

**Shire of Merredin**  
**Bush Fire Advisory Committee**  
**Annual General Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, 23 March 2023 at 3.00pm**  
**Shire of Merredin Council Chambers**

**1.0 Official Opening**

The Chair opened the Meeting at 3.00 pm noting that a quorum was present and welcomed all in attendance.

**2.0 Attendance and Apologies**

**Delegates**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
Stephen Crook	Collgar Brigade	Chief Bushfire Control Officer Chair
Michael Caughey	Nukarni/Nokaning Brigade	Deputy Chief Bushfire Control Officer
Nigel Edgecombe	Burracoppin South Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Matt Barnett	Burracoppin South	
Kael Crees	Collgar Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Glenn Crees	Collgar Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Cam Gethin	Hines Hill Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
John Flockart	Korbelka Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Darren Major	Muntadgin Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Paul Wanless	Muntadgin Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Neil Smith	Nukarni/Nokaning Brigade	Fire Control Officer

**Shire Officers**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
Chloe Townsend	Shire of Merredin	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Lindon Mellor	Shire of Merredin	Executive Manager of Engineering Services
Sheree Lowe	Shire of Merredin	Emergency Services Officer

**Special guests**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
Jeremy Willis	DFES	Area Officer, Central Wheatbelt
Robert Campbell	DFES	A/District Officer, Wellness (arr. 5.20pm)
Rebecca Jex-Blake	DFES	Critical Incident Coordinator (arr. 5.20pm)

**Apologies**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Position</b>
Lisa Clack	Shire of Merredin	Chief Executive Officer
David Last	Collgar Brigade	Captain
Sam Hooper	Korbelka Brigade	Captain
Chris Hooper	Korbelka Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Cr Phil Van Der Merwe	Shire of Merredin	Shire of Merredin Council delegate

### 3.0 Confirmation of Minutes

***Motion: That the Minutes of the previous Bush Fire Control Officers Annual General Meeting held on 17 March 2022 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.***

**Moved: Neil Smith**

**Seconded: Glenn Crees**

### 4.0 Business arising

Nil

### 5.0 Election of Office Bearers – 2023/2024 Fire Season

To nominate for the vacant positions, nominations must be made by an accredited Fire Control Officer. Chloe Townsend was nominated as Returning Officer.

**Moved: Stephen Crook**

**Seconded: John Flockart**

The Returning Officer declared all Bush Fire Brigade positions vacant and called for nominations for the below positions:

#### 5.1 Chief Bush Fire Control Officer

Nominations for Chief Bush Fire Control Officer were received for:

Glenn Crees

**Moved: John Flockart**

**Seconded: The nominee declined his nomination before a second was heard.**

Michael Caughey

**Moved: Glenn Crees**

**Seconded: Paul Wanless**

There being no further nominations, Michael Caughey accepted the position of Chief Bush Fire Control Officer.

#### 5.2 Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer

Nominations for Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer were received for:

Glenn Crees

**Moved: Stephen Crook**

**Seconded: Nigel Edgecombe**

There being no further nominations, Glenn Crees accepted the position of Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officer.

#### 5.3 Fire Control Officers

Nominated: As listed below.

***Motion: That the following people being appointed as Fire Control Officers of the Shire of Merredin for the 2023/24 fire season:***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Brigades</b>
Chris Barnett	Burracoppin
Nigel Edgecombe, Matt Barnett (subject to completion of training)	Burracoppin South
Stephen Crook, Glenn Crees, Kael Crees, David Last	Collgar
Cam Gethin, Colin Miller, Luke Growden	Hines Hill
Chris Hooper, John Flockart, Sam Hooper	Korbelka
Darren Major, Paul Wanless	Muntadgin
Mick Caughey, Neil Smith, Phil Gray, Marshall Crook, Daniel Giles	Nukarni/Nokanning
Sheree Lowe	Shire of Merredin

**Moved: Glenn Crees**

**Seconded: Stephen Crook**

#### **5.4 Fire Weather Officers**

Nominated: As listed below

***Motion: That the following people being appointed as Fire Weather Officers of the Shire of Merredin for the 2023/24 fire season:***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Brigades</b>
Chris Barnett	North East
Nigel Edgecombe	South East
Neil Smith	North
Chris Hooper	South West
Stephen Crook	Central
Paul Wanless	South
Cam Gethin	West

**Moved: John Flockart**

**Seconded: Paul Wanless**

#### **5.5 Dual Fire Control Officers**

Nominated: As listed below.

***Motion: That the following people be re-appointed as Dual Fire Control Officers of the Shire of Merredin for the 2023/24 fire season.***

<b>Name</b>	<b>Brigades</b>
Chris Hooper / John Flockart / Paul Wanless	Bruce Rock
Cam Gethin and Colin Miller	Kellerberrin
Michael Caughey / Neil Smith	Nungarin
Darren Major / Paul Wanless	Narembeen
Chris Barnett	Westonia

**Moved: Nigel Edgecombe**

**Seconded: Kael Crees**

## 6.0 Brigade Reports

### 6.1 Chief Bush Fire Control Officer

The Chief Bush Fire Control Officer ran through a summary of incidents from the fire season.

A recurring problem has been incidents being closed by people other than CBFCO (possibly VFRS?) so that brigades who haven't reported their attendance to Com Cen can't be added later.

### 6.2 Shire of Merredin

#### Fire reports

Thank you to those brigades who completed the fire incident report forms, or communicated the information with Sheree so she could submit the reports online. The crew leader from every brigade at every incident must contact Sheree with the info to allow her to submit reports online on your behalf, or must submit incident report forms. We haven't got a 100% completion rate yet, but we're closer than we ever have been.

Incidents Attended and IRS Reports completed	2020/2021			2021/2022			2022/2023		
	Incidents Attended*	IRS Report completed	Perc. Completed %	Incidents Attended*	IRS Report completed	Perc. Completed %	Incidents Attended*	IRS Report completed	Perc. Completed %
<b>Brigade</b>									
BURRACOPPIN BFB	2	0	0%	2	2	100%	4	1	25%
BURRACOPPIN SOUTH BFB	0	0	0%	2	2	100%	6	3	50%
COLGAR BFB	0	0	0%	4	3	75%	6	2	33%
HINES HILL BFB	1	0	0%	2	2	100%	7	0	0%
KORBELKA BFB	1	0	0%	3	3	100%	5	1	20%
MUNTADGIN BFB	1	1	100%	3	1	33%	5	1	20%
NUKARNI/NOKANNING BFB	3	0	0%	4	4	100%	3	1	33%

Figure 1: Data correct as at 1st March, 2023

Thank you also to those brigades who have been contacting Com Cen from the fire ground. Please continue to encourage your members to do so.

Accurate reporting information makes it easier for us to seek funding, new stations and appliances.

#### Brigade training burns

Any brigades who wish to do burning off as training for new members, or if you're asked to do one by a neighbour – please contact Sheree so she can give you written approval ahead of time. If it's authorised by the Shire then the volunteers and the appliances are covered by insurance.

#### New Fire Model

We have obtained a 3D fire map model that allows users to re-enact the course of a fire, or to demonstrate strategies used in different scenarios. The fire model is particularly useful for training new members, training future brigade leaders or debriefing after big incidents. It is available to all brigades to use for training purposes, so if you're interested in borrowing it please contact Sheree.

#### Honorarium

Council have agreed this year to pay a small annual honorarium to the Chief and Deputy Chief Bush Fire Control Officers to assist with costs incurred in the carrying out of their duties, and to cover necessary purchases that are ineligible under the ESL.

#### Policy review

Due to the lack of current fire control policies, we have started drafting a number of policies to assist with guidance and protection around fire control. While they are Council policies and therefore do not need to be approved by BFAC, we will distribute via email for feedback before they go to Council.

The policies include:

- **Harvest and Vehicle Movement Bans.** Documenting the circumstances in which a Harvest Ban can be called.
- **Hazard Reduction Burns.** Documenting the requirement to get Shire approval before carrying out brigade hazard reduction burns and the conditions under which they can occur.
- **Use of Council Equipment.** Documenting Shire commitment to making machinery and operators available to assist at a fire whenever required.
- **Children on the fire ground.** This policy will explicitly state the Shire's position that no children under the age of 16 will be permitted on the fireground.

### **New firefighting trailer**

A new 2500L firefighting trailer has been purchased by the Shire and is available for use if required.

John raised the issue of communications difficulties between bushfire units and Shire machines. Lindon and Sheree will discuss the possibility of redistributing Shire WAERNS.

### **6.3 Burracoppin South BFB**

Burracoppin South attended fires on three separate occasions (but the 3rd occasion involved multiple fires from lightning strike). The Light Tanker is working well.

### **6.4 Collgar BFB**

Collgar attended 4 fires this season.

The door is falling off the shed that houses Collgar Light Tanker. The Light Tanker is experiencing problems with the air-conditioner and battery.

### **6.5 Hines Hill BFB**

Hines Hill attended 6 fires this season, 3 of which were in the same 2km stretch of the Great Eastern Highway. The truck is currently running well. Cam is again Captain, Luke is Lieutenant and Meg is Secretary.

### **6.6 Korbalka BFB**

Can only recall one call out, started by lightning strike. The Korbalka truck has been relocated to Sam Hooper's property.

### **6.7 Muntadgin BFB**

The brigade attended 3 fires this fire season, and the truck was used to ferry Santa around at Christmas.

The truck will need repairs at the end of fire season. There was a leak underneath panelling and it appears rats have chewed through the pressure gauge line. Mal Willis has done a patch job, but it will need to be sent to an auto-electrician for major repairs once fire season ends.

### **6.8 Nukarni-Nokaning BFB**

Nukarni-Nokaning attended 4 call outs. Brigade members have expressed frustration about being called to multiple tip fires. There is a water leak on the truck which will be addressed after the fire season.

## 6.9 DFES

DFES have received a Freedom of Information request that relates to a Shire of Merredin incident for which the report is missing. A reminder to all brigades that reports are not just done to tick a box, that there are a number of reasons they need to be done.

Regarding the labels with the Com Cen phone numbers; Shire of Yilgarn take it one step further with a cheat sheet to go with it. Jeremy passed around an example of Yilgarn's information sheet.

The new Superintendent (Goldfields Midlands), Damien Pumphrey, is a lot more proactive about incoming bad weather, and FCOs/Shires can continue to expect conference calls, efforts to bring additional resources into the region, etc., ahead of forecast dangerous fire weather.

There has been a lot of confusion regarding the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System (AFDRS) this year, but DFES will shortly be implementing a review of the first fire season to see what can be improved.

One of the improvements that is currently happening relates to the change in fuel loading, and how it impacts the FDR, specifically how the post harvest FDR is calculated using a pre harvest fuel load. A lot of the fuel conditions are gauged using satellite imagery, but the region is working on a project to determine more accurate fuel loads for different times of year. DFES Northam is seeking volunteers to take photos of their fuel loads at different times of the year (probably 3 times a year). They want a better, closer cross reference to what they're getting on the satellite imagery.

## 6.10 DOAC

The new Superintendent (Goldfields Midlands), Damian Pumphrey, has been very proactive. Rather than just sit back and wait for the fires, he has been bringing resources from other areas of the region, and holding video calls/phone hookups before dangerous fire weather.

There has been concern over some people around the Zone not taking Harvest and Vehicle Movement Bans seriously, with the fines not being high enough to deter larger operators. They have been trying to nip that thought process in the bud.

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**

There were also discussions at DOAC recommending that the FBI trigger point of 40 for calling a Harvest and Vehicle Movement Ban be lowered to 37.

## 7.0 General Business

### 7.1 Outgoing Chief Bush Fire Control Officer

*Motion: The BFAC would like to thank Stephen Crook, the outgoing Chief Bush Fire Control Officer, for his leadership and service over the years.*

Moved: Neil Smith

Seconded: Glenn Crees

### 7.2 Firebreak Orders 2023/24

Recommendation:

*Pursuant to Section 33 of the Bush Fires Act 1954, all owners and/or occupiers of land are required to carry out fire prevention work in accordance with the requisitions of this notice on or before 31<sup>st</sup> October each calendar year or within fourteen days of the date of becoming the owner or occupier of the land, should this be after the 31<sup>st</sup> October. All work specified in this Notice is to be maintained up to and including the 16<sup>th</sup> March the following calendar year.*

Moved: Mick Caughey

Seconded: Darren Major  
CARRIED

### 7.3 Prohibited/Restricted Burning Periods

Recommendation:

*That the Restricted Burning Period will commence on Saturday, 16 September 2023, and will continue until Tuesday, 31 October 2023 and from Sunday, 18 February 2024 until Saturday, 16 March 2024 (permits required); and*

*The Prohibited Burning Period will commence on Wednesday, 1 November 2023, and will continue until Saturday, 17 February 2024 (no burning).*

Moved: Paul Wanless

Seconded: Kael Crees  
CARRIED

### 7.4 Brigade Membership update

Membership lists were distributed to each brigade present, and FCOs present were asked to check for accuracy.

### 7.5 Reimbursement and Expenditure processes

Brigades were reminded that Sheree needs to be contacted before making purchases that require reimbursement (for example, food at incidents) or before engaging contractors for repairs to the trucks. There are both local government and DFES processes and rules that need to be followed, and this is easier to do if Sheree is informed from the start.

John raised the issue that local government is not always easy to be contacted out of hours.

Sheree advised the meeting that the Shire is planning to have a system in place for next fire season which is similar to the DFES RDC system, where there is one Shire emergency mobile number, and one of the executive managers will be rostered to answer that phone 24/7 during fire season. The manager will have the power to authorise personnel overtime and the deployment of machinery.

### 7.6 New Fire Danger Rating System

The first 12 months of any new system will inevitably be one of trial and error, and there were a number of challenges connected to the new Australian Fire Danger Rating System. DFES will be reviewing the implementation.

### 7.7 Training & Training Dates 2023

*Rural Fire Awareness*, the 1-day course targeted at individuals who may need to work on the fire ground but are not actively firefighting is now available online on eAcademy. Non-members can access this course by completing an External Applicants form.

*Bushfire Safety Awareness* and *Firefighting Skills* are recommended for newer or less experienced registered members. Sheree is working with Jeremy to have these courses scheduled for August/September.

There is a *Fire Control Officer* course in Westonia next week for anyone urgently needing to complete it.

Now that air support is being based in the region ahead of bad fire weather, there is an increasing need for people to be trained in Ground Control. Jeremy believes *Ground Controller* courses will start to be held in the region.

### 7.8 Bushfire Operating Procedures – review

When the Shire of Merredin Bushfire Operating Procedures was initially endorsed by BFAC it was on condition that it be reviewed twice a year. Sheree emailed the document with the agenda prior to the meeting, noting a number of changes that needed to be made to the Harvest Ban procedure with regard to the new AFDRS system.

**MOTION: That the following changes be made to the Bushfire Operating Procedures:**

- **Amendments to the Harvest Ban procedure as per suggested changes emailed prior to the meeting; and**
- **All references to “Merredin Bush Fire Brigades” be amended to “Merredin Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades”.**

MOVED Glenn Crees

SECONDED Cam Gethin

### 7.9 DFES Wellness Team

Stephen introduced Rebecca Jex-Blake and Rob Martin from the DFES Wellness team. Bec and Rob addressed the BFAC, explaining some of the services that are available to DFES volunteers and their families.

### 7.0 Next Meeting

Schedule of Meetings:

Pre-season - Fire Control Officers 2023	October 2023
Bush Fire Control Officers AGM 2024	March 2024

### 8.0 Meeting Closure

There was no further business and the Chair closed the meeting at 7pm, thanking all in attendance.