

# RULES POINT DEBRIEF MEETING OF THE RIVERINA HIGHLANDS ZONE BUSH FIRE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



## MEETING DETAILS:

**Meeting date:** Monday, 5<sup>th</sup> March 2007

**Location:** Tumut Council  
Chambers

**Start:** 10.00am

**End:** 12:00pm

<b>Attendance:</b>	<b>Present:</b>	<b>Apology:</b>	<b>Absent:</b>
Bruce Holtz (RFS HQ)	√		
Councillor Ron Blyton			
Councillor Graeme Smith (TUSC) Chair	√		
Mr Brian Pearson (TUSC)			√
Mr John Jervois (GC Tumbarumba)			√
Mr Greg Lyons (C Maragle)			√
Councillor M Kingwill (GSC)			√
Graeme Tickner (GSC)			√
Bruce McGregor (GC Gundagai)			√
Chris Luff (C Gobarralong)			√
Glen Moore (GSC)			√
Councillor Gene Vanzella (Mayor)			√
Chris Adams (TSC)	√		
Paul Mullins (TSC)	√		
Keith Harrison (GC Tumut)			√
Rodney Purcell (GC Tumut)	√		
Steve Horsley (NPWS)	√		
Mick Pettitt (NPWS)	✓		
Mr D Darlington (NPWS)		√	
Ian Dicker (NPWS)			√
Andrew Grant (NPWS)			√
Bob Germantse (SF NSW)	√		
Charlie Taylor (SF NSW)			√
Darren Davis (SH Ltd)			√
Superintendent Col Holmes (NSW FB)		√	
Mr Kerry Willis (NSWFB)	√		
Alan Walker (ACT RFS)		√	
Brian Murphy			√
Colin Honeyman (RTA)		√	
Graham Wade (DL&W)		√	
Gus McEachern (Wilmont Forests)			√
Phil Stelling ( Hume Forests)			√
Tony Clee (RFS)	√		
Marie Casey (RFS)	√		
Steven Jory (RFS)	√		
Ken Hall (RFS)	√		
John Parker (RFS)	√		
Stan Wall		√	
Athol Price (SES)	√		
Lindsay Lashbrook (RFS)	√		
Ian Stewart (RFS)		√	
John Larter (NSW Ambulance)	√		
Bob Vandort (NSW Ambulance )	√		

## **RULES POINT DEBRIEF MONDAY, 5 MARCH 2007**

**1. OVERVIEW:** Steve Horsley (Incident Controller) confirmed that over the duration of the fire 20,500 hectares was burnt in total. Severe drought conditions made suppression strategies difficult as did unpredictable local winds with strong overnight easterly playing havoc. Spotting occurred from strong SW – NW winds, in some cases up to 10 klm. Given the intensity of the fires it was a good result restricting the area to 20,500 hectares. Serious storm events within the district sparked other fires in Bago and Bondo State forests justifying the decision to keep SF NSW resources in reserve.

A lightning strike at Goat Hill had potential to burn through to Broken Cart but was contained. Public interest in fire was intense as it had potential to burn to Brindabella and Goobarragandra Valley, the ACT and possibly Cabramurra. Fire activity was spread across three Local Government Shires.

Steve made mention of the support of the Tumut Shire Council and special appreciation for handling finances. The Tumut Shire EOC provided logistical support when handed over from the IMT. SES provided support as required.

Both Tumut and Cooma Monaro RFS Zones were actively involved with some pre-emptive work done at the Cooma end (Adaminaby). Fire fighting resources consisted of 148 out of area NPWS personnel and 6 taskforce from RFS (150 Out Of Area personnel). ACT RFS supplied 26 firefighters and a RAFT team. Forest NSW provided senior staff when needed.

Steve thanked all participants for the assistance given over duration of the fire. The Section 44 was declared at 1200 Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> February and terminated on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> February.

### **2. FIRST RESPONSE: Steve Horsley / Tony Clee**

Lightning ignited fires at Long Plain and Peak Back Ridge on Friday February 2<sup>nd</sup>. A Helicopter was deployed but had limited flight time due to the approaching night. NPWS requested additional 6 helicopters to be tasked at first light (Saturday)

First response was from 6 NPWS crews and 1 dozer to the fire at Long Plain. Long Plain fire was approx. 150 metres in length, located 500 metres off Snowy Mts Hwy at 2100 hrs. RFS Notified at 2110 hrs Friday night. A decision was taken not to risk remote teams into that area at night as it was considered unsafe due to fire activity. RAFT crews (including local RFS) were deployed early Saturday morning to Peak Back Ridge.

**Peak Back Ridge fire;** initially contained to 5 hectares by 1430 Sat. until a burning tree breached control line. By 1730 looking at fall back options.

**Lone Plain Fire;** By Sat. midday reached 40 hectares, 2 dozers operating. By 1300 a track around the perimeter was completed accessible to Cat 9's. At 1315 strong SW winds caused spotting 200 meters ahead of the main fire, dozer and ground crews pulled out. At 1930pm the fire was approx. 200 hectares in size. Crews were tasked for property protection for huts on long plain. Additional RFS Cat 9 crews were deployed Saturday afternoon to assist back burning on Saturday night. Raft crew were organised late Friday night and additional resources provided when requested by NPWS.

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After emergency executive meetings of both BFMC's from Riverina Highlands and Snowy River a Section 44 was declared midday Sunday.

**Rodney Purcell** said that as a result of a debrief with volunteers the RFS crews questioned choice of tankers as a lack of available water was a concern. Additional RFS tankers and two Snowy Works bulk water tankers were tasked 0200 Sunday.

**Ken Hall:** referred to the S52 plan and asked if there is anything the Committee needs to look at in relation to first response. Do we need to change the plan in relation to first response particularly during a drought year?

**Clr G Smith:** said Inter-service communications worked very well. The fire was very difficult to get to with unpredictable weather compounding problems.

### **3. DECLARATION / REVOCATION:**

The joint declaration required close cooperation between BFMCs and needs to be better coordinated. The section 52 plan can support this by involving pre season planning for such joint declarations. The Local Emergency Management Committee EOC was involved in the Declaration which was made more complex with joint shires.

As a fire gets beyond local resources it is the trigger point in declaring a S44 to access out of area resources.

### **4. APPOINTMENT OF IC**

The Recommendation for the Incident Controller was made and approved by the Commissioner. Initial IC'S were -: Steve Horsley (IC) Dave Darlington, Tony Clee, Barry Aitchison, Len Thompson,

### **5. ORGANISATIONS/AGENCIES**

SES, RFS, NPWS, SF NSW, NSW Ambulance, ACT RFS, NSW FB, RTA, Tumut Aero Club and Tumut and Tumbarumba Councils.

### **6. FIREGROUND ACCESS FOR FIREFIGHTERS**

One RFS crew had a minor problem with a locked NPWS gate, restricting access and temporarily hindering their assigned task. No problems after the Friday night. Long Plain road was a good fall back option with a lot of work that had been completed prior to the fire season paying dividends for NPWS.

### **7. PUBLIC ACCESS**

Tourists in the Tantangara area were quick to react when asked to leave. Closures of the Snowy Mountains Highway well coordinated by the RTA (Col Honeyman) and sign posted. Comments made that the road closures procedures have certainly improved since 2003.

### **8. STRATEGIES**

There were some big decisions made regarding strategies on the Long Plain fire given the potential for it to escalate. The decision to back burn off Spicer's Trail and the main highway, creating a large block involving some 14 km's of back burning proved pivotal in containing the main fire on the Sunday night. The Peak back Ridge fire (once it escalated) was difficult to control due to storm activity and light rain hampering back burning off strategic trails and the Murrumbidgee River. As a result of numerous spot over's caused some major runs. Establishing a Forward Control and Staging Area at Long Plain greatly assisted inter agency liaison and fire operations overall.

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### **9. EOC**

Recommendation from Paul Mullins that the EOC be allocated whole tasks from day one. Initially, logistics were handled through the IMT and this caused some problems in the hand over. Chris Adams had no problem with the EOC running out of Tumut as the fires had the potential to impact on TSC area and its ratepayers.

### **10. IMT**

The IMT working out of Tumut through NPWS office went well. There were some problems with Cooma Monaro but these were largely overcome by the appointment of Ian Stewart as over arching IC. The subject of building a designated joint Fire Control Centre for all local agencies was discussed. Tony Clee advised that the rear of the Tumut Shire Council building was being investigated for conversion to an FCC. Steve Horsley suggested the area may be too small and an alternative may need to be considered.

### **11. COORDINATION ON THE FIREGROUND**

The Forward Control and Staging Area provided a vital link between the IMT and the fireground. Initially communications between the IMT and staging was poor due to no mobile coverage and poor radio coverage. This severely hampered all agencies, in particular the Ambulance Service who experienced problems relaying advice on treating injured personnel prior to evacuation. Funding has been applied for to fix radio black spots in the area.

Some problems were encountered with shift changeovers due to some sectors being up to an hour travel time from the staging area. Mapping and IAP's were again highlighted as being inadequate, particularly early. Use of Topographic maps with overlays could solve the problem, especially where GPS is used by crews. Some food wastage was reported due to inaccurate crew numbers on the fireground being supplied to the EOC. There were some IT problems experienced by NPWS due to firewalls preventing access to RFS systems.

### **12. UTILISATION OF RESOURCES**

Numbers of resources were about right for the size of the incident. Most resources were kept busy with minimum down time for crews. Some confusion was caused by some plant not being sourced through the IMT as it should be. Access to aircraft was excellent due to lack of fire activity elsewhere. There appeared to be a lack of communication between the airbase manager and the Tumut Aero Club in utilising the runway lights after dusk for incoming aircraft. Ken Hall pointed out that all aircraft are required to be on the ground before last light.

### **13. CATERING ACCOMMODATION**

Out of area RFS Strike team crews were catered for on the eastern side at Providence Portal and Adaminaby. There were no complaints regarding accommodation or meals. Feeding on the fire ground worked quite well with some recommendations made at the EOC on how this could be improved. The EOC is looking to develop a plan for field catering for the future. RFS grab bags were well received by crews when other food was not available and these can be accessed readily, however it was mentioned that food coming in from out of area is a touchy subject with local caterers.

### **14. MEDIA AND PUBLIC AWARENESS**

An experienced Public Liaison unit was in place although some complaints were received from Cooma regarding lack of information on the eastern side. The amount

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of smoke generated from the fires caused some concern in and around the ACT. Media updates were ongoing every couple of hours as the situation changed. It was explained that it was likely that information from Cooma came in too late for media updates each day.

**15. MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS**

Inter agency systems were satisfactory with only minor problems experienced.

**16. OUTCOMES**

There were no serious injuries reported. A total of ten minor injuries were recorded, mostly being strains and minor burns. There were no assets lost.

**17. CAUSE OF FIRE AND INVESTIGATIONS**

Investigation completed and satisfied both fires started by lightning.

**18. PREPAREDNESS**

Due to the level of fire activity experienced prior to the incident, all agencies were well prepared and on high alert. Some recommendations will be made to amend the s52 plan. The s52 plan is treated as a live document and should be amended and updated prior to the start of each fire season.

**19. RELATIONSHIP TO BUSH FIRE RISK PLAN**

The use of strategic fire trails in the overall management of the fires worked well.

**20. OTHER ISSUES**

Bruce Holts commented that his role in attending was to observe and listen to the comments made and noted the successful outcome of containing the fire spoke for itself. His compliments to the team as a good job of coordinated, cooperative fire fighting between agencies had been achieved. If the BFMC is honest to address some of issues raised, it will only go forward.

**Thanks**

Mick Pettitt thanked Zone duty officer, Lindsay Lashbrook for initial assistance and all committee members for their combined efforts in combating what could have been a more serious fire. The Executive Officer also thanked Ken Hall and Bruce Holtz for their support during the incident and of the Major Incident Coordination desk at Homebush.

**21. SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

1. That the Rural Fire Act Section 52 plan be updated annually and pre-season planning be undertaken with Cooma Monaro and Snowy River BFMC
2. That the BFMC support the RFS in preparing a coordination of Heavy Plant at Bush Fire Policy.
3. That consideration is given, by the Tumut Council, to upgrading retardant and general aircraft parking areas at Tumut Airport to avoid dust, if possible.

MEETING CLOSED at 12.10 pm

Tony Clee  
EXECUTIVE OFFICER

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**OUTSTANDING TASKS REGISTER:**

<b>No:</b>	<b>Resource:</b>	<b>Task Description:</b>	<b>Current Details:</b>	<b>Due Date:</b>	<b>New Date:</b>
<b>New Tasks</b>					