



Shire of Merredin Bush Fire Advisory Committee Pre-Season Meeting Agenda

Wednesday, 11 October 2023 at 4.00 pm
Council Chambers, Shire of Merredin Administration Building, Merredin

1.0 Attendance and Apologies

Delegates

Name	Organisation	Position
Michael Caughey	Nukarni/Nokanning Brigade	Chief Bushfire Control Officer (CBFCO) Chair
Chris Barnett	Burracoppin Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Glen Millington	Burracoppin Brigade	
Nigel Edgecombe	Burracoppin South Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
David Last	Collgar Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Kael Crees	Collgar Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Stephen Crook	Collgar Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Cam Gethin	Hines Hill Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Chris Hooper	Korbelka Brigade	Fire Control Officer
John Flockart	Korbelka Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Paul Wanless	Muntadgin Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Darren Major	Muntadgin Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Neil Smith	Nukarni/Nokanning Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer

Officers

Name	Organisation	Position
Codi Brindley-Mullen	Shire of Merredin	Executive Manager Strategy and Community
Amer Tawfik	Shire of Merredin	Executive Manager Engineering Services
Sheree Lowe	Shire of Merredin	Emergency Services Officer

Apologies

Name	Organisation	Position
Glenn Crees	Collgar Brigade	Deputy Chief Bushfire Control Officer (DCBFCO)
Luke Growden	Hines Hill Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Cr Phil Van Der Merwe	Shire of Merredin	Council Delegate
Jeremy Willis	Department of Fire & Emergency Services	Area Officer

2.0 Official Opening

The Chair acknowledged the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the Njaki Njaki people of the Nyoongar Nation and paid his respects to Elders past, present and emerging. The Chair then welcomed those in attendance and declared the meeting open at 4.06pm.

3.0 Confirmation of Minutes

Confirmation of Minutes of meeting held on 14 October 2021

S Crook noted a correction to item 5.6 being:

S Crook - We got the call at 9:15pm the latest and we left at 2:15pm and Main Roads turned up at 2:30pm

The minutes originally read 9.15am.

Motion: That the minutes of the Bushfire Advisory Committee Pre-season meeting held on 13 October 2022 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of proceedings, noting the above correction.

Moved: K Crees

Seconded: S Crook

4.0 Business arising

4.1 Shire minimum requirements on firefighting equipment for offroad operations

Minimum requirements for firefighting equipment while carrying out certain agricultural activities have been a point of discussion at several recent GEDOAC meetings.

The original item from the Great Eastern District Operations Advisory Committee (GEDOAC) meeting held 13th September 2021 reads as follows:

12 Late Items

Discussion on Water Capacity at fire grounds

Manpower is down and the risk with larger machinery is high.

John Flockhart – Chaser bins should have built in fire units.

- Need to update the regulations that currently say 400L in paddock corner and 20m of hose.

Should be amount of water and appliance per header – this would also mean more personnel required.

- Each Shire, through the BFAC, should be setting their own standards.

Dave Gossage – Great opportunity to make changes to the regulations as the farming techniques are changing.

- Should bigger harvesters also have more fire extinguishers? Currently there is 1 9L extinguisher.

Murray Dixon suggested a recommendation be made

“The Great Eastern DOAC recommends to all shires, that all chaser bins are fitted with a minimum 300L fire fighting unit as soon as practical and 600L capacity equivalent on static firefighting units, 30m of hose and a UHF Handheld radio per harvester be standard.”

Moved: Gary Coumbe

Seconded: Alan Nicholson

All in Favour

It was discussed again at the GEDOAC meeting held 13th March 2023:

Discussions were made to make an agenda item for the next meeting to discuss the banning of trailers in paddocks. Locate suggestion from DOAC minutes regarding recommendation as to the requirements to use in the paddock.

From 13 September 2021 Minutes from Action item 5 "Take recommendation to the Local Government for Consideration. The Great Eastern DOAC recommends to all shires, that all chaser bins are fitted with a minimum 300L firefighting unit as soon as practical and 600L capacity equivalent on static firefighting units, 30m of hose and a UHF Handheld radio per harvester be standard."

At the Merredin BFAC AGM in March 2023, the following motion was made:

Mick asked if John could comment on the items regarding to chaser bins, PPE and trailer units that were referred to in the DOAC minutes of the 13th March:

- **Chaser bins:** there was a recommendation that all chaser bins be fitted with a minimum 300L firefighting unit, 600L capacity equivalent on static firefighting units, 30m of hose and UHF handheld radio per harvester.
- **PPE:** there are ongoing issues with firefighters not turning out in PPE. After a recent fatality in Goomalling, PPE is going to be pushed hard.
- **Trailer units:** there is a push in other regions to ban trailer units. John believes we can't function without them. Jeremy says this has been raised at other BFACs and may be something that needs to be looked at.

Motion: That the Shire find current minimum requirements or regulations on firefighting equipment during offroad/paddock operations during Restricted and Prohibited burning periods with a view to increasing capacity to the standard recommended by DOAC of 13th September 2021.

MOVED Stephen Crook

SECONDED Nigel Edgecombe
CARRIED

The ESO has been unable to find any evidence of current minimum requirements required or recommended by the Shire.

John is unsure if any other local governments are taking it on as a recommendation, but emphasised that the requirements should be aspirational – something that people can work towards attaining over a few years.

The CBFCA asked FCOs to consider these recommendations over the fire season with a view to making a decision at the BFAC AGM in March.

5.0 General Business

5.1 Respirators

Through the LGGS the Shire has been approved for funding to purchase 14 respirators (2 per brigade) this year. In coming years, further attempts to secure funding will be made to increase the number of respirators available to each brigade.

A brief training/familiarisation session is required prior to allocating the respirators, as they need to be worn correctly, and then disinfected, sanitised and dried correctly in order to be safely worn.

If you haven't already arranged a training session with the ESO, please do so.

Each brigade will also be set up with wash stations.

5.2 AVL upgrade

The ESO has been contacted by DFES regarding the AVL units on the appliances. Telstra will be turning off the 3G network in the coming months, and therefore our AVL units need to be upgraded to 4G. The replacement units have been sent to the Shire, and Mal Willis has been contacted to carry out the replacements. This will not take place until after harvest. Mal will travel out to you to carry out the upgrades, so you won't need to bring the appliances into town.

5.3 DFES Rostered Duty Coordinator (RDC)

At the last GEDOAC meeting, brigades were reminded that the DFES Rostered Duty Coordinator (RDC) is a resource available to you 24/7 that can assist with:

- Technical advice on how to tackle the incident you're dealing with
- If you require more support to deal with the fire than you have available to you (including air support)
- If there is potential that the fire may escalate beyond a Level 1 incident, and you may be looking at handing over the incident to DFES.

The advice is to communicate with the RDC early and often.

The RDC number is 1800 966 077. The RDC is a member of staff from the Northam office, and someone is rostered to be RDC 365 days a year.

5.4 Shire contact for water tank/machinery for firefighting purposes

Amer Tawfik has taken over from Lindon Mellor as Executive Manager Engineering Services. If brigades require the Shire water truck or machinery, please contact Amer on 0429 683 645

5.5 LGIS online induction

The Shire's LGIS (Local Government Insurance Scheme – they are the people who insure the bushfire volunteers, appliances and private vehicles) representative has requested that all volunteers be encouraged to complete their online, self-paced induction. The link to the induction (<https://greateasternwheatbelt.velpic.net/#register?key=PB0MHQH9FIB>) can be shared in brigade WhatsApp groups.

5.6 Safety at fires

The CBFCO reminded FCOs that volunteer safety at incidents is paramount and must remain front of mind. Lessons from a recent incident in the shire include:

- DFES Communications Centre (Com Cen) should be utilised to despatch police if required to manage traffic when incidents occur across a road;

- Firefighters can be directed to assist with traffic management; the ESO will organise the procurement of signage to assist;
- FCOs who are managing the incident should stay off the hoses and focus their attentions on controlling the fire ground and their volunteers;
- All volunteers are to report to the officer in charge upon arrival on the fire ground, and leave a note in the WhatsApp group when they leave the fire ground;
- First responders are encouraged to drop a pin of the fire location in their WhatsApp group so that other responding firefighters can make their way to the fire as efficiently as possible;
- Crew leaders are reminded that they need to communicate with DFES Com Cen throughout every incident.

5.7 Hines Hill truck

The new Hines Hill 4.4 Broadacre single cab Tatra has finally been delivered. Cam has brought it along to the meeting, and everyone is invited to have a look at it after the meeting and report any comments/feedback. Still awaiting the official DFES handover.

5.8 Observations Register

When the CBFCA attended the Chief's Forum earlier this year, he was informed of the "Observations Register", an initiative from Lessons Management at DFES.

Until now, the primary method of raising issues from the fire ground was through the major post incident reviews, but they can take a year or more before they even begin, and years before they're completed. They're also often the same issues that are raised each time, and are quite high level issues that need involvement from the very top of DFES to implement. Additionally, the information for the reviews is sourced from post event debriefs, but the people who are invited to contribute to these tend to be quite senior, not usually the people on the ground. When crews have their own debriefs and issues are raised, it's not usually clear how and to whom they can escalate these issues; when they do get escalated, they may get escalated one or two levels, but then someone drops the ball, or doesn't think it's important enough to prioritise and push, so the issues don't reach the people who can make change.

The idea with the Observations Register is that any volunteer or employee can report any issue at any time, about any interaction they have with DFES (not just relating to incidents). When an issue is reported multiple times from multiple sources, the staff in Lessons Management can bypass chain of command and refer the issue exactly to the relevant personnel.

Volunteers are encouraged to use the Observations Register whenever they feel appropriate. The direct link to report is <https://app.smartsheet.com/b/form/Of707745b92f4aacbd483d6f92658da3>. The QR code will be appended to these minutes and may be distributed among brigades.

Attachment 5.8A – Observations Register QR code

5.9 Wish list for brigades

Brigades are asked to consider over the fire season if they need anything purchased for the brigade.

The Shire's deadline for applying for ESL funding for eligible major purchases is March 31st each year – so brigades are asked to send any wish lists to the ESO before or at the BFAC AGM next year.

5.10 Vehicle identifier labels

If any volunteers require Vehicle Identifier Labels (to assist private firefighting units to bypass any road blocks while assisting at a fire), the ESO has registration forms that can be completed and labels issued today, and will bring blank forms and labels to brigade AGMs.

5.11 General reminders

- The CBFCO commended brigades on positive progress with wearing PPE at incidents. Anyone who still requires PPE should contact the ESO
- Brigades are reminded to contact DFES Com Cen at every incident. In addition to reporting your attendance and departure from events, Com Cen can assist you if you need additional support such as VFRS, Police, Ambulance, Western Power, Water Corp or ARC Infrastructure. The Com Cen number is 1800 198 140
- Brigades are reminded to forward any outstanding reports to the ESO, and to keep up completing their incident reports over the coming fire season. These can be done by completing the paper forms or by phoning the information through to the ESO.
- Brigades were asked to add the ESO and the DCBFCO to all brigade WhatsApp groups

5.12 Review of Bushfire Operating Procedures

When the Bushfire Operating Procedures (BOP) were endorsed, BFAC requested the opportunity to review it twice yearly. The CBFCO recommends that members consider changing this to once annually at the AGM.

It was noted that the BOP currently specifies a quorum of 50% of brigade members for brigade AGMs. Given the push to register as many people as possible in brigades to ensure insurance coverage, access to PPE, training and information, but they may not necessarily be closely involved in the management and operational side of the brigade, it was requested that quorum be reduced to 25%.

5.13 Roadside verges

FCOs were asked about any areas of concern in their district that required mowing or spraying by the Shire. The following roads were listed:

- Narembeen Road near Collgar South Road
- Bulls Head Road X Springwell Valley Road
- Burracoppin-Campion Road
- Chandler Road
- Burracoppin Siding Road near the CBH bin

5.14 Restricted burning and issuing of permits

The Prohibited Burning Period begins on 1st November, but given how dry conditions are so early in the season and that harvest is beginning for many this weekend, the CBFCO recommends FCOs do not issue any new permits from this weekend.

5.15 Brigade/BFAC AGM dates

Currently, the Brigade AGMs and the BFAC AGM take place at opposite ends of the year. FCOs were asked if the timings of AGMs should all align?

Stephen Crook commented that the historical reason for this is that it is difficult to get the bushfire volunteers to come together, and the easiest time to do that is right before fire season.

The meeting agreed to leave things as they are.

6.0 Next Meeting

The next meeting of the BFAC will be the AGM, taking place in March 2024 on a day to be confirmed.

7.0 Close

There being no further business, the Chief thanked those in attendance and declared the meeting closed at 5.17pm.