

## ACT Bushfire Council

### Meeting Minutes

22 March, 2007  
3.00pm – 5.55pm

Conference Room  
Air Support Operations Centre  
4 Point Cook Avenue Fairbairn

#### Attendance:

Kevin Jeffery	Chair
Geoff Butler	Member
Stephen Wise	Member
Tony Fearnside	Member
Simon Katz	Member
Bruce Leaver	Member
Tony Bartlett	Member
Conrad Barr	ex Officio
Gregor Manson	ex Officio
Bronwyn Mills	Secretariat

#### Apologies:

Peter Kanowski	Member
Michael Ross	ex Officio

#### 1. Opening

Kevin Jeffery opened the meeting at 3.00pm.

#### 2. Minutes from last meeting

The minutes from the last meeting, held in February were presented.

Motion to accept the minutes with changes as proposed:

**Proposed:** Kevin Jeffery

**Seconded:** Tony Fearnside

Accepted unopposed.

#### 3. Correspondence

##### Out:

A letter was sent out to the Minister and the Commissioner regarding the restructure of Emergency Services Agency

##### In:

1. A letter was received from the Minister responding to the correspondence sent to him regarding the Coroners report. The letter outlined the Governments response to the report.

2. An email was received from the Minister in response to the advice given to the Minister on the restructure of ESA.

## 4. Business Arising

### 4.1 *Is Council making a submission on the proposed Coroners Act?*

Tony Fearnside raised his concerns regarding the untimely manner in which a coroners report is issued. The Coronial process is too lengthy and has an adversarial element, and thus the ability to learn the dispassionate technical lessons in a timely manner is difficult.

Tony Fearnside was supported by Bruce Leaver in his suggestion that after major incidents a technical enquiry should be completed with a panel of experts in the field.

**Action:** Tony Fearnside to draft a brief for the Minister to be discussed at the next meeting.

### 4.2 *ESA Restructure*

The Commissioner briefed the Council on the ESA's Three year Business Plan and discussed his role and that of Council as provided for in the Act.

The *Emergencies Act 2004* places responsibility on the Commissioner to provide a management structure and business systems to deliver the services required of the *Emergencies Act 2004*. The Commissioner and senior officers developed the Three Year Business Plan to achieve this and provide for public comment, reporting and accountability.

The process of developing the ESA Three year Business Plan was conducted by completing a thorough internal and some external review of the administrative systems and structures within ESA. The ESA Three year Business Plan will be reviewed in September with public comments being sought and encouraged at any time.

The priorities in the ESA Three year Business Plan provide the focus areas for the business improvement of ESA following the review.

Table 1. An overview of background issues to Three Year Business Plan and revised structure of ESA.

<b>Administration</b>	<b>Operations</b>
<b>Manage within Budget Appropriations</b>  Gain credibility with Treasury for improved management of funds  Seek to provide government with the risk profile and cost to treat risks in a comprehensive way to underpin budget bids	Manage within the budget except for major incidents costs that may exceed normal budgeted costs  Seek to address Fleet, equipment and PPE matters and shed OH&S in a coordinated way across the whole agency
Allocate resources to a known and identified risk profile for ACT	Size, nature and frequency of incidents or potential for incidents to drive operational critical mass for incidents - see previous

	studies on this Dobbin 2005.
Improved procurement - Services specify and the logistics unit will tender and procure to government standards. Significant savings envisaged to be passed on to operational needs	Best resource/ mix of resources to be dispatched to each incident.
Fleet management system introduced	Improve coordination response across the agency.
Facilities management system introduced	Improve Dispatch issues from Comcen related to RFS
Technology unit to respond to Service specified needs - ICT committee established	Improve the mutual aide model between Services
Economy of scale in support units to provide centre of expert advice to assist Services	Improve daily high level incident team readiness
Duplication of activities and expertise across the agency reduced by central support units providing advice to all Services	Improve integration of expertise across Services and agencies to support incidents
Maintain Identity of each Service	Clarify the role of IC functions and ensure ICS team understand clearly the roles
Senior Officers meeting fortnightly to manage business of whole of agency	Key Operation Chiefs meet fortnightly to review daily and weekly readiness against prevailing environment and intelligence.
Reduce overheads and senior management positions following implementation of McLeod works program	Provide a merging at the edges between Services to improve working together and supporting functions, e.g. helicopter operations for BAZ
Introduce formal performance management and reporting through Business plans for each Service and support units	Reduce the silo approach to incident management - especially where an incident has the potential to escalate to a major incident
Provide for all projects to be sponsored by a Service Chief to ensure operational effectiveness and sign off, e.g. technology projects.	Recognise that the organisational and administration structure is not the incident structure in major incidents
Support units: Training; Planning; Comcen ICT; and Fleet & Facilities. These units will provide specialist functions and a business plan for further consultation - some staff will remain embedded in Services based on their first call for core operational roles.	

In the current and especially the new building these units will provide support arrangements around the operational control centre model relieving Services to focus on operational matters.	
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Other matters discussed;

The Deputy Chief Officer and Deputy Commissioner will review the workload and work distribution issues between them to operate effectively.

The Commissioner asked for further discussion to clarify what the BFC issues were in the revised structure.

The Commissioner advised that he and the Minister have publicly stated that they would maintain and enhance the volunteer's role within the Services and by implementing the new business plan, which will cover fleet management, training and budget allocation this should improve the results on ground level.

The Commissioner has asked the Services and support units to provide draft business plans by the 2<sup>nd</sup> April (target date). He expects further consultation with stakeholders in developing and finalising for adoption these plans.

Mr Tony Fearnside asked, "You came to an organisation which you found to be dysfunctional to what extent did the senior officers in the organisation agree with you?"

The Commissioner advised that when the ESA senior executive group went reviewed issues and areas where things could improve as may be expected in some areas it was reasonably obvious that without better governance policies and procedures in place like a fleet plan, building maintenance system, staff system etc the organisation would not be as functional as it could be. There was agreement that these governance, policies and procedures needed to be a priority for the ESA's Three Year Business Plan to relieve the workload of senior officers and provide for continuous improvement in these areas.

Mr Tony Fearnside asked if "The Commissioner had any opinions on why the problems existed and continued. The Commissioner advised that perhaps management and central agencies had not demanded it. Mr Tony Fearnside asked if "that it was simply a new management style". The Commissioner advised that in his view good management systems need to be in place to run the ESA business and his style was to use good governance and management systems to improve effectiveness of the budget allocations and improve efficacy.

Stephen Wise raised the issue that has been concerning the BFC which is "the loss of experience in the resignations from staff and volunteers because of the announcement of new restructure".

The Commissioner advised there had been no resignations of staff, or volunteers that he was aware of and the turnover of experienced staff is an ongoing issue across all of government. We need to continue to develop and recruit the appropriate expertise into the agency. Campaign fires will always stretch resources and we look to national system of assistance in these circumstances under existing MOU's.

The position for Deputy Commissioner for the Fire and Rescue side of the structure has been advertised and until this position has been filled the current structure will remain in place.

The Commissioner asked the Bush Fire Council to consider representation on the selection panel.

**Motion:** The Council agreed for the Chair to be on the selection committee for the Deputy Commissioner Fire and Emergency Services. Move Bruce Leaver, seconded Simon Katz, accepted.

Stephen Wise raised the issue on concerns the BFC had with the “morale of the volunteers, and that the BFC is unsure whether this is due to miscommunication to the volunteers or something more”. However due to the actions taken in recent past this has created growing displeasure. The council believes that there needs to be a way forward to satisfy them that things are as they should be.

Stephen Wise stated that “BFC would also like to have been consulted or made aware of the restructure so they could give their advice and be involved in the process. The Council has strong expertise and the Minister has stated that the Council has a role to play in providing that advice”.

Tony Bartlett asked if the “new Deputy Commissioner will be the head of operations with extensive experience in all three Services and experience in type 3 incidents for all three services? The Commissioner replied that those people do exist in Australia. Mr Tony Fearnside asked if the Commissioner could name one, and The Commissioner replied “he could and that most states have integrated/cooperative arrangements of SES Rural and Urban fire services where possible candidates had worked across most areas.

The Commissioner believed given the workload analysis that for day-to-day management the single Deputy Commissioner could manage three portfolios and deliver better business management.

The Council agreed that budgets were a given and that the organisation had to meet their budget or show why they needed more.

Tony Bartlett asked if “the Stuart Ellis report was available for the Council”. The Commissioner replied that the report had not been circulated however the structure was consistent with matters raised by the Ellis Report.

A discussion was held about the systemic issues and the history of known catastrophic failure in bushfire management. Issues that were raised included

the need for better preparation for large events, the inability to rely on other states when in need, understanding cultural issues, the bureaucratic overlay that happens when the chips are down, building bridges with the volunteers (a large percentage of the fire fighting force, other structure options, the need to remove silos if they are not solving problems, and that this structure seems to merely push the problems down another layer.

Council agreed that relationships with the volunteers needed to be improved.

The Commissioner suggested the Bush Fire Council consider if some Council members would be in a position to meet with Mr Pat Barling and RFS Volunteer representatives to begin to identifying issues through informal discussion with a view to assisting in resolving the current concerns expressed by the resignation of the administrative positions of the Volunteer Captains and Deputies.

***Action:***

1. Bruce Leaver & Tony Bartlett to arrange a meeting with Pat Barling
2. Chair to write letter of congratulations to Cliff Stephens on receiving a medal

**9. Confirmation of next meeting**

Kevin Jeffery closed the meeting 5.55pm.

The next Council meeting will be held at the ASOC on April 26<sup>th</sup> at 3pm.