

**Shire of Merredin
Bush Fire Advisory Committee
Pre-Season Meeting Minutes**

**Thursday, 14 October 2021 at 4.00 pm
Room 9, North Merredin Primary School, Merredin**

1.0 Attendance and Apologies

Delegates

Name	Organisation	Position
Stephen Crook	Collgar Brigade	Chief Bushfire Control Officer / Chair
Michael Caughey	Nukarni/Nokanning Brigade	Deputy Chief Bushfire Control Officer / Captain
Chris Barnett	Burracoppin Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Josh Barnett	Burracoppin Brigade	Volunteer Firefighter
Nigel Edgecombe	Burracoppin South Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Matt Barnett	Burracoppin South Brigade	Volunteer Firefighter
Glenn Crees	Collgar Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Cam Gethin	Hines Hill Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
John Flockart	Korbelka Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
John Goodier	Korbelka Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Chris Hooper	Korbelka Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Darren Major	Muntadgin Brigade	Captain/Fire Control Officer
Paul Wanless	Muntadgin Brigade	Fire Control Officer

Officers

Name	Organisation	Position
Andrina Prnich	Shire of Merredin	Deputy Chief Executive Officer
Lindon Mellor	Shire of Merredin	Executive Manager Engineering Services
Sheree Lowe	Shire of Merredin	Emergency Services Officer

Non-Voting Delegates

Name	Organisation	Position
Cr Julie Flockart	Shire of Merredin	President
Cr Phil Van Der Merwe	Shire of Merredin	Council Delegate

Apologies

Name	Organisation	Position
Colin Miller	Hines Hill Brigade	Fire Control Officer
Neil Smith	Nukarni/Nokanning Brigade	Fire Control Officer

2.0 Official Opening

The Chair opened the meeting at 16:11 and welcomed all in attendance.

The meeting observed a minute's silence to remember Jordan Lynch.

3.0 Confirmation of Minutes

3.1 Confirmation of Minutes of meeting held on 15 October 2020 (Attachment 1)

Recommendation: That the minutes of the Bushfire Advisory Committee Pre-season meeting held on 15 October 2020 be confirmed as a true and accurate record of proceedings.

Moved: Glenn Crees

Seconded: Chris Hooper

4.0 Business arising

4.1 Meeting at Burracoppin next year.

We will try again to host our next meeting at Burracoppin.

4.2 Re-establishment of Merredin Bushfire Brigade

Council have received the minutes from BFAC AGM recommending the re-establishment of the Merredin Bushfire Brigade. Shire staff need to undertake a new Resource to Risk, and are in the process of researching the process and the approach.

5.0 General Business

5.1 Report Brigade preparedness

a Member callout/SMS/WhatsApp

Most brigades have a brigade WhatsApp group by now for fire ground and brigade related communications, and they appear to be working well.

It was suggested that all Captains and FCOs be members of all brigade groups so that they can be pre-alerted to any fire activity in neighbouring areas that may impact them; however, this idea was vetoed as a number of Captains did not want to receive chatter from 7 different groups, and recommended that the Merredin FCOs group be used for that.

Andrina suggested that Lindon be added to brigade WhatsApp groups, so that he is alerted early to fire activity and can have the water truck mobilised early.

It was suggested that a separate Fire Weather Officers group might be valuable. Cam will organise for this group to be set up.

If there are new people to town who should be on the Harvest Ban SMS notification list, please advise the Shire.

b Unit service/operation: Preseason vehicle checks

All appliances except for Burracoppin South and Muntadgin have been serviced.

Mick asked if Ross's are just doing a mechanical check or checking fire gear. Sheree will go back to Ross's and confirm.

The Chair asked all brigades to hold a pre-season meeting when they get their appliances back from their annual service and go through the firefighting gear to make sure it's operational and that everyone knows how to use the equipment.

c Water supplies

- I. One of the deliverables of the funding agreement for the ESO role is a creation of an emergency water supply database. A sample resource created in conjunction with the Nukarni-Nokanning brigade should be ready to trial during this fire season.
- II. Lindon distributed swipe cards to all brigades to enable access to the new standpipe on Hubeck Road. Other standpipes are locked off, but all units should have keys. If any brigade doesn't have keys, they are to contact Lindon.
- III. The South Burracoppin standpipe has not been operational, for several years now (the wrong standpipe was disabled several years ago when the Shire was consolidating standpipes, and the problem was never rectified). Mick asked Andrina why it hasn't been rectified before now. Cr Flockart responded that part of the issue is that the Shire has had 3 EMES's in the past 2 years, which has resulted in some regrettable communication/continuity issues. Lindon will action. Cr Van Der Merwe advised that if the Shire has no luck with the Water Corp, he can try going through the DFES Northam Regional Office.
- IV. There is a new water tank at the Merredin cemetery; however, it has not been commissioned yet, and it will be reused water for the purposes of reticulation, not scheme water, so it will not be available to Bushfire Brigades.
- V. The Shire has been successful in terms of acquiring funding for the new Korbel water tank. The purchase needs to be finalised by 30th June next year.

d PPE levels

There is a small supply of PPE in the Shire office. All active registered members who do not have PPE are encouraged to contact Sheree at the Shire and they will be issued with what they need.

Shire staff can also bring PPE to supply to members if advised/invited to brigade AGMs.

e Update membership lists

Current membership lists were distributed to brigade Captains to be updated and returned.

5.2 Brigade/Shire/Weather Officer contacts

The current FCO/FWO contact list was distributed, and members were asked to make any updates or corrections required.

Anyone requiring a permit to burn is to contact an FCO in their area. FCOs are advised not to write permits for themselves, and contact the CBFCO for a permit instead.

The Shire launched their online permit request forms this fire season, as another available option for Merredin residents to submit their permit requests. Sheree

estimates about one third of Merredin townsite requests for burn permits have been received via the online request form.

5.3 Restricted Period dates

It was asked if anyone had heard any talk regarding Shires aligning for pre-emptive fire bans. Cr Flockart reported that this had been discussed at a WEROC meeting, to gauge appetite among the Shires. The feeling was that Bruce Rock's procedures might be a little out of step with other Shires, but most Shires were pretty well aligned already.

It is expected that the Solar Farm will want to request exemptions to Harvest Bans to allow them and their contractors to continue hot works over summer. Andrina advised that applications for exemptions go through DFES (not the Shire), who then advise the Shire of the decision. The Solar Farm are required to apply for each individual Harvest Ban.

The CBFCO will liaise with the VFRS Captain and the ESO to see if an extension to the Restricted Burning Period is required.

In response to Council concerns regarding a high fuel load this year and addressing firebreak responsibilities of property owners early, Shire staff have undertaken a coordinated push to communicate with the community, including:

- Creating "Firebreaks Cards", designed as a friendly and informal communication from the Shire to alert occupiers.
- The Rangers began pre-inspections during the week commencing Monday, 13 September, dropping off Firebreaks Cards in the letterboxes of properties identified as requiring attention.
- Communications on social media, the newsletter and the SMS list regarding the restricted burning period and landowner/occupier obligations with respect to the Firebreaks Notice.
- Discussions between Shire staff including the ESO, EMES and the Ranger, and the Chief and Deputy Chief FCOs and the Merredin VFRS Captain with a view to a cooperative approach to reducing fuel load in public areas.

5.4 Introduction/induction of new Fire Control Officers

Sheree has tried to organise FCO training in Merredin but was informed by DO Krammer at the DFES Northam Regional Office that it would be impossible before fire season. Based on BFAC members' recommendations, Sheree will request an FCO course in Merredin for February or March 2022.

5.5 Upcoming Training

- I. Sheree is qualified to deliver both the DFES bushfire introductory courses (*Bushfire Safety Awareness* and *Firefighting Skills*) and can deliver them locally and flexibly (ie, during the week, or over a series of evenings rather than on the weekend, etc). If brigades or members want or require a training course, please advise CBFCO, DCBFCO or ESO.
- II. A small amount of funding has been allocated in the current budget to fund refreshments for informal quarterly refresher training. These may take the form of very informal and social training sessions available to all brigades, held in different areas each time, where we spend half an hour practicing, ie, foam refreshers, a drafting drill, burnover procedures, etc. It was suggested one could be held in the next couple of weeks at Burracoppin.

5.6 Completion of Incident Reports

Brigades were reminded that incident reports need to be completed whenever the unit attends a fire. The first to the fire, or the most senior member among those who arrive first becomes Incident Controller, and needs to keep a record of actions and decisions relating to the fire. We'll be trialling a new process this summer where people ring Sheree with the details of the incident for her to submit the report online, rather than complete paper reports.

Brigades were also reminded that ComCen (1800 198 140) needs to be contacted when the appliance is turning out to an incident, when the appliance arrives on the fire ground, when the appliance leaves the fire ground, and when the appliance returns to its shed, at a minimum. Stickers will be made up with the contact number for ComCen to be placed in all the appliances.

The DOAC is developing recommended minimum standards for farm fire units. Stephen thinks they're good recommendations. It may be a few years before anything is implemented.

5.7 Standard of dress for attendance to any incident must be in accordance with regulations

All registered volunteers need to wear appropriate PPE when responding to fires. If any registered volunteer doesn't have PPE and needs it, they are encouraged to contact the ESO to be issued with everything they need.

5.8 Date for Fire Break Inspections

The Rangers will begin their official fire break inspections in the week commencing 1st November.

If there are problematic landowners in your areas but FCOs want to protect their personal relationships, the Rangers are happy to inspect and address fire breaks with landowners.

5.9 Bushfire Operating Procedures

Most Local Governments have a Bushfire Operating Procedures document, but the Shire of Merredin doesn't (though one is referenced in the Bushfire Local Laws). The purpose of the document is to set out both administrative procedures and standard operating procedures (SOPs). The procedures and guidelines largely already exist in various forms (ie, the administrative procedures are an amalgam of the Bushfire Local Laws and DFES administrative procedures; and the SOPs are taken from DFES SOPs); the Bushfire Operating Procedures brings them all together in one easy to access, digestible form.

A draft Bushfire Operating Procedures document has been compiled and was distributed to all brigades to read and review over the summer.

5.10 Service Awards

The Shire has received a service medal to be presented to Graham Whitehead, which will be presented to him at the AGM. If any members feel there are others who deserve to be recognised, please forward names to CBFCO or ESO so they can carry out the application process.

5.11 John Goodier

John Flockart moved a vote of thanks to John Goodier for his many years of service to Korbalka Bushfire Brigade.

6.0 Next Meeting

7.0 Close

The Chair thanked everyone in attendance and closed the meeting at 6.15pm.