



# **VICSES Community Safety Program for flood**





The Victoria State Emergency Service respectfully acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

## Purpose

To provide an overview of the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) Community Safety Program for flood, which demonstrates how we work with communities and partners to achieve more aware, informed and prepared communities; supporting them to understand their flood risk and the relevance of taking action before, during and after emergency events.

This approach also provides assurance for our Spring (2020) Preparedness activities and actions, and for key stakeholder briefings, in what has been achieved to date and arrangements currently in place for our flood engagement program.

## Our strategic direction

Community engagement at VICSES is guided by our [Strategic Plan](#) to realise the vision of **Safer Communities – Together**, aligning to key initiative 3.2 to ‘Mainstream community resilience through our services structures and systems’.

The delivery of this strategic intent is through the [VICSES Community Resilience Strategy 2016-19](#) and current [Community Resilience Strategy Renewal 2019-22](#) being the starting points for all our community engagement work at VICSES, setting the roadmap for how we work with communities to build their resilience to emergencies.

## Community Resilience Strategy

The VICSES Community Resilience Strategy 2016-19 was first released in 2016. The purpose of the strategy was to provide guidance to all VICSES members on how we could work together to build safer and more resilient communities.

The strategy marked a significant change in service delivery for VICSES, promoting a shift from the traditional response-based approach to an outcomes-based model that empowered communities to develop awareness, shared responsibility and self-reliance – before, during and after emergencies.

Aligning to the broader sector reform for resilience introduced by the Victorian Government in 2012, VICSES viewed the integration of its stance on resilience into core business not so much as a new direction in its service delivery approach, but as a reaffirmation of what VICSES had always done as a community-based volunteer organisation.

The Strategy Renewal 2019-22 extends this approach for a further three years, building on the key achievements and lessons learnt during the initial term. This Strategy continues to provide a road map for the design and development of community resilience activities, and delivery and evaluation of programs and resources throughout the next three years.

It reaffirms our commitment to better understanding community attitudes, key drivers and barriers, and details how we will continue to join with our communities before, during and after emergency events, develop positive partnerships and provide timely, effective reporting to the Victorian Government.

The Strategy enables Our People to support communities to better understand the full scale of emergency events for VICSES hazards by:

- Building competency in knowing what to do in the future – **Believe they know how to do it.**
- Increasing individual capacity and capability to respond – **Believe they can do it.**
- Increasing awareness of their role, and the role of VICSES and others in the community – **Believe everyone has a role to play.**
- Realising the positive outcomes and relevance of preparing for future emergencies – **Believe it will make a difference.**



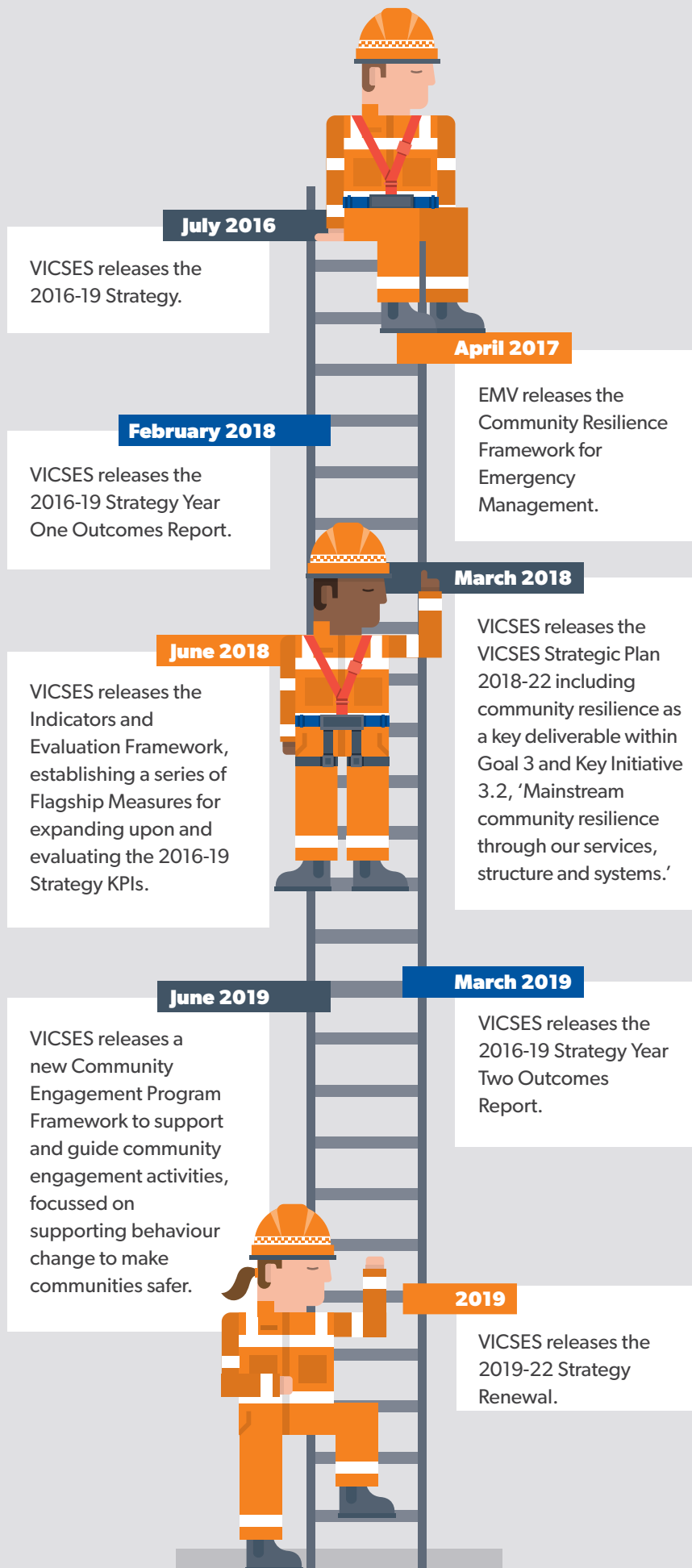


Figure 1: Milestones for VICSES Community Resilience Strategy

## Our role in flood

VICSES is the control agency for flood in Victoria. VICSES undertakes a range of activities relating to preparing for and responding to flood events with the objective of preserving life and property.

The roles and responsibilities of VICSES are detailed in the [State Emergency Management Plan \(SEMP\)](#) which includes community engagement, education and awareness building of flood-prone communities.

Our role is further detailed in the [Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy \(VFMS\)](#), including the development and delivery of VICSES [Local Flood Guides](#), campaigns and key resources that explain local flood risks and provide the tools to engage with 'communities of interest' on how to prepare for and respond to floods.

## Understanding the flood risk

Under the direction of the Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy, the consequent Regional Floodplain Management Strategies (for nine of the ten Catchment Management Authority areas in regional Victoria), and the Port Phillip and Westernport Flood Management Strategy (for metropolitan Melbourne footprint) provide the framework to help all agencies with floodplain management functions. This is to better manage flood risks and to support flood emergency preparation and response across each region<sup>2</sup>.

These strategies include actions and priorities for flood studies, land use planning, flood warning systems, flood modelling and mapping that provide flood-prone communities with evidence based information about the impacts and consequences of floods that may affect them.

The VICSES [Community Emergency Risk Assessment \(CERA\)](#) tool and approach is also used in Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP) assessments. The CERA approach aims to understand the likely impacts of a range of emergency scenarios (such as a flood) upon community assets, values and functions, providing an opportunity for multiple community impacts and consequences to be considered and enabling collaborative risk treatment plans and emergency preparedness measures to be described.

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<sup>2</sup> The Victorian Floodplain Management Strategy, the site of Victoria Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning 2016 <https://www.water.vic.gov.au/managing-floodplains/new-victorian-floodplain-management-strategy>



## Our Community Engagement Program Framework

VICSES acknowledges that there is no one-size-fits-all approach: Victorian communities are diverse, speaking more than 260 languages and dialects, and following 135 faiths and religions. What works well for one community may not necessarily be meaningful in another, and with such diversity, our programs and service delivery may vary considerably across the state.

The importance of community focused activities is well recognised across the emergency management sector within Victoria, nationally, and globally. As such, there has been a shift towards shared responsibility to prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies such as flood, across government, business and the community.

VICSES has developed a Community Engagement Program Framework to bring together multiple evidence-based disciplines to achieve a step-by-step approach for our Community Engagement Programs.

The framework is intended to provide VICSES members with a simple tool to increase the preparedness and resilience of the community.

Importantly, it clearly links objectives and actions, and emphasises quality and simplicity for these areas. The framework helps to establish what key components of a community engagement program are.



Figure 2: VICSES Community Engagement Program Framework

## Taking an evidenced based approach

A critical component to our approach has been the many years' of research conducted by VICSES to provide scientific rigour and a base of evidence for what is proposed.

Our early research, which served as the foundations for the *2016-19 Community Resilience Strategy*, found as expected, that some members of the community were actively preparing and maintaining readiness for the next emergency event, while a large proportion of the community was not interested and therefore, not planning to do anything to prepare for future emergency events.

VICSES also found that hazard awareness does not necessarily translate to higher levels of preparedness or action across the preparedness chain<sup>2</sup>, and is influenced by a number of key drivers and barriers that can and will vary significantly across Victoria's diverse communities.



Figure 3: VICSES preparedness chain

Throughout 2016-19, VICSES reviewed its previous research, conducted new research and partnered with other organisations in a variety of research projects.

This research has trialled new approaches to engagement and warnings, explored the potential for 'just-in-time' preparedness to support community decision making immediately before a severe weather event, and revealed that messages that connect on an emotional level and contain a simple and easy 'call-to-action' are more likely to be effective.

An example of this is utilising the [15 to float](#) social media collateral in geo-targeted social media posts prior to severe weather with expected high rainfall.

<sup>2</sup> VICSES preparedness chain, VICSES Community Resilience Strategy Renewal 2019-22 <https://www.ses.vic.gov.au/documents/8655930/8796798/VICSES+Community+Resilience+Strategy+Renewal+2019-22.pdf/ca006ad1-fba5-f120-ca10-ef8e4e251204?t=1620867504291>

In conjunction with our findings, VICSES community engagement programs have been developed with consideration and alignment to international, national and state disaster resilience and disaster risk reduction (DRR) doctrine and reviews.

VICSES programs also align to the Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) Flood and Severe Weather Community Safety Position. This is the nationally agreed view of the principles underpinning actions that AFAC member agencies take in their work across Australia in the development of best practice as they work with communities to enhance public safety during flood and severe weather events.

### How we build capability to deliver

We are well placed to deliver our community engagement program for flood, having skilled and committed volunteers who live and work in their communities and embody the spirit of community service. Our People play an important role in influencing and supporting community actions and decisions before, during and after emergency events.

We support our volunteer's capabilities through the delivery of the VICSES [Community Engagement Facilitator](#) (CEF) training that provides contemporary skills and strategic guidance for their work with regard to community engagement.

The training is delivered using a combination of online training, reinforced with face-to-face sessions, that allow our members to practice and refine skills. The online component allows our CEF's to engage with relevant behaviour change theories and align with the Community Engagement Program Framework.

Across the state VICSES also have active Community Engagement Advisor Groups (CEAG) made up of CEF's and other members who have a particular interest in engaging with the community to encourage behaviour change by taking protective action.

Step-by-step guidance has been developed to assist our Members with their community engagement activity. The guides (titled 'Member Series Guides') have been developed as a practical quick reference to maximise community safety conversations at a few types of community engagement activities that our Units often get involved in, and are aligned to the Community Engagement Program Framework.

The guides provide support for various community engagement programs, and emphasise the importance of having one objective, one key message, and one call to action. Evaluation and reporting is underpinned by international measurement approaches, and will enable us to have a shared language with our partners, the wider community, and celebrate the important work we do in community engagement.

Many of our Member Series Guides have been completed, and include advice for the following community engagement programs:

- Digital engagement using draft local flood guides
- Community events (face-to-face)
- Doorknocking (flood specific)
- Primary school visits
- 'Bag it, Block it, Lift it and Leave' (school visits engaging Year 5 students)

Work is currently underway for programs focused upon other digital engagement, multicultural communities, our First Nations Peoples and people of all abilities.

### Our partners in community safety

Our collaborations with others can assist in the achievement of objectives we might not be able to achieve on our own and to extending our reach to the Victorian Community - executed through exchange of goods, services, financial or in-kind support.

Our key partners for flood include:

- AAMI – VICSES principal community partner
- Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)
- Emergency Management Victoria (EMV)
- Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC)
- Australian Red Cross
- Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC)
- Catchment Management Authorities
- Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP)
- Jemina
- Local Government
- Melbourne Water
- Transport Accident Commission (TAC)
- Transurban



## Our resources for flood

### Website

VICSES provides community information via our website under the 'Plan and stay safe' section. This section of the website contains information on preparing for emergencies at home, at work, on the road and a section for schools and students.

These sections contain information and links to resources that help the community to take action to prepare. The 'Plan and stay safe' section of the website also contains community information on the hazards for which VICSES is the control agency: [flood](#), [storm](#), [landslide](#), [earthquake](#) and [tsunami](#).

Extensive planning and testing has been undertaken on the VICSES website upgrade project, which is planned for implementation in early 2021. This has included user 'tree-jack' testing into the flow and navigation on the website architecture, as well as the look, feel and significantly improved design features.

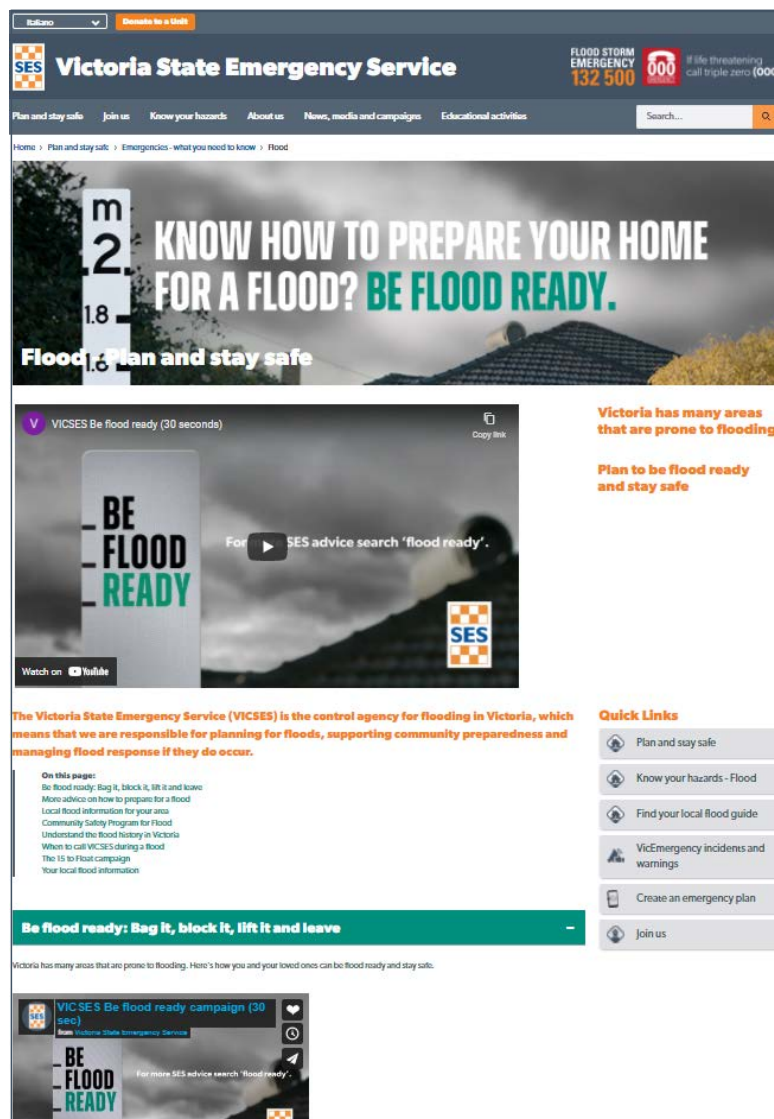


Figure 4: VICSES Flood 'Plan and stay safe' website

## Local Flood Guides and Municipal Flood Emergency Plans

VICSES has developed and delivered over 125 [Local Flood Guides](#) (LFGs) that provide tailored information to flood-prone communities across most municipalities in Victoria.

LFGs support communities to understand the local flood history in their suburb or township, the risk profile, potential impact areas and how a flood might behave in those areas, as well as the impacts and consequences of particular water heights if supported by a flood warning system. Community members are encouraged to take the time to check the flood guide for their area to understand how flooding may impact them.

These are available using an interactive map on the VICSES 'Get Ready' flood website and are listed by municipality, or by name in A-Z order.

LFGs are an important community engagement and education resource that highlight the flood risk across the community, along with critical information about protective actions to take before, during and after a flood event.

Engagement with local communities in relation to LFGs can now also be undertaken using a digital approach. Community members are encouraged to share their feedback on draft LFG's using Facebook and the VICSES website, creating rich dialogue and discussion between VICSES members and community.

LFGs currently undergoing updates are able to be placed on to the VICSES website to open up for community consultation. This content includes information regarding how to provide feedback, time frames, and other details. This helps VICSES bridge the gap for face-to-face communication, using technology and existing content to directly engage with targeted communities.

A recently generated website analytic tool enables VICSES to track the individual reach of each specific guide.



Figure 5: VICSES interactive map for LFGs and MFEPs



Figure 6: Local flood guide

## Key call to action

*'Get Ready – Have a plan – Know what to do'*

## Digital and printable engagement resources for flood

### Individuals and households

Experience shows that those who plan and prepare for emergencies can reduce the impact of the emergency, and can recover quicker afterwards.

In addition to Local Flood Guides, a number of other online and printable resources are available on the VICSES Flood 'Get Ready' website to support the community to raise awareness on specific topics and calls to action related to flood.

- **Floods, storms and landslides after bushfires** (revised 2020) provides information for fire affected communities regarding increased risk to other hazards post bushfire.
- **Sandbagging** - factsheet (2020) and video (2012) provides information on how to use sandbags in a flood emergency.
- **Emergency flipchart** – before, during and after emergencies (revised 2019) provides a quick reference guide and has a magnet so that it can be attached to a fridge.

VICSES is collaborating with Australian Red Cross for the community to do one simple thing – create an emergency plan using the **RediPlan** template or the **Get Prepared app** by visiting the Australian Red Cross website.

### Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD)

VICSES is committed to identifying ways for our members to work effectively with our CALD communities in Victoria.

- Resources available for working with CALD communities include **VICSES CALD Flood & Storm brochures and audio translations**.
- VICSES has also had specific (key message) text translated into eight languages other than English to support CALD members of the community assess flood information.
- VICSES liaise with the Victorian Multicultural Commission to participate in major CALD events and to link in to local CALD community leaders via the Regional Advisory Committees.

## Children & youth - Schools (Primary)

- **'Plan to stay dry – Bag it, block it, lift it and leave'** – posters (2019) and animation (2020) to provide action based information to school children and the broader community on how to prepare for imminent flooding.
- **Li'L Larikkins videos** – Natural hazards education series (2011) supported by the Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience designed to educate children in Australian primary schools about the dangers of natural hazards (and bushfires), and the actions they can take to protect themselves from harm. The resources are supported by lesson plans.
- **Activities and games** - Chatterbox and links to Australian Red Cross children's resources.

## Road Safety

- **15 to Float** (2017) - the number one cause of death during flooding is people attempting to drive through floodwater. **15 to Float** specifically targets motorists and discourages driving in floodwater with a focus on the protective action of never driving on flooded roads.

## Business

- **Business Flood Planning resources and video** (2020) - Business plan guidance for flood preparedness for business owners. A case study video has been developed about the Castlemaine Mill and their proactive flood prevention works and planning.
- **Caravan and tourist park emergency planning guidance** provides preparedness information for both park owners and occupants.

## Digital engagement – Social media channels

VICSES has developed a number of social media tiles for flood, storm and landslide which cover the key messages for just-in-time preparedness. Local volunteer Unit pages are encouraged to use these tiles, as well as this content being shared across the VICSES state pages.

Two-way communication is encouraged to ensure communities have the knowledge and skills to act appropriately before, during and after an emergency occurs.

Partnerships with corporate partners and other emergency services enable VICSES to leverage the message to a greater audience increasing reach and engagement.

## Community warnings

VICSES is a member of the Emergency Management Joint Public Information Committee (EMJPIC), comprising of members from all state government departments and emergency management agencies helping to communicate whole-of-government key messages and promote timely consistency of message to the public.

Like all emergencies, VICSES encourages the community to download the [VicEmergency App](#) and set up a watch zone to ensure they receive community notifications and warnings. It also promotes a key message that 'You may not receive an official warning so never wait for a warning to act'.

**Flood Watches and Flood Warnings** are issued by the Bureau of Meteorology (BoM)

VICSES' role in flood warnings is to issue timely, tailored and relevant information to the community about the likely or actual impacts and consequences of flooding initially communicated in the BoM Flood Watch and Warnings. This warning information is coupled with guidance about what protective actions should be taken immediately before, during or after a flood event.

The **VicEmergency app** aligns with the [VicEmergency website](#) to provide a centralised location for Victorians to access timely emergency information and warnings.



## Campaign advertising

Our campaign advertising is designed to inform, educate, motivate and change the behaviour of the community with a particular focus on key safety calls to action. Our campaigns are communicated via print, radio, television, outdoor signage, online and social channels.

Our successful [15 to float](#) campaign is utilised for just-in-time messaging in the event of flooding in Victoria. This is primarily a social media campaign which sends a clear message to the community to never drive on flooded roads.

In September 2020, our newest campaign - [Bag it, block it, lift it and leave](#) - was released. This campaign outlines the protective action that community members should take to prepare their homes for impending flooding.



Figure 7: 15 to Float

**Plan to stay dry, know how high. Bag it, block it, lift it and leave.**

Following the devastating 2010-11 floods in Victoria, a VICSES volunteer leader from within the Rochester community realised that many community members did not necessarily understand what simple protective actions could be undertaken to protect their homes and businesses.

Determined to ensure the local community was better prepared the next time floods occurred, efforts were focussed on what protective action the community could take and a refinement of messages to simple language with clear actions. This was the genesis of this campaign.

This type of community engagement initiative demonstrates how practices can be community focussed, incorporating lessons learnt and local knowledge in raising awareness of flood impacts and consequences with clear and achievable calls to action. i.e. if flood gauges are located in their local areas, how to understand what the levels mean; and knowing how to sandbag their homes, block the drains inside their home, lift valuables up high and leave to be in a safer place.

Over time the message has been transformed into a catchy jingle with an attention grabbing animation that will appeal to children. Lesson plans have been developed linking to the Victorian school curriculum for grade 5 and these resources are available for all VICSES volunteers to get this important safety message into the minds of our young people.

VICSES is currently developing video assets that will promote this important message broadly, including to CALD communities, to inform them of the action they should take if flooding is imminent.

The key messages have been tested with social research confirming that the campaign is understood by both adults and children.



Figure 8: Plan to stay dry - Bag it, block it, lift it and leave



Figure 9: Plan to stay dry - Bag it, block it, lift it and leave video

## Connecting with the community

A number of roles are available for volunteer members to help create awareness of emergencies and emergency preparedness in their local communities.

Of the nine volunteering personas offered by VICSES - **connecting with the community** is an important role in helping other prepare for and respond to emergencies and a key aspect of achieving the VICSES vision of *Safer Communities - Together*.

A community that is prepared for floods, storms and other emergency situations can reduce the impacts on property and save lives.

VICSES executes this important function with a dedicated volunteering role of Community Engagement Facilitators (CEF). CEFs are provided training that has been developed as an evidence approach to ensure our volunteers in this field are able to work effectively with the community to influence behaviour change that encourages the taking of actions that protect both life and property.

They do this through a range of activities including campaigns, demonstrations, presentations, workshops, school visits, community meetings and other face to face discussions. They also coordinate door knocks in their local communities and participate in regular community events. During 2020 they have built on our digital engagement to ensure that our key safety messages are reaching the community.

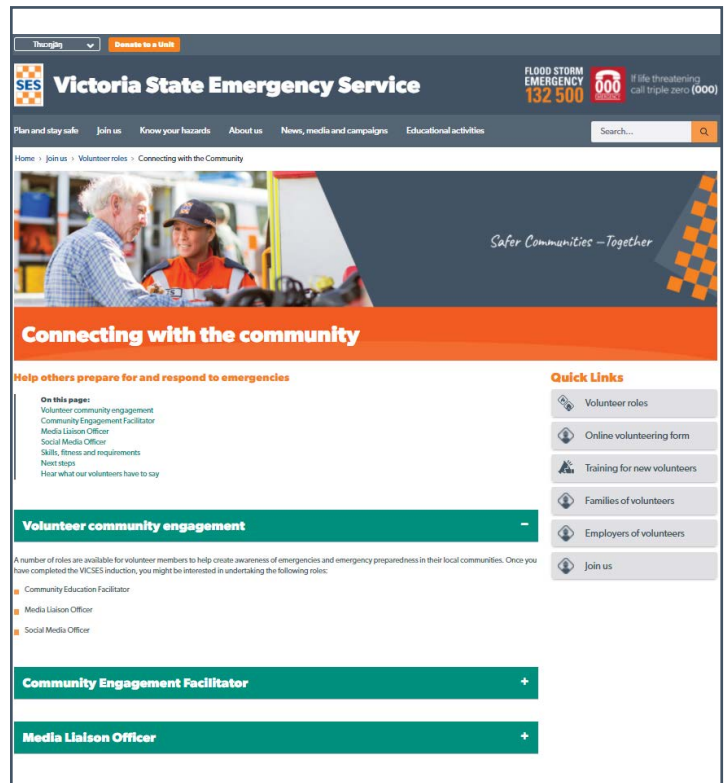


Figure 10: VICSES website



## Spring Preparedness 2020 and COVID-19

### The situation

The Bureau of Meteorology (BOM) advises that the climate drivers, La Niña and Negative Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), are occurring and are forecast to continue into early 2021. Victoria saw widespread flooding in 2010-11 and 2016 when similar climate drivers occurred resulting in impacts in 70 local government areas with an estimated cost of \$1.3 billion.

The Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES), along with emergency agencies, are preparing the community for the likelihood of widespread flooding and severe weather over spring and summer 2020-21.

### Communication approach

Clear communication with the Victorian community is needed to raise awareness of the potential for flooding events due to the La Niña conditions over spring and summer.

The aim is to increase awareness of key protective actions that the community can take to protect life and property, including not driving in flood water, sandbagging to protect their homes, and knowing what to do if they need to evacuate. Resources are currently accessible at [ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/emergencies/flood](https://ses.vic.gov.au/plan-and-stay-safe/emergencies/flood) but communication needs to drive to this content.

### Challenges

**VICSES are challenged to cut through with flood preparedness messages following the summer bushfires and COVID-19 pandemic:**

- Flood preparedness does not have the same prominence as fire preparedness in the media.
- Flood preparedness messages are competing with COVID-19 and fire safety messages.
- Warning fatigue can set in due to saturation of ongoing COVID-19 messaging, making it harder to get cut through with flood safety messaging.

**COVID-19 travel restrictions mean that more Victorians will be holidaying within the State during spring and summer.**

- It is anticipated that a significant percentage of Victorians, who traditionally travel overseas or interstate during the December-January period, will holiday in regional Victoria this summer.
- This potentially equates to an additional 1 million visitors to regional Victoria - an estimated increase of 10%.
- Holiday makers are likely to favour accommodation types including caravans, camping and holiday homes as they offer a greater ability to physical distance from other travellers. Many of these locations are close to water.
- Travellers who are visiting destinations for the first time may be unfamiliar with the hazards in these areas such as floods.

**Community need to be reminded that driving in flood water is deadly.**

- In the 2019-20 financial year, VICSES responded to 175 flood rescues relating to vehicles trapped in floodwater.
- Driving into flood water is dangerous and may result in the need for rescue or loss of life.
- It can take as little as 15cm of water over a road to float a small car.
- With the large numbers expected to be holidaying and driving on our roads, this is a key safety message for all Victorians.



## Engaging with community during COVID-19

Due to COVID-19 restrictions, engagement with the community by our volunteers and partners has not been possible in the usual face-to-face format. VICSES has been undertaking innovative ways to maintain our community on how to prepare for and respond to floods.

These practices include:

- Stronger focus on digital engagement. This has occurred primarily via VICSES social media channels utilising Unit, Region and State channels.
- Use of online platforms to engage with community members to consult with the development of local flood guides and we expect to continue this type of engagement into the future to increase our reach as mentioned under 'Local Flood Guides and Municipal Flood Emergency Plans'.

Other key initiatives during COVID-19 have included collaborating on a research project with CFA and Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) to find out how communities would like us to engage with them. The purpose of the project is to undertake social research to:

- Understand the current engagement and communication preferences of community members so that emergency services can adapt community facing activities and programs that are responsive to community needs
- Explore what is important to communities at the moment e.g. what are the factors influencing their current engagement and communication preferences.

This knowledge and understanding will be used to plan and deliver programs and activities that are accessible to, and inclusive of, the Victorian population while also responding appropriately to community sentiment and the variety of environmental and systemic factors that affect that sentiment.

Through our partnership with Melbourne Water, VICSES were able to complete the [production of six video's on localised flood risk and preparedness](#) activities to engage with communities who live in flood hot spots in metropolitan Melbourne.



In March 2020, the focus of the VICSES **Neighbour Day Campaign** had to shift from a planned face-to-face emphasis using a cup of 'Communi-tea' to an alternative one. The essence of the campaign however, had never been important with elderly and vulnerable community members adjusting to the consequences of the pandemic.

VICSES instead encouraged the building or maintaining of relationships through: social media, phone calls, instant messaging, video chats or popping your head over the fence.





## Our evaluation approach

Under the Community Resilience Strategy, VICSES uses a series of resilience models that provide the framework to test our underlying assumptions in better understanding community attitudes, associated barriers and drivers across a range of preparedness behaviours.

These resilience models for **Capacity, Collaboration & Connections** provide guidance for the future design and development of our community engagement programs and resources, provide detail for Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and shape how VICSES will invest effort in the delivery and evaluation of these services to the community and our partners.

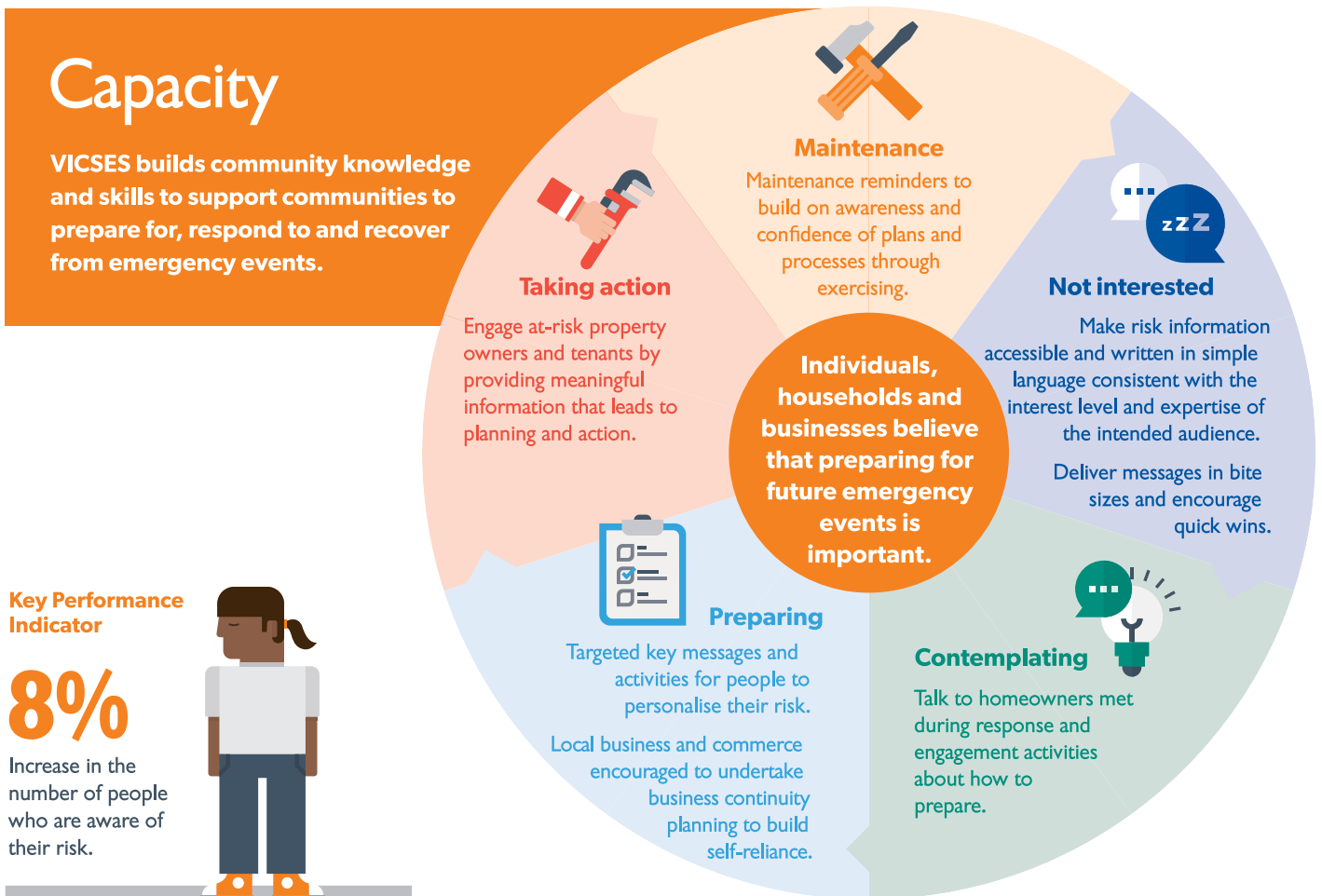


Figure 11: VICSES Community Resilience Strategy KPI 1

## How we report

VICSES reports annually on our community resilience agenda and community engagement programs under the [Community Resilience Strategy](#).

These reports present some of the key highlights, activities and outcomes of the Strategy’s implementation which measure our achievements against the Strategic Objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), and is intended to support continuous improvement of programs and initiatives during the lifetime of the Strategy.

Regular reports are further provided to government in accordance with the Victorian Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan (SAP) 2015-2018 and Emergency Management Performance Framework and Standards (EMV), and other key stakeholders and partners in accordance with agreements in place.





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