

ACT Bush Fire Council

Meeting Bushfire Operational Plan Review Sub-Committee

14 September 2006, 1400-1700, RFS Fairbairn

Minutes

Attendees

Kevin Jeffery	Acting Chair
Michael Lonergan	Member
Michael Ross	RFS – Chief Officer
Rick Mcrae	ESA – Risk Management Unit
Nick Lhuede	RFS – Planning Manager
Dylan Kendall	Land Management Agency – Territory and Municipal Services
Ross Burden	Land Management Agency – Territory and Municipal Services
Kon Kudzielco	Land Management Agency - Department of Housing and Community Services

Apologies

Lindy Smith	Land Management Agency – Department of Education
Adam Nugent	Land Management Agency – Land Development Authority

Minutes

1. Introduction

The purpose of this meeting of the sub committee is to review the draft Bushfire Operations Plans for 2006-07, prepared by ACT Government Land Managers in accordance with the Emergencies Act (2004)

The formation of the sub-committee was agreed to at the previous meeting of Bushfire Council 24 September 2006, to provide specialist input to the BOPs and provide advice to land managers on the content and priorities identified in the BOPs.

2. Forecast for the 2006-07 Bushfire Season

Rick McCrae presented the attached seasonal forecast.

It was acknowledged the Territory is presented with the potential for a severe fire season, with indicators showing clear parallels with previous “bad” fire years – eg

1983, 2001, 2003. An early start to the season is possible with rapid grass curing and the potential for significant grassfires to occur in October in the event of continuing low rainfall.

3. BOP Presentation – Department of Housing and Community Services

DH&CS engaged a consultant (Renaissance Forestry – Tony Fearnside) in 2005 to undertake a bushfire risk assessment for all properties managed by the Department. From this risk assessment, BOPs were developed for each property and included works to be undertaken by the tenant and the Department in relation to property and structural maintenance. BFC was presented with the BOPs for these properties.

3.1 Comments by BFC

Concern was raised regarding the efficacy of the different types of gutter guards, and the need for ongoing maintenance.

The need for DH&CS to engage with ACT FB was recognised, in relation to the actions being undertaken and structural protection issues for these properties.

3.2 Actions

DH&CS will be using stainless steel gutter guards, and the need for the tenants to maintain their integrity is identified in the BOP. Audits of the actions under the plan by both the Tenants and Department will be undertaken by the RFS and DH&CS.

With the assistance of the RFS, DH&CS will make contact with ACT FB to discuss the BOPs and arrange inspections of the properties as appropriate.

4. BOP Presentation Education and Land Development Agency

Nick Lhuede presented these BOPs on behalf of the above agencies. Education are in the process of reviewing the need for BOPs for all the properties they manage, however have prepared a plan for Birrigai outdoor centre for 2006-07. In conjunction with the ACT RFS, other key properties (eg Hall and Tharwa primary schools) will have plans prepared as appropriate.

4.1 Comments by BFC

In relation to Birrigai, further consideration of evacuation arrangements should be undertaken, including training.

ACT RFS should consider the provision of a VHF radio for the main office and any appliances based at Birrigai.

Training of appropriate staff in fire suppression should be considered.

The need for Education to engage with ACT FB was recognised, in relation to the actions being undertaken and structural protection issues for these properties.

4.2 Actions

Education have included basic fire training, the development of an evacuation plan and provision of VHF radios as part of the BOP.

With the assistance of the RFS, DH&CS will make contact with ACT FB to discuss the BOPs and arrange inspections of the properties as appropriate.

5. BOP Presentation - Department of Territory and Municipal Services (TAMS)

TAMS was established at the commencement of the 2006-07 FY, and combines the BOPs previously prepared by ACT Forests, Parks and Conservation, ACT Planning and Land Authority and Parks and Places. The TAMS BOP for 2006-07 also includes lands managed for horse and stock agistment.

The plan was provided to BFC for review.

5.1 Comments by BFC

In light of the seasonal forecast, in depth discussion was held regarding the timing of activities, particularly slashing undertaken along the urban interface. The need to ensure that the slashing works were completed before the peak of the fire season was recognised.

Issues associated with the construction of new fire trails and prescribed burning in Namadgi National Park were discussed, including the potential for opposition to these activities by elements of the community.

TAMS commented that almost all of the trails located within Namadgi had been maintained or upgraded last financial year. Thus the maintenance and upgrading budget this BOP was to be focussed on the inner areas and urban edge (apart from some key upgrade initiatives).

Discussion was held regarding the approval process required under the Land (Planning and Environment) Act (1991) for a number of the activities identified in the BOP, including significant physical removal works and fire trail construction. Concern was raised by BFC regarding the implications these requirements had in relation to delaying the implementation of the works

TAMS noted that the manager of the horse paddocks has had specific fuel management objectives included within its contract, thus answering a risk identified by the Council in previous years.

In 2006-07 an “emergency fire management” fund was included in the BOP to undertake unforeseen activities. This was a major issue in 2006-07 where a number of additional works were identified which required re prioritising of activities.

Discussion was engaged between TAMS representatives and Council members regarding the fuel status in Namadgi. It was generally agreed that the fuel load was a shrubby layout with grassy floor and interspersed with high levels of dry fallen trees and logs. It is expected to behave in a similar fashion to heathland. It has been tested for a fuel reduction burn over winter and found resistant to ignition – but is expected to tip to being highly flammable at some point during the fire season.

TAM identified that it will have two fast attack dozers and a grader available during the fire season.

5.2 Actions

In relation to slashing, TAMS have significantly changed the operational and contractual arrangements for slashing in the current BOP to address concerns raised in previous years. This includes a re-focussing of work crews onto fore trail slashing, increased use of contractors and use of alternative machinery in difficult areas, such as slope and flail mowers.

BFC will closely monitor the progress of fire trail and prescribed burning activities detailed in the plans. BFC strongly support the access activities and prescribed burn in southern Namadgi identified in the BOP.

The BFC will write to the minister regarding the delays caused by the requirements under the Land (Planning and Environment) Act (1991) and request if any means can be identified by which the process of approval can be expedited

The inclusion of the “emergency fire management fund” was supported and should be retained in future years as a critical component of the BOP.

6. Process of approval

Following review of these plan, the BFC will advise the RFS on any further issues that may be relevant by 20th September, who will advise the land managers of any changes that are considered necessary. Following this, the RFS will advise land managers the BOPs are *informally* approved and that they may be formally submitted to the ESA for approval under the Emergencies Act (2004). It is anticipated formal approval will be provided by 25 September 2006.