore their homes, businesses and communities. We have a great deal of respect for their determination and fortitude. Victorians are tough and resilient and determined to recover and rebuild—but they need help.

A huge amount of progress has been made with extensive repair works completed but we know the work ahead is significant. The Victorian Government is committed to supporting communities on their recovery journey. With assistance from the Commonwealth Government and in partnership with local government, and a diverse range of organisations and affected communities, we are creating a more resilient Victoria that will face future events with improved flood mitigation and emergency responses.

We are pleased to present this progress report, which shows the enormous amount of work and recovery that has taken place so far. You will see in the following pages the level of destruction faced by those in the path of the floods and how far we've come to repair and rebuild.

Ted Baillieu MLA
Premier

Peter Ryan MLA
Deputy Premier

Mary Wooldridge MLA
Minister for Community Services



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INTRODUCTION

Torrential rain, riverine and flash flooding took place across Victoria from 4 September 2010 to 23 March 2011, causing major damage to whole communities, roads, rail networks, community infrastructure and the natural environment. Some communities were inundated several times, causing repeated damage to homes, businesses and the agricultural sector.

For many in regional and rural areas of Victoria, these floods followed the hardship that came from over a decade of drought.

Many separate flooding events took place over this six-month period affecting different regions of the state at different times with different impacts. Funding and support measures were set up to enable the recovery of communities and local economies, the reconstruction of the state's essential public assets and to help communities become more resilient for future disasters.

Recovery efforts have included particular emphasis on ensuring people affected by these floods have the information, support and services they need to pursue individual and community recovery.

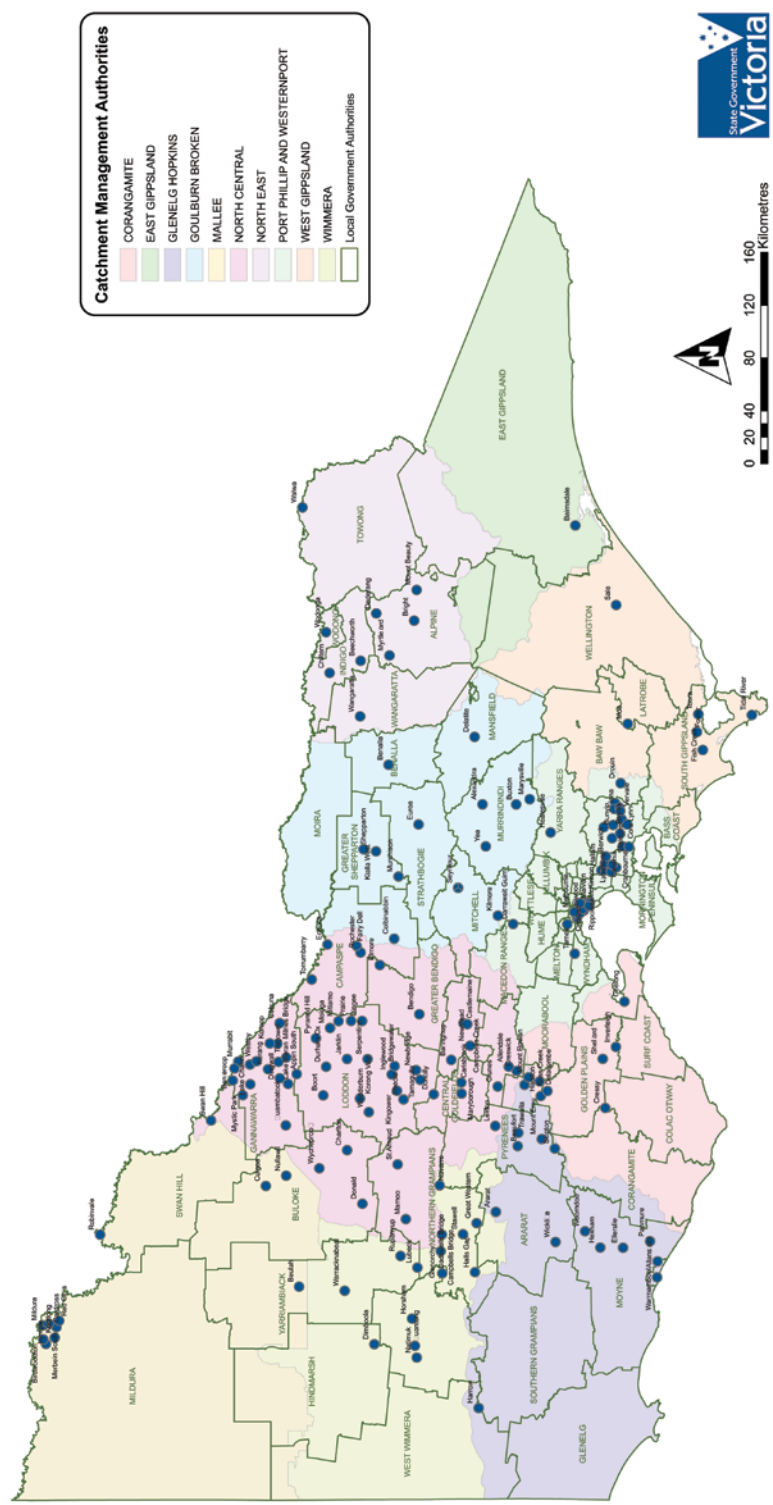
This report describes the various flooding events during this period and their impact on people and communities, the economy (business and primary industries), the natural environment and public assets and infrastructure (reconstruction). The report details the recovery and reconstruction efforts of the Victorian Government, in partnership with the Commonwealth Government, local councils, private and not-for-profit sectors and local communities, up until 30 September 2011.

This report does not include detail about flood warnings, emergency response, broader emergency management issues or recommendations for future disaster recovery programs or processes. It is intended to provide affected communities and the people of Victoria with an overview of the recovery support provided and the progress made to date.

More information on the responses to the various flooding events can be found in the *Review of the 2010–2011 flood warnings and response* being undertaken by Neil Comrie AO, APM on behalf of the Victorian Government.

The Victorian Government's Green Paper *Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria* (September 2011) details broad emergency management issues and called for the community to offer innovative ideas and feedback to improve the way Victoria responds to emergencies. The Green Paper creates an opportunity to consider new ways to deal with the increased risks of fire, flood and other natural disasters. The paper challenges current thinking about Victoria's crisis and emergency management arrangements and poses proactive questions about the practical options for reform.

MAP OF AFFECTED AREAS





What happened

Throughout the period from September 2010 to March 2011, Victoria experienced some of the most extensive and damaging storm and flood events in its history.

In early September 2010, high rainfall, particularly in the west and north-east of the state, resulted in significant riverine flooding and swelling of major rivers. Flash flooding occurred in several regional towns.

In October, flooding developed in the northern catchments of the state, together with heavy rains in central and north-eastern Victoria.

November saw further downpours in the north-east and then across the state with major flooding again occurring in the Avoca and Loddon rivers.

December brought heavy rainfall across the western and northern areas.

More summer rainfall in January 2011 came on top of ground that was already saturated, creating more severe and widespread flooding events. Extensive rains across two-thirds of the state caused flash flooding, followed by major river flooding in northern, western and central Victoria. The multi-day rainfall caused the Avoca, Loddon, Wimmera and Campaspe river systems to flood, with waters moving slowly downstream and progressively flooding wide areas of the landscape during January and into February. The impacts were unprecedented for many areas.

Further heavy rains fell over much of the state in February, generating flash flooding in the Melbourne metropolitan area and Mildura.

In late March, a severe storm event resulted in significant flash flooding and storm damage to the South Gippsland area, particularly Wilsons Promontory.

These dramatic flood and storm events had widespread impacts across the state, affecting most of Victoria's 79 local government municipalities.

Impacts

Immediate physical damage from such dramatic flooding events is usually easy to see, but long-term personal impacts can take months and sometimes years to become evident.

Fear for personal safety and the safety of family, friends and neighbours, along with concerns about the unknown level of damage that would come from such intense rain and flooding, created a great deal of anxiety for many people. Exhaustion from flood-proofing homes and businesses set in quickly. Once people started returning to their homes, farms and businesses, anxiety over the massive clean-up and loss of cherished personal items was often overwhelming.

Added to this were public health concerns over septic overflows, drinking water, food safety, increased risk of mosquito-borne diseases, mould damage, power outages, illness and injury.

Bushfires and more than a decade of drought had already created very high levels of stress in some communities and these flood events compounded the situation.

These personal impacts were obvious in the immediate aftermath but as recovery continues and new issues emerge, increased levels of stress and personal impacts will arise for months, and possibly years, afterwards.

Immediate physical impacts are clearer and usually easier to measure. Following each flooding event, the Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner coordinated rapid-impact assessments on the built and natural environments in all



affected areas. Assessments in January and February alone indicated some form of damage to many thousands of homes and buildings with a direct or indirect effect on thousands of businesses and primary producers. In the agricultural sector, estimates of the total loss and damage reached hundreds of millions of dollars.

Impacts were felt in many key tourism regions, including the Great Ocean Road, Grampians National Park, Wilsons Promontory and towns along the Murray River, with an estimated loss of \$176 million in tourism revenue alone.

Due to the scale, extent and slow-moving inundation of the 2011 events, particularly in northern Victoria, detailed damage assessments on buildings and road and rail infrastructure continued to be undertaken as the water receded. Damage estimates for public assets such as arterial roads, parks and areas managed by catchment management authorities were continually updated as inundated areas became accessible and while detailed repair and rebuilding assessments were conducted.

Whole-of-government response and recovery

The Victorian Cabinet oversees the state's flood recovery program. They are supported by a Flood Recovery Group comprising departmental Secretaries to ensure a whole-of-government focus and engagement with regional Municipal and Community Recovery Committees.

The state and federal governments are working together to ensure flood-affected communities and local government authorities have the information and support they need for flood recovery. Financial assistance for departments and councils is available through the Commonwealth-State Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

With strong support from the Commonwealth Government, the Victorian Government is able to provide recovery assistance to flood-affected areas, build more sustainable infrastructure and develop increased resilience among these communities.

HISTORY OF FLOODS IN VICTORIA

On average, major regional flooding occurs somewhere in Victoria every 10 to 20 years. In the last century, major regional floods occurred in 1909, 1916, 1917, 1934, 1956, 1974, 1990, 1993 and 1998.

There are many drainage basins across Victoria, with each comprising a number of rivers and streams. These rivers and streams are subject to flooding and travel

through and around many towns and communities. These periodical floods sometimes result in significant social and economic consequences for local communities and the state. Many of Victoria's most significant agricultural areas are also located on the floodplains of most major river systems to take advantage of fertile soils.¹

¹ Source: Victoria State Emergency Service 2007, State flood response plan V1.4, State Government of Victoria, Melbourne, p. 5



PEOPLE AND COMMUNITIES

Following a disaster, meeting immediate personal needs and providing support for longer-term recovery is vital to creating a healthy, resilient community. This section details support provided for direct needs such as food, clothing and shelter as well as ongoing assistance for long-term emotional and physical health, repairing homes and meeting financial needs.

In the immediate aftermath

Fifty relief centres were established by local councils, supported by the Victorian Government, to provide shelter, food, first aid, public health information, counselling and financial and legal assistance.

After the flood information kits were distributed to provide practical information on how to manage issues such as safely returning home, being aware of the potential for disease, growth of mould in damp houses, how to manage trauma and where to find financial support.

Available immediately following each major flooding event, 9,555 personal hardship **emergency grants** of up to \$1,067 per household helped meet basic needs such as food, clothing and personal items, shelter and transport.

Emergency accommodation for 209 households was provided in motels, hotels and caravan parks. The Salvation Army coordinated the collection and distribution of donations such as clothes and household items through their shopfronts, working with affiliates such as St Vincent de Paul.

The floods significantly affected the quality of water supplies in certain areas so regular community consultation took place to ensure affected townships knew how to secure **safe drinking water** and develop solutions to restore safe supplies.

In January 2011, the Department of Health deployed a field primary care clinic to Charlton in north-western Victoria following the evacuation and flooding of the local hospital and its grounds. The **temporary clinic** provided clinical and primary care, including wound management and vaccination and acted as a central point for the community to access other services. The clinic was active from 21 January to 25 March 2011 after which a general practice and primary care clinic was established.

Ambulance Victoria worked side by side with state and local government public and environmental health officers in affected regions to help provide **health care services**.

Throughout 2011

Twenty-eight **flood recovery centres** were established by local governments to provide a one-stop shop for information and services. These centres provided a place where people could talk about their experiences, enquire about and apply for emergency grants and interim housing, collect donated clothing and household goods and find local services and support.



The Red Cross and the Victorian Council of Churches, working in partnership with municipalities and health and community service organisations, provided support through **home visits and phone calls**. More than 600 volunteers visited about 5,700 flood-affected households. This work continues to provide people with the opportunity to talk about their concerns and find relevant assistance.

Psychologists Dr Rob Gordon and Dr Sharon des Landes have years of experience supporting people recovering from disaster. They brought this knowledge to the 26 **community information sessions** delivered between them. These sessions provide information on how emergencies such as floods affect people and communities, ways to recognise and understand the effects of stress and practical strategies for people to look after themselves, their neighbours, family, friends and community.

beyondblue: the national depression initiative worked with communities affected by the floods to provide ten **workshops on mental health and wellbeing**. Through these workshops, community leaders were equipped to recognise when others were having trouble coping and learned simple strategies to help promote recovery. *beyondblue* also helped people find support within their own community and gave useful advice on how and when to seek professional help.

Major personal hardship grants have been an important source of financial support with 2,526 grants to the value of \$13.26 million being issued. These grants have helped cover the cost of temporary

accommodation, food, clothing, personal and household items, reconnection of services as well as repair of structural damage and replacement or repair of essential household contents.

The **Salvation Army's flood appeal** provided \$875,000 through their \$1,000 Winter Needs Gift. A partnership forged between the Salvation Army and the Department of Human Services made the gift available to those who had already been assessed as eligible for an emergency grant, reducing the amount of paperwork applicants needed to complete.

Emergency accommodation supplied in the immediate aftermath continued to be available while people established more permanent arrangements. **Interim accommodation** was provided in public housing properties or caravans and moveable units located on the private land of the household. Eligible households were also offered **rental assistance** to cover bond and rent to help people secure a private rental property while rebuilding.

Health services that were previously delivered by East Wimmera Health Service at its Charlton Hospital Campus were offered by the **newly established general practice and primary care clinic**. This interim service continues to provide a nurse triage service, district nursing and a range of allied health services, while planning occurs for replacement facilities for the Charlton Hospital. Planning is underway for the re-establishment of permanent facilities for the Charlton campus of East Wimmera Health Service.



SUPPORTING COMMUNITIES

To sustain the immediate and long-term emotional recovery of people in affected communities, health and community service organisations continue to provide Flood Support Workers and counselling sessions.

To 30 September 2011, Flood Support Workers have helped more than 1,100 households with practical assistance and referral to relevant services. Flood Support Workers provide

information and advice. They link people to accommodation assistance, counselling, financial or legal advice, information and support for farmers and businesses, advice on repairing or rebuilding a flood-damaged home and a range of other services. Helping with tasks such as paperwork and funding applications, Flood Support Workers also provide people with someone to talk to and listen to their concerns.

Needs identified by Flood Support Workers

Enquiries and assistance applying for grants
Accommodation and property issues
Referrals and support for psychological issues
Financial assistance
Physical health issues
Insurance issues
Home repair and rebuilding
Primary production and business issues
Material aid (clothes, household goods etc.)
Personal and family wellbeing
Legal issues
Employment and training

HOW FLOOD SUPPORT WORKERS CAN HELP

Mary and Bob* were referred to a Flood Support Worker after their home was significantly damaged by heavy rains in January 2011.

The spouting in their home couldn't cope with the volume of water and caused part of their roof to collapse. The water overflowed underneath their home, causing further damage.

The elderly couple, who need health and mobility support, were still living in their water-damaged home when they were referred to a Flood Support Worker. Their home was missing part of the roof, had electrical problems, mould was flourishing and mice were becoming an issue. Mary had been unwell and Bob had an infection.

Although the couple had received an emergency grant and their insurance paid for most of the damage to their house, the roof was not covered, making other repairs impossible. The couple were on a pension and did not have the financial means to pay for repairs to the roof.

The Flood Support Worker helped Mary and Bob apply for grants and access Salvation Army funding. She also arranged for an environmental expert to inspect the house and successfully negotiated for the insurance company to fund storage for home contents. The Flood Support Worker also linked the couple with a counsellor and they were encouraged to stay in contact with their local doctor.

* Not their real names.

VICTORIAN FLOODS DISASTER RELIEF FUND

The Victorian Floods Disaster Relief Fund was established on 17 January 2011 by the Victorian Government in partnership with the Australian Red Cross to help families, individuals and communities affected by the 2011 floods.

Almost \$19 million was raised to assist people whose household contents and homes were damaged. These donations were distributed through the Damage to House and Contents Gift in two separate rounds.

The first round issued payments of \$1,000 to more than 2,200 eligible applicants. The second round provided more significant funds to more than 1,350 applicants who had experienced severe damage to their homes. The grants were based on the extent of flood damage, the cost of repair, individual financial circumstances and level of need. These second round payments ranged from \$500 to \$18,500 for damage under \$100,000 and were capped at \$40,000 for people whose out-of-pocket expenses for flood damage exceeded \$100,000.





Sharon des Landes running a flood recovery information session in Horsham. Photo courtesy of Wimmera Mail-Times.

The \$4 million Floods Community Recovery Fund, a joint Victorian and Commonwealth Government initiative, was set up to provide funding assistance across 26 flood-affected municipalities to **restore community facilities and social networks**. Grants of up to \$5,000 for not-for-profit community organisations and notional allocations to municipalities are helping to deliver projects such as repairing and rebuilding community centres, sporting facilities and local halls as well as social activities, exhibitions and community events. A strategic reserve in this fund is also available to address unmet and emerging needs.

For flood-affected families with students the Victorian Government implemented a range of **educational grants and resources**.

Relief grants of up to \$1,000 were made available to assist with student materials and uniforms.

Counselling and support was provided for students, teaching and school staff who were feeling anxious. Workshops for teachers included *Psychological First Aid for Teachers* and *Mental Health First Aid for Teachers*. This gave them skills to support children and adolescents as they work through the recovery process, particularly relating to trauma.

Programs such as *Calmer Classrooms* and *From Isolation to Connection* have also helped students and teachers alike understand the distress they might experience and how to deal with it.

Here for each other: Helping families after an emergency, originally created by *Sesame Street* to help families and carers help children recover from Hurricane Katrina, was revised for Australian families. The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development worked with the creators to make this publication available

for parents and carers to **equip them with strategies for helping children** respond to their needs using familiar *Sesame Street* characters.

A **parent and teacher resource kit** was also developed, with a specific focus on how to talk to children who may be worried following the floods or scared about future flooding.

Support into 2012

Support for emotional and mental health continues to be available through **community information sessions** held by Dr Rob Gordon and Dr Sharon des Landes, **home visits and appointments** with Australian Red Cross and the Victorian Council of Churches and **counselling** through schools and a range of service providers.

Home visits and appointments with **Flood Support Workers** also continue to be available in 29 municipalities to provide information about ongoing support and referrals to counselling, housing, financial advice and education and training assistance.

Flood recovery centres in Charlton and Kerang continue to provide a central point to find personal support, advice and assistance.

Housing assistance is still being provided with three moveable units and 37 caravans on site where homes are being repaired or rebuilt, where land is still too wet to begin work or where insurance claims are being finalised. These vans and units will be available to those who need them until permanent arrangements are finalised. The Department of Human Services is working with these households to ensure they have access to all available, relevant services and support to help get them back into a home.



MARIE'S STORY

Marie's small miner's cottage was inundated with floodwater – destroying floor coverings, whitegoods and cupboards. Marie said she didn't believe she was as deserving of assistance as those flood-affected in Queensland.

"I wasn't going to make an insurance claim as I'd heard that claims weren't being paid on floods and I didn't know there was other help available to me," Marie said.

Months later, Marie visited a flood recovery centre and with help from Flood Support Workers, was able to apply for grants and put in a claim on her insurance.

Marie has now been able to repair her home and also has support for her emotional recovery.

Case study courtesy of Cheryl Munzel, Inglewood & Districts Health Service.



SUSTAINABLE FARM FAMILIES

Food and fibre-producing families from flood-affected areas are participating in the Sustainable Farm Families program, which focuses on the physical and mental health, wellbeing and safety of farmers and their families.

Managed by the Department of Primary Industries, the program is an initiative of the Western District Health Service and is designed to remind farmers

that, while they continue to work tirelessly to recover from the floods, it is vital they take the time to assess their own health and wellbeing.

The program provides a series of workshops that cover a range of health topics including cardiovascular disease, cancer, diabetes, stress, farm safety, depression, anxiety, nutrition and exercise.

GENEROUS VICTORIANS SUPPORT EACH OTHER

Victorians from across the state rallied together to help people facing ongoing hardship as a result of the floods. Families, small businesses and schools from Bendigo, Melbourne, Yarrowonga and Albury participated in an initiative to collect and donate groceries, with more than \$20,000 worth of groceries donated. A farming couple from Kerang also donated their time to deliver the groceries to people in need across the region.



Kerang farmers pick up donated groceries from Girton Grammar and St Joseph's Primary School students in Bendigo.

Photograph courtesy of the Bendigo Advertiser, 7 September.

FLOOD EDUCATION FOR KIDS

Students are learning about flood recovery and the positive and negative effects of floods through an innovative program run by Conservation Volunteers Australia and the Glenelg-Hopkins Catchment Management Authority.

The interactive program shows children how water moves through the countryside and creates flooding with a model of the Glenelg-Hopkins

catchment. Children can change the flow of water to see the effects of different water movement before, during and after a flood.

Funded through the Commonwealth Government's *Caring for our Country Program*, and supported by Wannon Water, the program is visiting schools in Portland, Warrnambool, Hamilton, Penthurst, Hawkesdale and Mortlake.

VIP VISITS BOOST MORALE

Visits by His Royal Highness, the Duke of Cambridge in March 2011 and the Honourable Alex Chernov, AO, QC Governor of Victoria in May and July 2011 lifted spirits and acknowledged the hard work being done.





BUSINESSES AND PRIMARY INDUSTRIES

Floodwater damaged crops, products, equipment and infrastructure but businesses and farming communities were affected by more than just the water. Damaged roads often cut access between employees and their workplaces and between customers and supplies and services. Employees who were needed to help rebuild at work had to prioritise getting their families back into their homes and were often unavailable to assist the business recovery.

Victorian businesses, primary industries and tourism operators in flood-affected areas are being rebuilt and revitalised through their own hard work and support from a range of government grants and programs that provide for staffing, loans, recovery packages, bonuses and mentoring programs. Many farmers have found that the floodwaters have restored the nutrients and moisture to the land and are expecting their best crops since before the drought.

In the immediate aftermath

Clean-up and restoration grants of up to \$25,000 were available for small businesses, farmers and not-for profit organisations that were directly affected by the floods to help them get back to business and minimise the negative impacts on local economies.

Major arterial roads were opened as quickly as possible to provide access between commercial and industrial centres and their employees and customers.

The Department of Primary Industries launched an immediate flood response with a **state flood recovery centre** in

Bendigo that phoned 2,173 farmers to identify animal welfare needs, assess loss and damage, refer urgent personal needs to relevant agencies and made 328 farm visits to address urgent issues. Staff attended 52 community recovery meetings that had about 1,300 people in attendance and made 1,322 referrals for support on animal welfare and recovery advice, housing assistance, personal and financial counselling and referral to the fodder coordinator.

Tourism operators in the Murray, Grampians, Great Ocean Road and Goldfields regions received a boost, with an initial \$1 million for marketing, public relations activities, event support and industry development support to let visitors and tourists know they were still **open for business**.

Throughout 2011

The **health of local economies** has been a focus with much flood recovery work concentrating on providing **access** to commercial, industrial and primary industry areas, on **using local suppliers** and making sure businesses and farms could get **back to operations** as quickly as possible.



Employment opportunities were created through a range of programs and parks have been reopened, even partially, as soon as possible to **minimise the impact on local economies** through lost tourism.

Flood Recovery Officers were employed across 32 municipalities to help communities develop and implement long-term recovery plans. The officers continue to help towns get back on their feet and work with families, groups and agencies to restore the infrastructure and spirit of these communities. The officers arrange support and counselling, including business support and provide links to initiatives and projects.

Rural Coordination Officers are in place in many municipalities and have helped match volunteers with the needs of farms for repair and clean-up work. They liaise with catchment management authorities, organise farm access and rubbish collection and communicate with primary industry representatives and businesses on behalf of farmers.

Funded by the Victorian Government, Rural Coordination Officers also link farming families and workers with personal and financial counselling.

The Flood Apprenticeship Retention Program has provided **employment security** for more than 600 apprentices who derive the majority of their income from primary production and associated services.

Primary producers, businesses and not-for-profit organisations that provide crucial and significant services to their communities could apply for low-interest concessional loans through a shared arrangement between the Australian and Victorian governments. Up to \$650,000 paid over 10 years will give these organisations an important boost to ensure services and employment continue.

It is likely the impact in tourism regions such as the Grampians, Murray and Wilsons Promontory will continue to be felt with considerable work yet to be done on damaged national park infrastructure. A **further boost of \$1.5 million** has been provided for tourism industry development and marketing and public relations in Australia and key international markets to minimise negative economic impacts in these areas.





Support for Small Business and Primary Industries

Flood Business Recovery Program

Small businesses struggling in the aftermath of the floods continue to be eligible for **free business mentoring** through Small Business Victoria in partnership with the Victorian Employers' Chamber of Commerce and Industry (VECCI). As at 30 September 2011, 290 small businesses, 109 farmers and seven not-for-profit organisations had been referred to business advisers.

Small business mentoring advisers **visited 20 flood-affected townships** on board the government's Mobile Business Centre to provide guidance to business operators on how to rebuild their enterprises, in particular, negotiating appropriate claims from insurers. These services have helped small businesses and farms get up and running, build resilience and bring economic prosperity back to communities.

VECCI Business Relief Fund

Businesses that were indirectly affected by the floods through loss of trade were able to apply for up to \$5,000 in **financial assistance**, with grants available through the VECCI Business Relief Fund. As at 30 September 2011, 197 eligible businesses have benefited from this fund.

Victorian Business Flood Recovery Fund

The \$10 million Victorian Business Flood Recovery Fund encourages private sector **investment and job creation to enhance the economic development** of flood-affected communities. The fund is available to medium to large businesses that have a focus on tourism, agriculture, food, forestry and energy to create sustainable new jobs and enhance local economic opportunities.

Financial counselling

Primary producers and small rural businesses continue to have access to **free financial advice** from the Rural Financial Counselling Service. The Victorian Government has committed an extra \$3.41 million to extend this program until June 2013 to help identify business options, prepare cash-flow budgets, review contracts and assist with loan applications and referrals to assistance schemes. The service operates as a partnership between the Australian and Victorian governments and the not-for-profit organisations that employ the counsellors.

Small Business Continuity Planning Project

Small businesses in rural areas are important in providing resources, expertise and employment opportunities that disaster-affected communities can depend on throughout the rebuilding process. This national project **highlights the role of business in supporting a community's preparedness for and resilience to natural disasters** such as floods and bushfires. A stocktake has already been conducted of existing business continuity programs and resources. The second stage will identify and plan for new initiatives. The Department of Business and Innovation is participating in the planning and implementation of the project within the context of the national strategy for disaster resilience. The project will be monitored through the National Emergency Management Committee.

EMPLOYMENT HELPING ENVIRONMENTAL RECOVERY

The Catchment Management Authority Flood Recovery Employment Program provides food and fibre producers and other workers in the Mallee, Wimmera, North Central, Goulburn Broken and Glenelg Hopkins regions with **employment opportunities**. Under the \$6.15 million program, more than 40 local people in regional Victoria have been employed to undertake flood recovery works, including stream clearing and fencing, as well as weed, pest and erosion control.

The program, delivered in partnership with the Department of Sustainability and Environment, is providing employment and training for skilled local

people who have been directly affected by flooding, including farmers and farm workers. These people are gaining transferable employment skills that will allow them to find employment in their local community. This program will also assist in building support networks and relationships in regional areas that aid in building the resilience of rural communities and improves their ability to manage and adapt to the effects of extreme events. The program supports sustainable production and helps the environment by using a local workforce that could otherwise be unemployed or impacted by the floods.





Support for people on the land

Goulburn Murray Irrigation District Flood Recovery and Flood Plain Restoration

A \$22.6 million assistance package for flood-affected irrigators was announced in April 2011 to help the region recover and ensure it is in a stronger position to reduce the impacts of future flooding. This program is available until 30 June 2012.

There are two key components to the package:

1. Lower Loddon Irrigators' Recovery Package – \$17.5 million

Voluntary land buyback and incentives – \$12.4 million

The package offers assistance to landholders in the highest flood risk areas of the Lower Loddon floodplain, where the duration of inundation was prolonged. It offers the opportunity to food and fibre producers who need to relocate or create a more flood-resilient business. It also offers a safe haven for those who decide to stay in the area by providing funding for ring levees to protect their homes from future flood damage.

The package is more than just a buy-back or response to hardship. It aims to allow more appropriate agricultural use on land that is subject to intense flooding. It also offers the opportunity to relocate vulnerable agricultural businesses to more suitable areas.

This land will be resold to farmers who will be fully informed of the flood risks so they are factored into the way the land is farmed in the future.

As at 30 September 2011, negotiations were taking place with 16 properties, which represent more than 2,200 hectares of very high flood-risk land.

Facilitating irrigator recovery – \$5.1 million

Flood-affected irrigators in the Loddon, Campaspe and Central Murray areas are receiving assistance to help them **plan for future flood recovery** of their farm businesses and to better understand and access existing financial and technical support programs. Irrigators can access full cost recovery on whole-farm irrigation plans to re-establish irrigation design and layout for flood-affected properties. They can also access full cost recovery on soil salinity surveys to help make sound decisions on where they will get the best return from investing in flood recovery activities.

Grants of up to \$2,000 are available for independent professional advice to help flood-affected irrigators make recovery decisions. Activities to the end of August had generated 204 enquiries, and as at 30 September, 19 properties (4,984 ha) have completed soil salinity surveys and six properties (1,303 ha) have completed whole-farm plans. Many more surveys and whole-farm plans are in progress.



COMMUNITIES SUPPORTING EACH OTHER

An iconic Charlton café is back in business thanks to community support and help from volunteers across Victoria.

The Boyz Café in Charlton is a treasured community meeting place and a highly-regarded lunch stop for travellers driving across the Wimmera. Like most establishments in Charlton, it was not spared from the force of the flood in January.

Owners Neville Cloak and Robert Spruhan faced an enormous amount of work to get the café repaired and back in business.

They say community support and help from generous volunteers from across the state was crucial to achieving the café's reopening in May.

Neville said the community had really come together and supported one another. "And we've also had help from volunteers from Melbourne".

"A retired builder from Glen Waverly Uniting Church volunteered to help us with the rebuild. He did a lot of good work including helping us gut the entire shop and build new cupboard and fittings.

"We also had help from a local couple who came in to help us re-establish the garden out the back," Neville added.

Neville says that without this support it would have taken a long time to establish the business again "and now, business is fantastic!"

2. Lower Loddon floodplain and groundwater bore works – \$5.1 million

Emergency repair of levees and groundwater monitoring bores to meet short-term needs in the Lower Loddon area are well advanced.

The Lower Loddon Irrigator's Recovery Taskforce is overseeing the recovery package. This taskforce is a joint local, regional and state government body that has gathered community input from a local Community Consultative Committee.

Community engagement and communication activities have also been delivered to help raise awareness and understanding of these programs.

Support into 2012

Financial counselling and advice, the Lower Loddon Irrigator's Recovery Package, Clean Up and Restoration Grants and the Victorian Business Flood Recovery Fund continue to be available to support businesses and primary industries in their recovery.

WORKSHOPS FOR THE WINE INDUSTRY

Vine growers were offered a series of workshops to help them deal with the implications of heavy rainfall throughout the growing season. The Department of the Primary Industries worked with the Victorian Wine Industry Association and the Australian Wine Research Institute to develop workshops focusing on best-practice production challenges, integrated pest, disease and vineyard floor management and associated quality implications for grape growers and grape buyers.



BUSINESS AS USUAL – OPENING UP THE GRAMPIANS FOR TOURISM

A significant storm swept through the Grampians National Park in January, causing damage to roads, walking tracks, campgrounds and popular visitor sites. Many areas of the national park were closed due to landslides. However, the townships of Halls Gap, Dunkeld, Wartook, Pomonal and Dadswells Bridge were open for business.

Tourism Victoria, in conjunction with the Grampians Regional Tourism Board, launched an immediate-response advertising campaign to let people know there was still plenty to do in the Grampians. As a result, tourism operators reported strong visitation during the Easter school holidays, delivering increased economic activity for the region.



BUSINESS RECOVERY FUND IS TRULY GOOD NEWS FOR MARYBOROUGH

True Foods, a manufacturer of flat bread products and supplier to supermarket chains, will open a new \$3.4 million food processing plant in Maryborough which will help boost the local economy. In July, the Victorian Government announced that True Foods would receive assistance

through the Victorian Business Flood Recovery Fund to establish the plant, which is expected to create 165 jobs over the next five years. The economic benefits are expected to flow throughout the Central Goldfields Shire and the Loddon Mallee South region.

WILSONS PROMONTORY TOWNSHIP REOPENS

The northern section of Wilsons Promontory National Park was open to visitors during autumn and winter, offering short walks and wildlife viewing opportunities. The township of Tidal River reopened to the public for the September school holidays. Walkers

were able to gain access to walking tracks such as Lilly Pilly Gully, Picnic Bay to Squeaky Beach and Darby River to Tongue Point. The Tidal River General Store reopened for the weekend leading up to Cup Day in November.





ENVIRONMENT

Victoria's natural environment such as waterways, parks and reserves, suffered major damage from the 2010-11 floods and the storms and heavy continuous rain that caused them.

The most obvious destruction occurred along the Wimmera, Avoca, Loddon and Campaspe rivers – all flowing north to empty into an already swollen Murray River. The flows along these waterways inundated adjacent farmland and townships and damaged dams, fences and the Wimmera-Mallee Pipeline. More than a hundred levee breaches were caused by the enormous uncontrolled flow of water in the Lower Loddon region.

The high river levels severely impacted on Victoria's flood warning system, severely damaging at least 152 of the 585 surface water and stream flow measuring sites and gauges. At least 14 of these sites now require full reconstruction. Of the 371 groundwater monitoring bores located within the flood-affected areas, 313 sites need a clean-out and a further 58 bores require maintenance to the headworks or stabilisation of the ground surface. A further 70 sites also require investigation, when the water recedes and they are accessible.

The February floods resulted in unprecedented volumes of murky standing water slowly flowing across arable farmland, through townships and across rural residential areas. This is a problem particularly with stormwater in the Sunraysia area around Mildura and trapped floodwaters in the Benjeroop and Murrabit areas near Kerang and Swan Hill.

The storms, rain and floods severely damaged 73 of Victoria's national and state parks and supporting public infrastructure.

The Grampians National Park suffered 192 flows of debris over a 75-kilometre area, with the longest landslip being 2.38 kilometres in length. The fierce storms and rain across the park also damaged 39 bridges, 512 kilometres of roadways, 204 kilometres of walking tracks, five camping grounds, 15 visitor facility sites and 20 visitor buildings. As a result, 90 per cent of the Grampian's walking tracks and road networks were closed to visitors.

The You Yangs Park near Lara was forced to close after heavy rain caused erosion at more than 90 sites across the park. Heavy rain over the Alpine National Park also severely damaged the West Kiewa Logging Road and the King Basin Track. In March 2011, Wilsons Promontory National Park was hit by storms and rain, flooding much of the Tidal River village, damaging 10 kilometres of the Entrance Road and cutting an access bridge.

Other areas damaged include public parks near Creswick, Hepburn and Bendigo in Central Victoria, the Mt Buffalo National Park and public land around Beechworth and the Upper Murray in the state's north and the Dandenong Ranges.

In the immediate aftermath

As part of the overall Victorian Government flood response, staff from the Department of Sustainability and Environment and Parks Victoria were deployed to assist the Victorian State Emergency Service in various roles. They helped with tasks such as filling



sandbags, dropping supplies to isolated communities, participating in incident management teams and providing technical expertise for mapping, floodplain management and dam safety issues.

Rapid assessments were made of risk to life and property, infrastructure and the environment on public land across regional Victoria. Recovery of Crown land, national parks and state forests included protecting water quality and supply, cultural heritage, built assets and infrastructure on public land.

The Victorian Government has provided a flood recovery package of \$62.4 million towards **restoration works** across the state. The Premier visited the South

Gippsland region soon after the flood, committing \$8.8 million funding to support immediate recovery efforts at the Wilsons Promontory National Park. The funding was used to help restore roads and infrastructure in the park enabling it to partially open for Easter. Some visitors were able to access the Prom and support local businesses. The Grampians National Park was allocated \$5.5 million.

Throughout 2011

Flood recovery work began almost immediately after each deluge and is still underway. This work includes **stream and waterway clean-up** and works to



restore and repair flood-damaged parts of Victoria's flood warning network.

Work has commenced to **restore the 76 parks** damaged by storm or flood. Damage assessments have been completed for all parks except those along the Murray and its main tributaries (that remain inundated with floodwaters). A total of 4,540 individual damage reports were received. Of these, 1,713 assets were damaged in the Grampians National Park and 480 at Wilsons Promontory.

All damaged parks are now open to some extent to facilitate tourism and recreation.

Minor repair works have also been completed within the forest estate to remove debris from bridges and to repair beaching. This is in addition to the temporary repair of roads to enable access to forest areas. Several recreational walking tracks with minor damage have also reopened, with the remaining damaged tracks requiring significant works.

The **flood agricultural recovery framework** is providing targeted services to industries such as meat, wool, grain, dairy and horticulture, with the aim of them returning to effective production levels within 12 months of the floods.

All **flood warning sites** damaged during the floods have been temporarily repaired to ensure they are operational (and able to send data) in case of further flooding events. Funding was allocated through the Flood Warning Network – Repair and Improvement Initiative to:

- permanently repair 132 damaged stream gauges and upgrade systems (with 65 gauging sites permanently repaired by the end of October 2011 and additional damaged sites identified)

- improve flood warning information accuracy and timeliness through improved technology.

In the meantime, **surface water gauges are being monitored** and actions taken to restore access and functionality. Work also continues to fully restore the state's groundwater monitoring system. **All 371 bores in flood-impacted areas have been inspected and the clean-out of damaged bores has commenced, with work on maintenance beginning shortly.**

Work continues to address levee breaches, especially in the state's north. To drain excess floodwater from the lower Loddon floodplain, emergency levee works and pumping was undertaken. This was followed by repairs to levees to provide some flood protection during the 2011 winter and spring, leading into a longer-term planning process on levee ownership and management issues. The local North-Central Catchment Management Authority is also implementing a streamlined approval process for landholders to repair private levees on adjacent property.

Meanwhile, a **base-level assessment of levees** will be undertaken in areas north of the divide, based on strategic rural levee systems as identified by catchment management authorities. A similar assessment will also be done of **urban levees** in regional towns. The resulting data will feed into the longer term planning process on levee ownership and management issues, which will also be influenced by the recommendations of the Victorian Parliamentary Environment and Natural Resources Committee Inquiry.

The first three of 25 **community flood studies** planned over the next four years are now underway at Charlton, Creswick and Clunes, and studies will commence at another 13 locations in western Victoria.



Monitoring sites

Of the 128 Regional Water Monitoring Partnership sites that were damaged, forty-eight have been completely repaired, including the following examples.

Meringur Pioneer Settlement

The Milewa Pioneer Park is located in the small farming community of Meringur, close to the South Australian border. The park is community-managed by a small band of dedicated volunteers who have an interest in preserving the farming heritage of the dryland Mallee. Over many years, an extensive array of exhibits has been built on the site including an impressive display of old farm machinery and buildings. Severe flooding of exhibits and facilities resulted in erosion to the grounds and water damage to buildings. Crews from the Flood Recovery Environmental Employment Program regularly visited the site to repair fencing, clean up exhibits and remove fallen timber and other debris to provide a safe and appealing environment. The crews also helped prepare for the annual Pioneers Day celebration in October.

Merbein Common

Merbein Common is a long-term collaborative project between the community, Merbein Common Friends Group, Parks Victoria, the Department of Sustainability and Environment and the Mallee Catchment Management Authority. This significant river frontage area suffered a high degree of inundation damage in February. Much of the built infrastructure was lost or damaged as a result. Protective fencing was either cut to allow stranded campers to leave the area or was washed away. This is an important area that provides a safe amenity for many

locals as well as holiday-makers. The area has many sites of cultural heritage significance including scarred trees and middens. Crews from the Flood Recovery Environmental Employment Program helped repair fences, remove rubbish and debris, reinstate traffic control bollards and repair the many damaged or lost facilities.

Moodies Swamp report

Moodies Swamp is a 180 hectare cane-grass wetland 40 kilometres north-east of Shepparton in the Goulburn Broken catchment. Above-average rainfall inundated this nationally significant wetland for the first time in over 10 years.

In response, swathes of cane-grass emerged across the wetland and the threatened brolga again formed nests. In December 2010, a Brolga chick was sighted at the swamp. One of the largest recorded populations of the nationally threatened rigid water milfoil (*Myriophyllum porcatum*) is also present at Moodies Swamp, and has benefited greatly from the flooding.

Approximately 70 bird species have been recorded at the wetland since flooding. Pied and black cormorants are using the swamp as a fishing spot. Pelicans, egrets, swans and grebes have nested, and whiskered terns have been seen undertaking their aerial aerobatics – chasing food above the water. Many woodland birds have also flocked to the wetland to take advantage of the abundant food.

Macro-invertebrates were observed at the swamp, with a diverse range of beautifully coloured damselflies and dragonflies being spotted.



Support in 2012

Longer-term flood studies will provide new or updated, high-quality information to implement structural flood mitigation measures (such as levees and floodways) as well as non-structural measures (such as land-use planning and community education).

Ground survey and remote sensing data collected during the flood events has been collated, validated, and will shortly be stored in an accessible statewide format, as well as being part of a formal technical review of the 2010–11 floods.

The flood studies will help with the development of a \$12.08 million **FloodZoom** initiative, which will improve the community's ability to prepare for, respond to and recover from flooding. They will also be used to improve land-use planning. Other studies will be funded through the Natural Disaster Resilience Program, which is led by the Commonwealth Government.

As the damage assessments have proceeded across storm and flood-affected state and national parks, it has become increasingly apparent that some **visitor facilities will not be able to be returned to their original location**, due to significant damage to the landscape itself.

This is particularly so for roads and walking tracks in the Grampians National Park and Wilsons Promontory. These sites are being documented in the damage assessment process and technical expertise will advise whether the sites can be repaired or need to be moved to another location. A cost-benefit analysis will be applied to each case to help guide this work, noting factors such as the cost of relocating the damaged facility, its value to the visitor experience and its effect on emergency access and other park management issues.

These issues will be considered and resolved according to their importance over the next 12-18 months.



Peter Walsh, Minister for Water and Deputy Premier Peter Ryan inspect flooded areas in rural Victoria. (AAP Image/Julian Smith)



PROVIDING A SAFE HOME FOR ANIMALS

The students at St Patrick College in Ballarat constructed more than 100 nesting boxes to help wildlife such as parrots and brushtail, ringtail and sugar glider possums. In some cases, the boxes will be used by Wildlife Victoria volunteers to help possums recover and rehabilitate over a 6-12 month period then be released into the wild with their boxes.

Year 10 and 11 woodwork Vocational Education and Training students made the nesting boxes with some help from Year 7 metalwork students and funds and material donations from the Ballarat community.

The school hopes to continue making the nesting boxes next year with another 50 planned as part of their curriculum.





RECONSTRUCTION

Damaged transport infrastructure such as roads, bridges, culverts and train lines, caused towns and communities to become isolated. Floodwater also seriously damaged important community infrastructure such as hospitals, power stations, community halls, health care centres, sports grounds and schools.

In total, more than 2,000 roads were damaged. At the peak of the floods in February 2011, 66 arterial roads and in excess of 320 local government roads were closed. Overall, approximately 10,000 kilometres of roads, or 25 per cent of roads and tracks on Victorian public land, were damaged.

Damage to roads included a significant amount of pavement surface washed away, large potholes, cracking and shoulder erosion. In some areas, road pavements and structures became dangerously weakened due to saturation of the area beneath the surface.

There were approximately **192 landslips**, 33 of which affected the arterial road network. The Grampians area experienced major landslips that destroyed roads and closed one of the state's busiest tourist routes. This unprecedented event effectively isolated Halls Gap, leaving just one route in and out of the town. Road closures had an ongoing significant impact on tourism in Halls Gap and surrounding areas.

Similarly, Wilsons Promontory National Park was isolated for more than six months due to the washout of a major bridge that formed part of the single access route into the park.

Passenger train services to Swan Hill, Echuca, Ararat and Maryborough **were temporarily closed** and a number of rail **freight lines were rendered inoperable** due to serious damage. Freight that could

not be moved by rail was displaced onto roads, with additional movements causing further damage to the road system. In addition, approximately **25 school bus services were disrupted** due to road closures.

Approximately 220 bridges, including 49 railway bridges, were estimated to have suffered extensive damage because of the floods. Some of these were major bridges, such as the Crowlands Bridge on the Ararat-St Arnaud Road, which was **completely washed away**.

The floods disrupted health and medical facilities including the East Wimmera Health Service Charlton Campus.

The heavy rain also led to the opening up of **16 historic goldmine** shafts and **12 sinkholes** (collapsed mine ventilation shafts).

In the immediate aftermath

As part of the overall response by the Victorian Government, staff from VicRoads, V/Line, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development and other agencies were deployed to assist the State Emergency Service. Staff participated in various roles, such as managing road and bridge closures, assisting with evacuations and participating in emergency management teams. They also provided vital information and technical expertise on road and rail networks, engineering, transport options and freight re-routing, as well as keeping the community informed.



Despite such significant and widespread damage, access to townships and roads was vital. Roads are a lifeline for access to food, medical assistance, material aid and equipment for shelter. Roads and rail are also major pathways for primary producers to distribute their food and produce to the rest of the community.

VicRoads regional staff worked closely with Victoria Police, **escorting trucks and cars through flooded sections of roads**. VicRoads ensured **roads were made safe** by clearing debris that was washed across roads. The VicRoads Traffic Management Centre had extra staff to manage the large number of enquiries and information about affected roads and road closures was published on VicRoads websites.

Throughout 2011

Much of the damaged transport and community infrastructure has now been repaired. Most are back to their existing functionality and many have been improved for **greater resilience** in the face of future natural disasters.

However, floodwaters don't always recede immediately and in some cases, land was covered or waterlogged for months, hampering rebuild and reconstruction efforts. Repair work could not start until floodwaters had receded and assessments could be made of the damage.

Flooding can also cause **major damage to homes** and this can take months or even years to repair. Damp conditions can cause mould to flourish, wet floors to swell and buckle, walls to become soft and sinking houses to need restumping. In many cases, repairs can't start until the land is stable and no longer saturated. A **repair and rebuilding advisory service continues to provide support and advice** on issues that specifically

relate to flood-damaged properties, such as reblocking, how to manage buckled floors, treating damp and mould and how to identify when the land is dry enough to rebuild on.

Transport infrastructure

Roads

Roads are being progressively reopened as floodwaters subside and repairs are undertaken.

As of September 2011, 60 of the 66 arterial roads and in excess of 258 of the 320 local council roads that were damaged have been reopened since the peak of the flood events in February.

VicRoads has flood recovery teams conducting ongoing assessment and recovery works. Natural disaster support to municipalities was established, including the appointment of regional coordinators to evaluate road infrastructure damage in municipalities.

VicRoads and its maintenance contractors are continuing the recovery effort, including managing closed roads, conducting inspections and making temporary and permanent repairs. Roads are a priority in rural and regional areas, providing essential links to schools, employment and services.

Damage assessments for up to 95 per cent of arterial roads across Victoria have been completed, with 100 per cent completed in western Victoria. Roads are being progressively reopened as repairs are undertaken.

Small but significant movement occurred in the northern wall of the Hazelwood Mine, owned by International Power Hazelwood, with cracks appearing on the surface of the Princes Highway



VicRoads and Victoria Police temporarily closed the Morwell Bypass. Department of Primary Industries geotechnical experts worked closely with Victoria Police, VicRoads, International Power Hazelwood and Latrobe City Council to identify what needed to be done for short and long-term stability in the mine.

Extensive remediation work was undertaken by the mine including repairing the sinkhole that developed in the Morwell Main Drain, drilling horizontal drains and other drainage work to improve stability of the mine.

VicRoads has completed significant remedial works on the freeway including waterproofing the central median, injection grouting of soft areas and installing extensive monitoring devices to measure any movement within the freeway reservation that enabled the freeway to be reopened on 22 September 2011.

Rail

Although some passenger train services were temporarily closed, **all were operational** by 4 February 2011.

Along the Mildura freight line, there were several sections of track where the underlying structures including ballast and formation washed away from several sections leaving sleepers and tracks suspended. As a temporary measure to get the line operational again, **ballast and rock were used to fill the gap so that trains could return to the track.** Temporary repair work to the Cope Cope Bridge has now been completed, with a 150-tonne crane lifting debris from the creek. In coming months, the bridge will need to be rebuilt.

Major Victorian freight lines Sea Lake and Robinvale were cut during the January and February 2011 floods. Following repair of the Arnold Bridge, the lines have now reopened. V/Line has rebuilt the bridge to higher specifications, with concrete pillars being buried up to seven metres into the ground to ensure stability and to mitigate against future flood damage.





Community infrastructure

Flood Recovery Community Infrastructure Fund

The \$30 million Flood Recovery Community Infrastructure Fund has **helped councils and community groups restore flood-affected assets**. Community infrastructure eligible for funding includes playgrounds, swimming pools, sporting facilities, picnic areas and recreational walkways that were badly damaged during the floods. Applicants have been encouraged to use local contractors to stimulate regional economies, create employment and provide opportunities to increase skills.

Local Government Clean Up Fund

The \$5 million Local Government Clean Up Fund was distributed to flood-affected **councils to assist their communities to clean up, recover and rebuild**. The funding helps manage the collection and clean-up of general flood debris including household goods, furniture and appliances. These funds went to 30 municipalities affected in the January, February and March flood and storm events.

School Reinstatement Program

Safe work environments were re-established at 215 schools where they had been deemed unsafe because of flood damage. Schools are also being assessed to determine any future risk of flooding to ensure measures are put in place to minimise future impacts.

REX THEATRE, CHARLTON

The art deco Rex Theatre is an important local community asset that provides entertainment for rural and regional communities in north-western Victoria. This iconic landmark is also a tourist attraction that brings visitors to Charlton.

After suffering significant flood damage earlier this year, the Rex Theatre needed extensive refurbishment, reopening in late 2011. Funds from the Flood Community Recovery Fund helped rebuild the Rex Theatre, with \$30,000 towards new chairs and floor coverings and \$1,500 towards a community event to celebrate its reopening.

URGENT BRIDGE REPAIR

When the floods hit, roads and bridges were damaged throughout Victoria, making it difficult for communities to stay connected. One such example was on the Murray Valley Highway in the state's north, where unsafe road conditions isolated residents.

In just one day, a temporary bridge, called a Bailey bridge, was assembled and erected over the Murray Valley Highway. This provided important access to Kerang for emergency services and local residents.

Road approaches to the bridge and asphalt laying were carried out at Wandella Creek. The temporary bridge was in place for two weeks until the critical section of the Murray Valley Highway could be restored.

In Victoria's west, a section of the Crowlands Bridge on the Ararat-St Arnaud Road, a key link for surrounding townships, was completely washed away and piers supporting the structure were undermined.

VicRoads staff worked closely with adjoining landholders, Pyrenees Shire Council, Wimmera Catchment Management Authority and service providers in the area in the period following the floods. They implemented a suitable engineering solution for a crossing over the Wimmera River to provide ongoing access for local communities.

The road was reopened mid-April with a side access road and low-level crossing, which restored access over the Wimmera River. Permanent repairs are still pending, but traffic is able to use the bridge and the community is once again connected.





Victorian Governor Alex Chernov speaks with staff at Charlton Hospital.

East Wimmera Health Service – Charlton Campus

In the early 1920s, Dr WE Wilson built a private hospital and residence in Peel Street, Charlton. Dr Robinson attended his patients in Nurse McLean's Private Hospital (Lanark) in Mildura Way. These were amalgamated in 1936 and the Charlton Bush Nursing Hospital was established. The hospital was expanded over the years and an active hospital committee and ladies auxiliary worked diligently to update and continue the high standards of the hospital.

The Charlton Bush Nursing Hospital amalgamated in 1999 to become the East Wimmera Health Service Charlton Campus. Further building works occurred in 2006-07 with the relocation of the Charlton Medical Centre from High Street to Menzies Street in Charlton. These modern co-located facilities greatly improved patient comfort, the amenities and delivery of service. Charlton Campus is an important and much-loved asset for the town and its surrounding communities.

Charlton Campus was badly damaged by the 2011 floods and could no longer be used to safely treat patients. Residents from the nursing home and hostel were relocated to various other residential aged care facilities in nearby towns or close to family.

In response, the Department of Health established a temporary clinical facility to help meet the urgent primary health care needs in the immediate community and surrounds. The field primary care clinic, the first of its kind in Victoria, was deployed by Ambulance Victoria and operated as a base for local health professionals including nurses, general practitioners and other allied health professionals.

After supporting the community for two months, the field primary care clinic was closed and replaced by a newly established general practice and primary care clinic. East Wimmera Health Service has been providing a nurse triage service, district nursing and allied health services from the clinic and after-hours health care arrangements are in place.

The state government has committed funding to East Wimmera Health Service Charlton Campus for staff transition arrangements, additional ambulance services and resources from other health services, as well as planning to replace hospital facilities. This includes potential land acquisition to avoid the risk of future flood inundation.

Planning has commenced to re-establish permanent facilities for the hospital at Charlton. The long-term outcome for the hospital will be developed jointly by the Department of Health and East Wimmera Health Service, in consultation with the residents of Charlton.



COMMUNICATIONS AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

In the immediate aftermath

Affected communities **were kept informed** about available support such as the location of relief centres and how to access food, shelter, financial support and advice, through regular advertising, newspapers, radio and TV across Victoria, community meetings and social media. This approach was also used to ensure the broader community knew how to provide cash donations to the Victorian Floods Disaster Relief Fund.

More than 2,100 **farmers were phoned** and 328 **visits to farms** took place to identify animal welfare needs, assess loss and damage and provide information and support.

Throughout 2011

To assist the recovery efforts of affected communities, a whole of Victorian Government Flood Recovery Communications group was established to **provide regular, consistent and helpful information**.

Strategies developed by this group included a **dedicated flood recovery website** and a printed **information guide** that provided a comprehensive list of the support, advice and financial help that was available. The guide was posted to more than 8,000 affected households and made available through flood recovery centres and various support agencies.

Councils in flood-affected areas continue to provide comprehensive recovery information on their websites and link

through to the whole-of-government flood recovery website at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/floods

The Victorian Floods Disaster Relief Fund provided regular information through media and advertising to make sure interested people knew how to donate to the fund, and those affected by the floods knew **how to apply to receive financial support**. This campaign included direct mail to more than 8,000 households. The fund also took two information roadshows through rural and regional Victoria to directly assist people to fill in their applications.

Leading on from the success of the relief fund roadshows, the Department of Human Services **coordinated a flood recovery bus tour** to 10 towns in isolated and remote regions. Information about grants, Flood Support Workers, consumer affairs matters, Centrelink advice and business and agricultural support was made available on this tour.

The Department of Primary Industries' focus shifted from the flood response to longer-term agricultural recovery from mid-February 2011 to **provide information and links to relevant experts** for farmers and farming communities.

Environmental and production recovery advice to support decisions and build resilience for the future was available through the Department of Primary Industries' website, media interviews, community meetings, workshops, phone and face-to-face meetings.



Support into 2012

Communication with flood-affected communities, and those providing support to them, will continue well into 2012 to ensure relevant information and advice is available throughout the recovery process.

The Department of Health's Better Health Channel released a downloadable mobile phones app. This app links to all the Better Health fact sheets and can include real-time emergency messages.



PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE

It is certain that Victoria will experience more floods and other natural disasters in the future. All levels of government and the community need to be prepared as best they can to minimise the impacts and be able to bounce back quickly and effectively.

Reviews are being conducted across the state to have a close look at what happened over the six months from September 2010 to March 2011 to see how such an impact could be minimised in future. The Victorian Government has established a range of inquiries and is working with flood and water management authorities and affected communities to review the events and develop improved responses. This will help create more resilient homes, businesses, farming land and important infrastructure such as community venues, roads, power and vital services.

Neil Comrie, AO APM, former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police and

current Bushfires Royal Commission Implementation Monitor, has been tasked with conducting a comprehensive review of flood warnings and emergency response efforts and to identify the best way to manage major flood events in the future.

In addition, the Victorian Government has released a green paper for community comment on Victoria's broader crisis and emergency management arrangements. *Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria* is the first step in a process of major reform to Victoria's emergency management arrangements, across the spectrum of planning, preparation, response, relief and recovery.





STATISTICS

From 4 September 2010 to 23 March 2011.

Statistics	Quantity/Value
Relief centres	50 with approx. 9,800 registrations ²
Recovery centres	28
Victorian Floods Disaster Relief Fund	3,550 grants paid almost \$19 million
Personal hardship grants	
Emergency grants	9,555 (\$6,882,342)
Re-establishment Grant – Contents	1,314 (\$7,383,955)
Re-establishment Grant – Structural	691 (\$4,543,103)
Temporary Living Expenses	521 (\$1,330,830)
Landslips in Grampians National Park	192
Roads damaged	2,000+
Bridges damaged	220 bridges (including 49 railway bridges)
VICSES calls for assistance	17,500+ ²
Sandbags used	600,000+ ²
Public housing damaged	189
Recreation sites closed	15
Recreation tracks closed	19
Horticultural losses	\$99 million
Poultry lost	330,000
Sheep lost	11,300
Pigs lost	400
Cattle lost	210
Pasture lost	127,000 ha
Hay and silage lost	122,000 tonnes
Sinkholes	12
Field crops lost	78,000 hectares
Stored grain lost	8,000 tonnes
Fencing damaged	4,200 km
Sheds damaged	250
Flood levees breached	114
National and state parks or reserves affected	76
Schools re-established as safe environments	215

NOTE: Agricultural statistics above represents a best estimate of damage done to private land based on estimates provided by farmers contacted by the Department of Primary Industries.

² Source: VICSES Annual Report 2010-11 p 25



FLOOD SUPPORT WORKERS

Northern and western Victoria

Ararat Rural City

Grampians Community Health
Phone: (03) 5352 6200

Buloke Shire

East Wimmera Health Service
Phone: (03) 5477 2100

Campaspe Shire

Rochester and Elmore District Health Service
Phone: (03) 5484 4400

Central Goldfields Shire

Maryborough District Health Service
Phone: (03) 5461 0400

City of Ballarat

Ballarat Community Health
Phone: (03) 5338 4500

City of Greater Bendigo

Bendigo Community Health Services
Phone: (03) 5448 1600

Gannawarra Shire

Northern District Community Health Service
Phone: (03) 5451 0200

Golden Plains Shire

Ballarat Community Health
Phone: (03) 5338 4500

Hepburn Shire

Hepburn Health Service
Phone: (03) 5348 2371

Hindmarsh Shire

Wimmera Uniting Care
Phone: (03) 5382 6789

Horsham Rural City

Wimmera Uniting Care
Phone: (03) 5382 6789

Grampians Community Health
Phone: (03) 5362 1200

Loddon Shire (north)

Boort District Health
Phone: (03) 5451 5200

Northern District Community Health Service
Phone: (03) 5451 0200

Loddon Shire (south)

Inglewood and Districts Health Service
Phone: (03) 5431 7000

Mildura Rural City

Sunraysia Community Health Services
Phone: (03) 5022 5444

Mount Alexander Shire

Castlemaine District Community Health
Phone: (03) 5479 1000

Northern Grampians Shire

Grampians Community Health
Phone: (03) 5358 7400

Pyrenees Shire

Ballarat Community Health
Phone: (03) 5338 4500

Swan Hill Rural City

Swan Hill District Health
Phone: (03) 5033 1450

Robinvale District Health Services
Phone: (03) 5051 8111

West Wimmera Shire

Wimmera Uniting Care
Phone: (03) 5382 6789

Yarriambiack Shire

Wimmera Uniting Care
Phone: (03) 5382 6789

Southern metropolitan Melbourne

People living in Bayside, Cardinia, Casey, Glen Eira, Frankston, Greater Dandenong, Kingston, Mornington Peninsula, Port Phillip and Stonnington municipalities can contact a flood support worker at:

Connections UnitingCare, Narre Warren
Phone: (03) 9705 3939



FLOOD RECOVERY INITIATIVES – MAJOR PROGRAMS

The figures in this table show specific flood recovery funding allocations provided by the Victorian Government. Some allocations are provided under the National Partnership Agreement and the Commonwealth Government’s Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

This table does not represent all programs, works or services detailed in this report as some were delivered from existing funding allocations.

This table is provided to demonstrate the general level of flood recovery support provided by government and list the state government departments that have been involved in the recovery effort.

Department	Grant / Program	Amount allocated
Department of Business and Innovation	Business and Industry Assistance Package (Victorian Employers’ Chamber of Commerce and Industry)	\$1.5 million
	Regional Tourism Long-Term Flood Recovery Package	\$1.5 million
	Flood Business Recovery Program (previously Business Mentoring)	\$0.7 million
	Tourism Fund	\$1 million
Department of Health and Department of Human Services	Counselling, Flood Support Workers, local outreach and community professional education	\$4.98 million
Department of Health	Charlton Hospital	\$2.055 million
	Charlton Primary Health Care	\$1.4 million
	Disease control	\$0.65 million
Department of Human Services	Interim Accommodation Plan	\$2.234 million
Department of Planning and Community Development	Victorian Business Flood Recovery Fund	\$10 million
	Floods Community Recovery Fund	\$4 million
	Flood Recovery Events Fund	\$0.1 million
	\$5 million Flood Recovery Community Infrastructure Fund (announced 30 Sept 2010)	\$5 million
	Local Government Clean Up Fund	\$5 million



Department	Grant / Program	Amount allocated
Department of Planning and Community Development (managed by Regional Development Victoria)	Flood Recovery Officers	\$1.86 million
Department of Primary Industries	Rural Coordination Officers	\$0.54 million
	Flood Apprenticeship Retention Program	\$1.076 million
	Rural Financial Counsellors	\$3.41 million
	Sustainable Farm Families – flood recovery	\$0.79 million
Department of Sustainability and Environment	Catchment Management Authority Flood Employment Program	\$6.15 million
	Flood warning system recovery	\$7.14 million
	Goulburn Murray Irrigation District flood recovery and flood plain restoration	\$17.5 million
	Lower Loddon levees and groundwater bore damages	\$5.1 million
	Flood recovery repair on public land	\$31.87 million
	Restoring and reopening Victoria's parks	\$62.41 million
	FloodZoom	\$12.08 million
Department of Sustainability and Environment joint initiative with Department of Planning and Community Development	Flood Recovery Community Infrastructure Fund	\$30 million
Department of Transport	Repair of flood damage to arterial roads	\$147.8 million
	Repair of flood damage to regional rail network	\$20.4 million
	Repair of Wilsons Promontory entrance road leading to Tidal River	\$6 million
Department of Treasury and Finance	Rural Finance Corporation – exceptional disaster assistance	\$37 million
Victorian Government	Donation to Victorian Floods Disaster Relief Fund	\$1 million



KEY CONTACTS

General flood recovery information can be found at www.dhs.vic.gov.au/floods

Department of Human Services:

- Barwon-South Western Region
(03) 5226 4540
- Gippsland Region
(03) 5177 2500
- Grampians Region
1300 307 512
- Hume Region
1300 769 878
- Loddon Mallee Region
1300 165 413
- Southern Metropolitan Region
(03) 9213 2111

Better Health Channel
www.betterhealth.vic.gov.au

beyondblue
1300 22 4636

Centrelink
180 22 66

Kids Helpline
1800 55 1800

Lifeline
13 11 14

Mensline
1300 78 99 78

Mental Health Advice Line
1300 280 737

NURSE-ON-CALL
1300 60 60 24

Parentline
13 22 89

Victorian Business Line
13 22 15

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