

ACT Bushfire Council

Meeting Minutes

31 January 2008

3.00pm

**Conference Room
Air Support Operations Centre
4 Point Cook Avenue Fairbairn**

Attendance:

Kevin Jeffery	Chair/ Member
Tony Fearnside	Member
Simon Katz	Member (advised will be late) -arrived 4.35
Stephen Wise	Member (advised will be late) -arrived 4.02
Tim McGuffog	ex Officio (DO RFS)
Brian Parry	ex Officio (Deputy Commissioner ESA)
Gregor Manson	ex Officio (Commissioner ESA)
Tracey Benn	Secretariat
Jenny Andreev	Secretariat

Invitees:

Virginia Dixon	ACT RFS
Nick Lhuede	ACT RFS
Arthur Sayer	ACT RFS

Apologies:

Peter Kanowski	Member
Tony Bartlett	Member

1. *Opening and Introduction by Chairman*

The Chair opened the meeting at 3.30 pm.

2. *Apologies*

Apologies were received from Peter Kanowski and Tony Bartlett

3. *Minutes from September meeting – 27 September 2007*

Minutes from November meeting – 29 November 2007

Motion: *To accept minutes of the September meeting.* Motion moved by Tony Fearnside seconded by Kevin Jeffery, **Carried.**

Motion: *To accept minutes of the November meeting.* Motion moved by Tony Fearnside seconded by Kevin Jeffery, **Carried.**

4. *Business Arising*

Follow up from Action Items

- **Michael Mulvaney follow up with Geoff Butler:**

- Kevin followed up with TAMS who were going to contact Geoff when they had their meeting with Mr Mulvaney but has heard nothing as yet; and
- Tim McGuffog mentioned that Neil Cooper had said that there was an offer from Peter Galvin to meet with Mr Mulvaney but it wasn't accepted.

It is suggested that with any future proposed burns we make sure that they are fully consulted (check with Tony Bartlett as he knows the area as well).

- **Commissioner to speak to Rick re: Fuel Mapping – heath-type land:**

- Rick has fed some work into a Working Group that Brian organised, to look at 'Hot Spots' and current fuel conditions;
- Broader issue – Risk assessment across the ACT;
- Strategic bushfire management discussions with Project Phoenix Working Group with a view of using Phoenix as the main fire behaviour model for SBMP2; and
- Rick McRae's fire and risk modelling for the ACT will be incorporated into SBMP2 planning as it is further developed and peer reviewed.

- **Commissioner's action re: Additional Senior RFS Position:**

ROAG had an extraordinary meeting involving discussion on this position on the 18th December 2007.

After some discussion on the merits of position, the matter was left to the Commissioner to provide advice following the outcomes of RFS Business Plan exercise.

- **Bushfire Council membership:**

- Advertisement has been undertaken and applications close 15th February; and
- Once applications close the Commissioner will discuss applicants with the BFC Chairman and provide our advice to the Minister .

It was discussed that the types of members we need to select should have skills, background and experience in those areas currently not represented on Council, including a lay representative of the community.

One area of concern is the representation of Environment and Conservation. Kevin mentioned that the outgoing member for that area recommended Christine Goonrey from NPA as his replacement.

5. *Agenda items*

5.1 **Virginia Dixon - Farm FireWise**

Virginia reported to the Council that:

- The Farm FireWise Project Report has been officially handed to Emergency Management Australia, and thus is basically complete in respect to the project and the grant money. (Virginia has left a copy of the report and complete package for Council);

- Fifty-six thousand of the original ninety thousand dollars granted to the project has been spent. Virginia believes the project was allocated more funding than required and did not need to spend the rest of the money;
- There has been positive and high participation by landholders so far, and 10% of the rural landholders have voluntarily called Arthur Sayer for a property visit;
- 10% of the resulting plans have been completed over a 2½-month period since the project was launched which averages out to 6 properties per month;
- Naturally over the coming months the participation will drop off so RFS is looking at a total of 15% by the end of this financial year. Project targets over the next 3 years aims for 22%, which is an average of about 36, people a year and 19% in the 4th and final year;
- Everything has been really positive and RFS are going to concentrate on a lot of Community Education this year, particularly with the rural kids to try to get the parents to voluntarily participate;
- The RFS will investigate and advise BFC on possible supportive mechanisms that may be available or proposed by way of planning instruments; and
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- NSW are still very keen for a cross-border program and RFS will be meeting with the Sydney Head Quarters Community Education Unit next week to discuss how we are going to coordinate the two programs. They are incredibly keen to use our collection and mapping components of the ACT program.

5.1.1 Arthur Sayer - Update of roadsides slash & burning

A question from the Council was asked of Arthur Sayer, if he could provide an update on the progress of roadside burning, and more specifically Stromlo through to Coppins Crossing.

Arthur reported to the Council that:

- Currently the slashers are on the Monaro Highway have done fence-to-fence up to Royalla;
- They have done the Tharwa/ Point Hut link and at this stage are on the Tidbinbilla Road and storing their machines on Arthur's property;
- The priority was to get the strategic main areas done so that we could stop fires in the Tidbinbilla Valley, if it got to the Tidbinbilla Road, by having it slashed;
- The Kings Highway was another top priority with all the residential areas around there now;
- Horsepark Drive was all going to be burnt as a controlled burn but Parks disagreed with this as they believed that if we burnt it we would create a seedbed and would spread weeds into their parks area. As a result they are physically mowing ¾ of Horse Park Drive, with volunteers burning the other ¼. At 7pm tonight RFS will be conducting a controlled burn in the areas that they haven't mowed;
- Coppins Crossing is also earmarked to be mown fence to fence; and
- So the current status is that the Southern areas are done, and areas in the North and East are progressing, making their way back into the central areas.

Kevin asked if Kambah Pool Road had been done? Arthur is not sure of this so he will check it out on his way to work in the morning and make the appropriate arrangements if needed.

ACTION: Arthur will have a look at Kambah Pool and if not done yet will contact Scott Farquhar and advise the Council.

ACTION: Arthur to contact TAMS to get an update on the Stromlo/ Coppins Crossing area and give advice to Kevin to pass on to Council.

Tony Fearnside believed that the concern was more with the regrowth of pines in Stromlo Forest from the new Arboretum to Coppins Crossing Road.

There is apparently some confusion as to who actually manages this land but TAMS have stepped in and will do the work anyway.

5.2 Nick Lhuede – SBMP Update

Nick reported to the Council that:

- Core principles – shared responsibility is nearing finalisation;
- Key points – agreement of relevant fire management values;
- Review of PPRR as there was a bit of confusion from the community in the meaning;
- Urban planning guidelines – ACTPLA doing this;
- Reliance on NSW? Nick not sure (90% applicable to ACT);
- Planning for Bushfire document should be used for prime input;
- Web mapping – proceeding; and
- BAZ – It is accepted that we need not recommend legislation change but there are some elements around the guidelines and boundaries that can be looked at and reviewed.

Brian requested advice from BFC on BAZ review.

Kevin replied that he would have to look at BFC's previous reports over the last few years. He recalled that the Fire Controller's Group put out a specific position paper and that they believed the Authority Guideline, which was based on the concept of – "the person with the most assets at risk" should be the person in charge, was a flawed concept and that it should be – the person best at dealing with the incident should be the person in charge.

Brian is concerned that the RFS are not getting sufficient activity to stimulate interest – you can't expect people just to train and not exercise the skills. Would be keen to get some feed back on how it's worked since it's been in.

Brian would like to suggest that, as the BFC is a legislated body, the BAZ be listed on the agenda for a future meeting to provide advice to him as to what concerns there may be.

Kevin asked that Council get a briefing on it before hand, as not all Council Members will be around this.

- SBMP – arrangement for response in the BAZ fits comfortably into SBMP.
- Council to be briefed and then give policy direction for Nick to fit into his action plan.
- Zoning – structure – close agreement. Looking at alternative models (phoenix model).

- Government perspective.
- Provides information to compare the models.
- Timing – 1st draft in May, public release in June, another month or so for cab submission. New financial year to be completed.

5.3 John Jenkins – RFS Tanker Replacement Update (As written by John Jenkins)

Heavy Tanker

The Procurement Plan for the heavy tankers has been submitted to Procurement Solutions for approval prior to sign off by the Commissioner.

Discussions have been held with both Hino and Isuzu re the purchase of the vehicle chassis. Both companies will provide final pricing this week so an order can be placed. Three body builders will then be selected from the current CFA contract and asked to submit pricing based on the ACT specifications that have been produced.

Scania Refurbishment

The Scania was completed and delivered to the Parks brigade on 25th January 2008.

The vehicle now operates under the call sign PARKS16 and will be located at the Stromlo depot.

HQ20 Light Unit (cat 9) Replacement Back

The procurement of services for this project has been approved and signed off by the Manager of Fleet and Procurement as of 29th January 2008.

The refurbishment project for this vehicle has been awarded to Tip Top Equipment from Kuring-gai in Sydney. The current HQ20 tray back has been removed and the chassis will be delivered to the body builder in two weeks once we have received the pumpset and other items required.

This project is still tracking to be completed by the end of March 2008.

HQ21 Medium (cat 7) Replacement Back

The Procurement Plan has been approved and signed off by the Commissioner as of 24th January 2008.

Alexander Perrie & Co from Rockdale NSW have been selected to undertake the refurbishment under the NSW Dept of Commerce contract #0602893/0003. The pumpset will be a GAAM Mk125 close coupled to a Ruggerini MD191 air-cooled diesel engine with a 1500lt water tank capacity.

We expect to deliver the chassis to the body builder towards the end of February for inclusion into their production schedule. This project is still tracking to be completed by the end of the 07/08 FY.

5.4 Tony Fearnside – Hydrological effects of the 2003 fires (Namadgi field trip)

Tony mentioned that during the Namadgi field trip that the Council took in December last year, Tony Bartlett and others pointed out that ACTEW should have good records of changes in water flow as a result of the bushfire in 2003.

It was suggested that this information would give us a better basis for future protection strategies for the catchment. Up until now we've only relied on the information that came out of the 1939 bushfires in the Melbourne water catchment. Council felt that the information held by ACTEW would be able to give us a better understanding of what actually happens with runoff and quality following fires, rather than relying on predictions through models.

It was agreed to approach ACTEW to see if this information is readily available and what needs to be done to access it.

It is suggested that the area most capable of developing this data and producing results would be Risk Management. The Commissioner adds that he is on the Chief Ministers Water Group and would be happy to approach them with the request.

ACTION: Commissioner to approach CMD Water Group re: information on the reduction of water flow, and by how much, resulting after the 2003 bushfires then advise Council of this.

Tony F. also mentioned that this information might be worth publishing in scientific journal?

5.5 Kevin Jeffery – Seasonal Preparedness (Report to the Minister)

The report has been submitted to the Minister and a copy was delivered to the Council via email.

The Commissioner asked Kevin for some more detail on what the key issues are – to assist him with the meeting he has with the Minister on the 7th.

The Commissioner has been asked by the Minister to look at some issues one being ‘Hot Spots’ – RFS should sit down with TAMS to look at these issues.

Brian said he was involved in a meeting with FB, SES, TAMS and RFS to discuss issues.

- Any areas of concern to be raised with TAMS and they will investigate and evaluate what is required.

Brian also mentioned that he has been receiving complaints from urban edge dwellers and it was decided that these are to be forwarded to Neil Cooper as TAMS have developed a letter that can be provided to these people explaining the difference between slashing for fire protection purposes rather than aesthetic purposes.

The Commissioner raised some concerns/issues, that he has, that were mentioned in the report:

- Motor vehicle issues

Tony Fearnside has a concern that the loss of home garaging vehicles is budget based and asks the Commissioner why this has stopped.

The Commissioner advises that this has not yet occurred, but it had been reviewed in line with Government policies and guidelines. He is giving RFS time to comply with legislation regarding motor vehicles and that operational requirements vehicles will be home garaged. There is a policy being written at the moment as no policy is in place as yet and adds that the Chief Executive is the only one to approve home garaging.

Council suggested that the Policy needs to be written to fit operational requirements.

- Underlying concerns with staff levels

The Commissioner said the concern is the management of RFS and says that he is forced to demonstrate actions to improve management with RFS rather than trying to deal with it.

Tony Fearnside asked if there was understanding of the issues regarding RFS staff leaving?

The Commissioner noted that two people have left the RFS and he does not know why they are leaving but exit interviews are being carried out.

Council felt that the general feeling as to the reason why people are leaving is due to the fall in morale in the place.

Council noted that getting Brian more involved in the RFS by having him coming out to Fairbairn three times a week seemed to be a good thing

- Budget concerns RFS Budget

The Commissioner was concerned that the Report suggested that the RFS was under funded. Kevin replied that Council don't have the view that the budget is too low, but that ESA/RFS seems to be focussed on budgetary affects first and operational affects second – seems that budget dominates decisions. The discussion centred on an agreement that once the budget is allocated to RFS it should be up to Brian to decide how it is spent.

- Budget Bids

The Commissioner mentioned that the budget bids have been put in and approved. He made the suggestion that Kevin be briefed prior to their submission to provide input.

Tony suggested that the Commissioner note his points to Kevin regarding the report rather than address them in this meeting.

5.6 Gregor Manson – BFC Monitoring Project/ Consultant Update

- Developed a list of consultants.
- He circulated the procurement plan.
- The procurement has been approved.
- The Select Tender advertisement was placed in the paper with the close date of Tuesday 5/1/08.
- Only looking at - schedule of rates and CV's.
- Brian, Commissioner and Kevin will be on the panel.
- Once agreement is received then contracts can be signed and we can get them on board.
- A copy of the procurement plan is available to members.

5.7 RFS Evaluation and Business Plan Development

The Commissioner reports that:

Neil Cooper was on the review panel but now John Jenkins is while Neil is on holidays. He just needs to have a look at it then it can get under way. The idea was to have the next ROAG in early February and have the Consultant to have done some work and be able to brief the group on where they are going.

5.8 Brian Parry – AFAC Bulletin re: Guidelines - People Sheltering in cars during Bushfires

Circulated to Council - not for discussion in today's meeting but to be added onto next meeting agenda.

ACTION - Members to read; this item to be added to next meeting's agenda

5.9 Brian Parry – South Australian Coroner's Findings

Circulated to Council - not for discussion in today's meeting but to be added onto next meeting agenda

ACTION - Members to read; this item to be added to next meeting's agenda

ACTION - Tracey to email link to members – Emailed 1/2/08

Kevin asked if it would be useful to submit a paper to AFAC

Commissioner suggested writing to both AFAC and EMA

Brian stated that some lessons that should have been raised by the Coroner were withheld due to family concerns.

6. Correspondence

- Season Fire Report to the Minister sent;
- Resignation letter from Geoff Butler received – reason for this was time commitments and feels that the same issues are constantly being raised;
- Kevin asked members to approach anyone they may consider would be good to put an application in as the Community Representative on BFC;
- Bruce Leaver's resignation (because he no longer lives in Canberra) was not mentioned in previous meetings;
- Brian asked whether it would be appropriate that an AFP officer be on the Council, for example in regard to evacuation plans? To be considered – Kevin to investigate who may be good and ask Val Jeffrey if he knows of any Rural Police that might be interested; and
- Bushfire Express Newsletter distributed – Kevin said there is a positive reaction from volunteers.

7. *General Business*

Simon Katz – Australia Day Honours

Simon, in not taking any merit from the award away from the recipient in any means, was surprised when he saw that an ACT FB member was awarded a medal – asked why was this decision made? Simon noted that people were disappointed, as it was perceived that this year it was to go to an RFS member so as a ‘morale factor’ it was another negative.

The Commissioner did receive nominations from RFS but in his opinion he didn’t feel that the information for a recommendation for the nominations was strong enough and went with a nomination from outside the organisation instead. AFAC put in a strong nomination for Russell Shephard. The Commissioner added that it is not a fixed arrangement of the alternate turns of RFS and FB. The Commissioner also believed that this arrangement meant that non-RFS/ACTFB staff at ESA would therefore not be excluded from access to the opportunity.

Tim mentioned that four nominations were received from RFS and that Val, Simon and himself evaluated these to submit final nomination.

Discussion was held regarding the desire to maintain the alternate years policy, and other alternatives. Concern was expressed from a number of areas as to whether next year was to be RFS or ACTFB. The recommendation resulting from the discussion was for the Commissioner to explain his reasons further to RFS volunteers and ACTFB, and to work out a way of going forward from here in a fair and equitable way.

Motion: The Council moved to congratulate Russell Shephard on receiving the AFSM Award.

Stephen Wise – Uriarra Settlement

Stephen raised the current proposal for Uriarra sprinkler protection for dwellings in the settlement.

Tim mentioned that Virginia has done some work on the proposal regarding this.

Kevin suggested that we ask for a FB Officer to provide a presentation to the Council.

Brian said that the decision whether Volunteer Brigade will be RFS or a CFU is yet to be made. This matter will require further consideration. It will be useful to discuss this at later Council meetings.

ACTION: Brian to arrange for a briefing from FB to do a presentation to be included on agenda for next meeting

Tony Fearnside – Meeting times

Tony suggests that we consider the timing of meetings.

ACTION: Tracey to send out an email to ask members

8. Reports

8.1 Commissioner

For information to Council the Commissioner handed out copies of the Draft Final Structure for Risk and Planning function ESA January 2008. The Commissioner's Operational Group and the Commissioner's Business Group have endorsed this draft.

8.2 Rural Fire Service – Tim McGuffog

- Volunteers from Jerrabomberra RAFT crew are currently completing their winch recertification. 30 out of 36 will be complete as of tonight;
- Have had a few lightning detection flights go up;
- The 202 Helicopter has gone to Tasmania;
- NSW Helicopter most likely to remain here at Canberra Airport until the season ends;
- There is an ASOG Teleconference tomorrow that will advise and further requirements;
- The Sky-Crane is currently in South Australia;
- There is a proposed hazard reduction burn Gungahlin with volunteers;
- TAMS hazard reduction burns coming up in Gossin Hill and Gilmore;
- Tim passed around some photos of the MacKillop College burn;
- Curing rates – risk assessment around the ACT is looking at about 60% curing through BOM;
- Photo - MT Clear repeater site, the simplex component will be up and running early next month then in the near future the TRN cables will be as well;
- Mt Tennent TRN repeater is now live;
- EOI for 3 staff positions – Volunteer Support - currently Operations Support and Training – Originally received 8 applicants but one has pulled out of short listing;
- FESTA program is on track;
- Attended a useful desktop exercise re: IMT arrangements with other services last wee;
- RFS is preparing the response for legislative assembly inquiry, to go to the Commissioner prior to the Assembly; and
- Tim to send SE NSW short term seasonal forecast to council members.

8.3 Council Member

Nil

9. Confirmation of next meeting

The Chair closed the meeting at 6.15pm

The next council meeting will be held at the ASOC on Thursday 28th of February at 3pm