



## Private Property Preparedness Community Working Group

### Meeting Minutes

Location: Function room

Date: Monday, 13 February 2023

#### **1. Acknowledgement of traditional owners and official opening**

The working group chair Cr John Giardina opened the meeting at 5:00pm and Mayor Margaret Thomas also acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which we meet the Wadjuk Noongar people.

#### **2. Attendance and apologies**

##### **Councillors**

John Giardina (JG)

Margaret Thomas (MT)

##### **Staff**

Nicole O'Neill – Director Community Engagement (NO)

James Wickens – Manager Community Health & Safety (JW)

##### **Community Representatives**

Chris Grubba (CG)

Paul Fantuz (PF)

John Sarich (JS)

Craig Bowers (CB)

Ian Burns (IB)

Garrie Vincenti (GV)

Ray Furfaro (RF)

Steve Lake (SLa)

Stephen Lock (SLo)

David Windsor (DW)

##### **Apologies**

Sean Winter (SW)

Mariellen Pearce (MP)

#### **3. Disclosure of Interests**

##### **3.1 Disclosure of Financial and Proximity Interests:**

- a) Members must disclose the nature of their interest in matters to be discussed at the meeting (Section 5.65 of the Local Government Act 1995)

- b) Employees must disclose the nature of their interests in reports or advice when giving the report or advice to the meeting. (Section 5.7 of the Local Government Act 1995).

**3.1.1.1** Nil

### **3.2 Disclosure of Interest affecting Impartiality**

- a) Members and staff must disclose their interests in matters to be discussed at the meeting in respect of which the member or employee has given or will give advice.

**3.2.1** Nil

## **4. Confirmation of minutes from the previous meeting**

N/A

## **5. Discussion re Private Property Preparedness for 2023/2024**

### **5.1 Round Table ideas for the season**

CB – Asked about reason to issue infringements and was that a DFES decision. Also mentioned on average 4,000 properties were inspected last season with a compliance rate above 70%. Only a small problem and main issue seemed grass on flat lands from what he had ready in CoKal reports i.e., 25% of the infringements.

IB – What does bare earth mean. I would get erosion on my block if I rotary hoed my firebreaks. We need alternatives to bare earth on slope. We need to get away from bare mineral earth.

GV – Variations are a waste of time. Where people have done 80% of the work don't fine for the remaining 20%.

RF – Fire control officers poorly trained. They are rogue and rude. More attention to staff training.

SLa – Core issue is about the process. Section 14 of the Bush Fires Act allow staff to enter land. Needs to be a partnership with the City and Community in bushfire preparedness.

SLo – Seems allot of people upset by the FCO's doing the inspections. The FCO that attended my property was a lovely guy but acknowledge there is inconsistencies between inspections. People don't know what is expected of them however acknowledged the delivery in the rates and e rates is good. Emphasised it is hard for elderly people and that the inspections need to happen earlier.

MT – Owns 2 properties in Pickering Brook. Received a work order so engaged a contractor but received an infringement in the meantime. The City needs to be more lenient and work with people.

CG – Bushfire readiness facilitator. Advised residents tell him on a daily basis what about the verges and fire breaks within the reserves. People also seem to be of the understanding they cannot touch their verge. If they can manage their verge, then they are not being told this. Allot of people generally frustrated by ensuring grass is mowed on their property whereas the verge grass is still long.

NO - Described the City fire mitigation and mowing program. Resources are limited and focus is on unkempt verges. People can manage their verges however they may be confused with street trees. Mowing or slashing of grass is not an issue.

CB – Just need to make sure people know if their verge contains any declared rare flora or not or Parks and Wildlife (and CoKal numerous documents), roadside remnant vegetation available from Landgate SLIP software. We do need to be cautious in telling people to burn for example without taking this into consideration.

CG – Allot of people who get a work order are not told exactly why they are getting a work order. The workorder comes out of the blue.

PF – The workorders are not descript enough. They need to be clear so people can do all the work at once. Also, some people are not getting inspected and therefore people who are, feel targeted. The blanket fines of \$250 is not enough for those properties where they are clearly not doing anything.

JS – Major issue is staff. As year on year, they are not the same staff so there is no continuity. FCO's are picking on things they don't actually know anything about because they are inexperienced.

SLo – On the topic of verges what about drainage ditches.

NO – Same as verges, resources are limited. It is important to note that the Notice does not actually apply to City or State managed land.

IB – Mentioned he was infringed this season where he has been managing his property that way for 30 years with no issue. It would be a good idea if the inspectors could mark on a google map and identify clearly where the issue is. Be good if the inspectors come out in winter and undertook inspection before September. We should not be doing inspections during the fire season.

Sla – Acknowledged that there are a lot of concerns about consistency. However, it is important to note that the Notice is only generic and should not be overly descriptive. It is only 2 pages long and very similar to the other ones presented. Very difficult to compare properties as what is required at one, is totally different to what may be required at another. We need to take a step back when doing the inspections and determine is this property fire safe or not.

GV – Agreed and comes back to the 80% rule.

NO – Advised the group that the City is proposing for 23/24 to go back to work order first and then allow 14 days to complete the works. We are also going to really encourage the pre-season inspections and try and get a better uptake on that. In regard to the Casuals the recommendation will be to replace them with a full-time staff member. This will all be detailed in the Fire Hazard Assessment Plan which will be presented to Council.

RF – Mentioned that the City used to have full time staff and they were better. Referred to a Julien Cole who worked here, who would be allot more helpful. He would provide a list of firebreak contractors people could choose from the if they needed to do works. Encouraged the City to have a similar approach.

NO – Advised the City has reintroduced the firebreak contractor list.

JS – Again raised main issue is staff. No common sense. Raised examples of where he has had to help landowners comply with the notice. However, does not know what that means anymore as it changes every year.

Also discussed the door hanger that the staff leave at the front door. People don't know if their property is compliant or if they are going to get a work order in the mail. People are confused. The work orders are also poorly written and need to be made clearer.

NO – Acknowledged that the work orders need to be reviewed and made clearer. Acknowledged that in the past workorders used to be completed and provided at the end of the inspection. They were undertaken on carbon copy books. Following the transition to electronic the City went to registered post as people were claiming they weren't receiving the infringements. They delays in Australia post has also created other issues.

IB – Advised that the City can SMS him information about total fire ban days etc, why can't he receive a text about his work order?

CB – Acknowledged that the Bush Fires Act was written in 1954 and we are now experiencing global warming and a changing climate. The seasons are changing. Also discussed issues about leaf litter on firebreaks and acknowledged landowners do need to maintain their firebreaks which may include using a blower vac from time to time. However, the FCO's need more education about what constitutes leaf litter and what is and is not acceptable. The DFES guide along with the CoKal residents fuel load depth gauge tool kit (gauge) is a useful guide however the FCO's seem to not be using that lately. An example being a landowner challenged a FCO regarding leaf litter that it met the DFES guide and referred to the gauge, however the FCO stated they don't use the gauge it just looks too much.

JG – Raised the issue about the orchardists and the City's request to install bare mineral earth breaks. This causes erosion, and dust issues. This can also bring up rocks which can then be flicked up and damage the fruit on the nearby trees. This is a big issue and separate approach needs to be applied to the orchards.

IB – They are also irrigated.

NO – Take the issue regarding orchards on board.

PF – Where does the need for bare earth come from There is no reference to bare earth in Section 33 of the Bush Fires Act. Also mentioned that many people have cut their paddocks to the required 50mm but are getting pinged for a few sprigs of grass. This has caused people to become paranoid thinking they are going to be fined. People are out there trying to whipper snip their paddocks. A question was posed to the Furies in the room is there a hierarchy that should be considered.

SLa & DW – Advised yes there is, and that protection of life is always the main priority followed by other factors such as property, environmental values etc.

NO – Acknowledged there are lots of factors that need to be considered and we need to come up with a set a of rules. Informing the community is difficult and many people still don't even have a bushfire plan let alone getting the properties prepared. The Notice is just the bare minimum requirement. The City wants to educate and not come across as authoritative.

SLo – Raised the issue about insurance and if you're not compliant what about your insurance.

JG – Agreed it would be good to get a better understanding from insurance providers on this.

NO – The City cannot provide advice on insurance and recommended individual landowners contact their insurance providers regarding those sorts of questions.

CB – Wanted to acknowledge and thank Cr John Giardina and Cr Geoff Stallard for advocating for landowners and getting their infringements withdrawn. Also, this group is a positive one and be good for it to be an annual thing. Need to consider the impacts of a changing climate and starting the inspections earlier in the year.

SLa – Suggested a way forward was for work orders to include an option to request a variation. Particular where it was clear a variation would be required.

GV – Discussed the group experience his father had working in New Norcia with local aboriginals and how they managed and applied fire to the land. We have a lot to learn from the aboriginals and we are not using their knowledge.

IB – Suggested fire brigade undertake the inspections.

PF – The variation process needs to be reviewed. Need to look at having them valid for longer than 1 year.

## **6. Any other Business**

DW – Can we email through suggestions. What happens next meeting.

NO – You all have been handed a pack which contains a copy of the City's Notice and surrounding local governments for you to read and think about. Feel free to email any suggestion you may have between now and next week. The aim is to bring back to you all next week, a copy of the draft Fire Hazard Assessment Plan for you to review and provide your comment and feedback on.

## **7. Closure**

Cr John Giardina closed the meeting at 6:15pm and thank everybody for their attendance and valued input into the meeting.