



# ACT BUSHFIRE COUNCIL MEETING

Meeting 4: Wednesday 4pm to 7pm, 1 July 2020

9 Amberley Avenue, FAIRBAIRN ACT 2609/ WebEx

## Members Present

Sarah Ryan – Chair, ACT Bushfire Council  
Natarsha Jakubaszek – Deputy Chair, ACT Bushfire Council  
Tony Bartlett – Member  
Steve Angus – Member  
Margaret Moreton – Member  
Cathy Parsons – Member  
Bhiamie Williamson – Member  
Marion Leiba – Member  
David Snell – Member  
Jeremy Watson – Member  
Nick Lhuede – Member

## Officials Present

Georgeina Whelan – ESA Commissioner  
Ray Johnson – ESA Deputy Commissioner  
Rohan Scott – A/g Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS)  
Chris Zeitlhofer – A/g Chief Officer, ACT Fire and Rescue  
Justin Foley, A/g Executive Branch Manager, Parks and Conservation Service, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate (EPSDD)  
David Foot, Executive Branch Manager Risk & Planning

## Meeting Information

Delegated Authority under the *Emergencies Act 2004*

Call-In Number: 02 6207 7160

## Invited Guest(s):

Mick Gentleman MLA, Minister for Police and Emergency Services  
Alicia Turner, Senior Advisor to Minister Gentleman  
Adam Leavesley, Bushfire Research Utilisation Manager PCS  
Wayne Dalton, A/g Ops Manager ACTRFS  
Julian Davies – A/g Manager, Membership ACTRFS

## Secretariat:

Kerri Clarke – Executive Officer, Commissioner's Office

**Apologies:** Kylie Coe - member

## Minutes

Item	Presenter
<b>1. Acknowledgement of country</b>	<b>Chair</b>

The Chair acknowledged the traditional custodians of the land that the meeting was on, the Ngunnawal people. She expressed acknowledgement and respect towards their continuing culture and the contributions they make to the life of this city and this region. She also acknowledged and welcomed other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people attending the meeting

## **2. Welcome (Introductions, apologies and nomination of member to monitor the performance checklist)** **Chair**

The Chair welcomed all to the WebEx meeting and apologies were noted. The Minister was warmly welcomed to the meeting.

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### 3. Declarations of interest

Chair

Council members acknowledged the potential conflict of interest declared by member Margaret Moreton. This was discussed at length later in the meeting with Margaret outlining the following:

- Margaret has been working as a consultant with ACT Government on community recovery before and after the 2019/20 bushfires.
- Margaret identified the likelihood that she will relocate to Victoria.

Margaret welcomed Council advice on how to manage this situation. The Chair and Council members agreed that Margaret is a valuable member of the Council and thanked her for her participation to date. Council members agreed to discuss this further out of session before deciding on the best course of action.

Action Item 0107-01	Action Officer/ Due
Chair to review guidelines and discuss options with Margaret out of session and work on a conflict of interest plan on how to manage the conflict moving forward. Deputy Commissioner Ray Johnson offered to be a sounding board for the drafted guidelines.	Chair August Meeting

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### 4. Minister Gentleman

Minister Gentleman spoke to this agenda item, and noted the following points:

- Council members were thanked for their assistance with the preparedness advice on the previous bushfire season.
- The Minister took the opportunity to congratulate the bushfire volunteers and the ESA team for a fantastic effort in ensuring that no urban areas were lost. The Minister further acknowledged the successful management of community expectations during this time.
- Council members further heard the Minister offer his acknowledgement of the massive effort from all involved including external jurisdictions.
- Minister Gentleman touched on the recent commentary in the media and noted the after-action review processes underway. The Minister noted that he felt all involved in the bushfire fight gave an outstanding performance.
- The Minister spoke about the current focus of recovery and acknowledged the Deputy Commissioner ESA, Ray Johnson (present in room) who has undertaken the Whole of Government 2019-20 Bushfire Review. The Minister noted that Ray's report will stand us in good stead in preparing for the next bushfire season

Council were welcomed to forward any questions to the Minister.

- The Chair took the opportunity to discuss the open action item and advice was sought from the Minister regarding his response to Council's preparedness report from last year. The Chair commented that in previous years they received an "agreed/ not agreed" response and queried what "noted" meant in his response.

The Minister, supported by Justin Foley, advised that "noted" refers to an acknowledgement of the recommendations and advised that an action plan to undertake Council recommendations is still to commence. Council noted that the recommendations made in their Preparedness Report can be "agreed" before an action plan commences. The Minister assured members that he takes Council recommendations very seriously.

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This advice was discussed and acknowledged by Council.

- Council member Tony Bartlett after outlining his history with the Council as background, asked the Minister whether a proper assessment should be undertaken to ensure adequate budget allocation to fuel management. Tony noted the ongoing climate change issue and issues with funding for land/ fire management and identified the difficulties surrounding this in the past.
- Secondly, Tony discussed his interest in the development occurring along the western edge of Canberra and advised the Minister of his concerns on whether houses would be able to withstand a fire similar or worse than 2003.

In response to these queries, the Minister advised the following:

- Since the last bushfire season, there has been a change in the planning strategy giving rise to a concentration of developments around major town centres rather than greenfield developments approaching ACT's borders. The Minister also advised that development in Bushfire Abatement Zones (BAZ) will continue with Council's advice. The Minister further assured Council that in working with Minister Berry and the Suburban Land Agency the correct precautions will be taken.
- In response to the budget query, the Minister assured Council that when attending budget bids, he ensures a future focus is foremost in any argument he makes. The Minister noted that costs have increased and assured Council that the land provided to the Suburban Land Agency turns into revenue for the government and this helps, however the Minister advised he will continue to work with the Chief Minister in his role as treasurer.

Council member Cathy Parsons addressed the Minister and queried when the *AS 3959 – Construction of buildings in a bushfire prone area* standard will be implemented in the ACT; and advised that a number of other States and Territories have acknowledged the Standard's importance and adopted it.

In response the Minister advised the following:

- Adopting this standard doesn't require a change to the Territory Plan;
- The Minister noted that this request came under the portfolio of Minister Ramsey and advised that he would follow this up with that Minister.

Council member Bhiemie Williamson sought support from the Minister on the recurring issue that Bushfire Council is experiencing in getting information from agencies/ directorates beyond ESA and PCS and asked the Minister for assistance. The Minister agreed to provide coercive assistance when needed.

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## 5. Acceptance of minutes and actions from previous meeting

Chair

The minutes from 3 June 2020 were accepted as a true and accurate record of the meeting with minor amendments made to the action items. Actions were reviewed and updated as per Appendix A.

Action Item 0107-02	Action Officer/ Due
<b>Council requested an additional item for the August meeting – a re-representation of adaptive management (Objective 9), noting that the information for this objective was not adequately provided to Council in the June meeting.</b>	<b>Commissioner August Meeting</b>

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## 6. Correspondence for noting

Chair

The Council noted the Chair's letter to Mr Ben Ponton, DG EPSDD – distributed with papers.

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**7. Report on activities attended on behalf of Council since the last meeting** **Chair**

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A SBMP Governance Committee Meeting occurred on 10 June 2020. The Chair advised Council of her attendance and provided feedback.

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**8. Presentation on PCS work on the impact of prescribed burns on the severity of the 2020 Orroral fire** **Adam Leavesley**

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This presentation was reviewed by the Minister and Council member with the following key points outlined:

- The Minister queried the regrowth of vegetation after a prescribed burn and its effects.

Adam noted that there wasn't usually much of a change and advised that high intensity fires result in higher rates of germination leading to a larger layer of vegetation regrowth. Adam spoke about the variables that make it difficult to judge whether fuel loads had been reduced. Council member Tony Bartlett concurred with this statement and advised Council on the paucity of studies conducted into the benefits of prescribed burning in areas like water catchments.

- Council member Nick Lhuede queried whether there had been any work on quantifying the impact of burnings on catchments.

Adam advised that he was currently working with university research teams on this topic and advised that the LIDAR and high-resolution imagery available will allow reviews into the sources of erosion and managing catchments in ACT. Adam assured Council that EPSDD are looking to improve the inclusion of bushfire risk into catchment models and are interested in research partnerships.

- Council member Tony Bartlett advised Council of the regrowth issues of Alpine Ash stands after fire, noting that this is an issue requiring attention.

The Commissioner took the opportunity to advise Council on the expansion in the Risk and Planning service within the planning and preparedness team. This was a direct result of ESA learnings from last season, and the Commissioner noted the multi-disciplinary/ all hazards approach to planning undertaken. The Council heard about ESA's intention and capacity to work more collaboratively with PCS and EPSDD so that the Incident Controllers are better informed about the landscape and assets that need protection. Council noted the changes occurring within the ESA and were advised that ESA and EPSDD are building capacity to address more actions in SBMP.

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**9. Presentation on Phoenix model analysis of the likely impacts on Denman Prospect from a bushfire burning through the forest blocks located to its west (*deferred*)** **Tony Scherl**

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This agenda item was deferred to August meeting.

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**10. SBMP Focus Objectives**

For this agenda item the Commissioner advised Council of a new method of information delivery that ESA has undertaken to be able to better consult with Council on SBMP objectives.

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Presentation

Objective 4. Effective firefighting operations by skilled and supported personnel

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The Chief Officer ACTRFS (CO RFS) spoke to this agenda item and in taking the paper as read, provided the following key points to Council:

- Council noted an increase in Peer Support Officer calls as staff are isolated due to Covid. With webinar and other technical means ESA has increased ability to reach staff seeking assistance.
  - A representative from RFS (Julian) spoke to this agenda item and advised Council that RFS is currently working on enhancing existing programs by rolling out a plan to mirror the SES
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recruitment process. This will allow RFS to forecast plan out a training calendar etc. The Commissioner advised ESA has created a common backbone between RFS and SES, allowing RFS to maintain pace with contemporary volunteer recruitment processes. Flexible membership will also be rolled out.

- Council noted ESA's expectation to launch an Agency wide recruitment portal next year, which will streamline the recruitment process.
- Council noted that Covid has not affected retention/ recruitment of volunteers. RFS reported quite steady numbers in those looking to join the service although there was a spike in EOIs after bushfires.
- CO RFS advised Council that in the collection of volunteer data, RFS will mirror SES which will allow all membership and volunteer data to have a single point of truth throughout the agency. As part of this there will be a single membership cell, which will collect data from members upon joining and leaving the service. This will assist in identifying triggers regarding retention.

The Chair commented that there will always be a turnover in volunteers and emphasised the criticality of reasonable retention rates as short tenure will mean that volunteers miss out on developing substantial bushfire fighting experience.

Council member Bhiemie Williamson advised Council that he had been approached to facilitate one of the training programs for volunteers and provided excellent feedback to Council on the experience advising that volunteers were keen to learn more about ATSI cultural asset management and cultural burning.

Council member Steve Angus commented on the previous frustrations of volunteers regarding a haphazard training schedule and advised that a 12-month set training calendar will be an excellent step forward.

- ESA discussed the review of IMT personnel underway, noting courses commencing this week for IMT teams. The Commissioner noted business rules had not been adequately set in the past, this has now been improved. She will now expect that ESA will regularly plan for training and exercises to ensure people's skills are refreshed. This will be part of her preparedness report.
- The CO RFS noted that RFS currently has 463 active members. He reported on the previous evening's induction of fire fighters in the ACT, noting that 24 were inducted with a further 24 planned. Council noted that this will take ACT numbers to around 500.
- ESA advised on capability requirements, and specifically on how ESA maintains capability over an extended campaign, noting that land managers/ ESA/ Bushfire Council will inform this conversation.
- The Commissioner noted her dissatisfaction with available opportunities for volunteers on the fireground and discussed solutions to allow volunteers to grow into command roles.
- Deputy Commissioner Ray Johnson introduced Jason Jones to Council, advising that Jason has been appointed to the newly created role of Capability, Support and Coordination. This newly formed section takes over the duties from the old logistics cell. This has been actioned to

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ensure capability is deployed efficiently. This was further discussed by members.

The Chair noted that the opportunity for extreme fire is going up with climate change.

- The Commissioner and Jason Jones spoke about the smoke issues over the summer and outlined that the ESA is working on plans for a worst-case scenario.

The Chair queried if EPSDD is included in the new planning strategy, doing the same things or connected to ESA.

- The Commissioner advised that ESA is waiting for formal recommendations from EPSDD.
- Justin Foley noted that EPSDD/ PCS are aware of the planning ESA are undertaking and have the expectation that a more holistic analysis and planning will be conducted after lessons learnt from this year's fires have concluded.
- Justin elaborated that EPSDD is connected to the land it manages 24/7 and will work with the ESA to build the right capability in the Territory for fire suppression.

Council member Tony Bartlett queried the issue regarding skill set and capability for large scale backburning.

- The CO RFS spoke to this and advised Council on the RFS Prescribed Burning training program, conducted by Cameron Leary.
- Further the Commissioner advised that she has written to EPSDD to identify more opportunities for RFS to train under PCS staff. She noted that training options and opportunities to undertake back burning are drying up nationally.
- Tony commented on the shared experiences and past implementation is important.

Council member Nick Lhuede queried the relationships between NSW and ACT.

- The CO RFS advised that NSW is heavily reliant upon ACT, as we are quite well resourced and further advised Council on the benefits the new ACTF&R Enterprise Bargaining Agreement will provide in assisting with resourcing.

In closing, the Commissioner advised Council that ESA is hesitant to move forward until it receives the recommendations handed down by Royal Commission.

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## Presentation

Objective 5. The necessary equipment and resources to respond to and extinguish bushfires

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The Executive Branch Manager Capability, Coordination and Support spoke to this agenda item and advised Council of the following key points:

- ESA's 10-year program forecast for vehicles
- Council attention was drawn to Priority 3 – reduction of emissions and ESA's intentions to tap into emerging technology (e.g. electric fire truck) was discussed.
- Simulations increase driving experience without adding to driving time on the road.
- Council noted that as a standard operating procedure, ESA reviewed and inspected all appliances after the bushfire season. At present 51% of after season maintenance had been completed.
- CO RFS noted that ESA are building a new reiteration of vehicles that will last 20 years.
- Synergies between TCCS and ESA were discussed, noting that TCCS have fleet workshops like ESA.

Council member Steve Angus commented that more flexibility is needed in the repair of vehicles that are

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damaged. ESA noted this and advised on potential consolidation of damaged vehicles from wider afield to make it more attractive to an external provider. There was further discussion on the flexibility needed to obtain unusual spare parts.

ESA further noted that better relationship with brigades will assist in working collaboratively to ensure safety and adequate equipping.

Council was satisfied that MDT capability had been addressed, noting that MDTs available are not always adequate. MDT was further discussed.

A Learning Management System presentation was provided to Council, with ESA advising of the benefits of this process.

The Chair noted and appreciated the new presentation format for SBMP Objectives. This will assist the Council in what is needed to write its annual Preparedness Report to the Minister.

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CO RFS advised Council that RFS does not record response times like ACTAS and F&R. However, Council noted that response times are getting quicker. Council member Steve Angus advised Council on why it is very hard with volunteers to identify or improve response times.

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<b>11. Standing Item: Update on the Draft Regional Fire Management Plan</b>	<b>EPSDD</b>
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The report was taken as read

Justin Foley spoke to this agenda item and advised on the progress with RFMP, noting the November deadline. Justin advised that a full report will be forwarded to Council in September.

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<b>12. Standing Item- Report from the SBMP Governance Committee</b>	<b>CO ACTRFS</b>
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The Commissioner thanked all for their contributions towards achieving support for the SBMP across government.

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<b>13. Officials' reports for noting:</b>	<b>Officials</b>
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<b>12. 1 EPSDD Report</b>	<b>EPSDD</b>
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Nil to Report

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<b>12.2 Commissioner's Report</b>	<b>Commissioner</b>
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The final AAR report should be available within the next month.

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<b>12.3 Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service Report</b>	<b>CO ACTRFS</b>
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The report was taken as read. There were no questions.

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<b>14. Standing item – ACT Bushfire Council Business Plan</b>	<b>Chair</b>
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The Chair reminded all members and attendees of the following:

- Council Members who have carriage of SBMP Objectives for discussion at the September and October meetings to assemble their questions for presenters.
  - The annual report of implementation of the BOP will be included in next month's agenda.
  - Objective 9 will be revisited next month.
  - Continuation of conflict of interest discussion will occur at next meeting
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**15. Any other business****Chair**

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- Council member Cathy Parsons queried when the budget will be handed down.

The Commissioner advised that this will not be until next year and highlighted to Council that the budget does not affect ESA's operational capability, but ESA will not receive any further funding for additional projects until it has been handed down.

Council member Cathy Parsons further queried the budget for PCS, however as Justin Foley was offline Cathy was advised by ESA that budgets are Cabinet in Confidence until such time as Cabinet has reviewed them. It was noted that this will not be until later in the year.

- Council member Marion Leiba queried whether the RFS training in prescribed burning has an Indigenous expert. This was taken on notice.

<b>Action Item 0107-03</b>	<b>Action Officer/ Due</b>
<b>Council requested details on RFS prescribed burning training, and specifically whether it has Indigenous expert input.</b>	<b>CO RFS August Meeting</b>

- The Chair officially thanked Lynda Scanes for her time and service as secretariat to the ACT Bushfire Council.

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**16. Review and adoption of action items from this meeting – out of session.****Chair**

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**17. In camera meeting if required - No****Chair**

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**18. Council's performance checklist – Nil****Chair**

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**19. Close****Chair**

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The meeting concluded at 7.11pm

Next meeting: 4pm, 5 August 2020

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## Appendix A

### ACTION ITEMS – ACT BUSHFIRE COUNCIL

Action Items			At 1 July 2020	
Ref	ACTION	DUE	ACTION OFFICER	STATUS UPDATE
0107-01 (2020)	Chair to review and discuss options with Margaret out of session and work on a conflict of interest plan on how to manage the conflict moving forward. To be discussed further at next meeting.	August Meeting	Chair	0107 – Action Opened.
0107-02 (2020)	Council requested an adaptive management (Objective 9), noting that information for this objective was not adequately provided to Council.	August Meeting	Commissioner	0107 – Action Opened. The Commissioner advised she had met with the Chair and discussed options.
2019100 2-2	Documents from June to December 2018 to be put on SharePoint 20200603-04 Action: Arrange ACT Government login for all Bushfire Council Members to access meeting papers and presentations on ESA G Drive	Sept Meeting	Commissioner	0107 – Council advised that ESA will be providing Council members with an iPad and SharePoint access all papers to an online platform. Members will also be provided with an ACT Gov logon.
2020304 -13	ESA to provide formal advice on public comment conflict of interest for Council members.	August Meeting	Secretariat	In progress – agenda item for discussion. Someone from ACT GOV to provide input in what is expected.
2020040 6-08 (1)	The BFC Chair to write to EPSDD Planning to request an update on where the Cabinet Submission is up to in relation to AS 3959:2018 being incorporated into the ACT Territory Plan and to request that a briefing be provided to Council on the agreements with developers on the fire protection measures to be applied at the final western boundaries of the suburbs of Denman Prospect and Whitlam, including the expected locations of edge roads and asset protection zones and the details of the proposed thinning of the red stringybark forest.	1 July 2020	Chair	Added to papers. To be sent to EPSDD. Implementation strategy in EPSDD.
2020040 6-08 (3)	Neil Cooper to arrange a Phoenix model analysis of the likely impacts on Denman Prospect from a bushfire burning through the forest blocks located to its west, following discussions with Tony Bartlett and Nick Lhuede on the specific modelling	1 July 2020	Neil Cooper	Presentation to be added to the July Meeting Agenda 0107-Deferred to next meeting (August).

	requirements.			
2020040 6-13	The CO ACTRFS to seek further advice in relation to making BFC reports into the level of bushfire preparedness (each bushfire season) that are provided to the Minister for Police and Emergency Services be publicly available on the ESA website; including any restrictions on reports from recent years.	Ongoing	Commissioner and CO ACTRFS	Commissioner advised this is ongoing– Tony Bartlett to provide details to publish.
2020060 3-8	Provide Council with a copy of the draft After Action Review Report and add to the July Agenda	1 July 2020	Commissioner	0107-Commissioner noted that they have been delayed and as soon as they are ready, they will be distributed
2020060 3-12.2	Send Council the relevant transcripts of the Royal Commission hearings when they are available and add to the July Agenda.	August	Secretariat	0107 – Council provided with link to hearings. ESA to provide past and future dates on ESA hearings.
2020060 3-12.3	Greg Potts to arrange a meeting report on Farm Fire Wise (FFW) in the Bushfire Abatement Zone (BAZ) with data and an explanation of the constraints to meeting the target of 100%.	2 Sept 20	Greg Potts	Follow up date to be provided.

<b>Action Items (CLOSED)</b>	
<b>Ref</b>	<b>As at 1 July 2020</b>
20200603-9	Facilitate meetings pre and post Council Meetings with key stakeholders to provide Council access with the information they have requested in line with their business plan. The Commissioner, CO ACTRFS and Chair to discuss the outcome out of session.
20200406-07	The BFC Chair to draft a response to the Minister for Police and Emergency Service (MPES) seeking clarification to his response to the recommendations in Council's 2018-19 Bushfire Season Preparedness Report.
20191204-9	ESA to advise Council if they provided comment on the Canberra Nature Park Draft Reserve Management Plan, and if so, provide a copy of those comments to Council.
200304-10	EPSDD PCS to provide the Secretariat with an electronic version of the BOP Quarterly Report to be circulated to Council members out of session.
20200406-08 (2)	Secretariat to add to the June BFC Business Plan a presentation by Greg Potts and Scott Seymour on the current status of the Bushfire Management Standards (including an ACT & NSW comparison) and the review of Fire Management Zones. Greg Potts undertook to provide his paper/presentation prior to the meeting.
20200406-08 (4)	Secretariat to send the ACT Bushfire Management Standards to Council Members.
20200406-08 (5)	After each BFC meeting, a short meeting between the CO ACTRFS the Council members whose focus objectives are in the Business Plan two months ahead will be held to discuss and agree on the nature of the information that BFC would like presented at that meeting.
20200406- 12	Secretariat to update the BFC Business Plan to reflect requests for information arising from the May meeting and to add Nick Lhuede as a Council member who will focus on objectives 3, 7, 8 11 of the SBMP version 4.
20200406-14 (1)	Secretariat to ensure the WebEx meeting invite and details is sent out to all Council Member and Officials.
20200406-14 (2)	The Chair, David Snell and Tony Bartlett to review the section in the BFC Terms of Reference that requires that after a new SBMP is made the Commissioner must conduct an assessment of the adequacy of the resources to deliver the Plan and must give that assessment to the BFC and the Minister; and then provide a recommendation from BFC to the Commissioner and the CO ACTRFS.