



## Visitor Economy Emergency Communications Plan

**Prepared By:** Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism

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### Introduction

Emergencies can strike without warning, and their impact on tourism is immediate and far-reaching. Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism has developed this Emergency Communications Plan to ensure that operators across the visitor economy are equipped with clear, coordinated strategies to manage communication during times of crisis. The tourism sector thrives on trust and confidence. Qualities that must be preserved even in challenging circumstances. This plan provides the framework to achieve that.

Designed as a living document, the plan is adaptable to a range of scenarios, from natural disasters to community emergencies. It is not a rigid protocol, but a flexible guide that evolves with changing conditions and lessons learned.

Its purpose is twofold:

1. To support internal stakeholders including staff, operators, and partners with structured processes.
2. To ensure external audiences such as visitors, media, community and industry partners receive timely, accurate and reassuring information.

At its core, this plan empowers operators. It offers practical tools, messaging templates and situational awareness to help businesses respond confidently and responsibly. By outlining roles and responsibilities within the broader emergency management ecosystem, it fosters collaboration

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between tourism bodies, emergency services and local authorities. Operators will find actionable guidance for both preparedness and response phases, ensuring they can protect visitor safety, maintain reputation and contribute to regional recovery.

This is more than a communications manual. It is a resource for resilience. By working together and communicating effectively, we can safeguard our communities, support our industry and restore confidence in the Grampians Wimmera Mallee region.

The following infographic demonstrates how tourism operators are supported during emergencies through a network of connected agencies. The operator remains focused on maintaining business operations and keeping guests safe, while surrounding stakeholders provide information, guidance and resources. Emergency Services deliver official warnings and situation updates, Local Government supports community level impacts and services, Government Departments provide regulatory guidance and recovery assistance and GWMT offers specialist tourism advice, coordinated messaging and advocacy. Together, this network enables operators to make informed decisions, communicate confidently and recover strongly after an emergency.

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## Emergency Communications Network



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## 1. Purpose

The Visitor Economy Community Emergency Communications Plan (herein known as the Emergency Communications Plan) outlines a communications strategy to support tourism operators and the wider community during times of natural emergency or crisis.

It aims to ensure a proactive approach to managing community and media messaging to maintain calm, build public confidence and provide timely, accurate information.

The plan also supports the work of a Tourism Recovery and Response Group, which would be responsible for enacting a responsive and responsible 12–18-month recovery roadmap to guide the tourism industry forward.

## 2. Plan Objectives

- Provide clarity, prior to heightened potential natural disasters, to operators in the Visitor Economy
- Coordinate with emergency services to relay accurate information.
- Support tourism operators with guidance, messaging templates and updates. Undertaken in consultation with the Public Information Section of the lead agency.
- Mitigate negative impact on destination reputation.
- Assist in recovery communication and business continuity.
- Ensure visitor and resident safety through informed travel messaging.

## 3. Stakeholder and Audience Matrix

Audience	Responsibility	Method(s) Used	Timing & Frequency	Information Needs
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Tourism Operators (Local)	GWMT CEO / Partnership Managers/ PR Comms	Email, Operator website, Phone calls, industry fb page	Immediate; updates every 2–4 hours	Safety updates, operational impacts, visitor support guidance, media protocol
Visitors (Current)	Visitor Information Centre Staff / GWMT Comms Team	Social media, website updates, direct contact	As needed during crisis; daily summaries	Safety instructions, travel disruptions, emergency contacts, reassurance
Prospective Visitors	GWMT Marketing & Comms Team	Websites, social media, newsletters, travel advisories	Initial within 2 hours; daily updates	Travel advisories, booking changes, regional status, reassurance
Local Government & Emergency Services	GWMT CEO / TRRG	Direct calls, email, coordination meetings	Real-time; ongoing coordination	Tourism impact, visitor numbers, support needs, resource coordination
Media	GWMT CEO in conj PR / Communications Officer	Media statements, press conferences, email alerts	Initial within 1 hour; updates every 4–6 hours	Verified facts, official quotes, regional impact, contact protocol
Industry Bodies (e.g., Visit Victoria)	GWMT CEO / Board Chair / TRRG	Email, briefings, shared dashboards	Initial within 2 hours; daily updates	Regional impact, response measures, support coordination
Tourism Industry & Travel Trade (non-local)	GWMT Trade / PR Comms / Partnerships Managers	Email bulletins, trade newsletters, webinars, direct calls	Initial within 4 hours; follow-ups every 24–48 hours	Regional accessibility, itinerary changes, safety

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				assurances, messaging guidance for clients
Local Community	GWMT Community Liaison / Council	Community noticeboards, social media, local radio	Every 6–12 hours or as needed	Safety info, tourism impact, reassurance, support services
Staff & Volunteers	GWMT CEO / Team Leaders	Internal messaging app, email, team briefings	Immediate; updates every 2–4 hours, daily team meeting	Safety procedures, role expectations, wellbeing support

## 4. GWMT Communications Roles and Responsibilities

### GWMT's Broader Role in Emergencies

Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism (GWMT) does not replace or replicate the functions of emergency services or the State Emergency Management Plan. Instead, GWMT plays a complementary role focused on tourism and visitor economy needs. This includes:

- Supporting operators across eight Local Government Areas (LGAs) by providing access to relevant, up-to-date information about the situation, ensuring they can make informed decisions for visitor safety and business continuity.
- Maintaining confidence with consumers and trade partners by communicating accurate, reassuring updates to Online Travel Agents, international travel agents, and Visit Victoria. This helps minimise cancellations, sustain bookings, and protect the region's reputation.
- Acting as a conduit between tourism operators and authorities, ensuring messaging aligns with official sources while addressing industry-specific concerns.

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- Providing practical tools and templates for operators to manage visitor communications effectively during and after emergencies.

This role ensures that while emergency services manage the incident response, GWMT safeguards the visitor economy by focusing on communication, confidence, specific logistics requested by support services and continuity.

Role	Responsibility
<b>Visitor Economy Partnership</b>	Central coordination of tourism related messaging, updates, stakeholder support.
<b>Tourism Recovery &amp; Response Group (TRRG)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Monitor industry sentiment and provide feedback to group</li> <li>• Maximum group 5 – 6 members and should include 1 – 2 operators.</li> <li>• Regular meetings during &amp; post crisis to assess risk factors, priorities and actions.</li> </ul>
<b>CEO or Delegated Spokesperson</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinates approved and relevant communication from Control Agency</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Media Spokesperson</li> <li>• Liaise with PR / Comms on key messaging and scheduling of media interviews</li> <li>• Mobilise TRRG &amp; set agenda</li> </ul>
<p><b>PR / Communications</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prepares media statements</li> <li>• If an EMJPIC is in place by the Control Agency, ensure attendance at meetings.</li> <li>• To share approved media and information as required.</li> <li>• Prepares key speaking points for CEO or nominated media representative.</li> <li>• Manages message distribution channels and is first point of contact for media enquiries.</li> <li>• Set up of Google Alerts for media coverage and tracking of media monitoring – pre, during and post event.</li> <li>• Log all media enquiries in a shared spreadsheet</li> <li>• Participates in TRRG Meetings</li> </ul>
<p><b>Partnership Manager/s</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Operator engagement</li> </ul>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide feedback loop to authorities and stakeholders</li> <li>• Messaging and resource distribution through approved channels.</li> </ul>
<b>Marketing Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website and social media updates</li> <li>• Monitoring 'owned' channels for consumer questions / sentiment,</li> <li>• Management of paid marketing campaigns ie: postponement / cancellation, etc</li> <li>• Preparation of re-opening campaign materials ready for emergency downgrade</li> </ul>

## 5. Messaging Principles

- **Timely:** Updates issued regularly and promptly.
- **Accurate:** Only verified information from emergency authorities is shared.
- **Consistent:** Unified, approved messaging across platforms and operators.
- **Supportive:** Encourage empathy and cooperation within the industry.
- **Proactive:** Include preparedness and recovery content.
- **Relevance:** Sharing of relevant communications when necessary.

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## **TRRG – Preparation & Activation**

- Group Chair of TRRG will default to CEO of Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism
- All members' current contact details, including after-hours contacts, will be provided to CEO and included in the Emergency Communications Plan. Contact details will be updated annually ahead of peak Summer season, or as required, depending on environmental factors.
- A Crisis Communications Kit should be held ready at the GWMT office including a copy of the Emergency Communications Plan, contact details of emergency services, notebooks, pens and large note paper.
- A Crisis Communications Centre will be nominated depending on the location of the emergency. The location will be communicated in alert messaging. In setting up a Crisis Communications Centre the following items should also be considered:
  - Printer
  - Extension cord and a power board
  - Mobile phone charger / charging bank
  - A battery powered radio in case of power outages
  - Where activation of the TRRG is required a text will be sent to all parties with relevant details for meeting or situation update.
  - If mobile phone communications are unavailable or impacted mobile devices should have Wi-Fi Calling activated to operate over the nearest Wi-Fi network.

## **6. Media and Public Information Management in Emergencies**

During any emergency, the Control Agency assumes primary responsibility for managing media access and ensuring the safety of media representatives. The Incident Controller will coordinate the delivery of up-to-date and accurate information through official channels.

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Public warnings and updates will be distributed to industry, and where appropriate, through consumer-facing channels by GWMT and the TRRG, using verified sources such as VicEmergency, CFA, Victoria Police and Ambulance Victoria. These updates will be shared via digital platforms including social media, websites and direct stakeholder communications.

Visitor information and tourism-related messaging from TRRG will be aligned with official incident control communications. This ensures consistency and avoids interfering with operational management or emergency response efforts.

## **The communication role of GWMT and TRRG includes:**

- Sharing timely verified safety updates with tourism operators to help protect both visitors and the local community
- Managing tourism-related media enquiries to support clear and consistent messaging, reducing the pressure on individual businesses to respond directly
- Acting as an authoritative voice for tourism-related media and communications, providing clear information and directing enquiries to appropriately trained industry professionals
- Using digital tools and platforms to disseminate real-time information across the visitor economy, ensuring tourists and operators have access to trustworthy and relevant updates

## **Working with the Media in a Crisis**

The TRRG plays a vital role in shaping public perception, minimizing the long-term impacts of a crisis and must actively manage the message to build trust, demonstrate leadership and protect the region's tourism reputation.

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## Key Media Principles

- Use media as a communication tool, not an adversary. It allows the region to be seen, heard and understood.
- Actively shape public perception. All communication must be calm, accurate and demonstrate a sense of control.
- Media will report—with or without you. Journalists are well-resourced and persistent; the best approach is to engage constructively and professionally.
- Be informed and prepared. Only speak on matters you understand. Misinformation can cause lasting damage.
- First impressions matter. Visitors, governments and other stakeholders often form their views based on early media reports.
- Prioritise trust and credibility. Only share verified, factual and authorised information. Avoid speculation.
- Communicate regularly. Timely updates help counter rumours, misinformation and fear.
- Be transparent—even with bad news. Acknowledge issues honestly, and explain what's being done to address them.
- Respond quickly to reasonable media requests. Doing so positions the tourism industry as proactive, open and responsible.
- Adapt tone and timing to the crisis. Sensitive incidents (e.g. loss of life) may require delayed responses beyond essential traveller information.
- Nominate a single spokesperson. The VEP CEO should be the main voice of the tourism sector to maintain message consistency.
- Coordinate with impacted businesses. If operators need to comment publicly, this should be done in collaboration with TRRG to ensure aligned messaging.

## Media Protocols

A consistent and strategic media approach is essential in any crisis. How the region is perceived during a crisis will leave a lasting impression—often more than the crisis itself.

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## Required Media Actions

- Notify the VEP CEO immediately of any crisis that could affect tourism and provide an initial briefing.
- Refer all initial media queries to the lead emergency agency unless there's a clear tourism focus.
- Direct tourism-related media requests to the VEP CEO for official response.
- Avoid all speculation or unauthorised commentary.
- The GWMT Administrator or nominated on-duty staff member should notify relevant contacts, switchboards and reception areas with updated contact details for the Crisis Management Centre.
- Redirect all follow-up media enquiries to the TRRG and Incident Control Centre.
- Inform the TRRG as soon as practicable about any direct media contact.
- If media are present at the crisis site, coordinate with the lead agency's media liaison to identify tourism-related questions.
- Provide timely, factual and authorised updates to the media regarding tourism impacts.
- If requested information isn't yet available, clearly explain why and provide an expected update timeframe.
- Regularly update the TRRG with insights into media interest, public sentiment and community feedback (including via social media and talkback radio).
- Prepare clear, concise key speaking points ahead of any media interviews or public statements to all parties.
- Distribute all media releases to relevant stakeholders as soon as they are issued.
- Ensure, where possible, that the VEP CEO or delegated representative acts as the public spokesperson for media interviews and press conferences.
- Identify trusted local experts or operators to act as third-party commentators when appropriate and in coordination with TRRG.

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## Pre-Prepared Messaging Templates for digital assets *(for operators to adapt and use)*

### **A. Visitor Alert**

*"There is an active bushfire situation in parts of [Region]. We are working closely with emergency services to monitor conditions. For the latest safety information, visit [official link]. Please follow instructions from your accommodation, Visitor Information Centre or tour operator."*

### **B. Operator Closure Update**

*"[Operator Name] is temporarily closed due to local fire conditions. The safety of our guests and staff is our top priority. For rebooking or refunds, please contact us at [phone/email]."*

### **C. Travel Advisory**

*"Visitors are advised to avoid non-essential travel to [affected areas] until further notice. The rest of [Region] remains open and safe. Refer to our official travel updates at [website link]."*

### **D. Post-Emergency Recovery Message**

*"Thanks to the efforts of emergency services and community support, [Region] is open and welcoming visitors again. Your support helps our tourism community recover."*

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## 7. Information Flow and Communication Channels

Channel	Purpose	Audience	Frequency
<b>Operator Toolkit</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Prepared messaging for websites and social media</li> <li>Contact details for GWMT Staff (updated according to team annual leave and delegated authority)</li> </ul>	Tourism operators	Initial + updates as required
<b>Email Alerts / eDM</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Direct updates to operators and stakeholders via eDM</li> <li>Update to be distributed to GSTR, Visit Vic International offices, OTA's etc</li> <li>Create eDM that can be shared by operators with consumers and industry contacts with industry updates</li> </ul>	Operators, LGAs,	As needed
<b>Website Updates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Consumer website – add pop up directing to <a href="#">Incidents and Warnings - VicEmergency</a></li> <li>Liaise with ATDW for operator information to reflect current situation</li> <li>Corporate page – Updates from Vic Emergency and Parks Victoria, support for impacted individuals and community as becomes available</li> </ul>	Visitors, Media  Operators / Industry	Immediate and updated as needed

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<b>Social media</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Updates, areas of safety / safe travel,</li> </ul>	Visitors – Current and Prospective	Twice daily or as situation changes
<b>Media Releases</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public statements, safety &amp; recovery messaging</li> </ul>	Media	As required

## 8. Coordination with Authorities

Effective communication during emergencies relies on clear alignment with the designated lead agency which may vary depending on the nature of the incident. At the State level, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) provides overarching guidance through the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) outlining the roles, responsibilities and coordination structures that underpin Victoria’s emergency management framework.

This regional communications plan serves as a guiding document for Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism (GWMT) ensuring that all tourism-related internal and external communications are consistent with and complementary to the SEM. By maintaining strong coordination with authorities GWMT can support timely, accurate and unified messaging that reinforces public confidence, supports tourism operators and aids effective response and recovery.

The EMV website should be used as the most current and up to date reference for the relevant control agency based on the nature of the emergency. [Roles and Responsibilities | Emergency Management Victoria.](#)

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## 9. Phases of Communication

Phase	Focus	Regional Tourism Body Actions
<b>Pre-Emergency (Preparedness)</b>	Preparedness, education, template delivery	Share operator toolkit, communication messaging and key contacts.
<b>Active Emergency (Response)</b>	Real-time updates, safety messaging	Coordinate info flow, provide daily updates, liaise with authorities
<b>Post-Emergency (Recovery)</b>	Recovery, reassurance, reopening messaging	Support storytelling, relaunch campaign activation

### Pre-emergency (Preparedness) - Regular Training and simulation

- Run crisis simulations and media response training for GWMT and industry annually
- TRRG is on standby during peak periods or potential emergencies.
- Keep the crisis team's skills sharp and procedures fresh
- Update the plan annually or after major incidents

## 10. Review & Debrief

- After each emergency event, a debrief will be held with operators, council, and key stakeholders to assess:

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- What worked well
- What needs improvement
- Updates needed for this plan
- Feedback on regional support

## 11. Contact Information *(to be included at end of all communications)*

### Grampians Wimmera Mallee Tourism

Website: [www.visitgrampians.com.au](http://www.visitgrampians.com.au)

Emergency Tourism Hotline: [Phone]

Email: [ceo@gwmtourism.com.au](mailto:ceo@gwmtourism.com.au)

## Appendix

### TRRG Crisis Assessment Checklist

Category	Assessment Point
1. Nature of the Crisis	What is the type and extent of the incident? (e.g. bushfire, flood, pollution, disease outbreak, crime, poor visitor experiences, etc.)

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	What visitor operations are affected? (e.g. safety, travel, accommodation, activities, reputation)
	Is the incident contained or escalating?
	Are there any health risks for visitors or tourism operators?
	Which stakeholders are affected or potentially affected?
	What are the potential short- and long-term impacts on the region's desirability as a destination?
<b>2. Impacts on Tourism Image &amp; Economy</b>	Is there substantial media coverage? (Local, Statewide, National, International, News, Current Affairs)
	What are the economic impacts? (Business disruption, liability, insurance, duration, etc.)
<b>3. TRRG Response Considerations</b>	Is TRRG receiving timely and accurate information?
	Is there effective communication with the Emergency Management Team?
	Are communication links established with the crisis site?
	Is a TRRG observer needed on-site?
	Are communication links with key audiences and stakeholders effective?
	Are additional resources or outside communication expertise required?

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	Are media inquiries being managed in a timely and accurate way?
	How frequently should the TRRG meet during this crisis?
	Are there directly affected stakeholders who should be temporarily included in the TRRG?

## TRRG Responsibilities & Action Plan

This action plan outlines the key responsibilities and actions for members of the Tourism Regional Response Group (TRRG) during and after a crisis. Actions are grouped by functional area for clarity.

### 1. Chair (VEP CEO) Responsibilities

#### Initial Response & Activation

- Assess the probable scale of the crisis.
- Activate the TRRG and arrange for all members to be contacted.
- Arrange verbal and/or written briefings on the situation.

#### Strategic Coordination

- Determine TRRG support and resource requirements.
- Identify and involve specialist personnel as needed (e.g. crisis management consultants).

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- Advise key stakeholders (e.g. Minister, Tourism Victoria).

## **Communications & Media**

- Refer to the Crisis Communications Plan and determine relevant components.
- Revise, cancel, or suspend advertising as appropriate.
- Determine media strategy in conjunction with TRRG members.
- Authorise all media statements and function as the regional spokesperson for key media interviews.
- Authorise regular updates for:
  - Visitors
  - Regional tourism operators
  - Staff and stakeholders

## **Recovery & Review**

- Coordinate planning for long-term recovery.
- Commission an external review of the effectiveness of the Crisis Communications Plan and response actions once the crisis has passed.

## **2. Information & Strategy**

### **Information Management**

- Establish and maintain contact with emergency response teams for regular updates.

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- Provide authoritative information to the TRRG.

## **Analysis & Strategic Input**

- Assess the immediate implications for regional tourism, including potential economic impacts.
- Identify immediate actions required and key communication themes.
- Determine the most effective communication tools and platforms.

## **Stakeholder Engagement**

- Coordinate regular updates for stakeholders.
- Review and approve proposed media statements and releases.
- Participate actively in TRRG operations and decision-making.

## **Post-Crisis Review**

- Participate in debrief processes.
- Identify and report on gaps in information dissemination and strategy.

## **3. Planning**

### **Impact Assessment & Planning**

- Assess potential short and long-term impacts on regional tourism.
- Begin planning to mitigate these impacts in consultation with operators and stakeholders.

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## **Event & Media Coordination**

- Review the need to reschedule or modify planned events (e.g. seminars, conferences).
- Assist in managing media engagement and website updates.

## **Operational Support**

- Actively contribute to TRRG decision-making and coordination.
- Support the implementation of actions across communication and planning areas.

## **Post-Crisis Activities**

- Participate in debrief processes.
- Coordinate updates to procedures and internal documentation.
- Organise and send letters of appreciation to individuals or organisations that supported the TRRG.

## **Additional Recommendations**

### **1. Digital Resilience & Cybersecurity**

Emergencies may include cyber incidents or digital disruptions. Ensure website and social media accounts have multi-factor authentication enabled. In the event of digital compromise, redirect communications through verified emergency channels and notify stakeholders immediately.

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## **2. Accessibility & Inclusion**

Emergency messaging must be accessible to all, including people with disabilities or language barriers. All communications should be available in plain English and include visual aids where possible. Consider translation into key languages spoken by visitors.

## **3. Mental Health & Wellbeing Support**

Crises can cause emotional distress for staff, operators, and visitors. Provide access to mental health support services and include links to regional wellbeing services in post-crisis communications.

## **4. Visitor Data & Privacy Management**

Emergency communications may involve handling visitor data. Ensure all data usage complies with privacy legislation and avoid sharing personal information without consent.

## **5. Evaluation Metrics**

Measuring effectiveness helps improve future responses. Track engagement rates on emergency updates, stakeholder feedback, and media sentiment to assess communication success.

## **6. Backup Communication Channels**

Power or network outages may disrupt primary channels. Include backup methods such as local radio, satellite phones, and printed notices at key visitor hubs.