Case Study - Exercise Lights Out – Major Power Outage Discussion Exercises – Southern Region

Exercise need

The South-Eastern Regional Emergency Management Committee (REMC) conducted the exercise on 24 February 2026 at the NSW Police Force Academy, Goulburn. This exercise was developed to strengthen local and regional arrangements be testing decision making coordination and consequence management in response to a prolonged, widespread electricity supply disruption. This was the first time that an exercise using this theme was conducted in the Southern Region. The exercise scenario involved severe late-summer weather causing widespread storm damage across the region, including major impacts to power infrastructure in towns and surrounding rural areas.

Exercise aim

The exercise aim was to evaluate Local Emergency Management Committee (LEMC) / REMC arrangements for responding to a major power outage within the local or regional area, to assess the effectiveness, readiness, and suitability of LEMC / REMC and Emergency Operations Centre (EOC) response and recovery plans.

It focused on the effectiveness of arrangements to maintain critical services, communicate with and reassure the community during prolonged uncertainty, support decision-making and escalation when energy information is incomplete or delayed, and provide welfare support to vulnerable and isolated communities. Participants noted that it may take 24–36 hours for energy providers to understand the full extent of infrastructure damage, requiring EOCs to make decisions and set priorities across multiple timeframes while operating with incomplete information.

The exercise strengthened Regional Emergency Operation Centre (REOC) and Local Emergency Operation Centre (LEOC) planning, preparedness and coordination under Emergency Operations Controllers to manage the consequences of a prolonged, widespread electricity supply disruption in NSW. It tested decision-making, interagency coordination, continuity of critical services, community communication, and welfare support for vulnerable populations, in line with the NSW Energy and Utility Services Supporting Plan and the State Electricity Supply Emergency Sub-Plan.

Exercise objectives

1. **Assess** how effectively REOCs and LEOCs coordinate with the Energy and Utility Services Functional Area (EUSFA), local councils, emergency services, and other agencies in managing the consequences of a prolonged electricity supply disruption.

2. **Assess** arrangements to maintain and restore essential community services, including health, water, fuel, food, telecommunications, and public information, during extended power outages, with particular attention to infrastructure interdependencies.

3. **Exercise** the adequacy of arrangements for providing timely welfare assistance, relief services, and community support to affected populations during prolonged disruptions.

4. **Assess** how agencies identify, prioritise, and provide targeted support to vulnerable groups and individuals, including those reliant on medical equipment, Aboriginal communities, and geographically isolated populations, during a prolonged power outage.

5. **Evaluate** how REOCs, LEOCs, and supporting agencies make and escalate decisions when operating with incomplete, delayed, or inconsistent *information from energy providers and other sources.*

Exercise outcomes

Exercise Lights Out achieved its objectives and confirmed that existing REMC, LEMC and EOC arrangements provide a sound basis for managing a prolonged major power outage, while also highlighting the need to adapt arrangements where EOC facilities, communications systems or operating locations are impacted by the outage The exercise produced the following outcomes:

Strong trust-building across agencies
Participants reported improved understanding of who to contact and confidence in working relationships during incidents.

Value of regional, multi-agency exercises
The exercise reinforced that coordinating and practicing together improves preparedness and operational effectiveness.

Operational insight into decision-making trade-offs
Participants recognised the balance required between **urgency, safety, and coordination** in real incidents.

High perceived applicability
Participants indicated the lessons were directly transferable to real-world emergency operations.

Exercise evaluation

Insight/Lesson	Sustain/ Improve
As the first exercise of this type in the Region, the activity provided a useful test of current arrangements, highlighted capability strengths and planning gaps, and confirmed the value of further exercising or follow-on workshops to explore the scenario in greater depth.	
Prolonged outages require decisions to be made under uncertainty and across multiple timeframes, with agencies needing to establish priorities over 12, 24, 36 and longer horizons as impacts evolve and information becomes clearer.". This makes a shared Common Operating Picture essential to support prioritisation as impacts evolve.	Improve
Because outage impacts are unlikely to align with LGA boundaries, LEOCs, adjoining areas and supporting agencies must coordinate closely, with REOCs playing an increasingly important role in consolidating regional issues, resolving cross-boundary constraints and escalating systemic matters to the SEOC.	Improve
Existing REMC, LEMC and EOC arrangements provide a sound foundation for managing prolonged power outages, but they require adaptation where outages affect EOC facilities, communications systems, local infrastructure or operating locations, including through business continuity measures.	Sustain and improve
Effective response depends on flexible liaison models, resilient communications, strong Local Government engagement and timely cross-agency information-sharing, particularly where agencies cannot staff every EOC and telecommunications outages constrain virtual coordination.	Sustain and improve
Prolonged outages create cascading impacts across interdependent essential services, including water, health, fuel, transport, communications and community facilities, highlighting the need for clearer arrangements for service continuity, vulnerable	Improve

Insight/Lesson	Sustain/ Improve
people and fuel access and prioritisation.	
Preparedness requires stronger operational use of EMPLANs, documentation of generator capability, connection requirements and NMI details for critical sites, and practical readiness measures to support sustained operations during extended outages.	Improve

Participants also highlighted that communications disruptions and loss of telecommunications may significantly constrain coordination, requiring alternative methods for information sharing, community engagement and inter-agency liaison

Recommendations

The following recommendations are based on the exercise observations and feedback.

- Critical localities in local areas need to be reviewed to ascertain whether they have onsite generator backup or have the provision for generators to be installed. These localities need to include facilities such as supermarkets, service stations, water treatment plants, water and sewage pumping stations.
- EMPLANs need to document critical localities within their context including generator availability and backup to provide electricity.
- Business Continuity Plans for EOCs should be developed or reviewed to ensure that they are operable in extreme situations where communications, power and required people are disconnected or unable to be present (both digitally and physically). The documents should include
    - Documenting provisions to operate should electricity be unavailable for an extended period, and
    - Documenting provisions should access to standard telecommunications be unavailable affecting the collection and dissemination of information, or the ability to operate virtually.
- Review the process for sharing information on critical / vulnerable customers between agencies and in a cross-border setting.
- A process for the prioritising of access to fuel by LEOCs and REOCs needs to be documented.