



Shire of Northam
Heritage, Commerce and Lifestyle

Shire of Northam

Minutes

Bush Fire Advisory Committee

16 March 2021

UNCONFIRMED

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1. DECLARATION OF OPENING

The Presiding Member, Cr T M Little declared the meeting open at 5:34pm.

2. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT TO COUNTRY

The Presiding Member acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet, the Ballardong and Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation and pay our respects to Elders, past present and emerging.

3. ATTENDANCE

Voting Committee:

Councillor – Shire of Northam	Terry Little
Councillor – Shire of Northam	Carl Della
Chief Bush Fire Control Officer	Chris Marris
Deputy Bush Fire Control Officer	Neil Diamond
Inkpen Bush Fire Brigade	Nic Dewar
Clackline Muresk Bush Fire Brigade	Blair Wilding
Bakers Hill Bush Fire Brigade	Kris Brown
Grass Valley Bush Fire Brigade	Sam Moss
Irishtown Bush Fire Brigade	Rob Herzer
Jennapullin Bush Fire Brigade	Aaron Smith
Southern Brook Bush Fire Brigade	Paul Antonio
Wundowie Bush Fire Brigade	Mathew Macqueen
Northam Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service	Greg Montgomery
Northam Central Bush Fire Brigade	Jaime Wilkinson at 6:05pm

Non-Voting:

Community Emergency Service Manager	Brendon Rutter
DFES District Officer Northam	Phil Hay

Staff:

Executive Manager Development Services	Chadd Hunt
Executive Assistant - CEO	Alysha McCall

Gallery:

Clackline Muresk Bush Fire Brigade	Bob Stockman
	Joe Marasco

3.1 APOLOGIES

Voting Members:

Deputy Bush Fire Control Officer	Simon Peters
Wundowie Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service	Jeffrey Roberts

3.2 APPROVED LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Nil.

3.3 ABSENT

Non-Voting Members:

Department of Parks and Wildlife (Wheatbelt)	Graeme Keals
Department of Parks and Wildlife (Perth Hills)	Michael Pasotti

4. DISCLOSURE OF INTERESTS

Members should fill in Disclosure of Interest forms for items in which they have a financial, proximity or impartiality interest and forward these to the Presiding Member before the meeting commences.

As defined in section 5.60A of the Local Government Act 1995, a **financial interest** occurs where a Councillor / Committee Member, or a person with whom the Councillor / Committee Member is closely associated, has a direct or indirect financial interest in the matter. That is, the person stands to make a financial gain or loss from the decision, either now or at some time in the future.

As defined in section 5.61 of the Local Government Act 1995, an **indirect financial interest** includes a reference to a financial relationship between that person and another person who requires a Local Government decision in relation to the matter.

As defined in section 5.60B of the Local Government Act 1995, a person has a **proximity interest** in a matter if the matter concerns a proposed change to a planning scheme affecting land that adjoins the person's land; or a proposed change to the zoning or use of land that adjoins the person's land; or a proposed development (as defined in section 5.63(5)) of land that adjoins the person's land.

As defined in 34C of the Local Government (Administration) Regulations 1996, an **impartiality interest** means an interest that could, or could reasonably be perceived to, adversely affect the impartiality of the person having the interest

and includes an interest arising from kinship, friendship or membership of an association.

Item Name	Item No.	Name	Type of Interest	Nature of Interest
Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Paid Position	7.1	Chris Marris	Financial	Chris Marris is the current CBFCO which is paid an honorarium. This would cease if the role shifted to the CESH or another person.
		Neil Diamond	Financial	Neil Diamond is the current Deputy CBFCO which is paid an honorarium.
Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Paid Position	9.1	Chris Marris	Financial	Chris Marris is the current CBFCO which is paid an honorarium. This would cease if the role shifted to the CESH or another person.
		Neil Diamond	Financial	Neil Diamond is the current Deputy CBFCO which is paid an honorarium.

5. CONFIRMATION OF MINUTES

5.1 COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2020

RECOMMENDATION / COMMITTEE DECISION

Minute No: BFAC.240

Moved: Mr Nic Dewar

Seconded: Mr Kris Brown

That the minutes of the Bush Fire Advisory meeting held on 8 December 2020 be confirmed as a true and correct record of that meeting, subject to the following amendment:

- The inclusion of the time that Mr Chris Marris and Mr Neil Diamond left and returned to the meeting as a result of their financial interest in agenda item 7.1 – Two Year Tern for Leadership Positions.

CARRIED 13/0

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS

6.1 COMMUNITY EMERGENCY SERVICES MANAGER REPORT

File Reference:	5.1.3.1
Reporting Officer:	Brendon Rutter, Community Emergency Services Manager
Responsible Officer:	Chadd Hunt, Executive Manager Development Services
Officer Declaration of Interest:	Nil.
Voting Requirement:	Simple Majority
Press release to be issued:	No

BRIEF

For the Committee to receive and note the update provided by the Community Emergency Services Manager.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Open BFAC Decisions.

A. BACKGROUND / DETAILS

N/A.

B. CONSIDERATIONS

B.1 Strategic Community / Corporate Business Plan

Theme Area 3: Safety and Security

Outcome 3.1: Shire of Northam residents are able to pursue the fullest life possible without fear of or hindrance from crime and disorder.

B.2 Financial / Resource Implications

Nil.

B.3 Legislative Compliance

Nil.

B.4 Policy Implications

Nil.

B.5 Stake Holder Engagement / Consultation

Nil.

B.6 Risk Implications

Risk Category	Description	Rating (consequence x likelihood)	Mitigation Action
Financial	N/A	N/A	N/A
Health & Safety	N/A	N/A	N/A
Reputation	N/A	N/A	N/A
Service Interruption	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	N/A	N/A	N/A
Property	N/A	N/A	N/A
Environment	N/A	N/A	N/A

C. OFFICER'S COMMENT

The 2020/21 bushfire season is one for the record books, almost the entire month of January & February were spent with suppression activities on numerous L2 & a L3 fire on our doorstep.

2021 for Northam was rocky start with the Wundowie Fire on Jan 2nd. This fire was incredibly fast moving and posed significant risk to both life and property within the Wundowie townsite., the Fire started at approx. 1300 during a Harvest, Vehicle Movement & Hotworks ban.

The quick action of the brigades involved in the initial turnout additional to the round the clock monitoring prevented this fire from over running the townsite. The fire reached a total of 71 Ha and although there were some incredibly close calls, it was a positive outcome to see that no significant property had been lost.

The community was impacted by power and mobile phone coverage for 2-3 days.

Shire of Northam Bush Fire Brigades also the Wundowie VFRS managed this incident with 24hr coverage until it the incident was safe to close, approx. 8 days after it started.

As the Wundowie Fire was winding up, the Red Gully fire was rapidly escalating, and this was stretching the availability of resources across the state. Shire of Northam brigades supplied appliances and personnel for multiple strike teams in support of local and intrastate crews

Just as the Red Gully incident was starting to wind down the Wooroloo Incident started and turned out to be on the most significant fires of modern times in WA. Starting on a day of Severe Fire Danger Ratings, also during a Total Fire Ban, and HVMB in Mundaring the fire quickly grew beyond the capacity to be stopped in a very short time frame. Shire of Northam BFB appliances and personnel maintained a presence at this incident in support of the local & intrastate brigades until maintaining 24hr coverage of the massive fire ground.

This fire razed just over 11,000ha, and unfortunately resulted in the loss of 86 homes, with significant impact on critical infrastructure such as phones, power, water. Although the total loss of animal/livestock numbers was high, the 1 positive to come from this fire was that no human life has been lost, some lives have changed irreparably but to have a fire like this, in such a built-up area with fire behaviour never before seen during hours of darkness has some suggesting some form of divine intervention.

Whatever the case divine intervention, good planning or just pure luck this will go down in the history books as a significant event in our time.

Coming into this season, we all knew there was a possibility of COVID-19 playing a part in this bushfire season, and it is possibly widely accepted that most people were prepared to some extent.

The announcement on Jan 31st by the premiere Mark McGowan of the hard border closure for the Metro area, just 2 days prior to the Wooroloo fire made added an extra layer of complexity on what was already an extremely challenging fire, the goal posts were moved a couple of times in relation to masks and other personal protective measure in line with advice that was improving and out teams largely took on the added impost to assist in other regions which is highly commendable

It is important that the work of all both our own brigades and those outside of our regions is acknowledged, this season is most definitely one for the history books and one most of us are not in a hurry to repeat.

Staff would like to acknowledge the incredible work of our leadership teams on the whole, but none more importantly than our Captains, the work in the background that each Captain performed to liaise with crew and staff, as well as releasing appliances in support of the bigger picture is greatly appreciated.

Our brigades were involved in a variety of tasks in an increasingly dynamic environment, meaning we all had to adapt on the fly to get the job done, for this we say thank you, without the work you have done this year, we would not have had the capacity to assist our neighbours as much as we did, it is greatly appreciated by our own community and that of our neighbours.

The 2020/21 season is definitely one that none of us will be quick to forget, there has been opportunities for us all to learn as we prepare for what the future holds, but there is a lot of things we did right and we did it well, most importantly we did it as a team, we did this for the benefit of the greater community.

As some of our community may still be hurting, we will stand with them, and help them through what might seem like their darkest days, this is what community is.

Avon Districts Support Brigade

The Department of Fire and Emergency Services has approached the Shire of Northam with a request to form the Avon Districts Support Brigade. This proposes to specifically recognise the Emergency Services Group as a unified brigade entity, which will provide further identity for its members and enable access to further opportunities of Local Government Grants Scheme funding for PPC/PPE.

The Incident Support Brigade is a group of newly recruited and existing Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, Volunteer Fire & Rescue Service Brigade members and Volunteer State Emergency Services members who provide incident management support at fire stations and provide a crew to run the DFES owned Incident Control Vehicle out of the DFES Regional Office in Northam

The Shire will simply manage the brigade membership list on behalf of DFES, and supply PPC to the members through the LGGS. DFES will manage the day to day running of the brigade and manage the ICV as it is a regional DFES asset.

Bush Fire Control Officers

Brigades have been requested to provide nominations to the committee for Bush Fire Control Officers for the 2021/22 Bush Fire Season.

Each nominee once approved by Council will be assessed against the minimum training criteria, a report will be tabled at the June BFAC making recommendations to Council for formal appointment if training standards are met.

As per s5.6 of the Bush Fires Manual, Brigades are asked to provide a maximum of 3 nominations per brigade area.

The following nominations have been provided by the time of this report being published with the remainder to be provided at the committee meeting

Wundowie BFB
Mathew Macqueen
Jason Cacic

Wundowie VFRS - To be provided at BFAC

Inkpen BFB - To be provided at BFAC

Bakers Hill
Kris Brown
Simon Peters
Tristan Davey

Clackline BFB - To be provided at BFAC

Northam Central BFB - To be provided at BFAC

Northam VFRS
Greg Montgomery

Irishtown BFB - To be provided at BFAC

Southern Brook BFB - To be provided at BFAC

Grass Valley BFB
Chris Marris
Phil Lloyd
Mark Littlefair
Paul Reynolds

RECOMMENDATION / COMMITTEE DECISION

Minute No: BFAC.241

Moved: Mr Kris Brown
Seconded: Mr Mathew Macqueen

That Council:

- 1. Note the Community Emergency Services Manager Report as provided.**
- 2. Establish an Avon Districts Support Brigade.**
- 3. Note the nominations for Bush Fire Control Officers and request the CESM to provide a report at the June BFAC, confirming that each nominee meets the training requirements prior to formal appointment.**

CARRIED 13/0

The following additional nominations were provided at the meeting:

Inkpen BFB

- Neil Diamond
- Nic Dewar

Northam Central BFB

- Luke Hagan

Irishtown BFB

- Murray McGregor
- Rob Herzer

Southern Brook BFB

- Paul Antonio

Mr Blair Wilding advised that Clackline / Muresk BFB nominations cannot be provided until after Thursday as this is when their Annual General Meeting is scheduled.

Attachment 1

By Officer & Status								
Date	Motion No	Item No	Subject	Motion	Action By	Comment	Date Completed	Status
16-Sep-20	C.4032	11.5	BUSH FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 SEPTEMBER 2020	<p>That Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notes the Community Emergency Services Manager Report as provided. 2. Notes the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer Report as provided. 3. Formally appoints the following qualified Bush Fire Control Officers to the position of Chief and Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officers for the 2020-21 fire season: 4. Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Chris Marris 5. Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officers – Simon Peters and Neil Diamond 6. Senior Bush Fire Control Officer- Kristafer Brown 7. Undertakes the following actions in response to the issue of Unexploded Ordnances (UXO) within the Shire of Northam: <p>General</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) All existing UXO mapping be removed from operational use 2) All Brigades, Brigade appliances and CBFEO, DCBFEOs, FEOs and CESM be provided with hard-copy maps of existing potential UXO areas currently available from the Department of Defence website https://www.defence.gov.au/UXO/Where/MapAppInfo.asp 3) Provide mapping to clearly distinguish the various classifications of the land as included within the DFES SOP 4) Clarification be sought from DFES/Department of Defence on the previously distributed mapping that indicated additional 	CESM	<p>Update as of 09/03/2021</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. No Action Required 2. No Action Required 3. Complete 4. Complete 5. Complete 6. Complete 7. 1)Complete 2)Complete 3)Complete 4)No action required, all mapping provided by ADF is now current 5)Not required - advice received from consultant is SOP should be followed and implemented 6) Complete - SOP interpretation as Substantial Vacant for majority of parcel, "Substantial Developed" for building envelope and access road only due to dwellings. 7) will form part of 		Open

By Officer & Status								
Date	Motion No	Item No	Subject	Motion	Action By	Comment	Date Completed	Status
				<p>High Risk areas not currently included on the mapping</p> <p>5) Engagement be sought with the Department of Defence and DFES re 'Slight UXO' areas (which equates to most of ClacklineMuresk and half of Irishtown brigade districts, with small areas elsewhere) to discuss the implications for firefighting efforts, e.g., understanding the risks of using a grader on a previously cropped paddock in Irishtown</p> <p>6) DFES/Department of Defence be requested to clarify the three existing land parcels identified as being "Substantial" if they are classified as "Developed" or "Vacant Land", given the development on the land</p> <p>7) DFES/Department of Defence be requested to clarify the extent of the "slight occurrence" on the above mapping given the historical development of the area, with specific reference to the active firefighting suppression methods that can be used in these areas</p> <p>8) Council provide official notification to landholders of "Substantial" sites concerning the implications of future fires, based on the current operational SOP</p> <p>9) DFES be requested to provide a timeframe for updating the SOP Operational/Response</p> <p>10) The Shire of Northam Bushfire Manual (Section 1.12E) be updated to include specific turn-out requirements for incidents within the "Substantial-Vacant" and "Substantial-Developed" classifications, and land within close proximity to that land (suggest within a 500m radius).</p> <p>11) DFES be requested to ensure turn-out procedures include an automatic UXO warning for those sites either within or within 500m radius of land identified as "Substantial" from the</p>		<p>Operational Pre Plan (OPP) being developed by DFES.</p> <p>8) Completed via face to face meetings with EMDS</p> <p>9) Complete. DFES will not provide a timeline.</p> <p>10) ongoing once OPP developed</p> <p>11) Advised by DFES as complete.</p> <p>12) Advised by DFES as complete</p> <p>13) Complete</p> <p>14) Already occurring</p> <p>15) Crews to follow SOP</p> <p>16) Crew to follow SOP</p> <p>17) Ongoing</p> <p>18) ongoing (OPP)</p> <p>19) Ongoing</p> <p>9. no update - updates will be minor, and will only be around clarification of wording, the SOP is largely complete and deemed sufficient from a risk perspective.</p> <p>10. Will workshop as</p>		

By Officer & Status								
Date	Motion No	Item No	Subject	Motion	Action By	Comment	Date Completed	Status
				<p>above mapping, as included with DFES SOP3.5.13.</p> <p>12) Turn-out messages to include a more specific warning such as "This incident is within the vicinity of a known Substantial UXO area – please refer to local mapping."</p> <p>13) DFES be requested to update FESMAPS, to reflect the above</p> <p>14) The Shire of Northam mobilisation matrix be updated to include the requirement for the CESM, CBFCO or DCBFCOs, and DFES to be mobilised with the DEFS staff member to provide operational assistance to the Incident Management Team (IMT).</p> <p>15) The procedure above to also include the requirement to adhere to SOP3.5.13 – this is currently that brigades cannot enter the site unless the IC approves a variation to the guidelines in the SOP based on a fully documented risk assessment</p> <p>16) Subject to the clarification of the above, the Shire of Northam Bushfire Manual (Section 1.12E) be updated to include specific turn-out requirements for incidents within the "Slight" classification – the turn-out requirement is to include the advice that heavy earth-moving machinery (such as a dozer) not be used and that other earth-moving machinery complies with SOP 3.5.13. This is to be reviewed following additional advice from DFES and Department of Defence</p> <p>17) Mandatory training session be held with CBFCO, DCBFCOs all FCOs, brigade leadership teams and Shire plant operators on the revised Bush Fire Manual procedures relating to UXO issues mentioned above – it is recommended that appropriate DFES and Department of Defence staff attend the training session</p>		<p>part of Bush Fire Manual review</p> <p>14. Complete</p> <p>17. Complete. Pre-season training scheduled annually.</p>		

By Officer & Status								
Date	Motion No	Item No	Subject	Motion	Action By	Comment	Date Completed	Status
				<p>18) Site specific bushfire response plans be developed for the three properties within the Shire of Northam classified as "Substantial"</p> <p>- the response plans are to detail how bushfires either within the property or that in the immediate vicinity (suggested 500m radius) will be handled (alternately, a site-specific documented risk assessment for the three sites be developed in consultation with DFES and Department of Defence in accordance with the requirements of SOP 3.5.13)</p> <p>19)UXO issues be included as an ongoing aspect to scenario training, pre-season briefings, and pre-season tours of the Shire</p>				
16-Dec-20	C.4100	11.3	BUSH FIRE ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING HELD ON 8 DECEMBER 2020	<p>That Council:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Notes the Community Emergency Services Manager Report as provided. Notes the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer Report as provided. Approve the matter of extending the leadership positions of Bush Fire Control Officers, Chief Bush Fire Control Officer and Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer to a two year term is included as part of the discussions at the next Bush Fires Manual workshop, is brought to the brigades for comment, and is then presented to the next Bush Fire Advisory Committee meeting. 	CESM	<p>22/01/2021 Update will be provided in late January.</p> <p>Update 19/02/2021</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> No Action Required. No Action Required Discussions still ongoing, brigade workshops required <p>Update 09/03/2021</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> On hold due to new motion received from DCBFCO & Wundowie BFB at March 21 BFAC 		Open

6.2 CHIEF BUSH FIRE CONTROL OFFICER (CBFCO) REPORT

File Reference:	5.1.3.1
Reporting Officer:	Chris Marris, Chief Bush Fire Control Officer
Responsible Officer:	Chris Marris, Chief Bush Fire Control Officer
Officer Declaration of Interest:	Nil.
Voting Requirement:	Simple Majority
Press release to be issued:	No

BRIEF

For the Committee to receive and note the update provided by the CBFCO.

ATTACHMENTS

Nil.

A. BACKGROUND / DETAILS

N/A.

B. CONSIDERATIONS

B.1 Strategic Community / Corporate Business Plan

Theme Area 3: Safety and Security

Outcome 3.1: Shire of Northam residents are able to pursue the fullest life possible without fear of or hindrance from crime and disorder.

B.2 Financial / Resource Implications

Nil.

B.3 Legislative Compliance

Nil.

B.4 Policy Implications

Nil.

B.5 Stake Holder Engagement / Consultation

Nil.

B.6 Risk Implications

Risk Category	Description	Rating (consequence x likelihood)	Mitigation Action
Financial	N/A	N/A	N/A
Health & Safety	N/A	N/A	N/A
Reputation	N/A	N/A	N/A
Service Interruption	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	N/A	N/A	N/A
Property	N/A	N/A	N/A
Environment	N/A	N/A	N/A

C. OFFICER'S COMMENT

It seems so long ago since my last December report. A lot has happened. Most notably on the incident front with a number of large incidents in or in close proximity to our district. Contributing to this we have had some significant weather events with persistent winds dominating January and then most recently significant rains in the district to kick-off March.

In terms of incidents, the Wundowie Incident which started early afternoon on Saturday January 2, 2021 had significant potential to impact the Wundowie townsite. Started during a harvest vehicle movement bans (HVMB), the fire was fuelled directly towards the Wundowie townsite. With the fire impacting the edge of town within one hour, and reports of a spot fire some 3.5km away, the quick escalation and mobilisation of Brigades both locally and neighbouring, combined with air support, was key to the successful suppression of the fire. While property damaged was limited, and no houses lost, the fire was not without its challenges. The speed of escalation, the hand-over process to DFES, failing radio communications, and the impact to infrastructure (highways closed, water pipe impacted, power outages resulting in the lost of phones) are among some on the list.

The support provided by strike teams and brigades from the Wheatbelt, Metro and the South West during the incident and over the mop-phase was highly appreciated by local crews and the community. The tireless work by local VFRS and BFB brigades during the incident and over the proceeding days and weeks to monitor this incident should not be underestimated. As the winds persisted, the smallest of flare up could have been of real risk in the wrong spot. Thanks must also be extended to the supporting services such as the SES, WAPOL, DPAW, Shire staff and the numerous other agencies and people involved. Finally, thank you to our Deputies, CESM, BFCO's, our Sector Commanders and other leaders who stood up and worked tireless during this time.

Before the Wundowie incident had even finished, we had a crew heading towards Beverly to support an incident kicking off there. Over the following weeks we saw a number of larger incidents in our neighbouring Shires including York and two in Mundaring, along with the Red Gully incident. The devastation of Wooroloo fire, which started barely more than one kilometre from our boundary is an unfortunate reminder of the devastation that fire can cause. Again there was a significant and prolonged effort by Northam brigades to support this incident, despite Covid-19 restrictions.

Any large scale incident obviously provides the opportunity for learnings and we await the opportunity to provide feedback into the formal debrief/review of the Wooroloo incident and the Wundowie incident (which was delayed due to Wooroloo). I thank Brigades and members who have already taken the time to document concerns and opportunities for refinement. Certainly the delayed turnout of Northam brigades in support of the Wooroloo incident in the first five plus hours of the incident is high on the list to get an explanation.

While my last report noted an incident which occurred very close to a scenario that we had run, another incident since in Irishtown was also within a few hundred meters of a previous scenario. Thankfully in both cases the conditions were not as bad as the scenario but it shows the relevance of this preparation work.

Coinciding with the numerous larger fires in January and early February was persistently strong winds. This, combined with public holidays, resulted in an unprecedented number of harvest vehicle movement bans during this period. It is never lost on me the impact these can have on industry and the community, and finding the right balance between risk and impost/cost is essential. Others influencing or making these decisions must also consider this balance. We must also collectively do more to ensure that the community understand what these bans are, how they impact not just farmers, and the risks associated with not adhering to them. The work to make the HVMB SMS signup process easier is one great step in the right direction in this regard.

It is pleasing to see a number of individuals re put their hand up to be an FCO for next season, and I understand other Brigades may still be going through the process of nominating FCO's. There is no getting around that local knowledge and understanding on local brigades is essential to effective fire management. We must all collectively do what we can to support and encourage the development and roles of our FCO's. Some of the required training for our FCO's are currently only being schedule once in our area for the coming off season, so I implore those needing or interested in training to register early and reach out should they need a second/alternative opportunity to complete the training. I think it is also worth acknowledging that we are currently still awaiting the second workshop on the review of the Northam Bush Fire Manual. Despite requests, the scheduling of this workshop has proved illusive but is important

given its potential to change the current process for electing FCO's including those in leadership positions, along with important updates.

On a personal front, the start of February saw me have a double hernia operation which took me off frontline duties for a short period of time. I thank the Deputies for their coverage during this time and to the broader members for their support.

Finally, it is pleasing to see the paddocks start turning a bit green, coinciding with the start of the restricted period. This period will be the first time that the 1m3 burns are not permitted which may be a source of confusion, so we must all work actively to keep the community informed.

Thank you again to you and your members for your remarkable work.

RECOMMENDATION / COMMITTEE DECISION

Minute No: BFAC.242

Moved: Mr Sam Moss

Seconded: Mr Greg Montgomery

That Council note the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer Report as provided.

CARRIED 13/0

The Chief Bush Fire Control Officer discussed the contents of his report.

Cr Little acknowledged the efforts of all volunteers and brigades.

6.3 MINUTES FROM THE OPERATION COMMAND MEETING

File Reference:	5.1.3.1
Reporting Officer:	Brendon Rutter, Community Emergency Services Manager
Responsible Officer:	Chadd Hunt, Executive Manager Development Services
Officer Declaration of Interest:	Nil.
Voting Requirement:	Simple Majority
Press release to be issued:	No

BRIEF

For the Committee to receive and note the minutes from the Operation Command Meeting.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Minutes from the meeting held on 15 February 2021.

A. BACKGROUND / DETAILS

The Operations Command Meetings has evolved as a way of combining the Bush Fire Control Officers Meetings, Captains Meetings & Harvest Ban Officer Meetings into quarterly high-level strategic meetings that encompasses the entire Volunteer Bush Fire Service leadership teams which includes 1st Lieutenants and ensures that our leadership team is informed and included in important decision-making processes.

The Leadership teams are provided a platform that encourages greater collaboration between brigades while empowering our leadership team members to be more involved in issues that directly affect their area of responsibility.

The Operations Command Meetings ensures a more balanced approach to decision making and provides for greater information sharing to ensure a consistent two-way information flow between the leadership teams, and brigade members.

B. CONSIDERATIONS

B.1 Strategic Community / Corporate Business Plan

Theme Area 3: Safety and Security

Outcome 3.1: Shire of Northam residents are able to pursue the fullest life possible without fear of or hindrance from crime and disorder.

B.2 Financial / Resource Implications

Nil.

B.3 Legislative Compliance

Nil.

B.4 Policy Implications

Nil.

B.5 Stake Holder Engagement / Consultation

Nil.

B.6 Risk Implications

Risk Category	Description	Rating (consequence x likelihood)	Mitigation Action
Financial	N/A	N/A	N/A
Health & Safety	N/A	N/A	N/A
Reputation	N/A	N/A	N/A
Service Interruption	N/A	N/A	N/A
Compliance	N/A	N/A	N/A
Property	N/A	N/A	N/A
Environment	N/A	N/A	N/A

C. OFFICER'S COMMENT

Nil.

RECOMMENDATION / COMMITTEE DECISION

Minute No: BFAC.243

Moved: Mr Neil Diamond

Seconded: Mr Kris Brown

That Council:

- 1. Request the CEO to write to the DFES Commissioners Office via the Regional Superintendent, to invite representatives from the Commissioner's office to meet with the Operations Command Team, to initiate open dialogue about the future of the Volunteer Bush Fire Service and the service delivery model under which it will operate.**
- 2. Formally advise the DFES Regional Superintendent, of the nominated date being April 30th 2021 for the disconnection of the VHF High Band & VHF Mid-Band connection at the Fox RD repeater site.**

CARRIED 13/0

Clarification was sought in relation to how many people attended the meeting and how was notification provided to the invitees. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that all captains were provided an invite by email. Eight members attended the meeting, those listed as apologies formally apologised and those not listed did not respond to the invite.

Discussion was held around the service delivery model under which brigades would operate, i.e. would this become a paid service, continue under the local government or DFES. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that this motion would initiate those discussions and engage key personnel to hold a discussion around how the various models may operate. It was noted that there has not been a decision made in relation to the model and therefore it may be difficult to obtain a response.



Attachment 1 Minutes



Shire of Northam
Volunteer Bush Fire Service
Operations Command Meeting
Monday 15th Feb 2021
Northam Recreation Centre

Apologies:

Murray Mc Gregor, Simon Peters, Soren Nielson, Jason Cacic, Matt Macqueen

Attendance :

Shire of Northam BFCO's: Rob Herzer, Neil Diamond, Kris Brown, Nic Dewar, Chris Marris, Phil Lloyd

Wundowie BFB: N/A

Inkpen BFB: N/A

Bakers Hill BFB: N/A

Clackline BFB: Bob Stockman

Northam Central BFB: N/A

Irishtown BFB: N/A

Southern Brook BFB: N/A

Grass Valley BFB: N/A

Invited Guest: N/A

Meeting Opened 1742 by CESM

Agenda Items

1- Restricted Burning Period

The prohibited burning period ends on Feb 28th 2021, discussions around available options to manage the risk.

Group Discussion around 2021 being the first year that there is no cubic meter burning for Autumn Restricted Burning Period.

Decision: Delay start to restricted burning period until March 15th due to fuel loadings in West of Shire, low forecasts for rain with forecast temperatures being above median for both day & night temps, trending weather pattern of low RH with gusty winds justify intervention by leadership teams to reduce the risk to the community

- Shire to communicate with wider public, restricted burning is for Ag purposes with permit only, all burning without permit, promote in SMS, and online media.

- VMS signs to advertise along hwy – Shire to investigate

2- **WAERN Radios connection of VHF-Mid/VHF High**

Decision has been made that due to issues in January 2021 and many previous the link between the 2 networks will be permanently decommissioned, Mid Band VHF will operate as it's own network.

B.Rutter - all appliances have 2nd radio operating on VHF High – no operational appliances have midband capability anymore with the exception of Clackline 2.4 which is up for replacement, new appliance will have same radio configuration as rest of fleet.

Neil Diamond: Brigade level training required to assist membership with greater understanding of functionality of existing radio hardware to ensure improved communications with private units on the fire ground.

C.Marris: Opportunities to encourage further use of BART for increased awareness of incidents within brigade districts.

*CESM to discuss other options for free scanning apps to allow network channel scanning at next meeting, will forward to brigade secretaries for dissemination.

Decision: That the Shire of Northam advise DFES of the nominated date for the disconnection by end of the high threat period or April 30th whichever comes first.

Shire to SMS to wider brigade membership aswell as communication to public about extension of the prohibited burning period, and cessation of mid band 43 as default operational radio channel.

- 3- **Intercom replacements** – CESM provided information about concept being developed to identify solution to potentially replace vehicle intercoms which have significant ongoing issues, and future replacement of hand held radios, Shire of Northam fleet is under resourced with single portable radio, and no crew radio comms. This issue has been highlighted at incidents and the concept/business case for x10dr heads could be a solution.

- 4- Operational feedback to region for Wooroloo incident – Appendix A – Bob Stockman – Clackline/Muresk BFB & Appendix B – Bruce Deveroux – Grass Valley BFB.

5- **Bush Fire Service management for the future – Kris Brown**

The Future of the Bush Fire Service for Northam,

- 1- what are the options,
- 2- how would it look
- 3- What are advantages & disadvantages of this model

Discussions around some examples of how DFES brigades operate, how this could work within the Bush Fire Service and some of the potential advantages & disadvantages.

B.Stockman – Advised his belief that a change to DFES management is inevitable however believes a culture change is required within DFES to improve relationships with volunteers (BFB) first.

R.Herzer- what would happen to Bush Fire Control Officers, are they still required?
Who would be managing the permits, would it be local government or would the local brigade manage this?
Would BFAC still operate and if not what would replace it?

B.Rutter – These are the questions that need to be asked, to enable brigades to continue with informed discussions around the future of the bush fire service, suggested questions like this are best answered by DFES themselves, and recommended a meeting in the near future between operational command team and regional DFES staff, perhaps even a representative from the Commissioners office to answer/address some of these questions.

N.Diamond – Can see better operational support at incident management level, and believes this could lead to a smoother transition for incident escalation & de-escalation, Sec 13 process is clunky and if not done right causes the incident to fall apart.

All agreed that a big change such as what is being discussed would have initial teething issues that would take a period of adjustment from all sides. All agreed that the process would not be a quick one, and would potentially take 12-18 months to get to a point where the brigades, the LG & DFES are in a position to make an informed decision for the future of the service, and it's ongoing management to deliver the best outcome to the volunteers and the community.

N.Diamond – Advised his belief that the service will go over the DFES, suggested that recent incidents may expedite this process. Sees value in proactively engaging DFES staff & having open robust discussions about a potential transfer, to be a part of setting the standard of service as other brigades move over to DFES. Being a part of setting the benchmark could open the door for the service to improve for the benefit of the volunteers and the community.

Action: B.Rutter to approach DFES staff to initiate a meeting with the operations command team to workshop some of the brigade questions, and continue dialogue to allow informed discussions to continue.

General Business:

Nic.Dewar – asked about the status of the 2nd workshop on the Bush Fires Manual

B.Rutter – Conceded that it is unlikely that the workshop will be held prior to the March BFAC, however is setting a date (likely March) in the short term to further progress the amendments to the manual.

Meeting Closed – 1955

Annexure A

Clackline Muresk Bush Fire Brigade

Report/comments on the Wooroloo Fire 1/2/2021 to 6/2/2021.

Introduction:

In the days following the conclusion of the involvement of the above brigade in the Wooroloo Fire, members of the brigade expressed some concerns regarding the management of the resources during their time on the fire ground. The following report is their written observations and comments which are offered in good faith for evaluation for future fire events.

1800 hrs 1/2/2021 to 0700 hrs 2/2/2021

- This deployment very similar to others in the early stages – very dynamic and likely suffering from information overload.
- Power loss resulted in a loss of mobile phone reception particularly in the Reen Road area – similar to the situation in the eastern states last year. GPS tracking on Google Maps was knocked out as a result. This also prevented the Avenza map system from being updated. The crews were requested to download the Avenza app when they arrived at Gidgegannup West but many had never used this tool before.
- Would like to understand why the local brigades were excluded from call out when the fire was initially reported. Inkpen, Wundowie, Bakers Hill and Clackline could have been on site much quicker than some of the city brigades.
- Once the local units were requested, they were asked to assemble at Wundowie Fire Station and then proceed in convoy through back roads to get to Gidgegannup West. This delayed many of those units from reaching the fireground by an hour.
- During the asset protection program on Reen Road in the early hours of the 2nd, the water available in our vehicle was reduced to crew protection only. At that time, the bridge to the eastern end of Reen Road was blocked and Sector Commander was waiting for a FEL to clear the bridge. The road in the opposite direction was blocked by

fallen power lines. We were approached by a local land owner who said he had a substantial dam and could refill our tank which we did. As we left the property, we tied a large piece of emergency tape at the entrance to the property and informed the sector commander of the potential for other units trapped in that area to refill their tanks – the land owner agreed to remain at the dam and fill any vehicle needing water. To the best of our knowledge, this information was not passed on to any of the units (believed to number 6 or more) that were locked into that section of Reen Road at the time.

- Our crew and many others were on route or on the fireground from 1800 hours 1/2/2021 until 0700 hours 2/2/2021 without a break or any refreshments. While recognising this was a critical time of the fire, it is not good and sensible resource management policy to expose crews to such extended hours without welfare.
- We would like to understand why the brigades were used solely for asset protection and not used to fight the fire.
- The Shire of Mundaring has no emergency numbering system in place in the rural areas. We spent more time looking for the right property to defend an asset that we did defending the asset – no numbers on the gate, hidden driveways, numbers on the gate not matching the number provided by sector commander.

Wednesday 3/2/2021 0000 hrs to 0800 hrs

Friday 5/2/2021 1600 hrs to 2400 hrs

Listed to attend as OIC of Clackline 2.4

Saturday Feb 6 1600 hrs till 2400 hrs. Crew of 3. However, I requested this shift to be cancelled (approved) due to inactivity from previous deployments including expected rain.

Points to consider for better organisation in the future.

- Fire started Feb 01 1200, Werribee Rd and Allen St. Reported around Midday. Why wasn't there a request for Shire assistance until 5 hours

after the start of the fire? BART text sent by Northam CSEM Feb 1 1653. The local shire brigades should have been called out as soon as it was reported. Many questions to be answered.

- Local shire brigades should have been deployed earlier and to local areas. If COVID19 protocols were the reason local brigades should have been separated during the early stages. e.g. Northam Shire look after the eastern section. Toodyay the northern flank. Mundaring the southern flank. Perth Metro western area which in hindsight would not have been required.
- Don't task units to the furthest location on the fire ground from home base. In our case Bullsbrook. What happens if there was a fire in the shire and required to return? e.g. Irish Road Dumbarton Road Feb 4.
- Don't send strike teams/units into unfamiliar areas, especially deployed when its dark.
- Provide the latest mapping (roads, tracks and fire breaks) to each unit OIC as we be familiar with the area prior.
- Sector commander should provide as much information as possible as in both deployments the Sector commander was not even sure what was going on.
- The information provided at the main IC Midland was excellent if you knew what you were reading, however little or nothing more was said when in the area deployed.
- Don't have multiple units (Heavy and light) on strike teams waiting around for extended hours as experienced Tue night and Fri night.
- Heavy units were not capable of entering certain tracks which were more suited to LTs.
- Deploy to other locations even if its mopping up. Or send home.
- Improve welfare especially during the earlier days as there were reports of crews missing out.
- Better communications at the IC area.
- Have the sector commander who is responsible for the strike team be fully briefed and ready to outline the task at hand when his designated team arrives. Not having crews waiting around while task at hand is being organised.

- T Card protocols were not adhered to as per SOPs. Fri Feb 5, we filled out the correct heavy T cards at the main IC Midland and then the wrong type beige machinery T Cards at West Gidgegannup meeting place.
- Sector at both deployments instructed he will close our T cards off and sent us home, rather than units return to the IC and pull cards.
- Confusion over selecting radio channels needs to be improved as many in both teams had problems with the correct sector channels which is an indication of not enough training.

In my opinion if local brigades were call upon in the early stages this fire would not have escalated to such a catastrophic fire with many homes unnecessarily destroyed.

Wednesday 3/2/2021 0000 hrs to 0800 hrs

- It was a frustrating night on the entrance Road to Walyunga National Park. 8 to 10 trucks and 30 - 40 people doing very little. If it was observed by media it would be an embarrassment to DFES.
- In essence there was no task for us to do. We did a drive through one property to check for hot spots and some of the other trucks went and blacked out a few trees. This took about an hour.
- Whilst the Walyunga National Park was a potential risk zone given the wind conditions it was extremely unlikely that it would flare. Given the access issues to the hot spots we would have had to hold back until it got to more open ground.
- Most of the numerous trucks parked up should have been sent home or deployed to Gidgegannup / Wooroloo to black out what was possible.
- I was curious why the 4 trucks from Northam were sent to the furthest extremity of the fire were we as a crew had limited local knowledge. It would have seemed sensible to send local (Bullsbrook was there) and metro units to Walyunga National Park.
- More generally we all need to think about the manning of the midnight to 8 am shift. Unless some of the crew had been on the fireground previously the crew are really limited to blacking out duties on an established control lines unless the fire is in open country.

- Whilst we all want to help the fire effort; we don't want to waste time as in many people's cases they have other work or other priorities in their lives.
- Our sector commander who works in Northam but lives in Perth (I do wonder why DFES agrees to this - the cost of replacing utes early is a material cost - That said it is not related to this email) as I understand it had not been on the fire ground at Walyunga before we had arrived. This is not good as he was unfamiliar with task and terrain. I think sector commanders need to have local knowledge and a detailed handover. Particularly at a midnight changeover.

I agree that whatever we put forward should be positive and helpful. Whilst some people were clearly frustrated all of the crew acted professionally and acted in a respectful way on the site.

Thursday 4/2/2021 1600 hrs to 2400 hrs

- I attended the incident on Thursday evening (shift between 4pm and 12am). I was very disappointed that our pre departure briefing was very blasé and definitely did not follow a basic SMEACS format. We were given very basic point at map and say "we are here, we are going there, let's go!" brief. As a result, we left the control point at Midland very unclear as to the Situation that we were going into, our Mission, the expectation as to how we were to Execute the mission (especially hard as we had little understanding of the mission), near no explanation of Administration or Logistics such as location of water, welfare, Fuel and finally the only Communications information we received was a radio channel, we were not even aware of the callsign of the task force leader (we found this out quite late in the piece, in fact after we were on the fire ground and by luck I recognised his voice referring to himself as "Goldfields/Midlands Strike Team Leader").
- We were given a very basic Safety warning that we are to remain vigilant and not put ourselves in unnecessary danger which was explained a bit further as to potential dangers, it was probably the best of the brief but still very limited.

- In regards to this, I believe that we should suggest that Basic SMEAC must occur during all briefings, not just in the training practicals. I believe a booklet/file should be made up by DFES which has a “worksheet” or table that has all of the components of the SMEAC structure on it and a place next to them to place relevant information. These booklets/files should be placed in all appliances. This would mean that it would work both ways, firstly by ensuring all crew have relevant information but also allows crews to ask briefing officers any information they may have missed. It is obvious to me that as we most of us don’t use SMEACS every day it is common for briefing officers to glide over or miss parts.
- The other suggestion I have is that all relief crews are tasked before arriving at an incident and that this is shared with the crews as early as possible i.e. when requesting crews or before they turnout from the shed. The fact that our crews had to travel over an hour in the evenings to and from the incident, across a COVID boarder, to then be tasked to sit in their vehicles or conduct meaningless tasks for between 8 and 12 hours on the ground (excluding travel) , which in fact resulted in some members questioning why they bothered volunteering to go in the first place, and as a final insult resulted in these volunteers now having to adhere to the restriction requirements as they entered the restricted areas of Perth and Peel arguably unnecessarily. Had the crews been tasked prior to their departure, it should have been identified that some crews were not required well in advanced. Especially as whilst we were in Wooroloo, a fire broke out in Irish Town which ended up having Toodyay crews attending in replacement of us and the other Northam Shire crews down the hill.
- In summary, my suggestions are that DFES and VBFS OICs and members take SMEACS more seriously and that a sheet is prepared, and distributed to all appliances, outlining the requirements of the SMEACS with placed for relevant information to be written in.

- Secondly, if IC staff require appliances from other districts, especially after the first shift (I recognise at the beginning of a fire (1st shift) understanding of the fire ground is difficult and unclear), they should be tasked before they are requested and certainly after 4 days of the incident the IC should know if they are needed. This information should be handed onto the crews so they know what they are going for and also to improve the crew's confidence in the management (transparent management and decision making).

Thursday 4/2/2021 1600 hrs to 2400 hrs

- We met at Swan shire SES ground at 1600, it wasn't until about 1630 that the person leading our team took us out for a briefing which lacked many of the SMEAC principles. It wasn't made clear that our leader wasn't to be sector commander or what his call sign was to be, neither was it made clear that we were a separate strike team or what our mission was to be.
- On the fire ground we used the sector's simplex radio channel which was difficult, it was suggested that we use a UHF channel but our leader was unable to make the frequency change. We were assigned to asset protection on a part of Clenton road. With three other appliances, we spent much time following our leader up and down the road looking for an asset to protect. In my opinion there were too many appliances in the area looking for something to do, most with no direction. About 2200 we were led to a dwelling to protect, we were there with two other heavy appliances and a light tanker, there was barely enough room for all of us in the driveway. The fire advanced very little in the ensuing two hours until our stand down time. We went home with the full tank of water we had left with.
- Now the \$64,000 question: Why weren't the closest brigades paged when the fire was called in? Wundowie, Inkpen and Bakers Hill could have had appliances on scene as quickly as Wooroloo (if Wooroloo were called). On a day of such high winds/temperatures it seems to me close

to dereliction of duty not to call all close brigades immediately. The first official call I received was about 1700 requiring our 2.4 to be at Wundowie VFRS shed by 1800.

Thursday 4/2/2021

I was part of strike Team GM12 for Thursday evening

We left the Clackline shed about 2:15pm for a briefing meeting set for 3:30pm at **Midland ICC!**

Upon arrival it appeared the place was being packed away...

points in summary as follows:

- **Why did we not receive an early call out (Clackline BFB) when the fire was "small" at the time it was reported like we got for the Werribee Road fire in January? Early intervention with more units could have stopped it earlier than the catastrophic wild fire it grew into.**
- No-one on duty seemed to know we were arriving! (we had units from Merredin (Colgar), York, Clackline and Toodyay etc - word MUST have been passed through to ICC Midland....<maybe not!>)
- The duty IC did not have a "briefing/task" ready and we wasted a lot of time while they scratched around trying to allocate us to a task.
- We eventually we told to go report to East Gidgegannup via Toodyay Road to patrol sector/Div "South" and were given a map with vague instructions that they will re-task you.
- We were eventually sent to backup the End loader clearing the Railway service track along the Avon river but told to get to that via O'Brien road.

- When we eventually found the poorly tagged entrance track to the start of the actual service access road it was only about 10 km from where we had set out from in Midland !!! i.e. the rail crossing on Campersic Road and at the foot of the scarp in Brigadoon. (about ten minutes from the ICC not the hour journey (60km) we had just undertaken from Midland. Surely distant crews should be deployed at the closest part of the fire ground to them as they arrive - even if they are just tasked as mopping up and not attacking the fire front.
- Food snack ration packs were very good and Vacuum sealed.
- Toilets were being packed away - incoming relief crews were then sharing the centre's toilets = cross risk potential.
- Salvos had their food kitchen setup with sanitiser pods etc - excellent. (same as the recent York fire on a larger scale.)
- We were allocated radio channels BUT not all of our units could use those "allocated" - one difficulty in setting them AND older radios not having the VHF system on them. - it took about half an hour to get everyone onto different channels. CB 5 and the new common channel...
- WATER: we had our own tanker truck following on but the service road was one way and few turn around and had two at least very narrow bridges. E Gidgegannup and West Gidgegannup fire shed are not on any scheme Water! Our 12.2 (7.0) tanker was too heavy to go on the track so was parked up in a picnic spot acting as a radio relay if needed. Also, while we had a convoy we could not pass easily and if one truck ran out of water (as we nearly did - the warning buzzer sounded all the time as we had used our upper deck monitor to douse a tall burning stag, we were vulnerable if there was a running fire!

- The map we had did not clearly show the roads and fortunately we had some mobile coverage and could use that in the area as we had it available offline! Our truck was recently fitted with WIFI booster to facilitate same =VERY GOOD addition in the field.
- The end loader had low fuel so we had to dispatch our LT to tow the fuel pod back from the ICC midland and wait for it to drive up the track fuel the loader *and then return* before we could move out on station some four hours after we had left the Midland ICC It also bought up food rations for everyone in take away packs so we had a meal break before getting on task after sunset - it was very dark.
- We had lodged our T cards at Midland but had to fill-in another set at E Gidgegannup (they had run out of the correct ones!!!)
- Other Observations: we saw a Service vehicle at the Midland centre - great for in house repairs to hoses etc.
- the Towable fuel pod was deployed (and available!)
- Water there was none available along our section of the track - apparently there were some tanks further on but we did not encounter them - we just shared the mopping up of cleared (still burning!) logs etc so that we did not run out. - **there were some awkward turn-arounds they need to be made wider for truck access here possible.**
- The rail signalling solar panels need to be able to be protected but NOT if we have limited water available to replenish on the one-way track.
- the maps need to also show travel routes - OR different maps printed as well to indicate SHORTEST SAFEST ROUTE to tasking allocated.

- When a fire breaks out at the junction of Local Govt. boundaries ALL shires concerned should be sent the emergency call out not just one.

Friday 5/2/2021 1600 hrs to 2400 hrs

- Day 5 Friday I was a crew member with the Clackline 2.4. Tasked from 4pm to 12am with 4 brigade members. Along with us were Julimar 2.4, a Merredin L. Tanker, York 4.4, Greenhills 3.4, + one other L. Tanker, Toodyay 12.2.
- Why weren't more Northam VBFB units called upon at the initial call out on a day of such strong fire behaviour conditions and when there was a realization that they were losing the fight?? It pretty much started on the Shire boundary!
- The initial brief gave almost no information except a map and DFES person to control us! There was no overall information on the current circumstances of the fire, was it running, was it contained, position of threat etc.
- Took 45 min to sort radios out between all units, told to go to Giddegannup West fire shed, waited there another 45 min. Got our task to clear service track for railway line from Cathedral Ave East to the Eastern boundary of the burnt area - approximate distance 7-8km. Took another 45 minutes to get there along O'Brien Rd.

- Loader was at start of track to go through first, had to wait for a USAR team who are chainsaw accredited to follow. Loader had low fuel so had to wait another 60min to get fuel and have a driver changeover.
- Dinner arrived and we hadn't struck a blow - 3.5hrs. Eventually proceeded up track at 8.15 pm thereabouts.
- Fire area was burnt from edge to edge occasional trees alight - at most this was a job for a heavy tanker and 1 light tanker, or almost 2 heavy and USAR.
- Volunteers put their time forward to help in whatever way they can, the feeling of uselessness sitting, waiting, achieving nothing with wasted resources is putting volunteers off. This gets looked at every time there is a major incident that DFES runs and when you turn up to put your time forward again nothing has changed.
- DFES staff should have these volunteer shifts organised prior to volunteers turning up so they are straight onto the job at hand. They know what crews and when they are coming so there is no excuse. All crews that I have talked to from other brigades say the same!

Summary:

1. The basic tenet of bush fire fighting is the speed of response. A common thread of these observations is why was no call made for assistance from Northam brigades until after 1700 hours on Day 1, 5 hours after the initial report was made. The ignition point of the fire was approximately 2 kilometres east of the western boundary of the Shire.

2. Fatigue management/welfare supply in the first 48 hours of the fire left a lot to be desired. Could consideration be given to the airline catering firms to provide a contracted service for the provision of hot meals from their reserves?
3. All local governments in rural areas should introduce emergency numbering as a matter of urgency to reduce time wasted trying to identify assets that require protection.
4. Local knowledge is a key feature of successful fire suppression – the brigades closest to the current fire front should be the priority units especially in the immediate aftermath of the emergency notification.
5. A common theme from those attending this fire was the lack of proper SMEAC briefing before deployment and poor radio use/protocol.
6. The use of resources/time was poorly managed. A thirty minute briefing and, perhaps, seven hours work should be the aim. Sector commanders should be well versed in the sector conditions before leading a deployment on to the fire ground.
7. Consideration should be given to the collation of data at a central point to allow the Incident Controller make the safest and most prudent decisions – to this end, efficient administration support in the Incident Control Centre should be a priority.
8. Have the recommendations of the NSW Bush Fire Enquiry 2000 been studied and the key recommendations identified for the Incident Controllers and Sector Commanders in Western Australia?

Bob Stockman

Brigade Captain

Clackline Muresk Bush Fire Brigade.

11th February 2021.

Phone 0417310 397

Email bobandbetty@westnet.com.au

Annexure B

Dear Sir,

I am a member of the Grass Valley BFB DFES number 180004 and I write to you firstly to inform you of my concerns and also to receive answers I have in regard to the Wooroloo fire.

Firstly, we were task to attend at 23.30 at the Jack Mann control point for tasking onto the fire ground we were part of a strike team from Northam consisting of 5 heavy appliances.

Volunteers were called around 15.00 and the team was put together, my question for you is why with nine hours of notice of our arrival we arrived on scene that it then takes just short of two hours to find a task for us to do that a total of 3000lt of water was used to black out six burning logs.

We then sit around for another task that required machinery to create a tracking break around the fire for us to access. The machinery was not even on the scene when this task was assigned.

It was then decided that instead of all five appliances waiting around for at least 90 to 120 minutes before getting access that two units were told to stand down and head home because at best it was a task that required minimal assets to complete.

The portrayal on the DFES website, the pictures in the media and even your own interview on channel seven continued to say the fire was out of control, houses were under immediate threat and we get on scene to just sit around. It is just not good enough. We had no problem if blacking out was going to be our task but surely a better use of resources could have and should have been found than the minimal tasks that were performed in the time we were on the fire ground.

Volunteers want to be at an incident to be of help and by giving up work, family time or in this case a good night sleep it shows they care. In my case I paid for an extra staff member to work in my absence which I am willing to do but not to be just sitting around doing nothing while having numbers on the board to make the whole show look more important.

My biggest question though is that when the fire was first reported no units from the Shire of Northam were deployed when most are located closer than any Shire of Mundaring **units whose district Wooroloo is in**. The incident at Wundowie several weeks ago every asset was thrown at the fire early, it was very chaotic early but the conditions were very similar to Wooroloo, hot and windy and was contained relatively quickly.

I am not saying that the escalation of the Wooroloo fire would not have happened but given the closest assets were not **used how many** of the 70 odd dwellings lost could have been avoided. What could have been a fire of a few hundred hectares ends up the way it did.

The sitting around is not new at fire incidents but it wears very thin with many of the volunteer's and I think it is an issue that needs addressing as a matter of urgency. Getting volunteers is hard so keeping the them should be the highest priority given the aging of the volunteer's in the brigades and the need to encourage younger volunteers.

I thank you for your time and look forward to your reply and or discussions we may have.

Bruce Devereux

0419962110

7. MOTIONS OF WHICH PREVIOUS NOTICE HAS BEEN GIVEN

Mr Chris Marris declared a "Financial" interest in item 7.1 – Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Paid Position as he is the current CBFCO which is paid an honorarium. This would cease if the role shifted to the CESM or another person.

Mr Neil Diamond declared a "Financial" interest in item 7.1 – Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Paid Position as he is the current Deputy CBFCO which is paid an honorarium.

Mr Chris Marris and Mr Neil Diamond left the meeting at 5:53pm.

7.1 CHIEF BUSH FIRE CONTROL OFFICER – PAID POSITION

BACKGROUND

Neil Diamond

I would like to put a motion before BFAC Northam that the CBFCO position be fully paid position with the Shire of Northam and removing the responsibility and accountability away from a volunteer. This proposal would see the CESM position also become the CBFCO as it is in many other regions.

The new legislations that are soon to be introduced will take away some of the protections that a volunteer working in good faith now has, the accountability will increase significantly to a point a volunteer should not be in this position.

Two DCBFCO positions as per current would remain to continue the conduit between brigades and the CBFCO and the Shire.

Wundowie Bush Fire Brigade

The Wundowie VBFB puts a motion forward that the Shire of Northam move away from the current model of having a volunteer chief, the position should be a paid position under the shire.

There are changes coming in legislation (Work Health & Safety Act 2020) that are posing significant risk on what has historically been a volunteer role, the level of accountability for the position is higher than it has ever been, and the brigade believes the risk is now too great to be undertaken by a volunteer.

The recent fires in Red Gully, Wooroloo, and our own fire in Wundowie this year, has highlighted how times have changed and as we move to a level of greater accountability and responsibility placed on the shoulders of a volunteer the Wundowie VBFB recommends that Council create a paid position within the Shire of Northam.

Note: All metro local governments that have a CESM has appointed them as the CBFCO. Shire's backing onto the metro region is also going down this path being Mundaring, Swan, Kalamunda, and Chittering.

The Wundowie VBFB puts forward Neil Diamond & Chris Marris as deputies 1 & 2.

OFFICERS COMMENT

Staff recognise the significance of the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer position and the impost it can have on what has historically been a volunteer role. Staff support further investigation into the potential for the CBFCO to be combined with the CESM position. This includes discussions with DFES who currently jointly fund the CESM position with the Shire of Northam being the host organisation.

It is also be recognised by staff and Council that the positions of CBFCO, and DCBFCO's (and in fact all FCO's and volunteer personnel) have involved significant dedication and time commitment from our volunteers. Staff also recognise that the role of CBFCO is changing and becoming more challenging for volunteers.

This model is seen to be very effective in neighbouring local government districts such as Mundaring, Kalamunda & Swan, in fact all Metropolitan CESM's are all appointed as Chief Bush Fire Control Officer by their respective local governments. It is recognised that the position carries significant responsibilities that requires ongoing training to ensure that the position delivers a professional, highly skilled volunteer service that aligns with industry best practice, and meets the expectation of the volunteer membership, the organisation & community.

The integration of the CESM and the CBFCO positions could potentially allow for improved relationships with partner agencies such as WAPOL, St John Ambulance, Parks & Wildlife Service, plus other government and non-government agencies that have historically not been possible under the volunteer model.

This proposal would see the DCBFCO's take on more of a strategic operational role as the conduit between the Bush Fire Service Volunteers, the LG and DFES.

Staff support the proposal as written, however further discussion with other stakeholders including DFES is required to form a recommendation to Council.

Staff propose a workshop to be held with DFES, Shire staff, Shire of Northam Elected Members and the Operations Command Teams to look at available options to table a recommendation at the June BFAC.

CBFCO COMMENT

- The Chief role is very involved, but it is currently been managed by a volunteer and indeed we had multiple volunteers nominate for the position just last season
- To imply that a volunteer is less professional or capable than a paid employee is not an argument that I, or I am sure the Association, would support
- Holding the CESM to account, and fighting for the best outcome of Northam and our volunteers, is a key part of the chief role. It is also a difficult aspect of the role as the CESM often have their own priorities influenced by DFES and their own healthy career aspirations. Having this discussion and accountability is healthy. Having this left unchecked I think is a real risk in the wrong hands
- The discussion for the motion talks about new legislation as an example. The Shire of Northam should be providing the Chief support in areas of legal, HR, etc just like they should provide this support to the CESM or other paid employee should be able to get this support. Just being the CESM does not make this person an expert in all areas. Just being a volunteer doesn't mean that you are not prepared to continue learning
- The volunteer chief by their nature and experience has a good understanding of volunteers and the local district. While we have a CESM currently that has been with us for a number of years, that could change tomorrow. Our current requirements for a volunteer chief mean we should never have an inexperienced chief. Plus Brigades have a meaningful input into the appointment of this person. This would not be the case in terms of the future recruitment of the CESM position
- While some Shires to our West and in metro have or may be going down this path, we are not in these areas. If we look to our neighbours to the south, east or north, these Shires have and continue to see merit in the roles being fulfilled by volunteers
- Ultimately I believe that the chief role is not suited to the CESM (irrespective of who is in the role) for our Shire, and while there are volunteers professionals prepared to do this role, we should make use of that opportunity
- In saying that, I have no issue in personally stepping back from the role to allow another suitable volunteer to step forward - we have that process currently to allow for such changes. Equally I will respect the decisions of the Brigade should they support this change
- While the discussion makes mention of, if the CESM is the chief and Neil and myself are proposed as being deputies, I would not seek nomination for a deputy role under that model

Mr Jaime Wilkinson entered the meeting at 6:05pm.

MOTION

Moved: Mr Mathew Macqueen

Seconded: Mr Rob Herzer

The Council recognise the increasing risk of the CBFCO position and make it a paid position within the Shire of Northam from 1 July 2021.

LOST 2/10

Debate was held around the motion. Mat Macqueen spoke for the motion. Nic Dewar spoke against the motion.

Clarification was sought in relation to the intent of the motion. Mr Mathew Macqueen advised that this is not necessarily to combine the CESM and CBFCO, it is making the CBFCO position a paid employee of the Shire of Northam instead of an honorarium.

Discussion was held around if the CBFCO position is covered by the Shire from an insurance and legal assistance perspective. The Executive Manager Development Services confirmed that they would be covered by the Shire of Northam and are essentially an unpaid employee.

Mr Phil Hay advised that prior to making a decision on the matter, members should give consideration to both sides (brigade and Shire) and understand that the Shire needs to give consideration to risk management. It was also advised that there can be considerable pressure on a CBFCO in the event that an incident is subject to a coronary investigation or legal proceedings. This can have a huge impact on lives. Mr Hay advised that the decision made needs to be in the best interest of your community.

It was raised that this matter continues to be brought up and queried if there is there new evidence to support this being revisited or to alter previous decisions. Cr Little advised that there are changing demographics in the West which is putting a lot of pressure on volunteers.

It was queried why a decision is needed at this time given there may be a new operating model implemented in the near future.

Mr Nic Dewar advised that his brigade overall is against combining the CESM and CBFCO positions, based on previous brigade discussions.

Mr Blair Wilding advised that the matter is not supported by his brigade and the matter should not be considered at this meeting as further discussions are required with brigade members.

Mr Rob Herzer advised that his brigade does not support the motion.

Mr Greg Montgomery advised that the VFRS does not support the motion at this point and time.

Clarification was sought in relation to the changes to legislation. The Community Emergency Service Manager advised that a briefing was held with LGIS today and staff are currently seeking further clarification on this. Staff are requesting the LGIS Representative to attend the next Operational Command Meeting to provide some clarification. It is understood that the changes will involve volunteers being treated like employees.

Mr Greg Montgomery noted that when an incident is greater than what an FCO can handle, this is handed over.

Mr Kris Brown advised that this was discussed last year with his brigade, his brigade saw merit in this however is not currently supportive.

Mr Aaron Smith outlined that these are 2 entirely separate roles that need to work in harmony together. It is believed to be too much for one person.

Mr Mathew Macqueen advised that many members do not understand what the role involves if you have not been in the position. When an incident occurs, you need to be involved until the end which can have a financial impact if they are unable to work due to the duties associated with the CBFCO role. It is believed supporting CBFCO financially in that role is a better outcome than handballing to this to the CESM.

Mr Chris Marris and Mr Neil Diamond returned the meeting at 6:27pm.

7.2 RISK TO RESOURCE

BACKGROUND

Wundowie Bush Fire Brigade

Wundowie VBFB is in desperate need for the R2R outcomes to be delivered by Council without further delay because of the way the brigade has grown in the past 8 months.

As a direct result of the hard work being conducted by the volunteers, 22 members along with a cadet unit of 17 members and we have no station, no facilities and a completely inadequate firefighting appliance that is not fit for purpose and is not suitable for the level of risk that the brigade district covers. The Wundowie community has been extremely helpful and supportive of the brigade, with the Wundowie Club opening their facility for us to meet which is always appreciated but the brigade needs its own facility with our own training and ablution facilities moving forward. The brigade needs a permanent home for the longevity of the brigade in support of our community.

OFFICERS COMMENT

Staff are working on the 2021/22 LGGS submission that will include a single bay facility with amenities based on the current DFES facility footprint design.

The preferred option of the Wundowie BFB & VFRS co-locating does not seem to have the support of brigade members from either brigade, so moving forward it is the intent of Staff in support of the Wundowie BFB rapidly growing membership that the Wundowie BFB will have its own standalone facility within the Wundowie townsite.

Staff acknowledge the work the brigade has done in the past 3-8 months in completely reinventing itself and becoming a strong brigade with a large number of members, both active and auxiliary.

Staff also commend the brigade for the initiative shown in opting to host the Emergency Services Cadet unit recognising the future of the service being with our local youth.

MOTION

Moved: Mr Mathew Macqueen

Seconded: Mr Nic Dewar

The Council instruct the Shire of Northam CEO to write to the DFES Commissioner and the incoming Emergency Services Minister requesting an update on the progress of funding being available for the provision of a new facility and amenities for the brigade, and a definitive timeline for when this and the LT replacement of a 3.4U will be completed.

Cr Terry Little advised that the VFRS station was built in 2003 and the intent was for the brigade to be based here when this was established. Mr Mathew Macqueen advised that there has already been a number of meetings with brigade and VFRS members with no outcome achieved. Mr Phil Hay advised that a meeting should be held with the Regional Superintendent, VFRS and brigade members.

With the approval of the mover and seconder, an addition was made to the motion to include the potential utilisation of the VFRS facility.

MOTION / COMMITTEE DECISION

Minute No: BFAC.244

Moved: Mr Mathew Macqueen

Seconded: Mr Nic Dewar

The Council instruct the Shire of Northam CEO to write to the DFES Commissioner and the incoming Emergency Services Minister requesting an update on the progress of funding being available for the provision of a new facility and amenities for the brigade, including the potential utilisation of the existing VFRS facility, and a definitive timeline for when this and the LT replacement of a 3.4U will be completed.

CARRIED 14/0

7.3 TEMPORARY STATION FOR THE WUNDOWIE BUSH FIRE BRIGADE

If the WVFB cannot get allocated a station by the end of the financial year 2020/ 21 that council lease the building next to the IGA (old hardware) until a station is built.

OFFICERS COMMENT

Officers will investigate this option and prepare a report to council for budget consideration, officers will at the same time look at alternative options and provide Council with recommendations as the current facilities are inadequate and do not provide the volunteers with the basic requirements for personal hygiene, or operational readiness, this will be tabled to Council as part of the annual budgetary process.

MOTION

Moved: Mr Mathew Macqueen

Seconded: Mr Sam Moss

The Council lease the land and building next to Wundowie IGA (old hardware) if land and plans for a station have not been signed off on by DFES & the Shire of Northam by end of 2020/21 financial year.

Mr Paul Antonio left the meeting at 6:51pm.

Debate was held around the motion. Mat Macqueen spoke for the motion. Cr Carl Della spoke against the motion.

Cr Carl Della raised concerns with the motion being to restrictive.

Mr Mathew Macqueen advised that there are 22 active members and the facility has no power, water or a toilet.

With the approval of the mover and seconder, the motion was amended to include 'and/or exploring other suitable premises'.

Clarification was sought in relation to whether the Shire will get reimbursed from DFES. The Executive Manager Development Services advised that this would need to be a budget allocation of Council as it is not covered by DFES.

MOTION / COMMITTEE DECISION

Minute No: BFAC.245

Moved: Mr Mathew Macqueen

Seconded: Mr Sam Moss

The Council lease the land and building next to Wundowie IGA (old hardware) and/or explore other suitable premises if land and plans for a station have not been signed off on by DFES & the Shire of Northam by end of 2020/21 financial year.

CARRIED 13/0

8. URGENT BUSINESS APPROVED BY DECISION

Nil.

9. GENERAL BUSINESS

Paul Antonio returned to the meeting at 6:52pm.

Mr Chris Marris declared a "Financial" interest in item 7.1 – Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Paid Position as he is the current CBFCO which is paid an honorarium. This would cease if the role shifted to the CESH or another person.

Mr Neil Diamond declared a "Financial" interest in item 7.1 – Chief Bush Fire Control Officer – Paid Position as he is the current Deputy CBFCO which is paid an honorarium.

Mr Chris Marris and Mr Neil Diamond left the meeting at 6:54pm.

9.1 CHIEF BUSH FIRE CONTROL OFFICER – PAID POSITION

Raised by Mr Mat Macqueen

Clarification was sought in relation to whether this matter should be presented back to brigades for further discussion. Discussion was held around what cover brigade members have in the existing and new legislation. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that this will be discussed at the next Operation Command meeting where the LGIS representative will be invited to attend. Mr Blair Wilding advised that the Volunteer Fire Association would be able to assist with some brigade queries in relation to cover.

It was noted that some brigades have already formed a position on this and do not want to see this position changed to being a paid position.

It was determined that a motion was not required at this stage.

Mr Chris Marris and Mr Neil Diamond returned to the meeting at 7:05pm.

9.2 BUSH FIRE MANUAL

Raised by Mr Nic Dewar

Clarification was sought in relation to when will this be finalised. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that he will be able to provide further detail on 12 April 2021, once advice has been provided by LGIS.

9.3 WOOROLOO FIRES QUESTIONS

Raised by Mr Blair Wilding

Clarification was sought in relation to whether the questions raised by brigades have been answered. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that a formal debrief has not yet been held and information will be provided to brigade members once this is available. The Chief Bush Fire Control Officer advised that the Chief and Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer are raising the brigade concerns at every opportunity.

9.4 PERMITS AND 40 HECTARE MINIMUM – SMS ISSUED

Raised by Mr Blair Wilding

Clarification was sought in relation to the recent SMS issued relating to permits as this was not clear.

Mr Aaron Smith advised that if your property is not over 40 hectares, you cannot obtain a permit. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that this allows burning to occur on properties used for agricultural purposes only. These were the parameters set in 2020 and the brigade Captains wished to maintain this. The Community Emergency Services Manager advised that permits can be issued outside of these parameters on a case-by-case basis and subject to consultation with the local FCO or brigade Captain.

It was noted that the SMS could be better worded to ensure the permit eligibility is clear.

Case by case is for ag purposes. Engage local FCO or captain.

Intent is for farmers / ag purposes with properties over 40 hectares.

9.5 NEW 4.4 UNIT

Raised by Mr Phil Hay

Mr Phil Hay advised that the new 4.4 unit is available for anyone wanting to view after the meeting. This vehicle is suitable for off road areas.

10. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

15 June 2021.

11. DECLARATION OF CLOSURE

The Presiding Member Cr Terry Little declared the meeting closed at 7:13pm.

"I certify that the Minutes of the Bush Fire Advisory Committee, held on Tuesday 16 March 2021 have been confirmed as a true and correct record."

_____ Presiding Member

_____ Date

UNCONFIRMED