

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting of Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade on Saturday 7th June, 2014 in the Mt Wilson Hall

Attendance:

Invited guests present: Dr. Roza Sage, MLA for the Blue Mountains, and Edward Sage, David Jones (District Manager BMRFS), Fred Taylor (Group Officer, West 2), Peter Church (Deputy Group Captain, West 3), Neil Stone (NPWS), Michael Garvey (Ambulance), Bill Shields (Group Captain, Hawkesbury RFS).

Residents of Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine present: Jane and Philip Beeby, Joe and Elizabeth Montano, Elizabeth Raines, Nancy Fox, Bruce Arnold, Brian Carrigan, Robyn Scrivener, Mark Bancroft, Peter Raines, Robyn Hyde, Barry Freeman, Deb and Ted Griffin, Bruce Kerridge, David and Sarah Howell, Minny and Henric Nicholas, Timothy Sterling-Lewis, Leith and Darrel Conybeare, Barbara Harry, Ray Harrington, Paul Naylor, Richard Beattie, Bob Korogiannis, Mike Pearse, Wendy Holland, Moira and Ron Green, Eleanor Herriot, Michael Bates, Anne Mellady, Vic Zhukov, Michael Sweeney, Robert Chesney, Marilyn and Peter Laving.

Welcome:

The President, David Howell, opened the meeting at 4.10 p.m. and welcomed the invited guests and residents.

David spoke of the State Mine Fire of October 2013 and of the outstanding response from the villagers, with particular mention of Brigade leaders Beth and Peter Raines, official deputies Barry Freeman, Tim Gow and Peter Dempsey and unofficial deputies Graham Tribe, Michael Sweeney, Stephen Dean and Mark Bancroft; Deb Griffin and Lesley Wilson from the catering group; Kathleen Oakes from Community Engagement; and Sarah Howell, Nancy Fox and Sue Woolfenden leading the Station Officers. Catering and Community Engagement had been singled out for high praise in the After Action Review.

The Photographic Exhibition organized by Bev Goodman, Tim Gow and Stephen Dean had raised more than \$7000, and the opening of the gardens of Bill and Lata Moss and Tony and Lorraine Barrett on the Easter weekend, organized by Judy Tribe, Susie Hope, Deb Griffin and Lesley Wilson, had raised over \$20,000.

David thanked Owen Havilland for his work on the extension to the MW shed, for which a DA has been submitted.

He also acknowledged the work done attending MVAs on Bells Line of Road particularly by Beth, Stephen, Vic and Graham who attend so often, by Graham and Michael Sweeney in organizing monthly training and recruitment and Stephen Dean for cooking the breakfasts for them. He thanked his Vice-President Henric Nicholas, secretary Judy Tribe and treasurer Susie Hope - "but most of all Beth and Peter, without whom this Brigade would not function".

With an El Nino due this year, and favours to repay to other Brigades, he expected another busy summer.

David then introduced Barry Freeman for a special presentation.

Tribute to Beth and Peter Raines:

Barry Freeman gave an amusing address in which he likened Beth and Peter Raines to two clumps of a special strain of Mt. Wilson bamboo, nurtured by Libby Raines, which last October came to full maturity and grew ten feet overnight. On behalf of the community, he presented them with bamboo boxes inscribed: "...from a grateful Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Community - State Mine Fire, October 2013".

Apologies:

Invited guests: Hon. Louise Markus (Federal Member for Macquarie), Councillor Robert Stock, Councillor Michael Begg, Councillor Don McGregor, Ron Gavin (Ambulance), Richard Kingswood (NPWS), Steve McMillan (President Bilpin RFB).

Residents of Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine:

Graham and Judy Tribe, Susie Hope, Owen Havilland, Penny Ewing, Mary Holt, Helen Freeman, Hugh and Emmy Nicholas, Cathy Harrington, John Lee, Tim and Kim Gow, Lesley and Raoul Wilson, Helen, Geoff and Pam Naylor, Margaret Dean, Loretta Beattie, Linda Raines, Bill and Ruth Scrivener, Ross and Maria Kelly.

Address by Hon. Roza Sage, MLA:

Dr. Sage thanked the community for its work during the State Mine Fire. She compared Beth to a diamond, formed under heat and pressure, and praised the community for its resilience and self-reliance. She added that she had particularly heard about our wonderful catering, which made visiting Brigades reluctant to leave the area.

Dr. Sage foreshadowed the "10/50" legislation proposed by State Government, which will allow residents in designated areas close to bushland to clear trees within 10 metres and vegetation within 50 metres of their homes without the existing "green and red tape". She said this "should help us look after ourselves."

Confirmation of Minutes from 2013 AGM:

Moved Henric Nicholas, seconded Moira Green that the minutes of 2013 AGM be accepted.

Report from David Jones, District Manager, Blue Mountains:

(A summary of Superintendent Jones' address is presented in these minutes; the full report is available on request).

David Jones congratulated the Brigade for the highest standard of emergency response in one of the biggest fire seasons for many years, with no life lost and only a small number of serious injuries. He asked members to be supportive of one another, and realistic in their expectations. As a District, David Jones was keen to focus on integrating technology to assist with information flow and efficient sharing of workloads. Each Brigade is to be given an iPad to this end. He looked forward to enjoying the shared journey ahead, overcoming challenges and reaping the rewards of teamwork.

Reports for 2013 - 2014:

Captain: Beth Raines:

This year's events were dominated by the State Mine Fire and I will get around to talking about that shortly.

Call-outs attended by the Brigade over the past 12 months: 15 MVAs, 13 CFR, 2 storm damage, 4 fires, 1 oil spill; no rescues, for a change.

We completed one Hazard Reduction at the end of Mt Irvine Road but the north side of Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine won't need any hazard reduction work for quite a few years. There are still a few areas that we have identified to do some HR burning but these will be delayed to ensure a mosaic pattern is established again.

Training continues within the Brigade thanks to Graham and Michael - we are currently putting 11 people through their basic firefighting along with members from Bell and Mt Tomah. Other members are completing advanced firefighting, chainsaw, training/assessor and first aid. Monthly training has seen trips to District Office to learn about Comms, area pre-incident planning, village refresher training, map reading and GPS skills and driver training. Maintenance nights have proved a great success with many hours spent doing work and enjoying each other's company and a meal, with thanks to Stephen and his assistants.

First Responder continues supported by Lithgow Ambulance with training once a month.

The Community Protection Plans are being finalized - we hope to have the Mt Wilson plans ready for distribution very soon, however the Mt Irvine plan is still going through the approval process. There has been a shift in RFS policy and they are no longer willing to endorse private properties as neighbourhood safer places so all the work the Brigade spent liaising with the Thompsons, the Pembrokes and the Barretts and their subsequent agreements has been effort and time wasted.

Kathleen was asked to do a presentation at the recent Australian Community Engagement and Fire Awareness Conference on community resilience - as I have been told "she did us proud".

Unfortunately she isn't here today otherwise I would have roped her in to do a quick overview because I believe this community deserves to stand proud in the resilience department!

We continue the seemingly never-ending task of fundraising for building projects - we still have a vehicle sitting outside with no secure housing and another station that you can't fit a big fire truck into and that has no running water or toilet. But we are getting there. After the fires we had some generous donations and so many people gave what they could. A few people heard about us through word of mouth so we had some random donations like one from Russell-Lea Infants' School!

We had an overwhelming response to both the Photographic Exhibition (which was postponed due to the fires) and to the Dennarque garden opening. Both events take considerable effort in setting up and running; our thanks to the Woodmans, friends of the mountains, who do the lion's share along with Tim, Kim and Susie for the exhibition. The Dennarque weekend was a huge success (with a lot of the money raised coming from visitors - I am very conscious that this community is always supporting us!)

Two special mentions this year - unofficial long service awards need to be made to our President and our Treasurer who have both held office for ten years! David and Susie both made the mistake of saying that they would stay on to see the completion of the extension at Mt Wilson and that was some years ago. Thanks to David and Susie.

Now for the State Mine Fire, which by its end had burnt 60,000 hectares and gone for two weeks. The head of the fire directly impacted the north of Mt Irvine with devastating results whilst in total 55 properties at Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine had fire on their property - all with asset losses. That's a pretty big impact when there are only 170 properties in total. Even with the total loss of everything at Carrisbrook and the partial loss at Yurunga we were lucky - there was no loss of life or serious injuries although two firefighters were injured during the event. If the fire run was a little further to the south the result would have been totally different for the two mountains - there would have been major losses - instead of fire impacting on 50 properties it would have been more like 50 houses destroyed. The fire could have run through this area here and through the middle of both villages.

After each major event we hold an 'after action review' - what we did well in, what needs improving. The Brigade held one after the wind storm in 2011 and the recommendations that came from that AAR were implemented by the Brigade. This meant that for this event our Community Engagement team were on the ball from the outset, keeping the community informed about the growing threat, suggesting to our more vulnerable residents that they relocate themselves elsewhere; our Catering team had preplanned and there were dozens of meals in the freezer ready to go; we knew which fire trails were the priority for the heavy plant; we knew what our water resources were and what size vehicles could fill up where - in other words, we had done our preplanning and were in a good position. I reread my notes from last year and have to include this - in regards to fire trail maintenance - "there is some repair work to be done after the torrential rain in February - we won't hold our breath and wait for Council - we do what we have to do - get stuck in and do it ourselves at our own expense!" Just as well we did because one of our most essential fire trails would have been impassable.

So what are the **areas for improvement**, looking at the results of the Community AAR? (We do a whole-of-community AAR as well as a Brigade AAR):

- Communications with crews - "Fire ground radios were useless; TG channel worked a charm once we got it"
- Situational awareness - both to the Brigade and from the Brigade
- Day one procedures
- **DISPLAN LINES NEED TO BE ACTIVATED**
- More community briefings at BOTH village halls
- Better property maps
- More hazard reduction
- Temporary signs for fire trails, SWS, and local landmarks
- Ensure there is enough fuel (drip torch, diesel) for initial operations

- Ensure all gates and SWS are open at the start of an incident
- Transfer local knowledge around Brigade members
- Drivers
- Access to Danes Way via private property

What worked well:

- Community engagement - web site, phone message, emails, direct visits, street coordinators, community meetings
- Support from "Brigade families"
- COMMUNITY SUPPORT - 80 residents out of the 120 who were around during the fire actively helped (what other community can boast that?)
- The Brigade - incredibly positive feedback
- Deb's Café
- Help from outside
- Local Crews, Hornsby Strike Team, West Division Strike Team, Hawkesbury Strike Team, NPWS, ACT RAFT, CFA Strike Team.

Captain's report accepted by acclamation.

Treasurer's Report:

(Read by Henric Nicholas on behalf of Susie Hope)

Firstly, I'm sorry that I'm not here but I'm hopefully having almost as much fun elsewhere! I'd like to thank both Libby and Henric for covering for me.

This report goes over our financial dealings for the 12 month period 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014. It's a verbalized version of the financial details (since audited and found correct) you should have all received with your notice of this meeting. Spare copies are with Libby if you need them. A reminder that, thanks to our ATO, we now have to keep 2 bank accounts so my report is even longer than it used to be. I'm therefore dropping the cents (except for bottom-line figures) - a standard practice with all company reporting, and the ATO!

Our Working Account which actually runs the Brigade financially but is no longer able to accept donations:

Income for the year totaled **\$44,491** being:

- Income from our photo and art exhibition - \$15,640
- Bank account interest - an amazing \$1
- Membership fees - \$2,708
- Transfers from our new Public Fund, as approved by its trustees - \$13,909
- Donations incorrectly deposited into this account instead of our Public Fund - \$9,940 (I think you all did pretty well interpreting the new ATO rules with this being a minor hiccup)
- Our S44 claim - \$2,329
- A bank error which was in our favour, so I kept quiet about it - \$50
- GST collected and the paid to the ATO - (\$88)

Outgoings for the year totaled **\$46,073** being:

- General fire fighting equipment purchases - \$2,124 - and maintenance - \$381
- Fire trail maintenance and general slashing/clearing - \$3,395
- Expenses relating to our photo and art exhibition - \$9,946 (The resulting profit was \$5,694. Add the \$3,602 donations from the artists plus \$531 entry by donation and we netted \$9,827. People we really need to thank for this incredible outcome are Bev and Phil Woodman and their 'snap-happy' network, our fabulous local artists, Judy Tribe for organizing things at our end, and Deb Griffin plus her great team of caterers)
- Our share of the maintenance of our great community website - \$278
- PayPal subscription fees - \$181 and general fees - \$208
- Weather station - \$1,129
- A new freezer for the Mt Wilson shed (invaluable during our October S44) - \$2,031

- S44 expenses - \$2,935
- Office admin - \$492
- Telecommunications expenses - \$3,917
- Transferred to our new Public Fund - \$9,940 incorrectly deposited and \$3,602 donations from our exhibiting artists
- Sundry expenses of \$3,592 - being for Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine hall hire - \$305, general catering and shed supplies - \$2,743, BMCC for recycling - \$96 and Elgas - \$448
- GST paid and then refunded from the ATO - (\$84)

The resulting **deficit** from all this was **\$1,582.81**, which when subtracted from our 1 April 2013 opening balance of \$6,127.70 left us with a closing balance in our working account of **\$4,544.89**. On a brighter note, our new Public Fund account actually made a profit. Its function is to accept all donations and channel funds, as approved by its trustees, back into our Brigade Working Account as long as they are purely for the purpose of supporting fire and emergency services. Income for the year totaled **\$112,252** being:

- Donations directly deposited into the fund - \$96,512
- Donations transferred from our Working Account - \$9,940
- Photo and art entry by donation - \$531 and donations from artists - \$3,602
- Bank account interest - \$8
- Membership fees incorrectly deposited - \$100 (culprits since severely chastised!)
- Photo and art exhibition food proceeds incorrectly deposited (my fault!) - \$1,558

Outgoings for the year totaled **\$73,568** being:

- Transfer to Working Account, as approved by the trustees - \$13,909 and membership incorrectly banked - \$100
- Photo and art exhibition food proceeds incorrectly deposited (my fault remember) - \$1,558
- New term deposits - \$58,000

The resulting **profit** from all this was **\$38,684.56**, which, when added to our 1 April 2013 balance of \$575, resulted in a total of **\$39,259.56**.

I'd like to highlight something in the figures Henric has just given you. The unsolicited donations we received over the last twelve months actually totaled \$106,452. The vast majority of these flowed in after the horrific State Mine Fire last October. This is an incredible tribute to how we all feel about our amazing front line fire fighters and their support teams, and how grateful we are to them.

As well as the funds in our Working Account and Public Fund as at 31 March 2014, we've squirreled away **\$206,551.96** investment in term deposits with the Commonwealth Bank, including an increase over the year of the additional \$58,000 invested plus \$5,496 interest received.

With the **\$3,000** held in our Captain's debit account (set up to cover her general minor expenses without waiting for prior exec committee approval) our total fund as at 31 March were **\$253,356.41**.

As David has probably already outlined, we are now finally able to proceed with our much needed extension to our Mt Wilson shed and our equally much needed revamp of our Mt Irvine shed. Only the red tape to conquer!

A separate account is also kept for social activities not strictly related to RFS operations. The funds in this account totaled **\$1,898** as at 31 March 2014. This reflects a **decrease** of **\$1,725** for the year. Too many social activities?

Yet again my wonderful accountant, Phill Lupton from Honan Partners, has kindly audited our books at no charge to us. I could twist his arm to act as our auditor for the 2014/2015 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 2014/2015 I would like to thank Phill for auditing our accounts over the last seven years.

If anyone has any questions about general things relating to my report I'm sure someone on the committee will be able to answer them. I'll be back 19 June to answer any queries you may have about my actual figures...so please contact me after then.

Thank you - Susie Hope (Treasurer)

Acceptance of treasurer's report:

Moved Barry Freeman, seconded David Howell that the Treasurer's Report be accepted.

Appointment of auditor for 2014/2015:

Moved Beth Raines, seconded David Howell that Phil Lupton of Honan Partners be appointed as auditor for 2014/2015.

Presentation of award to Brigade:

David Jones (District Manager, Blue Mountains) presented the Brigade with an award from Chifley Zone. The citation reads: "Awarded to the Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine RFB, In recognition of your involvement and support in efforts to protect life and property during the State Mine Fire, October 2013."

Election of officers for 2014/2015:

District Manager David Jones took the chair for the elections. The following people 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, Ian Docker, and Peter Dempsey
*Training:	Graham Tribe
*Community Engagement:	Kathleen Oakes
Equipment Officer:	Stephen Dean
Fire Trails Coordinator:	Peter Dempsey
Fire Trails Officer:	Vic Zhukov
*Catering:	Deb Griffin

Those elected officers marked with * will form the executive committee.

Beth Raines advised that Tim Gow was standing down as a Deputy Captain owing to the other demands on his time. The meeting gave a round of applause for Tim and Kim for their years of hard work for the Brigade.

Other business:

Stephen Dean led the meeting in thanks and a round of applause for those who made the "staggering donations" to the Brigade after the State Mine Fire.

Elizabeth Montano raised the community's continuing concerns about the state of the Bowen's Creek Road. It is still the case that there is only one way in, one way out in an emergency. If the State Mine Fire had tracked a few degrees further south the community would have faced loss of life and property, and a subsequent Coronial Inquest would conclude that local and state governments should have paid attention to the long history of submissions on this matter.

Dr. Roza Sage, MLA for the Blue Mountains, responded that she had been lobbying on this matter ever since she was elected; there is an impasse with the Councils concerned, particularly Hawkesbury Council, but "I keep plodding on."

Closure of the meeting:

David Howell closed the meeting at 5.20 and invited all those present to join the committee for wine and cheese.