

MINUTES



ACT BUSHFIRE COUNCIL (BFC)

07 OCTOBER 2009

***ESA Headquarters
Conference Room***

Curtin ACT

Wednesday 7th OCTOBER 2009

AGENDA

- 1. Opening and Introduction by Chairman**
- 2. Attendees/ Apologies**
- 3. Minutes of previous meeting**
- 4. Actions running sheet**
- 5. Correspondence**
 - Incoming
 - Outgoing
- 6. Agenda Items**
 - 6.1 Presentation on new National Early Warning Systems – Greg Kent
 - 6.2 BFC Field Trip 17th October – discuss route and agenda
 - 6.3 Bushfire Abatement Zone
 - 6.4 Ministers BFC Seasonal Preparedness Report
- 7. Other Business**
- 8. Outstanding Items/Issues**
- 9. Confirmation of next meeting**

AGENDA ITEM: 6.1

SUBJECT: Presentation on new National Early Warning Systems

BACKGROUND:

The new National Early Warning system has been developed by AFAC and adopted nationally by States and Territories. Greg Kent and Virginia Dixon were on the National Working Group that developed the policies, procedures and messages. Greg will provide members with a presentation, explanation and handouts on the new national system and the implications for the ACT.

SOURCE: Greg Kent

DISCUSSION:

Greg Kent provided a presentation on the recently developed National Early Warning System. Nationally consistent approach, Trigger Points linked to FDR's. There was not time in the 6 weeks to ensure FDI's were current, decision made to leave as is for now. They are expecting people to leave the day before when CATASTROPHIC conditions apply – leaving is the safest option.

(DF) Noted the term Code Red – a concession made for Victoria.

(GK) Victorian Agencies felt that black was an affront to indigenous people – decided on the red with black stripe. Code red only used in VIC – included in literature for interstate deployment purposes

Some questions were asked of Greg Kent.

(KB) What does this mean for Canberra?

(GK) We are going to be targeting the ember zone areas

(KB) Are we ever going to be expecting people in the inner suburbs of Canberra to leave their homes?

(CB) No that is one of the issues picked up in the SBMP consultations. There are some requirements we as and ESA need to make the message we're sending out to the people of Canberra about what this means.

(DF) ACT have a fairly limited urban – rural interface that would be under direct threat at Catastrophic because of the way the vegetation is laid out., Catastrophic is different for different areas.

(KJ) If there is not a fire already running we can not tell people to leave!

(MIL) There is a missing link somewhere. How do you tell people when the catastrophic level comes up, the day before?

(ML) Are you going to have maps to show what parts are likely to be in direct fire paths and how far back from that you could be subject to ember attack, and if you are subject to ember attack, whether in fact you need to go or stay and defend your home.

(GK) Links into SBMP, ember zones. Our challenge now is how to tie this all in together. Target specific areas rather than general broadcast.

Further presentation from Greg Kent:

Standard Warnings, 3 types

1. EW – Emergency Warning
2. WA – Watch and Act
3. A – Advice

Same wording in messages Australia wide with action of what people need to do, only difference will be geographic locations. There is no use issuing a blanket warning when half of Canberra will not be affected. No emergency warning if no fire.

- ADVICE – general media information

- WATCH and ACT – be aware of what is happening around you and start preparing.

- EMERGENCY WARNING – you are in danger, need to take action immediately you will be impacted by fire.

STAY or GO POLICY

This slogan is no longer relevant new replacement had to have key words that told people what we wanted them to do in plan language.

PREPARE – ACT – SURVIVE

People to take some responsibility themselves.

1. PREPARE – physically and mentally. Prepare property, a plan and share with other, know where to seek information – think ahead of time.
2. ACT – respond to forecasts of weather and fire danger. Put plan into action early and let people know what you are doing.
3. SURVIVE – your life and your family's life is priority. Your house may not be the safest place for you.

Further discussion was held about:

- who issues the warnings
- the point in the FDI where nearly all fires are uncontrollable (50)
- publishing of daily FDI
- the need to inform community on days after nothing happened, to minimise community complacency from constant warnings
- stand-up arrangements
- powers to relocate (Chief Officer)
- issues in calculation of daily FDI, and need to update MacArthurs work

Greg was thanked for his presentation

MOTION MOVED:

No motions were moved.

MOTION SECONDED:

AGENDA ITEM: 6.2

SUBJECT: BFC Field Trip 17th October

BACKGROUND:

At its September meeting, members agreed to and requested that a field trip be organised around the Canberra interface and fire prone areas within the suburbs to familiarise themselves with potential risks and problems. This may help them to better inform the minister in their advisory capacity and contribute to their pending report.

Members may take this opportunity to contribute to the route and what they would specifically like to see and visit. An agenda can then be developed to accommodate these requirements.

SOURCE: Tim McGuffog

RESOLUTION AND/OR DECISION:

(TM) Looking for suggestions for a route. I will get a brigade to organise a BBQ lunch. Aranda, Duffy, Black Mountain, Hall, Royalla and along Monaro Highway. We will start from TaMS depot. 10am – 3pm – organised with Coop and send out the schedule.

ACTION REQUIRED:

TM will organise the field trip and inform members.

AGENDA ITEM: 6.3

SUBJECT: Bushfire Abatement Zone

BACKGROUND:

The Bushfire Abatement zone has been a source of contention for Rural Fire Brigades for a number of years. The previous Deputy Commissioner Fire and Emergency undertook to consult and redefine the boundaries of the BAZ. This has not yet however been through the legislative process and the previous boundary is still in force. Copies of maps identifying the boundaries of the existing BAZ and the proposed new BAZ will be available at the meeting.

Points of contention arise around the following points:

Is the BAZ a planning tool to engage both the Fire Brigade and RFS to address the problems of integrated fire management at the interface, or is it a demarcation line?

The Commissioners guideline indicates who is responsible for Incident control but there are still very grey areas as to the most appropriate personnel and service depending on the situation.

Closest Available resources responded will almost always be the Fire Brigade because RFS brigades are not generally stood up. This doesn't account for the possibility of RFS brigades being capable of providing a response either sooner or more appropriately than the Fire Brigade.

Almost all fires on lands associated with the BAZ will be fire under TAMS jurisdiction and this also has to be considered in incident management decisions.

CURRENT SITUATION:

The RFS, Fire Brigade and TAMS have recently discussed development of pre-suppression plans and the establishment and exercising of pre-formed IMT's to address interface and internal grass and bushfires in the built up areas. This approach needs to be considered as a possible solution to this ongoing problem.

SOURCE: Kevin Jeffery

RESOLUTION AND/OR DECISION:

Preliminary comments:

(KJ) It provides for a joint planning process that enables the on ground activities to be done in a pre – planned sense. Look at how we can improve this to avoid issues on the ground.

(DF) TaMS workshop on 29th. As we have RFS, FB and Council in the room we should discuss it a bit today. I am 100% agreed that BAZ should be an extremely valuable planning tool for the agencies to be able to work in a collaborative fashion. It shouldn't be a demarcation.

BAZ map explanation:

(TM/CB) Explanation of the two maps – The one with the red line is in fact what BAZ is at the moment, the legally constituted BAZ. The one on the other page is the one that Brian Parry drew up last year but has never signed off and enforced. We are still operating on the original map. I believe effectively that the BAZ is the area between the green and red lines, the interface of the suburbs where we need to do planning and make sure we have IMT's arranged in case of fires.

(MIL) The Uriarra line. What is the point of having to the west of a BAZ that point?

(CB) Abatement Zones around villages rather than around the primary urban area of the ACT.

Discussion on callout procedures:

(CB) It can be easily changed as it is the business rule in the CAD the principle is nearest available appropriate resource. RFS to determine an appropriate mobilisation time for volunteer (or Parks) units when not stood up, because when they are stood up they are immediately mobile. This is then built into the business rule of the CAD. (TM) Captains have been requested to send me the mobilisation turn out times for their Brigade.

Council members believed this is a good idea.

A small discussion was also held regarding AVL (Automatic Vehicle Location) systems in vehicles. It was seen to assist in despatch, but with potential downsides for encouraging command of units being done from away from a fire ground, and the tendency to move to non-verbal communications, which was widely agreed by Council members as essential in bushfires.

Further BAZ discussions:

Concerns were raised by Council members of volunteers not being called out, and problems on the ground organising who is in control of a fire. The Bob Smith Report also recommended higher levels of pre-incident planning being required, especially for interface areas.

(CB) The ACT says that the RFS is in charge of the rural area and the FB is in charge of the city area.

(DF) Section 29 of the ACT, CO, FB, operational planning for fire in the built up area including fire preparedness control, operational planning in consultation with CO RFS for fire in the banners, bushfire abatement including fire preparedness control. It is quite specific. CO RFS, operational planning in consultation with CO FB for outside the city area including fire preparedness control, Fire response in rural areas. However the one for CO FB is also quite specific about fire control as it relates to rural in the BAZ itself.

(CB) One option that was looked at just after the BAZ, not too long after Peter Dunn's notifiable instrument, with Michael Ross. Mr Ross didn't feel comfortable with the instrument. The brigade proposed a concept of operations for how we would work together for the fires in the BAZ in accordance with the notifiable instrument. Basically it was a little bit like the new BAZ only it was a bigger line that didn't go out as far as the red line and it basically said on any occasion fires inside this area, when the FB is there they're going to take control fires outside of that line, the RFS will be responsible for those fires and I'm trying to think of the final wording – it was something along the lines of, unless the CO FB decree's otherwise. That was another alternative we proposed for how to address it.

CB provided a copy of the draft Concept of Operations, and there was a discussion about how it could work. Council believed that with some additional work, the Concept of Operations would be useful.

ACTION REQUIRED:

RFS and ACTFB to revisit the Concept of Operations and provide updates to Council as to its implementation.

AGENDA ITEM: 6.4

SUBJECT: Ministers BFC Seasonal Preparedness Report

BACKGROUND:

Members to discuss the current status of the report and to discuss any issues that have arisen.

Members to agree on timeframes for production of components and the process of developing the final document ready for presentation to the Minister by November 1st.

SOURCE: Kevin Jeffery

RESOLUTION AND/OR DECISION:

Discussion was held within the Council to decide who was writing each section and drafting them up. CG provided a draft for the education section. It was necessary to check today where we are up to and where we need to go from here. We have one month to get it done. Discussion about Brendan Smyth "Bill" – it is a useful structure in terms of what we need to look at each year. It is a good checklist.

The Report is due to the Minister on the 1st NOV 2009.

ACTION REQUIRED:

Council members to prepare nominated sections and provide to Kevin before the end of October for collation and review by all of Council...

AGENDA ITEM: 7

SUBJECT: Other Business

AFAC Conference Report

TB and GP attended the AFAC/CRC conference on behalf of the Council. TB has a few notes scribbled down from the presentations. TB agreed to write a quick 1 or 2 page report to give you an update. In a verbal presentation it was noted that there was a mix of papers, where some were research based and interesting in terms of the reports back from all the CRC projects, and a lot of which have come to the completion stage.

There were updates about papers on the Victorian Fires – it is always good to hear the people who were involved talking on those sorts of things. You pick up information about technology and one thing attendees were quite impressed with was someone who gave a paper about the helicopter that they use around Perth, and the infrared camera/spy camera technology, so the helicopter can stand off up to two kilometres away and read a number plate. So if you've got an arsonist who sees a helicopter they will take off but you could actually catch people with that sort of technology.

Volunteer Brigades Association

TM reported that at the VBA meeting last night, Pat Barling stood down from the VBA President and Ben Bryant was elected in as the new President. Jamie Schulin is still the Treasurer and Mel Riches from Hall is Deputy President.

The Chair recommended that Council recognise the huge work that Pat Barling has put in over the years, and thank him for his work. Council also congratulates Pat on his achievements over that time.

Strategic Bushfire Management Plan

The Commissioner noted that the SBMP Version 2 was official released by the Minister on the 1st October. He informed Council that he has suggested to the Minister that we have a bit of an informal get-together one morning for morning tea; we don't have to make speeches. If there is any morning that is not suitable please let Michelle Watson know and we'll either meet in town or here at ESA.

(TM) One of the other components of that is that Nick and Virginia is starting to work on a Communication Strategy, to actually get it out there because it has not been widely dispersed.

Council suggested to ESA/RFS that it would be great to get copies in hard copy.

Seasonal Weather Outlook

(KB) We are still in an El Nino, although we are not currently in a traditional El Nino – we were. Each El Nino has been different and this is a whole new beast. It is expected to get a bit worse as we go. That's why it's expected to dry out, so we'll get to the stage where, November and December rainfall will become quite sparse.

Map Book

(MIL) noted that Captains recently received the new map books, and he congratulated RFS on the books. Everything is on the maps. The maps detail water points, tracks; they rate all the tracks to tanker, light unit etc, and full of information. I don't think it has static water supplies but it shows dams.

Time and Date of Next Meeting:

Wednesday 4th November, 4pm, Fairbairn