

Mountain Districts Citizens Assembly

Bushfire strategy

Due to the Covid-19 lockdown, it has not been possible to call together a local Assembly to further develop a strategy in relation to future bushfire threats in our districts.

The steering committee will meet as soon as social distancing rules are sufficiently eased.

In relation to recent events:

“By all accounts we were very lucky this time with the Three Mile fire. Lucky that fortunate wind shifts intervened and, with RFS help, stopped the bushfire continuing eastward as it did in 1994.

When fires threaten, the Mountain Districts area is the Front Line - the Western Front. How we manage our area is critical not only for our lives, homes and livelihoods, but also the welfare of all those who live on the Central Coast to our east. We know this from analyses of historic fire patterns.

What matters is that we urgently need a location specific plan (taking into account our unique geography, ecology, population patterns, cultural and heritage assets, infrastructure, soil types etc.) adapted to anticipated climatic conditions. There is an urgent need to get started, as any plan will of necessity be long-term.”

Further, many agree that local decision-making and authority to act are indispensable components in mitigating future fire threats. Centralised control and slow forward planning inhibit hazard reduction measures that often require quick weather determined action. GreenFire models are worth investigation.

Neil Berecny-Brown
Convenor

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P.S.

I will not be capable of attending the Virtual Community Meeting scheduled for May 11, but would be interested in further information from the inquiry.

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
<p>Clearly delineated threat zone.</p> <p>Large blocks of bushland can be managed efficiently for hazard reduction using fire trails.</p> <p>Identification and mapping of refuge zones for endangered habitats and species can be rationalised on a large scale.</p> <p>Relatively low population density.</p>	<p>Fire in large blocks of bushland in rugged terrain very difficult to control.</p> <p>Fire trails inadequate, poorly maintained, if at all. Frequently inadequate for back burns.</p> <p>No refuge zones identified or mapped.</p>	<p>Urgent mapping of fire trails and construction of an integrated network of trails across private and public land, conforming to appropriate construction standards.</p> <p>Full length of network to be maintained by government.</p> <p>Design network to facilitate mosaic (cultural) hazard reduction burning.</p> <p>Recent fires greatly assist location of trails and construction.</p> <p>Identify, map and manage nature preservation refuge zones based on aerial images from the 3 Mile Creek fire.</p> <p>Environmental education workshops to raise community awareness of diversity preservation and appropriate management of fuel reduction.</p>	<p>No funding for construction and maintenance of fire trails.</p> <p>No funding identified for wildlife refuge identification and protection.</p>

<p>Connected community. (Clubs, associations, newspaper, identity)</p> <p>Known patterns of fire behaviour over generations</p> <p>Privately owned fire control equipment. Private access to water.</p>	<p>Poor communication between authorities and residents.</p> <p>Many residents vulnerable with inadequate private hazard reduction.</p> <p>Uncoordinated integration of private resources in fighting fire outbreaks.</p>	<p>Establish policies and procedures for ways to integrate private resources and personnel with RFS in preparation and mop-ups.</p> <p>Investigate GreenFire model as an option. (Training of community members) Education workshop campaign on preparation, regulations, fire patterns (many new residents) and fire trails.</p> <p>Update inventory of private resources.</p>	<p>Local knowledge not valued by authorities.</p> <p>Plethora of legislation and regulation. Difficulty getting permission for hazard reduction on private and adjoining public land.</p> <p>Poor communication loop between RFS and community.</p> <p>Legislation might be needed to authorise integration of RFS and other local citizens, including their training and equipping.</p>
<p>Local knowledge of environment, weather, past fire fighting practices.</p>	<p>Gradual centralisation of authority removes decision making from those tasked with immediate response.</p> <p>Incompetent line-authority from very senior RFS Officers to local Group Captains/incident controllers.</p>	<p>Re-think the way decisions are made to include local knowledge. Devolve decision making from RFS head office to local captains.</p> <p>Devise a bushfire plan tailored to our unique circumstances.</p> <p>RFS to revise duties clearly such that ignition, monitoring, suppression, extinguishment and patrolling are perfectly executed.</p>	<p>Plethora of legislation and regulation hindering both preparation and mitigation practices.</p> <p>Local knowledge not valued by authorities.</p> <p>Willingness of State government to introduce new legislation.</p> <p>Willingness of local government to amend regulations to meet the new</p>

		Engage with government to introduce specific bushfire legislation to rationalise the overlapping existing acts.	climate forecasts, and the lessons learnt from the 2019-20 fire season.
Local RFS has good knowledge of the district	<p>Critically inadequate past hazard reduction measures.</p> <p>Longer fire seasons and fewer fire fighting resources available at any one time. Global heating will exacerbate fire risks.</p>	Organise, train, equip and mobilise local residents as an adjunct group to work alongside RFS in lower risk functions such as hazard reduction, patrol and mop-up.	Shortage of fire fighters and equipment in widespread “unprecedented” outbreaks, possibly compounded by disease outbreaks (Covid 19).
<p>Known patterns of fire behaviour over generations</p> <p>Some privately owned fire control equipment. Private access to water.</p> <p>Local knowledge of environment, weather, past fire fighting practices.</p>	<p>Many homes and businesses inadequately prepared.</p> <p>Many residents lack equipment, knowledge, interest or fitness to undertake necessary precautions.</p>	<p>Education workshops and/or a supplement in the Mangrove Mountain Community News on clearing property boundaries, fire resistant plantings and windbreaks.</p> <p>Council to assist in removing accumulated flammable waste.</p> <p>Address regulatory impediments to protective measures.</p>	<p>Regulatory prohibitions.</p> <p>Lack of time, knowledge, and money to undertake clearing and replanting with fire resistance species.</p> <p>Cost of retrofitting older building to higher fire rating.</p>
Doctors, dentist, pharmacy available on the Mountain	<p>Maintenance of services could be jeopardised by road closures and need for service providers to relocate.</p> <p>Outside medical services may be cut owing to staff Health</p>	Clear directions to be published about the meaning of RFS warning notices, evacuation centres and sources of information about when a medical service is closed in a fire event.	Unreliable communications infrastructure

	<p>and Safety concerns.</p> <p>People needing services from outside might not be able to return.</p>		
Telephone land lines and patchy mobile coverage.	<p>Weak communications infrastructure and services.</p> <p>Frequent occasions of poor signal strength and consequent information vacuum. Better mobile coverage vital.</p> <p>Towers vulnerable to fire and power supply. shortages.</p> <p>Overhead telephone and electricity lines vulnerable to fire.</p>	Increase clearing around towers and ensure generator backup available.	Cost of bringing infrastructure up to fit-for-purpose level.
Main roads are paved.	<p>Two main through road cross the district, limiting ingress and egress.</p> <p>Precautionary closure of roads often undertaken.</p> <p>Roads closely bordered by trees.</p>	Access routes to be protected by roadside vegetation modification to take into account predicted bushfire behaviour.	Cost to local and state governments.

<p>Community grapevine.</p> <p>Mangrove Mountain Community News.</p>	<p>Poor communication from authorities.</p> <p>Confused, often contradictory, and imprecise messaging.</p> <p>Automated text messages received were often not applicable.</p> <p>Fires near me app slow, sometimes incorrect information (e.g. location of outbreaks), used outdated Google maps.</p> <p>RFS headquarters too far behind events.</p> <p>Council has no reliable way to contact the community.</p>	<p>Council to put in place a system of notifications to residents.</p> <p>Council to compile a comprehensive database with options (email, automated telephone, social media).</p> <p>Clarification of RFS warning levels (fridge magnets?).</p> <p>RFS to improve its digital capabilities.</p>	<p>Willingness by Council to resource required measures.</p>
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