

ACT Multi Hazard Advisory Council

draft Minutes

Date: Wednesday, 06 August
Time: 2:30 pm – 7:00 pm

Location: Room 0.19, Ground Floor, 220 London Circuit, WebEx

Attendance	
Chair	Dr Sally Troy – late arrival at 14:55
Members in Attendance	Asha Naznin Nicola Smillie Nina Allen John Brickhill Len Morris Dr Tony Bartlett Dr Marta Yebra Stephen Mudford
Member Apologies	Dylan Kendall, Deputy Chair Kylee Shea
Guests	Cameron Beresford – Executive Branch Manager (EBM), Emergency Management, (JACS SEMD) Wayne Phillips, Commissioner, ACT Emergency Services Agency (ACT ESA) Rohan Scott, Chief Officer, ACT Rural Fire Service (ACTRFS) Chris Condon, Assistant Director, Strategic Risk Management Bushfire ACTRFS Michaela Watts, A/g EBM, PCS, City and Environment Directorate (CED) Nicholas Daines, Senior Director, Parks & Conservation Services (PCS), CED Deb Stanley, A/g Fire Management Officer, Prescribed Burn Research PCS, CED Bethany Dunne, Fire Ecologist, Office of Nature Conservation, CED
Secretariat	Linda Woods – Secretariat, JACS SEMD

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1. Bushfire Prone Area Determination

Chris Condon, ACTRFS

As the Chair was delayed due to an emergency and the Deputy Chair was an apology, Council moved ahead to this item on the agenda with the aim to return to Council business on the Chair's arrival. The paper was taken as read.

At 2:45pm, Chris Condon provided an overview of the two different methods utilised in the ACT to determine Bushfire Prone Areas (**BPA's**):

- First, the ACT Emergency Services Agency (**ESA**) determines BPAs in compliance with the Australian Standard Construction of buildings in BPA's (AS 3959:2018). This method of determination ensures the BPA extends into the urban environment by up to one hundred metres dependent on adjacent vegetation and meets a higher Bushfire Attack Level (**BAL**) than the second method outlined below.
- The second method is defined in s44 of the *Building (General) Regulation 2008* made under the *Building Act 2004* (ACT) and used by the ACT government. It does not incorporate urban areas meaning this method falls short of AS 3959:2018.

Chris ended his presentation with an overview of the current guidelines for creating Asset Protection Zones, how adjacent vegetation is categorised and managed along the urban edge and detailing the higher suitability of the first method in determining BPA's.

Discussion:

Members raised the following points for clarification:

- The effectiveness of the online ACTmapi Bushfire Map in identifying at-risk addresses located in BPA's: Chris responded under Version 5 of the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan (**SBMP**) there is an intent to contact homeowners and tenants geographically situated in BPA's and Flood Prone Areas (**FPA's**) via a direct mail-out. This engagement method will be repeated to inform people when their risk is reassessed by ACTmapi e.g. a suburb is built next to theirs.
- If and where BPA's overlap with FPA's: Chris responded in the affirmative confirming current intent is to inform Canberrans of their FPA risk via the mail-out discussed above. Members then queried if the demographics of the community living along the urban edge were known, with Chris responding he did not have that information to hand.
- Categories of vegetation and how land slopes are accounted for with Category 2 vegetation: Chris clarified AS 3959:2018 includes a buffer for slopes which does not need to be considered further.
- Engaging the community where the buffer for the BPA crosses onto private land: Chris responded the communication methods are currently being worked out to engage private landowners and the Federal Government is developing a Handbook for AS 3959:2018 that provides guidance on maintaining a property for a Bushfire Attack

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Level (BAL) 19. Discussion turned to the expense of managing buffer zones with Chris acknowledging Category 1 vegetation is the most expensive to manage. There was also discussion on how households in BPAs are engaged on their risk regarding garden plantings with Chris confirming through a Bushfire Smart Gardens document.

- How community members living on the urban edge are informed when the adjacent vegetation surrounding them requires management: Chris responded all public land is managed under the Bushfire Operations Plan (**BOP**) and the Asset Protection Zone with regular audits of the BOP ensuring work is completed.
- The average meterage of slashing as per the categories of vegetation management ranging from 30 to 100: Chris demonstrated via the ACTmapi Bushfire Map how the vegetation within the Asset Protection Zones is managed.
- The regulation of urban planning in new suburbs and the requirements to ensure verges are kept: Chris responded public land managers must develop a BOP for verges annually with ACTRFS reviewing them for adherence to regulations and standards.
- The protections around critical assets e.g. energy infrastructure: Chris responded BOPs are in place for these assets and utilities. There are share maps and inspections prior to the Bushfire Season commencing.
- The terminology of “buffer” may be problematic and a better description is “extend”. Chris added the term “Buffer “has been raised as an issue.
- The continued use of pine forests in the ACT with Nicholas Daines responding the risks are included in all risk profiles with pine forests planted in lower risk areas adding there are cost and recreational benefits realised by the ACT.
- Evacuation planning of suburbs with low egress options: Chris responded warnings are issued early to provide people options to leave as early as possible.
- Insurance companies’ involvement in planning and preparing for individuals living in BPA’s: Chris responded they are not always aware of the build standard and it’s a balance between providing details of and risk Insurance Companies either refusing or pricing people out of insurance. Cameron Beresford added at the National level early work is underway between insurance companies and the Commonwealth on how premiums are priced.

**The Chair joined the meeting at 2:55pm.*

- Lessons learnt from the Los Angeles (**LA**) fires and the level of confidence here in our 100 metre buffer zones: Chris responded in the ACT building standards are higher and Asset Protection Zones bigger. In 2019/20 the buffer zones were a very good buffer into the Built-up Area (**BuA**). Wayne Phillips added in LA there was house-to-house ignition and the ACT is built to withstand fires better than LA. Rohan Scott added building materials used in LA are susceptible to fires and there is good work undertaken in the ACT resulting in a more prepared community.

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- How first responders are protected with Chris responding Bushfire Protection Zones allow for fighting fires in “defendable spaces”.
- The mapping and identification of Ngunnawal assets with Rohan Scott answering a Values Officer identifies Ngunnawal assets and these assets are moved and placed back if threatened by disasters. This work is undertaken alongside the Ngunnawal People.

Action: The Council will write to the Minister recommending the ACT ESA’s method of determining Bushfire Prone Areas (BPA’s) be adopted as it is compliant to AS 3959:2018, Construction of buildings for BPA’s and considered best practice.

Due Date: To be confirmed

Person Responsible: Council Chair, Sally Troy

Outcome

Members **noted** the way Bushfire Prone Areas are determined by the ACT ESA.

2. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair made an Acknowledgement of Country and officially welcomed Council Members, Officials and Guests to the meeting at 16:00.

The Chair noted apologies were received from Dylan Kendall and Kylee Shea.

3. Declarations of Interest

As per the Conflict of Interest Register no members noted a conflict. Len Morris no longer volunteering with the ACTSES is to be noted on the register.

4. Review of Council Action items

The Chair took the paper as read and provided an update to all open Action Items:

- **2025-06-01** as the presentation is at Agenda Item 5, closure of the item was proposed and agreed to by the Council.
- **2025-06-03** the Councils YourSay submission was provided on 11 June and all agreed to its closure.
- **2025-01-04** action to be considered after Machinery of Government changes are complete.
- **2025-06-02** update to be provided at the meeting.
- **2024-08-03** the draft advice is at agenda Item 4.

Outcome

Members noted the update on open action items: **2024-08-03**, **2025-01-04** and **2025-06-02** and **agreed** to close: **2025-06-01** and **2025-06-03**.

5. Correspondence for noting

The Chair outlined the correspondence for noting:

- Letter to the Minister, to be discussed later in this Meeting.
- Letter from the ACT ESA Commissioner received on 6 August 2025 acknowledging Councils submission into the Strategic Bushfire Management Plan.

Outcome

*Members **noted** recent Council correspondence.*

6. Regional Fire Management Plan update

Nicholas Daines, CED

The Chair introduced Nicholas Daines, Deborah Stanley and Bethany Dunne CED to provide an update on the Regional Fire Management Plan (**RFMP**). Members raised the following points with CED:

- If Mount Franklin Road had been updated to a Rigid Float Road: Nicholas Daines confirmed the road was now articulated to the Corin Dam and Rigid Float for the remainder.
- The approach taken in the RFMP update was good and queried how the Orroral Valley Fire lessons learnt were incorporated: Deborah Stanly answered through the technical appendices.
- Page 5 of the RFMP landscape management zones and the Graph on Page 8 be further articulated and clarified: Nicholas Daines acknowledged Councils point and will look at rewording the parts mentioned.
- Concerns on fuel loads and how Hazard Reduction burning is planned for the next five years, mentioning Moonlight Hollow Track and suggested the modelling may have missed some areas of risk: Bethany Dunne responded the RFMP is led by both ground trooping and high-risk areas expressing confidence in the modelling.
- Concerns over the environmental impact on Bullen Range over the next five years in regard to the planned burns: Bethany Dunne responded that Bullen Range is a key strategic place in the landscape and will potentially be returned to frequently, however will not be burnt to 100%.
- The terminology of prescribed burns and references throughout and noted that on page 26 to 27 the table is not in chronological order: Nicholas Daines thanked Council for the pick-up and will amend. Bethany Dunne responded that terminology is complex and ACTRFS, Cultural and Ecological burns are all reported as discrete items with different meaning in reporting.

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- Planned grazing and where it was currently planned: Nicholas Daines responded planned grazing is reliant on Graziers being interested in placing their cattle in the areas that need to be managed.
- How planned burns versus delivered burns are reported: Reference was made to Page 27 of the RFMP. Stephen Mudford expressed disappointment as the First Nations representative on Council that cultural burns are very difficult to organise and there are regulatory barriers in place to cultural burning. Nicholas Daines conceded the difficulties and acknowledged the importance of completing community driven burns.
- Page 22 of the document suggesting Bredbo risk be clarified and Tallaganda Road may be referenced inaccurately in the report as it is near the ACT.

Action: Stephen Mudford and Nicholas Daines to meet to discuss cultural burning and how more can be undertaken.

Due Date: to be scoped

Person Responsible: Stephen Mudford and Nicholas Daines

Action: Sally Troy to contact Michaela Watts and offer to either endorse the process or an updated version of the Regional Fire Management Plan.

Due Date to be scoped

Person Responsible: Sally Troy

Outcome

Members could not **endorse** the RFMP as per the Paper recommendation.

7. Council Prescribed Burning Advice

The Chair tabled the draft Council's Prescribed Burning Advice for noting. The advice was developed by the working group made up of Council members.

**Asha Nazin and Marta Yebra left the meeting after agreeing to the advice as written at 18:05.*

Members discussed the advice as tabled advising minor amendments are made. The Chair agreed to update Attachment A to Appendix 2 and include any recent Machinery of Government changes.

Outcome

Members **agreed** to provide the advice to the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services as circulated to Council pending minor amendments.

8. Orroral Valley Fire – Coronial Findings

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The Chair tabled the findings from the Orroral Valley Fire Inquest as circulated to Council. The Council noted the Findings did not account for the known protocols for the use of military craft or the requirement an ACT Government Officer is on board prior to take-off. the Council agreed to note this and move on.

Outcome

Members **noted** the recommendations arising from the Inquest.

9. Council Workplan and Terms of Reference

16:00 - Prior to leaving the Meeting, Wayne Philips confirmed work on face-to-face strategies for community engagement is underway and language is reverting to Bushfire Season and Storm Season for community engagement. The Chair added Extreme Heat risk coordination across government will be reviewed by the Council.

18:10 - The Chair tabled the endorsed 2025-26 Council Workplan as circulated with the Meeting Papers adding an interim Chair will be in place prior to the next meeting scheduled for October 01. The interim Chair will be a Government Executive until a permanent Chair is appointed by the Minister.

Members discussed the terms of appointment with some members being extended and some having to end their term. The reduced Quorum is noted under the Terms of Reference with these membership changes. The new Chair will scope the Workplan and set timeframes for deliverables with Council agreement.

Action: Workplan output timeframes and meeting cadence will be scoped when the interim Chair is in place.

Due Date: Next meeting

Person Responsible: Interim Chair and all Members

Action: Secretariat to follow up on all the appointment terms for remaining members and provide detail of the Interim Chair.

Due Date: ASAP, definitely by 01 October.

Person Responsible: JACS SEMD

Outcome

Members **noted** the 2025-26 Council Workplan as endorsed by the Minister for Police, Fire and Emergency Services.

10. Future Council Arrangements

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The Chair provided the detail that the next meeting is scheduled for the 01 October and an Interim Chair from the ACT Government Executive will Chair until Council Appointments are finalised. Members discussed the independent advice from the Council continues to be important and its neutral nature and advisory capacity should be maintained. Members can contact Secretariat for information on the Council until informed of the Interim Chair.

Outcome

Members **noted** the appointment of an Interim Chair.

11. Council Member updates

The Chair tabled the update provided by Tony Bartlett as circulated to Members who all agreed the lack of data is concerning raising an action to contact Bren Burkevics and seek it.

Action: Sally Troy will write a letter to EGM Bren Burkevics seeking the data Tony Bartlett has asked for in his paper.

Due Date: by 01 October.

Person Responsible: Sally Troy

Outcome

Members **agreed** to contacting EGM CED for data.

12. Other Business

- Holly Harris, the usual Secretariat from JACS SEMD is on leave from 5 August – 12 September. Members should email MHAC@act.gov.au with any inquiries.
- Members thanked the Chair for her time in Chairing the Council. The Chair responded it was fantastic to work with such lovely people.
- Members further thanked John Brickhill, Tony Bartlett and Dylan Kendall for their time and contributions with Nina adding it has been a learning experience and she has gained a lot from working alongside them. The Chair also thanked all retiring Members for their contributions, noting Dylan Kendalls work behind the scenes even though he was not present tonight.

Outcome

Members **noted** the Other Business as raised.

13. Confirmation of Communique

The draft meeting communique was discussed and agreed:

On 6 August 2025, the ACT Multi-Hazard Advisory Council were provided a briefing on Bushfire Prone Area Determinations by officials from ACT Emergency Services Agency and an update

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on the Regional Fire Management Plan by officials from the City and Environment Directorate. Council Members discussed their draft advice on prescribed burning for the Minister, the Orroral Valley Fire inquiry findings, their forward workplan and future Council arrangements.

Outcome

Members ***agreed*** on the proposed communique.

14. Meeting Close:

The Chair closed the meeting at 18:55

Meeting 5 of 2025 is set for Wednesday, October 01.