Case Study – Cudgegong Fire Control Centre/Mid-Western Emergency Operations Centre Exercise

Exercise need

The Mid-Western Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) in conjunction with NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) Cudgegong District developed and delivered the Cudgegong Fire Control Centre (FCC)/Mid-Western EOC exercise at the Cudgegong FCC, Mudgee on Thursday 23 October 2025. The exercise scenario was based on a previous large bush fire event (Alpha Road Fire, March 2023) in the Mid-Western Local Government Area. This scenario was developed by NSW Rural Fire Service with injects from the Mid-Western LEMC/Emergency Operations Centre (EOC).

The purpose of the exercise was to:

- Test the Cudgegong FCC and Mid-Western EOC, using a bush fire scenario. The facility had not been tested since construction was completed.
- Test disability inclusive emergency management including identifying gaps and scope of local service providers.

Exercise aim

The exercise aim was to test the capability of the Cudgegong District Fire Control Centre (FCC) and Mid-Western Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) with a focus on Disability Inclusive Emergency Management. This exercise provided insights into the challenges faced by emergency management in identifying disability service providers, vulnerable facilities and their capacity and capability.

The primary target audience for this exercise are LEMCs/LEOCs and their members. Participants were able to explore issues in depth and workshop responses to plausible situations.

There was a high standard of discussion around the current gaps and opportunities for better engagement between emergency managers and local disability/community support providers.

Exercise objectives

1. **Test** the FCC and EOC. There had been no large-scale emergency events since the FCC/EOC construction was completed.
2. **Test** how effectively LEOCs coordinate with the relevant Functional Areas including Transport, Health, and Welfare Services, local councils, emergency services, and community disability support agencies in addressing the extra support needs of people with disability.
    a. Participants clearly identify roles and responsibilities of LEOCs, Functional Areas, local councils and disability service providers during discussion of the scenario.
    b. Disability coordination/liaison officers are identified for disability related requests at the EOC.
    c. Decision-making processes and escalation pathways are described consistently across agencies.
    d. Coordination challenges are recognised and potential solutions discussed collaboratively

Exercise outcomes

This exercise highlighted challenges in identifying disability service providers, vulnerable facilities, and their capabilities. It enabled LEMC/LEOC participants to explore issues in depth and collaboratively identify gaps and opportunities to strengthen engagement with local disability and community support providers.

The exercise demonstrated that while the Cudgegong FCC and Mid-Western EOC are capable platforms for coordinating multi-agency response, there are critical gaps in integrating disability and community service providers into emergency management arrangements. Participants identified challenges in identifying vulnerable populations, accessing up-to-date service information, and maintaining individual emergency plans, highlighting a need for stronger cross-sector coordination. This reflected broader findings from the exercise that there are existing gaps between emergency services and local disability and community support providers, particularly in identifying available services, facilities and support arrangements

Operationally, the exercise exposed issues with connectivity, information access, task management, and IMT–EOC communication, reinforcing the importance of clearer liaison roles and improved systems to support situational awareness. For example, participants experienced difficulty accessing Wi-Fi and maps during the exercise and identified the need for clearer task tracking (including timelines and status updates) and more structured briefing arrangements between the IMT and EOC. Despite these challenges, the exercise was viewed positively, with participants reporting high-quality discussion, improved understanding of disability-inclusive emergency management, and increased confidence in their roles, with 85% of participants indicating they felt more confident operating within an emergency environment following the exercise. Overall, the exercise met its objectives and provided valuable insights, while also highlighting a number of capability gaps requiring further development to support effective coordination and disability-inclusive practice.

Exercise evaluation

Insight/Lesson	Sustain/ Improve
Integration with disability and community service providers needs to be strengthened. The exercise highlighted the importance of more structured engagement with local providers so support to vulnerable people can be coordinated more effectively during incidents.	Improve
Visibility of vulnerable people, facilities and services needs to improve. Current arrangements do not provide sufficient access to the information required to support timely decision-making and coordinated operations.	Improve
Individual emergency preparedness should be more consistently embedded. The exercise reinforced the value of maintaining individual emergency plans so support needs can be identified and addressed in advance of an emergency.	Improve
Liaison, briefing and communication arrangements between the IMT and EOC require greater clarity. More structured communication pathways and clearer liaison roles would strengthen coordination, shared situational awareness and operational decision-making.	Improve
Tasking and information management practices need to be strengthened. Clearer task allocation, status tracking and timeline management would improve operational visibility and support more effective coordination.	Improve
Infrastructure and supporting systems within the EOC require	Improve

Insight/Lesson	Sustain/ Improve
improvement. More reliable connectivity, access to maps and consistent availability of operational resources would strengthen EOC effectiveness under operational pressure.	
The FCC and EOC provide a sound foundation for multi-agency coordination. The exercise confirmed the value of the current coordination model and the importance of sustaining this capability as a platform for future preparedness and response.	Sustain
Ongoing multi-agency exercising should be maintained to build capability. The exercise demonstrated the value of collaborative discussion and problem-solving in improving understanding, confidence and disability-inclusive emergency management practice.	Sustain

Additional observations included opportunities to strengthen exercise planning involvement across agencies and improve EOC logistics, including access to resources and clarity of liaison roles.

Recommendations

1. The LEMC (via the LEMO) engage with local service providers and facility owners to identify services available, location of vulnerable communities and ascertain support service providers can give to the EOC during an emergency.
2. The LEMC (via the LEMO) work with vulnerable members of the community to develop bespoke emergency plans specific to their individual risks, needs and environment.
3. Explore opportunities to work with the National Disability Insurance Scheme in developing disability focused material.
4. The LEMC investigate hosting a disability inclusive emergency management forum between emergency services/combat agencies and service providers.
5. Ensure details of disability support/community service providers be available during an emergency to assist with contact vulnerable communities/persons.
6. A number of other recommendations were identified but related directly to the Emergency Operation Centre setup, logistics and liaison with IMT.