



Minutes for the Bush Fire Advisory Committee Meeting to be held at the Shire of Northampton Council Chambers, Northampton on Monday 24 March 2025

1.0 Meeting Opening

The meeting is scheduled to commence at 2:00pm

2.0 Attendance

Rob McKenzie – Chief Bush Fire Control Officer (CBFCO)

Captain Isseka BFB

Damien Harris – Deputy CBFCO North

Scott Bridgeman – Deputy CBFCO South

Captain Sandy Gully/Alma BFB

Kyle Caron – Captain Ajana/Binnu BFB

Joe Wood – Captain Port Gregory/Yallabatharra BFB

Scott Rintoul – Captain Northampton VFRS

Travis Glass – Captain Kalbarri VFRS

Karl Suckling – Shire Councillor

Brian Robinson – Acting Chief Executive Officer

Guests

Mark Teale – Department of Fire and Emergency Services

Julia French – Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attraction

Trevor Jones – Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attraction

Matt Johnson – Ajana/Binnu Brigade

Jerome Drew – Ajana/Binnu Secretary

Tatiana Vafiades – Yallabatharra/Port Gregory

Michelle Allen – Shire of Northampton Manager of Corporate Services attended for approximately 15 minutes commencing at 3:00pm.

3.0 Apologies

Lindsay Rowe – Captain Horrocks BFB

4.0 Confirmation of Minutes

Meeting held on 14 September 2023.

Motion:

The Minutes of the Bush Fire Advisory Committee meeting held on the 14 September 2023 be accepted.

Moved: Jerome Drew
Seconded: Tatiana Vafiades

5.0 Business Arising from Last Meeting

a) CBFCO to enquire about the provision of handheld radios for brigades;

The Executive Manager of Community, Development & Regulation outlined that the Shire had obtained some preliminary costs, being around \$1,000/unit and that an application for grant funding was not successful on the first occasion. As a result the Shire intended to apply for five of the units as part of the DFES Grant Funding Application.

Mark Teale advised the meeting that DFES were the suppliers of the units and it may be possible to be granted 2 units per brigade given the current lack of communication devices within the brigades.

Action: The Executive Manager of Community, Development and Regulation to liaise with Mark Teale over DFES ability to supply the communication units.

b) A list of equipment and contractors available for fire mitigation and response situations;

Through discussion it was identified that this task had not been completed. Brian Robinson requested the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer arrange this prior to next fire season.

Mark Teale advised that where not available, DFES can arrange for other contractors, with the DFES 24/7 hotline. 1800 317 555.

Action: Chief Bush Fire Control Officer (CBFCO) to prepare and circulate list.

c) Potential location of a water source and tank at Alma School Site;

It was identified that this issue would be addressed through a wider examination of potential tank sites, strategically located within the Shire. No further action required.

d) Provision of high season appliance, being a 4.4 if available;

Mark Teale outlined that there is a range of 'stand by' equipment held by DFES that can be deployed during peak fire season, as occurs with the Water Bomber being located in Geraldton during harvest.

Action: CBFCO to approach DFES to secure a high season appliance for the 2025/26 fire season, preferable a 4.4 if available.

- e) *CFBCO to arrange for the installation of new replacement Automatic Vehicle Location (AVL) devices;*

This was identified through discussion as not being an issue. Testing of the devices is however required.

Action: Testing of AVL devices to be arranged and coordinated by CBFCO and Deputies.

- f) *Revision of mapping of brigade boundaries, following amalgamation of brigades;*

Mark Teale provided the meeting with several copies of the current (updated) brigade area map. No further action required.

- g) Membership for Isseka Brigade – list of potential members to be investigated by Isseka Captain.

The CBFCO advised that he did not think this had been done. Through discussion it was identified that there was potential for the Isseka brigade to be amalgamated with others. No further action required at this stage.

6.0 2024/2025 Fire Season Brigade Reports

6.1 Chief Bushfire Control Officer

The CBFCO gave a verbal report on the total number of incidents attended by brigades within the Shire. They furthermore:

- a) briefed the Advisory Committee of their attend at the District Operational Advisory Committee and that the committee intended to address Western Power over the frequency of pole top fires in the Region, however Western Power did not attend.
- b) Training modules identified in latest DFES publication, including several on-line courses.

6.2 Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer South

The Deputy CBFCO – South, gave a brief verbal report indicating that clear majority of fires started as pole top fires associated with Western Power Infrastructure. All incidents being well attended.

6.3 Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer North

The Deputy CBFCO – North, gave a brief verbal report confirming that like the Southern portion of the district, pole top fires associated with Western Power Infrastructure were the biggest issue. They furthermore advised that:

- a) They had observed the water cannon in use and that it worked really well;
and

b) all incidents being well attended.

6.4 Northampton VFRS

A wide range of incidents had been attended, with the majority road crashes involving either passenger vehicles or trucks. Always good attendance.

6.5 Kalbarri VFRS

Some 25 jobs had been attended, being a mix of Road Crash and Bushfire.

6.6 Other Brigades

The Ajana/Binnu brigade provided a breakdown of the incidents attended in the period September 2023 to March 2025. A copy of the report is attached.

6.7 DFES

Mark Teale provided a Post High Threat Season Report for the 2024/25 fire season outlined that within the require there was a total of 1,059 fire, rescue and natural hazard incidents for the year, tracking on par with the total incidents last year of 1,436 incidents. They further outlined that:

- Two water bombers were located in Geraldton during the harvest season;
- Applications for Local Government Grant Scheme close at the end of the month;
- The 2025 Training calendar is available on eAcademy for nominations.
- The Emergency WA app was released last year and encouraged all brigade members to download the app.

A copy of the Post High Threat Period 2024.25 Report is attached.

7.0 General Business

7.1 Bushfire Operational Guidelines

The formation and operation of Bush Fire Brigades within the Shire is governed by the provisions of the *Bush Fires Act 1954* and the Shire of Northampton's Bush Fire Brigades Local Law 2017.

Within the Local Law, there are multiple references to a "Bush Fire Operational Manual for matters such as "command of a fire". Yet it appears that the Shire is yet to adopt an Operational Procedure Manual. It is considered that a Manual should be developed in consultation with the Bushfire Advisory Committee as a matter of urgency, so that it may be finalised and implemented prior to the 2025.2026 Bushfire Season.

The Shire is proposing to:

- a) Formalise the Bush Fire Advisory Committee as an Advisory Committee of Council; and
- b) To work with the BFAC to develop/finalise a draft Bush Fire Operational Manual as soon as possible.

Nominations for the Bush Fire Advisory Committee are to be sought under item 7.2 below.

Attached are two examples of Bush Fire Operational Guidelines from local authorities who regularly experience fire events within their district.

The meeting is requested to consider/discuss the two sample guidelines to assist Shire Officers in preparing the guidelines for consideration at the next BFAC meeting.

Action: That the Shire prepare draft Operational Guidelines based on the Collie example provided to the meeting, with the Advisory Committee to consider those guidelines at the next BFAC meeting.

7.2 Nominations for Shire of Northampton Bushfire Advisory Committee

A copy of the Terms of Reference for the Bush Fire Advisory Committee as adopted by Council are shown attached. As reflected within the Terms of Reference, the purpose of the Bush Fire Advisory Committee is to:

1. Advising the local government regarding all matters relating to the preventing, controlling and extinguishing of bush fires;
2. Annual bushfire budget and relevant financial matters;
3. Annual review of the Shire's Annual Firebreak Notice;
4. Standards of equipment that should be provided and maintained under Brigade Control;
5. General Maintenance and capital works on Bushfire Brigade Stations;
6. Planning, setting standards and works program for fire prevention within the Shire;
7. Composition, formation, rationalisation of winding up of any Bush Fire brigades within the Shire;
8. Preparation and periodical review of a Bush Fire Operational Procedure Manual to guide the management and co-ordination of bush fire fighting resources within the Shire; and
9. Ensuring co-operation and co-ordination of bush fire brigades in their efforts and activities including training of brigade members.

In accordance with the Terms of Reference, each brigade is to have one voting representative, which is suggested to be the Captain's of each bridge. In addition the CBFCO and one Councillor (Cr Karl Suckling) are to be voting members.

It is requested that each brigade also nominate a proxy member who is able to attend the Advisory Committee meetings in the absence of the voting member. These nominations are to be confirmed during this meeting in order for Council to amend the Terms of Reference.

Finally a number of non-voting members are included, being representatives from DFES, DBCA, Northampton and Kalbarri Volunteer Fire and Rescue brigades, the Shire's Executive Manager of Community, Development and Regulation and the Shire Ranger.

Action: That Council be requested to amend the Bush Fire Advisory Committee Terms of Reference to reflect the following proxies:

- Tatiana Vafiedes for Port Gregory/Yallabatharra
- Trent Suckling for Sandy Gully/Alma?
- Matt Johnson for Ajana/Binnu Brigade
- Wes Teakle for Captain of Isseka Brigade

7.3 Future Chief Bush Fire Control Officer Arrangements

In recent years, the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer has been a Council appointed position, who has performed as CBFCO as part of their duties.. Whilst there are no issues with a Shire Officer being the CBFCO, the Advisory Committee may wish to nominate an external member.

This item is for discussion purposes.

The appointment of the CBFCO is to be determined by the Group as part of setting the Annual Firebreak Notice.

7.4 Use of Private Vehicles

DFES Guidelines for Operating Private Equipment at Fires are attached for members information and reference. Detailed discussions welcome at next BFAC meeting.

During discussion Mark Teale confirmed that these are guidelines only. It was identified by the CBFCO that currently only one private vehicle has been certified as a Volunteer Fire Fighting Vehicle. The Shire is not insisting on compliance with the guidelines at this stage.

7.5 Insurance Claims

During the 2024/2025 season, multiple insurance claims were received by the Shire relating to private vehicle damage, with those vehicles reported to have been used to attend fires within the district. For all insurance claims, it is imperative that:

- a) *In the first instance, all insurance claims need to be lodged individually by the vehicle owner with the Shire's Manager of Corporate Services (Michelle Allen), with the documentation to include:*
- i) *A completed insurance claim form with all details regarding the incident supplied including witnesses, documentation of damage and demonstration of repair value. The insurance claims forms can be sourced from Ms Allen; and*
 - ii) *Supporting documentation from either the Chief Bush Fire Control Officer, the Deputy CBFCO's or the relevant brigade captain demonstrating the vehicles role in the incident.*
- b) *The Shire and it's insurers will not accept "grouped claims". All claims are to relate to individual's or individual equipment as may be applicable.*

The Shire's Manager of Corporate Services outlined the process for insurance claims, emphasizing that 'group claims' are not permitted and that individuals should liaise with her to ensure that the Shire's Insurers have sufficient information to determine claims.

7.6 Review of Bush Fire Management Plan

The Shire's Bush Fire Management Plan, which can be used to secure Bush Fire Mitigation Funding from DFES is now overdue for review. Due to current workloads/resources at the Shire, it is proposed that an appropriate consultant will be employed to prepare a Bush Fire Management Plan for the consideration of BFAC

It is proposed that Council will be requested to consider funding this review as part of the coming budget.

Brian Robinson identified that the plan is now out of date and cannot be used to apply for Bush Fire Mitigation Funding.

Action: Secure funding as part of the Shire's annual budget to undertake a review of the Bush Fire Management Plan in order to be eligible for future Mitigation Funding.

7.7 2025/2026 Funding Requests

There are opportunities for funding in the 2025/2026 financial year through DFES and other grant programs, along with the Shire Budget. The following matters are identified for the purposes of discussion at the meeting.

7.7.1 Communication;

Brian Robinson identified that the Shire previously obtained costing and sought grant funding of \$2,000 being for 2 4 hand held units. Given this grant was not successful, the Shire was proposing to apply for \$5,000 towards the devices as part of the 2025/26 Operational Grant.

The group identified a complete lack of reliable communication equipment due to inconsistent mobile telephone coverage.

In response Mark Teakle advised that DFES holds stock, which is about to be updated. DFES may be in a position to supply 2 communication devices to each brigade.

Whilst Starlink devices were also mentioned, no specification action item was identified at this time, with efforts to concrete on DFES approved devices for brigades.

Action: The Executive Manager of Community, Development & Regulation to liaise with DFES over the potential supply of 2 DFES approved handheld communication devices per brigade as part of the 2025/26 DFES Operational Grant.

7.7.2 Water Availability

The group identified a lack of options in terms of access to water during fire response incidents. The group discussed the need to identify strategically located fire water resources in the form of a suitable tanks, with required couplings and vehicle turnarounds. Such facilities to be connected to available services or stand along solar bore pumps.

During discussion it was confirmed that prior to supporting grant funds for water supplies, DFES requires the local government to have tenure over the land. Brian Robinson identified that a series of strategically located tanks could be established for fire using grant funding, and shire facilities that would be established for road maintenance but established to meet water access needs in the event of a fire.

On the basis that new water tanks have been established using non-recurrent expenditure in the 2024/25 budget, there is an intension to request that Council fund a water tank suitable for fire and road maintenance purposes.

Mr Robinson advised that in his opinion, the strategic location of water for fire fighting purposes should be addressed by the review of the Shire's Bush Fire Management Plan.

Action: The Executive Manager of Community, Development & Regulation apply for funding under the Shire's proposed 2025/26 Annual Budget towards a water tank and associated water supply for the purposes of fire fighting and road maintenance.

7.7.3 Fire Fighting Equipment

During discussion it was identified that there is a need for existing fire fighting couplings to be updated to meet today's standard for Fire Fighting Couplings.

The Executive Manager of Community, Development and Regulation identified that additional funding would be sought towards PPE through DFES grant and Shire Budget processes. This being on the basis that the current years budget was exceeded.

Action: The CBFCO undertake an audit of existing couplings and obtain costs for the replacement of the couplings to be considered as part of the Shire's annual budget process.

Action: The EMCDR seek additional PPE funding through DFES operational grants and/or Shire Budget processes.

7.8 Proposal for Community Emergency Services Manager

The Shires of Northampton and Chapman Valley have made application for a shared Community Emergency Services Manager. On Monday 17 March, correspondence was received from the Commissioner advising that:

"Unfortunately , the CESM program remains oversubscribed and DFES is not currently funded to increase participation either through direct or shared funding arrangements. However, your interest in securing a dedicated CESM for the Shires of Northampton and Chapman Valley is noted and should a position or funding become available in the future, your request would certainly be considered on a risk-based assessment. "

The Shire will continue to seek State Government support for a CESM resource shared with the Shire of Chapman Valley.

8.0 Other Business

8.1 Airports/Runways

Currently the only airport/runway certified for Water Bombers within the Shire is Kalbarri Airport. The Advisory Committee discussed the need to look into registration of a number of strips.

Brian Robinson indicated that there may be issues with formal access arrangements that will need to be examined by the Shire's Manager of Corporate Services.

Action: Shire Officers to confirm current status of access arrangements for private airfields located at Northampton (primary preference), at Kyle Carson's property in Binu & West Ogilvie.

8.2 Amalgamation of Isseka & Sandy Gully/Alma

It was generally agreed that vehicles towing trailers should not be permitted to enter the fire ground.

The following motion was passed unanimously:

That the Isseka, Sandy Gully/Alma brigades be amalgamated due to dwindling active membership.

**Moved: Karl Suckling
Seconded: Scott Bridgeman**

8.3 Use of Trailers on Fire Grounds

Through discussion it was generally agreed that vehicles towing trailers should not be permitted to enter active fire grounds for various reasons. This is to be reflected within the operational guidelines.

Action: The Draft operational guidelines reflect the fact that vehicles towing trailers should not be entering active fire grounds.

8.4 Incident travelling in Back of Ute

Damien Harris advised the group that there was an incident where a member posted a video to social media riding in the back of a ute. It was agreed that such practices should not occur.

8.5 Location of Horrocks and Port Gregory Fire Appliances

During discussion it was identified that:

- The Horrocks 2.4 had only been activated on a couple of occasions and there is concern that significant periods of non-use may result in a need for greater maintenance; and
- If the Port Gregory and Horrocks vehicles were more centrally during periods of peak need, they would more likely to be used;

It was generally agreed that locating the Horrocks fire appliance at a more central location during peak fire risk periods would ensure it is utilized more often. Peak risk periods being during Harvest, Lightning Storms and first permitted burns. For further discussion at next meeting.

9.0 Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Bush Fire Advisory Committee is scheduled to be held on 19 May 2025.

10 Closure

The meeting closed at 4:13pm

Shire of Northampton Bush Fire Advisory Committee – List of Actions from Minutes

No	Action	Comment	Responsible Officer	Status
1.	Supply DFES approved communication Devices for each Brigade	Discussions to occur with DFES over potential supply of communication devices as part of Shire's Operational Grant. Potential supply of 2 DFES approved hand held community devices per brigade as part of the 2025/26 DFES Operational Grant.	EMCDR	Commenced.
2.	<i>A list of equipment and contractors available for fire mitigation and response situations</i>		CBFCO	Pending
3.	Secure Use of High Season appliance from DFES for 2025/26 fire season.	As a minimum high season appliance to be sought over harvest period, preferably a 4.4 if available	CBFCO	Pending
4.	Testing of Automatic Vehicle Location Devices	Testing of AVL's to occur in a coordinated manner.	CBFCO/Deputy CBFCO's	Pending
5.	Preparation of Bush Fire Operational Guidelines based on	Draft Guidelines to be prepared based on Collie example for consideration at the next meeting (19/5).	EMCDR	Pending
6.	The Terms of Reference be updated with the identified proxies.	An agenda item is being prepared for consideration at 17 April 2024 Council meeting.	EMCDR	Pending
7.	Secure Budget funds to undertake a formal review of the Shire's Bush Fire Management Plan.	Subject to Shire budget process	EMCDR	Pending
8	Additional water resources for fire fighting	Funding to be sought under the Shire's proposed 2025/26 Annual Budget towards a water tank and associated	EMCDR	Pending.

		water supply for the purposes of fire fighting and road maintenance.		
9	Standardisation of Fire Fighting Couplings	The CBFCO undertake an audit of existing couplings and obtain costs for the replacement of the couplings to be considered as part of the Shire's annual budget process.	CBFCO	Pending.
10	Additional PPE for Brigades	Shire to seek increase in funding to \$15,000 per year through DFES operational grants and/or Shire budget processes.	EMCDR	Pending
11	Additional Airports/Runways to provide water refill opportunities for aircraft.	Shire Officers to confirm current status of access arrangements for private airfields located at Northampton (primary preference), at Kyle Carson's property in Binu & West Ogilvie.	CBFCO & Manager of Corporate Services	Pending
12	Amalgamation of Isseka, Sandy Gully/Alma Bush Fire Brigades	Isseka and Sandy Gully/Alma brigades to consider potential for amalgamation.	CBFCO	Pending
13	Use of Trailers on Fire Ground	Use of trailers on fire ground to be addressed in draft Operational Guidelines (see Item 5)	EMCDR	Pending