



ACT Bushfire Council Meeting

1 April 2015
16:00 to 19:00
Black Mountain 1 & 2
Meeting Rooms
ACTESA Headquarters

Chair:	Kevin Jeffery	Secretariat:	Tony Hanson
Attendees:	Ms Christine Goonrey, Member Mr Michael Lonergan, Member Ms Cathy Parsons, Member Ms Marian Leiba, Member Mr Andrew Joyce, Member Mr Steve Angus, Member	Mr Andrew Stark, Chief Officer ACT Rural Fire Service Mr Conrad Barr , A/g Chief Officer ACT Fire & Rescue Tony Hanson, Acting Manager, Bushfire, Planning and Coordination	

Minutes

Agenda item: 1.0 – Apologies **Presenter: Chair**

The chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting.

Apologies received from:

- Neil Cooper, TAMS Manager Forestry and Fire Management
- Tony Bartlett, Member
- Dominic Lane, Commissioner
- Nick Lhuede, Group Manager, EMRSDS

Agenda item: 2.0 – Disclosure of “Conflict of Interests” of Council Members **Presenter: Chair**

No Conflicts of Interest were reported by Council Members.

Agenda item: 3.0 – Acceptance of minutes of previous meeting **Presenter: Chair**

The minutes from the previous meeting, of 4 March 2015, were accepted as a true record.

Moved: Marion Leiba. Seconded: Steve Angus.

Agenda item: 4.0 – Update on action items arising from previous meetings **Presenter: Chair**

Item 1 - Council Members to review Terms of Reference in early 2015 and provide feedback to Commissioner *Council Members to consider any amendments and provide to Tony Hanson prior to the next meeting. Discussion to occur at the April Meeting.*

Council agreed that Tony Hanson prepare and present an options paper at the May meeting exploring record-keeping at meetings.

Item 2 - Tony Hanson to explore avenues for Indigenous participation on the ACT Bushfire Council for Council’s consideration in early 2015. *Minister has agreed to seek Expressions of Interest for vacancies on Council include seeking a person who has experience in Indigenous land management.*

Council agreed that this was now “closed”.

Item 3 - Secretariat to follow up Ministers response to BFC Annual Report:

Ministerial response imminent: Council agreed this was now “closed”.

Item 4 - Council would like an update on the Treasury Review

Updated to a request for a briefing on the Treasury Review post-cabinet but pre-public release.

Item 5 - - Coordinate presentation for next meeting on Forestry Production in the ACT

Council agreed that with Tony Langdon attending the May meeting, this was "closed".

Item 6: New action item: that Council requests a briefing on the "as-is" Study of the ESA Review.

Item 7: New action item: Council requests more information on numbers and composition of attendees at RFS scheduled training events.

Agenda item: 5.0 – Correspondences

Presenter: Chair

No correspondence was received or sent.

Agenda item: 6.0 – Commissioner’s Report to Bushfire Council

Presenter: Chair

The report was introduced by the Chair. (Attachment A)

Discussion: In regard to the ‘Meet the Volunteers BBQ’ on the evening of 25 February 2015, it was suggested that more of these very constructive events were held in future. An issue was raised, that the Commissioner had classified this as "consultation" with volunteers, however it should not be counted as such as it was a very one-way interaction. Were more traditional consultation events planned? Conrad Barr advised the meeting that a meeting was scheduled next week between the Minister and volunteer representatives, to discuss the progress of the Review.

The meeting was satisfied with this response.

Concern was raised that the resourcing of volunteer bodies was becoming inadequate, but the meeting was assured that the workload was under control.

The Council agreed that an Action Item be added (Item 7) to source a briefing on the situation.

In regard to vegetation management and power infrastructure, Mr Stark outlined how, as a result of the 2009 Royal Commission findings on the Victorian fires, the ACT had set up a review of technical standards of vegetation management and power lines.

The meeting noted this advice, and requested updates on this in future as the review progressed.

Action: The meeting noted the Commissioner’s report.

Agenda item: 7.0 – RFS Chief Officer’s Report to BFC

Presenter: Mr Stark

Mr Stark briefly summarised the content of his report (Attachment B), making the point that while it had been a significant fire season, reflected by the statistics on incidents and attendances, no event was particularly significant in size. March was mainly occupied with official burns with volunteers either conducting the work, or assisting Parks in Namadgi etc. As shown in the report, a large amount of training was undertaken, and he explained Tasmania had developed new IMT training with a commonwealth grant, with the aim of it being used for the states with small jurisdiction agencies: Tasmania, Northern Territory, South Australia and the ACT (the larger agency states could develop their own). Mr Stark referred to the list of training courses on page 2 of his report, and explained that, although some were pilots that normally wouldn't confer recognised qualifications on participants, in this case the pilots had been accredited before delivery, so participants' new skills were recognised.

Discussion: The meeting discussed issues around the goal of increasing collaborative/co-operative work between fire management agencies, noting that scheduling events that enabled everyone to attend was an ongoing challenge, but that attitudes to co-operation between Parks staff and volunteers was steadily improving, in contrast to what was observed during attendance at Victorian bushfires.

A request was made that the Council be supplied with information on numbers and composition of attendees at burns and training, with a view to tracking the progress of increasing co-operative fire efforts between agencies.

Action: Andrew Stark to provide information on numbers and composition of training attendees (RFS) (Action Item 7)

Agenda item: 8.0 – Land Managers Report to BFC

Presenter: Chair

Discussion: The Chair presented the report to the meeting (Attachment C), and it was agreed that the Hardy Range fire line photos were impressive. The Council commended the flow of information on this, and that the conduct of the official burns was of a high standard. The meeting discussed burns, agreeing that conditions had been particularly suitable, that fuels had dried quickly, and that the Camelback burn which was originally queried by some had provided a key strategic firebreak.

The meeting discussed a differing in timelines for BOPs between the Council, and TAMS; the Council's timetable as agreed was that BOPs be provided to the Council by May, for consideration in June, and then proceeding to the Commissioner by July. The meeting resolved that the original timeline should stand, and it would expect the BOPs to be supplied in May.

A question was raised regarding the section on fire trails in the lower Cotter catchment (pp 2 – 3) and why this was now being proposed. Mr Stark outlined how the number of trails in the Blue Range area had reduced, as some in the previously commercial pine forest area were made dormant. ACTEW had wanted all the trails closed due to sediment risk to the dams, so this report might incite some discussion. The timing of the paper was also discussed, with concerns raised that it pre-empted the BFC's previously-agreed role of visiting the area and providing advice. The Council was assured that this paper (written within the ESA) was for comment by the Directorate only at this stage, and to assist the BFC in its future deliberations on the issue.

Mr Hanson advised the group that Forestry Production was on the next agenda, and arranging a speaker for the meeting was discussed. Mr Hanson undertook to seek advice as to the expected role of the Bushfire Council regarding the position paper.

Action: Tony Hanson to seek advice as to Bushfire Council role in relation to the position paper (Action Item 8).

Agenda item: 9.0 – Research Update

Presenter: Rick McRae

Mr McRae presented information on the three topics listed on the agenda, plus some brief items of interest, accompanied by slides of information and pictures.

Advances in forecasting blow up events

The meeting was briefed on some recent collaborative work by a group of experts on fire and weather, which included the presenter, on pyrocCB events. Australia provides a very interesting arena of study for fire/weather research, and the group was shown a study of a group of fires west of Sydney, in the Wollomi and Grose Valley areas. A second paper is in production on fire dynamics on the ground interacting with pyroCB clouds, and how fire behaviour can be studied using weather tools: radar, measurements, soundings and satellite pictures.

Discussion: In response to a question about how this research could be used in fire management, the group was told that ACTESA were already collaborating with the NSW Fire Service to test if predictions using these methods were proven accurate. They were particularly looking at whether triggers which occurred in various combinations then actually caused severe events. Uses for this included preventing people, and in particular fire crews, from heading into areas which would become too dangerous.

The group heard how international discussion and collaboration was mitigating the limitations of research in a sparse measurement environment (Australia) with contributions from a range of people with access to different data and methods. Civil aviation was finding this information useful as well, and it's easy to show that studying fires overseas feeds directly into our knowledge, and vice-versa.

Introduction of new Japanese Weather Satellite

Mr McRae briefed the group on a new Japanese satellite that was soon to come on line, which will massively enhance our weather knowledge with more data, and in almost-real time. NOAA is already using satellites with this capability, so we know what Himawari-8 will provide us. He illustrated this with images of flames; with 10-minute updates, a fire's movement can be assessed very accurately, as it happens.

The meeting hoped that it would be available for next fire season, saw great value for early detection in remote areas, and discussed its potential in relation to GeoScience Australia's Sentinel system. NASA is already developing very relevant information in this area with their existing satellite resources.

National developments re BOM forecasting for El Nino

Mr McCrae confirmed that scientific consensus is, an el nino is imminent and probably already in play. However, it is also being affected by some other global weather phenomena: the Pacific decadal oscillation (which affects primarily the northern pacific, and is a much longer cycle than the southern oscillation index: el nino), and the Indian Ocean dipole. The latter might still send moist air to SE Australia from the North West, supplying needed rain before the el nino drought

becomes established, as current soil moisture levels are very low for the season. A full-blown el nino is expected to develop over Winter: a large Kelvin wave is moving across the Pacific.

Other items of interest

- a) The group passed around a new book *Fire Spread in Australian Vegetation* (CSIRO & AFAC).
- b) Another book was also circulated: *Bushfire Fuel Classification* (CSIRO & AFAC), which is helping predictions of fuel load levels, and will also help with fire spread prediction systems.
- c) A new paper was mentioned: *A Semi-mechanistic model for predicting the moisture content of fine litter*, a collaboration between a large number of researchers, which will help develop a moisture index for fuel.
- d) The meeting viewed images of smoke runs, illustrating how the NSW RFS (TAPM RMN) was modelling the smoke run of the current burns in the ACT ranges. Discussion of this revealed that at present, the public can only benefit from this through air quality health warnings issued by the authorities, but this work will add to current knowledge of how smoke behaves in the atmosphere.

The meeting moved a vote of thanks to Mr McRae for compiling and presenting a very interesting collection of information and images.

Agenda item: 10.0 – Bushfire Council Terms of Reference

Presenter: Chair

The Chair introduced this item, stating that it was the feeling of some members that a frank exchange of views, and the mentioning of potentially sensitive information, was being affected by the requirement that the minutes of BFC meetings be made public. This issue drove the discussion of the Terms of Reference.

Discussion:

It was agreed that this review was an opportunity to explore improvements that were possible, and members wondered if the requirement to publish the minutes was preventing the Council from being given valuable but sensitive information; having access to this more comprehensive and timely information would enable the Council to better advise the ESA.

Reasons for the requirement to publish the minutes were briefly canvassed, as-was the conundrum between the public wanting to be assured of what was discussed in these meetings, but that this was preventing the Council from performing its role to the maximum extent.

The meeting heard that the ESA was very keen to provide more comprehensive information to the Council, but that publication of such information could become contentious.

The idea of publishing a set of minutes that recorded decisions and other brief information, while retaining a fuller transcript for use by members was raised, and discussed at length. Some members wondered what standing such notes would have under things such as FOI, coroners enquiries, or questions to the Minister in the Assembly.

It was mostly agreed that having access to full meeting notes for future reference would be helpful, with some members expressing frustration at trying to remember why certain decisions were made in the past, as the official minutes did not make this clear.

The current practice of officially not minuting certain discussions meant there was no official record; likewise, entities invoking cabinet-in-confidence had the same result, with the memories of members being the only repository.

There was a lengthy discussion of what was discoverable by the various official mechanisms, and whether any detailed transcripts of meetings could be kept completely confidential. That members could not recall why certain decisions had been made, with no information to back them up, showed the current situation was not working. Likewise, the inability of the Council to source timely and detailed information due to its sensitivity was hampering the Council in its work, and thus the Commissioner and the Minister were not getting the best advice.

The meeting resolved that it would defer a decision, pending Mr Hanson developing and presenting an options paper exploring mechanisms available, and canvassing their costs vs benefits.

No other issues with the review of the Terms of Reference were raised.

Action: Tony Hanson to develop an options paper around meeting record keeping and

present to the May 2015 meeting of the Bushfire Council (Action Item 1).

Agenda item: 11.0 – Other Business

Presenter: Chair

An issue was raised concerning an item from the previous meeting on the public representation of members to the media. Mr Hanson noted that this was clearly governed by the *ACT Government Boards and Committees Handbook (2009)*.

The meeting agreed that the Council did not aim to embarrass the Commissioner, and that the agreed course of action was for the Chair to raise contentious issues with the Commissioner separately, then take the results of that back to the group, before anything was made official.

Agenda item: 12.0 – Next Meeting

Presenter: Chair

The Council noted that its next meeting is scheduled for 6 May 2015, and that the feature topic will be Forestry Production in the ACT.

Closing: The meeting was declared closed at 7pm. The next meeting is scheduled for 6 May 2015.



ACT
Government



EMERGENCY SERVICES COMMISSIONER

REPORT TO THE ACT BUSHFIRE COUNCIL

1 April 2015

Bushfire Council Members – Expression of Interest

The Minister has approved the calling of Expressions of Interest to fill vacancies on the ACT Bushfire Council. The EOI is expected to be advertised in April 2015. Candidates with experience in Indigenous Land Management will be actively encouraged to apply.

Lower Cotter Catchment

I recently wrote to the TAMS Director-General providing an ESA position paper on the Lower Cotter Catchment. The position paper has the objective of identifying options to maintain a high quality water catchment and improve public safety. ESA will be working with TAMS to identify priorities for the 2015–16 Bushfire Operational Plan. A copy of the ESA position paper is attached for Council's information.

Women in Emergency Services Strategy Project

The Women in Emergency Services Strategy Project is progressing well and consultation with staff and external stakeholders is underway. Senior staff and frontline managers attended workshops on 4 and 23 February on communications and gender issues delivered by Ms Avril Henry.

Incident Management System (IMS) Review

ESA representatives attended a workshop at NSW Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) in Sydney on 11 February 2015 to get a better understanding of their Emergency Management Operations System (EMOS). The EMOS is a standalone web base used by the NSWRFS.

Review of Enabling Support Functions

In addition to the Treasury Review, staff in ESA have been participating in an internal review of our enabling support functions. Staff in our support services and back office functions have mapped their activities and the review has moved to the next stage, which is identifying options for improvements ("to-be"). Six (6) working groups of about six (6) staff in each, met on 26 February and 25 March 2015 discussing and presenting options for change in a range of key areas. This work will support ESA in our strategic reform agenda throughout 2015.

Working Group to progress 'Power Infrastructure and Vegetation Management'

ESA has been coordinating the first meeting of a whole of government working group on 1 April to advance key actions around power infrastructure outlined in the SBMP. It is expected an action plan will be able to be developed to guide a whole of government approach to key priorities.

AFAC and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC Conference

The 2015 AFAC and Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC Conference will be held in Adelaide from 1-3 September 2015 at the Adelaide Convention Centre.

Ministers Meet the Volunteers BBQ

Minister for Police and Emergency Services, Ms Joy Burch MLA attended the 'Meet the Volunteers BBQ' on Wednesday evening of 25 February 2015.

Commissioners meeting with Bushfire Council Chair

I met with the Kevin Jeffery, BFC Chair on Thursday 26 March 2015 to discuss a number of issues, with the key issue being a request for additional information from ESA to support the Council. I plan to formalise an approach over the next month on how ESA might effectively provide information to Council going forward.

Dominic Lane
Emergency Services Commissioner
31 March 2015



Working in partnership to protect and preserve life, property and the environment in the ACT

Chief Officer's report to Bushfire Council – 1 April 2015

RFS Ops March

Operations have focussed on the Hazard Reduction Program, with all Brigades participating in both BOP Burns allocated to Volunteer Brigades and assisting Parks with most of their BOP Burns. In addition, we have involved NSW RFS, particularly units from the Lake George Zone in number of Hazard Reductions to develop cross border communication and coordination.

Public Events/Community Awareness

RFS has had displays the Snowy Hydro Southcare Aeromedical Open Day and the opening of the new South Tuggeranong Fire Rescue Station Open Day

Six Brigades have attended community fetes/events to undertake community engagement, as well as a combined presence at SkyFire during March.

Training

Another Bush Fire Fighter Course has been completed with assessment undertaken at a Hazard Reduction on the last weekend in March

This course had 15 participants, of which a third are female. These are new members of Rivers, Tid, Hall and Guises Creek Brigades.

Other training through the month included:

- completion of a new Sector Leader/Divisional Commander Course delivered by NSW National Parks at Hume Training Centre with participants from RFS including Parks.
- A navigation training sessions part of the Advanced Fire Fighter Program
- 4WD Training Course
- AIIMS Training (Introduction to AIIMS)
- Asbestos Awareness Training (White Card)

RFS Personnel including Officers from Parks and Conservation, together with IMT staff from other areas of ESA, are participating in some pilot training courses of new National IMT Training.

These training packages have been developed in partnership between, ACT – SA – TAS – NT, lead by Tasmania with a Commonwealth Training Grant.

ACT Rural Fire Service

GPO Box 158 Canberra City ACT 2601
9 Amberley Ave Fairbairn ACT 2609
Ph. (02) 6207 8609 Fax. (02) 6207 8743
www.rfs.act.gov.au

**A member of the ACT Emergency
Services Agency**



The project has developed new training packages in line with the new Public Safety Units of Training for Incident Management.

The courses are being evaluated by a combination of students and subject matter experts.

Following the pilot and any subsequent modifications these packages will be available for delivery.

The program as planned:

Dates allocated for pilot	Package	State	Preferred flexible delivery style for pilot from options 1-5	Trainee	SME	Venue
27th April - 1st May	Planning	Northern Territory	5 days face to face with pre-course assignment			Alice Springs Fire Station
11 th – 15th May	Incident Control	South Australia	5 days face-to-face with pre course assignment.			SACFS Training Centre, Brukunga.
12 th – 14 th May	Public Information	A.C.T.	3 days face-to-face.			ESA Training Centre, Hume.
19 th – 22nd May	Operations	Tasmania	4 days face-to-face delivery plus pre course assignment			TFS Training Facility, Cambridge.
26 th – 28 th May	Safety	Tasmania	2 days face-to-face delivery with pre course assignment			TFS Training Facility, Youngtown.
9 th – 12th June	Logistics	South Australia	4 days face-to-face with pre course assignment			SACFS Training Centre, Brukunga.

The ACT has taken the lead on the Public Information Package and is hosting the pilot which has enabled us to have additional personnel participate.

International Women’s Day

The RFS hosted an ESA wide event on the 8th March on International Women’s Day, to celebrate the role of Women in ESA. It was a family event held at the RFS Helibase and Andrea Ho, the manager of ABC here in Canberra spoke.



ACT
Government



Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS) Land Managers update for March 2015

1. We are at the end of the third quarter for delivery of the BOP. All indications are that we are on schedule to deliver the BOP however due to all staff being involved heavily in the concentrated prescribed burning program over the past few weeks we have not had a chance to finalise quarterly reports.
2. The forecast weather conditions over Easter look damp and we will pull up burning before-hand with the view to resuming (weather depending) after the Easter break.
3. As far as burning is concerned, Parks have completed 1400 ha and have another 1900 ha currently being implemented and due to close before the end of this week. This equates to a completion of 8 of the 11 large rural burns being finished. We still have Honeysuckle (2700ha) and Bendora Arboretum (270ha) to do and they will be looked at after Easter.
4. We will be postponing two of the larger rural burns – the first at Lone Pine (600ha) is no longer required as the NSWRFs have burnt in NSW just south of this location and there is no longer any strategic advantage in undertaking this burn – it also allows us to retain some of the “long unburnt” forest within the ACT. The second is at Warks Road (260ha) which was a carryover from previous years – we have completed three burns in this area in the last 2 years and as such it does not provide us with any strategic advantage to undertake at this stage. We will adjust our Regional Fire Plans and place these burns into the forward years.
5. ACT Parks have been able to rotate all our IMT people through the various roles as we maintain a full IMT during the course of the current prescribed burning program – this is fantastic opportunity for these people to exercise in their roles and gain valuable experience.
6. We have completely updated and refined our Fire Management component of the web site to make it far more advisory and informative. Please go to the following address to look for yourselves;

http://www.tams.act.gov.au/parks-recreation/bushfire_management/prescribed-burns

People can now subscribe to RRS feeds which can become an automatic email notification of updates and progress.

Future amendments will be Google map embedded in page enabling zooming to see burn shape with an associated information box relating to each burn.

People can now subscribe to RRS feeds which can become an automatic email notification of updates and progress.

7. Parks have been involved in several joint burns with NSWNPWS and we continue to share resources to further enhance working relationships.
8. Last week we had planned to commence a large burn and had crews in place however we diverted all our Parks resources to fire suppression to assist the NSWRFs in containing a prescribed burn that had escaped its control lines. This was located just south of Lone Pine.
9. ACT Parks have three staff that have had Posters accepted for the AFAC conference in Adelaide. Two of these posters reflect the diverse range of research Parks are involved with and in particular

the national curing project and the post burn monitoring using satellite data. In addition we are working very closely with a number of Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC projects with much of the research being undertaken here in the ACT.

10. The Parks Fire Unit has now completed a promotional video that shows the range of things we do – great for staff recruitment and field days. I will provide a copy at a future meeting.
11. Work on the Mt Franklin Road upgrade is ongoing and we still estimate that the project will be complete by May.
12. The 2015/16 BOP will be ready in late July – currently developing and meeting.

Neil Cooper
Manager
Fire, Forests and Roads
ACT Parks and Conservation Service

30th March 2015