



## POLICY NO 1/2012

### COMMUNITY SAFETY AND COORDINATED EVACUATIONS

#### General

Bush Fire Coordinating Committee *Policy No 2/2000 – Residential Evacuation*, is hereby revoked and is replaced by this Policy.

#### Preamble & Rationale

There have been significant changes to National and State policy on bush fires and community safety in response to the 2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. This has in part, necessitated an updated New South Wales position regarding coordinated evacuations during bush fires.

The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC) formally acknowledges the broad scope of work developed by a variety of agencies and their value to the NSW context. These include but are not limited to:

- AFAC position paper “Bushfires and Community Safety” September 2010,
- Nationally agreed Fire Danger Ratings, Bush Fire Alerts and Public Information,
- BFMC Bush Fire Risk Management Plans,
- State Bush Fire Plan, and
- State and Local DISPLANS.

Furthermore, the BFCC acknowledges the productive relationship between the NSW Police Force (NSWPF), NSW Fire and Rescue (NSWFR) and the NSW Rural Fire Service (NSWRFS) as vital for the safety of NSW communities and by extension, their further responsibilities in evacuation arrangements.

Section 48 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997* provides that one of the functions of the BFCC is to advise the Commissioner on bush fire prevention, mitigation and coordinated bush fire suppression. Accordingly, the BFCC provides the following advice to the Commissioner.

### Policy Principles

- **Bush fires are a common occurrence** in the NSW landscape and the responsibility for reducing their risk is the collective responsibility of government, communities and individuals.
- **The safest option during a bush fire is leaving early**, however the national *Prepare. Act. Survive* framework provides guidance, triggers and options for people prior to and during a bush fire event, including sheltering in a well prepared property. Late evacuation can be dangerous, exposing people to dangers such as fire, smoke, heat and congested roads. As such, though it may be desirable to evacuate people from areas affected by bush fire, it could be potentially safer to leave them in place.
- **Special consideration must be given to the relocation of vulnerable community members**, particularly the young, aged and other individuals requiring assistance, at the earliest opportunity.
- **The decision to undertake planned evacuations during a bush fire is to be made by the Incident Controller in consultation with the NSWPF.**

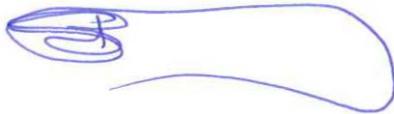
Irrespective of this, the NSWPF retains the authority to undertake emergency evacuations where there is an imminent or actual threat to life or property. Members of the NSWPF will liaise with the Incident Controller and/or Fireground Commanders prior to undertaking any evacuation (or inform at the earliest opportunity) to ensure a coordinated approach.

- **Decisions on evacuations should consider the current fire danger rating, level of fire activity, level of preparedness and the likelihood of fire impact.**

(Specific guidelines are attached in Annex A)

- **Evacuations necessitate a coordinated approach; as such, Bush Fire Management Committees (BFMCs) will advise Local Emergency Management Committees (LEMCs) of areas which require specific bush fire evacuation plans.**

These will be identified through the Bush Fire Risk Management Plan and/or Community Protection Plan process. These plans should be contained within Local DISPLANS. (Specific guidelines are attached in Annex B)



**Shane Fitzsimmons AFSM  
Chairman  
26 July 2012**

## **Guidelines for the Development of Evacuation Plans for BFMCs and LEMCs**

BFMCs, in conjunction with LEMCs, are to identify areas requiring the preparation of bush fire evacuation plans. The process of developing a Bush Fire Risk Management Plan and/or Community Protection Plan will identify if a bush fire evacuation plan is required.

***When determining the need for such evacuation plans, the following criteria should be considered:***

- The level of bush fire risk of the area as identified in relevant Bush Fire Risk Management Plans;
- The population demographic and density of the area;
- The occurrence and distribution of 'at risk' (vulnerable) communities/facilities in the area;
- The nature of road egress from the area; and
- The number and location of Neighbourhood Safer Places (or other shelter options).

Where it is determined that a bush fire evacuation plan is required for an area, this should be incorporated as a treatment into the relevant Bush Fire Risk Management Plan.

***Evacuation plans are to include information pertaining to (but not limited to):***

- Identification of high risk townships/areas
- Identification and arrangements for protecting vulnerable facilities and critical infrastructure
- Identification and arrangements for protecting vulnerable communities members
- Potential triggers (Fire Danger Ratings & Alert Levels)
- Appropriate egress routes
- Warning and notification arrangements (SEWS)
- Location and management of Evacuation Centres
- Location and management of Neighbourhood Safer Places
- Provision for the movement of companion animals

## Guidelines for Fire Services and NSW Police Force During an Evacuation

Incident Management Teams (IMTs) should include a NSWPF Liaison Officer for fires occurring in areas where property evacuation may need to occur. The Incident Controller shall work cooperatively with the Police Liaison Officer to identify areas that may require evacuation during the bush fire fighting operation.

Where a Police Liaison Officer is not present within an IMT and NSW Police officers in the field determine an evacuation is necessary, a Police Liaison Officer will be dispatched to the Fire Control Centre/Emergency Operations Centre as soon as possible.

NSW Police Officers implementing evacuation plans during a bush fire emergency shall work co-operatively with Fireground Commanders, using local knowledge, to identify areas and homes requiring evacuation.

### *Considerations prior to undertaking an evacuation of properties should include:*

- The likelihood that structures immediately adjacent to the bush land being adversely affected from direct flame impingement.  
On level ground, a fuel free area (eg. short green lawns, paved areas or water features) 30 metres wide will normally provide adequate protection from direct flame contact. Where an up-slope or down-slope is involved, the protection will decrease and increase respectively. It is preferable to leave people with homes that are not likely to be directly impacted by flames, provided they are properly prepared.
- The level of dwelling preparedness  
(Gutters cleared, roofing firmly fixed and eaves boxed, metal screens or shutters installed and under floor areas enclosed, vents into roof space screened, combustible items removed from around the premises, and branches over hanging the house or outbuildings are removed).
- The ability of the occupants to extinguish small spot fires that may start as the fire front passes  
(Occupants are fit and able to locate and extinguish small fires in hot smoky conditions for an extended period, each household member has full cover natural fibre clothing and sturdy footwear, adequate equipment is available to reach and extinguish small fires - ladders, garden hoses, buckets, mops rakes and shovels etc).