

WESTON CREEK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

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Minutes

April Monthly Meeting

7.45pm 28th April 2004

Welcome

Mr Jeff Carl welcomed the committee, residents and guest speakers to the meeting. Mr Carl advised that the Interim Chair, Pat McGinn was not able to attend tonight's meeting and that the Council Committee had requested assistance in chairing the meeting.

The guest speaker is Brig General (ret) Peter Dunn, Commissioner (designate) of the new Emergency Services Authority (ESA). Commissioner Dunn will provide an overview and background of the establishment of the ESA, the legislation to be tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly as well as information on the proposed operational management of the ESA.

Other business would be after the guest speakers.

Apologies

Jacqui Burke MLA, Pat McGinn

Emergency Services Authority (ESA)

Commissioner Dunn advised that the beginning of the ESA was last November with the aim of creating a new authority. There are new laws and regulations being developed with the aim of modernising old legislation, for example the 1936 Bushfire Act and the 1950's Fire Brigade ACT and the 30 year old (1970's) emergency services legislation.

Commissioner Dunn indicated that also present tonight to assist with the discussion were a/g Commissioner of the ACT Fire Brigade David Prince, Deputy Director of the Emergency Services Bureau Tony Graham, Peter MacDonald the Executive Officer of the ESA as well as the legal team of David Snell and Tania Manuel.

The draft legislation is to be tabled in the ACT Legislative Assembly next week and debated in June. Consideration of amendments will take place and it is hoped that the legislation will be in place for 1 July 2004. If the legislation is referred to Committee and delayed then the current legislation will continue. The ESB (Emergency Services Bureau) will close and the ESA will operate under the old legislation for a period. Discussions have been held with all MLAs and there are no obvious impediments to the passage of the legislation at this stage.

The Objective of the ESA is to protect life, property and the environment. The ESA will make decisions to balance the outcome with the Objectives. The organisations involved would be the State Emergency Services (SES), Ambulance Service, Fire Brigade and the Rural Fire Service.

Currently the ESB reports through the Dept of Justice and Community Safety to the Minister. The new ESA will report directly to the responsible Minister. There will be minimal bureaucratic structure to manage and the shortest possible chain of command is being put in place.

The ESA will have high operational effectiveness and will not just be another part of the Public Service. Volunteers will continue to be important and in looking to the future of emergency services, more volunteers will probably be involved. There is a need to manage the potential risk to volunteers.

In addition the ESA will have a role of informing and educating the community. The informing will ensure warnings are timely and accurate. Another aim will be to reinvigorate the current Bushfire Council. Previously the Bushfire Council managed two-thirds of the ACT and with the creation of National Parks and bush reserves, this has dwindled to a small percentage. The Bushfire Council will have a core advisory role with the ESA.

The McLeod Report looked at the operational approach for the 4 services involved in emergency service provision and looked to blend them into a cohesive management structure. The current aim is to ensure that the entities maintain their traditions and cultures, and that this assists in nurturing the new organisation.

A name change will be the ACT Emergency Services (ACT ES) to be changed to ACT State Emergency Services (ACT SES). This will bring the naming into alignment with other jurisdictions and make it easier to find in alphabetical listings in the telephone book. It will also provide the same status and agreement on inter-operability with other SES organisations interstate.

The Bushfire Service will be renamed the Rural Fire Service. A bushfire service historically has tackled forest and grass fires but has not provided protection for rural property or buildings. Along with the renaming there will be training to assist in the protection of rural property and houses.

In addition, the renaming and consolidation of legislation will enable forces to come into the ACT from other jurisdictions if and when they are needed. It also assists in any operation where ACT services need to go interstate.

The new ESA will also be responsible for reporting on 'preparedness' and 'capability'. At present there is no single source of information in the ACT on how prepared we are for a particular emergency. In addition 'capability' is not reported on, and the ESA will be required to report on 'capability' to undertake action in emergencies.

The ESA will be able to undertake audits of bushfire management areas and order rectification. If rectification is not made in the stated period the ESA can undertake the rectification and then charge the land manager.

The ESA will be able to issue a State of Alert. This would be an early warning of a potential event, and would occur prior to a State of Emergency. Under a State of Alert, there will be a legal requirement to provide a constant flow of information to residents.

There is provision under the new legislation for all emergency service providers to be indemnified.

In planning for the city area, the definition of the city area has been expanded and it will include the urban areas and the proposed bushfire abatement zones as recommended in the McLeod Report. This would mean that responsibility for action does not change at the 'back fence'. The Chief Fire Commissioner of the Urban Brigade is responsible for planning (with consultation) of the city area and the Chief Commissioner of the Rural Fire Service for the remainder of the ACT in consultation with the Fire Commissioner.

In terms of administration there will be no Board of Management. Board's of Management are being phased out in other emergency services organisations interstate. The Commissioner will be responsible for budgets, assets and strategic approach. The ESA will also have a recovery role as was highlighted after 18 January 2003.

External relationships will be important in the operation of the ESA. The relationships with the SES, Rural Fire Service, Ambulance Service and the ACT Fire Brigade are well established. The relations with the Australian Federal Police (AFP) are continually being strengthened. There will be an Emergency Management Committee to seek input and there will be a range of members eg Urban Services, Health etc and a community member. The Bushfire Council will continue to provide independent advice to ESA and the skills and experience of members of the Bushfire Council will cover the range of areas of science, operations and administration. The ACT Dept of Urban Services will continue to provide the Forests Brigade and the Parks Brigade.

Commissioner Dunn said, in summary, that there will be a new approach to emergency services in the ACT. There will be linked services, and the structure will have a shorter chain of command. The approach is to capture the recommendations of the McLeod Report and to go further than the coronial enquires to ensure the mechanism in place will address issues and events for handling emergencies as they occur.

Q&A

Mr Carl called for questions.

- Who has priority in regard to a fire in a rural area which could impact on the urban area? Commissioner Dunn advised that there is no win / lose in such a scenario. Forward planning and operational needs would determine how a coordinated solution was gained. The setting up of planning so as to anticipate different scenarios will be undertaken. There would need to be assessment of the threat and make a judgement call and be accountable for the decision. The decision and the authority to make the decision lies with the ESA. There is an MOU (memorandum of understanding) with the NSW Rural Fire Service for inter-operability and

improved communications. The ESA would need to make the call on where to put the available assets. In the future planning it is hoped to have a 25% increase in Rural Fire Service in the ACT.

- A resident asked; is Canberra big enough to support 4 separate services and what is the relationship like with the AFP? Commissioner Dunn advised that where possible, common activities are undertaken as a joint function, eg planning, finances, the common parts are undertaken together and are not duplicated. In respect of the AFP, there are good relations and the ESA will have a new position which would have a liaison role with the AFP. Residents of Weston Creek would be aware that evacuation protocols need to be developed and agreed. In addition meetings in emergency situations do not work when there is a need to commute from ESB in Curtin to the Winchester Centre in Belconnen.
- In regard to Joe Average, communications to residents is critical for us to help ourselves, who will tell us? There is a legal requirement that when a State of Alert is declared the ESA will continue to provide a constant stream of information to the general public. There is the option of instigating a door knock of houses, for example when a severe weather forecast is predicted. The State of Alert with protocols in place with the AFP will make it work. Broadcasts will be made on radio and TV in a coordinated approach. ABC 666 did a great job on 18 January 2003 however commercial stations were 'steaming' programs from Sydney and Melbourne on weekends and did not break into them. Discussions are underway with commercial radio and TV stations to 'call-in' Canberra staff on a needs basis. Also being addressed is the possibility of 'crawler' messages during programs.
- A resident asked of the interaction with the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) on Bushfires and the role of research in the planning and operations of the new Authority? Commissioner Dunn indicated that he had been in discussions with the CRC on Bushfires and had just made a visit to the Country Fire Authority of Victoria research centre. A major emphasis at present is to protect fire fighters through what has been learnt in research. There is continuing pressure on the CRC to answer questions of bushfire impact and driving forces of bushfire. The ACT is contributing to the CRC and is hoping to get practical and useful results which can be implemented.
- A resident asked, is there sole control over an emergency services and are there rules of advising and informing the community? The sole responsibility under the new legislation rests with the Commissioner of the Authority, as for providing information the legislation requires the Authority to inform and to continue to inform the community on the emergency.
- A resident who identified himself from the urban edge of Chapman asked of access to do an audit of land? Commissioner Dunn indicated that the Authority would be able to gain access and instruct on activities to be undertaken. Also in terms of access the ESA is being and will need to be consulted by ACTPLA and Urban Services in terms of physical access in planning and infrastructure. A recent example is input into the design and alignment of the re-building of Uriarra Village. Suggestions of three access routes rather than one have been taken into account in the village. Examples of cul de-sac and dead-end streets may need to have a dirt track constructed to deal with the issue of only one access/ egress. There is a dilemma with the already built-environment. There are good discussions with ACTPLA on what can be done in an area. If there are few options in terms of access and egress the area becomes of significant interest in an emergency.

- In regard to audits how is it undertaken with international institutions and Commonwealth facilities in the ACT? Both are required to meet the legislation. The Commonwealth has been very cooperative with concerns already identified by the ESA and have rectified the situation identified very quickly.
- Steve Pratt, Opposition spokesperson on Emergency Services identified himself and asked a question of the May 2003 Auditor-General's report - there was much on command and control however what about the other issues raised; and, in the re-organisation planned what will be the impact on Community Fire Units? Commissioner Dunn indicated that the range of recommendations of the Auditor General's report, beyond command and control, have been considered and taken into account. Written findings of the coronial inquiry were awaited, but efforts have been made to address the findings of numerous other coronial enquires which investigated Bushfires. The aim was to 'put arms around' all the major findings of recent inquiries and reports where issues needed to be addressed. In respect to Community Fire Units, a response was given by a/g Commissioner David Prince. A/g Commissioner Prince advised the meeting that the uptake of volunteers was 320 in 8 units and over the next 4 years the plan is to have 20 units per year which is a long-term plan. How the CFUs are used is a major discussion point. The Fire Brigade interaction with CFUs will be a lot of work. There could be up to 3,000 volunteers in CFUs and 1,000 volunteers in the Rural Fire Service. Another consideration could be an additional fire station in north Canberra taking the number to ten. Other considerations are the division of north and south Canberra into different administrative areas.
- A resident asked of job protection for volunteer emergency services people? Commissioner Dunn indicated that this an area of great debate and the model being investigated was Defence Reserves. Periods of 3 to 5 days were being looked at and how effective the Defence Reserve legislation was. Volunteers had a strong opinion that they did not want to be paid but job protection was critical. There is no easy answer for this issue.
- Is there uniform equipment across southeast Australia? Commissioner Dunn indicated that the long-term outcome was to look for commonality of equipment, however much would not match. It will take time for commonality as some gear has a working life of 20 years. Victoria has ordered 200 tankers at \$40M and there is the ability to piggyback on this order so there is a basis of commonality beginning. It needs to be remembered that bushfire fire services run on old and donated equipment and there is much to do to modernise these assets.
- A resident asked of an illustration, what would happen if they was a fire a Piccadilly Circus at 10 o'clock tonight? Because it is still bushfire season it would be responded to by 10.05pm.
- A question was asked of a deliberately lit fire, for example along a bike path? There has been an effective anti-arson TV and radio campaign directed at 16 to 21 year olds. The media campaign has been based on prevention and preparedness with a focus on general education not just kids. A/g Commissioner Prince added that there was a juvenile intervention program managed by the Fire Brigade which is focussed on kids playing with fire or with a fascination with fire. The program utilises a fire fighter and a psychologist to work with the family. There have been numerous interventions however, not wishing to advertise arson, this has had a low profile but has been very effective.

Mr Carl called an end to the questions and indicated that Commissioner Dunn, A/g Commissioner of the ACT Fire Brigade David Prince, Deputy Director of the Emergency Services Bureau Tony Graham, Peter MacDonald the Executive Officer of the ESA would be available at the end of the meeting to take questions from residents.

Any other Business

Mr Carl called for other business from the audience.

Graffiti at Cooleman Court

The meeting was advised of the increased occurrence of graffiti at Cooleman Court as well as vandalism of lights in the area. Residents were encouraged to report to ACT Police such incidents. A resident added that if incidents were not reported the ACT Police would not consider it an issue. It is in the best interest of residents to continue to report graffiti and vandalism to the police.

Gungahlin Drive Extension

Mr Jon Reynolds from the Gungahlin Community Council encouraged Weston Creek residents to attend the pro-road rally at 1pm on 8th May at the Gungahlin Town Centre.

Holder Shops refurbishment

Mr Carl advised the meeting of recent press reports that the ACT Government has approved expenditure of \$500,000 on the refurbishment of the Holder Shops to be completed by July this year. This was in the WCCC Budget submission two years ago. It is welcome news considering that the project initially started in 2001. A resident asked of the Duffy shops and the disused petrol station. Mr Carl advised that this was included in the WCCC Budget submission for 2004/2005 and would need to be considered in the context of the re-building and recovery of Duffy. Any consultation this year may not find itself into an ACT Budget until 2005/2006.

Mr Carl called for further business. As there was none forthcoming Mr Carl closed the meeting and thanked residents for their attendance.

Meeting closed 9.40 PM
Next Regular Meeting
Wednesday 26th May 2004