

Blue Mountains Rural Fire Service

Mount Wilson/Mount Irvine Rural Fire Brigade

Annual General Meeting 2020

Held at Mount Wilson Village Hall and via Zoom
Saturday 6th March, 2021 at 4pm

David Howell, President, called the meeting to order and acknowledged that we were meeting on Darug Country. Invited guests and residents of Mt Irvine and Mount Wilson were welcomed. Due to COVID the 2020 AGM has been delayed. David also thanked Beth and Peter Raines for their tireless work for the Brigade. He noted that Beth will be awarded the Blue Mountains Woman of the year on International Women's day March 8th. Each member of the Executive Committee was also thanked.

Apologies:

Invited Guests:

Nicholas Medianik, District Manager, Blue Mountains District Office

Mick Medcalf, Goup Leader, Blue Mountains District Office

Fred Taylor, Deputy Group Leader, West 1

Community Members

Penny Ewing, Tim and Kim Gow, Matt Mason, Jim Tzannes, Annie Catlin, Keith Waters, Hugh Wilson, Stephen Dean, Bruce Kerridge, Alexander Montano, Katherine Montano, Loretta Beattie, Alice Simpson, Peter McDonald, Adam Freeman, David Hyde, Sarah Hyde, Andrew Woolfenden, Mitchell Woolfenden, Linda Raines

Attendees:

Invited Guests:

Robert Vinzenz, 2IC, Blue Mountains District Office
Via Zoom

Susan Templeman, Federal Member for Macquarie

Trish Doyle, Member for Blue Mountains

Kerry Brown, BMCC Councillor Ward 1

Fiona Staglis, Deputy Group Leader West 3

Steve Parrott, Deputy Group Leader West 2

Residents of Mt Irvine and Mount Wilson and guests:

Lesley Wilson, Beth Raines, David Howell, Graham Tribe, Steve Woolfenden, Sue Woolfenden, Allen Hyde, Robyn Hyde, Elizabeth Montano, Joe Montano, Helen Freeman, Barry Freeman, Keith Ralston, Sarah Howell, Robbie Feyder, Mike Farmer, Mary Holt, Richard Beattie, Duncan Peppercorn, Georgina Bill, Ian Lourenco, Tony Hutt, Judy Tribe, Peter Raines, Jane Hutt, Sean Irwin, Cheryl Dubois, James and Linda Sterling-Levis, Mark Bancroft, Robyn Scrivener

Via Zoom: Vic Zhukov, Ted Griffin, Deb Griffin, Alex Moffat, Andrew Cameron, Ray Harrington, Kathy Harrington

Acceptance of the Minutes of the 2019 AGM.

Moved: Barry Freeman. Seconded: Elizabeth Montano

Report from Robert Vinzenz - 2IC Blue Mountains District Office

Nicholas Medianik is on leave and sends his apologies. The extreme fire season stretched from August 2019 to February 2020. The Gaspers Mountains Fire saw over 500 volunteers deployed. As the Gaspers Mountain Fire stretched to the Ruined Castle Fire the deployment became month in/month out shifts.

Membership is growing due to the extreme fire season. Brigades are continuing to train and keep new members engaged.

Nicholas Medianik took up the position of District Manager in September 2020.

The District has seen several new vehicles commissioned.

Priorities have become focussed on the membership. PPC – new helmets will be rolled out. RFS ACTIV is also a new initiative.

Emphasis should be placed on each member's mental health and the need to support each other, each other's families and to seek support if needed. Every member makes a difference.

Thanks were extended also in particular to Beth Raines.

President's Report:

David Howell invited Joe Montano to address the meeting on the progress of the proposed extensions to the Mount Wilson Station.

Joe reported that a DA had been obtained for the shed extension in September 2020.

Particular thanks are due to Owen and Susie and their staff for the great amount of work that they have done, and continue to do, on this project.

The DA was just of course one more step along the journey, albeit a significant one.

The existing fire station site is very small. The large area surrounding the shed which we currently use for access and truck parking is actually a separate parcel of Crown Land. To make the new shed work, and to fix some legacy issues, we need to obtain a licence over that Crown Land.

As part of the DA process, we had obtained a letter of commitment from Blue Mountains City Council in its capacity as local crown land manager to issue us with such a licence. Unfortunately, BMCC has still not issued that licence.

However, we are hopeful that this will be resolved in the next couple of months.

We then of course need to be able to fund the work. Application has been made under the Bushfire Local Economic Recovery Fund programme for a grant to assist with this project. However, that grant programme has been 8 times oversubscribed, so competition for funding will be very strong.

If the grant application is successful, we will be able to proceed.

If it is not, we will need to revisit the scope of the project and consider further fundraising.

Nonetheless, we are trying to work to a target date for project commencement of 1 October 2021. This is obviously ambitious, but better to have a target than not. We will keep the membership advised of progress.

Mt Irvine Shed replacement: Nick Medianik wants it put as a high priority, so that it goes onto a priority list for funding within the next couple of years. There has been a meeting with Nick Medianik, Beth Raines, Peter Raines, Allen Hyde and David Howell to determine a site from five potential candidates. This group will present a paper to Nick Medianik. This paper will be used by District Office in their determination of a suitable site.

Barry Freeman asked whether the Brigade has a preferred site. David Howell responded that the Brigade does not have a preferred site but noted that the Mt Irvine community's preference is next to the Mt Irvine Village Hall.

David Howell acknowledged the passing of Henric Nicholas. Henric had a distinguished career as a Barrister and a Judge. Henric was also a significant contributor to our Brigade. Henric and Minnie bought a property on Danes Way in the 1970s; along with their family, they have enjoyed frequent stays there since.

Henric was a hazard reduction co-ordinator in 2008 and from then Vice President of the Brigade. His commitment to that was such that he was responding to queries pertaining to the Brigade the week before he died.

Another example of both his and Minnie's commitment to the Brigade was that when called to alert them to the 2013 State Mine Fire they returned to the Mount as soon as possible from their holiday in Dubai. Almost immediately upon their return they both were on duty for the Brigade. Their children and their spouses have also joined the Brigade.

Henric's wise council was such that he almost knew what questions would be asked before they were posed, and his considered responses were highly valued. His enormous contribution will be missed.

Other members of the Brigade have passed in the last year, Ron Green, Ron Leonard and Graham Thompson. The Thompsons have raised significant funds for the Brigade over many years by opening their garden, Bisley.

Captain's Report:

June 2019 – March 2021

I would like to especially thank our newest members. It is a great way to quickly feel part of the community as well as give you knowledge and confidence in managing your own properties from a fire perspective. Graham and his cohort of trainers have put 17 people through Basic firefighting this past year which is well and truly above anything we have done previously – welcome aboard and an incredible amount of thanks to all involved. We hope for a break in the weather, so we send you off to attend some hazard reductions elsewhere and gain fireground experience.

One of the reasons for all the new members is because of the big turn-over of properties in the last two years. Many of our long term residents have faced the decision of leaving, be it for medical reasons or because owning acreage was becoming too much to manage. Sadly, the list of passed members since our last

meeting is long and all of them contributed more than most over their considerable time as members in the Brigade.

Keith Raines was awarded life membership of the Brigade in 1989 and used to tell us kids accounts of fighting fires during the late 70's and early 80's often with Ron Gunn, also a passed member, firefighting locally or travelling to the other side of the mountains picking up other firefighters and heading to places such as Kings Tablelands. The massive work bench in the Station is the work of Keith and my two brothers with the logs supplied by Bill Smart from Wynstay.

We deeply miss Ruth Scrivener with her chatty news and humour, endless support of Bill in his role as Captain and for being a stalwart of the community. We miss the carefully constructed and monitored piles of burning leaf litter on the roadside under Kookootonga in winter.

Milba Kirk, the last of the Kirks to live here was another stalwart who contributed operationally - was very proud to be on an all-girl crew with Helen Freeman, Alison Heap and Libby Raines - went away on strike teams and assisted in everything from the Willy to Billy, support during rescues and fires to mowing the lawn and a keeper of 'the way things used to be'.

Ron Green was a great Street Co-ordinator for the Wynnes Rocks area and again the eyes and ears of that part of the Mountain.

Bill Ryan joined mid 2000's, completing BF and assisting with Hazard Reductions and was a very generous benefactor.

Mary Reynolds was also great supporter of the Brigade and was always made cakes, biscuits and scones for any function or fund-raising event.

Graham Thompson, along with Beverley opened their garden Bisley anytime they were asked in support of the Brigade and in general were always one of the first to offer assistance when a general request for help went out - Graham's community spirit is missed.

Henric Nicholas, our much-loved Vice President has left a hole - the wise owl that he was, the thoughtful reasoning and the gentle guiding will be missed. He was always trying to get new members and was chuffed to see the growth in active members last year with more to come through this year. He was always very keen to see generations of families be active members so it's great that Grace and Tom are so involved.

Covid has meant various adjustments with some of our activities, especially with training and most notably with maintenance dinners having to be cancelled - hopefully they will start up again this month.

Call outs

We have had 42 responses to various incidents since June 2019

18 responses to fire or smoke sightings ranging from the re-ignition of wood chip piles, to automatic fire alarms, lightning strikes, cars on fire and unattended campfires.

We have had 11 turnouts to trees blocking roads and 1 patrol during a snow event.

We have had 4 Community First Responder call outs and 4 responses to Motor Vehicle Accidents

We have had a crew on standby during a Catastrophic fire day and crew members head away on strike team deployments.

And most recently we have had two protracted search and rescues with tragically the loss of two lives in what can only be called a freak and tragic

accident. Both these last events saw Pete, our SDC lead the Police and Ambulance rescuers to the locations through challenging terrain and in terrible conditions. The support crew included personnel staged along fire trails or walking trails to act as a radio relay between the rescue walking party and the commanders at the fire station as well as station offices monitoring radio calls and members assisting the affected family and friends. A huge thanks to all crews who assisted in particularly trying circumstances.

We also had 40 days straight where we had crews out either preparing trails for the Gaspers Mountain Fire or fighting the fire locally or at Colo Heights, Mountain Lagoon and Bilpin. What started out as us being actively included in discussions and planning for operations from Bilpin to Mt Irvine changed to being left out of the planning and decision making process for the back burn and deteriorated to Hawkesbury Group Offices sending away our own Blue Mountains Group Offices who were here to assist. After spending so long after the 2013 State Mine Fire trying to get better collaboration between the three Fire Districts I am so disillusioned – we identified risks and gaps in processes, highlighted them and unfortunately this community has borne the brunt of inaction and apathy. We have now had two massive fires that were managed by a District that was not our own with serious consequences. What I do know is that this Community is resilient. We will strive to make things better. We will keep up the pressure for positive change. I know that the bush will grow back with time, but I also know there will be other fires and that everything can burn if it is dry enough. I'm sorry that for many of you your first fire season was such an intense experience – nothing like a sharp learning curve. We gave out 79 NSW Premier's Bushfire Emergency Citations to Members in December for the help they provided during that last fire season – pretty impressive for such small communities. I can't thank everyone enough for the effort that went on during this period – you turned up shift after shift, many of you after your own properties were affected, you rallied around neighbours to make sure they had power, water, food & fuel.

And you rallied around me – Thank you.

Treasurer's Report.

Firstly I'd like to say how very sad I personally was about Henric's death. He was a great member of our RFB exec committee, always contributing with much sense and wisdom.

My report covers our financial position throughout the 12 month period 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. As it's almost 31 March 2021 this is a summary of the audited financial reports of about a year ago .. thanks to COVID-19! You should have all received a copy with your notice of this meeting. In case you didn't I've given a few copies to David to make available at the "actual" meeting.

Assuming you have access to them I'm going to break with tradition and 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 can't legally accept any donations.

Income for the year totalled **\$27,617.72** with the notable amounts being:

- Our sale of our topographic maps still continued. This has been a most successful venture. In the year 2019-2020 we netted another \$618.23. When added to our last 2 years sales it totals \$3,417.23. Since then they are still selling. Only \$20 each!
- We're also still selling our wonderful RFB history books, "Fighting Fire". Sale of these has netted us another \$1,163.54. Having gone through our last horrific 2019 fire season I'm sure that anyone who doesn't have a copy of our Villages' incredible history of surviving fires should purchase one. They are available for just \$30 each. Contacting me or Robin Scrivener, our Brigade secretary for your copy.
- Other income of note was that we managed to claim back some money from BMCC, being \$473.46 for our telephone rental and \$1,679.00 towards our Mt Wilson hall Wi-Fi
- There is obviously a huge gap between the above amounts and \$27,617.72 income. As you can see from your financial reports this is mainly attributable to \$89.77 from a Get Ready Day BBQ, \$2,272.58 membership fees and funds transferred from our Public Fund Account of \$19,900.51. Then there's the GST out and back from the ATO.
- Our only other income was \$1,520 donations incorrectly deposited into our working account. Once again can I please stress that our DGR (Deductible Gift Recipient) status relies on all donations to our Brigade being deposited into our Public Fund Account, not our Working Account. Details of both are on our website.

Outgoings for the year totalled **\$20,731.20**. The biggest notable expenses were

- General catering & shed supplies - \$4,829.41. Our caterers are amazing as anyone who attends monthly Friday maintenance nights or who was there during our fires in December 2019 can attest!
- Fire trail maintenance & general slashing/clearing - \$3,490.00.
- Equipment repairs & maintenance - \$3,232.18
- Website upgrade & maintenance - \$2,178.12, proved absolutely essential in December 2019!
- A new water tank - 748.00. Lots more being placed around our villages since then.
- Communication expenses - \$3,443.95

The resulting **surplus** from the above and a few other minor expenses was **\$6,886.52**, which, when added to our 1 April 2019 opening balance of \$7,246.97, left us with a closing balance in our working account of **\$14,133.49**.

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 **\$199,600.65**. This was because of incredibly amazing financial donations and support from our community and their families and friends following the even more amazing work our Brigade did to inform and protect us while the Gospers Mountain fire slowly crept inevitably towards us. How can we ever adequately thank all our active fire fighters .. and particularly Beth and Peter! When the back burn instigated by Hawkesbury FC got out of control just below us in Wynnes Rocks Road Beth turned up and told the crews that were to take care of our house because I was the Brigade treasurer and paid the bills. No-one ever said to a crew to take care of Beth's house because she was our Brigade Captain.

Outgoings for the year totalled **\$171,160.91** consisting of the \$19,900.51 transferred to our working account, \$150,000.00 invested in term deposits & \$1,180.40 Paypal fees.

The resulting **surplus** from all this was **\$28,439.74**, which, when added to our 1 April 2019 balance of \$29,530.50 resulted in a 31 March 2020 balance of **\$57,970.24**.

As well as the funds in our Working and Public Fund accounts as at 31 March 2020, we have **\$534,375.25** invested in term deposits with the Commonwealth Bank. Safely squirreled away to put towards upgrading our 2 sheds .. and we are about to do this at last!

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 2020 were **\$609,478.98**.

A separate account is also kept for social activities not strictly related to RFB operations. The funds in this account totalled **\$291.93** as at 31 March 2020. This reflects a **decrease** of **\$867.15** for the year because we purchased sundry drinks for our AGM and general meetings.

Yet again my very caring 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 2020/2021 (almost over!) 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 thirteen years.

Hopefully I've explained everything well enough for someone to accept and second my report but does anyone have any questions?

Accepted Barry Freeman seconded David Howell

Could you please vote on whether you think Phill should continue to be our auditor or whether we should seek out someone else?

Appointment of Auditor, Mr Phil Lupton.

Moved: Beth Raines Seconded: Lesley Wilson

Changes to Membership

- › A new constitution was adopted in 2018 when the RFS insisted that all Brigade constitutions were brought into uniformity
- › This new constitution has had some changes on the operations of the Brigade:
 - There are four categories of membership: ordinary, associate, probationary and junior
 - Ordinary members can be operational, operational support, administration or reserve
 - Associate members are involved as ad hoc members or social members
 - A quorum at an AGM is now 15% of the ordinary members
 - This is at odds with the previous way we thought about membership and thus we have to change the structure of the membership
 -

We are proposing to make the following changes to the membership list:

- Remove 75 members as they have pass away or moved out the villages;
- Add 94 new members being new recruits, new residents or members whose category has changed
- It was noted that Thomas and Suzanne Bassett were sent the Remove from Brigade letter, rather than Associate – Ordinary as they have recently moved to the far north coast. Ken Carruthers has resigned due to ill health. Although Graeme Tribe read their names out appropriately, the written lists at the meeting did not reflect that recent change.
- A list of those members removed from the Brigade's register was read out. The list for those to be changed from
- Associate was displayed and attendees invited to view it. The Secretary, Robyn Scrivener, secretarymtwilsonmtirvine@gmail.com can make these lists available to members who would like to see them.

Current	138	26	164
Additions	34	60	94
Subtractions	-69	-6	-75
New number	103	80	183

*Motion: "To accept removal of members from Brigade as per attached list"
Proposed: Robbie Feyder. Seconded: Beth Raines. Carried unanimously.
"To accept change of members from Ordinary member to Associate member status as per attached list"
Proposed: Robbie Feyder. Seconded: Beth Raines. Carried unanimously.*

Election of Officers for 2020-2021:

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

*Those with an * form the Executive Committee*

General Business:

Mary Holt asked if the Executive had considered leasing the land from Crown Lands for the proposed extensions of the Mt Wilson Fire Shed.

Joe Montano addressed the question outlining that there are historic issues which preclude that being a viable option. These being that there is no legal access from the public road to the current shed site as that access is Crown Land. To deal with the proposed extension the site has to be either owned or leased by BMCC. There is an option of buying the Crown Land but that is difficult and unlikely to happen within the next five years as the cost would be prohibitive. There is however a prospect in years to come that the Crown Land in question may be accessed for free. That timeline is undetermined.

Lesley Wilson pointed out the 'kitchenalia' at the back of the Hall that had been left after functions. If not claimed they will be taken away.

Barry Freeman asked when the Mt Wilson Hall would be assigned NSP status.

Robert Vinzenz claimed that the signoff would be imminent.

Peter Raines displayed the Community Fire Plan which will be reviewed over the next few years. Any feedback from the community can be passed on to the Executive, who will liaise with Cameron Lowndes from the RFS on this matter.

Canyon rescues need to be considered and improved. We need to consider what would enable more efficiency for Brigade and other emergency services during rescue operations. Communications need improvement as there is great difficulty coordinating and facilitating radio/phone communications in such remote country. Any feedback can be given to Beth Raines and Peter Raines.

Elizabeth Montano reported that Trish Doyle had contacted her about suggestions for Blue Mountains Woman of the Year. Elizabeth Montano and Linda Raines provided testimonials to Ms Doyle to support Beth Raines' nomination for the award. Ms Doyle was very moved by the testimonial and Beth Raines was nominated as the outstanding candidate.

The following email from Susan Templeman, Federal Member for Macquarie was received after the meeting:

Dear Mt Wilson/Mt Irvine RFS

It was good to get an update from you at the AGM, and I wasn't sure if the quality was good enough to say a few words. We could hear Susie Hope's report clearly on Zoom but I'm not sure whether it was a strain for you.

So I thought I'd raise a few points I would otherwise have made in person:

1. Thank you to the President, Captain and whole team for the work you've done in the 19/20 year. A memorable and horrific year, the effects of which are clearly still being felt. As a community you know there is still a journey ahead to "recover" but the fire seasons will keep on coming. I was really pleased to meet with several residents a few weeks ago and discuss ongoing issues.

Along with the Labor MPs representing other bushfire-hit areas, we have ensured that the need for ongoing attention to the recovery and issues arising from the fires is not ignored federally, in spite of COVID. I have worked closely with the National Bushfire Recovery Agency, which will be wound up in July and

replaced by another agency. Fencing remains a problem, and yesterday I discussed with the head of the Agency, Andrew Colvin, the need to find support for those unable to afford refencing. Funding for local environmental recovery has been minimal, and nationally only 1 percent of promised/allocated funds has been spent.

2. Mobile phone coverage: I continue to work on getting a mobile phone tower at Mt Tomah, and letters from me, as well as Council, have gone to the telcos in the lead up to the latest round 5a of federal funding. This is unspent funds from Round 5 and is meant to prioritise bushfire prone areas. Working with the RFS we are hopeful that this area will again be prioritised and we then hope that the promise will be delivered, unlike the last time.

3. You should have received advice about applying, as a Brigade, for the National Emergency Medal. I have spoken with Nick Medianik about the process of presenting them for those who have applied.

4. Bushfire grants: the failure of the NSW Govt to allocate funds to the BM in the fast tracked round of funding was already mentioned at the meeting and has been well publicised. The electorate I represent was used as the first case study to demonstrate the stark difference between funds granted to State coalition electorates versus State Labor electorates. This is federal and state funding, but the states have been given the responsibility to allocate the grants. None of the initial 71 grants, including the 3 in the Hawkesbury, went to RFS brigades. They went to private businesses in fire affected areas, to regional industries and for regional tourism initiatives. It remains to be seen what the panel determining the grants will decide for the remaining \$250 million but they are significantly oversubscribed.

After the media coverage and NSW inquiry, it has been revealed that local State MPs will be involved in the process in some way. I have spoken on multiple occasions with the Regional Recovery head, Alison Morgan, and the National Bushfire Recovery Agency head, Andrew Colvin, about the failure to have any advisory role for Federal MPs and I am yet to be advised if and how I will be able to express my views on the priorities for the hotly contested funds, but I remain hopeful after conversations as recently as yesterday that some engagement will be extended to Federal MPs, given this involves Federal funding.

What's really missing from the recovery grants is a stream for community infrastructure, so I will continue to push for that at a federal level.

4. Senate Bushfire Inquiry: There is expected to be a public hearing next month of the Senate inquiry which has a particular focus on the recovery to date, aerial firefighting, hazard reduction, mitigation and insurance issues. If you didn't make a submission but have some issues you would like to be heard, please contact my office.

Terms of reference and submissions made can be seen here https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Bushfirerecovery

I look forward to attending the next AGM in June in person, but please reach out to me if I can help with anything.

Kind regards

SUSAN TEMPLEMAN MP

Federal Member for Macquarie

P: [\(02\) 4573 8222](tel:0245738222) / [1300 519 482](tel:1300519482) (toll free) Ground Floor, 299 George St
Windsor NSW 2756

E: Susan.Templeman.MP@aph.gov.au | Mail to: PO Box 855 Windsor NSW 2756

David declared the meeting closed at 5:05 pm and invited everyone to join the Executive for refreshments.