



Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee (BFCC)

MINUTES

Meeting:	No. 108 Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee (BFCC)
Location:	Berrigan Meeting Room, NSW RFS, 4 Murray Rose Avenue, Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127 and via MS TEAMS
Date and time:	Tuesday, 19 March 2024 – 1030 - 1230
Members:	Commissioner Rob Rogers AFSM, NSW Rural Fire Service (Chair)
	Acting Deputy Commissioner Greg Penney, Fire and Rescue NSW (<i>Representing DC Megan Stiffler</i>) (<i>On-line</i>)
	Dr Atticus Fleming AM, NSW National Parks, and Wildlife Service (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr George Schneider, Department of Planning, Housing, and Infrastructure (DPHI) – Crown Lands (<i>On-line</i>)
	Dr Ross Dickson, Forestry Corporation of NSW
	Mr Greg Mullins AO AFSM, representing the Minister for the Environment (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr Robert Conroy, Nature Conservation Council of NSW (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr Garry Grant, NSW Farmers (<i>On-line</i>)
	Cr Julie Griffiths, Local Government NSW (<i>On-line</i>)
	Cr Giacomo Arnott, Local Government NSW (<i>On-line</i>)
	Superintendent Liz Ferris AFSM, NSW Rural Fire Service Association (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr Scott Campbell, NSW Rural Fire Service Association (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr Kim de Govrik, NSW Public Service Association (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr Leighton Drury, Fire Brigade Employees Union (<i>On-line</i>)
Attendees:	Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie AFSM, RFS
	Deputy Commissioner Kyle Stewart APM, RFS
	Assistant Commissioner Kelly Quandt AFSM, RFS
	Assistant Commissioner Stuart Midgley AFSM, RFS
	Dr Simon Heemstra, NSW RFS
	Ms Melissa O'Halloran, RFS
	Ms Renee Armstrong, NSW RFS
	Mr Scott Donohoe, Fire and Rescue NSW
	Ms Rebel Talbert, Forestry Corporation of NSW
	Mr Cameron Chaffey, NSW National Parks, and Wildlife Service (<i>On-line</i>)
	Ms Naomi Stephens, NSW National Parks, and Wildlife Service (<i>On-line</i>)
	Mr Shaun McBride, Local Government NSW
	Mr Scott Vale, Department of Planning, Housing, and Infrastructure (DPHI) – Crown Lands (<i>On-line</i>)
	Ms Kate Woods, RFS
	Ms Teresa Stambe, RFS
Apologies:	Deputy Commissioner Megan Stiffler, Fire and Rescue NSW
	Dr Leigh Pilkington, NSW Department of Primary Industries
	Ms Sarah Stone, NSW Aboriginal Land Council (<i>Representing Mr Yuseph Deen</i>)
Members not in attendance:	Ms Natalie Rotumah, Native Title Services NTS Corp
	Deputy Commissioner Peter Thurtell APM, NSW Police Force
Minutes by:	Committees, RFS

1 Acknowledgement of Country, Welcome and Apologies

The Chair opened Meeting 108 and noted apologies received. The Chair advised of the resignation from the Committee of two members: Ms Tanya Koeneman (NSW DPI), who was the member to promote the integrity of Cultural Burning and Mr Dominic Lane, the representative of the NSW Reconstruction Authority. The Chair proposed that the Committee write to acknowledge Ms Koeneman and Mr Lane's contributions. The Chair welcomed AC Quandt, the A/Director of Operations following AC Millington's move to Queensland.

The Chair declared the meeting open at 1030.

Action 108.1 Secretariat to prepare thank you letters to Ms Koeneman and Mr Lane for signature by the Chair.

2 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3 Acceptance of Minutes

The minutes of BFCC Meeting 107, held on 12 October 2023, were tabled, and accepted.

Decision 108.1 The Committee resolved to endorse the minutes of Meeting 107, held on 12 October 2023 for signature by the Chair.

4 Open Action Items

The Action Items were tabled and discussed. The Action Items have been updated in accordance with the discussions (refer to Table 1).

4.1 Bushfire Protection for Existing Development (BPED) Presentation, Scott Vale, Crown Lands.

Mr Vale gave a detailed presentation on Crown Lands' work to consult developed spatial algorithm to apply BPED to existing development on and adjoining bush fire prone Crown-managed land. The presentation is attached to the minutes.

Cr Arnott queried if councils were notified at any stage of the clearing process used for Asset Protection Zones (APZ's) due to concerns of potential community reactions to large scale clearing of dense bushland. It was noted that consultation with local landholders and relevant authorities, such as the RFS and councils, was typically conducted before any clearing works began. The consultation included site inspections and discussions regarding the proposed works and any environmental considerations, such as koala habitat. In areas identified as environmentally sensitive, the Bushfire Environmental Assessment Code and threatened species guides were consulted to determine appropriate restrictions and mitigation measures for the clearing activities.

Mr Mullins raised concerns about proposed area near Maybrook Manor, noting that a 100 metre clearance would severely impact valuable urban bushland and riparian environments, and suggested exploring alternatives to clearing APZs. Mr Vale explained that the guide considered pre and post-2002 construction standards and offered alternative solutions if APZs could not be achieved due to environmental constraints. Mr Schneider provided further clarification, noting that the algorithm used was a starting point for further investigation and not definitive. There was a need to consider various factors such as terrain, vegetation, building construction, refuge locations, cultural heritage, and community expectations when determining appropriate measures.

Mr Conroy queried the formalisation of a guideline and tool. The Chair acknowledged the importance of the document in advising occupants of buildings about fire safety but noted it required further clarification. The Chair agreed to investigate why the BPED had not been formalised and would provide a report outlining the background, linkages, functionality and legislative origins that would facilitate a more informed discussion at the next BFCC meeting.

The Chair thanked Mr Schneider and his team on their work on hazard management, particularly in challenging areas.

Action 108.2 DPHI to share presentation with Co-ordinating Committee.

Action 108.3 DC Stewart to provide report on status of the BPED at the next meeting.

Decision 108.2 The Committee resolved to note the Open Action Items.

5. Correspondence

The Correspondence Register was tabled and noted.

Decision 108.3 The Committee resolved to note the Correspondence Register.

6 Standing Items

6.1 Operations Co-ordination Plans update

The report on Operations Co-ordination Plans was tabled and taken as read.

AC Quandt noted all plans had been transitioned to a new format at the end of 2023 and would be due for review and update in two years. A decision on whether to stagger the reviews or conduct them simultaneously would be made shortly.

Decision 108.4 The Committee resolved to note the Operations Co-ordination Plans report.

6.2 Bush Fire Risk Management Plans (BFRMPs)

The report on Bush Fire Risk Management Plans was tabled and taken as read.

Dr Heemstra reported that several plans had been recently signed off and four more BFMCs had started work on their plans. Mr Conroy queried whether district BFMC members were notified once the plans had been approved by the Chair. Dr Heemstra advised the communication process would be reviewed to ensure the executive officers notified BFMC members once plans were approved.

Action 108.4 Secretariat to review BFRMP approval letter to ensure executive officers are aware that members need to be notified of BFRMPs' approval.

Decision 108.5 The Committee resolved to note the status of the Bush Fire Risk Management Plans.

6.3 Status of Fire Access and Fire Trail (FAFT) Plans

The Status of Fire Access and Fire Trail Plans report was tabled and taken as read.

Dr Heemstra noted 10 plans were due for renewal this year. Discussions were under way with BFMCs and stakeholders regarding piloting the new policy and preparing the BIP tool to aid in developing the next generation BFMC Information portal.

The Chair queried the status of plans and the remediation and upgrade work. DC McKechnie advised the information could be manually collated to report on treatment plans until the next phase of Guardian brought this together. The Chair suggested a report and presentation from the fire trail supervisor providing a status update of where the plans' implementation was up to.

Action 108.5 DC McKechnie to present on status of the implementation of the FAFT treatment register for next meeting.

Decision 108.6 The Committee resolved to note the FAFT Plans Report.

7 Standing Advisory Sub-Committee (SAS) Progress Report

The Standing Advisory Sub-Committee Progress Report was tabled and taken as read.

DC McKechnie provided an update on progress regarding Make Safe and Section 44 payments. Finalising the matters had been delayed but there had been progress in recent months regarding how the processes would align with the State Recovery Plan.

Decision 108.7 The Committee resolved to note the Standing Advisory Sub-Committee Report.

7a BFMC Handbook

Dr Heemstra advised the BFMC Handbook had been completed after extensive consultation and acknowledged the contributions from various agencies. The final version of the handbook had been circulated and approved for submission to the BFCC by the SAS.

Ms Stephens requested a small amendment to the Handbook in relation to NPWS roles. Ms O'Halloran advised this had been flagged and would be accommodated.

Mr Greg Mullins queried what would happen if a council did not engage with the BFMC. DC McKechnie agreed to investigate how to engage specific council and Cr Griffith offered to raise the matter with the LGNSW executive.

Mr Schneider requested a list of all BFMCs, including the Executive Officer's contact details. It was noted this list would need to be reviewed and updated on a regular basis.

The Committee acknowledged and thanked Dr Heemstra and his team for their work and collaboration on the Handbook. Mr Conroy expressed his appreciation for the transparency in responding to feedback.

An issue regarding members accessing documents circulated by FRNSW via SharePoint due to private email addresses was raised. Mr Donohoe would follow up on the issue, noting that the imminent release of Guardian2 would resolve the access issue for members.

The Chair advised a handbook was to be developed for new BFCC members to ensure they were aware of their roles, committee functions and responsibilities. It was important to clarify the core responsibilities of the BFCC as there were potential overlaps with other agencies such as the RFS.

Action 108.6 FRNSW to provide solution to accessing documents via SharePoint.

Action 108.7 DC McKechnie to investigate Council engagement with BFMC.

Action 108.8 Secretariat to create list of all BFMCs, including Executive Officers' contact details.

Action 108.9 Secretariat to develop a handbook for new BFCC members.

Decision 108.7 The Committee resolved to endorse the BFMC Handbook.

8 Hazard Reduction Report

AC Midgley provided an update on work completed until the end of February. It was noted the schedule was behind, with only 19% of hectares and 39% of properties protected completed, with the delay mostly attributable to the wet weather. Mr Conroy raised concerns about discrepancies in properties protected per hectare treated specifically on the Central Coast and suggested a review of data to understand the anomaly. The Chair suggested investigating the proportion of maintained APZ contributing to higher property protection figures. AC Midgley agreed to review the data to understand the discrepancy.

Action 108.10 AC Midgley to review the HR report data to understand the discrepancy in properties protected per hectare on the Central Coast report.

Decision 108.8 The Committee resolved to note the Hazard Reduction Report.

9 NSW RFS Fire Trail Standards

Dr Heemstra noted that printed copies of the plans were no longer required, with online access instead provided. Following a previous report about new areas coming online, the standards for fire trails were being considered with ongoing collaboration meetings regarding implementation standards. Mr de Govrik raised concerns about the spacing of turning bays, questioning whether cost was a driving factor. Dr Heemstra clarified that the matter had been extensively discussed in a review committee, resulting in specified standards.

Mr de Govrik also queried the capacity for inspecting fire trails before each fire season and after significant weather events, given staffing levels. The Chair acknowledged the challenges and noted that inspections primarily fell under land managers' responsibility. The Chair suggested a report and further discussion at the next meeting, aiming to align with land managers and provide a comprehensive overview of standards, and data management practices.

Ms Stephens advised that detailed information about trail conditions was held by NPWS and suggested a need for better data sharing and coordination among agencies.

Action 108.11 Dr Heemstra to provide a comprehensive report addressing changes to fire trail standards, and data management practices at the next meeting.

Decision 108.9 The Committee resolved to note the Fire Trail Standards Report.

10 Review of BFCC Policy 1/2008 – Bush Fire Risk Management

Dr Heemstra discussed administrative amendments to BFCC Policy 1/2008. The first amendment involved transitioning to online distribution of plans in compliance with legislation, eliminating the need for printed copies. The second part incorporated historic heritage risk mapping into the policy to enhance BFMC awareness. Ms Talbert requested a copy of the approved plans be circulated to the Standing Advisory Sub-committee.

Action 108.12 Secretariat to circulate the approved BFRMPs to the Standing Advisory Sub-committee.

Decision 108.10 The Committee resolved to note the Review of BFCC Policy 1/2008 report.

11 General Business

Mr Schneider highlighted significant vegetation growth in the far west of NSW and advised Crown Lands had been actively collaborating with RFS to address the issue by establishing APZs around smaller towns and villages and undertaking hazard reduction burns and fire trail upgrades. An interest in early fire detection cameras was expressed and Mr Schneider sought information on the pros/cons and potential deployment in high risk areas. DC McKechnie provided updates on existing projects involving such cameras and noted collaboration with other agencies for their effective use. DC McKechnie to arrange a meeting to discuss the use of cameras with Mr Schneider.

Mr de Govrik queried RFS staff qualifications for hazard inspections and staff training. It was clarified by DCFO that where required delegated Hazard Management Officers deal with inspections and outcomes. Other personnel assist as required.

Action 108.13 DC McKechnie to arrange meeting with Mr Schneider to discuss the use of cameras for early fire detection.

Decision 108.11 The Committee resolved to note the matters of general business raised by members.

The next meeting of the BFCC is to be held as follows:

Date	Time	Location
Thursday, 16 May 2024	1030 - 1230	Berrigan Room L3, RFS HQ and via MS Teams

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 1203.