



# Post Activity Report

## Operation Thorpe – Mallacoota, VIC

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### Foreword:

After eighteen months of delays due to pandemics and weather, it was pleasing to be able to attend the first sustained operation in Victoria in almost two years. Whilst a small operation in terms of footprint, Operation Thorpe (which ran from 25/11/21 - 11/12/21) still required a massive effort by the DRA volunteers that attended; both to provide meaningful support to a town in recovery and to win the hearts and minds of those who were still cautious of volunteers entering their community. They excelled at both.

With every operation that DRA runs, we learnt lessons – this time on how to integrate plant equipment and contractors into our activities to expand and extend our offering. As always, these will be applied in future operations to ensure that DRA continues to evolve and fulfil its intent to be a pre-eminent force in disaster recovery.

Yours in service

Mark Reilly

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### Summary of Events:

#### Background

Mallacoota was heavily impacted by the Black Summer bushfires of 2019-20, and received significant media coverage when the town was evacuated to waiting naval vessels, due to the one access road being cut off. A large number of properties in the town and surrounding area were destroyed or damaged.

After the disaster the Mallacoota and District Recovery Authority was established to lead the recovery effort, only for the Covid pandemic started to impact disaster recovery efforts stalling the town's own recovery as agencies withdrew.

#### Intent

Following positive reports from its work in Buchan, Victoria, DRA were approached by Bushfire Recovery Victoria to consider providing support to the Mallacoota community. An Operational Reconnaissance Team was launched in June 2020 to undertake an initial assessment and reported positively on the potential for DRA to support the community recovery. Subsequent repeated lockdown then impacted any follow-on work, with a Damage Assessment team only deployed in March 2021. Further lockdowns impacted an actual deployment until November 2021, and the scale of the deployment was restricted due to ongoing border restrictions and low numbers of available volunteers.

Whilst a short-term operation, Operation Thorpe was used to test a few new approaches to how DRA deploy – updated data reporting platforms, logistics management systems, and the use of plant equipment operated by trained DRA personnel as an enabler for DRAs core activities.

#### Overall Assessment

Whilst volunteer EOIs were low (especially given the period since local DRTs had deployed volunteers in significant numbers), the operation was a useful platform for testing several processes and skillsets in development and rewarded the tenacity of DRA not to renege on a previously made commitment. Community uncertainty and mistrust was evident at the beginning of the operation and notably reduced at the end – a testament to how DRA performed and the integrity of those involved. The desire to have stayed longer and helped more was noticeable amongst many volunteers, but it is hoped that this has provided the foundation for further work if opportunity presents.

## Operational Data Overview

<b>General Data</b>		<b>Operations Data</b>	
Operation #	Thorpe	Total DRA Volunteers	M: 31 F: 4 32 indiv, 35 deployment (3 did two waves)
		Total SponVol - CorpVol	n/a
Dates	25/11/21 - 11/12/21	Total Vol. Hours	1417 (inc Project Resilience)
		Total ADAT flights	n/a
Location	Mallacoota, Victoria, 3892  FOB located at A'wangralea Caravan Park, 78 Betka Rd, Mallacoota Ops Room located at MADRA Reovery Hub, 62 Maurice Avenue, Mallacoota	Total Work Orders Completed	21
Regions Involved	VIC, NSW, ACT, SA, WA	Total Work Value	\$68,934.55

### **Interagency Collaboration**

Government	Bushfire Recovery Victoria	PR / Media	
Partners	Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Initiative Coates Hire – Project Lowerson	NGOs/VOADs	Envite
Local Business	A'wangralea Caravan Park Mallacoota Automotive and Towing	Corporate Volunteers	Coates Hire

**Table 1. Operational Data Overview**

## Operational Appraisal

### **Notable Achievements**

- Two years after the fires and almost 18 months after the first recce, DRA managed to overcome covid and logistics hurdles to deploy to a community still in recovery.
- Although not the focus of this PAR, it is worth noting that this operation provided the foundation for the first Project Resilience activity

### **Key Feedback & Lessons Learnt**

#### **Pre-deployment preparation and planning**

This was beset with delays due to Covid restrictions that had knock-on effects for volunteer availability, plant and equipment availability, and work requiring completion.

The Covid delays were by far the most impactful, delaying the actual deployment of volunteers by 18 months. The delays also meant that work that was identified as suitable during the Damage Assessment (DA) phase was unsuitable (for various reasons) by the time of actual deployment, leading to extra effort reviewing old DAs

#### **Volunteer selection process and deployment**

This was a short term / small scale op, with an early demobilisation due to weather, but even so, only a limited number of EOIs were lodged. Everyone eligible was deployed, which left no opportunity for selection of most suitable personnel. Wave 2 in particular was undersubscribed, and two members were deployed who might not / should not have been if choice was available.

The AO (Area of Operation) was a long distance from the state capital (7.5hours). This made short wave deployments especially difficult to manage. The small scale / stand-alone nature of the operation (and absence of concurrent national operations to divide resources) made it achievable, but it was still very labour intensive.

The Mobilisation cell reported that IMT selection from Field Ops could have been faster, but overall, the communication from each department was streamlined and easy from mob perspective

The Mobilisation Cell has requested that restriction of back-to-back deployments be reviewed again. An exception was made for three members (for differing reasons). Whilst all performed very well, two had no stand down time, including:

- MC, who was deployed for all 17 days of the operation despite the formal request for this to not happen (or if it must, he needed to have 2 days stand down, which did not happen). Fatigue was reported.
- Second person deployed for 16 days straight and had to demob due to emergency at home and was noticeably fatigued and less able to cope with challenges.
- Third member worked 14 days, but did have 3 days off site downtime, with no known issues related to fatigue and remained a high functioning asset.

### **IMT roles and support**

Due to the preparation work that was done over and between the various deployment phases of this operation, as well as the small size of the operation (2 waves of circa 12 volunteers), a slimmed down IMT was deployed. This worked reasonably well, however the need to revisit what work was to be completed meant that the reduced manpower did have a bigger workload than originally envisaged. The shorter deployment periods of some members also increased workload e.g., mid-wave changes in roles on first wave and absence of roles on second wave.

Member After Action Review (AAR) comments identified the need for job descriptions for all roles (the Camp Manager / Logistics role was referenced). If these already exist, they should be available during the operation for quick reference. It is noted that a Tactical Aide Memoire style document is being prepared and will include this sort of detail.

### **Work - including identification and allocation, and selection of teams**

Identification of suitable work was hard and impacted by several factors:

- The extended periods of time between reconnaissance, damage assessment (DA) and operation. This resulted in the following:
  - Some work had been completed by others
  - Some work was inaccessible due to funding bids currently under assessment
  - Equipment identified as required in the DA was not available for hire during the actual operation (see Equipment below)
- Sheer size and scale of the job being outside of DRA scope
- Disaster fatigue and uncertainty about volunteer organisations promising but not delivering
- Choice of jobs that did not either show (perceived) favouritism, did not take away work from local trades but was also meaningful to the community

Deployment of a DA team immediately prior to the operation commencing (to review validity of DAs) may have alleviated some of the above challenges.

Member AAR feedback noted on several occasions of the benefit of a having a professional arborist on the team to support skill development in ticketed (but less competent sawyers. One member also highlighted how important it felt to volunteers to complete a job, even if that job ran into two days.

### **Spontaneous Volunteer Management / Corporate Volunteer Management**

Not applicable for this operation

### **Donor Management**

Project Lowerson (Australian Capital Equity funding) was utilised in support of this operation through the hire of plant equipment. Whilst specific donor management efforts were not required, ACE were kept informed of the use of funding in support of the recovery of the Mallacoota community.

### **Deployment logistics**

Distance complicated logistics with no close air hub and a 7.5hour drive from Melbourne. The temporary loss of part of the IMT kit in transit from Adelaide meant that the start of the operation was impacted by limited IT infrastructure.

The National Logistics Manager commented that there was little input by National Logistics into the Operations Order. This is noted and acknowledged and resulted from the original intent of having a DRT Victoria led deployment with the DRT VIC Logistics Coordinator as MC.

The Logistics Management System (LMS – Hardcat) was trialled during the operation. Overall, the LMS has a minimum level of functionality currently - it contains an inventory and item's locations can be changed. However, more work needs to be done looking at field workflows to increase usability and functionality. The LMS does not show target stock levels. The differentiation between assets and stock makes management of kits or items challenging.

### **Demobilisation process**

The departure of personnel at varying times over the operation meant that extra effort was expended in coordinating and tracking personnel. Whilst a certain degree of flexibility is required and the low EOI numbers for this operation meant that differing travel arrangements needed to be accommodated to enable volunteer participation, the following adjustments to the demobilisation process have been requested by the Mobilisation Cell:

- Mobilisation to have a role in the control of demobilisation departure dates
- IMT to update the tracker and coordinate departure from the FOB with Mobilisation Cell
- The Demobilisation plan to be finalised early with Mobilisation Cell to allow for organising personnel and vehicle returns – including reinforcement that the demobilisation planning should commence at the start of the operation.

### **Documentation**

Member AAR feedback noted on a couple of occasions that the paperwork required to be completed at the start of the operation was onerous.

### **Finances – portal and credit cards**

The National Administration Cell reported that a significant number of high value tax invoices are missing from the Teams portal. Some have EFTPOS receipts loaded, and others have been identified off the credit card statements.

A credit card from Adelaide HQ was sent within the IMT kit (which went missing in transit). Correct procedure was followed (the card was reported missing to the CFO). However, cards should not be transported this way in future.

### **Technology and Information Management**

The use of technology and electronic reporting / data management was hampered by parts of the IMT kit shipment going missing. IMT kit needs to be pre-staged or rolled to site with members. Contingency needs to be allowed for in freight timings to allow time for a second shipment if the first attempt fails.

A recurring point (also made on previous ops) is the need to balance technology and efficient information management with the tech skills of volunteers (often in the older demographic)

*Member hotwash notes:*

- *Tablets would be preferable for Fulcrum*
- *IMT phones should ship with their chargers and cables in the same box!*
- *Use of Gapguardian makes owning a smartphone a pre-requisite for deployment*

### **Equipment**

Plant that was available for hire during deployment was of different types and specifications to the plant originally planned. This was due to the limitation of having to source primarily from Coates, and the equipment they were able to provide at the time of the operation. This changed the nature of the work DRA could do and affected selection of DAs to prioritise. It also impacted on DRA ability to move plant from site to site in Mallacoota, although this was rectified by use of a local towing company

It is noted that the plant originally proposed would have made the work of DRA members easier to undertake.

Some commentary recorded in the Member AAR recommended assigning chainsaws to an individual on each wave to manage and coordinate use and maintenance. Currently there is little ownership and with lots of people handling equipment, meaning that the status / condition is not well managed.

*Member hotwash notes:*

- *Chainsaw kits should contain 2 chainsaws (DRTVic kits have only 1)*
- *Each strike team should have 2 sawyers*
- *Utes should be fitted with off-road tyres and would be better equipped to have trays instead of tub back*
- *String trimmer heads for brushcutters in addition to supplied brushknife blades*
- *Air compressor for cleaning chainsaws.*
- *Forestry clearing saw was much more powerful to than Coates supplied brushcutters and could work much faster in heavier material.*

### **Health and Safety**

One near miss incident was recorded, when a trailer became detached from the towing vehicle during mobilisation. No damage or injuries were sustained, and the details of the incident correctly reported. The Quick Assessment procedure was followed, and corrective actions are being implemented.

*Member hotwash notes:*

- *Safety 5 should appear first in Fulcrum task list. (This might be the case in the newer version)*

### **Medical**

No points of significance

### **Communication and Media engagement**

There were some early limitations with some of the IMT kit not arriving in time, however the PRO (Public Relations Officer) (Jonathon 'Morgs' Morgan) adapted well on his feet and did an excellent job in collecting community stories and images to be used by MarComms and the wider DRA team.

This included obtaining images and content that could be used as part of our engagement and reporting activities with key stakeholders and partners (i.e., Mitsubishi, Coates, Gap Gurdian)

The PRO established a good rapport with not only the DRA team on the ground but with any member of the community he encountered. He provided a good example on how to be successful in the role, that can be used in the PRO training course

### **Crisis communications**

In response to the initial 'frosty' welcome from the community and the misunderstanding of who DRA are (belief was that we were part of the council/government), the Marcomms team did a social media education and awareness push as well as contacted local media to do a general "who DRA are" engagement piece.

This provided a good learning opportunity for pre-engagement for future operations and service projects, so the community understand our services and activity and why we are there. Will include this in pre-planning as action item for upcoming activity.

**Additional Items of note**

None reported

**Stand out individuals**Chris May

A very capable operator who knows the right thing to do in any situation and always acts swiftly. Chris was safety officer for the beginning of Wave1 and had detailed knowledge of all procedures, policies, and situational awareness. Chris is a natural leader and an inspiration to work with.

Peter Sanderson

Peter was OPs for wave 1 and organised all the jobs for wave 1 and most of the jobs for wave 2 with little more than a whiteboard and a telephone. Peter's ability to organise, communicate and negotiate is nothing short of phenomenal. He is a very resourceful and hardworking contributor.

Jonathon Morgan

"Morgs" was appointed PRO and went to amazing lengths to engage with the community, including door knocking all of the businesses in the main street of Mallacoota. It was his self-appointed role as camp counsellor that he really shone though. The operation had several troubled individuals deployed who were having difficulties with their emotional responses and Jonathon never hesitated in stepping in to support them regardless of the emotional burden on himself.

For all of the above the recurring theme is that they are all excellent at leading and supporting people whilst also having deep expertise in their own technical domains.

***Table 2. Operational Appraisal***

## Community Feedback

None received at time of writing

**Table 3. Community Feedback**

## Improvement Goals

The following goals were developed and have now been aligned to the Australian Institute of Disaster Resilience (AIDR) P<sup>2</sup>OST<sup>2</sup>E capability framework (see Appendix A), except for the exercise (E) capability element.

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Complete / Achieved</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Partially complete / Achieved</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Not started / Achieved</p> </div> </div>			
Capability	Goal	Status	Comment / Further Action
People	Enough volunteers submit EOIs to be able to hand pick skills and resources (recurring improvement)		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Limited EOIs lodged with all eligible personnel deployed. No scope to allow for selection of most suitable personnel.</li> <li>Wave 2 was undersubscribed - two members were deployed who perhaps should not have been if choice was available.</li> <li>Three members, deployed on back-to-back waves, two of which had zero stand down during this time. No incidents resulted but fatigue was noted to have impacted ability to manage challenges</li> </ul>
	Membership experiences are positive		Overall, yes, but 2 members did detract, handled well in house (w2) and one from wave 1 who left early due to behaviour.
	Disciplinary action against volunteers is avoided		<p>4 QAs issued – one vehicle incident / 3 volunteers</p> <p>Set people up for success by deploying with best chance of being their best.</p>
Process	IMT data entry QA process: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80% of records entered correctly / complete = Goal achieved</li> <li>50-80% partial win = Goal partially achieved</li> </ul>		Data capture was good. However, similar problem to past Ops with too many eftpos receipts being used instead of tax receipts.
	Fulcrum app audit: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>80% of records entered correctly / complete = Goal achieved</li> </ul>		Fulcrum data had been entered correctly during DA phase in March. Subsequently, records had become inaccurate and had to be re=assessed. Fulcrum accounting didn't allow



	- 50-80% partial win = Goal partially achieved		for this scenario very well and it took a little time to develop accurate reporting.
Organisation	Positive feedback that can be used for marketing purposes on DRA provided by key stakeholders post operation – good news stories / quotes		2 reflections obtained and published to website. Flickr updated with good amount of Coates hire photos.
	Partnership opportunities generated		Partnered successfully with Envite on several shared jobs.
	Capability enhancement opportunities realised		<b>PLANT</b> - DRA deployed plant (3T Excavator) into the field. This was used safely and effectively by properly qualified DRA personnel. <b>RURAL FENCING</b> - A fence line was replaced by 4 team members, approx 200m in 4 hours. <b>CHAINSAW</b> – A qualified arborist was deployed and was used to mentor less experienced operators.
	Near misses / safety incidents recorded		Single near miss occurred – detail recorded, QA conducted, and safety corrective actions are being followed up.
	Crisis communications NOT required		Crisis comms were not needed
	PRO performs to satisfactory standard		Johnathon Morgan performed extraordinarily well in his first deployment as PRO.
Support	Adequate support provided by National departments to operation		Mobilisation cell reported effective communications by departments to support mobilisation process.  National logistics reported lack of consultation during operations order development
Technology	New metrics capture and finance tracking successful	  	The Finance tracker needs to be adjusted re editable actions- currently this is an email to tech to fix. If mobilisation cell BOH could have edit access, we can fix any adjustments to mobilisation expenses and save extra layer of work by tech team  Feedback is going to be sought from both IMT Members & BOH staff to seek improvement suggestions.  Additional tweaks need to be made to include the BoH hours automation – this will be considered an enhancement as it was not transitioned from the Smartsheet's

	New engagement register rollout successful		Rolled out and used. Adjustments in progress to make mobile friendly
	IMT successfully operates in Microsoft		Confirmed
	Hardcat field trial successful		Hardcat trial was successful, if only to highlight where further work is needed - field workflows to increase usability and functionality, target stock levels, differentiation between assets and stock.
	Pre-start checks (Fulcrum)		Despite remaining on an older version of Fulcrum due to the much earlier data entry the system worked well. Due to late arrival of IMT kit, member IT kit was used, including a Samsung Android tablet which worked extremely well. There was some confusion around accounting and metrics disparity between Fulcrum, Teams, and Word reports. This was resolved by W2 but would ideally all be integrated in the future, so data does not need to be cross posted manually between platforms.
	Verizon tracker rollout successful		Verizon is very easy to use once installed and operational. Several members had login/registration/installation issues. It also presumes that everyone deploying will always have access to a smart device.
Training	DA course and Fulcrum course informed via operational PAR process		Valuable information is contained in this document that can be fed in the training programs. This target should be revisited at future operations to confirm that detail has been incorporated into the relevant courses.
	IMT Training on the new tech platform and duties/responsibilities		An investigation is going to be undertaken to determine how the training can be improved and implemented on the next Operation.

<b>Key Improvement Actions</b>			<b>Responsible</b>
	Priority Issues	Priority Actions	
1	Volunteer engagement and low EOI numbers	Review root causes and consider implications for future deployments	Membership / DRT VIC Manager
2	Hardcat capability improvements	Ongoing development	Tech / Logistics
3	Fulcrum updates	Confirm latest version rectifies issues noted in older version as captured in this PAR	Tech / Capability
4	Metrics capture	Ongoing improvement cycle:	Tech / Admin



		<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>- specific feedback from BOH / IMT / others as required</li><li>- Incorporation of feedback in next iteration</li></ul>	
<b>5</b>	Policy review	Deployment policy regarding back-to-back deployment	Field Ops / Mobilisation
<b>6</b>	Deployment logistics	Review of policy for location of IMT kits	Field Ops / Tech / Logistics
<b>7</b>	Equipment / Capability	Critical review of member hotwash feedback and incorporation where relevant	Field Ops / Capability

***Table 4. Key Improvement Actions***

**Appendix A: Supporting Information**

The application of the AIDR capability framework against the established goals provides capability targets against which the DRA's operations can be evaluated.

**P<sup>2</sup>OST<sup>2</sup> Elements of Capability**

Breaking down issues into their basic elements can help identify root causes for problems, as well as viable treatment options.

<b>People</b>	Roles, responsibilities, accountabilities, skills
<b>Process</b>	Plans, policies, procedures, processes
<b>Organisation</b>	Structure, jurisdiction
<b>Support</b>	Infrastructure, facilities, maintenance
<b>Technology</b>	Equipment, systems, standards, security, inter-operability
<b>Training</b>	Capability qualifications/ skills levels, identification of required courses

*Table 1. – Elements of capability*

<b>Icon</b>	<b>Interpretation of rating</b>
	Goal is complete.
	Goal is partially correct.
	Goal is not complete.