



CITIES POWER PARTNERSHIP

Be Prepared: Climate Change, Bushfires & Local Government

Feb 19, 2019, Blue Mountains Cultural Centre NSW

Discussion Notes – Facilitated by CPP Director, Alix Pearce

How can local government better collaborate on bush fire challenges (can include between councils, or councils & fire service & community groups)

Regional management committees involving police, fire & rescue & council regions are effective although the physical regions can overlap

For Bushfire Management Fire Committees, one Council employee or individual may be involved in multiple committees & not have the time to actively participate

Local Government NSW (LG NSW) are falling down on bushfire co-ordination – Bushfire co-ordinator committees have representation at state level & can cover regional issues

Some council staff who deal with rehabilitation are pushed into bushfire management. Council officers have set up their own email groups & try to organize their own forums but are struggling to have co-ordination

A good example of LG NSW co-ordination was an LG NSW officer who was active in the education to support the rollout of the NSW Rural Fire Service state wide 10/50 vegetation clearing code. Position not re-filled

Nature Conservation Council NSW runs forums to help councils and communities with education and engagement in regional & peri-urban areas at extreme risk.

Our healthy ecosystems bushfire program has been running since 1979 and we have representation on the Bushfire Co-ordinating Committee (BFCC), Rural Fire Service Advisory Committee (RFSAC), and Bushfire Management Committees (BFMCs) around the state.

The [Hotspots](#) program is run with the RFS NSW

We also contribute to policy and hold a bushfire conference every 2 years - [See 2017 event website](#). May 2020 next national conference – all welcome.

We offer 3 workshops per year for NSW councils & have run these in the Blue

Mountains in the past .

Resources

[Fire & Restoration Network Resource Hub](#)

We observe that the more bushfire affected councils have greater resources. The inner metropolitan councils often outsource engagement & education to Fire & Rescue NSW

Bushfire hazard forums have been combined into Nature Conservation Council forums.

Q to Fire Services- how do you interact with Local Governments?

The relationship is good but could be sharper to reduce duplication.

We have traditionally been very response focused and need to do more with a prevention & preparation focus with more emphasis on engagement with community. as there is better bang for buck in education & awareness than in response with constrained resources moving forward.

Spending more effort to prepare community - should be viewed as developing relationships with people to do the work for you.

Use RFS & local SES volunteer groups to assist with outreach – as they have a statutory obligation to address risks in community.

eg .South West Sydney storms- educate & empower communities re how storms will impact your future & how to reduce their impact.

We still get people ringing 999 for fire, rather than 000

The NSW Rural Fire Service (RFS) currently gets a 4% uptake in bushfire management plan completion –

They have recently worked on simplifying & making the form more visual with checklists.

We're trialing a NSW Office of Emergency Management (OEM) [Get Ready Councils Program](#)

It offers consistent & efficient government messaging for all hazards to be shared to communities via Council social media & other communications channels.

Content - text & artwork is drafted & issued by OEM that brings in advice from Fire & Rescue, RFS & others.

Still being piloted for Local Govt

What additional support do local governments need to be prepared?

Councils have a very broad remit re service delivery - waste, infrastructure, community. managing bushfire risk, vegetation management , hazard reduction.

Good quality community engagement very resource intensive eg door to door visits for bushfire plan support. We have 30K homes & 80K residents.

Community advertising easy but unknown return on investment - hard to measure

We can help! Engage with your local rural fire service brigade. We hand out bushfire survival plans for free to the community, run school education programs, have active Firewise Community Forums & Facebook Groups

CRIP funded program for Winmalee NSW reviewed the impact of bushfire on vulnerable communities

NSW Office of Emergency Management funded the development of a great program - [CRIP – community resilience innovation program](#)

Good tools funded but post grants, no push technology re outreach eg what schools can do – just static on a website.

Fire education program no \$ committed for ongoing delivery.

Our Local Emergency Management Committee is very combat focused – They have resources but the planning, preparation & recovery work seems to be pushed back to local government.

Bushfire planning needs to be longer term than 3 months before bushfire season.

RFS good at sharing information

We liked the Nature Conservation Council workshops & picked up the Ku-Ring-Gai Council [ClimateWise Communities](#) program resources

Post bushfire event our Council received \$7m funding through Office of Emergency Management which covered waste & asbestos removal, clean up & psychological support

No funds available for ongoing preparation or prevention.

Council has good relationships with RFS, Fire & Rescue

Community impacts –

Insured elderly homeowners in 1970s & 1980s homes that burned down were offered an insured value \$200K & unable to afford the rebuild to fire rating cost estimate of \$700-800K , so have moved out of town.

Psychological impacts – high trauma when subsequent fire caused smoke to travel through the region .

Are there any knowledge gaps that need to be addressed eg research?

Would like to see a climate change & bushfire mythbusting guide for our Fire Authority liaison

Eg what contributes to fires, what burns easily, what is the responsibility of local government, grassland impacts, wind tunnels

Need to understand reasons for low adoption of NSW Rural Fire Service Bushfire management plan above the current 4% - Apathy? Cultural? Different risk management understandings?

Look at strategies to increase uptake – eg simplifying form (formerly 67 pages)

Where residents don't want fire trails & want to live in the bush accept the risk– should we walk away?

Need to need to look at & communicate fire risk – ie it's easier to defend a house well prepared with a native garden

Local Emergency Management Committees could do more to promote personal risk & acceptance.

Working with the Rural Fire Service post bushfire we see a need for resource kit for communication for non scientists that can help to link climate change and bushfire impacts

Cultural sensitivity post bushfire event - when can you talk about future bushfire threat & preparation/ risk management?

Need to communicate that communities are vulnerable, there's not a lot that we can do for you – you need to be OK with that risk translation process.

Responses -

-Talk to residents re what are your triggers, awareness that there will not be a big red truck at corner to help you & personal responsibility for you & your animals.

– life before property – need to account for fire fighter danger – let property burn

Interested to look at understanding the most vulnerable elements of things we value to set current & future risk profile for resource investment.

Current bushfire risk mgmt. plan process is very granular & physical in focus Eg slashing & firebreaks. It accounts less from a social impacts perspective. –

is that the best spend or should we be spending on resilience?

Recent trip to Tasmanian Bushfires has seen cultural change among in fire fighting community.

Former climate change sceptics are now convinced re impacts from the fires seen in past 5 years – new areas, length of season etc

We've seen the biggest success in fire education for children, learning about smoke detectors, messaging :get down low & go go go, having a safety storage box,

Children often wake up first in a fire, translates to parental education for new families to area who haven't experienced past fire events

Suggest look at setting up school program for local primary & high school

Fire Education - curriculum integrated in high school – also reliant on RFS volunteers

Look at the [Red Cross Pillow Case](#) disaster preparedness primary schools program – 1 hour workshop with supporting lesson plan

Emergency kit sent home in pillow case that were sponsored (Disney?)

2014-15 program piloted in Blue Mountains but grant funding has run out.
[Strathewen primary school](#) in Vic has had good results

Re research, the Red Cross-commissioned consultants to look at the social & health costs to community – - lost productivity, domestic violence, stress, mental health

Produced in addition to report from Insurance Council Australia & Local Govt re infrastructure

Would like to see shared resourcing for

P&P – prevention & preparedness.

R &R -Response & recovery

R&P -resilience & prevention