



ACT Bushfire Council Meeting

5th February
2014
16:05 to 18:15
Black Mountain 1 & 2
Meeting Rooms
ACTESA Headquarters

Chair: Kevin Jeffery (KJ) **Secretariat:** Leandra Parker (LP)

Attendees: Christine Goonrey (CG), Member Andrew Stark (AS), CO ACTRFS
Andrew Joyce (AJ), Member Neil Cooper (NC), Mgr Fire Forest and
Tony Bartlett (TB), Member Roads, PCS
Natalie Hile (NH), Member Dominic Lane (DL), ESA Commissioner
Cathy Parsons (CP), Member Paul Swain (PS), DCO, ACTF&R
Marion Leiba (ML), Member Nick Lhuede, Manager, EMR&SS

Meeting commencement:

Meeting concluded:

Minutes

Agenda item: *1.0 – Apologies* **Presenter:** Chair

Nicola Lewis, Michael Loneragan

Agenda item *2.0 – Disclosure of “Conflict of Interests” of Council Members* **Presenter:** Chair

No “Conflict of Interests” reported by Council Members

Agenda item: *3.0 – Acceptance of minutes of 4 Dec 13 meeting* **Presenter:** Chair

Discussion: The minutes from the previous meeting held on 4th December 2013 were accepted as a true and accurate record.

Accepted by Christine Goonrey and seconded by Kevin Jeffery

Agenda item: *4.0 – Update on action items arising from previous meetings* **Presenter:** Chair

Discussion: Refer to implementation of action items report ([Attachment A](#)).

Agenda item: *5.0 – Correspondence* **Presenter:** Chair

Discussion: Council provided a written response to Dominic Lane, Commissioner, ACT Emergency Services Agency, on Councils advice in relation to the impact of the proposed development upon bush fire safety in the Coombs and Wright areas of the Molonglo Valley.

Discussion: Under the review of the SBMP, the planning committee has identified 11 key issues;

1. Urban Interface Protection – Asset Protection Zones

In implementing the current plan, the ACT Government has achieved a high standard of urban interface bushfire protection. However, the ACT continues to grow at a rapid rate in terms of new urban developments, and there remains the requirement to ensure that standards remain applicable and recognise that in some areas, we need to provide greater flexibility in how standards are achieved. Specifically, the revised plan will:

- Review the currently applied standards for intensively managed Inner Asset Protection Zones (APZs) against latest research and best practice nationally and internationally;
- Provide greater flexibility in applying standards for zones particularly Outer APZs where land management practices, such as primary production, complement fire management objectives.
- Consider the need to strengthen legislation for high risk areas where fire-fighter and public safety is of the highest priority, as well as remove any potential conflicts in existing legislation;
- Integration of APZ treatments with the concurrent consideration of Bushfire Prone Area (BPA) declarations and the application of construction standards (see below)

2. Landscape fire management – Strategic Fire Advantage Zones

The current plan has seen the reintroduction of landscape level prescribed burning in the ACT, establishing the foundation for a mosaic of fuel conditions across public land in the Territory. This is achieving the recommendations of the McLeod Inquiry and Coroner Doogan's inquiry into the 2003 Canberra bushfires and is at the forefront of landscape fire management practice nationally.

The review of the plan proposes to build on these achievements. The practical implementation of large prescribed burns in the current plan has identified the need to give greater flexibility in the definition of fuel management standards in Strategic Fire Management Zones. This will better reflect the variability in operational outcomes across differing landscapes, ecological and fuel elements under prescribed conditions.

3. Regional Fire Management Plans

The RFMPs remain a key component of the Territory's fire management strategy to detail the desirable pattern of mosaic burning across the landscape to achieve fire prevention and ecosystem management objectives.

As was the case with the current RFMP's, their ongoing development will require significant collaboration between the ESA, TAMS and ESDD to ensure the strategic framework, operational requirements and ecological and heritage requirements are integrated for the development of achievable and effective operational plans.

The planned review will also provide for the development of clear policy to guide managers of National Land in developing bushfire risk mitigation strategies, which will also be identified in the RFMPs to ensure integrated and comprehensive strategies across all land tenures in the Territory.

These matters relates to specific recommendations of the Auditor General's Report.

4. Land Management Agreements

Land Management Agreements (LMAs) play an important part in ensuring that rural

land holders understand their obligations in land management activities, including fire management.

The ESA will work with ESDD and TAMS to ensure that LMAs are clear on the responsibilities, actions required and process to be followed by rural landholders within the ACT and ensure there is alignment between the LMAs and Farm FireWise plans.

The SBMP will provide the framework to ensure these arrangements are clearly established in policy. This matter relates to specific recommendations of the Auditor-General's Report.

5. Bushfire prone areas

There has been significant progress by the interdepartmental steering committee, which is led by ESDD with the close involvement of the ESA.

6. Planning approvals and delivery of major projects

A review of major bushfire mitigation projects will be undertaken to identify any statutory, policy or procedural improvements that may be required, and provide advice to Government as appropriate, of any proposed legislative amendment to the *Planning and Development Act 2007*.

The revised plan will also identify the requirement to provide forward planning information to ESDD from the Regional Fire Management Plans. This will allow ESDD to pre-emptively identify significant issues and constraints in undertaking future fire management activities.

This matter relates to specific recommendations of the Auditor-General's Report, as well as the Royal Commission's findings into the 2009 Victorians bushfires.

7. Urban Vegetation Management

The ESA is concerned with the risk presented by dense, native plantings on private land particularly in high risk in the urban interface areas.

The ESA will consult with ESDD and ActewAGL to identify targeted strategies and public information towards better gardening techniques to ensure that household gardens and associated structures do not become fire hazards themselves.

8. Vulnerable communities (disabled, elderly and non-English speaking background)

Vulnerable communities are those that, by their nature or location, would be at a greater disadvantage than the mainstream part of the community and would therefore require special attention and support in the event of an emergency.

Significant work has been undertaken by the ACT Government in providing this support, however the review will further focus on:

- Extent and demographics of the vulnerable community in high risk areas;
- age and condition of the community
- ability to communicate with community to understand warnings or inform of an emergency); and
- physical access to the community in need during an emergency.

9. Bushfire Reporting and Governance

While the Auditor-General's report recognised the strength of the ACT's fire management planning framework, it criticised the monitoring and reporting of prescribed strategies and actions. The revised plan will review these arrangements and ensure appropriate governance and reporting arrangements are established across government.

This matter relates to specific recommendations of the Auditor-General's Report.

10. Forestry practices

In coordination with TAMS and ESDD, current forestry practices will be reflected in the SBMP review as it ties in with RFMP reviews. If a review of certain practices is warranted, the ESA and TAMS will ensure that there is minimal impact on flora and fauna.

11. Climate change

The new Climate Council recently published a report on '*Climate Change and Bushfires*'.

The report highlights the increasing temperatures in the Australian continent and occurrence of heat waves during the fire season are indicating a clear causal effect to climate change. The SBMP review will take into account what significant variations climate change is having on weather patterns and how it affects the local environment.

This will inform how the ACT can implement new and innovative fire management and prevention strategies to take into account the changing environment attributable to climate change.

Key Actions to date

- Three meetings of the review committee have been held, with the key focus of meeting to date to develop the themes identified above. Next Meeting 27 February.
- The development of Community engagement and consultation strategy
- TAMS and ESDD have been undertaking the review of the Regional Fire Management Plans for 2014-2019. These plans are based on those developed in 2009 for the current plan. The majority of the works identified have been maintained however, there are approximately 100 changes identified which are currently being reviewed to finalise the plans. These changes reflect a number of factors including land use changes as well as changes to expected risk levels. First drafts available for consultation are expected to be completed by the end of February.
- Other meetings held with key interest groups include:
 - Commissioner with ACTEW (Michael Costello), reviewing issues associated with power lines easements and clearing, power poles on private and the authority of the ESA to shut down power during emergencies
 - Discussion with the ESDD regarding approvals processes in relation to bushfire prevention activities;
 - Meeting with CFU representative
 - Engagement with ESDD to consider the use of ACTMAPi for publication of bushfire maps in the SBMP
- The ESA are in the process of engaging a consultant to review the background documentation of the current plan. This project will undertake a comprehensive reading and review of documents and detail with annotation changes, improvements. The project will also assess potential realignment of text and rearrangement of Chapters to incorporate new material and minimise appendices.
- Redrafting of the current plan has commenced. The ESA POC is the Group Manager Emergency Management Risk and Spatial Services, Nick Lhuede.

Discussion: RFS Ops Dec/Jan 2013

There were no fires within the Territory during December/January that have damaged property, but due to the conditions, operations have been extended for a number of incidents.

Weather conditions have resulted in four Total Fire Bans, but there have been many days of Very High Fire Danger. IMT's have been established on any days of Total Fire Ban. Stand-up has been extended a number of times due to the weather.

Aircraft have been activated for a number of fires within the ACT and Queanbeyan area.

In addition to the two ACT based aircraft, NSW has based a third aircraft which is a winch RAFT/RART machine since early January.

Other aircraft has been based at Hume during period of increased fire danger, including and AirCrane, which remains here at this time.

RFS currently has crews deployed to Cooma (28), Orbost (5) and Bega Valley (5). We expect to supply further crews to Orbost, but not Bega or Cooma beyond the current planned rotation.

Deployments have also been made to Tumut and Goulburn.

So far this season, including the Blue Mountains and Nowra deployments of October, 247 members of RFS (including Parks) have deployed to an incident outside the ACT. This has been great for experience levels for all involved including nearly 50 members who have only joined RFS in the last 3 years.

RFS has been supported in these deployments by the SES, and a large number of MAPS Volunteers have been deployed both with and independently to RFS.

Public Events/Community Awareness

Brigades have been busy with ongoing engagement with community at Bunning's stores and strong representation in the Convoy For Cancer.

Agenda item: 8.0 – Land Managers Report to Bushfire Council Presenter: Neil Cooper

Discussion: Main points

- 2013/14 BOP included undertaking work along sections of Mt Franklin Road which were un-trafficable to tankers (mostly creek crossings. This work was completed just before Christmas - TAMS are pursuing a capital works funding bid to allow the completion of the upgrade of Mt Franklin Rd in 2014/15.
- After an audit was conducted of the BOP into TAMS reporting of its KPI's. A new system was put in place to ensure that all work undertaken could meet the auditable standard. This new step requires all auditable paperwork to be collected prior to jobs being marked as complete. This change has highlighted that we require a change to the way completed work is reported. Due to the changes we are making moving from an Excel system to TM1 reporting will be delayed this year. We are confident that we have completed 50% of the BOP work.

Fire Business Operating Costs

This includes activities such as leasing vehicles, fuel and repairing vehicles, paying permanent staff salaries and office lease. All these activities have commenced and are less than 50% implemented.

Seasonal Program

This includes engaging the seasonal plant (1 x grader and 2 x fast attack dozers) and a range of activities related to engaging and paying the salaries of season fire crews. The seasonal plant have been arranged to commence at the beginning of the fire season (October). The seasonal fire crews have already been re-engaged to assist with the Spring prescribed burning program.

Fuel Management – Prescribed Burning

Traffic management plans for all prescribed burns requiring them (including volunteer burns) have been obtained via contractor. Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act self assessments (a Commonwealth Government requirement) have been completed for all prescribed burns (including volunteer burns) that require them. There are 47 burns planned for TAMS to undertake. 12 of these burns have been conducted. They have not yet been marked as complete due to the reporting issue mentioned above.

Fuel Management – Slashing

A new slashing contract has been signed. Slashing commenced in mid October with the first cut of all identified areas completed by Christmas. A second cut will be undertaken, where required in January – February 2014.

Fuel Management – Chemical

Chemical fuel management has not commenced and will not commence until plants are actively growing when herbicides will be more effective.

Fuel Management – Physical Removal

11 of the 18 Physical Removal jobs are complete. On-ground work is continuing on two of the remaining 7 physical removal activities. Works plans have been completed for all of the remaining 5.

Fuel Management – Grazing

Considerable planning has gone into the grazing program with the early introduction of grazing being targeted at those paddocks which contain grasses that are likely to exceed SBMP fuel standards early. The introduction of grazing is being delayed in those paddocks which contain grasses which are not likely to exceed SBMP fuel standards until late Summer. Grazing has been or is being undertaken in all of the 77 locations identified.

Volunteer Burns

Skeleton Burn plans to be completed by volunteers have been developed for all volunteer burns. In addition, traffic management plans and Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act self assessments have been completed for all volunteer burns which require them. All of these planning documents relating to volunteer burns have been provided to the RFS. To date 2 of the 18 burns have been completed.

Access Management - Maintenance

On site work has commenced or been completed on 8 of the 32 access management maintenance activities.

Access Management - Upgrade

None of the access management – upgrade activities have commenced.

Access Management – Vegetation Control

Work has commenced, using fire crews, on seven of the access management – vegetation control activities at Kowen Forest, Mt Ainslie and Googong.

Access Storm Damage

Of the 173 roads requiring storm damage repair listed in the 2013/14 BOP, repairs have been completed on 123 roads. **Storm damage work has now ceased.**

Infrastructure

Infrastructure includes installation of fences and troughs to make fuel management grazing more effective, repairs/installation of helipads, repairs/checks of water tanks and maintenance of radio repeaters. Of the 13 infrastructure activities identified in the

BOP, three have been completed and work has commenced on four.

Equipment

There are six equipment related activities of which one is complete and work has commenced on three.

Training

Of the 46 training activities, nine have been completed (bushfire fighter, advanced fire fighter, crew leader, TAMS tanker driver assessments and lighting patterns), and a further 13 have commenced. Importantly, fire preparedness workshops and fitness assessments have been completed.

Audit and Monitoring

13 Audit and Monitoring activities - two have been completed and three have been commenced.

Planning and Research

47 Planning and Research activities have been identified. Five of these have been completed. A further 27 activities have been commenced with many of these (eg: reviewing plans for nature strip developments, reviewing plans for tree plantings, reviewing development applications) continuing throughout the year.

Education

Two of the three education jobs are complete

Agenda item: *9.0 – Presentation on the Bushfire Assessment at Stromlo Forest Park* **Presenter:** **Andrew Stark**

Discussion: Held over for next meeting

Agenda item: *10.0 – Business Plan for 2014* **Presenter:** **Chair & Andrew Stark**

Discussion: AS and KJ tabled for discussion the first draft of activities undertaken by Council as well as additional activities of key concerns to be included in the ACT Bush Fire Council Business Plan, Council Members provided additional activities not previously captured. AS & KJ will update and provide Council with a second draft for approval.

Agenda item: *11.0 – Bush Fire Assessments for New Developments in the ACT* **Presenter:** **Cathy Parsons**

Council had a brief discussion on the process of the Bush Fire Assessments for New Development in the ACT, F&R DCO will provide Council with a previous example of a Bush Fire Assessment application to help Council better understand this process.

Next Meeting

The next meeting is scheduled for 5th March 2014

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