



A Fortunate Place

Shire of Wickepin

Minutes

Bush Fire Control Officer's Meeting

Council Chambers, Wickepin

13 September 2022

**Minutes of a Bush Fire Control Officer's Meeting held in Council Chambers, Wickepin
Tuesday 13 September 2022, at 7.00pm**

The CBFCO declared the meeting open at 7.01pm.

1. Attendance

Chief Bush Fire Control Officer	Trevor Leeson
Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer	Luke Lansdell
Fire Control Officers	Tim Heffernan Phil Russell Wes Astbury Roger Butler Ken Martin
Acting Chief Executive Officer	Noel Mason
Manager of Works & Services	Graeme Hedditch
Department of Fire and Emergency Services	Grant Hansen

Apologies

Todd Mullan

2. Minutes of Previous Meeting

2.1 Confirmation of Minutes – 22 March 2022.

Moved Roger Butler / Seconded Wes Astbury

That the minutes of the Fire Control Officer's meeting held 22 March 2022 be confirmed as a true and accurate record.

Carried 7/0

3. Business Arising From Minutes

3.1 Bush Fire Radios – WAERN radios for CBFCO and DCBFCO - Item 5.1 22 March Minutes

Still processing request. Information has been forwarded to DFES on requirements. Bit of pushback on radios already allocated to Wickepin, so detail of who has what at this point may help in pressing our case.

Grant Hansen provided background to the supply of Wickepin radios, he is still waiting for DFES to supply a list of who had received base sets originally. The request for WAERN radios has been lodged.

DFES Grant Hansen suggesting it is possibly time for the Shire to establish a Communication plan and address radio issues.

Noted

3.2 CBFCO Report Items - 5.1 Chief Bushfire Control Officer Report – 22 March 2022

3.2.1 Very cautious approach with setting harvest bans – Complaints about onerous Harvest Bans; Shire has a complaints policy and FCO's are able to remind those making complaint to have them lodge their complaint to the Shire. FCO's need to communicate this to the complainants and it helps to cc in the CBFCO so understanding of the issue is passed on to all. Shire process has rigidity around obnoxious complainants – so happy to deal with them, should not be left to FCO's. **Noted**

3.2.2 Header Fires – Hazard reports for Volunteers in Attendance – ROAC reminder that reports on header/tractor fires etc. should include the names of volunteers who attended fires when hazardous materials exposure was likely to occur. Health and Safety issue for insurance. **Noted**

3.2.3 Stock Losses – East Narrogin Fire

A number of processes have been reviewed following this fire relating to animal welfare. DPIRD have release guidelines on – Animal Welfare in Emergencies and Heatwaves (Attachment 1&2)

Narrogin Shire advised that the delay in attending to animal welfare issues was because the appropriate “declaration” had not been made within the system to trigger a State response. It seems processes require the on ground fire controller to declare that animal welfare issues require State attendance, before anything is triggered. DFES cannot do.

Narrogin has also taken steps to see if DPIRD can allow “stock agents” to undertake welfare work in rural settings, thereby removing the difficulties of finding sufficient vets to do the work. This is being considered by DPIRD. **Noted**

3.2.4 CBFCO Lessons Learnt and CEO Shire response in italics - East Narrogin Fire

- The initial response was reactive and we were chasing the fire and not making significant headway.
- The wind was whipping up embers and lighting random fires so knowing where the edge of the fire was unclear and the risk was that you could be caught inside the fire.
CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, DFES demonstrated considerable data can be obtained once air observation is in place, until then satellite and communications systems are the only available data sets. The earliest link into DFES systems at the start of the fire is becoming a critical part of the FCO process. **Noted**
- Bushfire radios worked well late Sunday afternoon and onward once fire somewhat contained.
CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, considerable comment on the operations of Channel 5. In the East Narrogin Fire, over 50 users were on Channel 5 at the same time. A number of sectors then split off onto other channels – but this information wasn't passed to people arriving at the fire sectors and this created even more fragmented issues in both communications and the fire response. People in the same sector were on the alternate channel and Channel five unknowingly, in sight of each other but not able to communicate. Better use of alternate channels as soon as you hit the fire ground was a big issue. **Noted**

- Aerial support was invaluable particularly saving infrastructure.
CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, DFES have a Power Point presentation showing the work by the jet at Wickepin. Grant Hansen provided presentation in General Business. **Noted**
- Use of speed tillers more effective and faster than graders and don't leave a mess.
CEO Comment – valuable insight, may need research – can forward comment to DFES.
Comment forwarded to DFES representative
- Mobile phones were unreliable with signal and battery fails.
CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, considerable DFES response on this issue. Also links into work the Telstra are doing on a battery/generator project across towers in WA. The other appreciation is that at times of high demand in an emergency, mobile use by volunteers and others floods the system. Obviously, when comms are down in a radio sense, this add to the complications. Establishing comms processes as a first step in attendance becomes even more critical. Has been raised at State level. **Noted**
- Chief Bushfire Officer requires a second person in the mobile command unit to assist with communications.

CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, fully supported by DFES. Command personnel is a critical first step in attendance at fire. **Noted**
- Traffic management needs to be improved.
CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, this process was discussed at ROAC in light of East Narrogin fire. A lot of opinions, some not helpful, but it becomes critical in a larger fire scenario. Command FCO needs to be thinking of more than the fire response. Comms to on ground teams and back to DFES, resources required, weather updates, fire data and the sources, use of sectors, signing/acknowledging people in to fire, calling in air support, road closures, animal welfare, hazardous material – all in the space of minutes – suggests the training required is significant and should be regularly rehearsed. **Noted**
- Availability of maps for a large fire early would be welcomed.
CEO Comment – At ROAC meeting 22 August 2022, not surprisingly DFES has loads of data including infrared snapshots of fire movement. The question is how the FCO can get the data in a timely manner. Establishing comms to DFES as soon as possible must be part of the process – they can read it and relay over comms.

The Shire has previously produced hard copy map booklets for fire trucks. FCO requested that Shire produce hard copy maps booklet for FCO's so that when mobile phones are ineffective, maps can still be used. **Requested**

3.2.5 Photo of Ernie White

CEO Comment – Have been advised that the family have a suitable photo and this will be forwarded to Shire. Some comment has been received about a suitable location for the photo – suggesting that if FCO group has an opinion – this best be passed on to Shire.

Tim Heffernan indicated that he will follow up sourcing photograph from family and prepare words for suitable plaque. The FCO's expressed a preference for the photo to be on public display e.g. Mezzanine level of Community Centre.

Cr Wes Astbury indicated he would indicate this preference to Council.

Noted

4. General Business

4.1 Chief Bushfire Control Officer Report – First meeting as CBFCO – Nil

4.2 ROAC Agenda and Minutes (Attachment 3 & 4)

CEO Notes from ROAC Meeting 22 August 2022 – CBFCO unable to attend so CEO attended and provides summary notes of what occurred.

Action Sheet – outstanding items

1. Semi-trailer (or similar) for bulk water - Effectively, each Shire can come up with their own arrangements. Does Wickepin need to do anything? In the case of bigger fires, something the FCO has to consider early, where the additional water resources are coming from.

Noted – no action required at present

2. Light drive Starter motors for auxiliary motors – early advice of the starter motor problem is essential. DFES Fleet reporting some spares for trucks are out to 6 months delivery time for replacement. Note: seems to apply to most spares from DFES.

Noted

3. Arson or cause of fire notification – Command are required to report “cause of fire” ASAP if obvious and known. Still waiting for procedures to be documented.

Noted

4. Chainsaws now claimable as part of the ESL – Grant Hansen to provide updated Shire ESL Guidelines and commented that use of chainsaws may create training requirements and additional PPE.

Noted – no action required at present

5. Limp Mode Isuzu Trucks – Procedures to DBF burns are essential, either on returning truck to shed at end of fire or as part of the maintenance. Takes approx. 20-30mins of idle time and occurs every 20-30hours of drive time. Was suggested drivers should “drive it like its stolen” to keep the limp mode from coming on whilst on fire duties.

FCO's expressed concern that this equipment in limp mode could heighten the risk to volunteers on the fire ground. Following discussion, noting the legal requirement why limp mode cannot be removed from trucks, it was agreed that the limp mode process has to be managed regularly as part of vehicle operations and maintenance and not overlooked.

Noted

6. Great support for Rural Fire Awareness Courses across the region. DFES prepared to run more – if we have the numbers. Question is, should Wickepin be doing more now and do we need a course for seasonal workers?

The FCO's agreed that the DFES Rural Fire Awareness Course provides excellent introduction to volunteers. Have requested Shire consider/prepare and run another course during the 2nd week of October 2022, for those who were unable to attend courses in August.

Requested

7. Pole Top Fires – number of issues with data on how many have occurred. Seems to be significant resistance inside Western Power to release data. Suggested DFES send out a previous photo ID sheet for insulators, so ground crews can observe how many of the problematic insulators are on poles in each district. Grant Hansen may have more information. Matter has been reported via LEMC and SEMC. **Noted**

8. Cross Boundary Meetings – Shires commented on need to hold regional meetings with CBFEO's and Deputies with focus on operations. East Narrogin Fire highlighted a distinct lack of knowledge of who was on fire ground and what equipment they had, once a Shire boundary or DFES region came into play. DFES can facilitate meetings.

CEO has offered to set up meetings with Kulin CBFEO, as introductory visit when next available. Grant Hansen DFES indicated that he would see if Leader Forums could not be organised as part of Liaison operations. **Noted**

9. Communications on other than Channel 5 – was suggested that procedures at brigade level, when combined with farmer volunteers, should have a plan B as to what channel to use as alternate communication channel.

FCO's commented that the "plan B" is to switch to the channel used predominantly by the farm upon which the fire has occurred. In this way, the local farmer and his equipment can be kept in the loop in relation to what is happening. No other changes deemed necessary at this point.

Noted – no action

10. Incident Contact Numbers for road closures – Main Roads WA – (Agenda - Attached 5) Shire contacts for local roads should be added.

CFO's requested the Shire contact numbers for road closures be added to the MRWA information and the item be included in the Bushfire Information Booklet. **Requested**

11. WAFES – Opportunity exists to send local FCO's to the WAFES conference in Perth – Interested parties should speak to Grant Hansen ASAP. **Concluded – no action**

12. Presentation by AFDRS – Air fleet was excellent – Grant Hansen will present in General Business. Take away – ground controller of air support essential. Training is an essential pre-requisite. Wickepin currently has 7 FCO's trained in ground controller duties. **No action required**

13. Danger Fire Rating System – Live 1 Sept – Grant Hansen will present in General Business. Replacement or new Danger Fire Rating Signs – electronic.

Whilst DFES are yet to determine how Shire's can apply for upgrades or new Danger Fire Rating signage, FCO's requested Shire seek grant funding or from own resources (ESL) to install signage at Wickepin, Yealering and main exit roads from the town site as a matter of priority.

Requested

14. Calculating Fire Danger rating. CEO suggested the need to advertise the fire danger rating system in Watershed. The more people who understand how ratings are calculated the better, particularly now this system is on-line and in app. Agreed by FCO's **Requested**

15. Fire Weather Officer/s – There is now a statutory requirement to have a Fire Weather Officer (FWO). Grant Hansen DFES explained that the FWO is required to “cancel” all fire permits when the fire danger rating hits or exceeds 24.

Previously FWO's provided support to FCO's in the determination of harvest bans, but now under changes to the Bush Fires Act they are the only persons capable of cancelling permits. The FCO's discussed how best this process be established. CEO indicated that the best person to be FWO is the Shire CEO, or as a minimum a permanent office based Shire staff member, because FCO's generally inform Shire of permits issued or outstanding. Shire office also considers weather in terms of its own operations when weather deteriorates, and the majority of the public turn to the Shire for messaging about harvest bans etc.

Moved Wes Astbury / Seconded Phil Russell

That the Shire Chief Executive Officer be appointed Shire of Wickepin, Bush Fire Weather Officer and these duties be added to existing responsibilities for the CEO's position.

Carried 7/0

4.3 General Discussion

4.3.1 Danger Fire Rating System – The Danger Fire Rating system went live on 1st September 2022. Grant Hansen DFES presented a detailed outline of the danger fire rating system and the Fire Behaviour Calculator that supports the system.

4.3.2 Aerial Support DFES - Grant Hansen DFES provided information from a Power Point presentation provided at the ROAC meeting in relation to the full suite of air support DFES can provide for fires. The presentation had embedded video of the DFES jet laying down retardant during the East Narrogin fire at Wickepin in Feb 2022.

4.3.3 Insurance for Volunteers – DCBFCO asked question in relation to insurance coverage for volunteers/seasonal workers, particularly in relation to Shire insurance or farm insurance and when each would apply.

CEO and Grant Hansen responded indicating that the safest approach is to have volunteers/seasonal workers join a Shire Brigade, then the matter is not in doubt and they will be covered by Shire insurance. In addition to the insurance issue; Personal Protective Equipment and training can be provided once the volunteer/seasonal worker is a brigade member.

CEO indicated that Shire can advertise such in the Watershed to alert landowners to this approach. Requested that Shire do advertising in Watershed. **Requested**

4.3.4 WA Kaolin Mine – A request has been received by WA Kaolin in relation to receiving a permanent exemption for harvest bans and movement bans. Considerable discussion followed. Grant Hansen DFES outlined the provisions contained in the Bush Fires Act 1954 Regulations relating to the issue of Harvest/Movement Bans.

CEO indicated that under those provisions, DFES can only grant exemptions relating to Total Fire Ban days, and this is what WA Kaolin may have in mind, but the Shire is not in a position to provide a

permanent exemption, as the legislation does not cater for that. In declaring a Fire Harvest and Movement Ban, the Shire can indicate exemptions and generally does. e.g. "Does not apply to the movement of vehicles for the purpose of stock watering". In this case, the Shire may consider wording that allows WA Kaolin exemption, e.g. "for the purpose of transportation of packaged kaolin to the public road network."

In this way, the exemption they are seeking can be considered each and every time a harvest/movement ban is being considered and on those days when the conditions are Catastrophic, FCO's are recommending that an Agreement with the mine be established to cease transportation movements on those days.

CEO to contact WA Kaolin to discuss issue.

Requested

4.3.5 Sparks Road – WA Kaolin – With the issue of WA Kaolin, FCO's were quick to point out that the risk of fire exists more on Sparks Road. They requested the Shire investigate the fire dangers on this road reserve and report back to Council and secondly FCO's urged Shire to reassess this road's design (potentially widen) in light of the proposed 15 per day planned B Double movements.

Requested

4.3.6 Road Reserves Fire Risk – DCBFCO queried what mitigation works the Shire undertakes in relation to the fuel loadings on Shire roads. FCO Roger Butler commented on the Gillimanning road where the road reserve is 20 chains. Previously burning of road reserves was approved and there has been considerable conversation amongst landowners that this procedure needs to return.

CEO advised that burning of road reserves had ceased more than a decade ago and is not likely to return for environmental reasons. Even so, the Shire has a duty to ensure roadsides are safe, and in the case of all bitumen roads controlled by the Shire, undertakes spraying for approx. 1.5m either side of the bitumen to keep the gravel shoulders clear. Not all Shires do this, by Wickepin does.

CEO suggested that if there are road verges that pose a particular risk to road users due to grass fuel loads, then Shire can maintain a list of these so that annual maintenance of the locations can be conducted.

CEO also indicated that the same applies in relation to mitigation efforts in and around town sites. A list of the annual works that the Shire is required to do in grading firebreaks, spraying and slashing should be held by the Manager Works and Services so that we can conduct this work annually.

FCO's should forward details of work required to the Manager of Works and Services. **Requested**

4.3.7 Training of Brigade Members – The FCO's asked if it was appropriate for the Shire to determine minimum standards of training for Brigade members and volunteers, prior to them attending fire grounds. FCO's are suggesting that as a minimum the Rural Fire Awareness course is a suitable introduction for any person. It was suggested that this may be a suitable minimum requirement.

Discussion ensued whereby it was suggested that a transition process over a number of years or target numbers/percentages could be set and that the aim of this approach is that in the case of untrained members or volunteers, they be given secondary roles at the fire zone. Transitioning will give time for adequate training to be provided and the Shire to Budget for this change.

CFO's requested that the Shire CEO prepare suitable wording for this proposal and circulate to FCO's for consideration – so that the next Agenda (Annual FCO meeting) could consider before presenting to Council. The main thrust of this suggestion is to establish minimum training standards for persons attending fires. **Requested**

The next Bush Fire Control Committee Meeting will be held 21 March 2023.

5. Closure

There being no further general business CBFCO declared the meeting closed at 9.45 pm.