



November 2018

# HOT TOPICS

Celebrating our network

## FIRE FIGHTERS, LAND MANAGEMENT OR WHAT?

By Collene Bremner, Executive Director

At the November Bushfires Council meeting, the Council noted the title of the operational staff had changed from Fire Control Officers to Fire Management Officers.

The Council wanted to know whether Bushfires NT staff still fought fires or had we moved to more of an advisory role and if that was the case was this due to the introduction of the *Bushfires Management Act*?

The Council also requested that the following explanation of the changes to name be circulated across the volunteer and regional committee network.

Firstly, I would like to assure everyone that the role of a Fire Control Officer has not changed because of the *Bushfires Management Act*.

The powers under the previous Act for a Fire Control Officer are still reflected in the current legislation with the role expanded to include formal requirements for planning and risk mitigation.

This is in recognition of the fact that every dollar spent on planning and mitigation improves community safety and saves many dollars that would otherwise be spent on response.

The titles for the job descriptions were changed following a round of recruitment for BFNT positions across the Territory.

The interview panel at the time highlighted that we seemed to be attracting professional fire fighters experienced in structure or aircraft fires rather than from a land management background.

The panel suggested the title of positions be changed to better reflect the role Bushfires NT staff have for the entire year rather than just the few months of a year when fire weather conditions increase.

During the fire season, the experience we were looking for was for landscape fires rather than structure fires.

Bushfires NT recognise that there are common operating systems across fire agencies such as, the Australian Inter-service Incident Management System (AIIMS) which Bushfires NT has adopted to ensure better interoperability between Bushfires NT staff and volunteers and NT Fire and Rescue Service.

Interestingly, the way people find vacant positions has changed substantially with the use of the internet, search engines and social media platforms such as LinkedIn and other professional networks rather than paper based newspaper advertisements.

To ensure we are able to source the best people for the work we need them to do, Bushfires NT needed to review both the job descriptions and title.

So just to ensure we are all on the same page BFNT staff do:

- put water on fires when required
- work with landowner/managers to assist them with fires on their property
- work with volunteers at a fire that a volunteer Fire Warden may be leading
- we may take control of a fire if the situation warrants it
- call in extra resources to support a fire fighting operation, i.e. other brigade volunteers, contractors, air support, NT Fire Rescue Service
- assist landowners with aerial prescribed burns
- investigate the source of fire and enforcement activities as required

This is just a small portion of the role BFNT regional staff undertake and I hope that this explanation clears up any confusion that may have resulted from us changing the title of our positions within Bushfires NT.

## BEMS ROLL OUT KEEPS ROLLING ON

By Steele Davies, Bushfires Information Manager

Work is continuing on ensuring BEMS is up to standard prior to its official launch in early 2019.

The final component of BEMS is to test the offline interface platform Field Connect, which allows Volunteers and staff to access and process information when out of mobile coverage areas.

The delays we have been experiencing are mostly due to deciding on the most suitable mapping product that will work offline.

The maps must be capable of operating effectively over the entire NT so that various layers such as aerial photography (Google Earth), cadastre, NAFI, BOM and general street maps are all accessible at varying zoom levels.

Despite the map issue, the rest of the Field Connect Interface is nearing completion.

To help with testing the system some volunteers have been selected to assist.

They are playing a key role by making sure that Field Connect operates effectively within the parameters of our business, SOP's, policies and the Bushfires Management Act and regulations.

The Volunteers also help by picking up any grammatical errors and incorrect terminology.

They are also testing iPads to make sure they operate effectively and provide feedback on the best ways to deliver training.

If you require any more information please give Steele a call, 8922 0837.



BEMS Manager Steele Davies showing John Trott from Dundee Volunteer Bushfire Brigade the finer points of using one of the new iPads

## ALICE SPRINGS VOLUNTEERS TEST THE NEW BEMS SYSTEM

The Alice Springs brigade are helping to refine the Field Connect app that allows the new BEMS system to be used on portable devices in the field. The brigade was quick off the mark and ran a Field Connect training session at its regular Wednesday training night on 28 November.

The training included having two small groups each deal with a fire response scenario and use Field Connect to map and record the incident. This sort of scenario training is really valuable - it not only allowed ten members to have hands on experience with BEMS and Field Connect, it also gave new members an opportunity to operate vehicles, use the radios, and become familiar with situation reporting and operating within the chain of command.

Well done Alice Springs! A great example for us all.



Ben Cromarty showing Bruce Colombert, Darren Clark and Sharn Hortin how to use Field Connect on an iPad



Jason Bunting showing Katrina Bartholomew, Blake Debney, Kenny Malthouse and Reece Debney how to use Field Connect on an iPad



Kenny Malthouse, Ben Cromarty, Bruce Colombert and Josh Clarke using Field Connect during the scenario training



Sharn Hortin entering data with Ben Cromarty, Kenny Malthouse and Bruce Colombert during the scenario training

## VOLUNTEER STRATEGY UPDATE

By Lucas Fiddaman, Project Officer – Volunteer Strategy

Volunteer Census forms are still making their way to my desk in Winnellie, which is fantastic!

If there are volunteers still out there who haven't yet completed the Census, please let me know.

The first round of consultation with brigades is currently underway, and this will continue into December.

I've been delighted at how productive the meetings have been so far and I look forward to speaking with everyone else over the coming weeks.

Thank you to everyone who has taken the time to meet with me. It's been great catching up.

Discussions with all of you have been excellent and your suggestions will prove invaluable as I start to prepare a report which outlines the common and major issues raised in relation to volunteer programs.

I will make sure I forward the report to everyone once it has been drafted.

Over the coming months, I will also be seeking to consult with other agencies and jurisdictions to determine whether programs and practices implemented elsewhere could be adapted to suit the needs of our volunteers.

If you have any suggestions, I'd be more than happy to hear from you.

Please feel free to get in touch if you have any questions.



Members of the Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade met with Project Officer Lucas Fiddaman to discuss the Bushfires NT Volunteer Strategy

## LONG AND MERITORIOUS SERVICE

Recently Bushfires NT had the pleasure of presenting Volunteer Long & Meritorious Service Medals to members of the Elizabeth Valley Volunteer Bushfire Brigade.

The medals are in recognition of their ongoing commitment and support to fire management in the Northern Territory.

They represent the countless hours and determination each member has given to keeping their local communities safe.

Bushfires NT would like to thank the recipients for a wonderful night and their ongoing support.

So, a big shout out and heart-felt congratulations to: Riitta Aksila, Steven Bayley, Jean Baker, Geoffery Baker, Andy Lewsley, Robert Pitts, James Weir, Paul Pokorny, Margaret Christensen.

THANK YOU!!!



Winners: Back L – R: James Kevin Weir, Roy Christensen (on behalf of Margaret Christensen), Steven Bayley, Robert Pitts and Paul Pokorny

Front L – R: Kiara Baker (on behalf of Geoffery Baker), Riitta Aksila, Jean Baker and Di Tynan



*The winners' taste buds were also well treated with this special commemorative cake that was served up at the event*

## ENGAGING IN TRAINING

By Krissy Riley, Manager Engagement and Training

Hi everyone, with Christmas just around the corner I just wanted to give you a quick update as to what we are up too.

FF1 training is currently under review and we are looking at an online component which may enable you to do the majority of FF1 in your own time before coming together for a practical assessment.

We are also investigating accredited training that would possibly be delivered externally.

Both of these are in the investigation phase and as we gather further information we will look at commencing a working group involving volunteers and staff to further our work.

Please don't hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or ideas.

Watch this space!



*Bushfires NT ED Collene Bremner (centre) presenting the new Toyotas to Berry Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade Captain George Lowe and Elizabeth Valley Volunteer Bushfire Brigade Captain Di Tynan*

## NEW VEHICLES

Following the Government's increased funding commitment for Bushfires NT earlier this year, new vehicles for our Volunteer Brigades have started to drive out of the Winnellie shed.

To kick things off, Bushfires ED Collene Bremner handed one new Toyota Landcruiser Grass Fire Unit to both Elizabeth Valley and Berry Springs Volunteer Brigades recently.

They were the first of what will be an extensive roll out of vehicles in the coming months.

Elizabeth Valley Captain Di Tynan was excited to be getting her brigade's new unit.

"This is the first time ever that we've had brand new vehicles," Di said.

To top things off, the handover was done in front of the land that will house the new Bushfires NT headquarters.

The design tender for the new HQ was awarded to local company Ashford Group Architects.

## WESTERN TOP END REGIONAL FIRE PLANNING MEETING

By Conan Williams, Fire Management Officer

Bushfires NT Fire Management Officers Michael Carter and I attended the Western Top End Regional Fire Planning Meeting on November 20 and 21 at the Malak Malak Ranger Base, down on the Daly.

Representatives from the Malak Malak, Wadeye, Peppimenarti, Woodycupaidiya, Fish River and Wagaman Ranger groups were among those who made the journey, along with ILC (Indigenous Land Corporation), NLC (Northern Land Council), Department of Primary Industries Bio Security / Weeds Branches and Bushfires NT.

The purpose of the meeting was to discuss Weeds and Biocontrol in the region and to look into the 2018/2019 Fire Activities and opportunities that could be realised by combining them with Carbon Farming.

The feeling in the group was upbeat and the importance of "looking after country" was often spoken about!

A lot of work is being done across the Western top End, with an emphasis on stemming the spread of declared weed such as Gamba grass and Mimosa.

The next step for some of these Ranger groups is to use the early Savannah burning practices and move into Carbon Abatement, otherwise known as Carbon Farming.

This is a way for the groups to supplement their income and increase their capacity to maintain their land in an environmentally friendly, economical and sustainable manner.

With the intensity of the Gamba grass fires at the forefront of people's minds, the dangers to the environment and those working in close proximity to the fires are aspects the Rangers are looking at as a high risk in the future.

The need for Emergency response personal and machinery were also flagged as a major issue.

Talk of setting up a committee, with primarily Indigenous Rangers, to speak on behalf of all the groups was on the table.

Bushfires NT recommended that one of the same members would also be invaluable as a representative on the Regional Committee.

The Ranger groups have also asked if Bushfires NT are able to look into tailoring training, more suited to their needs.

All in all, it was an informative meeting with a bunch of friendly people.

I would like to thank the NLC and ILC for the invitation and a special thanks to the Malak Malak Rangers for hosting.

Cheers, Conan



*A wide range of land management groups travelled to the Malak Malak Ranger Base down on the Daly River for the Western Top End Regional Fire Planning Meeting*

## VOLUNTEER OF THE YEAR AWARDS

Once again the work of our fantastic volunteers has been recognised through the NT Volunteer of the Year Awards.

In the Red Centre, the Alice Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade was successful winning the Jacana Energy Community Volunteer Organisation of the Year award.

It is a fantastic achievement from the crew and a HUGE congratulations goes out to all the members of the Brigade for the continued efforts and dedication.

In the Top End Volunteer brigades and members also featured heavily as finalists in a number of categories.

Bushfires NT would like to thank our fabulous Volunteers for helping all Territorians celebrate the Top End Volunteer of the Year Awards.

A special congratulations goes out to our Top End finalists Fred Bynes from our BART brigade, Maureen Kohlman from Acacia Hills, Paul Pokorny from Elizabeth Valley, David Wills from Manton, Charlie Gimbel from Livingstone, Campbell Elliot from Edith Farms and the Katherine Volunteer Bushfire Brigade.

It was great to see everyone looking spectacular and enjoying well-deserved applause on the night in Darwin.

WELL DONE!



*Bushfire Volunteers from a number of Brigades enjoyed the awards night in the Top End*



*Alice Springs Volunteer Bushfire Brigade members receiving their award in the Red Centre*



## BIOSECURITY ALERT

# DETECT IN THE WET

Help prevent the spread of citrus canker this wet season

**Heavy rain and winds can spread citrus canker. Detect in the wet by inspecting your citrus plants for symptoms.**

What to look for when checking your citrus plants for citrus canker:

- Small tan-coloured spots on leaves, stems or fruit which grow into raised, brown-grey blisters.
- Spots may have a black, water-soaked margin surrounded by a yellow halo or ring.

It is important to monitor your plants during this time of year. If you think you may have a plant with citrus canker please do not touch, move, remove or destroy the plant.



*Citrus canker - Jonas Janner Hamann, Universidade Federal de Santa Maria (UFSM), Bugwood.org*



*Image courtesy of Plant Health Australia*



*Image courtesy of Plant Health Australia*

**Call the citrus canker hotline on 1800 931 722 to book a time for an authorised officer to inspect your plant.**

**Contact us via:**

Citrus canker hotline: 1800 931 722

Email: [citruscanker@nt.gov.au](mailto:citruscanker@nt.gov.au)

Web: Visit [www.nt.gov.au/citruscanker](http://www.nt.gov.au/citruscanker)

