

Meeting notes

Community Recovery Bushfire Reference Group

Date	1 December 2020	Time	5pm
Venue	Zoom	Chair	Mayor David West
		Note-taker	Gemma Cluff
Attendance	Mayor David West, Paul De Szell, Deputy Mayor Claire Pontin, Mark Johnson, Janine Friedrich, Chris Jones, Alastair Breingan, Sharon Chamberlain, Lindsay Segal, Steve Farrell & Trypheyne McShane		
Apologies	Linda MacKenzie, Bettina Bettington, Kylie Atkinson, Mike Parsons, Daintry, Peter Ruprecht, Neal Parker & Greg Hale.		

Meeting items

Item	Key points/actions
1	<p>Acknowledgement of Country</p> <p>We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work and live, the Gathang-speaking people and pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside in the MidCoast Council area. We extend our respect to elders past and present, and to all future cultural-knowledge holders.</p>
2	<p>Outstanding Actions</p> <p><i>Paul - Are you bushfire ready?</i></p> <p>Documents have been distributed throughout the area and it has become apparent that some members did not receive these.</p> <p>Currently following up with Australia Post as to what happened as the distribution was not completed, particularly Brimbin and Caparra. Paul asked community reference members check with their communities to see if everyone received these flyers.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – was concerned that the information included in the flyer may now be out of date with the updating of icons/warning, colours/shapes (now using yellow, orange and red triangles) with the National Australian Warning systems and is due for release in the next couple of days.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – has said he was aware of these changes and that residents were happy to receive any information in preparedness and will endeavour to include up to date information in the flyer, however with the information regularly changing it may always be a little behind.</p>

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	<p><i>Paul</i> – communications to residents had already gone out before the changes, intending to work with the RFS to ensure we release most up to date information with each distribution. It was the first time a large scale letterbox drop had been done to the communities and it will have fine-tuned next year.</p> <p><i>Janine/Gemma - Static Water Supply signs supplied by RFS</i></p> <p>Static water signs (100+) can be ordered through the RFS for distribution from the MidCoast Council. Any new property applying for a DA which will include a swimming pool or water tank will need to legally supply a SWS sign on their property. There are no exact criteria for a sign to be handed out, if a customer is requesting to display a sign on their property it is up to them. The signs are not entered into a database to track the signs, more so that the individual RFS would take note of their location when out doing training/patrols.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – The original intent was to obtain signs in bulk and have customer service hand them out when criteria met. Paul had suggested that we get the community representatives to ask their residents if they would like/need a sign and distribute to community halls, etc. for collection in each area.</p> <p><i>AI</i> – Generally property owners in the past would just turn up at RFS and they give you a sign.</p> <p><i>Chris</i> – we can secure 100+ signs. We can hold them for collection at customer service, who can collect them from communities? It should not up to the customer service team to make that decision.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – SWS is for the community, to give an indication that a water supply is available for RFS trucks to use. We could find/produce flyers to go out with sign – before property owner puts sign up, property owner to know what they are committing to. SWS program is a community engagement activity.</p> <p>Janine and Gemma to work on a plan for the distribution of these signs.</p>
3	<p>Community Recovery Update - Janine</p> <p><i>Janine</i> – The recovery space has been extremely busy with 14 bushfire events in November, 7 booked in for December and 3 booked in for January.</p> <p>A lot of residents still have not tapped into bushfire support or assistance. Would like persons to reach out to us or Jo at Service NSW for recovery support.</p> <p>Concerns – no coordinated approach for school to get assistance. Any concerns please contact Janine offline.</p> <p>Discussion has been started with Back Track to potentially bring them to the area in late January/February 2021 to assist landholders with new fencing, now BlazeAid is no longer active in our area. Up to Janine to build a case for them to come to the area, so please send recovery@midcoast.nsw.gov.au stories of persons needing help within your communities.</p> <p><i>Sharon</i> – Mount George Facebook page, a post was put up by a resident about the poor turn out for the pizza night – not everyone is in contact with hall committee. Flyers needed to be put up at the shop, letter box drop, etc. Not everyone is in the</p>

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	<p>same groups. Janine commented that she has to rely on community contacts to do some of this work, as she does not have the time to do it for each community.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> - a well lead and united community makes for an easier fix for communications. If these things aren't in place all things fall apart.</p> <p><i>Trypheyne</i> – suggested that a community notice board in Possum Bush would be great</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – supports Trypheyne's idea, where do you put it though? Most success he's seen is with RFS sheds on a main road. Dependant on location, Council will consider notice board, it needs to be a focal point.</p> <p><i>Lindsay</i> – great pizza night at Moorak Creek, 100 pizzas consumed.</p> <p><i>Mark</i> – For Rainbow Flat area the Facebook pages, Kiwarak Estate and Rainbow Flat were best for communication.</p>
4	<p>Discussion of concerns about RFS volunteers' mental health – guest attendee</p> <p><i>Steve Farrell</i> – Started by asking more about the Question, who raised it and in what context.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – the reference was to brigade members that are part of this community, the issue was raised in a debriefing after last year's event.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – after any incident it is normal for the brigade to do an informal debrief at brigade level. Ordinarily after major event an After Action Review (AAR) would be completed and was targeted for March.</p> <p>With such a large scale event (2019/2020 bushfire season) the RFS wasn't able to do this. Then COVID-19 hit and restrictions came into place. The RFS made two attempts at an AAR, but neither attempt was successful because of COVID social distancing restrictions issues we were not able to carry it out. Since September an online AAR was set up, which was not the same, but was available to provide input and collated. After an event the Captains from North, South, East and West would meet.</p> <p>With mental health impacts, incidents affect people in a variety of ways; brigade members, critical incident support persons, variety of persons, paid and volunteers. After every event there should be a debriefing for the crew to ensure there are no long-term impacts.</p> <p>Al commented this is the case, but it is dependent on the brigade and some person being pro-active about it. The district could push harder on this.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – In the last month Paul Scott, Manager of Mental Health Services pushed out an email to all volunteers a link to a survey on mental health. It has been recommended the RFS enhance mental health capability and the RFS has partnered with Black Dog to support this.</p> <p>Locally people can get a very quickly response, these members could be put in contact with our Mental Health Clinicians Tony Colechin or Jinu Abrahams.</p> <p><i>Sharon</i> – The problem is persons fly under the radar and their issues are huge, we are going into the fire season and they are already working hard, we are worried</p>

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	<p>about them, even if we have 1/ 4 of the season these brigade members are already not coping. Feels somebody should be asked personally via phone or face to face. Believes the captain should be appointed to look after these people.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – there are nearly 2,000 members in MidCoast and wouldn't be logistically possible, RFS can provide information to Brigades, officers are tasked to say, 'I'm safe', and make sure everyone is mentally capable to perform the job. Another program 'Are you ok?'</p> <p><i>Al</i> – happens organically in well run brigades, it's difficult to make sure you are capturing the all people. Down to individual brigades to take this on. The survey is rather lengthy and if you were suffering you wouldn't complete the survey so maybe there should be a way to track the surveys started but not completed.</p> <p><i>Trypheyne</i> – more concerned it's not just ticking boxes. Had listened to an announcement that Taree has the second highest rate of suicide. Everything needs to be connected. Concern – worst natural incident for death is heat wave. Believe all community members should be on lookout for signs.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – not sure of announcement that Trypheyne is referring too. Is aware that Taree has high level of suicide.</p> <p><i>Lindsay</i> – what Al said about RFS debriefing and follow-up, hasn't happened everywhere. Moorral Creek had no contact from anybody about how they are doing. Has sort help on a personal level and believes it comes down to individual brigades.</p> <p><i>Kim</i> – In the smaller communities, usually elderly persons as captains and don't have email. No one in Bobin has been contacted about fires, they should have had communication with volunteers straight away.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – thanks to Kim, well aware of enormous impact of Bobin, since then been there twice, spoke with Allan Moore, instigated mitigation work around school, have spoken to people, after action review wouldn't have had anyone in a room of 100 people put their hand up and said they need help. Doesn't believe the AAR was the right place to speak about mental health.</p> <p><i>Kim</i> – people need to be heard, and because that hasn't happened people haven't been able to voice their opinions.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – There is crew leader training, it is usual to hold AAR at site after the incident. Believes what Kim is talking about should have had these done at a brigade level, then it should of been taken to the next level.</p> <p><i>Sharon</i> – two things of concern – peer pressure – lack of resources (counsellors)</p> <p><i>AL</i>- reinforce what Kim said – captain meetings not being ran because of COVID– person upset about this, not being able to have their say.</p> <p><i>David</i> – RFS members are only part of the problem, what about their family? Neighbours? Friends? It's a mammoth task to get people past this catastrophic event and into the future. It's the Australian way to not come forward and to be macho, we as a community need to come together to ask for help.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – can say that a critical support service is available for members and their families. <i>Recommendation 42 of enquiry</i> is to access fire workers can access help through GP, etc.</p>

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	<p><i>Paul</i> – has 530 employees that range from outdoor workers to head office. They have a disconnect from one another as they don't work with one another, all people want to know that you have their back, for someone to talk to, <i>brigades don't feel they have had enough gratitude.</i></p> <p><i>Janine</i> – we have had a lot of conversation about what has and hasn't been done. Mental health Community Skills Support workshops are available so we, as community members and volunteers can have those conversations about it, so RFS can have resources and can have those conversations. People don't know how to talk about this.</p>
5	<p>Discussion of issues (what worked, what didn't work) raised by reference group members</p> <p><i>David</i> – There are a lot of points to cover here so maybe we could read and see what are the most important points to discuss.</p> <p><i>Kim</i> - Bobin we were not sure what happened? lack of communication to RFS and fire burning in Bobin and hitting Caparra.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> - What may have happened is that there is a misunderstanding about tools such as app, we had produced a district wide communication strategy from 7/8th November, there were days where the commissioner was saying days were going to worsen, unfortunately, message and alerts were not understood by people.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – issue is that Bobin is isolated, no digital download space, only ABC radio if lucky, how do you communicate with areas where the modern media doesn't apply.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – RFS has airtime on ABC radio – also has the Bushfire Information Line (BIFL). Fires are fast and unpredictable, and you may not always get a warning.</p> <p><i>Kim</i> – something that needs to be looked at in the future; community meetings so that isolated areas don't fall off the radar</p> <p><i>Al</i> – Backing Steve up, people assume what comes from the media must be right, the app failed, too much data to download, we shouldn't rely on technology as it can't catch up, people need to be searching themselves.</p> <p><i>David</i> – Can people look over what has/hasn't happened and maybe we need a meeting as list is substantial, can we raise in the early part of next meeting, raise serious issues.</p> <p><i>Paul</i> – Action for the next meeting is to update the list, add Possum Brush, focus on solution and turn around what didn't work</p>
6	<p>Further Update on Hall upgrades program</p> <p><i>Paul</i> - Huge list of halls works, the approach is to work with the halls in fire affected communities first, personally connect with persons running halls, then go to the rest.</p>
7	<p>General Business</p> <p><i>Kim</i> – Bobin Community is putting together an application for stream 2 funding, looking for other communities that are interested. The grant if approved will enable</p>

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	<p>residents to attach an enclosed PVC pipe at the front of their properties and inside the pipe will include a note if the resident/s have evacuated and laminated mud map of property. The outside of the tube would have the house number. Other communities wanting to be included in grant would need to be able to give resident details and collect/distribute materials. Also the number of residents that would be requiring the tubing.</p> <p>Is the Council and other communities able to write a letter of Support for this application?</p> <p>A possible risk of looting if people know the property is evacuated</p> <p><i>Kim</i> to send out information to all members attending</p> <p><i>Trypheyra to Steve</i> – firstly, very grateful when RFS where on ground working with roads closed, RFS were brilliant, police were not.</p> <p><i>David</i> – the police were brought in from outside the area, they didn't know where they were or what they were doing.</p> <p><i>Steve</i> – thanks of appreciation – as the mayor correctly said, many agencies on fire ground, RFS had the best interaction with police, however, many police from out of area and sometime communication may have broken down.</p> <p><i>Mayor</i> – we have gone through one of the worst year in our history, lets hope that Christmas brings joy and peace on earth, an emotionally prosperous 2021. Appreciated by Paul, Chris and everyone else on MidCoast council.</p> <p>Paul – next meeting – 2 February 2021, 5-7pm</p>

Next meeting

Date	2 February 2021	Time 5-7pm	
Venue	Zoom		

Record of actions

Date of Meeting	Action	Responsible Officer	Status
23 June 2020			
	Group members provide summary of themselves	All	Progressing
25 August 2020			
	Group Members to provide a list of actions/issues	All	Progressing
15 September 2020			
	Details of Reference Group Members be included in the next Bushfire Newsletter	Janine	Progressing

1 December 2020			
	Reference group members to check with their communities to see if they have received there 'Be ready' brochures	All	
	Reference group members to check with their residents if they would like an SWS sign, where can communities store them for collection/distribution	All	
	Reference group members to submit which issues they wish to discuss about what did/didn't work to be discussed at next meeting, focusing on a solution to turn around what didn't work	All	
	Janine to add Possum Brush details of what did/didn't work onto spread sheet and re-send out	Janine	
	Information about Bobin's Community grant being sent out to reference group members about the grant	Kim	