

ACT Bushfire Council

Meeting Minutes

27 March 2008

3.00pm

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

Attendance:

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| Tony Bartlett | Deputy Chair/ Member |
| Tony Fearnside | Member |
| Simon Katz | Member |
| Michael Lonergan | Member |
| Tim McGuffog | ex Officio (DO RFS) |
| Brian Parry | ex Officio (Deputy Commissioner ESA) |
| Gregor Manson | ex Officio (Commissioner ESA) |
| Tracey Benn | Secretariat |

Apologies:

| | |
|----------------|---------------|
| Kevin Jeffery | Chair/ Member |
| Stephen Wise | Member |
| Peter Kanowski | Member |

1. Opening and Introduction by Chairman

- The Deputy Chair opened the meeting at 15.11 pm.

2. Apologies

- Apologies were received from Stephen Wise, Peter Kanowski and Kevin Jeffrey.

3. Minutes from Previous Meetings

- 3.1** 31 January 2008 - The minutes were noted and accepted. Action Item 5.4 - TMc advised that Norm Mueller and/or Jackie Lavis from the Water Group will attend the next meeting in April.
- 3.2** 28 February 2008 – Amendment to minutes – Item 5.7 - That BFC note that ROAG have motioned a vote of confidence in RFS staff. Minutes were accepted.

4. Business Arising

4.1 Consultant for review of McLeod and Coronial

The Commissioner advised that the recommendation of tender panel has been signed off and given to Procurement Solutions for processing, signing of contract and should be completed within 5 days. Bob Smith was the successful tenderer.

TB requests once the paperwork is finalised and a start date organised that Council be advised of this and an informal meeting arranged for a 'meet and greet'.

- 4.2 Awareness Campaign** – KJ's objective is to raise public awareness and education. The Council is to think about where we are going to for next year. Darren Cutrupi was invited

to today's meeting to provide an overview, however, due to other commitments was unable to attend. The Government submission to the Legislative Assembly Inquiry is fairly comprehensive on the media awareness and education campaigns that the ESA currently has going.

- 4.3 Actions Running Sheet** – A number of action items have been completed. Action Item 5.4 - Water hydrological effects – The Commissioner will obtain a representative from ACTEWAGL to attend the next meeting. Malcolm Gill provided a paper on hydrological studies Australia wide and is happy to attend the next meeting to give a presentation. Water Catchments – BP attended the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan Steering Committee (yesterday). They are currently looking at the water catchments plan and will be going to Melbourne and Sydney to review their catchment management issues (i.e. environmental and bushfire prone land). The Council is keen to obtain data relating to these issues (Action Item still current).

Action: Commissioner to invite Malcolm Gill, Norm Mueller and Jackie Lavis to next meeting

- 4.4 Action Item 5.7 Tanker** – The Commissioner updated the Council. The tanker is actually in the schedule for replacement in 08/09. Due to cash flow and contract issues the Commissioner wants to bring forward the purchase into this years budget.

So far all the chassis have been purchased but the backs won't come until August or September because we are in a building schedule with the company and are next in line.

There is approximately \$1.4 million dollars that has been committed to contracts but the cash won't go out until next year. The Commissioner has been in discussions with Wayne Willimott (WW) about what can be done to bring forward expenditure from next year to this year to take up that cash flow. The answer to that is the purchase of two ambulance chassis, that are currently sitting in Sydney and available, to be built next year also purchasing three chassis for the Fire Brigade to replace their Rural Fire Units.

The Commissioner and WW made an agreement today that WW would check whether there was a suitable super tanker chassis sitting in Sydney or Hong Kong that we could get here and pay for before July 1 this year.

WW has given the Commissioner the original specifications document as well as an updated version. There was some confusion in the beginning because KJ and the Brigade Captains were of the understanding that they had agreement with the Minister that it would be a tanker/ striker but what was actually specified was a bulk water carrier with a dog trailer. WW assures the Commissioner that, between himself, John Jenkins (JJ) and Tony Hill (TH), the specs can be tweaked to the tanker/ striker model, which can then go to the Captains for sign off.

TB asks Council if they are happy with this arrangement. ML replies subject to the Captains' approval.

- 4.5 Timing of Meetings** – The Council formally agreed that the meetings would continue to be held on the fourth Thursday of every month but at the new time of 4.00pm (Action Item Completed).
- 4.6 Table of status of McLeod Report and Coronial Recommendations** – updated written report provided to the Council by TMc. The report is in tabular form with comments against the recommendations as to where it is up to.

ML asks that if the Government rejected some of the recommendations from either inquiry does that put it off our agenda. TB believes that if there were matters of substance that went to the heart of fire policy then, in our role, to provide advice to Government it would need to be done in a very considerate way.

BP is hoping to go through the recommendations and pick out any that he considers may be of detrimental effect to the availability of Volunteers. It seems that some of the recommendations may be impacting upon the volunteers – their involvement in the organisation and the retention of them. If this is the case BP will bring a report back through Council to address and possibly rectify any situations.

5. Agenda items

5.1 BOP Update (TMc) – Report provided by Ross Burton

ML believes the report to be very good. The ‘fire trail upgrading’ that includes the Clear Range fire trail that goes from Mount Clear through to ML’s place where it comes out, is going along at approximately a km to a km and a half per day. ML rode the Clear Range Trail recently and reports that it is just beautiful and that a fire couldn’t be lit there even if we wanted to.

TMc explains that the initial burn proposal was based on the fuel assessment which takes into account mid level bark etc...there is quite a bit of fuel at the mid storey level but none on the ground so the only way to get it to burn would be on a ‘Red day’ basically so the proposed burn has been cancelled.

TB noted from the report that he was quite impressed with the number of fully trained and fit fire fighters, as he had been wondering, with some of the changes that have been occurring, whether that number was gradually sliding. TMc mentions that their target is 150 and it appears that, with the restructure and in particular the duty statements, they are getting their numbers up, as it is now part of the requirement that you will be a fire fighter.

TMc – Before next season we need to redevelop an acceptable Standards of Fire Cover Method and revisit where we have tankers and light units placed. Then come to some consensus with TAMS and have some flexibility, as we need to be able to identify the standards of fire cover we need for the various locations and maintain it. Another component to this is, if circumstances change, when our Duty Coordinator gets a call he knows which units are where to be able to send.

TMc requests that Council recognise the report and adds that the intention is to produce these reports quite regularly during the fire season and not so regularly in the off-season.

TB and ML agree to accept the report and convey to PCL that Council is impressed with the quality and information contained in it.

5.2 Relocation of Stations (ML)

BP informs Council that a station relocation report has been distributed to all of the Brigades for their perusal with a meeting scheduled for next week. Staff are also coming together to have input into the process.

There is some talk from people that the report hasn’t quite hit the mark.

TMc – the bulk of the report is primarily to do with Ambulance and Fire Brigade within the city. No great impact on the Brigades. An evaluation report has been conducted on the current situation and deficiencies in sheds - space, training, parking facilities and OH&S

requirements. The report brought back mixed feelings, from some of the Volunteers, of either scepticism or acceptance of the fact that they are going to be fairly low on the list before things get done.

SK would like it noted that the extension of the deadline is a good thing as there was a lot of concern about the original short timeframe.

The Commissioner wants there to be a serious level of comfort in any decisions that go up on this project and is happy for the process to take it's time to ensure this.

5.3 Bushfire Season Close (TMc)

The Bushfire Season, under Legislation, is due to close at the end of this month. A memo was submitted to BP requesting an extension of the season for an extra month but due to the recent rain this may not be happening. Lake George and Yass have both extended for an additional month but Monaro and Tumut have not.

As per the legislation, Council is to be consulted on their idea of extending or cutting short the season.

Stand up arrangements can remain the same even though the season may have ended and Fire Towers can run on an as needed basis.

There is general confidence that we would be able to pull up a grass fire if one were to occur. Council agree that they are comfortable with the decision not to extend the fire season.

5.4 National Disaster Mitigation Program (TMc)

TMc attended a meeting with Queanbeyan and discussed their process on getting Bushfire Mitigation Program funds. In the ACT it is essentially TAMS that obtain Federal Government funding for fire trail, firebreak maintenance so we need to work with Neil Cooper on this. The other program, that now comes under the Attorney General - EMA, is the National Disaster Mitigation Program. There is some funding opportunity here but it could be matching dollar for dollar. A range of funding initiatives has gone up in the past, where we've been able to access some of those funds. Options to look at could be the upgrading of the fire towers and getting power up to Mount Tennant.

TMc raised the issue to ask if any Council members have any ideas.

The Commissioner mentions that at the Emergency Management Ministerial Committee meeting yesterday there was very strong national support for continuing the program. The Attorney General signalled that it wasn't likely to be an area of any significant budget cuts if any at all.

A survey has been done on the towers and a report has been submitted with what is required of the towers to bring them up to survey. The Commissioner believes that this would be a good project to put up. TAMS will probably continue with their upgrading strategy of the fire trails.

Action: The Commissioner to forward TMc the list of bids (currently up in front of the program) for him to circulate through Council to review and make suggestions of prioritising or adding more important items to be addressed.

6. Correspondence

NIL

7. General Business

7.1 RFS Business Plan Update (the Commissioner) – There was a technical hiccup in terms of the procurement of a business plan facilitator. This has been rectified. KJ to sign off on the evaluation so that the Commissioner can enter into the contract. Neil Cooper from TAMS also needs to sign and then, subject to the facilitator still being available, contracts should be signed off in five days. Is hoping that the sub-committee from ROAG can meet with the Facilitator to present a draft of the project plan.

TB asks if this will come before Council at some point. The Commissioner suggests that the consultant contact Council Members one on one or possibly organise to get together as a group out of session one evening to thrash out any issues. TB agrees that it would be useful for the Facilitator to meet with everyone.

7.2 New Nominations for Council (the Commissioner) - In total, 14 applications were received of good variety. KJ and the Commissioner will review the applications and advise the Minister who will then make the final decision.

Currently the Council is made up of 8 members; however, the Commissioner advised that an additional four or five could be added to this group (for discussion with KJ). Four members are up for renewal (automatic roll-over to be discussed with KJ).

8. Reports

8.1 Commissioner

Attended the Australian Emergency Management Council meeting yesterday. There was a review of COAG Bushfire Council recommendations and emergencies.

Action: The Commissioner to email a copy of the communiqué to Council.

A lot of emergencies, which were spread out across Government, are now being focussed through Emergency Management Australia, which the Commissioner believes to be a good move. Clear indications that the Mitigation type Commonwealth funding will continue. The Commissioner has just recently become the chair of the Education Communication Warnings and Awareness.

Senior Fire Officer Position - The Commissioner advised ROAG that he would conduct interviews before the period for the applications lapsed. Interviews have occurred but no final papers have been drafted as yet. The Commissioner will talk to KJ before any recommendation or appointment is made. The position is key to the operational requirements of the RFS Business Plan.

The Budget – Numbers should balance this year. Some areas require smoothing out. Due to spreadsheet corruption PPE, fuel and other areas are being looked at to get the correct amounts sorted out. Hoping to have the budget run from a single spreadsheet with line items entered in correctly. Entire workbooks will be linked making the budget easily managed on a daily basis.

The Inquiry – The Commissioner will circulate copies of the initiatives to Council. Four submissions were made with one of these being a joint submission. The Commissioner believes that the Council's report on the McLeod Recommendations will be of interest to the public.

Action: The Commissioner to circulate copies of the initiatives to Council.

8.2 Rural Fire Service (TMc)

Hazard Reduction Burns – the Mount Clear burn has been indefinitely postponed. The proposed joint burn between NSWRFs and TAMS for Googong has been postponed due to rain last week. TMc has indicated to the other agencies that if they have any opportunities for our volunteers to be involved in their burns to keep us informed, as the season has been a quiet one. Ms Julie Crawford NSWNPWS, has a few burns coming up that we may get a call for assistance. The Gundagai Exercise that is coming up will be a good joint exercise with NSW and ACT. Two teams of six have been invited to the NSW State Championships in Tweed Heads. Looking at other opportunities for higher level exercising both internal and joint.

Training Modules – The move to the use of the NSW training resources is progressing well.

TRN Issues – having a range of discussions around the networks with NSW at the moment.

RFS Temporary Staff – have been extended for another three months.

8.3 Fire Brigade (BP)

Going well. Ten additional CFU units in the pipeline. Training has commenced and is progressing well.

TB requests the possibility of getting someone from FB to come and give a briefing of all the CFU's and their progression.

Action: BP to organise a member of Fire Brigade to give a presentation of CFU progression to Council.

8.4 Council Members (ML & SK)

ML – In South Australia Ewan Ferguson (Chief Officer) floated the idea of changing training in a way to get in more volunteers. Training at the moment seems to be more about the toys rather than fire behaviour.

TB suggests going to ROAG to discuss with the Captains. Council agrees.

Action: Extend invite to BFC representative to attend next ROAG meeting to discuss.

ML got some goals from the CFA website: Reduce the impact of fires and emergencies in Victoria, whether we've achieved our goal and mission and lessons from Ash Wednesday. He believes that we need to get a more general message out to the community that we can't defend everybody in a bushfire situation rather than saying we're fully prepared or we're better prepared than ever etc...

The Commissioner suggests inviting Darren Cutrupi from Media to a Council meeting to talk about his paper – ESA Media and Community Information Business Plan. Council agree.

Action: Extend invite to Darren Cutrupi to speak to Council about the ESA Media and Community Information Business Plan.

SK has been asked by a few people to bring up the medals discussion again to see where it is headed.

Council discuss the Awards Committee and the reconvene of the committee, as it seemed to have lapsed. BP adds that the outcome from ROAG meeting was that the committee come back together and BP is quite happy for this to occur. TMc mentions that Nicky is finding out what needs to be done to get the committee re-established. SK is happy with this outcome.

9. Confirmation of next meeting

The Chair closed the meeting at 17:46pm

The next council meeting will be held at the ASOC on Thursday 1st May 4pm.