

## **Blue Mountains Rural Fire Service**

### **Mount Wilson/Mount Irvine Rural Fire Brigade**

#### **Annual General Meeting**

Held at Mount Irvine Community Hall

Saturday 1st June 2019 at 4pm

Mr Henric Nicolas, Vice President, called the meeting to order and welcomed invited guests and residents of Mt Irvine and Mount Wilson.

#### Apologies:

Invited Guests:

Member for Blue Mountains: Trish Doyle

Member for Macquarie: Susan Templeman

Captain, Bell RFB: Greg Honeysett

Rob Vinzenz Acting RFS District Manager

Arthur Henry National Parks and Wildlife Service.

Community Members:

Martin Barge, Brian and Carol Carrigan, Ann Catling, Margaret Dean, Anne de Salis, Penny Ewing, Robbie Feyder, Tim and Kim Gow, Alex Halliday, Alison Halliday, Mary Holt, Sarah Hope, David and Sarah Howell, Noel Hutley, David Hyde, Sarah Hyde, Maria Johnson, Bettina and Julian Ludowici, Mick Medcalf, Andrew Mitchell, Paul and Shane Naylor, Geoffrey and Pam Naylor, Minny Nicholas, Grace Nicholas, Linda and Peter Raines, Maureen and Bill Ryan, Robyn Scrivener, Alice Simpson, Fred Tay, Raoul and Lesley Wilson, Sue and Steve Woolfenden.

#### Attendees:

Invited Guests:

BMCC Councillors: Kerry Brown and Kevin Schreiber.

Justin Pinson RFS Operations Officer 2IC.

Ron Gavin Intensive Care Paramedic and Inspector NSW Ambulance

Steve Parrott Deputy Group Leader West 3.

Residents of Mt Irvine and Mount Wilson and guests:

Henric Nicholas, Susie Hope, Owen Haviland, Graham and Judy Tribe, Beth Raines, Allen and Robyn Hyde, Barry and Helen Freeman, Mark Bancroft, Ray and Kathy Harrington, Bruce Kerridge, Adrienne Schreiber, Bob Korogiannis, Peter and Marilyn Laving, Joe and Elizabeth Montano, Keith Ralston, Robert Green, Stephen Dean, John Hutley, Megan Wood, Tom Riddell.

Acceptance of the Minutes of the 2018 AGM.

Moved: Susie Hope. Seconded: Elisabeth Montano

### Ambulance NSW:

Ron Gavin spoke on behalf of Commissioner Morgan from NSW Ambulance. Ron thanked our NSW Ambulance Clinical Volunteers, previously known as Community First Responders, for their valuable service to the community and for their past and ongoing commitment. Barry Freeman was presented with a Certificate of Service recognising his 11 years as a CFR and thanking him for his ongoing interest in the service being Chairman of the committee redesigning a purpose built vehicle for Ambulance Clinical Volunteers use.

The service is looking for people who are willing to train and become Ambulance Clinical Volunteers in our community. There is a training course over 4 weekends, in Bathurst, in October 2019.

### President's Report:

On behalf of David Howell, Henric Nicholas informed the meeting that the reports of the Executive Meetings of the RFS were available for all to read on the website. These are very informative about the progress of approval for the Mt Wilson Fire Station extensions and include information about Native Title and Indigenous Land Use Agreements.

Henric, on behalf of the Brigade, offered our thanks and appreciation for the time and effort put into the pursuance of these matters by Alex Halliday and Minter Ellison – Legal and Consulting, and to David Howell.

With regard to the Mount Irvine Fire Shed, the recommended site is that between the Community Hall and the tennis court. Ongoing discussion between interested parties, continues.

State Mine Fire, Marangaroo, Coroner's Report is available on the Mt Wilson Mount Irvine website. Henric expressed thanks to all those involved in the many man hours spent in preparing and formulating the submissions. Lesley Young, Beth Raines, Peter Raines, Barry Freeman, Jason Heffernan, Jason McKellar and Elizabeth Montano.

Mt Irvine: Bowen's Creek Road, Fire. 4<sup>th</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

Caused by a lightning strike. Reported by Bilpin Residents.

Responded to by Mount Irvine and Mount Wilson RFS members and Station Officers and Mount Victoria and Blackheath Brigades.

### Captain's Report:

Beth Raines started her report showing the meeting a copy of "Fighting Fire Stories of the Mt Wilson and Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade" compiled by Alison Halliday and published by The Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine Rural Fire Brigade 2019. Beth encouraged everyone to purchase the book as a "great read" and the proceeds of sales go to our Brigade. Beth acknowledged the very successful "Get Ready" weekend organised by Peter Laving and thanked everyone involved.

The Brigade responded to 32 incidents over the past 12 months: 5 fire related, 11 CFR, 5 trees down/damage and 5 MVA's. Vehicle movements, Total fire ban sign placements and removals, 6-foot track drink station manning and various courses being run. These responses involved 117 brigade member attendances.

Beth also paid tribute to former Brigade Members, Brian Abrahams and Helen Naylor who both passed away in the last 12 months.

Helen Naylor notified the Brigade of the devastating impact on the northern end of Mount Irvine, of the State Mine Fire.

During previous fires Helen was the northern lookout and constant phone contact for fire position updates. We will miss Helen's wisdom and knowledge.

Helen's legacy continues in the Brigade, with her family at "Booralee" and "Arellana" and other Morley descendants at "Irvineholme".

#### Treasurer's Report 2018-2019: Susie Hope.

This report covers our financial position throughout the 12 month period 1 April 2018 to 31 March 2019. It's a summary of the financial reports (since audited and found to be correct) that you should have all received with your notice of this meeting. In case you didn't, I have a few copies available.

I'm not going to 'verbalise' every figure on the report but simply comment on some important ones and highlight our bottom line. If anyone has any queries about amounts that I don't mention, or ones that I do, please don't hesitate to put them to me.

Our Working Account which actually runs the brigade financially but doesn't accept any donations.

Income for the year totalled **\$49,725.56** with the notable amounts being:

- Our autumn sausage sizzles netted us \$5,672. We manned barbecues every April weekend so the return was minimal considering the effort put in by our volunteers
- Our sale of maps still continues. This has been a most successful venture with sales ongoing. I have some here if anyone wants one (\$20 per map). This year we netted \$1,763 which, when added to last years sales, totals \$2,799.
- We've started to sell our wonderful RFB history books, "Fighting Fire". Alison Halliday (aided by daughter, Matilda) has done an amazing job with this project. I'm sure you'll agree when you purchase one. Copies are available at the entry door for a mere \$30 per book.
- Judy Tribe organised a lunch for a tour group which netted us \$504.
- Membership fees - \$1,236. This year we've done better so far but still only about a third of our residents are financial members
- We collected an additional \$236 in our donation hats over April and sent it to Tathra.

Outgoings for the year totalled **\$39,056.29** with the notable amounts being:

- General catering & shed supplies - \$4,047. Our caterers are amazing as anyone who attends monthly Friday maintenance nights can attest!
- Fire trail maintenance & general slashing/clearing - \$3,520.
- An additional water tank - \$12,639. We've plans for more tanks around both villages

- \$157 to the Coroner's Court allowing us to be involved in the 2013 State Mine Fire enquiry. Lesley Wilson spent hours over this
- \$422 being for a further LUA fee to BMCC in relation to our Mt Wilson shed extension. still ongoing!

The resulting **surplus** from all this was **\$10,669.27**, which, when added to our 1 April 2018 opening balance of (\$3,422.30), left us with a closing balance in our working account of **\$7,246.97**.

Our Public Fund Account accepts all donations and channels its funds, as approved by its trustees, back into our Working Account as long as they are purely for the purpose of supporting our fire and emergency services.

Income for the year totalled **\$42,788.63**

Outgoings for the year totalled **\$38,809.75**

The resulting **surplus** from all this was **\$3,978.88**, which, when added to our 1 April 2018 balance of \$25,551.62, resulted in a balance of **\$29,530.50**.

As well as the funds in our Working and Public Fund accounts as at 31 March 2019, we have **\$374,094.88** invested in term deposits with the Commonwealth Bank. Safely squirreled away to put towards upgrading our 2 sheds!

Note that this is down from last year as we had to cash in one TD because our available funds were less as we didn't hold our usual Spring Blossom Festival. We intend to hold one this year so watch out for our notices re this! We hope that lots of you will help as volunteers at garden gates, the Cafe, etc..

With the **\$3,000.00** held in our Captain's debit account (set up to cover her general minor expenses) our total funds as at 31 March 2019 were **\$413,872.35**.

A separate account is also kept for social activities not strictly related to RFB operations. The funds in this account totalled **\$1,159.08** as at 31 March 2019. This reflects a **decrease** of **\$396.50** for the year because we purchased sundry drinks for our AGM and general meetings.

Yet again my wonderful accountant, Phill Lupton from Honan Partners, has kindly audited our books at no charge to us. I've twisted his arm to act as our auditor for the 2019/2020 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 our future auditor is I would like to thank Phill for auditing our accounts over the last twelve years.

Moved: Henric Nicholas. Seconded: Steven Dean  
Appointment of Auditor, Mr Phil Lupton.

Moved: Beth Raines Seconded: Henric Nicholas.

Henric extended our gratitude to Mr Lupton for his contribution to our Brigade.

Training and Membership Report: Graham Tribe. Attached.

Moved: Helen Freeman. Seconded: Beth Raines.

Life Membership of the Brigade:

- Barry Freeman.
- Owen Havilland.
- Peter Raines.

Election of Officers for 2019-2020:

<u>President:</u>	David Howell
<u>Vice President:</u>	Henric Nicholas
<u>Secretary:</u>	Robyn Scrivener
<u>Treasurer:</u>	Susie Hope
<u>Captain:</u>	Beth Raines
<u>Senior Deputy Captain:</u>	Peter Raines
<u>Deputy Captain-1:</u>	Barry Freeman
<u>Deputy Captain-2:</u>	David Howell
<u>Deputy Captain-3:</u>	Joe Montano
Station Officer Coordinator:	Barry Freeman
Catering Team Leader:	Lesley Wilson
Community Engagement Officer:	Peter Laving
Equipment Officer:	Steven Dean
Fire Trails Co-Ordinator:	Graham Tribe
Training Officer	Graham Tribe
Committee Members:	Allen Hyde Elizabeth Montano

General Business:

Bowen's Creek Road: Elizabeth Montano

- Hawkesbury City Council (as lead local government area – its partner in this being BMCC) is still considering emergency services agencies' responses to the feasibility study undertaken in 2018 to identify the technical and engineering requirements to restore the whole of the route between Mt Irvine and Bilpin route to fire trail standard for use by emergency services vehicles and then to provide a general costing.
- The feasibility study sets out, in very general terms, material regarding how the route can be restored. Further, it provides an indicative costing of \$3.25 million. While this is, necessarily, an imprecise figure, it does put a cost on restoring an important part of our emergency services infrastructure to support the safety of our communities.
- The Brigade (along with other emergency services agencies, such as NSW Ambulance, NSW Police as well as the RFS more broadly) was provided with an opportunity to comment on the value to the Brigade and our

communities in having the route restored. The Brigade's response has been provided to the RFS and HCC and BMCC in January 2019.

- Since then, HCC has advised that it is waiting for strategic advice from the RFS on the implications for both affected RFS Districts – Hawkesbury and the Blue Mountains. We have been seeking a meeting with the two District Managers to better understand the current state of their work to identify and prioritise fire trails within the two Districts and, most importantly, in respect of this fire trail which spans both Districts.
- The release of the feasibility study provided opportunities to continue our engagements with the two local government areas, and State and Federal MPs. For both the State and Federal election campaigns, we continued to engage with State and Federal election candidates. However, because consultations are still ongoing with emergency services on the usefulness of the route, no decision has been made by HCC and BMCC to restore the route and seek State and Federal funding. Without any local government requests for funding, it was impossible to get any concrete commitments from any candidates.
- As advised to the community via an RFS email group, the New South Wales Labor Party gave an “in principle” State Election commitment to examine the restoration of the route. This was, of course, not a definite commitment but it was a helpful recognition of the significance of the route to our communities. While we briefed the Liberal candidate for the State seat of Blue Mountains, no corresponding commitment was given by the Liberal Party.
- In the Federal Election context, we also sought statements of their positions from both the Liberal and Labor Candidates. While both confirmed their support and interest in the issue (which they have demonstrated over some time), no formal positions were provided. At the time of writing, the Election result for the seat of Macquarie is unknown. Once it is, we will continue our work with the incoming Member. Thank you to those community members who have also taken the time to express their concerns to all levels of government about this issue. It does help.

#### Telstra Black Spot Tower at Mount Tomah: Elizabeth Montano

- The provision of communications equipment at Mt Tomah to address local black spot issues was announced in September 2015 by Minister Paul Fletcher, then Minister for Territories, Local Government and Major Projects and, then Member for Macquarie, Louise Markus as part of the nationwide Black Spot Tower Program.
- The launch was widely publicised in the area with our RF Brigade asked to attend the “launch” of the program in the area (which we did). Because the clear undertaking by the federal Government (confirmed by the current Opposition) is that this Tower would improve coverage for our communities, not only traffic on Bells Line of Road.

- Three years on and we still struggle with very poor to no mobile reception for the majority of properties and areas within the Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine area.
- Our RF Brigade has decided that we need to take this on as both a public safety issue and one which impacts on our operational effectiveness.
- From a public safety perspective, as the recent Tathra fire demonstrated, poor mobile phone reception means that emergency evacuation messages don't get through to remote communities and, by their nature, other means of alerting people to local risks is very difficult.
- In respect of RF Brigade work, we have two concerns.
- A long standing concern is that the lack of reliable mobile phone reception is a significant hindrance to our Brigade's work during operational activities, such as the 2013 State Mine Fire when we were unable to use mobile phones in some areas (where RFS radio systems also struggle without line of sight signal) to communicate between RFS vehicles and between our Brigade and members of the community.
- A new concern is that the NSW Rural Fire Service has introduced an app called BART which is being rolled out to RF Brigades. It alerts active firefighters, coordinates responses and generally makes getting to incidents – fire, motor vehicle accidents, NSW Ambulance First responder Incidents quicker. We have taken up this new communications method but it is of limited value because it only works if you have mobile reception. Apart from BART, the significance of not having reliable mobile coverage is increased because our landlines are regularly out of service with some residents waiting weeks and occasionally up to a month for landlines to be restored following lightning strikes or heavy rain.
- Earlier this year we had the bizarre situation where some RF Brigade Members who are needed at all hours of the day and night to attend emergency callouts, could not be contacted without physically going to their properties – no mobile reception and landlines out for weeks due to lightning strikes.
- Compounding that is that if the Telstra Exchange at Mt Wilson is cut off from electricity in a fire or other emergency event (with electricity often being cut off as a precaution in fire events), coverage
- For all the above reasons, mobile phone reception is not a luxury – it is an essential.
- In our work with Ms Templeman's Office and BMCC we understand that until recently the site which was explored is a tower owned by Endeavour Energy. That Tower also hosts communications equipment for NSW Police, the Rural Fire Service and National Parks and Wildlife Service. It's hard to understand why Telstra would not be able to come to an agreement with Endeavour Energy on using that Tower to host its equipment (presuming that the orientation of that would lead to better mobile phone reception at Mt Wilson/ Mt Irvine, not just along Bells Line of Rd).
- We now understand that three other sites are being explored – two owned by the State Government (at Mt Tomah Botanic Gardens and one on RMS land) and one owned by BMCC. BMCC staff have advised us that enquiries have been made and preliminary assessments being

undertaken. In the course of our work with BMCC we have emphasized that, for this particular black Spot Tower to be effective it must reach as much of local affected communities as it can, not just traffic along parts of Bells Line of Road.

- Both BMCC staff and the Mayor have advised that they are sympathetic to our concerns and will be supportive of a Tower being erected – it will need DA approval.
- After some delays in identifying the appropriate senior Telstra official I am now in contact with the relevant Manager and he has undertaken to keep us advised regularly.
- (**Michael Marom** Northern NSW General Manager Telstra Retail & Regional Australia).

Henric thanked Elizabeth for her hard work and persistence in pursuing both these matters.

Henric declared the meeting closed at 6.48 pm and invited everyone to join the Executive for wine, cheese and sandwiches.