CRISIS COMMUNICATIONS HANDBOOK

FOR REGIONAL AND LOCAL TOURISM

Tourism Victoria

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Acknowledgments

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Andrew Buckley – Gippsland Coastal Board
John Buckland – Dept. of Sustainability and Environment
Gabrielle Gelly – formerly Lakes & Wilderness Tourism Inc.
Kevin Hennessy – East Gippsland Shire

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Robyn Betts – Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner
Bindi Gove – Tourism Alliance Victoria
Jodie Willmer – Tourism Alliance Victoria
Ronnie Beauchamp – Alpine Shire Council
Geoff Low – Glow Marketing

Prepared by:
Gavin Anderson & Company
Level 10, 171 La Trobe Street
MELBOURNE, VIC 3000
Ph: (03) 9654 6555

Minister's Message

Crisis Communications Handbook for Regional Tourism

The Hon John Pandazopoulos MP, Minister for Tourism

Tourism is a vital economic driver for the entire State, particularly regional Victoria were tourism is worth $3.5 billion and responsible for 60,000 jobs.

The importance of regional tourism has come to the fore in recent times with many destinations feeling the effects of bushfires and drought as well as global uncertainty brought by SARS and September 11.

We are now well on our way to recovery, with recent data showing an 18 per cent increase in the number of domestic visitors travelling to regional Victoria. An injection of extra State Government funds and a coordinated industry effort are responsible for such an excellent result.

While we are indeed delighted with such a terrific result, we cannot afford to be complacent. Not only must we continue marketing activities but must also plan for the inevitability of another crisis.

I am delighted to present you with the *Crisis Communications Handbook for Regional and Local Tourism* which has been developed to assist local and regional bodies to plan for, respond to, and recover from crisis events both man-made and natural. Essentially the handbook will help counter negative publicity in the event of a crisis.

The handbook has been developed by Tourism Victoria in consultation with the tourism industry and I am confident that it will arm regional Victoria with the information and step-by-step guidance to developing and implementing a crisis communications plan.

John Pandazopoulos MP
Minister for Tourism

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Ministerial Message

Introduction

Tourism plays an increasingly vital role throughout Victoria in terms of economic and social wellbeing, and must be nurtured as well as protected whenever possible.

Our tourism sector is especially vulnerable to the often unavoidable impacts of natural and man-made disasters and events, and this makes the implementation of a timely communications response crucial.

Worldwide and local experience shows that the absence of an effective, tourism-focused communications response in the immediate and short term following a crisis or incident can be devastating to local businesses, towns and regions.

The lack of a planned, coordinated communications effort can significantly delay the restoration of a region's ability to attract visitors and generate economic activity .

This Handbook is an acknowledgment that effective stakeholder communications play a critical role in the tourism recovery process for regions affected by disaster and other high-impact events.

Crisis Communications strategies are needed to help retain the confidence of travellers and the travel industry, and to minimise the impact of a crisis on the destination.

No matter what kind of crisis occurs, the techniques for dealing with it effectively are quite similar. Good communication based on the principles of honesty and transparency is the key to successful crisis management.

To assist regional and local tourism officers with this process, the following guidelines suggest specific actions to take:

• Before a crisis - Preparing for the worst
• Response during the actual crisis - Minimising damage in a crisis
• Recovery - Restoring visitor confidence

Aims & Objectives of this Handbook

The overall aim of this Handbook is to assist local and regional tourism bodies in planning for, responding to and then recovering from crisis events – both natural and man-made – with a view to safeguarding their tourism industries and avoiding or minimising long-term damage.

This aim will be achieved by pursuing the following objectives:

• Highlight potential impacts of a crisis or incident on local and regional tourism and thereby regional economies

• Raise awareness among local authorities, government agencies, tourism associations and individual tourism businesses of the value of a coordinated and timely response

• Identify potentially relevant stakeholders and methods of communication

• Suggest preparatory measures for a timely, professional response

• Detail the role of regional or local Tourism Response & Recovery Groups (TRRG)

• Provide personal action plans detailing responsibilities of TRRG members

• Outline a Media Management Plan, including recommended procedures, protocols, holding statements, checklists etc

• Explain how best to manage media attention

• Outline a Tourism Industry Communication Plan

• Examine communications options as part of a recovery plan.

This Handbook will also apply these policies and principles to a topical Case Study to demonstrate how they would work in a practical situation.

Definition of a Crisis

For the purposes of this Handbook:

A crisis is a serious event, perceived or real, that disrupts normal tourism activities and impacts negatively on a region's desirability as a tourist destination in the immediate to short term.

Some samples of crisis issues and incidents include:

- Bushfires
- Flooding
- Drought
- Water pollution
- Blue green algae outbreak
- Severe storm
- Air pollution
- Landslides and mudflows
- Major transport accident
- Terrorist incident
- Major crime
- Safety queries re: visitor activities
- Pest plagues eg: rodents, insects
- Animal attack eg shark
- Oil spill
- Hazardous material accidents
- Outbreak of disease (eg: Legionnaires, Meningococcal)
- Earthquake
- Food poisoning
- General safety (eg: bag snatching, pickpockets etc)
- Repeated bad service, poor visitor experiences
- High profile criticism (eg: from a celebrity)

Given the diversity of possible crises and the fact that every specific event will unfold differently and have varying impacts on tourism, this Handbook does not set out prescribed actions to follow. Instead, it canvasses a range of generic actions that will assist destinations/regions in preparing for, and responding to, the consequences of a natural or man-made disaster or incident. It must also be recognised that communications is just one part of the overall response to a crisis or incident and needs integration with other plans to ensure success.

Potential Impacts

Depending on the crisis itself, the potential economic impacts can be devastating to local tourism operators and long-lasting in terms of a region's reputation as an attractive tourist destination.

For example, the effect of the foot-and-mouth disease crisis in the United Kingdom in 2000/2001 was substantial, with bans enforced on access to popular countryside destinations affecting both domestic and international visitors. Tourism businesses subsequently presented an invoice to the British Chancellor for £12 billion in May 2001, which they considered to be a 'conservative estimate of the damage to the rural economy after businesses had gone bankrupt or lost 80% of their turnover'.

Closer to home, blooms of toxic blue-green algae in the Gippsland Lakes region of Victoria have had significant impacts on both the local fishing and tourism industries in terms of revenue and jobs. In 1987-1988, a major outbreak is estimated to have the cost the area around $8.5 million and the equivalent of more than 85 jobs.

In January 2003 Victoria's biggest bushfires in the last 60 years caused the virtual shutdown of the tourism industry in the State's northeast during a popular holiday period, creating severe economic hardship and putting

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Many tourism businesses lost substantial revenue through the decrease in visitation, leading to widespread job losses and severe flow-on effects on the local economy, as reduced consumer spending by both residents and visitors exacerbated an already dire situation.

Every disaster or crisis will attract unwelcome attention of varying degrees, with the potential to impact negatively on visitors' perceptions regarding personal safety, suitability of access, availability of accommodation and the likelihood of disruption to travel plans. Furthermore, the nature of media coverage means that often the seriousness and extent of incidents may be magnified in the lens of a television camera or the words of a newspaper reporter when conveyed further afield.

These factors underline the benefit of a planned, considered communications response that seeks to put the issue into perspective, reassures observers about the measures taken to control and address the situation, and fully explains the true extent of the crisis.

Stakeholders

At a local level, the tourism industry consists of a range of partners including local and regional tourism associations, tourism enterprises (accommodation providers, tour operators, attractions and services) local businesses and the general community.

Victoria's regions adopt a variety of structural models to organise their tourism promotion and activities. Across the State, stakeholders that may have a direct interest include:

- Tourism Victoria
- Tourism Alliance Victoria
- State and Local Governments
- Regional Tourism Associations
- Local Tourism Associations
- Tourism Advisory Boards
- Regional Economic/Tourism Boards
- Regional Campaign Committees
- Industry Associations
- Traders Associations
- Chambers of Commerce.

Regardless of the specific structure established in each region, it is vital when responding to a crisis or incident to have an agreed approach based on effective coordination and communications between the relevant stakeholders (see Tourism Response & Recovery Group).

Other potential stakeholders in terms of information provision, joint announcements and expert advice regarding issues such as visitor safety and travel conditions include:

- Victoria Police
- Country Fire Authority
- Victoria State Emergency Service
- Department of Sustainability and Environment
- Parks Victoria
- Rural Ambulance Victoria
- Bureau of Meteorology
- VicRoads
- Department of Justice
- Parks Victoria
- Water Authorities
- Department of Human Services
- Port Authorities
- Australian Red Cross Victoria
- Environmental Protection Authority
- Relevant local industry associations

Key Audiences

Several audiences need to be considered when formulating a communications response to a crisis or incident affecting regional and local tourism. They include:

- Current visitors (and potentially their families elsewhere)
- Potential visitors
- Media – both local and further afield
- Local tourism operators
- Local tourism employees
- Local community
- Local MPs
- Local business community
- Intrastate travel industry
- Interstate travel industry
- International tour operators/wholesalers
- Federal, State and local Governments – Tourism Ministers
- Commonwealth Department of Industry, Tourism and Resources
- Diplomats – if foreign nationals are involved
- Tourism Victoria
- Tourism Australia

Each may require specifically targeted messages but all will gain reassurance and confidence from a region's well-planned and authoritative response.

Communications Tools

While the media can be a fast and efficient means of disseminating information and messages, it is not a substitute for communicating directly with key audiences.

Tools of communications that should be considered include:

- Media releases
- Holding statement
- Media conferences
- Media interviews
- Central contact point for media
- Fact sheets
- Advisory notices / Update Bulletins
- Visitor Information Centres
- Local Visitor Radio
- Telephone calls
- Switchboard scripts
- Victorian Tourism Information Service (VTIS)
- Emails Fax/mail outs

Communications Tools cont.

- Meetings
- Letters
- Website
- Newspaper notices
- Advertising
- 1800 number

It is imperative that up-to-date and authoritative information is provided when utilising these tools.

Tourism Response & Recovery Group

A coordinated response is a prerequisite if a region is to be portrayed with a sense of reassurance, control and, if appropriate, a 'business as usual' atmosphere to its potential audiences.

In the United Kingdom it was found that the tourism recovery effort following the foot-and-mouth outbreak was hindered by a perception that there were too many tourist organisations and associations purporting to speak for 'tourism'.

It is recommended that regions establish a Tourism Response & Recovery Group (TRRG) consisting of a core team of stakeholder representatives who would be responsible for formulating a local or regional Crisis Communications Plan for tourism.

In the event of a disaster or incident, the TRRG would meet as soon as practicable and would be responsible for implementing the Plan and all communications surrounding it. Other stakeholders would then be brought in to support this team (eg: emergency service representatives relevant to the crisis and specific tourism operators if directly affected).

TRRG Membership

The membership of the Tourism Response & Recovery Group should reflect the region's established tourism bodies, whilst taking into account its primary tourism interests and biggest risk factors.

Suggested TRRG membership:

The size of the TRRG is dictated by each region's tourist profile, but generally would consist of 5-6 members, representing some of the following bodies:

1. Regional Tourism Association (chief executive) - Chair
2. Local Tourism Associations (President)
3. Tourism Victoria (Regional Marketing Coordinator)
4. Local Government representative/s (tourism officer / economic development officer)
5. Relevant Government agency (if applicable)

TRRG Membership cont.

An experienced media officer from one of the agencies could also play a valuable role.

Importantly, the Group should maintain the flexibility to include other stakeholders who either have a direct interest in the tourism ramifications of a specific incident or are involved in the emergency response.

Early consideration should be given to appointing or contracting a professional and experienced media officer or public relations company.

For suggested actions that are indicative of the responsibilities and actions that should be assigned within the TRRG, please refer to section 6.

Planning Preparing for a Crisis

Victoria's Emergency Management Planning Arrangements

In planning for a crisis, the TRRG should consult, and coordinate its actions in accordance with, the State's established Emergency Management Planning Arrangements.

Under these arrangements, the key regional bodies are:

• Divisional emergency response planning committees
• Municipal emergency management planning committees

These are the principal groups charged with local crisis and incident management and will be primarily concerned with the protection of life and property in the immediate to short term.
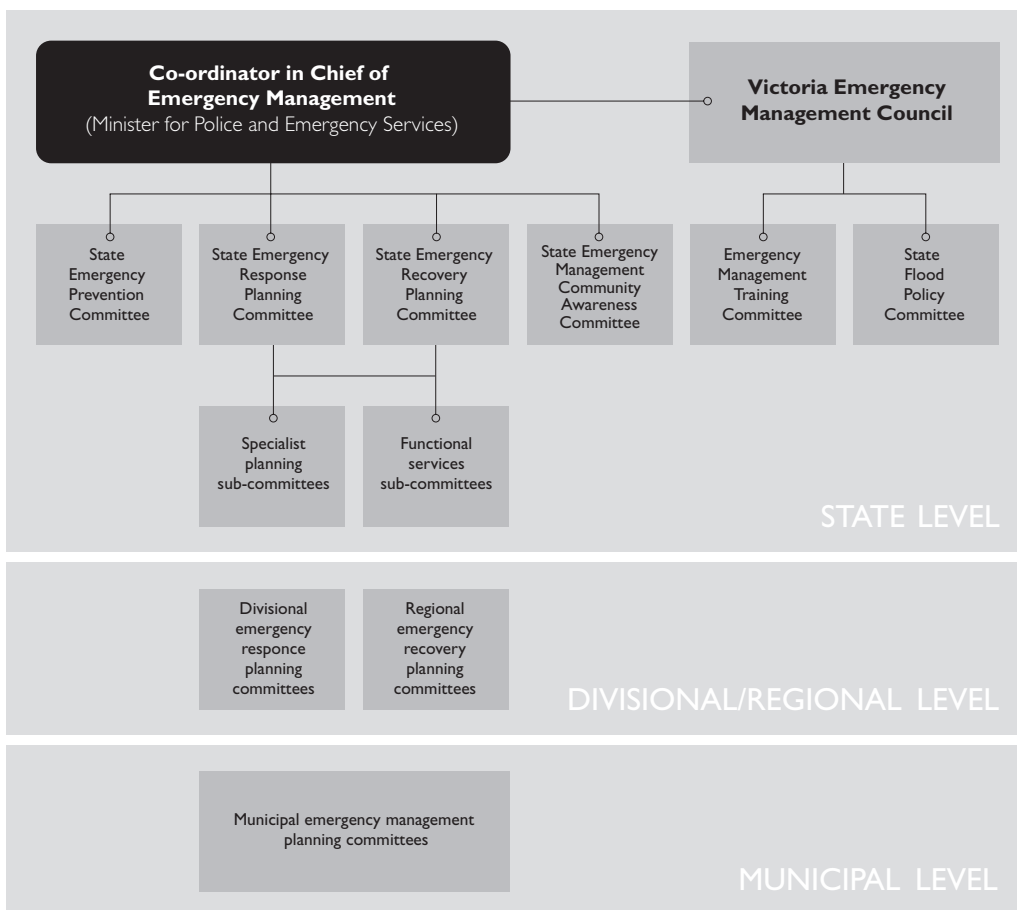
Victoria's Emergency Management Planning Arrangements

Divisional Emergency Response Planning Committees

Divisional Response Planning Committees, based on Victoria's Police Divisions, prepare Divisional Response Plans, identify regional resources for emergency response, and exercise and review divisional response arrangements. Divisional response operations that transcend municipal boundaries are co-ordinated by Regional Emergency Response Coordinators.

Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committees

Municipal councils are required to appoint committees designated to plan for the use of municipal resources in emergency management, and to appoint a municipal emergency resources officer (MERO) and municipal recovery manager to coordinate the provision of council resources in emergencies.

Each council is required by law to prepare a **Municipal Emergency Management Plan** (MEMPlan). These plans take into consideration each type of emergency situation and develop generic principles and arrangements that can be activated in any crisis situation.

A MEMPlan records a municipality's emergency management arrangements and includes:
*   key geographic and demographic information about the municipal district
*   the results of emergency risk analyses performed
*   outlines of risk reduction strategies
*   information about public awareness and education campaigns and other actions taken to increase community resilience
*   arrangements for the management of response and recovery activities
*   contact lists of key council staff and other personnel needed during an emergency
*   information on access to resources owned or controlled by the council, which are available for prevention, response and recovery activities, including the contact details of suppliers.

Importantly, the MEMPlan is a valuable resource for the TRRG in preparing its Crisis Communications Plan. The TRRG is strongly encouraged to obtain a copy of the relevant local MEMPlan/s.

Crisis Communications Plan

Awareness and planning are the keys to being prepared for a crisis.

The TRRG should develop a tourism-specific **Crisis Communications Plan** that assigns roles and responsibilities as well as detailing questions that need to be asked and actions that should be taken. It should also contain an up-to-date contact list of potential stakeholder groups and local/metropolitan media. This would be an evolving document that should be re-visited regularly – particularly following a practical experience that highlights any deficiencies.

Seeking input for the development of the Plan (especially from the local MERO, the Divisional emergency response planning committee and Municipal emergency management planning committees) would greatly assist in the building of stakeholder relationships if they do not already exist and provide expert advice. The TRRG is encouraged to maintain a working relationship with the government agencies responsible for emergency management in its region.

The Emergency Management Manual Victoria states:

> *The process of planning is both educative and developmental. Production of a plan through a consultative process promotes a sense of involvement without which the document will be of less practical value to its users.*

> *A well-managed planning process develops trust between agencies and individual officers, commits agencies to particular roles and helps develop shared goals.*

As part of the Plan development, TRRGs should assess their region's risk factors and priorities, as well as the actions and communications required to assist recovery efforts. These risk factors can be found in the relevant MEMPlan/s.

The Crisis Communications Plan could include the following:

- Agreed membership (+ back-ups) of the Tourism Response & Recovery Group
- Member roles and responsibilities
- Assessment of risks
- Personal Action Plans
- Action checklists
- Stakeholder contact lists – regularly updated
- Media contact lists – regularly updated
- Key audience contact lists – regularly updated
- List of communications tools available
- Nominated media spokesperson and back-up
- Tips on dealing with the media
- Media protocols
- Draft media releases
- Draft background materials
- Draft Question & Answer documents
- Possible marketing options.

TRRG – Alert Systems

An alert system should be in place to ensure that every member of the TRRG is contactable at all times and is available at short notice.

After hours contact numbers will be held and circulated to all TRRG members by the Group Chair. A simple laminated card with all relevant TRRG details should be sufficient. It will be the responsibility of TRRG members to notify the Chair of any updates to this information.

Also, it is a requirement that an up-to-date contact list of all the region's tourism operators and venues, media representatives and key stakeholders be held. This information must be accessible to the TRRG at all times.

TRRG "Crisis Communications Centre"

Once activated, the TRRG will assemble as quickly as possible (depending on the circumstances) at a pre-determined location – the "Crisis Communications Centre."

This location should be assessed in advance of a crisis situation to ensure it is functional and can easily be configured to suit the requirements of the TRRG.

Access to either an in-house or external facsimile distribution system with current media fax numbers will also be essential to enable fast and effective dissemination of media notifications and statements. Other equipment and materials that should be considered include at least three telephones, at least two facsimile machines, photocopiers, computers, printers, an electronic whiteboard, butchers paper and easels, regional maps, contact numbers, a radio, television and VCR.

Response Minimising the impact of a crisis

Immediate Actions – The first 24 hours

Task	Responsibility
1-2 hours after incident	
Make an initial assessment of the probable scale of the crisis	Chair
Activate the TRRG and arrange for members to be contacted	Chair
Arrange for verbal/written briefing on situation status for TRRG	Chair
Advise senior stakeholders eg: Minister, Tourism Victoria, as required	Chair
Refer to Crisis Communications Plan and determine what is applicable	TRRG
Establish and maintain contact with emergency response team/lead agency for regular information updates	Information Officer
Refer all initial media queries and requests back to the lead agency dealing with the crisis or incident unless there is a specific tourism focus	Chair/media officer
Immediately revise, cancel or suspend advertising	TRRG
Prepare and update holding statement/talking points/Q&As and send to media outlets etc	Media officer
Set up media log	Media officer
Handle subsequent media inquiries based on initial holding points.	Chair / media officer
2-6 Hours after incident	
Set up media monitoring	Media officer
Liaise with emergency response team	Chair / Media officer
Convene TRRG Chair Report on communications to date	Media officer
Liaise with senior stakeholders	Chair / TRRG
Communicate/consult with affected operators	TRRG
6-24 Hours after incident	
Undertake impact assessment process	Information Officer
Develop response to tourism industry	TRRG
Update holding statement	Media officer
Liaise with stakeholders	TRRG

Medium Term Actions – Days 2 to 14 after the incident

Task	Responsibility
Liaise with stakeholders	Chair / TRRG
Update speaking points and holding statement	Media officer
Convene TRRG	Chair

Long Term Actions – Day 15 after the incident and beyond

Task	Responsibility
Liaise with stakeholders	Chair / TRRG
Update speaking points and holding statement	Media officer
Convene TRRG	Chair

Incident Media Management

Media management at any incident, including access and safety for media representatives, is the responsibility of the control agency. The incident controller should ensure that current and accurate information is available.

Warnings, or release of other public information which the response co-ordinator deems necessary, must be cleared by the incident controller prior to dissemination.

Visitor information and advice released by the TRRG must be consistent with that released by these bodies and must not interfere with the operational management of the situation.

At the same time, the TRRG's network of tourism operators and accommodation providers can prove invaluable for the dissemination of urgent information to regional visitors – particularly those visitors who do not have the benefit of local knowledge.

Initial TRRG Checklist

- Upon responding to a natural disaster or other crisis, the TRRG needs to consider these issues as a matter of urgency:

- What is the nature and potential duration of the crisis?

- Is there continuing danger?

- Is there a risk of over-reacting?

- Does the Crisis Communications Plan cover this situation?

- Which is the lead emergency services agency?

- Who can provide the TRRG with authoritative, timely information?

- Will this crisis really reduce the region's desirability as a tourist destination?

- Can the crisis be isolated to a specific area?

- What is a realistic assessment of related safety issues?

- Should travel to the area be suspended?

- Have any visitors been directly impacted?

- Are any short-term measures needed to assist affected visitors?

- Are arrangements required for visitors' families?

- Have any tourism businesses been directly affected?

- What disruption has been caused to travel, accommodation and visitor activities in the region?

- Are staff safe?

- How can reliable information be passed to visitors and tourism businesses?

- How is the crisis being reported in the media?

- How widespread is the media coverage?

- Who is monitoring media coverage?

Initial TRRG Checklist Cont.

- Who is keeping a record of journalist contacts?

- Should the region's existing marketing efforts be immediately suspended?

- Which regional tourism operators need to be consulted?

- How quickly can the region be promoted / marketed again?

- What proactive communication measures can the TRRG take in the immediate to short term?

- Should a holding statement be issued?

- Is outside expert assistance required?

- Following is a Crisis Assessment Checklist to guide the TRRG in determining the level of response required and whether further expert support and advice is needed.

Crisis Assessment Checklist

This checklist is to be used by the TRRG Chair in identifying the problem areas created by the incident.

1. What is the nature of the crisis?

(a) Type of incident and how extensive?

- Bushfires
- Flooding
- Drought
- Water pollution
- Blue green algae outbreak
- Severe storm
- Air pollution
- Landslides and mudflows
- Major transport accident
- Terrorist incident
- Major crime
- Pest plagues (eg rodents, insects)
- Animal attack
- Oil spill
- Hazardous material accidents
- Outbreak of disease (eg Legionnaires)
- Earthquake
- Food poisoning
- General safety (eg bag snatching, pickpockets etc)
- Repeated bad service, poor visitor experiences
- High profile criticism (eg from a celebrity)

(b) What visitor operations are affected?

- Safety
- Travel
- Accommodation
- Activities
- Reputation

(c) Is the incident/problem contained or escalating?

(d) Are there any health issues for visitors or tourism operations?

Crisis Assessment Checklist Cont.

(e) What stakeholders are affected/potentially affected?

(f) What are the potential short- and long-term impacts on region's desirability as a tourist destination?

2. What are the impacts/issues regarding the region's tourism image, operability and earning power?

(a) Is there substantial media coverage?

- Local
- Statewide
- National
- International
- News
- Current Affairs

(b) What are the economic impacts?

- Direct business interruption
- Indirect disruption to associated businesses
- Duration
- Potential liability claims
- Insurance issues

3. Other TRRG issues

(a) Is the TRRG receiving timely and accurate information? Issues to be considered include:

- Effective interface with the Emergency Management Team
- Communication links to site of crisis
- Need for TRRG observer at site
- Effective interface with other key audiences and stakeholders
- Need for additional resources
- Need to bring in outside communications expertise

(b) Are media inquiries being adequately addressed in a timely fashion?

(c) How frequently will the TRRG need to meet?

(d) Are there any directly affected stakeholders who should be asked to join the TRRG to address this specific crisis?

Working with the Media

- In the event of a crisis, the media must be regarded as a vehicle for the region to communicate effectively with visitors, potential visitors and the wider community. It offers an opportunity not a threat.

- The TRRG will play an important role in managing public perceptions about an incident and how the region is responding to it. Being heard and understood cannot be left to chance. Therefore, all media interaction must be calm and measured in order to convey a sense of control and preparation.

- Always remember that the media is well resourced and will not go away. Journalists have a job to do and will do it – with or without your help.

- Know what you are talking about.

- Many key audiences and stakeholders such as visitors, potential visitors, governments, regulatory bodies and so on will often gain their first (and lasting) impressions through media reports.

- **Trust, integrity and good faith** are vital components when liaising with the media, particularly in times of crisis. This underlines the requirement for the release of only authoritative, reliable information.

- Regular updates will serve to counter speculation and misunderstandings.

- The TRRG must be upfront, even regarding bad news, if it is to be relied upon, and given credence by the media for an official position. Often, bad news can be tempered by emphasising the actions taken to address it and by putting the matter into its full context.

- Furthermore, all reasonable media requests should be accommodated as quickly as possible in order to disseminate factual details and to position the region's tourism industry as being open and responsible, and working in the best interests of its customers.

- The nature and timing of the TRRG media response must be guided by the extent of the crisis or incident. In some cases, particularly those that require sensitivity such as the loss of life, it will be advisable to wait until an appropriate time before issuing anything other than essential factual advice for travellers.

- As far as practicable, the TRRG Chair should be the sole public face of the industry. This will ensure consistency of message and style.

- However, it may become necessary for directly impacted tourist businesses to comment on a crisis in many instances and this should be done in coordination with the TRRG.

Media Protocols

A consistent, strategic and carefully managed approach to media interaction is absolutely vital in the event of a crisis. The manner in which the region is perceived to respond in a crisis situation will be remembered long after the crisis itself has passed.

The region's authorities must be portrayed as a responsible, professional and responsive, placing the interests of the community as well as visitors first and foremost. They must also be seen to be open and accountable.

For this reason, it is essential that all media contact by the tourism industry conforms to the following protocols:

• The Chair of the TRRG should be notified immediately of a crisis with the potential to impact on tourism and receive an initial briefing

• All initial media queries and requests should be referred back to the lead agency dealing with the crisis or incident unless there is a specific tourism focus. They should then be handled by the TRRG Chair

• No speculation or unauthorised comments should be made on any basis

• The TRRG executive assistant is responsible for notifying relevant parties, switchboards and receptions of contact numbers for the Crisis Management Centre once it has been established

• All subsequent media queries and requests must be transferred or directed to the TRRG

• The TRRG should be notified as soon as practicable about any media contact

• If media attend the scene of a crisis incident, the TRRG should make contact with the lead agency's media liaison coordinator to ascertain whether tourism-specific queries are being raised

• The TRRG will provide the media with authorised factual updates on the situation relating to tourism as quickly as possible

• If further or specifically requested information is not immediately available, the media should be told why

• The TRRG must be regularly updated regarding media interest and attitudes, as well as any community feedback via talkback radio

• Clear and concise messages should be formulated by the TRRG before any media interview or statement

• All media releases should be disseminated to regional tourism stakeholders as soon as possible after being issued

• As far as practicable, the TRRG Chair will be the public face of the region's tourism sector and will take part in all significant radio and television interviews and media conferences;

• If appropriate, the TRRG will identify appropriate local experts or tourism operators to make "third party" comments.

Holding Statement

Media deadlines and inevitable demands for a quick response mean it may prove necessary to issue an interim "holding statement" to AAP, radio stations and other media in the short term.

This ensures that the region does not appear defensive and also allows for an explanation as to why further details are not yet known. It also informs the media who they should contact if seeking information or comment on tourism issues in the region.

This 2-3-paragraph statement should be clear, concise, factual and qualified (eg: "as far as can be ascertained at this early stage"), and will be drafted by the assigned TRRG Media Officer in consultation with other TRRG members.

Distribution of the statement will be the responsibility of the TRRG Chair, and can be done initially on a verbal basis and then in written form eg: release, website etc.

A copy of the statement should also be issued to all TRRG members, relevant tourist operators, local agencies and any necessary third parties.

Proforma Media Release

The content of media releases will vary depending on the type and magnitude of the incident. However, they should include the following elements:

- Be factual – don't speculate
- Provide a contact name and number for further inquiries
- Date and time clearly stated, specifying whether for immediate release
- Detail efforts to resolve the situation
- Be calm, reassuring and positive (avoid terms such as "crisis" and "emergency")
- Acknowledge responsibility to visitors and community
- Indicate that further information will be released as it becomes available
- Acknowledge importance of visitor welfare etc (if appropriate)
- Indicate that key stakeholders will be briefed (if appropriate)
- Contain quotes from the TRRG Chair
- If appropriate, empathise with any victims etc of the incident.

A sample media release can be found in section 7.

Media Interview Guidelines

1. Speak concisely and in short sentences

2. Formulate a handful of central key messages - write them down and stick to them

3. Remember who your real audience is – viewers, listeners, readers

4. Be aware of latest information

5. Be aware of how the crisis or incident is being reported and of any specific concerns raised

6. Don't do media interviews off-the-cuff – think first and have a clear objective

7. If appropriate, ask whether the journalist has spoken to anyone else

8. Anticipate potential questions and prepare thoroughly

9. Don't be defensive

10. Know the facts – never attempt to bluff

11. Never lie – you will be found out

12. Don't repeat provocative phrases eg: "No, we're not embarrassed by this situation …"

13. Avoid debates

14. Be mindful of media deadlines

15. Never assume the cameras or tape recorders are off

16. Make written background information available if appropriate

17. Use everyday language – not technical jargon

18. Minimise surrounding distractions

19. Dress appropriately

20. Ensure an appropriate backdrop for TV interviews.

Communicating with the Tourism Industry

- In the event of a crisis or major incident, members of the local tourism industry will be understandably concerned about the potential impact it will have on their livelihoods. They will expect a communications response that is practical and realistic but also measured.

- Further afield, the tourism sector will need clear and concise information as well as regular updates so that visitors, their families and potential visitors can be properly informed about the situation in the region.

- If evacuation from an area proves necessary then procedures must be put in place to ensure the cancellation or postponement of inbound tourism to that specific area (and surrounding areas if necessary).

- It is important to ensure that information being released to the media is consistent with that being disseminated among those in the industry.

- During a crisis, and in its immediate aftermath, clear lines of communication between tourism stakeholders are essential to avoid misunderstandings and damaging speculation.

- These lines should be established as part of the formation of a region's TRRG and during the development of its Crisis Communications Plan. Local tourism industry education and awareness are vitally important to a region's preparedness and the success of its disaster and crisis response.

- Operators need to understand why certain things might be done or said, as well as appreciate the benefits of having a sole regional spokesman on tourism and the need for protocols in working with the media.

- The industry should resolve any disagreements about contentious elements of the Crisis Communications Plan in advance of an actual crisis occurring.

- During an incident, regional tourism operators and accommodation providers may be well placed to provide feedback to the TRRG regarding the nature and extent of the incident as well as its likely impact on visitor activity.

- In return, the TRRG should provide advice and possibly short-term assistance as a matter of urgency to those directly affected.

- Tourism operators and accommodation providers are perfectly positioned to provide their customers with practical and authoritative information regarding travel plans, safety of routes, alternative activities and so on. Other communications avenues such as Visitor Information Centres, websites, VTIS and local visitor radio should also be utilised in this regard.

Communicating with the Tourism Industry Cont.

- All TRRG media statements should be immediately distributed to tourism industry stakeholders.

- As appropriate, the TRRG needs to consider whether it needs to liaise with and seek assistance from outside industry stakeholder bodies.

- These could include:

  - Office of the Federal and State Tourism Ministers
  - Tourism Victoria
  - Domestic retail and wholesale travel industry
  - International wholesalers and inbound tour operators
  - Tourism Australia

- The TRRG also needs to either revise or suspend any current marketing programs for the region until an appropriate recovery strategy has been determined.

Recovery Restoring visitor confidence

Recovery

A number of actions will be necessary to restore a region's desirability as a tourist destination following the 'bad publicity' that may accompany a crisis or negative incident.

Several factors will influence consumer confidence and determine the speed of recovery from natural and man-made disasters, including:

- The nature of the crisis and its impact on perceptions of safety
- The extent of damage caused to vital infrastructure
- The efficiency with which facilities are brought back on line and services resumed
- The success of media management strategies
- The effectiveness of marketing to promote the destination's status.

There are not only economic benefits in restoring a region's attractiveness to visitors. From a psychological perspective, the return of visitors to an area following a disaster event will assist the overall recovery process.

Combined Effort
A region's recovery efforts should include a combination of different tactics to spread the word that it is safe, open for business and ready to welcome visitors. In most cases, a mix of media publicity, targeted marketing and advertising may be necessary to reassure the travel industry and potential travellers that the region's visitor desirability remains intact.

Importance of Communication
Misinformation and rumour are the natural products of the confusion that normally surrounds crises and natural disasters, and nothing should be taken for granted when communications is concerned. During recovery, too much information for key stakeholders and audiences is better than too little.

Coordinated Response
The existence of a Tourism Response & Recovery Group or similar body will be crucial in leading a coordinated industry response for the region's recovery efforts. It will ensure a region-wide focus and will lead to consistent and united marketing, and promote media messages designed to effectively address the perceptions of observers and potential visitors.

Timing Considerations
The timing of a region's recovery strategy will depend not only on its level of preparedness but also on the appropriateness of marketing and media activities in the wake of an incident that may have involved loss of life. The region must be sensitive to such considerations when planning its response.

Involve the Local Tourism Industry and other Tourism Stakeholders

Once the incident has been resolved or contained, local tourism industry participants should have input to the TRRG's deliberations on the recovery efforts so that plans take into account as many views as possible. They will be able to contribute ideas and potential solutions as well as useful information on the expectations of their customers and employees. This can be ascertained through a simple industry questionnaire, an example of which is provided in Section 7.

Expertise from outside bodies such as Tourism Victoria and the travel industry should also be utilised.

Regional Emergency Recovery Planning Committees

The State's Emergency Management Planning guidelines require the establishment of a Regional Emergency Recovery Planning Committee. Key roles of each committee are to:

- Develop and maintain a regional recovery plan
- Plan for the establishment and support of community recovery committees when required
- Monitor and review recovery operations and the effectiveness of the regional recovery plan.

The TRRG should seek input to this committee to ensure that the local/regional tourism sector is acknowledged and taken into account from the start of the regional recovery process. In fact, the TRRG could be designated a Community Recovery Committee under the Emergency Management guidelines to fulfil its role.

Recovery Checklist

Immediate

☐ Convene a debrief/meeting to review all actions taken during the crisis.

☐ Ensure that there is an up-to-date position paper available that also details what authorities are doing now.

☐ Update any web site information with a "concluding statement" and remove outdated crisis releases.

☐ Be aware that the media usually writes post-crisis feature stories and may require further comment

☐ Ensure that communication is maintained with contacts made during the crisis (travel industry, accommodation providers etc).

Short-term considerations

☐ Is a burst of tactical or infomercial advertising required?

☐ Do reporters need to be brought to the region to demonstrate the effectiveness and progress of recovery efforts?

☐ Is market research required?

☐ Can the Tourism Minister or other government departments assist?

☐ Does an up-to-date briefing paper need to be circulated for consumers, trade and/or media?

☐ Are any external briefings required? Is a letter to industry required?

☐ Taking into account the sensitivities of those directly impacted, when is an appropriate time to resume marketing efforts?

☐ Can you promote any 'good news' stories about how well the region responded and the support provided to visitors at the time?

☐ Are visitor testimonials available for dissemination?

☐ Should a coordinated marketing campaign revolve around special deals?

☐ Are there significant milestones in the recovery process that could be used for publicity?

☐ Are there any matters to bring to the attention of government?

☐ Are there any positive stories to issue?

☐ Should there be a thank you letter or function for internal and external people who helped out?

☐ Update this Handbook, reviewing what did and didn't work.

Medium to long term

☐ Be aware of post-crisis follow-up stories, particularly on anniversaries.

Restoring Consumer Confidence

The most crucial and urgent requirements of a region's tourism recovery plan are to restore consumer confidence and to raise awareness that the impacts of the crisis or incident have either been contained or completely resolved.

Key steps to take and principles to follow include:

1. Establish industry credibility
2. Determine all the facts
3. Consider the sensitivities
4. Accurately gauge outside perceptions
5. Assess extent and tone of media coverage
6. Consult affected industry stakeholders
7. Explore availability of financial assistance
8. Determine budget for recovery phase
9. Define key messages
10. Address negatives head-on
11. Stay flexible
12. Agree on the most cost-effective communications option/s
13. Implement coordinated recovery strategy
14. Measure success of campaign
15. Refine campaign as necessary

As discussed earlier, when a crisis occurs, the region's recovery process should begin immediately by portraying the local tourism industry's response as being upfront, authoritative and timely.

Constructive media relations are the key to addressing misperceptions, and will ensure that the region's marketing efforts are not contradicted by negative stories. Smart use of the media can also be far more cost-effective than relying solely on advertising and other marketing activities.

Consideration should be given to engaging professional media liaison services.

Once established as a reliable and credible source of information, the industry will find the media and other observers far more receptive to subsequent messages that the region is 'open for business' and ready for visitors.

Following the initial response, the next step is to fully assess the situation and gather as many facts as possible so that the process of relaunching the region is realistic and properly informed.

Assisted by expert and up-to-date operational advice, the TRRG will then be in a position to determine the timing and content of its communications activities during the recovery phase.

Naturally, all information used in media releases, briefings, fact sheets, advertising and marketing efforts must be accurate and consistent, although emphasis will obviously vary.

Recovery Options

Once the extent of the relaunch effort has been decided, a number of options are available depending on the budget available and the audiences to be targeted. These include:

Low Cost

Media	Advertising/Marketing
• Provide regular media updates • Promote newsworthy stories • Distribute fact sheets • Highlight recovery milestones • Encourage high profile visitors eg: Premier, celebrities • Highlight impact of crisis on local businesses etc	• Targeted advertising in tourism publications • Direct communication with inbound travel operators • Freecall Information Line • Existing outlets eg: Visitor Information Centres, Visitor Radio etc

Medium Cost

Media	Advertising/Marketing
• As above • Select journalist familiarisations to the region • Pursue positive stories with expert PR assistance • Conduct briefings/familiarisations for opinion-leaders eg: radio hosts	• As above • Market research • More extensive print and radio advertising in mainstream media • Opportunities for advertorials • Coordinated special travel and accommodation deals

High Cost

Media	Advertising/Marketing
• As above • Arrange more extensive familiarisations to the region	• As above • Extensive print and broadcast advertising, including TV • Newspaper supplements/advertorials • Direct marketing to key audiences • Introduction and promotion of generous travel and accommodation deals

The timing of any re-launch activities will be dependent on the status of the crisis itself and of those people directly affected by it. The premature launching of a public recovery program can prove disastrous by squandering the goodwill of potential visitors and other observers who will scrutinise such efforts.

Crisis/Incidents & Possible Strategic Responses

For certain types of crises / incidents, there are more than one control agency. Each regional and municipal plan identifies the relevant control agencies through consideration of normal geographic areas of operation and resources capacity.

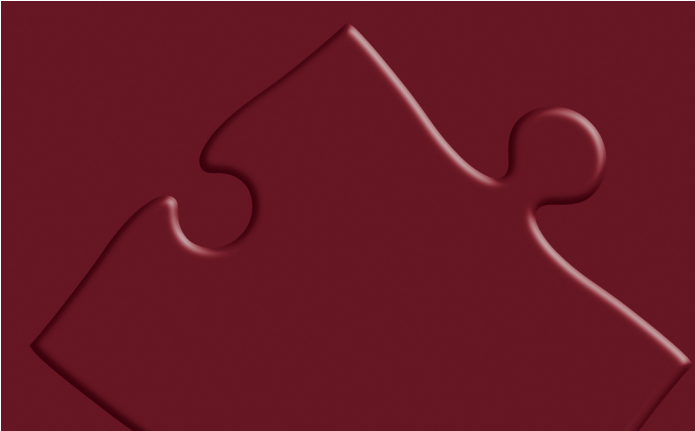| Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Wildfire/ Bushfire	Country Fire Authority / Metropolitan Fire Brigade / Dept. of Sustainability and Environment / Parks Victoria	• Depends on severity • Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Provide advice to camps, caravan parks etc • Emphasise safe areas / those unaffected • Stress expected recovery time • Promote activities not impacted • Promote re-growth etc	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • Website • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector • Marketing	• Factual information & advice to go out immediately • Marketing activities 2-3 weeks following
Flooding	VICSES	• Depends on severity • Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Emphasise safe areas / those unaffected • Stress expected recovery time • Promote activities not impacted	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Visitor Information Centres • Website • VTIS • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector • 1800 number	• Factual information & advice to go out immediately • Marketing activities 1-2 weeks following

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Drought	Dept. of Sustainability and Environment / Dept. of Primary Industries	• Make visitors aware of situation /need for restrictions etc • Ensure visitors are aware of affected water activities • Promote alternate tourism activities in region	• Media • Marketing • Visitor Information Centres • Facts sheets • 1800 number • Website	• Ongoing
Water pollution	EPA / Melbourne Water	• Emphasise specific areas affected • Promote speedy efforts to address the issue • Stress expertise of those responding • Promote alternate visitor activities	• Media • Visitor Information Centres • Fact sheets • 1800 number • Website • Localised signs	• Immediate
Blue green algae outbreak	Dept. of Sustainability and Environment	• Emphasise specific area/s affected • Explain precautions • Explain short & long term efforts to address the issue • Promote alternate tourist areas and activities • Heavily promote end of outbreak	• Media • Visitor Information Centres • Fact sheets • 1800 number • Website • Localised signs • Marketing	• As advised by DSE • Regular updates • Modified marketing activities

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Severe Storm	VICSES	• Depends on damage • Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Issue warnings as appropriate • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Emphasise safe areas / those unaffected • Stress expected recovery time • Promote activities not impacted	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector • 1800 number • Website	• Factual information & advice to go out immediately • 3 days following promote 'business as usual' if appropriate
Air pollution	EPA	• Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Issue warnings as appropriate • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Emphasise safe areas / those unaffected • Stress expected recovery time • Promote activities not impacted • Advise when danger has passed	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • 1800 number • Website	• Immediate to affected areas

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Landslides Mudflows	VICSES	• Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Emphasise safe areas / those unaffected • Promote activities not impacted • Advise when danger has passed	• Media • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Website	• Immediate
Major transport accident	Victoria Police	• Ascertain whether visitors involved & respond accordingly • Promote speedy emergency response • Stress road/rail/air safety record of region • Advise when travel disruption has passed	• Media • Local tourism radio • VTIS • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector • 1800 number • Website	• Immediate & 1-2 days following
Terrorist incident	Victoria Police	• Severe impact, regardless of nature/ extent of act • Stress rescue/recovery efforts – visitor safety • Offer information etc to visitor families/friends • Coordinate efforts to account for all visitors in region	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Website • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS	• Factual information & advice to go out immediately • Low-key marketing activities 6-8 weeks following (if progress made on safety issues)

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Terrorist incidents Cont.	Victoria Police	• Underline measures to safeguard people • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Promote areas & activities unaffected • Underline need to stand up against terrorism & support local business • Promote care, assistance given to visitors by locals • Stress end of threat when appropriate • Explain that 'region' is also a victim of incident	• Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector • Marketing	
Major Crime	Victoria Police	• Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Coordinate information for families etc • Emphasise unaffected areas / activities • Stress one-off nature of incident • Promote region's safety track record	• Media • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation – for use if asked • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • 1800 number • Website	• Immediate

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Pest Plagues	Department of Primary Industries	• Practical advice on travel, accommodation • Emphasise unaffected areas / activities • Advise when travel disruption has passed	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Website • VICs • VTIS • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector	• Immediate
Animal attack eg: shark attack	Victoria Police	• Reassure observers • Put into proper context - isolated, rare incident • Express sympathy for victim, families, friends • Offer every assistance to victim, families, friends • Announce specific safeguards to be reviewed as a matter of course • Explain fate of animal involved eg: danger has passed	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Website • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • Marketing	• Immediate • Marketing activities 2-3 weeks following

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Oil Spill	Marine Safety Victoria	• Emphasise specific areas affected • Promote speedy efforts to address the issue • Stress expertise of those responding • Promote alternate visitor activities	• Media • Visitor Information Centres • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Fact sheets • 1800 number • Website • Localised signs	• Immediate • Marketing activities 2 weeks following
Hazardous materials	Country Fire Authority / Metropolitan Fire Brigade	• Emphasise specific areas affected • Promote speedy efforts to address the issue • Stress expertise of those responding • Promote alternate tourist activities	• Media • Visitor Information Centres • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Fact sheets • 1800 number • Website • Localised signs	• Immediate • Marketing activities 2 weeks following

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Disease outbreak	Dept. of Human Services	• Depends on severity • Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Warn of symptoms • Ensure expert medics on hand • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Advice to families, friends • Emphasise unaffected areas / to remain safe • Stress expected recovery time • Promote tourist activities not impacted	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Website • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector	• Immediate
Earthquake	VICSES	• Depends on severity • Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Provide advice to camps, caravan parks etc • Emphasise safe areas / those unaffected • Stress recovery efforts • Put into true perspective • Promote activities not impacted	• Media • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • 1800 number • Website • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • Notify intrastate & interstate travel sector • Marketing	• Immediate • Marketing to follow initial recovery efforts

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Food Poisoning	Dept. of Human Services	• Depends on severity • Stress primary focus is on visitor safety • Warn of symptoms • Ensure expert medics on hand • Emphasise most areas unaffected - isolated incident • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Provide advice to families, friends	• Media • Visitor Information Centres • Local tourism radio • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Fact sheets • 1800 number • Website	• Immediate – with emphasis on isolating source of outbreak
General Safety	N/A	• Stress resources devoted to community safety • Provide practical advice on travel, accommodation • Put issue into context • Emphasise unaffected areas / activities • Promote region's safety track record	• Media • Faxed updates to tourism operators & accommodation • Visitor Information Centres • VTIS • 1800 number • Marketing	• Ongoing

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
Repeated bad service	N/A	• Emphasise isolated source of issue • Explain industry response eg: education, standards • Highlight region's achievements in tourism and service levels • Address the issue head-on • Demonstrate a non-defensive approach to criticism	• Media (if necessary) • Educational & awareness material sent to tourism operators & accommodation • Marketing	• Ongoing
High profile/ celebrity criticism	N/A	• Do not be defensive • Be objective in assessing criticism & respond accordingly • If appropriate, seek to allay critic's concerns, complaint • Explain any relevant specific circumstances leading to the criticism • Address issue head-on • Put issue into context eg: numbers of visitors each year who enjoy the attraction etc	• Media • Fax sheets • 1800 number • Website • Local tourism radio • Marketing	• Immediate – for 3-6 weeks

Crisis/Incident	Control Agency	Strategic Response	Communication Tools	Timing
High profile / celebrity criticism Cont.	N/A	• Mobilise high profile, third party supporters eg: Premier, sports stars, to counter criticisms • Detail industry standards & relevant protocols etc		

TRRG Responsibilities & Action Plans

The suggested actions below are indicative of the responsibilities and actions that should be assigned within the TRRG.

Chair/Deputy Chair

1. Make an initial assessment of the probable scale of the crisis

2. Activate the TRRG and arrange for members to be contacted

3. Arrange for verbal/written briefing on situation status for TRRG

4. Determine the TRRG's support requirements

5. Decide what extra specialist personnel should be involved in the TRRG eg: issues and crisis management consultants

6. In conjunction with TRRG members, determine resource requirements to effectively address the crisis

7. Advise senior stakeholders eg: Minister, Tourism Victoria, as required

8. Refer to Crisis Communications Plan and determine what is applicable

9. Immediately revise, cancel or suspend advertising

10. In conjunction with TRRG members, initiate immediate actions required

11. In conjunction with TRRG members, determine media strategy and authorise all media statements on the crisis

12. Act as regional spokesperson regarding tourism issues for significant media interviews

13. Authorise regular situation updates for visitors, regional tourism operators and staff, other relevant stakeholders

14. Coordinate planning for longer term recovery

15. Once crisis has passed, commission external review of the effectiveness of the Crisis Communications plan and other actions taken.

Information & Strategy

1. Establish and maintain contact with emergency response team for regular information updates

2. Feed authoritative information into the TRRG

3. Assess immediate implications for regional tourism, including initial economic impacts

4. Canvass any immediate actions required

5. Determine key themes and messages for all communications

6. Determine most appropriate tools of communications to reach key stakeholders and audiences

7. Coordinate regular stakeholder information updates

8. Review any proposed media statements or releases

9. Contribute to the effective operation of the TRRG

10. Participate in debrief process and advise on gaps in provision and dissemination of information.

Planning

1. Assess potential implications for regional tourism

2. Start planning process to mitigate potential impacts

3. Consult with regional tourism operators as appropriate

4. Consider need to reschedule/make special preparations for any upcoming public events
    (eg seminars, conferences etc)

5. Assist with media and website management

6. Contribute to the effective operation of the TRRG

7. Once crisis is over, participate in debrief process

8. As required, update procedures and coordinate stakeholder de-briefings

9. If appropriate, send letters of appreciation to relevant staff and organisations that assisted the TRRG.

Media Management

1. Liaise with Media Officers of emergency response agencies

2. Arrange for all media inquiries regarding tourism to be handled or forwarded immediately

3. In conjunction with TRRG members, determine strategic approach to answering media inquiries and the proactive release of information

4. Respond to media inquiries in a calm, measured and reassuring manner, as quickly as practicable

5. If necessary, explain why more details are not immediately available

6. Monitor all media coverage, immediately alert TRRG of significant issues

7. Maintain a log of journalists making inquiries

8. Monitor extent and tone of media coverage

9. Determine appropriateness of issuing a holding statement and draft if necessary

10. Authorise extra public affairs support eg: other agencies, consultants, if required

11. Brief Chair in advance of media commitments

12. Draft media statements and website updates for authorisation by TRRG

13. Review all media statements prior to release to assess implications

14. Provide background information to media as required

15. Carefully manage all media events

16. Correct any factual errors or misperceptions reported by the media

17. If appropriate, and only in consultation with the TRRG, respond to any potentially damaging claims by third parties

18. Participate in debrief once the crisis is resolved.

Media Inquiry Log Template

Date: . . . . Time:. . . . .

Handled by: . . . .

Journalist:. . . . .

Representing: . . . .

Telephone: . . . . Fax: . . . .

Date of Response:. . . . . Time:. . . . .

Questions:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Response Given:

_____

_____

_____

_____

Follow-up Required?

_____

_____

_____

_____

Media Statement

Date / Time   **MEDIA STATEMENT**

(Name of region) has moved quickly to ensure the safety of / reassure international, interstate and local visitors following (description of event) which occurred (time, date) affecting (description of specific area /operations).

In line with a well-established action plan, a senior tourism group is undertaking necessary measures to provide clear and concise information to people regarding their travel and accommodation plans.

The Government and other key agencies such as Tourism Victoria are being briefed on the situation and further details of any interim tourism measures will be released as soon as they become available.

(TRRG Chair) said that the region's tourism sector was extremely concerned about the loss of life / destruction of property / disruption caused by the (description of event).

The (event) is restricted to the ( ) area of the region.

''We have well-developed contingency plans to deal with these types of incidents /issues and will offer every possible assistance to tourists currently in (name of region),'' said (TRRG Chair).

''Visitors can be reassured that authorities are doing everything possible to ensure safety and minimise disruption to travel plans in the region.''

For further information, contact: (name & number)

Industry Impact Assessment: Urgent Information Request Template

The following information will greatly assist in assessing the extent of damage or disruption caused by the recent crisis or incident to this region's tourism industry. Please complete it as soon as possible and fax it back to [insert name and number].

1. Name of tourist operator / accommodation provider

2. Location and main contact

3. Have you or your visitors been directly impacted? If so, how?

4. Do you or your visitors require any urgent assistance? If so, what?

5. What further information do you need?

6. What feedback have you had from visitors?

7. Have you heard any speculation or rumours? If so, what?

8. Have you been approached by the media? Have you seen or heard any damaging media reports?

9. Can you detail or forecast the current/potential economic impact on your business?
    (note: experience shows most people under-estimate financial impacts)

Advisory Notice / Update Template

[Time & Date]

Visitor Information Update

The following are the latest details available regarding the [crisis/incident] and its impact on travel and holiday plans in the region.

1. Status of the situation

2. Casualties and damage

3. Areas specifically affected

4. Disruption to travel eg: roads

5. Accommodation affected

6. Disruption to tourist activity eg: beaches, waterways

7. Relief operations

8. Areas and activities not affected

Please Note: Further information is available at [www.website.com.au]
or by calling FREECALL [number].

Tourism Industry Debrief Questionaire

Please complete the following to assist in efforts to learn from the recent [crisis or incident] and to enhance our region's preparedness to respond effectively and professionally to help safeguard our tourism industry. Fax back to [number].

1. Name, business/position and contact details

2. How were you affected?

3. How many visitors/consumers were directly or indirectly affected?

4. What feedback did you receive from visitors/potential visitors?

5. How many cancelled bookings did you have?

6. What was your view of media coverage – local and metropolitan?

7. What was your chief source of reliable information during the incident?

8. Did you receive enough information and timely updates?

9. Did visitors get the information/assistance they needed?

10. Did you hear much speculation/rumour?

11. How well do you think the region responded in terms of tourism?

12. What suggestions do you have to assist our recovery efforts?

Useful Publications and Websites

Publications

Centre for Risk and Community Safety (RMIT University) (2003) *Halls Gap Fire Risk Management Project.*

Pacific Asia Travel Association. *Crisis Communications Planning in the Travel and Tourism Industry.*

Pacific Asia Travel Association. *Creating a Crisis Communications Plan.*

Tourism Victoria (2002). *Working with the Media: A practical media guide.*

Tourism Victoria (2004). *After the Smoke. Tourism recovery in Victoria's Northeast*

Victorian Emergency Management Council (1997). *Emergency Management Manual Victoria.*

World Tourism Organisation (2002). *Crisis Guidelines for the Tourism Industry.*

World Tourism Organisation (1998). *Handbook on Natural Disaster Reduction in Tourist Areas.*

Websites

Tourism Victoria

www.tourismvictoria.com.au

Tourism Victoria is the State Government authority responsible for developing and marketing Victoria as a premium tourist destination for Australian and international travellers. Tourism Victoria's corporate website provides a comprehensive range of information relevant to the Victorian tourism industry, including up-to-date statistics and publications.

Victoria Police

www.police.vic.gov.au

Country Fire Authority

www.cfa.vic.gov.au/business/index.htm

The Country Fire Authority operates within the State Government portfolio of the Minister for Police and Emergency Services. CFA provides State-wide fire and related emergency coordination, including:

- wildfire suppression
- structural fire suppression
- transport related fire suppression
- road accident rescue
- hazardous materials transportation and storage incidents
- technical rescue
- forest industry brigades
- industrial accident response
- other emergency activities including flood assistance
- technical services including building code related inspections and post incident investigations
- fire safety input planning for major community risks and fire prevention and land use planning at municipal level
- community awareness, education and safety programs.

This site provides including information on fire safety, emergency planning and fire restrictions

Metropolitan Fire Brigade

www.mfb.org.au

The Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) has 1,511 professional firefighters staffing 47 strategically located fire stations and specialist departments around the Melbourne metropolitan area.

Victorian State Emergency Service

www.ses.vic.gov.au

The Victoria State Emergency Service (SES) is a volunteer based emergency service, servicing the State of Victoria. The SES has a wide range of roles including planning for and responding to floods, severe storms, earthquakes, road accident rescue as well as search and rescue. The SES also provides a support role to other emergency service agencies including the Victoria Police.

The SES also has a major planning role providing support and guidance to Government departments and municipalities, as well as providing an audit role on all municipal emergency plans.

This web site provides a range of information including historical information on the SES, current statistical data, and useful public safety information.

Department of Sustainability and Environment

www.dse.vic.gov.au

This site contains information and resources on how the Department of Sustainability and Environment manages fire on public land, including reducing the risk of fire, containing outbreaks of fire and how fire has shaped our environment.

Department of Primary Industries

www.dpi.vic.gov.au

The Department of Primary Industries aims to promote economic and sustainable production practices and protect Victoria's natural resources through its research, industry development and extension activities. This site provides in-depth advice on pests and animal-related health issues.

Marine Safety Victoria

www.marinesafety.vic.gov.au

Marine Safety Victoria is the State's marine safety agency and is responsible for the administration of the Marine Act 1988 and the Marine Regulations 1999.

The functions of Marine Safety Victoria include determining standards and procedures for navigation and maritime safety on State waters and investigating marine incidents and accidents and implementing appropriate action on the findings; developing, reviewing, coordinating and managing the Victoria marine pollution contingency plan; and promoting education and training and promoting guidance and information on marine safety matters

Emergency Management Australia

www.ema.vic.gov.au

Emergency Management Australia (EMA) has been established by the Commonwealth Government to assist states and territories to develop their emergency management capabilities to protect all Australian citizens and their property. EMA also coordinates Australian Government physical assistance to states and territories, upon request, during major disasters.

The organisation promotes a national approach to emergency management in Australia through comprehensive measures, which embrace prevention, preparedness, response and recovery activities.

This site provides all appropriate EMA services online.

Parks Victoria

www.parkweb.vic.gov.au

Parks Victoria manages the national, wilderness, State and regional parks, Melbourne's metropolitan parks and open space network, and also has responsibilities for the recreational management of the Lower Yarra, Maribyrnong and Patterson Rivers and Port Phillip and Western Port Bays.

This site includes up-to-date bushfire information & road/track closures as well as comprehensive information on the State's national and state parks and reserves.

The Victorian Ambulance Service

www.ambulance.vic.gov.au

This site includeS information on the activities of the Metropolitan Ambulance Service and Rural Ambulance Victoria, including emergency medical planning.

Department of Human Services

www.health.vic.gov.au

Health.vic.gov.au is a gateway to information relating to the provision of health services in Victoria.

The sites in health.vic.gov.au are developed and managed by the Department of Human Services and includes information on current health alerts.

Environment Protection Authority

www.epa.vic.gov.au

The Environment Protection Authority (EPA) is a statutory body established under an Act of the Victorian Parliament in response to community concern about pollution. At present EPA maintains standards of environmental quality through works approvals, licences, inspections, pollution abatement notices and land use planning referrals.

Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology

www.bom.gov.au/weather/vic/forecasts.shtml

This site includes weather and warnings information for Victoria.

VicRoads

www.vicroads.vic.gov.au

This Web site provides information about the VicRoads services, products and strategies, including road safety issues and strategies.

Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner

www.justice.vic.gov.au

The Office of the Emergency Services Commissioner provides independent, objective and strategic policy advice on emergency services to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services and the Department of Justice Executive. The Emergency Services Commissioner is also responsible for supporting the Minister for Police and Emergency Services as Co-ordinator in Chief of Emergency Management, and chair of the Victoria Emergency Management Council.

This site includes downloadable version of The Emergency Management Manual Victoria, a compilation of principal policy and planning documents for emergency management in Victoria. It is designed to provide you with information and guidance on what the emergency management arrangements are, the role of various organisations within them and the planning and management arrangements. The various sections include State, Divisional, Regional and Municipal Emergency Management planning; Response; Recovery; relevant Legislation and Agency Roles.

World Tourism Organisation

www.world-tourism.org

Following the tragic events of 11 September 2001, the World Tourism Organization (WTO), the world umbrella organisation for tourism, has undertaken a number of actions relating to crises impacting on the tourism industry. This includes the creation of a committee in monitoring events affecting the tourism industry, identifying trends and responding to new developments and the production of publications relating to this issue such as Crisis Guidelines for the Tourism Industry. These publications can be downloaded from the site.

Case Study Blue green algae outbreak

The following is a case study that examines the potential tourism impact of a natural disaster on a region and the possible immediate to medium-term steps that might be taken to address that impact and restore the confidence of visitors.

Background - Lakes and Wilderness Tourist Region
The Gippsland Lakes and Rivers in Victoria's south east have considerable significance for the State, and for the East Gippsland region in particular, on a range of levels including environmental, cultural, historical, recreational and economic.

The Lakes are a group of coastal lagoons separated from the sea by a broad sandy barrier known as the Ninety-Mile Beach and are known for their fresh and salt water as well as abundant fish and wildlife. Seven main rivers run into the Lakes on their way to the sea, creating a distinctive landscape of wetlands and flat coastal plains which is recognised internationally as having great environmental significance.

The main lakes – Wellington, King and Victoria - cover an area of 340 sq kms and have a shoreline of 320 kms. They contribute to the region's economic wellbeing in terms of tourism, commercial fishing, other industries and recreational boating. The area is a long-established and popular tourist destination, with visitors contributing around $150 million each year to the local economy.

Blue Green Algae
Unfortunately, the Gippsland Lakes are prone to outbreaks of cyanobacterial blooms (blue green algae). Algal blooms can occur naturally in most water bodies, but when major blooms occur they are a sign of abnormally rapid inputs of nutrients, particularly phosphorous. Severe blooms can pose a major health risk and, in turn, greatly reduce the recreational value of the Lakes. They can result in the waters being closed to commercial and recreational fishing and other activities, and may have toxic effects on water users.

In the past, media coverage of such occurrences has had a demonstrably negative impact on perceptions of the region as a tourist destination and subsequently visitation levels.

In recognition of the dramatic affect of severe algal blooms on tourism as well as other economic generators such as commercial fishing, a lot of time and resources have been devoted to researching and combating the problem. These efforts include a well-defined Regional Contingency Response Plan, which focuses on safeguarding public health, and a Gippsland Lakes Future Directions and Actions Plan that promotes a 20-year strategy for environmental sustainability and actions to enhance water quality.

Scenario

January
The Lakes and Wilderness tourist region is looking forward to a successful summer season following a blue green algae outbreak that marred the previous year, as well as flooding which caused major disruption during winter. Weather conditions are warm and sunny.

Tourists are drawn to the area because of its natural beauty, extensive environmental values and recreational pursuits such as boating, fishing, swimming, water skiing, camping, bird-watching and bush walking.

February - Day One

The Department of Sustainability and Environment (DSE) is the lead agency for responding to outbreaks of blue green algae. It receives a report of a possible bloom at Lake King from the Eagle Point Caravan Park – part of its extensive network of surveillance contacts across the region.

DSE urgently conducts testing at the area, which confirms that a potentially toxic species of algae is present. Based on the cell count of the algae and its propensity to produce toxins, the DSE Incident Controller determines that this incident triggers an Alert Level 2, requiring notification of several agencies, increased monitoring in the area and the issuing of a local media release, stressing a localised mid-level outbreak.

Response

The nominated Chairperson of the region's Tourism Response & Recovery Group (TRRG) is notified of the outbreak and alerts other TRRG members so that they can review their roles and responsibilities under the Crisis Communications Plan, check their readiness to respond and consider initial actions should the outbreak worsen.

Contact is established with the Incident Controller or nominee to enable the regular exchange of accurate, up-to-date information.

The TRRG Chair or nominee also contacts tourism operators in the immediate vicinity of the bloom to seek visitor-specific information and to pass on any relevant details or updated fact sheets for visitors.

A TRRG representative makes contact with senior editors at the local electronic and print media outlets to establish liaison regarding the issue and to emphasise the need for responsible reporting to avoid unnecessarily heightening the potential impact on the region's economy.

Even at this early point, tourism operators and accommodation providers are encouraged to be upfront with visitors about the situation in order to educate them, raise their awareness, detail the expertise being applied to the situation, explain the precautions they should take and establish 'good faith' regarding exchange of information.

Day Three

DSE receives further reports of blooms at Point King, Metung and Jones Bay and conducts more testing. Due to the high toxicity of the bloom and the fact it is widespread, the Incident Controller upgrades the alert to Alert Level 3 and declares it to be a Regional Bloom. This characterises it as generally a threat to a substantial area with possible impact on health, the environment or industry.

At Alert Level 3 there is an immediate risk to public health through exposure to affected waters. DSE's primary responsibility, in conjunction with the Department of Human Services (DHS), is to protect people by warning them of the dangers via the erection of appropriately located signs, detailed public updates and regular media releases.

As a result of past experience and subsequent consultation with tourism operators and commercial fishing representatives, DSE is mindful of the potential impact of its warnings and strives to pinpoint both affected and unaffected areas in its media releases.

DSE steps up its monitoring activities across the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment, and DHS bans the taking of prawns and mussels for human consumption from the affected waters.

Response

A meeting of the TRRG is convened as a matter of urgency and begins to enact its Crisis Communications Plan. The declaration of a Regional Bloom has serious consequences for a number of tourism operators – both in directly affected areas and also further afield because of perceived risks.

Immediate actions by members of the TRRG include:
- Lines of communication are established with the DSE Incident Control Team to ensure the flow of accurate, timely information from the frontline
- An approvals process for TRRG information updates (for tourism operators) and media releases is agreed upon to ensure consistent messages
- Local and metropolitan media is monitored to gauge coverage and identify any misreporting or confusion about the impact of the bloom on recreational activities
- Consideration is given to the preparation of a holding statement to correct any misreporting or misunderstandings relating to tourism
- Key messages and a media release are developed, which underline the array of areas and activities unaffected while explaining that visitors will be kept informed
- This information is posted on the region's tourism website and provided via fax in an update form to the travel industry
- Dialogue is established with tourism operators and accommodation providers, with priority given to those directly affected
- Regional tourism advertising is reviewed and revised as appropriate
- Key stakeholders such as Tourism Victoria and local MPs are notified and given a commitment that they will be kept informed about the ongoing impact.

Week Two
Weather conditions are mild and sunny and the bloom has spread rapidly (it is suspected because of the high-level input of nutrients during the flood) and now spreads from Wattle Point in the west to Lakes Entrance in the east.

This represents one of the most severe and widespread blue green algae outbreaks experienced in the Gippsland Lakes. DHS extends its bans on the harvest and consumption of mussels and prawns to several areas as well as 10km out to sea from Lakes Entrance.

Local media is careful not to over-dramatise the situation and reports responsibly on which areas have been affected and the early impacts on local businesses, as well as highlighting the safety of other recreational activities in the region.

The metropolitan media pick up the story and unfortunately concentrate on the negatives with television news using archival footage to illustrate a bloom in the area and the newspapers running articles headlined: 'An environmental catastrophe' and 'Lakes choking to death'.

Tourist operators and accommodation providers start to report widespread cancellation of bookings.

Response
The TRRG is meeting three times a week to actively address the negative impacts of the worsening situation caused by both the algal bloom and media coverage.

Unlike many disasters or incidents that might occur in an instant – leaving a region's tourism sector coping with the consequences - a blue green algal bloom normally presents an evolving issue, the ongoing nature of which will frustrate efforts to move on into a recovery phase.

As a result, the TRRG's initial focus is placed on ensuring visitors are kept safe and that they, along with potential visitors, are aware that the region remains 'open for business' with a range of recreational opportunities still available.

The TRRG also coordinates the dissemination of up-to-date information to key stakeholders to ensure that they are aware of the unfolding situation.

Ongoing actions of the TRRG include:
•   The faxing of an Urgent Information Request to all tourism operators and accommodation providers in the region to assess impacts
•   Daily contact with the Incident Control Team for latest details, including the expected extent and duration of the bloom
•   The faxing of regular internal updates (as required) on the situation to all tourism operators and accommodation providers in the region

- The faxing out of regular Visitor Information Updates (highlighting unaffected areas and activities as well as latest information on the outbreak) to all tourism operators and accommodation providers in the region
- Provision of Visitor Information Updates to local tourism associations and Visitor Information Centres at Bairnsdale, Orbost and Lakes Entrance
- Establishment of an 1800 hotline to reassure potential visitors and promote unaffected areas and activities
- Faxing of relevant information to regional tourism sector switchboards
- Inclusion of regularly updated, authoritative information on the region's tourism website under FAQs, including details of the hotline number and a link to the local DSE website
- Updated information placed on local visitor radio and Victorian Tourist Information Service (VTIS)
- Ongoing liaison with key stakeholders such as local MPs, Tourism Minister's office and Tourism Victoria
- Regular media releases for regional and metropolitan media to emphasise unaffected areas and activities
- All media releases also sent to network of region's tourism providers
- Briefings for local media regarding impact of the bloom on the tourism sector
- Ongoing monitoring of local and metropolitan media coverage – with timely responses to speculation or misinformation.

Week Three

The blue green algae bloom has worsened and both the local and metropolitan media are focusing on the impact on commercial fishing and also the effect on natural habitat across the region.

Tourism operators and accommodation providers are experiencing a dramatic downturn in visitation, with many people either assuming the region is unsafe or believing it would be inappropriate to visit in such circumstances.

While the local media is happy to publicise specific details in relation to those many areas and recreational activities throughout the region that are unaffected by the blue green algae outbreak, the metropolitan media – when interested – continues to report only the bloom and its implications.

The Incident Control Team reports that given the still and sunny weather conditions, the bloom is likely to continue for several more weeks.

Response

In light of the pessimistic outlook, the TRRG steps up its communications with key stakeholders to stress the seriousness of the situation and to quantify the tourism impacts, based on feedback from the frontline.

Initial discussions are held to explore whether financial assistance might be available to help the region address its tourism slump through effective issues management, marketing and promotion through the media.

Other TRRG actions include:

- A further Information Request form is sent to tourism operators and accommodation providers to gauge ongoing impact
- Members meet with tourism providers and local tourism associations, either individually or in small groups, to get direct feedback
- Advice is offered to directly affected operators regarding alternate tourism offerings and the assistance available
- Potential costings are developed for a short-to-medium term marketing and communications effort
- Survey results are collated into an Impact Report for use in discussions with key stakeholders regarding possible assistance
- Crisis communications experts are engaged to assist with efforts to communicate key messages to stakeholders, including Government and the media
- Senior editorial personnel in the metropolitan media are briefed about the impact of the bloom on the region's tourism sector and asked to assist in promoting unaffected areas and activities
- TV programs such as Stateline, Getaway and Postcards are also approached
- Selected journalists are invited to visit the region and experience first-hand what is still on offer
- Media interviews are arranged with tourism providers to emphasise their determination to overcome the difficulties and to appeal directly to potential visitors to support the region
- Efforts are made through Fact Sheets and briefings to educate observers about the causes of blue green algae and the long-term strategies (Future Directions and Action Plan) in place to minimise blooms
- Regional marketing efforts continue to be reviewed and revised as necessary to reflect the key messages.

Week Five

The serious outbreak is into its second month with the bloom at varying levels across the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment. DSE is monitoring the situation extensively and providing regular internal and external updates, with a focus on emphasising safe areas for recreational water use.

The metropolitan media has largely moved on to other stories and local media is concentrating on the economic impact of the natural disaster and the financial hardship being experienced by fishing and tourism businesses.

Unfortunately, mainstream media interest is re-triggered by reports of a nine-year-old girl becoming ill while on holiday in the region. She is flown for treatment to the Royal Children's Hospital and her parents speculate that blue green algae exposure may be to blame. All media cover the story extensively but it emerges within 24 hours that the girl's illness is not related to the bloom.

While this fact is duly reported, it does not receive the same blanket treatment in the metropolitan media, causing considerable damage in terms of potential visitor perceptions regarding safety and the region's desirability.

Response

Upon news of a potential serious illness, the TRRG immediately meets and quickly moves to reassure and inform visitors and potential visitors by updating the information available via websites, telephone hotlines, local visitor radio and Visitor Information Centres.

A media release is issued that re-emphasises the precautions that people visiting affected areas should take and also details the actions taken from the beginning of the bloom to warn people of the dangers, including Information Sheets, the hotline and signs.

Following briefings from the Incident Controller, regular Visitor Information Updates to be made available to visitors are distributed by fax to all tourism operators, accommodation providers and Visitor Information Centres.

Once it has been confirmed that the girl's illness is not related to blue green algae, the TRRG steps up its activities to underline the fact there has never been a serious illness associated with outbreaks. It also seizes the opportunity to again highlight the unaffected areas and recreational pursuits in the region.

Other TRRG actions include:

- As required, internal updates are faxed out to tourism operators and accommodation providers on the latest situation, including details of efforts being made to manage the media
- All media releases are forwarded to tourism operators, accommodation providers and the region's nine local tourism associations
- The DSE incident controller is encouraged to engage with the media to put the issue into its proper context and reassure observers where appropriate
- The public is advised that tourism operators and accommodation providers in the region are well versed with what symptoms of illness to watch out for and how to respond if necessary
- Further face-to-face meetings are arranged with affected tourism operators and accommodation providers to gauge feedback and canvas ideas
- Briefings are held for key stakeholders on the expected further impacts of the claim
- Continuing positive media opportunities are pursued to underline the level of expertise dealing with the situation as well as the other activities on offer in the region such as bushwalking, wineries and touring
- A program of special tourism deals is formulated, packaged and promoted to the travel industry
- Further journalist familiarisation visits are arranged in conjunction with launch of the special deals package
- Modest advertising is placed in metropolitan newspapers, promoting the region's unaffected areas and activities, and any special deals on offer
- High profile sporting, television figures and politicians are encouraged to promote the region's desirability and highlight its efforts to fight back from adversity.

Week Seven

The Incident Controller reports that there are now definite signs of recovery, although it is not uniform across the Lakes and Catchment region. Regular laboratory testing confirms that the blooms appear to be lightening and toxin levels are dropping. Both the tourism and commercial fishing industries continue to be severely affected by the bloom and the perceptions created further afield by media coverage – influencing visitor plans and seafood prices.

Visitor numbers remain well down, although there has been improvement in the volume of visitors in unaffected areas who are going sightseeing, bushwalking, touring the Coastal Route, birdwatching, visiting wineries and natural attractions such as The Lakes and the Croajingolong National Parks and the Buchan Caves.

Response

The TRRG continues to meet regularly to monitor the ongoing impacts on the region's tourism industry and to review the progress of marketing and promotional activities.

With the prospect of the blue green algae threat diminishing, the Group begins to formulate its recovery phase strategy that will continue to promote unaffected areas and activities while publicising the fact the Lakes are again 'open for business'.

It is almost April, and the upcoming Easter long weekend provides a natural marketing springboard to attract short-break visitors.

Ongoing TRRG actions include:
*   Conduct market research to assess consumer perceptions about the region and its desirability as a tourist destination
*   Continued exchange of information with tourism operators, accommodation providers and the region's nine local tourism associations
*   Continuing discussions with key stakeholders about the impact of the crisis on jobs, bookings and overall economic activity
*   Distribution of promotional material to popular fast food outlets and petrol stations throughout the region highlighting tourism opportunities
*   Placement of positive news stories in local and metropolitan media to highlight the challenge facing tourist operators and how they've responded
*   Continuing metropolitan advertising featuring visitor testimonials
*   Seeking the joint support of the Federal and State Tourism Ministers in encouraging visitors to return to the region
*   Inviting the Premier to participate in a major regional festival that serves to publicise the diversity of attractions in the Gippsland Lakes and Wilderness region
*   Briefing the metropolitan media about the recovery phase, with expert advice regarding the status of the blue green algal bloom and how quickly water-based recreational activities can return to affected areas.

Week Nine

Apart from a few isolated pockets that continue to be closely monitored, the outbreak has largely passed and DSE testing has given the tentative all clear. However, the Contingency Plan provides for two weeks of safe water before warning signs are removed.

Week Eleven

Testing confirms that the vast majority of the Gippsland Lakes and Catchment are free of blue green algal blooms and DSE reports that the risk of a recurrence is low.

Warning signs at affected water areas are removed and bans on the taking and consumption of seafood are lifted.

Local media report the good news extensively but most metropolitan media only cover it in passing – if at all.

Response

The TRRG moves to immediately update all publicly available information to spread the word that the outbreak is over and that there are now even more things for visitors to do in the region. A prepared marketing drive swings into action based on a range of special deals designed to convince people to overcome any lingering negative perceptions about the region's desirability.

A revised Visitor Information Update is distributed to the three Visitor Information Centres as well as to all tourism operators, accommodation providers and local tourist associations.

In addition, a media release is issued to local and metropolitan media that highlights the all clear, emphasises the calibre of DSE's ongoing monitoring efforts, details the impact of the crisis on the region's tourism industry and appeals for visitors to return soon. It also underlines the special deals on offer.

Other TRRG actions include:
*   Update briefings for metropolitan and specialist media editors
*   Update briefings for key stakeholders such as the Federal and State Tourism Ministers
*   Distribution of Debrief Survey Form to region's tourism providers
*   Placement of prominent local and metropolitan advertising that focuses on water-based recreational activities in the region
*   Launch of giveaway trips via radio and newspaper promotions
*   Arranging further visits for selected metropolitan and specialist media
*   Encouragement of high-profile swimmers (eg: Olympians) to participate in media activities in the Gippsland Lakes
*   Announcement of a charity long-distance swimming event
*   Launch of other ongoing strategic marketing activities, with a particular focus on the lead-up to the following peak tourist season.

De-Brief Phase

With the summer season over, the TRRG arranges a series of de-brief meetings with key stakeholders and audiences to assess:

- How the crisis was handled
- The appropriateness of the membership and responsibilities of the TRRG
- The practicality and effectiveness of its Crisis Communications Plan
- The quality and timeliness of information received from the Incident Controller
- What specific issues arose that should have been handled differently
- Whether the timing of actions was appropriate
- Whether communications between the TRRG and stakeholders was effective
- The value of the issues and crisis management experts brought in
- The effectiveness of marketing efforts during the crisis and in the recovery phase
- The quality of all written communications disseminated
- Whether all communications tools were utilised effectively
- Whether tourism operators, accommodation providers and local tourism associations felt sufficiently consulted
- Feedback from visitors to the region, both during and following the outbreak
- Further market research on perceptions about the region
- What changes (if any) should be made to the Crisis Communications Plan
- What preparations are necessary to enable a more effective response and faster recovery when the next natural disaster or crisis incident occurs.

Summary

Given its unpredictable and unconfinable nature, a blue green algae outbreak presents a certain set of circumstances that creates ongoing difficulties for a region attempting to pursue a tourism recovery strategy.

However, the principles applied in addressing the immediate, short and medium term communications issues that emerge are the same as would apply for a more finite disaster or event – only the timings change.

Reliable, authoritative and up-to-date information regarding both safety issues and which areas and attractions in the region are unaffected is the key to securing and maintaining trust with current and potential visitors.

A united regional voice representing the tourism sector in times of crisis will also ensure a consistency of message, and will assist significantly in dealings with other stakeholders such as Government and the media.

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