

COMMUNIQUE

The State Bushfire Advisory Council (SBAC) met at the new Bushfire Centre of Excellence (BCoE) facility in Nambeelup on 8 March 2021 for the first meeting of 2021.



Meeting attendees: Rob Cox, ESVA; James Ashley, BoM; Gary Peacock, PGAWA; Annie Riordan, Community member; Jason Foster, DBCA; Brad Barr, FIWA; Matt Darcey, DPLH; Chair Murray Carter, RFD, DFES; Susie Moir, WALGA; Diane Holland, Community Member; Paul Ryan, Country Operations DFES; John Tillman, BCoE, DFES; Tim McNaught, OBRM, DFES.

SBAC tour of the BCoE facility

The SBAC received a tour of the new Bushfire Centre of Excellence facility located in the Peel Business Park in Nambeelup from Chief Superintendent John Tillman AFSM. The group were guided through the training wing, central foyer, administration wing and outdoor areas to get an understanding of each space and its function. Chief Superintendent Tillman provided an overview of the consultation and design process which informed the development of the Centre – including the materials used, the landscaping and the artwork.



State Bushfire Management Policy

The SBAC continued its consideration of a State Bushfire Management Policy for WA. The draft policy, strategy and communications plan were circulated to the membership prior to the meeting. At the meeting, the membership discussed the structure of the policy, specifically the need for a separate strategy document and the consultation process, noting the Communications strategy will need to be clarified with the new Minister for Emergency Services, once appointed. SBAC members expressed a desire to be more heavily involved in the development of the policy, and a special policy development session will be scheduled to facilitate their contributions.

Proposed draft Bush Fire Risk Treatment Standard

The SBAC was provided with a presentation on a proposed Bush Fire Risk Treatment Standard for agricultural land, developed jointly by Forest Industries of WA, Pastoralists and Graziers Association, Association of Volunteer Bushfire Brigades and WA Farmers. This proposal follows the release of the FES Commissioner's Bush Fire Risk Treatment Standards in November 2020, which provide guidance for clearing on residential property in bushfire prone areas.

Discussion suggested that further work will be required, and the current proposal was too broad, and work should focus on just Agricultural and Forestry sectors.

The direction of this work is not yet fully clear, and the Chair has offered assistance from DFES (OBRM) to progress its consideration. Discussion suggested that further work will be required, and the members agreed that a subcommittee or working group be formed. The group will comprise the original four members that developed the paper with additional representatives from DFES (OBRM) and DBCA.

Letter from The Bushfire Front Inc.

The SBAC received a letter from Roger Underwood, Chairman of The Bushfire Front Inc. requesting that the SBAC consider two issues.

Part 1 focussed on enforcement of Section 33 notices by local governments. The SBAC members acknowledged The Bushfire Front's concerns, noting that with 139 local governments in WA with varying approaches and resources many were doing their best in addressing non-compliance and community education was challenging.

There was also discussion on confusion and inconsistencies in some shires on enforcement of Section 33; how the FES Commissioner's Bushfire Risk Treatment Standard published in November 2020, allowing property owners to clear may assist; and the opportunity to provide some clarity through the State Bushfire Management Policy.

Members agreed that it was a good opportunity to investigate the connection between fuel management and bushfire risk management planning during the first phase of the review into the Wooroloo incident and also look at some examples of local governments with best practice. DFES (OBRM) are currently reviewing Section 33 to provide some consistency for local governments, and the option to incorporate different elements into the notice.

Part 2 outlined an issue with insurance coverage for private contractors to undertake mitigation works. The Chair agreed that access to insurance is a significant issue and discussions have been progressing with the Insurance Commission of WA and a presentation to the national Insurance Council is anticipated in the near future. Members agreed that this is a complex issue and further work was required.

A response to The Bushfire Front Inc. will be provided.

Vehicle Policy

The PGA member requested clarification on vehicle policy specifically in relation to fit for purpose and vehicle disposal. These queries have recently been escalated through local government and addressed at the Bushfire Operations Committee (BOC). The BOC Communique will be shared with this Council.

SBAC Meetings

The next SBAC meeting is scheduled for 14 June 2021.

For SBAC related information or enquiries, please email RuralFire@dfes.wa.gov.au