

ACT Bushfire Council

Meeting Minutes

19 December 2006

4.00pm – 6.00pm

Conference Room

Air Support Operations Centre

4 Point Cook Avenue Fairbairn

Attendance:

Kevin Jeffery	Acting Chair
Dee Watson	Secretariat
Simon Katz	Member
Geoff Butler	Member
David Price	ex Officio
Gregor Manson	ex Officio
Michael Ross	ex Officio
Michael Lonergan	Member
Bruce Leaver	Member

Guests:

Neil Cooper	TAMS
Dylan Kendall	TAMS

Apologies:

Peter Kanowski	Member
Stephen Wise	Member
Tony Bartlett	Member

1. Opening

The Acting Chair, Kevin Jeffery, opened the meeting at 4pm.

2. Minutes from last meeting

The Minutes of the previous meeting held on 23 November 2006 were held over for review.

3. Business Arising

Namadgi plan

Neil Cooper and Dylan Kendall gave a presentation on behalf of TAMS (Territory And Municipal Services). The presentation covered the Namadgi Plan of Management and Fire Prevention Works for Namadgi and Tidbinbilla.

Points covered by the presentation were:

Namadgi Plan Of Management (POM)

- The Namadgi POM was written to, as far as possible, be consistent with the SBMP.

- A large number of stakeholder comments were received on the draft Namadgi POM and these, including those from Bushfire Council, are currently being reviewed. Submissions on fire management in the Namadgi POM have recently been passed on to the TAMS fire unit who will provide feedback on these comments.
- Bushfire Council is just one of many groups who commented on the fire management aspects of the Namadgi POM.
- There will be some changes made to the Namadgi POM as a result of the submissions received.
- The submissions received and the management response to these will be detailed in a submission report, which is a statutory document, and will go through the cabinet circulation process along with the final draft of the POM in early March 2007. This should see the POM finalised in late March 07.

Namadgi (and Tidbinbilla) Fire Prevention Works

- During the 2005/06 financial year 380km of fire trail maintenance and upgrade activities were completed in Namadgi NP and Tidbinbilla NR.
- Engineering surveys, flora and fauna surveys and DA/PA were completed for two proposed fire trails (Burnt Hill and Grassy Creek) during the 2005/06 financial year.
- Engineering feasibility assessments were also completed on the remainder of the proposed trails in the SBMP during 2005/06. As required by Ministers Hargraves and Corbell, a PA equivalent of an EIS will be completed for most of these trails during 2006/07 with, subject to approval, construction to commence on these trails in 2007/08.
- Fuel management activities undertaken in 2005/06 included slashing along roadsides, around identified assets and physical fuel removal around Mt Tennant Fire Tower and Facilities, Bulls Head facilities, several buildings at Tidbinbilla including the Depot and cross fostering pens and a couple of huts.
- Felling of standing dead pines was undertaken in an area of approximately 80ha in Jedbinbilla adjacent to Tidbinbilla. These were subsequently burnt early in 2006/07.
- The 2005/06 BOP included a prescribed burn in an area of standing native forest in Tidbinbilla NR. The fuels in this area were representative of fuels across large areas of Namadgi NP burnt in 2003. Despite being attempted on a number of occasions this burn would not sustain due to a high live to dead ratio and poorly developed surface fuels.
- Refilling of strategic water points in Namadgi was also completed.
- Fuel hazard assessment was undertaken throughout Namadgi over Summer 2005/06 with 0% of plots recording an Extreme Overall Fuel Hazard, 9% Very High, 39% High and 52% Moderate. These results were used to identify works to be included in the 2006/07 TAMS BOP, which was approved by ESA in September 2006 following a presentation to BFC.
- In 2006/07 the emphasis of access management activities is in and around the city rather than in Namadgi and Tidbinbilla. The 2006/07 TAMS BOP includes 54km

of trail assessment activities (DA/PA, engineering surveys etc.), 290km of trail maintenance activities (mostly chemical regrowth control but also some grading of heavily used trails that deteriorate rapidly) and 45km of new trail construction (grassy creek, Burnt Hill and Long Flat).

- The very dry conditions are hampering the implementation of access maintenance and upgrade activities.
- The dozer work on Burnt Hill and Grassy Creek has been completed and we are now awaiting significant rain before grading these new trails. PA/DA for Long Flat is with ACTPLA.
- In addition to the routine slashing activities, the BOP identifies an approx 700ha prescribed burn in Namadgi in the Potters Hill area where fuel hazard assessment identified SBMP standards were not being met – this area will be burnt in Autumn subject to the grading work being completed on the new Burnt Hill Fire Trail.
- Strategic water points including the water tanks at Orrrorral Valley and the Mt Clear Dam have been or are currently being refilled.
- The status of trails and other water points has recently been checked and works have been undertaken to clear trails that have been blocked by tree fall. The information collected during these checks has been provided to ESA who are preparing a pre-suppression plan.
- Fuel hazard assessments have commenced and will be used to identify fuel management activities for the 2007/08 TAMS BOP.

TAMS

No forced reduction of Personnel has taken place within Parks and Conservation, although through natural attrition 30 staff members have gone. It is now more difficult to meet the commitments of the MOU. The EBA states that personnel have 1 day off after 19 days on. As a result of changes in staff numbers, TAMS are proposing decreasing their commitment from 7 to 4 tankers and increasing the light units from 9 to 11. The 3 tankers would then be put on 2nd response. They could be crewed when required in an incident.

TAMS are currently going through a restructure/rebuilding process and are going through the selection criteria for personnel and including in the Duty Statements that certain positions are designated as fire roles. The Minister has agreed to Open Selection, particularly with Middle Management roles. TAMS is endeavouring to provide suitable fire response to the RFS, with the number of people currently remaining. They are currently meeting crewing requirements and using summer seasonals, this is however not sustainable in the longer term.

Michael Ross commented that there are less immediate 1st response units than in previous years. This will be a topic for discussion at a later date. TAMS have added 10 positions, which will be based on fire.

4. Listing of new Agenda items

Coronial Enquiry into 2003 Bushfires:

The Coroners Report into the 2003 Bushfires in Canberra has been handed down. The ESA Commissioner, Gregor Manson, advised that the ESA would be providing a

response to the Coroners Recommendations and that this was due by the end of February.

Geoff Butlers advised that the BFC should provide a separate response. This would need to be completed by the end of January. Council will hold an Extraordinary Meeting to formulate the response during the second week of January. Mr Manson offered to supply Council with the McLeod Recommendations and the Coroners Recommendations in a table format. Kevin Jeffrey suggested also using the “Lessons Learnt” document.

5. Correspondence

A letter was sent to the Chief Executive of TAMS, Mr Mike Zissler, in relation to the “Status of specific TAMS bushfire issues and actions”. Mr Neil Cooper and Mr Dylan Kendall were present at this meeting to provide answers to the issues raised.

6. General Business

7. Reports:

7.1 Michael Ross, RFS

Michael Ross advised that the fires in Victoria are still going. RFS personnel deployed to Victoria and NSW have returned. A second deployment to Victoria will take place tomorrow, 20 December. They will be based at Wangaratta. The Sky Crane, Delilah has also been deployed.

Michael Lonergan advised that personnel being deployed were not advised until 90minutes prior to their deployment that they were going. Michael Ross advised that he had no knowledge of this and that he would look into it.

Interviews have taken place for DCO RFS position, and a decision will be made in the next couple of days. There is currently an Acting DCO in place, and he would stay in the position until the end of January.

Mr Ross thanked the Council for their support and discussion throughout the year, expressing that having the Council in place is very beneficial to the RFS.

7.2 Fire Brigade

David Prince advised there are two fires currently burning in the ACT, one at Red Hill, which is currently being contained, and the other at Isaac Ridge. The helicopter is currently on its way to Isaac Ridge.

7.3 Michael Lonergan

Michael Lonergan expressed his opinion that Firelink should be taken off-line for the duration of the fire season, as he believes that it is not fully functional. He said that there is too much chatter happening and questioned its relevance for the RFS. This will be discussed as an agenda item at a future meeting. The Commissioner advised that this, and other issues, would be discussed at CAG. He is looking for a long-term solution and will be taking advice from a number of areas.

7.4 Bruce Leaver

Bruce advised that the Bureau of Meteorology has reported the December rainfall for the whole of South Eastern Australia is the lowest on record.

7.5 Gregor Manson, ESA Commissioner

This was Mr Manson's first meeting with Bushfire Council, having been in his position of Commissioner for a matter of weeks. He thanked Council for inviting him to the meeting. Although new to the role of Commissioner, he stated that he knows the area well. He has been asked by the Minister to provide him with a list of his priorities. He will be focussing on Training and Safety, Plant and Equipment and also on Prevention and Self Sufficiency. He will also be expanding the work already being undertaken on the interface.

The Commissioner stated that the ESA needs to look at different strategies in relation to which area the key areas that need to be protected. Strategies will need to change.

The Interim Budget is currently in place. The budget is currently running \$5m over, and the Commissioner has been given leeway to run over by \$3m this year. Next year the ESA will have to stay within budget. A budget strategy for the next three years will be in place by mid January. A number of changes will have to take place to ensure the organisation operates within budget. Mr Manson advised that he wants Council to be involved in the process and have input into the decision making process.

A decision will also need to be made as to whether or not the ACT can continue to support two Fire Services. It is imperative to ensure the capacity to deliver service is not impaired. A decision needs to be taken as to what assets will need to be protected. Government needs to be advised as to what is feasible.

David Prince commented that there is a need to look at the Coroners Report in conjunction with the McLeod Report and decide how best to implement the recommendations.

Michael Lonergan stated that the only commonality between the work of the RFS and Urban Fire Service is that they both deal with fire. The types of fires they deal with behave in a totally different manner. He suggested forging closer links with the NSW fire services.

David Prince stated that his concern is that the ACT is not a large enough jurisdiction to support all of the factors and that support from other agencies is needed.

8. Confirmation of next meeting

An Extraordinary meeting will be held during the second week in January to review and discuss the Coroners Report into the 2003 Bushfires.

The January meeting of the Council will take place at the ASOC, Fairbairn on Thursday 25 January at 3pm.

Kevin Jeffery closed the meeting at 6.00pm.