

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade Held on Saturday 6 June 2009 at Mt Irvine Village Hall

Attendance

Invited guests present: Tom Shirt (District Manager Blue Mountains RFS), John Fitzgerald (Group Leader Blue Mountains RFS), Doug Wood, Fred Taylor and Alan Catt (Group Captains Blue Mountains RFS), Dick Emerson (Captain Bell RFS Brigade), Councillor Terri Hamilton (BMCC), Arthur Henry (NPWS)

Residents of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine present: Ray Harrington, Julie Townend, Helen Naylor, Moira Green, Graham & Judy Tribe, Beth Raines, Ross & Maria Kelly, Eleanor Herriott, John Lee, David & Sarah Howell, Penny Ewing, Marilyn & Peter Laving, Florence Smart, Arthur Delbridge, Mary Reynolds, David Chesterman, Peter Raines, Luke O'Hearn, Joshua O'Hearn-Rosinski, Pam Cave, Richard England, Robert Chesney, Robin & John Leonard, Richard Beattie, Ian Kerridge, Henric Nicholas, Michael Bates, Brian Abrahams, Sonya Webster, Peter Buckle, Libby Raines, John Holt, Maurice May, Tim Gow, Anne Mellady, Vic Zhukov, Vivienne Eggers, James Telfer, Sara Sernack, Alan Rose, Bill Scrivener

Welcome

The President, David Howell, opened the meeting at 10.30am and welcomed the invited guest and residents of the villages to the meeting.

Apologies

From invited guests: The Hon. Bob Debus (Federal Member for Macquarie), Hon. Phil Koperberg (State Member for Blue Mountains), Inspector Jack Tolhurst (Operations Officer Blue Mountains RFS), Adam Searle (Mayor BMCC), Phil Pinyon (General Manager BMCC), Mick Garvey (Ambulance Service, Lithgow)

From residents of Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine: Joe & Diana Landsberg, Helen & Barry Freeman, Kim Gow, Suzanne & Ricananda Daly, Julian Ludowici, Owen Haviland, Susie Hope, Sarah Hope, Jane & Phillip Beeby, Kathleen Oakes, Peter Dempsey, Alan & Diana Heap, Stephen & Margaret Dean, Richard Knight-Brown, Mary Holt, Loretta Beattie, Margaret Richey, Ellis Reynolds, Milba Mewburn, Ron Green, Minny Nicholas, Ruth Scrivener, Paul & Geoff Naylor, Allen, Robyn & David Hyde

Confirmation of Minutes from 2008 AGM

- o Moved by Henric Nicholas and seconded by Penny Ewing

Report from Superintendent Tom Shirt, District Manager, Blue Mountains

Tom Shirt opened his remarks by saying that he has just completed his first full year as District Manager in the Blue Mountains. He has found the experience enjoyable, although not without some controversy and hard decisions.

The Senior Management Team has provided steadfast support and stability in the past 12 months during times when the decision making processes have been challenged. Only with their continuing support and staff and volunteers working together can we move forward.

There have been many staffing shuffles in the office this year. Thanks to our volunteers for understanding what a busy time it has been, particularly for the dedicated admin. staff.

In February we witnessed our worst natural disaster involving fire. Many of you were deployed to Victoria and many more put their hands up to go if needed. The deployment was the largest in the countries' history, thank you to all those involved. Undoubtedly the outcomes from the Royal Commission will change some views on how we should do business in the future.

Jack Tolhurst is retiring in July. He is one of the longest serving members in the State and his name has become a household word in fire fighting, particularly here in the Blue Mountains. I wish to take this opportunity to thank Jack for his dedicated service to the community, not only with the RFS, but the many other voluntary organisations to which he belongs. We will keep you informed about Jack's retirement party to be held later in the year.

In the next few months we need to take every opportunity the weather permits to undertake the hazard reductions planned. Rain is frequently a problem and short notice for the hazard reduction is often a necessity.

The Premier Nathan Rees has announced new measures to help investigate bush fires and reduce fire hazards in NSW. The proposed changes in legislation include increasing on-the-spot fines for lighting fires, establishing a Bushfire Protection Taskforce as well as increasing the powers of bushfire investigators to remove people and objects from fire scenes. Amendments to the Rural Fires Act will also confirm the Rural Fire Service as the primary body for managing hazard reduction on private lands, with the issuing of hazard reduction certificates and management of complaints to be streamlined with the Local Government and Shires Association.

He closed by thanking all those prepared to take on administration and field officer positions within the Brigade.

Reports for 2008-2009

Captain: Beth Raines

Welcome

Callouts & other Activities

The Brigade has had a busy year attending 34 incidents. Of these 34 incidents, 15 were callouts for our **Community First Responders**. This program is working well and the support from the Lithgow Ambulance Station and Staff is much appreciated especially in coming out to conduct monthly trainings. We thank the RFS for supplying a twin cab Hilux for our dedicated responder vehicle. Thanks to Suzzane, Diana, Kathleen, Libby, Barry and Pete for the added responsibility and commitment that they put into this program and the Brigade.

We responded to 8 storm damage incidents – all trees across roads and 4 MVA's – despite various personal views about the speed limit changes on Bells Line of Road, from a brigade perspective, the changes in speed limit and more importantly the increased presence of police patrolling the Bells Line has seen a noticeable decrease in accidents.

We were involved in 3 rescues over the last 12 months, 2 at Mt Wilson, which in both cases the people were able to walk out and one at Mt Piddington which was a carry out job. Other incidents included an unauthorised pile burn and a "back to base" smoke detector going off.

Added to these incidents the Brigade sent crews to Victoria. Vic Zhukov, David Hyde and myself plus the Mt Wilson 9 were involved working in the Warburton, Healesville and Narbethong areas. The Mt Wilson 9 was then sent down with other Blue Mountain crews to Wilsons Promontory. This vehicle was away for some 20 days but came back in surprisingly good nick. I would like to thank Vic and David for their outstanding effort in challenging circumstances.

Red Balloon Day: Thank you to everyone who purchased a balloon in support of the Victorian Bushfire Communities. We sold 117 balloons and made \$2370 for the Salvation Army Bushfire Appeal – what a wonderful effort.

Some of the other activities members of the Brigade were involved with included World Youth Day and the Popes visit, which David Howell and Vic helped and a mock terrorism exercise staged at Holsworthy army base where Vic and I worked on our acting skills as 'victims' with about 200 other RFS volunteers. 4 members of the Community First Responders also attended a mock train disaster in the Clarence Tunnels assisting NSW Ambulance.

Membership - This year we mark the passing of Kathleen Howard Smith, Wilga Smart and Luigi Strano, who all had an involvement with the Brigade and Ron Naylor who joined in 1968 and was awarded life membership in 1995. These people were long time residents of the mountains and we remember and thank them for their support. New members - we welcome Bruce Arnold and Nancy Fox, Toby Gow, Luke O'Hearn, Joshua O'Hearn Rodinski, Fiona Tonzing, Myf Ryan and Bettina and Julian Ludowici into the brigade and congratulate Bruce, Toby, Luke and Joshua in completing their BF courses and wish the others all the best in theirs. Anyone who wishes to join and do the Basic Firefighting course please see Penny Ewing or myself after the meeting. We continue to hold training once a month with a good turn out averaging 11 people and some 29 people have attended one or more training sessions in the last 12 months. We are looking into the feasibility of holding an additional training session mid week to try and capture the people who work on properties here and are looking for support in training these people. This is mainly because we have a shortage of personnel to cover fires mid week and it is these people who know and look after a number of properties and are in a position to help.

Bush Run - The Mt Wilson to Bilpin Bush Run was held on the 23rd of August with around 200 runners. The first 23Km are through Mt Wilson & Mt Irvine and about 40 people were involved in either the start or one of the 5 drink stations this side of Bowens Creek. Congratulations to Alan Heap, James Ross and Peter Raines who completed the 36km race. This years Willy 2 Billy will be on the 22nd of August and I hope everyone will help where they can.

The Brigade is also involved with the 6 Foot Track Marathon. It is our job to do the final drink station outside caves house for some 800+ runners and assist with traffic control. Thanks to those involved and again congrats to Alan and James who competed this 46.6 km run.

Hazard Reduction Burning

We continue to have a good working relationship with National Parks through Neil Stone and have achieved some large burns since 2002 and have plans for further large strategic burns.

The single biggest limitation to Hazard Reduction burning is the weather. The Mounts generally get the most rain in the months of January, February and March. This means of course that Autumn HR Burning is delayed. It is often too cold and too damp in winter months + into spring and the transition from spring to summer is very quick. The National Parks and the RFS are limited by this. Other factors that govern a Hazard Reduction burn include strong containment lines and the frequency of fire in an area.

We have 2 burns scheduled and ready to go once the weather turns in our favour. One at the end of Wynnes Rocks Road (some 150ha) and the other here below Mt Irvine Rd (7.2ha). Every time it gets close Pete comes out here to Mt Irvine to do a test burn and it will not light – another 1 to 2 weeks of fine weather would dry the area out but of course it rains. This cycle has happened again and again over the last 3 years but we have taken our opportunities where we can. In 2005/6 over 220ha were Hazard Reduced by burning at Scriveners Pass, Farrer Road West and around the Wollangambe walking tracks. In 2004/5 the area was over 170ha around Boronia Point, the Mt Wilson fire station, Wynnes Rocks Road and Cayleys Haycock. In the two years before that some 460ha were burnt at Du Faur Creek, Waterfall Creek and Danes Way. Add to that some 14,000ha on the south of the Bells Line of Road was burnt in 2006. This adds up to a substantial area that has been Hazard Reduced. That said it still comes down to ensuring that every owner has prepared their property in the best possible way and Hazard Reduction Burning is only one way of reducing fuel loads.

- The best way of reducing fuels on properties is slashing and hand clearing of the understory.

Other methods include:

- Skirting trees – removing the lower branches of trees which reduces the risk of fire transfer between ground fuels and the canopy
- Thinning trees and creating more selected clumps of trees with openness between rather than continuous canopy cover
- Selective pruning and tree removal especially of trees overhanging and near buildings and
- Pile burning – the Progress Associations have put a lot of good work into this with the Council and RFS so take advantage of these regulations.

All these things that you can (and need to do) will reduce the intensity of a fire and minimise damage to property. Most houses are lost through ember attack, so use the next 4 months to critically assess your buildings and then get something done about it to make your buildings ember proof.

The Brigade will be holding **Street Meetings** starting tomorrow and later on here at Mt Irvine where we will be emphasising these issues and explaining how you need to create these 'Asset Protection Zones' on your properties to help protect those things that you value.

Just a few other things – congratulations go to Barry Freeman, who received The Commissioner's Certificate of Commendation, and thanks to the executive especially David, Judy and Pete and to all members of the Brigade for their continued involvement.

We also take this opportunity to thank Jack Tolhurst for years of support of our Brigade and these two special mountains, we all wish him the very best in his upcoming retirement.

Thank you.

- Moved the report be accepted by Penny Ewing, Seconded by Tim Gow

Treasurer: Susie Hope

Susie was unable to attend the meeting. Her financial report for the 12 month period 1 April 2008 to 31 March 2009 was read to the meeting by David Howell

In summary:

Income for the year totalled	\$33,180.00
Including:	
Donations	\$16,555.00
Willy to Billy	\$ 4,422.66
Art Raffle	\$ 3,123.00 – used for new gutter guard at the Mt Wilson shed
M'ship fees	\$ 1,590.76
Expenses for the year totalled	\$28,082.84
Surplus	\$ 5097.15
Opening balance from last year	\$11,142.29
Closing balance in working acnt	\$16,239.45
Term Deposits	\$41,616.00
Total funds at 31 March 2009	\$57,855.45

David Howell explained that the funds that have been set aside for improvements to the sheds were firstly to be used to upgrade the shed at Mt Wilson, extra garaging and a communications and training room. As the plans to upgrade the facilities at Mt Wilson are out of our reach it has been decided to improve the Mt Irvine shed first. The operational people are to be consulted for specifications, an architect for the plan and hopefully we will be able to proceed.

The social activities fund not strictly related to RFS operations is \$2873.74. This reflects a huge increase of \$2196.25 for the year. Credit for this goes largely to our catering officer, Margaret Richey, who has rallied her troops to slave over BBQs and stalls at every opportunity.

- o Moved that the financial report be accepted by Graham Tribe, Seconded by Libby Raines

Full details of the financial report are attached at the back of the minutes.

Appointment of an Auditor:

Proposed motion: **That Mr Phill Lupton from N.A. Honan & Co be appointed as auditor for the 2009/2010 financial year**

Susie Hope wanted the meeting to know that Mr Phill Lupton is her personal accountant. The potential for a conflict of interest was not considered to be an issue by the meeting while our processes remained open and transparent.

- o Moved by Henric Nicholas and Seconded by Penny Ewing

Annual Membership Fee:

Proposed motion: That the annual membership fee is increased to \$15 per annum for each member commencing with the 2010/2011 year.

Susie Hope in her treasurer's report noted that the membership fee has not been increased for 6 years. Although the brigade is in a healthy financial position it makes financial commonsense for the membership fee to cover the basic costs of servicing the membership, so that income from donations can be put towards actual fire fighting infrastructure, the safety of our firefighters and our community. After some discussion an alternative motion was proposed that: **The annual membership fee to be increased to \$20 for each member commencing with the 2010/2011 year**

- o Moved by Ross Kelly, Seconded by Eleanor Herriott and carried unanimously by the meeting.

Election of Officers:

Superintendent Tom Shirt took the chair to conduct the elections. The following positions had been nominated prior to the meeting and each nominee was confirmed in the position:

Position	Nominee Name
President	David Howell
Vice President	Henric Nicholas
Treasurer	Susie Hope
Secretary	Judy Tribe
Captain	Beth Raines
Senior Deputy Captain	Peter Raines
Deputy Captain (1)	Barry Freeman

Deputy Captain (2)	Stewart Gunn
Deputy Captain (3)	Tim Gow
Deputy Captain (4)	Stuart Donaldson
Deputy Captain (5)	Alan Heap
Deputy Captain (6)	Richard Knight-Brown
Equipment Officer	Brian Abrahams
Equipment officer - PPE	Kathleen Oakes
Fire Trails Coordinator (joint)	Peter Dempsey & Vic Zhukov
Water Manager	David Howell
Training Coordinator	Penny Ewing
Hazard Reduction Coordinator	Peter Raines
Catering Team Leader	Margaret Richey
First Aid Officers (joint)	Dr Phillip Beeby, Dr Jane Beeby
O H & S Officer	Robyn Hyde
Community Education Officer	Brian Abrahams

General Business

Presentation by Barry Freeman of a West Sector training exercise to be held in Mount Wilson later this year. As Barry was unable to come to the meeting, Beth outlined that the exercise would be in October and would involve a theoretical fire, probably in the Mt Irvine area, and coordinating all services.

Other business

- John Holt asked Tom Shirt about building a bunker. Tom said that there were no building codes as yet for this and there are many issues to consider, the biggest being ventilation. He advised to wait until there are building codes in place
- Councillor Terri Hamilton from BMCC informed the meeting that a report on Bowen's Creek Bridge had been tabled at the council meeting on 26th May 2009. The recommendation was that the bridge cannot be kept open for the general community, that a gate be placed at Bowens Creek Bridge for emergencies only and that the 5T limit to be maintained. Tom Shirt said that BMRFS is trying to get the bridge upgraded to 6T suitable for a Cat 7 tanker and hopes to get the same support from Hawkesbury.

Concern was also expressed about resident access to Mt Irvine, especially in an emergency when Bells Line of Road may be closed

A deputation about Bowens Creek Bridge to Bob Debus (Federal Member) by David Howell & Henric Nicholas (Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine RFS), John Lee (Mt Irvine Progress Association), Bill Ryan (Mt Wilson Progress Association) and Bill Shields (Bilpin RFS) is being organized.

- Beth was asked about the demountables at the back of the Mt Wilson shed: She explained that as it is not practical to do the extensions to the shed these are a low cost way of solving two problems:
 - One is a communications room for the tower. It is isolated, so quiet, and weather proof.
 - The other is a fuel store to comply with OH&S regulations.
- As communication seems to have been an issue during the Victorian fires, Tom Shirt was asked about the analogue/digital capacity of the radio system used by Blue Mountains RFS. He replied that ours have digital capability, but are analogue. Personal communication is now in line with the rest of the state and can communicate with the hub. He warned though that there will always be blind spots e.g. in shadows.

Closure of meeting

As there was no further business the meeting was closed at 11.40am