



Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee

MEETING MINUTES

DOC23/

Meeting:	No. 105 Bush Fire Co-ordinating Committee (BFCC)
Location:	Via MS Teams and Berrigan Meeting Room, NSW RFS, 4 Murray Rose Avenue, Sydney Olympic Park NSW 2127
Date and time:	18 May 2023 – 1030
Members:	Commissioner Rob Rogers AFSM, NSW Rural Fire Service (Chair) Deputy Commissioner Megan Stiffler, Fire and Rescue NSW Mr George Schneider, NSW Department of Planning, Industry & Environment – Crown Lands Dr Ross Dickson, Forestry Corporation of NSW Dr Leigh Pilkington, NSW Department of Primary Industries Mr Robert Conroy, Nature Conservation Council of NSW Mr Garry Grant, NSW Farmers Association Mr Dominic Lane, NSW Reconstruction Authority (formerly Resilience NSW) Superintendent Liz Ferris, NSW Rural Fire Service Association Mr Kim de Govrik, Public Service Association Mr Leighton Drury, Fire Brigade Employees Union
Attendees:	Deputy Commissioner Peter McKechnie AFSM, NSW Rural Fire Service Assistant Commissioner Stuart Midgley AFSM, NSW Rural Fire Service Ms Renee Armstrong, NSW Rural Fire Service Mr Laurence McCoy, NSW Rural Fire Service Ms Melissa O'Halloran, NSW Rural Fire Service Ms Rebel Talbert, Forestry Corporation of NSW Chief Inspector Josh Trevillion, NSW Police Force (representing DC Peter Thurtell) Ms Naomi Stephens, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (representing Dr Fleming) Mr Scott Donohoe, Fire and Rescue NSW Mr Charlie Jacobs, NSW Aboriginal Land Council (representing Mr Yuseph Deen) Ms Kate Woods, NSW Rural Fire Service
Apologies:	Deputy Commissioner Peter Thurtell APM, NSW Police Force Deputy Commissioner Kyle Stewart APM, NSW Rural Fire Service A/Deputy Commissioner Paul Seager, NSW Rural Fire Service Assistant Commissioner Ben Millington, NSW Rural Service Cr Julie Griffiths, Local Government NSW Cr Giacomo Arnott, Local Government NSW Dr Atticus Fleming AM, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service Ms Tanya Koeneman, Cultural Burning representative Mr Yuseph Deen, NSW Aboriginal Land Council Mr Cameron Chaffey, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service
Minutes by:	Committees, NSW Rural Fire Service

1 Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed all to Meeting 105 and noted apologies received.

The Chair declared the meeting open at 1030.

2 Declaration of Conflicts of Interest

No conflicts of interest were declared.

3 Acceptance of Minutes

The minutes of BFCC Meeting 104, held on 16 March 2023, were tabled and accepted.

Mr Conroy asked for the process of the approval of BFCC Policy 1/2008 – Bush Fire Risk Management to be recorded in the minutes. Refer to Agenda Item 10.

Decision 105.1 The Committee resolved to endorse the minutes of Meeting 104, held on 16 March 2023 for signature by the Chair.

4 Open Action Items

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

Ms Stephens followed up on a request from Meeting 104 seeking copies of BFMC annual works programs. AC Midgley advised the programs were not completed until the end of May each year. The Chair agreed a list of each BFMC's program of works proposed by each agency for the coming year could be provided to the committee once completed.

Decision 105.2 The Committee resolved to note the Open Action Items.

5. Correspondence

The Correspondence Register was tabled and noted.

Decision 105.3 The Committee resolved to note the Correspondence Register.

6 Standing Items

6.1 Operations Co-ordination Plans update

DC McKechnie provided a verbal update on behalf of AC Millington and undertook to provide an updated schedule of Operations Co-ordination Plans for distribution with the meeting minutes. The RFS was working with a number of BFMCs to update their Operations Coordination Plans ahead of the bush fire season. If the new plan template was not completed before the season, the existing plan template needed to be current.

Decision 105.4 The Committee resolved to note the Operations Co-ordination Plans report.

6.2 Bush Fire Risk Management Plans (BFRMPs)

Another five BFMCs have begun the development of a next generation BFRMP since the previous BFCC meeting. All BFMCs have an approved BFRMP in place.

Thirteen BFMCs had not lodged an updated plan within the previous submission period in accordance with Section 52 of the *Rural Fires Act 1997*.

The draft Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area and Mid Murray BFMCs updated draft BFRMP had been placed on hold while BFMC boundaries were finalised following the council amalgamation. The boundaries have now been determined. All BFMCs with draft BFRMPs under former BFCC Policy 01/2008 Bush Fire Risk Management (including MIA/Mid Murray) are now in the process of preparing next generation plans. The updated MIA/Mid Murray Plan will be submitted when available. The BFRMPs in place for these areas prior to the amalgamation remain in force until the next generation Plan has been approved by the BFCC.

Decision 105.5 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 FAFT Plans for 54 of the 55 BFMCs have been approved. The Lord Howe Island plan will be reviewed when the BFMC next meets, following the postponement of its March meeting due to a COVID-19 outbreak on the island.

Decision 105.6 The Committee resolved to note the FAFT Plans Report.

7 Standing Advisory Sub-Committee (SAS) Progress Report

DC McKechnie reported that final reviews of agency feedback on the Hazardous and Hollow Bearing Tree Guidelines were being completed before implementation. The document would not be a BFCC policy but a practical operational guideline for the four operational agencies (RFS, FRNSW, NPWS and FCNSW). It would be circulated to BFCC members for information and appropriate distribution within their agencies.

The revised Operations Co-ordination Plans template was being finalised. Once SAS feedback was received, the completed document would be provided to the Commissioner before being circulated to the BFCC for endorsement out-of-session.

Mr Lane advised that the NSW Reconstruction Authority would work with the RFS and NSW Treasury on the review of the BFCC policy in relation to payment criteria and reimbursements under the Natural Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements, particularly in relation to Commonwealth arrangements.

Decision 105.7 The Committee resolved to note the Standing Advisory Sub-committee Report.

8 Hazard Reduction Report

AC Midgley tabled the Hazard Reduction report, noting that a reasonable amount of hazard reduction activity had been able to be completed over recent months as conditions had dried but work was still behind schedule due to the impact of sustained above average rainfall. It was unlikely that agencies would be able to make up the backlog this financial year.

The Chair advised that the RFS was implementing a weekly review of areas that were suitable to burn to ensure work was being carried out wherever possible. He offered to make this report available to members and stressed the need for agencies to work collaboratively, regardless of land ownership or tenure, to complete as much HR work as possible ahead of the next fire season. He urged agencies

that had work to be carried out to reach out to other agencies for assistance, if needed, to ensure work was not delayed due to any shortage of resources.

Decision 105.8 The Committee resolved to note the Hazard Reduction Report.

9 NSW RFS Fire Trail Standards

The RFS had started a review of the FAFT Planning Process, including individual consultation with major land management agencies, in late 2022. A review of RFS Fire Trail Standards had recommenced, with a draft of the updated standards currently until internal review ahead of anticipated external consultation in Quarter 2 of 2023.

An updated version of the paper was circulated prior to the meeting to clarify that a prototype for the RFS Fire Trail Assurance System, to support the implementation of the new Standards, has been developed and the next step would be to undertake stakeholder consultation.

Decision 105.9 The Committee resolved to note the Fire Trail Standards Report.

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

Mr Conroy asked for the minutes to reflect the process of formally adopting BFCC Policy 1/2023 Bush Fire Risk Management.

At Meeting 104 on 16 March, the new draft policy and Annexures A-E were tabled for endorsement, following the incorporation of member feedback. Following requests for an extension to provide for out-of-session endorsement, the Chair requested members provide any comments to the Committee Secretariat by 23 March, specifying that if no comments were received, this would be taken as an agency's endorsement. The Committee resolved that, pending no objections being received within the week, the Policy would be endorsed.

Four members provided their support of the policy, with minor edits made to address suggestions from another member. As no objections had been received, the policy was considered to be endorsed and subsequently circulated to members on 17 May 2023.

Mr Conroy asked for feedback on the amendments made in response to NCC comments and for the minutes to record that comments had been considered and reflected as appropriate in the policy and annexures and, as no objections had been received, the policy had been formally adopted.

The Chair agreed and offered to circulate a schedule of the comments received and the manner in which these had been addressed.

Mr McCoy reported work had begun on Annexure F – Reporting and Monitoring.

Eight BFMCs had recently completed "Have Your Say" early consultation, with another five plans currently open for feedback.

Decision 105.10 The Committee resolved to note the Review of BFCC Policy 1/2008 report.

11 General Business

State Bush Fire Plan

Mr Conroy queried if there were a need for BFCC involvement in the review of the State Bush Fire Plan before the updated plan was submitted to the State Emergency Management Committee. The Chair advised it was not a plan that required BFCC endorsement or approval but could be circulated for information to members once completed.

Fuel sampling

The Chair advised that the RFS would produce a summary of its fuel sampling in areas impacted by the 2019/20 fires. This data is being compared to normal fuel accumulation to track whether regeneration

was occurring more rapidly than would typically be expected, as was being anecdotally reported, and identify other changes such as altered fuel structure or more prolific growth of some species. This would be circulated to the committee and a presentation organised for the next meeting with the University of Western Sydney, which was working on the project with the RFS.

Fire trail information

Mr Drury queried how updated fire trail information was made available to firefighters on the ground via control centres. The Chair undertook that the RFS would confirm with the fire services (FRNSW, NPWS and Forestry) how they accessed that information and made it visible to their personnel and report back to the committee.

Decision 105.11 The Committee resolved to note the matters of general business raised by members.

11.1 Next Meeting

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

Date	Start time	Location
27 July 2023	1030	RFS Headquarters

The Chair declared the meeting closed at 1147.

Minutes approved by BFCC Chair , Commssioner Rob Rogers on 27 July 2023