

Submission guide for community organisations: Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria

ABOUT THE INQUIRY

The [Parliamentary Inquiry into the 2026 summer fires across Victoria](#) seeks to understand a range of issues related to the recent fires, including preparation and planning prior to the fires, the causes of the fires, the impacts on the community, and the efforts to aid in recovery.

The Inquiry also seeks to understand the role of misinformation, impacts on essential services and the environment, and resourcing of the CFA.

The inquiry is being conducted by the Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee.

Submissions are open until 19 April 2026.

THE INQUIRY PROCESS

A [parliamentary inquiry](#) is an in-depth investigation of an issue being considered by a parliamentary committee. Parliamentary committees are “all-party” forums that comprise Members of Parliament from a cross-section of the Parliament. (The composition of the Committee conducting this specific inquiry can be viewed here: [Legislative Council Environment and Planning Committee - Parliament of Victoria.](#))

Inquiries give Victorians the opportunity to weigh in on matters of public importance.

After a disaster, Parliamentary Inquiries can shed light on the experience of communities and the community sector, and are a mechanism to convey our priorities to Parliament.

The terms of reference for the Inquiry provides details on what the Committee will investigate, and can be found [here](#).

The process for an inquiry has five steps:

- **Submissions** are taken from organisations and individuals. Submissions for this Inquiry close on 19 April 2026.
- After submissions close, the parliamentary committee will call on witnesses to give evidence at a **hearing**. The transcripts of the hearings are publicly available.
- After the hearing, further **research** may be conducted through site visits or additional consultation.
- A **report** is then drafted which includes findings and recommendations for the government to consider. The report is made publicly available. The report from this Inquiry is due mid-to-late 2026.
- The Victorian government is required to **respond** to the Committee's report within six months. The government's response will indicate which, if any, of the report's recommendations are supported by the government.

WHY PUT IN A SUBMISSION?

The community sector is on the frontline of supporting communities through disasters and emergencies, including the January 2026 summer fires.

It's crucial for as many individuals and community organisations as possible to put in a submission to this Parliamentary Inquiry. Our submissions are important to:

- **Elevate community voices and local perspectives**, so that place-based perspectives and priorities are front and centre in the Inquiry's findings and recommendations.
- **Advocate for equitable approaches to recovery programs** to ensure those who have the greatest need can access support without barriers or discrimination.
- **Influence the long-term policy approach of the Victorian Government** to emergencies and disaster recovery, with consideration for systemic issues such as climate change and inequality.
- **Raise the profile of the community sector's role in emergencies** so that the often unseen, tireless work of community organisations is recognised and resourced.

TIPS FOR YOUR SUBMISSION

If your organisation is involved in bushfire relief and recovery, or if you have been impacted, it may be challenging to develop a submission. If this is the case, you could consider a short submission that focuses on just a few key points - based on prior experience, even a short letter of 1-2 pages is valuable.

To maximise the impact of your submission, you may wish to:

- Include recommendations that propose actions that the Victorian Government can take.
- Include concrete examples from your local area, organisation, community or service delivery context.
- If possible, link your recommendations to existing government commitments and policies.
- Send it to your local MP or local media outlets.
- If you are a VCOSS member, let us know if you'd like us to consider your priorities as we develop our submission: lucy.manne@vcoss.org.au

KEY MESSAGES

The [terms of reference](#) includes several issues that you may wish to comment on. The Committee will be particularly interested in hearing about issues and recommendations that are unique to your community, organisation, type of service, and lived experience of these bushfires.

VCOSS's submission will be made on behalf of the community sector and will be based on consultation with VCOSS member organisations that are leading bushfire relief and recovery efforts in their communities.

VCOSS's submission is still in development, and will build on the following key themes which you may wish to draw on for your own submission.

We need to invest more in climate resilience and emergency preparedness

Investment in disaster risk reduction and preparedness provides significantly greater return on investment compared with spending on recovery, yet an estimated 87% of Commonwealth disaster funding in Australia goes towards recovery.¹

Resilience and preparedness includes psychological preparedness, organisational readiness, person-centred emergency planning, efforts to build social capital and resilience, and community development. The positive impact of community-led resilience projects has been demonstrated time and again², and in the face of a changing climate, these programs must be scaled up. This will avoid significant harm and costs following disasters.

Disasters affect everyone, but not equally

¹ Andrew Colvin, *Final Report: Independent Review of Commonwealth Disaster Funding*, April 2024

² VCOSS, *Collaboration for Disaster Resilience*, 2025.

We know that certain groups are disproportionately impacted by emergencies, and this can exacerbate the impacts of a disaster and impede recovery.

The 2026 summer bushfires are no exception, with early indications that those who are not insured or underinsured, experiencing poverty and disadvantage, already impacted by previous disasters and drought, or not confident with online systems, have been particularly severely affected.

The community sector plays a critical role in emergencies, and resourcing and emergency management arrangements should reflect this

Community organisations play a key role in leading disaster resilience and recovery due to their trusted role in the community. The community sector provides supports that knit together to form a safety net for Victorians who are most impacted by emergencies, helping build individual, household-level and community-level resilience.

During and after emergencies, governments draw on these trusted relationships held by community services within their communities, as well as their specialist skills such as case work, community development, legal advice, and psychosocial support.

Yet despite this vital role, many community organisations report barriers to being resourced or recognised for their role in emergencies. Much of this work is done without resourcing or formal inclusion in emergency management systems. With greater recognition and resourcing from government, community resilience – and particularly those at highest risk from disasters – would be significantly increased.

Emergencies are no longer single events, requiring new recovery approaches

The 2026 bushfires are not the only disaster that communities are recovering from. For many communities and individuals, these bushfires are compounding the impacts of the 2019-20 bushfires, 2021 storms, 2022 floods, 2023-24 floods and storms, 2024 bushfires, 2024-25 bushfires, and severe drought.

As Victoria's climate changes, with extreme weather becoming more frequent and severe, we need to shift from a focus on each emergency as a single event, and instead recognise the compounding, overlapping and cascading impacts being felt across the state. This requires a shift from programs that are focused on recovery from single events, towards long-term investment in community-led adaptation, resilience, and recovery.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In addition to any specific recommendations based on these events and your local context, you may wish to include the following existing VCOSS recommendations which we included in our 2026 [State Budget Submission](#):

1. **Create a Resilient Homes Program targeted to disaster-prone areas** by making an initial investment in a co-design process with Victorian renters, low-income owner-occupiers and social housing providers who are located in parts of the state experiencing the greatest climate risk, to develop a program to strengthen their homes.
2. **Fund an ongoing disaster resilience workforce in the community sector.** This should include place-based, specialist, statewide and cohort-specific services for people at higher risk from emergencies (including women, multicultural communities and people with disabilities), and an initial investment in co-designing the workforce. In the interim, agencies currently with disaster recovery workers should be funded to maintain 1 FTE capacity to retain capability.
3. **Implement Recommendation 45 and 46 of the Yoorrook Justice Commission to support First Peoples-led climate justice and disaster resilience.** This includes:
 - a. Supporting the development of a self-determined Aboriginal Climate Justice Strategy which provides perpetual funding for Traditional Owner groups to deliver projects on their Country
 - b. Investing in a full review of all emergency management legislation; ongoing funding for Traditional Owner Groups, ACCOs and ACCHOs to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies; and giving weight to Traditional Owner voices regarding the protection of Country and cultural heritage.
4. **Establish an ongoing Community Climate Adaptation Fund** comprising:
 - a. Grants for community groups to undertake localised projects that can help government meet its obligations under the Victorian Climate Change Act.
 - b. Grants that assist community sector organisations and ACCOs to adapt their own operations and have capacity to support place-based adaptation