



ACT Bushfire Council Meeting

5 August 2015
16:00 to 19:00

Black Mountain Meeting
Rooms
ACTESA Headquarters

Chair:	Ms Cathy Parsons, Deputy Chair	Secretariat:	Tony Hanson, Executive Officer
Attendees:	Ms Christine Goonrey, Member Ms Marion Leiba, Member Mr Andrew Joyce, Member		Mr Andrew Stark, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service Mr Mark Brown, Chief Officer, ACT Fire and Rescue

Minutes

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

The chair welcomed Members and Officers to the meeting. The Chair welcomed Mark Brown, the new Chief Officer of ACT Fire and Rescue to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Mr Kevin Jeffery (Chair), Mr Tony Bartlett (Member) Mr Michael Lonergan (Member), Mr Steve Angus (Member), Neil Cooper, Manager TAMS Fire Management Unit and Mr Dominic Lane, ESA Commissioner.

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

No Conflicts of Interest were reported by Council Members.

Agenda item: 3.0 – Acceptance of minutes of previous meeting **Presenter: Chair**

Discussion: The minutes from the previous meeting, of 1 June 2015, were accepted as a true record. Moved: Christine Goonrey Seconded: Marion Leiba

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

The Chair noted that the action items from the previous meeting were on the agenda.

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

The meeting noted that Council had received an email from the ESA Commissioner thanking Council for their Report on the Lower Cotter Catchment. Andrew Stark noted the report would be provided to Director General's working group currently considering the fire management issues for the Lower Cotter.

Agenda item: 6.0 – TAMS Bushfire Operational Plan **Presenter: TAMS**

As background, a Briefing was held on 29 July 2015 specifically for Council Members to be briefed on the 2015/16 TAMS Bushfire Operational Plan (BOP) so as to provide advice to the ESA Commissioner, prior to his approval of the BOP under section 78 (2) of the *Emergencies Act 2004*.

The draft BOP, containing a spreadsheet of activities, along with a series of maps, were circulated to Council Members for analysis prior to the briefing.

At the briefing on 29 July 2015 Neil Cooper provided an overview and summary of the BOP and explained the activities using a series of maps showing the proposed activities.

The BOP contains prevention measures such as slashing, grazing, physical removal, maintenance and hazard reduction burns.

Neil explained that TAMS has approximately 700 fuel plots which measure fuel accumulation. Neil further explained that given the magnitude of the mitigation activities, each was provided with a priority level and as the priority increased, the work was scheduled to be undertaken.

Neil provided an explanation of a range of hazard, ecological and cultural burns, along with a range of proposed physical removal of fuel hazards throughout the region. The detail of each areas discussed with Council has not been included in this record of the briefing.

Neil explained TAMS would be engaging a employee to assist in develop a fire management plan for the Lower Cotter Catchment. It was noted that Council had provided a field report from their recent field visits to the Lower Cotter, which would support the development of the plan.

The central issue to come out of the briefing was the need for further information on the proposed contiguous burn in the vicinity of Smokers Gap and the consideration of environmental impacts in relation to that specific hazard reduction. Council welcomed further information at their next meeting on 5 August 2015, prior any formal support for the BOP being provided to the Commissioner.

Brian Levine, Adam Leavesley and Simon Butt from the TAMS Fire Management Unit joined the Council meeting on 5 August 2015 to provide Council members with further information on the prescribed burns.

Brian Levine distributed maps and provided a presentation outlining the challenges, risk factors and potential timeframes related to a large burn earmarked for the Namadgi National Park. Christine Goonrey sought advice regarding the impact and benefit of the burn in relation to its location and size, particularly given the burn is contiguous with other burns undertaken in recent years.

Following both the briefing on the 29 July and 5 August 2015, Council members agreed that they generally supported the BOP.

Council members noted that the BOP was consistent with the Emergencies Act 2004, Strategic Bushfire Management Plan and Regional Fire Management Plans.

Council members noted strong concerns about proposed prescribed burns from Honeysuckle Creek to Corin Dam. Notwithstanding the professionalism, high level skills and extensive planning within the relevant agencies, Bushfire Council urges extreme caution in conducting these burns because of the acknowledged risks of holding the proposed prescribed burn within the planned areas and their contiguity with previous large scale burns.

Council noted Ms Christine Goonrey, Council Member's statements urging future Bushfire Operational Plans to avoid repeating this scale of prescribed burn within similar timeframes.

Council noted that once the BOP had been formally approved, the BOP would be publicly available on the TAMS website.

(Note: Tony Bartlett was unable to attend the briefing or meeting, however, provide Council with his written views on the BOP)

Agenda item: 7.0 – Indigenous Fire Management Framework

Presenter: TAMS

Discussion: Ms Deb Melaluca, Mr Adrian Brown, Mr Dean Freeman and Mr Bhiemie Williamson from the TAMS Parks and Conservation unit provided a presentation to Council on Aboriginal programs within TAMS and the Aboriginal Fire Management Project.

The objectives of the Aboriginal Fire Management Project are to develop guidelines for cultural burning and rejuvenate the landscape through cultural burning.

Council recognised the opportunity for RFS Volunteers to work with TAMS Aboriginal Rangers, known as the Murumbung Rangers, and increase their awareness in relation to site management and bushfire.

Council Members were impressed with the work of the Murumbung Rangers and pleased with the advancement of the ACT Aboriginal fire management framework and program.

The Chair noted that the Council had for a long time sought to be more inclusive of Indigenous views and thanked TAMS Indigenous rangers and fire management officers for spending time with the Council.

Council resolved that they supported the Aboriginal fire management activities in the BOP and would formally write seeking to continue the relationship and also welcomed future approaches from Murumbung Rangers to provide briefings on their fire management activities.

Council commended the addition of the Murumbung Rangers Aboriginal Fire Project in the BOP which will deliver considerable benefit to the broader fire management objectives.

Agenda item: 8.0 – Review of the Emergencies Act 2004

Presenter: ESA

Discussion:

Council Members discussed the review in relation to Chapter 6 of the Emergencies Act 2004 regarding the role of Bushfire Council and the transition to an advisory role from an operational role prior to 2004.

Council members expressed a range of views regarding the Act in relation to the composition, role and responsibilities of Council. Discussion around the public nature of the Minutes was also discussed with various alternative models canvassed.

Council Members agreed that Andrew Joyce would draft a joint submission on behalf of Council out of session with a view to submitting it prior to the closing date on 24 August 2015 with Council's endorsement. A number of members also noted they would consider making individual submissions to the review.

(Note: Tony Bartlett was unable to attend the meeting, however, provided Council with his written views on the Review of the Emergencies Act prior to the meeting)

Agenda item: 9.0 – Council's annual preparedness report

Presenter: ESA

Discussion:

ESA distributed an Annual Report to Council on the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (SBMP) on behalf of the SBMP Implementation Working Group (IWG). The SBMP IWG has representation from Directorates with major responsibilities under the SBMP.

The Annual Report provides Council with an update on the progress of implementing a number of the more important SBMP Action Items along with information regarding the Directorate BOPs.

The Annual Report will also provide the basis for the JACS Directorate's annual reporting on Bushfire Risk Management for 2014/15 and assists Council in the preparation of Council's Annual Preparedness Report.

ESA noted Council had been provided with key documents throughout the year including: Strategic Bushfire Capability Framework; Internal evaluation of the Canberra Bushfire Ready campaign; ESA's Fuel Hazard Assessment; and Progress Papers on IMT capability implementation which addresses some of the issues raised by Council in their 2014 report and would assist Council in developing their Annual Preparedness Report to the Minister this year.

The Annual Report noted that a number of the ACT's emergency plans had been updated in 2014/15, including the Elevated Bushfire Danger Plan and the ACT Recovery Plan along with the strategic priorities for the SBMP Implementation Working Group in 2015/16.

The Annual Report from the Implementation Working Group assists Council with their statutory

function of assisting the Commissioner in monitoring the scope and effectiveness of the SBMP.

The Chair requested that the secretariat distribute Council's 2014/15 Annual Preparedness Report along with ESA's response.

The headings for the 2015/16 Annual Report would be confirmed out of session by Council Members and nominations would be sought from Members in relation to drafting sections of the annual preparedness report. The report would be prepared in early September with sign off at the October meeting.

Agenda item: 10.0 – Next Meeting

Presenter: Chair

The agenda for the next Council meeting will include:

- Areas of Focus from the Council's Business Plan
- Discussion on the Council's Annual Preparedness Report
- A presentation of the planned program to implement minor works on rural leasehold land

Closing: The meeting closed at 7:00pm. The next meeting is scheduled for 2 September 2015.