

Victorian Government response
to the recommendations of
the Emergency Services
Telecommunications
Authority Capability and
Service Review

INTRODUCTION

The Victorian Government welcomes the *Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority Capability and Service Review: Final Report* (the Report), by Mr Graham Ashton AM APM, former Chief Commissioner of Victoria Police. The Government thanks Mr Ashton for his comprehensive review and report.

The report provides valuable insight into the state of the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority's (ESTA) capabilities and services, to better understand the long-term challenges and enable changes to create a stronger triple zero system.

The Government, in partnership with ESTA and its critical stakeholders will chart a path forward for this critical service, accepting in principle all the recommendations made as we build a stronger, more sustainable future for ESTA. Five recommendations are already underway, with work on the remaining recommendations to begin immediately.

The Government's decision in 2021 to commission the independent ESTA Capability and Service Review recognises the importance of understanding opportunities to address any service and capability gaps impacting on ESTA's service delivery, which become even clearer in consideration of pandemic pressure points.

Since the review commenced, we've invested over \$360 million in practical and immediate measures to continue to build ESTA's capability to respond to the unprecedented pandemic-driven demand and get Victorians the help they need in these critical moments.

This includes our recent \$333 million Triple Zero package in the Victorian Budget 2022/23 which aligns with the intentions of this report, such as investing in call taking and dispatch workers, delivering better support to workers with more training, stronger governance and better technology systems to enable faster call taking.

On top of recruiting and hiring 400 new workers and ongoing investment in capability, we'll bring ESTA into government, create clearer linkages to our emergency service organisations (ESOs) and rebrand it as Triple Zero Victoria to better recognise the critical frontline workers that support our community every day.

The Government won't waste a minute in commencing implementation on these vital, but complex reforms. With the establishment of ESTA Capability and Service Taskforces, government will work in partnership with ESTA, workers, unions, ESOs and other stakeholders to make sure we get these reforms right.

Our commitment is to deliver a stronger, faster Triple Zero service for all Victorians.

THE REPORT

The Report provides an extensive outline of ESTA's current state of operation in October 2021 and provides recommendations to improve capability and service delivery of ESTA. The Report is based on consultations, conversations and the personal experiences of the stakeholders in and around ESTA, including the ESTA workforce, board and leadership, industrial partners, emergency services organisations, government departments and the community.

Mr Ashton has considered all aspects of ESTA's operating model and assessed ESTA's capabilities against the core services it delivers. ESTA plays a critical role in Victoria's emergency management sector. ESTA's Triple Zero service is crucial to the health and safety of the Victorian community and therefore, its services must be delivered at a consistently high standard.

ESTA is at a critical juncture, facing sustained demand increases. The increasing frequency of complex major emergencies and the pandemic has pushed ESTA's call-taking and dispatch capabilities to its limits since this report was first commissioned in 2021. The Government acknowledges that the future of ESTA relies on supporting the workforce to increase its call-taking and dispatch service in partnership with the emergency management sector.

The Government would also like to thank all staff at ESTA for their ongoing commitment to delivering critical services to the Victorian community and the individuals and organisations who provided input throughout the Review.

THE GOVERNMENT'S INVESTMENT TO DATE TO IMPROVE ESTA CAPABILITY

Significant financial investment in the Emergency Services Telecommunications Authority

While the review has been underway, the Victorian Government has continued building on its investments across the healthcare system, and in ESTA, to ease the pandemic pressure across the system.

May 2021

In the 2021-22 Victorian Budget, the government provided \$46.140 million to ESTA to support the recruitment of 43 new FTE to meet increased demand for services, the delivery of upgrades to ESTA's computer-aided dispatch capabilities and services to support ESTA's call-taking and dispatch staff's health and safety and accommodation costs. The 43 additional FTE are already operational.

October 2021

In October 2021, the Government provided a further \$27.5 million to address increased pressure and demand, caused by the pandemic. This included strategies to boost immediate call-taking and dispatch capacity during surge periods, immediate technology solutions to make services more efficient, increased training for existing staff, and the delivery of a targeted workforce recruitment campaign.

To support this investment and ESTA's transformation, its executive leadership was refreshed in October last year with the appointment of a new Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Stephen Leane and the appointment of Debra Abbott into a new Deputy CEO role. Importantly, they both have extensive emergency management experience, which aligns with recommendations of the Report, and have been working tirelessly on the operations of the organisation, including swiftly implementing the programs of work and improvements funded by the Victorian Government.

March 2022

In March 2022, the Government announced a significant package focused on recruiting and training more ambulance call-takers and providing them with greater and better support, such as additional trainers, managers and more administration support for the challenging and vital job they do. This uplift in call-taking and dispatch staff capacity is an important step towards delivering the improvements recommended by Mr Ashton.

A workforce recruitment campaign is already underway filling new positions—which includes more than 50 positions in ambulance call-taking and dispatch. All the new positions will come online by mid-2023. This extra capacity will mean a more consistent and stable number of call-takers rostered on each day, and more workers to draw on for overtime and extra shifts to meet higher call volumes. It is also enabling a new supervision structure to better support call-takers in this highly complex environment, improving call answer speeds and ensuring patient safety remains paramount.

The Government has also delivered funding for community awareness campaigns to redirect non-emergency calls to other channels such as the Department of Health's *Save 000* and *Managing COVID at Home* campaign and Victoria Police's *When You Need Us, But Not The Sirens*, Police Assistance Line campaign.

May 2022

The Government announced further investment in the Victorian Budget 2022-23, bringing the new funding provided this year to \$333 million for ESTA workforce and services.

With this funding, we will recruit and train 400 new staff to increase Triple Zero call-taking and dispatch capacity across the state for ambulance, police and fire services. This includes the funding allocated in March to increase capacity in the ambulance line.

This record funding will bolster call-taker and dispatch capability and provide an uplift in supervisory and corporate roles to support the workforce growth.

It will mean more trainers and team leaders, build better support and surge capability during busy times and provide further wellbeing support to look after our hardworking frontline staff. Funding for IT and security systems will also support ESTA to upgrade its operations.

These investments will deliver faster, better care for Victorians.

Progress and improvements at ESTA from our investment to date

ESTA's performance is already benefitting from the government's significant investment in its services. ESTA has recruited more call-taking and dispatch staff and streamlined its training, resulting in an improvement in ESTA's ability to meet its call-response performance standards.

Training courses and new employee induction processes have recently been streamlined and improved. ESTA has also been able to reduce training duplication on medical requests, non-emergency patient transport, surge response and CPR. There has also been a focus on staff wellbeing through the addition of mental health training packages. This is an important foundational step in strengthening the culture across ESTA's workforce.

Beyond the government's recent investments in ESTA, other steps have been taken to improve ESTA's call-taking and dispatch capacity and capability during periods of peak demand. Last year ESTA and its industrial partners identified and implemented short-term changes to facilitate urgent workforce response to demands arising from the pandemic. This aligns with and provides a starting point to improve workforce management as outlined in Mr Ashton's report.

The Government welcomes this collaboration with industrial partners and their commitment to the ESTA workforce and the Victorian community to continue to uplift and further professionalise our critical frontline ESTA workforce. Government looks forward to continuing to work together with industrial partners to enable ESTA to flexibly respond to the increasing demand for its services.

THE VICTORIAN GOVERNMENT RESPONSE

Victorians should have the confidence, that when they call for help in an emergency – they will get it.

It's why the Government supports in principle, all recommendations made by Mr Ashton that cover a range of issues aimed at improving governance, strengthening and streamlining service delivery and future proofing ESTA's capabilities and services.

Five recommendations are already well underway, with work on the remaining recommendations to begin immediately.

The significant investments the Government has made in ESTA to date, targets areas consistent with Mr Ashton's recommendation for a capability uplift to make ESTA a leading call-taking and dispatch organisation.

The Government recognises the full effects of the pandemic are yet to be fully realised and is committed to continuing to make improvements to ESTA in order to support the health and wellbeing of all Victorians now and into the future.

The report's recommendations cover five core service areas to improve ESTA's services and capabilities:

Recommendation	Subject	Government response	Work to be Completed
One to four	Propose reframing ESTA's organisational foundations	<p>The Government supports the findings that the current governance arrangements are not operating as intended and that ESTA needs to be brought into government with the form and structure to be agreed as part of the reforms to be progressed in 2023. This will revitalise ESTA both as an organisation and as a critical partner to ESOs, strengthening links to the broader healthcare system, leading to a more integrated, responsive service for the Victorian community. It will also ensure that ESTA can focus on delivering a better service to Victorians in their time of need.</p> <p>The Government will begin working with the ESTA board, emergency services organisations, unions and</p>	Q2 2023 – Q4 2023.

Recommendation	Subject	Government response	Work to be Completed
		<p>stakeholders through the ESTA Capability and Service Taskforces on the implementation of these recommendations.</p> <p>These recommendations also introduce a new governance model that reflects the partnership between ESTA and emergency service organisations: Ambulance Victoria, Country Fire Authority, Fire Rescue Victoria, Victoria Police and Victoria State Emergency Service; prioritising cultural change; and rebranding ESTA as 'Triple Zero Victoria'.</p> <p>There will also be a dedicated team to manage the implementation of these recommendations.</p> <p>In order for ESTA to meet community expectations in service delivery during the transition reforms, the Government is continuing to provide record investment into ESTA to significantly increase its call-taking and demand capacity, including adding nearly 400 new staff to increase Triple Zero call taking and dispatch capacity for Triple Zero services and training more operators to allocate calls across the state.</p> <p>The Government announced a significant package focused on recruiting and training more ambulance call-takers and providing them with greater and better support, such as additional trainers, managers and more administration support for the challenging and vital job they do.</p>	

Recommendation	Subject	Government response	Work to be Completed
		<p>A comprehensive recruitment campaign is already underway to fill the new positions—which includes more than 50 in ambulance call-taking and dispatch—to build a bigger workforce to draw on during peak and surge demand times, to train other call-takers and to better lead, support and manage teams. Funding for a community awareness campaign to redirect non-emergency calls to other channels was also delivered.</p> <p>All new positions will come online by mid-2023. This extra capacity will mean a more consistent and stable number of call-takers rostered on each day, and more workers to draw on for overtime and extra shifts to meet higher call volumes. It will also enable a new supervision structure to better support call-takers in this highly complex environment, improve call answer speeds and ensure patient safety remains paramount.</p>	
Five to 10	Propose that ESTA retain responsibility for its whole-of-emergency-services call-taking and dispatch model but enhanced to be more effective	<p>The Review found that ESTA will need to collaborate more closely with emergency service organisations on call-taking and dispatch, review its training standards and practices, develop and implement an industrial relations strategy, increase its engagement with call-taking and dispatch organisations at the national level and review its mental health support arrangements for staff.</p> <p>The Government agrees that with the most recent significant investments in ESTA and any other</p>	Q2 2022 – Q2 2023.

Recommendation	Subject	Government response	Work to be Completed
		<p>future investments these recommendations will enhance the capability of ESTA’s call-taking and dispatch service now and in the future and ensure its staff are well supported.</p> <p>To adequately respond to these recommendations, the Government has invested record funding to bring on more trainers and team leaders, build a better support and surge capability for busy times and provide further wellbeing support to look after our hardworking frontline staff. Funding for IT and security systems will also support ESTA to upgrade its operations.</p> <p>There has also been \$27.5 million invested to address increased call-taking demand driven by to the COVID-19 pandemic. This included strategies to boost immediate call-taking and dispatch surge capacity, immediate technology solutions and to scale up recruitment, training, and to deliver a targeted recruitment campaign.</p> <p>An investment of \$13.7 million is for essential information technology to reconfigure and expand several operational IT systems to ensure no disruption to service delivery. These include ESTA’s computer-aided dispatch system, IT networking and communications, turnout systems, incident management software, firecom, and corporate systems including FRV email and mobile devices.</p>	
11 to 14	Propose that ESTA work with the	The Government agrees that both managed services and technology services require a roadmap to	Q2 2022 – Q2 2023.

Recommendation	Subject	Government response	Work to be Completed
	<p>Department of Justice and Community Safety to develop and implement new roadmaps: for the future delivery of two key service areas currently delivered by ESTA: managed services and technology services</p>	<p>ensure future direction and sustainable delivery of services.</p> <p>DJCS and ESTA will work with ESOs and other stakeholders to develop a roadmap that enables more effective and efficient procurement of managed services and infrastructure.</p> <p>This will lead to better technology services, radios and communications technology.</p> <p>The roadmap will guide future investment when in the process of procurement.</p>	
15 to 17	<p>Propose that ESTA enhances its current intelligence capability to meet the needs of emergency service organisations</p>	<p>The Government welcomes these recommendations. ESTA must use intelligence services to both improve its day-to-day performance and inform strategic planning and preparedness for emergencies across the sector.</p> <p>This will ensure increased connectivity with other emergency services partners, inform call taking with real time data and ensure there are more frequent updates provided to Victorians in need.</p> <p>We are already ensuring that ESTA is appropriately supported by government and has better linkages it to other ESOs to enable ESTA to focus on its core service of call-taking and dispatch.</p>	Q2 2022 – Q2 2023.

Recommendation	Subject	Government response	Work to be Completed
18 to 20	Propose that ESTA develop and implement new outcomes-based performance standards, and with closer connections to clinical outcomes	<p>While rigorous time-based performance standards must be retained, the Government supports complementary outcomes-based performance standards as an additional way to ensure the effectiveness of ESTA's call-taking and dispatch service and ensure ESTA maintains accountability to its emergency service organisations partners and the community it serves.</p> <p>This will form the work of the implementation team, but ultimately relies on a strong and sustainable workforce to respond to surges in demand.</p>	Q2 2023 – Q4 2023.

The Victorian Government is proud to support organisational reform at ESTA, focused on providing more responsive call-taking and stronger, better connected dispatch services that will deliver and embed meaningful change, so that Victorians get the very best of care when they need it most.

It will be a priority of the Government to ensure that ESTA is equipped to respond to the pressure caused by the pandemic, and that staff are supported to perform their essential role throughout a significant program of reform.

The Government is committed to addressing ESTA's organisational challenges and focus on underpinning elements of the capability and service delivery required by ESTA's emergency management partners and the Victorian community.

The long-term partnership across the emergency management sector and our commitment will enable us to strengthen ESTA's call-taking and dispatch service, enhance staff wellbeing and satisfaction and ensure community confidence in its vital Triple Zero service.

Implementing reform with our key partners and the ESTA workforce

Successful implementation of the recommendations is not the responsibility of ESTA alone. It relies on a strong partnership between ESTA and its board of management, emergency service organisations, industrial partners, and the Government to deliver a program of reform to enhance ESTA's capabilities and services.

For that reason, we are establishing strong governance structures to oversee the implementation of these reforms. This includes the establishment of three ESTA Capability and Service Taskforces. The Government Taskforce will be jointly chaired by the Department of Justice and Community Safety and ESTA and include all critical stakeholders. An Operational Taskforce and a Workforce Taskforce will also specifically include our ESOs and unions to provide advice as to where the reform will impact operational service delivery and workforce.

It will be important that the ESTA Board, through representation on the Government Taskforce, and these key stakeholders have an opportunity to contribute to the planning and delivery of these recommendations. These partnerships will ensure that reforms are implemented in a way that will ensure intended benefits are realised and ESTA is well-positioned to continue delivery of its critical services as we continue to live with the pandemic.

Consultation and detailed implementation planning will occur in two tranches in order for ESTA to remain focused on core service delivery. The immediate priority will focus on those recommendations relating to call-

taking and dispatch, managed services and technology services, intelligence capability and performance standards. Implementation in relation to governance changes and legislative change will occur as a second stage.

Importantly, the ESTA workforce is central to the implementation of reform. ESTA employees are dedicated, compassionate and committed to the critical work of responding to and supporting our communities and emergency services organisations. The opportunities for the ESTA workforce as we implement the recommendations of the review are significant. This includes a focus on mental health and organisational culture and continues to build upon the professionalisation of their role as front-line emergency service workers.

The Government recognises the importance of ensuring a reform program for ESTA which is comprehensive and streamlined. This approach will provide a pathway for any recommendations from the Inspector-General for Emergency Management (IGEM) through their thematic review of emergency ambulance call answer performance during COVID-19 related 2021 surge, due to government later this year to be integrated into the reforms being driven by the implementation taskforces.

The Victorian Government would like to again acknowledge Mr Ashton's constructive report, as well as the individuals and organisations – including the ESTA workforce – who shared their experiences, time and expertise throughout the Review.