

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade on Saturday 6th June 2015 in the Mt Irvine Hall

Attendance:

Invited guests present: Hon Trish Doyle, MLA for the Blue Mountains; Councillor Sarah Shrug, BMCC; Councillor Don McGregor, BMCC; Paul McGrath, RFS BM District Office; Fred Taylor, Group Officer West 2; Matt Hunter Group Officer Central 3; Peter Ellison Captain Mt Tomah Brigade; Ron Gavin, Inspector, Ambulance NSW;

Residents of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine present: Kathleen Oakes, Bruce Kerridge, Ray Harrington, James Peppercorn, Beth Raines, Stephen Dean, David Howell, Sarah Howell, Deborah Griffin, Lesley Wilson, Paul Naylor, Geoff Naylor, Minny Nicholas, Henric Nicholas, Bill Scrivener, Jim Tzannes, Wendy Holland, Beverley Thompson, Graham Thompson, Richard Beattie, Philip Beattie, Elizabeth Montano, Joe Montano, Steve Woolfenden, Sue Woolfenden, Libby Raines, Allen Hyde, Robyn Hyde, Peter Dempsey, Owen Haviland, Susie Hope, Nancy Fox, Peter Raines

Welcome:

The President, David Howell, opened the meeting at 4.10pm and welcomed the invited guests and residents. He thanked the Executive for their efforts throughout the past year and acknowledged the loss of Alan Gunn, an important member over many years and Sebastian St Vincent-Welch, one of our newest members. As a result of the brigade participating in a number of rescues, a Red Cross sponsored course on 'Psychological First Aid' was held which was highly regarded by those participating. Out of adversity can come opportunities. He thanked Peter Raines for his recent efforts in rescuing a lost bush walker.

Apologies:

Invited guests: Michael Begg, Peter Church, Mick Metcalfe, Louise Markus, Mick Garvey, Frank Vincent

Residents of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine: Alex Halliday, Sarah Hope, Robin Treweeke, Mark Bancroft, Robyn Scrivener, Tom and Suzanne Bassett, Brian and Carol Carrigan, Barry and Helen Freeman, Alan and Elcira Rose, Tim and Kim Gow, Penny Ewing, Margaret Dean, Mary Holt, Loretta Beattie, Bruce Arnold, Linda Raines, Ted Griffin, Mitchell and Andrew Woolfenden, Hugh and Emmy Nicholas, Katherine and Andrew Montano, Kathy Harrington, Ruth Scrivener, Helen Naylor, Annie Caitling, Graham and Judy Tribe, Robert Chesney

Confirmation of Minutes of the 2014 AGM

Moved Henric Nicholas, seconded Nancy Fox

Report from David Jones, RFS District Manager, Blue Mountains

This was read by Paul McGrath. The following is a summary. The full report is available on request to the secretary.

David Jones noted the valuable contribution made by the brigade to the local and wider community and the importance of social capital in enabling communities to come to grips with natural disasters and develop levels of resilience. Paul presented copies of the Commissioners Certificate of Commendation (Unit) that was awarded to the Blue Mountains District (including all brigades) in recognition of its efforts during the October 2013 fires.

Address by Hon. Trish Doyle, MLA:

Ms Doyle thanked the brigade for the invitation and asked the community to take up the offer to advise her in person or by phone, email or letter of any issues or concerns they would like her to take up not only at the state level but also locally or federally. She emphasized that she was approachable and 'her office is your office'.

Address by Ron Gavin:

Mr Gavin thanked the brigade for the invitation and expressed his admiration for the Community First Responders who, in spite of local tragedies, had remained resilient and continued in their role. He also noted their commitment to maintaining skills and attendance at regular monthly training which covers 10 subjects of core ambulance protocol each year. He also thanked the brigade for their assistance during rescues and for creating 'a home away from home' for all involved.

Reports for 2014-2015:

Captain: Beth Raines

The Mt Wilson / Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade has had another busy year, attending incidents, doing pre-incident planning and conducting training... and getting awards

We have attended 41 incidents this past 12 months. The break down for these is:

19 Motor Vehicle accidents (11 to the stretch of road near Noel's Corner; 5 at Holly Lodge; and 3 around Mount Tomah). It is interesting to note that the RMS are finally doing something about these well know and notorious accident spots – two 0.6km sections – one at Holly Lodge and one at Jinki Bend are due to start mid this year (Holly Lodge appears to be about to start very soon) and a 1.4km section around Noels Corner is due to start mid-2016.

10 Community First Responder Calls

4 fires (including cars, fire alarms and escaped pile burns and the Cliff Drive Fire)

6 rescues

2 storm / snow damage

When we get called out to Rescues and MVA's the biggest noticeable difference is in the relationships we have built up with NSW Ambulance and the Police Rescue – we support them operationally but during a few of our more challenging times this year, the support we received from Lithgow Ambulance and Police Rescue - Dallas Atkinson in particular has been greatly appreciated.

The devastating loss of one of our newest members in Sebastian St Vincent-Welsh and one of our most experienced and long serving members in Alan Gunn is something that this Brigade and Community is still coming to terms with. They are missed deeply every day. Alan was a Captain and a Deputy Captain for many, many years, his contribution to the Brigade was enormous as was his worry and concern that things be done 'right'. This worry and concern stemmed from his deep love of the Mounts and that had to be respected. Alan took great pride in all he did and we are lucky in a way that a lot of his work is so visible to us – the Mount Wilson Sign, the flagging under the flag pole, the seat in Wynne Reserve.

During this trying period the Brigade won the NSW Resilience Award for the not-for-profit sector and then to our astonishment went on to win the National Resilient Australia Award. The Brigade and Community have had to learn a whole new level of resilience – something that we are getting used to despite the circumstances or more accurately because of the circumstances.

The Brigade was awarded a grant from the Blue Mountains Flexible Grant Program - Community Recovery Fund for signage, some you can see on the Fire Danger Sign outside the Mt Wilson Station. We have conducted a very informative Community Engagement workshop on what we learnt from the State Mine Fire – this was invaluable for those that attended especially those that were in the process of writing a Bushfire Survival Plan (which I hope are now all practiced and completed). We have also been involved in a number of studies with the University of Wollongong on various bushfire related research, all which can be found in the Mounts newsletters.

Training wise, I am pleased to add the following names to the list of trained firefighters – Robert Buchner, Patrick Buckle, Stephen List, Rosie Walsh, Alice Simpson, Keith Waters, Thom Renton, Johanna Renton and Mike Pearse – welcome aboard and thank you for all the time and effort you have put in to your training so far. Thank you also to West 3 Peter Church and to Bell, Tomah, Blackheath, Medlow and Megalong Brigades for providing instructors, trucks and venues for the training. The West Sector training that we attend is always great for upskilling and catching up with friends from other Brigades. Peter Ellison, the talk that Mount Tomah hosted last weekend was great. The Brigade has also organised two lots of training that are a bit out of the norm – we put our Catering Officers through a TAFE course on safe handling and supervising of food and we also completed a Red Cross course on Psychological First Aid which was invaluable to all those who attended.

The other project that the Brigade has become involved in is the RFS Mobile Mapping Trial. We are the only Brigade in the Blue Mountains involved in the trial which involves using mobile devices out in the field to send back reports as well as trialling in the field mapping. If we are in a position to conduct any Hazard Reductions during the trial period that will be a good test of the system. This is in the initial stages so we will see how it goes but it is an exciting project to be part of.

Our Community First Responders continue to train and attend incidents. We are very appreciative of Ron Gavin and the staff from Lithgow Station who come up and conduct the monthly training. Ron please send our thanks on to all the staff who have come up and put up with our stupid questions such as why can't you just call it a bleeding nose instead of epistaxis, or sweating instead of diaphoresis! We are always looking for additional members so please let us know if you are interested.

We are still frustrated with the lack of progress on the Station extensions and on Bowens Creek Road. This Brigade and Community punches above its weight in so much of what we do and yet the tiers of Government are so frustrating in their bureaucracy. Unfortunately, there is nothing like a wildfire to galvanise action – but we don't want to be the ones in front of a coroner saying "but we told them repeatedly but they did nothing"

We continue with the Photography and Art Exhibition, this years is on the 10th & 11th October – a huge thanks to Graham and Judy and Bev and Phil Woodman, Deb, Lesley, Susie and all the helpers who just made it happen.

This year we say goodbye to Ron and Moira Green and to Mary Reynolds as they move to the other side of the Mountains. We have also said goodbye to Ellis Reynolds who was a valued brigade treasurer for many years, to Arthur Delbridge and to Boz Brooks. We thank Roza Sage as she moves on and we welcome Trish Doyle as the Local Member for Blue Mountains.

Thanks

Thanks again to the great Exec – David, Susie, Judy, Graham, Pete, Kathleen, Barry and Henric – to the Deputies, training officers, catering, community engagement and equipment teams, thanks for all your work and for taking some of the pressure off me.

Acceptance of Captains Report: moved Susie Hope, seconded Henric Nicholas

Treasurer: Susie Hope

This report covers our financial dealings for the 12 month period 1 April 2014 to 31 March 2015. It's a verbal version of the financial details (since audited and found to be correct) you should have all received with your notice of this meeting. I did see that our secretary, Judy Tribe, emailed the reports out as 3 sheets in one EXCEL file with that file saved on the 3rd sheet, being the least important social club summary. Hopefully everyone that was emailed also accessed the first 2 sheets? I have some spare copies available plus the audited and found correct version should you wish to check it.

They are on the reports that were sent out but, except for the bottom line figures, I'm dropping the cents for this report so you don't all fall asleep!

Our Working Account which actually runs the brigade financially but no longer accepts donations.

Income for the year totalled **\$68,349** being:

- Income from the Dennarque garden opening - \$16,681 (a further note about this later)
- Income from our Photography & Art Exhibition - \$12,347 including donations from the artists later transferred to our Public Fund - \$2,213 (also a further note about this later)
- Bank account interest - an exciting \$5!
- Membership fees - \$1,763
- Transfers from our Public Fund, as approved by its trustees - \$25,530
- Donations incorrectly deposited into this account instead of our Public Fund - \$710 plus \$3,607 associated with the Dennarque opening (It's a nuisance – & to me too - but we really need our membership and donations to be paid separately to ensure we maintain our DGR status)
- BMCC claim - \$255
- Mt Wilson Progress Association – a grant organised through them for fire signage - \$8,246
- GST collected and then paid to the ATO – (\$796)

Outgoings for the year totalled **\$66,497** being:

- General firefighting equipment purchases - \$307 and maintenance - \$339
- Fire trail maintenance and general slashing/clearing - \$2,410
- Expenses relating to the Dennarque garden opening - \$3,101
- Expenses relating to our Photography & Art Exhibition - \$7,915
- Our share of maintenance of our great community website - \$272
- PayPal transaction fees - \$113
- Breen paddock clearing to allow for emergency helicopter access - \$5,833
- Pie warmer & glass door refrigerator - \$2,914
- Mt Wilson shed networking - \$1,132
- Fire signage as per the grant through MWPA - \$8,246
- Office admin - \$905
- Telecommunications expenses - \$3,635
- Term deposit - \$20,000
- Transferred to our Public Fund - \$710 & \$3,607 incorrectly deposited and \$2,213 donations from our exhibiting artists
- Sundry expenses of \$3,085 – being for Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine hall hire - \$507, general catering and shed supplies - \$2,218, medical supplies - \$35 and Elgas - \$325
- GST paid and then refunded from the ATO – (\$248)

The resulting **surplus** from all this was **\$1,852.61**, which, when added to our 1 April 2014 opening balance of \$4,644.89, left us with a closing balance in our working account of **\$6,497.50**.

Our Public Fund Account ended up with a **deficit**. Its function is to accept all donations and channel funds, as approved by its trustees, back into our Working Account as long as they are purely for the purpose of supporting fire and emergency services.

Income for the year totalled **\$31,942** being:

- General donations - \$21,615
- Dennarque garden opening - \$3,607 from Nooroo also opening & \$2,167 sundry donations
- Photography & Art Exhibition - \$2,213 donations from artists, \$1,500 donations from owners of open gardens & \$785 sundry donations (gold coin entry, firemen's hats, etc.)
- Bank account interest - \$12
- Membership incorrectly deposited - \$40

Outgoings for the year totalled **\$55,692** being:

- Transfer to Working Account, as approved by the trustees - \$25,530 and membership incorrectly deposited - \$40
- PAYPAL transaction fees - \$122
- New term deposits - \$30,000

The resulting **deficit** from all this was **\$23,750.29**, which, when subtracted from our 1 April 2014 balance of \$39,259.56, resulted in a balance of **\$15,509.27**.

I'd like to make special mention of both our Dennarque weekend & our Photography & Art Exhibition. Because the figures are split between our 2 above accounts the bottom line result for each is slightly murky! So to clarify..

The Dennarque weekend netted us \$20,597 after we paid & claimed the relevant gst. This consisted of gate & cafe takings at Dennarque - \$16,681 plus gate takings at Nooroo - \$3,607 less associated costs - \$3,101 plus donations - \$2,167. There was an additional net profit of \$1,243 made at the sausage sizzle which went into our social club account. The 'thank you's' for this amazing effort are endless as so many people were involved, but special thanks need to go to Bill & Lata Moss & Tony &

Lorraine Barrett for opening their beautiful gardens .. & to Lesley Wilson for feeding the masses so well.

The Photography & Art Exhibition netted us \$6,717, again after we paid & claimed the relevant gst. The sale of art & food, including donations from the artists, netted us \$4,431. The rest was from donations, being \$1,500 from garden owners who generously opened their gardens, and a sundry \$785. Again it would take forever to thank everyone involved but special mention needs to go to Bev & Phil Woodman and their network, our fabulous local artists, the generous garden owners, Judy Tribe for organising things at our end, and Deb Griffin plus her great team of caterers.

As well as the funds in our Working and Public Fund accounts as at 31 March 2015, we've squirreled away **\$262,922.71** investment in term deposits with the Commonwealth Bank, including an increase over the year of the additional \$50,000 invested plus \$6,370 interest received.

With the **\$3,000** held in our Captain's debit account (set up to cover her general minor expenses) our total funds as at 31 March 2015 were **\$287,929.48**. Most of this is earmarked for our much needed extension to our Mount Wilson shed and our equally much needed revamp of, or our new Mount Irvine shed. Still only the red tape to conquer!

A separate account is also kept for social activities not strictly related to RFB operations. The funds in this account totalled **\$2,784** as at 31 March 2015. This reflects an **increase** of **\$885** for the year thanks to the Dennarque weekend sausage sizzle covering our social events!

Yet again my wonderful accountant, Phill Lupton from Honan Partners, has kindly audited our books at no charge to us. I have twisted his arm to act as our auditor for the 2015/2016 financial year if you choose to appoint him to do so. Whilst I completely trust Phill to act on behalf of the brigade rather than me, I understand that if I'm re-elected as treasurer, appointing my personal accountant as my auditor may appear to be a conflict of interest for the brigade. Whoever your choice of auditor is for 2015/2016, I would like to thank Phill for auditing our accounts over the last eight years.

Acceptance of Treasurers report: moved Stephen Dean, seconded Beth Raines

Appointment of Auditor for 2015-2016:

Moved Beth Raines, seconded David Howell that Phil Lupton of Honan Partners be appointed as auditor for 2015-2106

Neighbourhood Safer Places (NSP):

On behalf of the Mt Irvine Hall Trust, Jim Tzannes noted that the Hall has accepted the proposal from the RFS for the Mt Irvine Hall to become a NSP on the proviso that any trees to be removed be done so at RFS cost. Although the brigade had been advised that were two possible locations for an NSP at Mt Irvine, it would appear that only the Mt Irvine Hall was considered. The Mt Wilson Village Hall was also being considered as a possible NSP and Richard Beattie, President of Mt Wilson Progress Association, noted that the Association had been approached by RFS as an adjacent landowner. The Association had given approval for clearance of their land on the proviso that a flora and fauna study be undertaken.

After Action Review (AAR) from the State Mine Fire, October 2013:

David Howell reported that there were 69 recommendations from the AAR covering Operations, Community Engagement, Station Officers and Catering. Of the 69 projects, 8 had been decided were no longer relevant, 32 completed, 9 ongoing and 20 still to commence. Examples of completed projects were Station Officer manual, new street coordinators, street coordinator duty statement, more RFS vehicle drivers and a generator maintained by Council at the Mt Wilson Village Hall.

Location of Mt Irvine Fire Station:

David Howell noted that delays with the extension to the Mt Wilson Station had led the Executive to consider the rebuilding of the Mt Irvine Station. An early consideration was a possible alternate location. It had been suggested that it could be sited beside the Hall so as to share facilities or, alternatively, on the current site of the tennis court. The RFS had advised that it would not fund facilities in any structure other than an RFS Station. The Mt Irvine Hall Trust did not approve of relocation of the Station on to lands managed by them. Jim Tzannes noted that the Trust was mindful that the Hall was a resource for both the current and future generations and was currently planning renovations and seeking grants to repair and upgrade facilities. It was noted that the President of the Mt Irvine Progress Association had been asked to survey the community for their preference which was still to happen. David Howell advised that the Brigade Executive had agreed that the decision on the location of the Station should be made after consultation with the Mt Irvine community. The new shed would be a two bay shed costing approximately \$200,000. Paul McGrath noted that there were three other building projects in the Blue Mountains (Shipley, Yellow Rock and Lawson) and that the Mt Irvine shed could not be scheduled until a location had been decided.

Bowens Creek:

Elizabeth Montano reported on progress so far on the issue of the Bowens Creek emergency access route and thanked local members from all levels of government for their assistance. She noted that Bowens Creek could be a 'poster child' for the regional alliance of councils (Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith) and made the following points:

- Since the 2014 AGM, work has continued on:
 - bringing the significance of the Bowens Creek Rd, Bowens Creek Bridge and Mount Irvine Rd route between Mt Irvine and Bilpin to government attention at all levels and lobbying for a solution to the current high risk situation of one road in and out
 - Defining the community's realistic needs – the full route needs to be an emergency vehicle access route
 - Identifying potential funding sources
- Two meetings have been held with Louise Markus, local Federal MP. The first, held in August 2014, identified the possibility for federal funding through national infrastructure programs and potentially other sources for emergency services work. It was noted that any funding application must be made by BMCC and HCC jointly to the State government which would then make an application to the Federal Government. That meeting was attended by Councillor Don McGregor of BMCC. Mayor Kim Ford was invited but, due to a diary miscommunication between him and Louise Markus' Office, he did not attend that meeting. The meeting led to further work being done on determining the level of degradation of the route. That work included a site visit with a local road construction firm to provide a ball park indication of cost. On the HCC side, two major washaways, due to blocked drains and nil maintenance, have made the road impassable. The BMCC side remains in good condition.

- A further meeting was held in December 2014, facilitated by Louise Markus and attended by Brigade and MWPA and MIPA representatives, Rosa Sage (former State MP), representatives of the two Councils including the deputy Mayor of BMCC (Chris Van der Kley) and the Mayor of HCC (Kim Ford), Roads and Maritime Services, National Parks and Wildlife Service.
- At that meeting, a strong Submission was presented which included information on emergency events of various kinds (fire, wind storm, medical, snow and rescue events) over the past twenty years during which the absence of a viable emergency vehicle access route posed significant risks to the community, visitors and emergency services personnel.
- The outcome of this meeting was an agreement by the two Councils to develop a joint proposal to the State Government and then onto the Federal Government for funding for an emergency vehicle access route. Prior to that meeting, the Brigade, MWPA and MIPA agreed that this outcome is the only one which will meet both community emergency needs and be politically achievable.
- At that meeting, the ongoing support of the BMCC was noted by community representatives. That part of the route which is owned by the BMCC continues to be maintained and the BMCC's past and ongoing commitment to appropriate maintenance is greatly appreciated by the community. The strong support for the joint funding bid with HCC, expressed by Deputy Mayor Chris Van der Kley, was particularly appreciated.
- At the December 2014 meeting, the Brigade, MWPA and MIPA representatives volunteered to obtain further information and support from relevant emergency services as support for the funding bid.
- Earlier this year, it was agreed by the Brigade, MWPA and MIPA that it would be more practicable if the Brigade gathered the information required to support the funding bid and to be the liaison point with government on this issue. The Brigade is keeping both associations informed of progress and consulting as needed.
- To engage with fire related emergency services, the Brigade put a Submission to the Blue Mountains Bush Fire Management Committee (BMBFMC) seeking its support for the emergency access route. This was considered by the BMBFMC's Fire trail Sub-Committee in late February. The Committee has provided support but noting that no funding is currently available for the works. Further liaison is occurring with the BMBFMC. We look forward to the District providing further support to our community efforts to have this emergency vehicles access route restored.
- To address the perception that this issue is only of interest to Mt Irvine and Mt Wilson, RFS Brigades in the Hawkesbury District have been contacted and the support of several Brigades received – to date, positive responses have been received from Kurrajong Heights and Bilpin Brigades. Those who worked on the October 13 fire will recall that it was a Kurrajong Heights crew and fire truck which was caught on the Mt Irvine side of the road cut off by the fire front from Mt Wilson. This support will be cited in further work with Louise Markus and others on the issue.
- Discussions have also been held with Alan McCartney Senior Deputy Captain of Mount Lagoon RFS Brigade who led the campaign for the Mountain Lagoon fire trail restoration. That was a much smaller exercise than the building project required for our emergency access route. It also did not have the complexities of straddling two local government areas and two RFS Districts. However, the briefing received on the active social media campaign and risk assessment approach used to gain awareness of the issue has been very useful in assessing how to continue our campaign.
- As this issue is wider than emergency access during bushfire or for hazard reduction activities, relevant emergency services such as NSW Police Rescue and NSW Ambulance Service have been informally approached with more formal interactions planned. As the Brigade acknowledges that the RFS's primary interest is in relation to bush fire and other fire

matters and the Brigade is therefore limited to lobbying in relation to fire risks, these other contacts are being made by individuals as concerned citizens.

- Further work is being done to build upon the submissions previously presented including additional risk assessments not limited to fire events. In particular, that work is drawing upon analysis being undertaken of the numbers of visitors to MW and MI during peak garden and nut seasons. As an example, on each April 15 weekend, over 2000 visitors to MW and MI all used Mt Wilson Rd. To have so many people using one road with no alternate access land route for emergency vehicles is high risk. This analysis will be the focal point of a new submission to be made to the NSW Minister for Emergency Services.
- In recent weeks I have had discussions with Louise Markus' Office to arrange for a follow up meeting to the December 14 meeting – to assess progress since that meeting and to present further analysis of the risks faced by our communities, visitors and emergency services personnel because of our one road in/ out access.
- Earlier this week, I was advised that a status report on Louise Markus' correspondence with relevant State and Federal Ministers would be provided for this meeting. I have not received it to date.
- We also hope to brief Trish Doyle, our new State MP on these issues shortly.

Don McGregor noted that the regional alliance had resulted in regular meetings and that the BMCC rate rise would provide an extra \$1.3 million for fire protection such as APZs and fire trails.

Election of officers for 2015-2016

Henric Nicholas thanked David Howell for his resilience and reliability as President of the Brigade Executive.

Paul McGrath took the Chair and declared the following residents had been nominated unopposed prior to the meeting and were confirmed in their positions:

President*	David Howell
Vice President*	Henric Nicholas
Treasurer*	Susie Hope
Secretary*	Judy Tribe
Captain*	Beth Raines
Senior Deputy Captain*	Peter Raines
Deputy Captains	*Barry Freeman, David Howell, Peter Dempsey
Training*	Graham Tribe
Community Engagement*	Kathleen Oakes
Equipment	Stephen Dean
Fire Trails	Peter Dempsey, Vik Zhukov
Catering	Deb Griffin

Those elected officers marked with * will form the Executive Committee.

Other Business

Richard Beattie advised that it will be announced later this month if there will be any improvement in communications for the area. There have been discussions with Paul Fletcher, assistant to the Communications Minister, Malcolm Turnbull.

Peter Raines noted that it had been two years since the State Mine Fire and that fuel loads were building up again. If properties were prepared over winter it would be easier to defend them. Properties need a good water supply and also need to allow access for RFS vehicles.

Beth advised that the RFS would be holding 'Get Ready Weekend' on 12-13th September. This is an opportunity for all residents to be in Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine that weekend preparing themselves and their properties for the bushfire season.

Closure of the meeting:

At the close of the meeting David Howell invited all those present to join the Executive for wine and cheese.