POLICY NO.1/2006

Bush Fire Management Committees

Policy Cancellation

Bush Fire Coordinating Committee Policy No. 4/1999 – Bush Fire Management Committees and Policy No. 1/2004 – Policy and Guidelines for the Amalgamation of Bush Fire Management Committees are both cancelled and replaced by this policy.

Rationale

The Bush Fire Coordinating Committee (BFCC) is required to constitute Bush Fire Management Committees (BFMCs) for areas in the State which are subject to the risk of bush fires (Section 50 Rural Fires Act 1997).

While the Rural Fires Act and Regulations specify functions required of BFMCs, the BFCC is also able to require BFMCs to assist it with the performance of its functions under Section 48, Section 60(2) and section 63(4).

BFMCs provide a forum for cooperative and coordinated bush fire management in their areas. They also provide for community involvement in bush fire management.

BFMCs assist the BFCC by drawing to its attention, or to the attention of the Commissioner RFS or public authorities in their area, any matter they consider relevant to the protection of land, life, property and the environment form bush fires.

Policy

The BFCC’s general requirements for the BFMCs (including membership, function and conduct) are detailed in the BFMC Handbook.

The BFCC expects that BFMCs will aim to reach consensus on issues before them. BFMCs must aim for all Decisions to be made by consensus. Matter of local importance should in the first instance be raised at the BFMC. If unable to be resolved, issues can be referred to the BFCC for resolution. However by necessity, the BFCC must take a statewide view of issues, and the outcome may therefore not accord with local wishes.
For this reason the BFCC encourages all eligible organizations to participate at the BFMC level, and for local issues to be resolved, as far as possible, through this process.

It is expected that all members of the BFMC will attend meeting and actively participate in decision making with the delegated authority of their respective organizations.

BFMCs will work closely with their communities on all matters relative to the protection of land, life, property and the environment from bushfires.

A BFMC should draw upon the expertise of both member and external agencies in the performance of their duties.

**Committee Membership**

If a BFMC member organization changes its representation on the BFMC, the approval of the BFCC for the change is not required; the name of the new representative must be notified to the BFCC.

**Committee Functions**

Draft Operations Coordination Plans and Bush Fire Risk Management Plans must be prepared in Accordance with BFCC policies and guidelines and submitted to the BFCC for approval. The BFMC must also review and monitor these plans, once approved.

BFMC decisions on bush fire management become binding when included in approved Operations Coordination Plans or Bush Fire Risk Management Plans prepared and approved under Section 52 of the Rural Fires Act 1997.

BFMCs must submit an **Annual Report** to the BFCC including:

- Meeting held;
- Attendance of members at meeting;
- Operational and bush fire risk management plan status and implementation;
- Operational exercises undertaken; and
- Other matters as may be requested by the BFCC.

The BFMC’s Annual Report will be made accessible to the public.

BFMCs must organize joint training and operational exercises as provided for by their Operations Coordination Plan.

**Committee Conduct**

BFMCs must meet with sufficient regularity to meet their statutory requirements and other obligations, and in any case at least once per year.

Meetings will be conducted in the spirit of consensus and in accordance with accepted meeting procedures.
BFMCs should consider any matter related to bush fire management in their area and convey a collective view to the local community.

BFMCs may use sub-committees or working groups to assist in such matters as preparing draft Section 52 plans or to address specific bush fire management issues in the local community (such as coordination of programs like “Community Fireguard”).

**Chairperson Functions**

The Chairperson is responsible for presiding over meeting of the BFMC and ensuring that business is conducted in an orderly fashion.

The Chairperson signs all BFMC correspondence.

**Executive Officer Functions**

The Executive Officer is responsible for arranging clerical and logistical support to ensure that the BFMC functions efficiently.

The Executive Officer is responsible for the preparation of agendas, the taking, preparation and distribution of minutes and correspondence.

See also the Bush Fire Management Committee Hand Book 2006.

**Fire Classification**

BFMCs have the following roles in terms of fire classification;

- identifying Incident Controllers for Class 2 and 3 fires and Incident Management Team members;
- appointing Incident Controllers for Class 2 fires; and
- recommending to the Commissioner Appointments to Class 3 fires, or preemptive appointments as dictated by conditions.

These tasks are to be carried out by the BFMC’s Fire Classification Group.

**Bush Fire Danger Periods**

A BFMC may make recommendations to the Commissioner RFS regarding the imposition of Bush Fire Danger Periods within the BFMC’s area.

**Fire Mitigation Funding**

BFMCs may participate in prioritisation and assessment of bids for funding for bush fire mitigation works, if invited to do so by the assessment panel.
**Fire Trail Register**

Each BFMC must maintain a Fire Trail Register.

**Training for BFMC Members**

In their endorsement of this policy, the Bush Fire Coordinating Committee has the expectation that the organizations with an involvement on BFMCs will make arrangements for the ongoing training of their representatives on these committees in the roles and functions of the BFMC and in their representative duties on these committees, using the BFMC Hand Book as a reference. **N.B.** The BFMC Hand Book is yet to be issued.

**Amalgamation of BFMCs**

In conjunction with the provisions contained within the NSW Rural Fire Service Brochure-“Guide to Establishing Zones”, the BFCC supports the amalgamation of BFMCs.

While the BFCC recognizes the prerogative of the Rural Fire Service to establish Rural Fire Service Zones, the BFCC maintains its prerogatives regarding the provision of approval for the amalgamation of BFMCs and its responsibilities for planning in relation to bush fire prevention and coordinated bush fire fighting in accordance with the provision of Section 48 of the Rural Fires Act.

Where BFMCs propose to amalgamated as a result of Rural Fire Service Zoning or for any other reason, these BFMCs must seek formal approval of the BFCC to the proposed amalgamation.

Proposals for amalgamation should be forward to the Executive Officer of the BFCC for submission to the BFCC. Proposals must clearly show the agreement of all affected BFMCs and also advise the name of the proposed new BFMC.

**Amalgamation principles**

The BFCC encourages the amalgamation of BFMCs in rural fire districts where a single Fire Control Officer/District manager has been appointed over all those districts.

The BFCC recognises local circumstances and arrangements that may preclude amalgamation.

For up to two years after an amalgamation, all existing members of the BFMCs may retain their positions on the newly constituted BFMC.

At the conclusion of the transition period, the provisions of clause 15 of Rural fires Regulation 2002 be met with a variation to sub clause 15 (g) to allow for at least one volunteer brigade member for each Council area.

The BFMC should seek continued assistance from former members where that expertise may assist in the Committee’s deliberations.
Where after amalgamation there is more than one representative for an organization set out in sub clauses 15 (b), (f) or (h), then at the conclusion of the transition period only one person is to be nominated by the nominating organization, but this does not preclude another person from the organization attending a meeting as an observer.

The BFCC reiterates that BFMCs should operate on a consensus basis and, as such, the number of representatives for each organization should not influence outcomes.

**Operations Coordination and Bush Fire Risk Management Plans after BFMC amalgamation**

As provided for by Section 52 of the Rural Fire Act 1997, the new BFMC (formed by the amalgamation) must submit a draft operations coordination plan and a draft bush fire risk management plan within 12 months of the date of the BFCC’s approval of the establishment of the new BFMC. Until such time as the new plan is approved by the BFCC, the existing plans prepared for the predecessor BFMCs remain in force.

Phil Koperberg, AO, AFSM, BEM
Chairman
1 June 2006